

# A Snapshot of the Philosophical Library: Florence, Italy, 1922

*Catherine Ann Lombard*

While conducting research, I often become like Alice in Wonderland, chasing rabbits down the garden path. I am continually amazed how much can be discovered from my little studio in the Italian Apennines via the Internet. Most recently, I came across a fascinating book, written by George Davis Herron (1862-1925), an American clergyman, lecturer, and writer from Indiana. In his book *The Revival of Italy*, published in 1922, Herron has a beautiful passage describing Roberto Assagioli as the inspiration for the Biblioteca Filosofica. (Philosophical Library) in Florence. A lively center of philosophical discussion, this library was initiated around 1903-1905 by those studying theosophy who wished to deepen their understanding of Oriental philosophy. The library members loaned books, organized classes and conferences, and published a bulletin.

Assagioli was one of its more frequent visitors.<sup>1</sup> The Philosophical Library's intent was to create a "free university for philosophical and religious studies" where the public could come and learn more about the current cultural movements such as Pragmatism, Idealism, and Modernism in a non-academic setting. In his book, Herron acknowledges Assagioli's series of lectures on "The Phases and Methods of Spiritual Development."<sup>2</sup> In 1942, the library was incorporated into the library for the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Florence, and today has more than 9800 volumes.<sup>3</sup>

## A Closer Look at Nella Ciapetti

In his account, Herron notes that Assagioli is "possessed of unusual discernment of mind as well as purity and power of spirit."<sup>4</sup> But what delighted me even more, after reading Herron's brief description and interview with Assagioli, was to find Herron's acknowledgment of Nella Ciapetti (1893-1973). He describes Ciapetti as the founder and inspiration of the Lamp-Bearers,<sup>5</sup> a women's movement that stated in its prospectus: "There exists, under all the diversities of races, creeds or tendencies of thought, the same fundamental and sacred humanity."<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2. Roberto, Nella and Ilario in 1923.

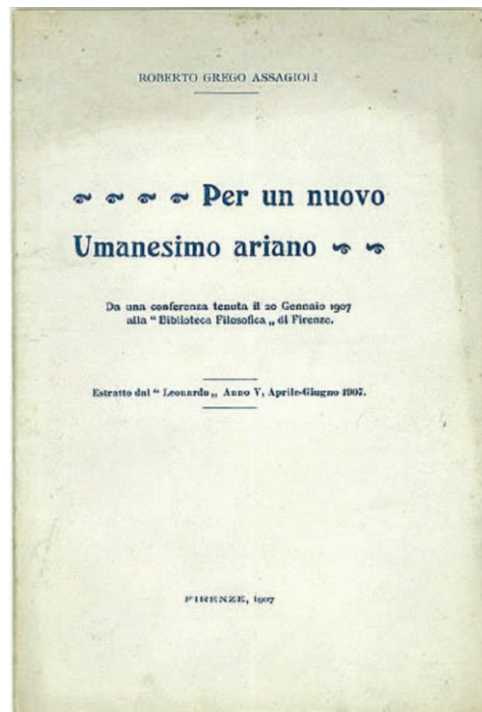


Figure 1. Assagioli's article "Per un nuovo umanesimo ariano" ("For a new Arian humanism") published by the *Biblioteca Filosofica* of Florence in 1907. Note that his use of the word "Arian" means Indo-European, or coming from India.

Besides finding Roberto and Nella referenced side-by-side (by an American no less!), I was particularly happy to find such a positive description of Assagioli's wife-to-be. They would soon be married on 12 August 1922,

(Continued on [page 19](#))

<sup>1</sup> Petra Guggisberg Nocelli. *The Way of Psychosynthesis*, Lugano, 2017. p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> George D. Herron, *The Revival of Italy*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., p. 106-109. Retrieved 28 April 2017 from <http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/inauthors/VAC1018>

<sup>3</sup> "Biblioteca filosofica (di Firenze)". *Biblioteca dei filosofi*. Retrieved on 30 April 2018 from <http://picus.unica.it/index.php?page=Filosofo&id=95&lang=it>

<sup>4</sup> Herron, p. 106

<sup>5</sup> During the early 1920s, Ciapetti became the coordinator of the woman's movement *Portatrici di lampade* (Lamp-Bearers) and belonged to a special committee of women who collected memberships for the *Rivista Spirituale Femminile* (*Women's Spiritual Magazine*; Esposito, p. 38).

<sup>6</sup> Herron., pp. 107-108.

(Continued from [page 18](#))

and would be together until Nella's death in 1973. Ciapetti always seems to appear either as a footnote in Assagioli's biographies or as a complex and fragile character in the margins of his activities. She is perhaps best known as the long-suffering mother who endured their only son's long illness and premature death. (At the age of 15, their son Ilario contracted tuberculosis, and died in 1951 when he was just 28.) But in Herron's account, she is vibrantly alive, "a young woman of great spiritual and intellectual power."

I know of three other accounts that include anecdotes of Ciapetti and Assagioli's life as a couple. The earliest appears in Luisa M. Lunelli's biography *Roberto, Nella e Luisa (Roberto, Nella and Luisa)*<sup>7</sup>. Lunelli met the Assagiolis in 1930 and was a long-time friend of the family. She was even present at Villa Serena when Assagioli was arrested by the Fascist police.<sup>8</sup> Paola Giovetti uses much of Lunelli's narrative in her biography of Assagioli,<sup>9</sup> augmented by statements from Donatella Ciapetti, the daughter of Nella's brother, who also lived for several years with the Assagiolis in Florence. Finally, William Esposito actually begins his "Introduction" to the collection of Assagioli's theosophical writings<sup>10</sup> with a quote of Ciapetti's, an excerpt from her article "L'amore della donna" ("The Love of a Woman") that was published in the magazine *Ultra* in 1925. Written as a new wife and mother, Ciapetti's words are especially powerful:

The new spiritually awakened man ... fervidly searches for his true companion, equal to him in interior stature, who can be his inspiration in the highest and most original sense of the word, the comprehensive friend, the collaborator of his works ...

This couple can create a new synthesized human, almost a new, great, and powerful being in which the feminine and masculine characteristics join to be considered, interwoven, and merged into a glorious superior unity.<sup>11</sup>

Ciapetti was very active in Rome's Lego Teosofica Indipendente (Independent Theosophical League), organizing conferences and writing articles, both before and after her marriage to Assagioli. Esposito notes that *Ultra* described her as "a distinguished lady" who was able to express herself "with great clarity of ideas and elegance of form." He continues with a quote from a 1916 bulletin in *Ultra* that described her as "young and cultivated ... with a heart inflamed for the theosophical doctrine of which she is worthy to espouse ... very much lauded for the exquisite form of her discourse."<sup>12</sup>

While Esposito imagines Roberto and Nella's love for each other growing during the years they worked together on theosophical conferences and articles for *Ultra*, Giovetti states that Nella had actually been a patient of his, seeking help for depression after falling in love with another. In her account of the Assagiolis as a married couple, Giovetti quotes their niece Donatella Ciapetti Assagioli: "The atmosphere in their house was of peace. When they were old, I could hear them in their room playing like two kids, laughing and teasing each other. They were very united, and they both had a great willingness to let the other do what he or she wanted."<sup>13</sup> Lunelli also notes that "They were different people, but complementary and communication between them was easy."<sup>14</sup>

(Continued on [page 20](#))

<sup>7</sup> Luisa M. Lunelli. *Roberto, Nella e Luisa*. Centro Studi di Psicosintesi 'R. Assagioli', Firenze, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Assagioli. *Freedom in jail*. C.A. Lombard, (Ed.). Florence, Italy: Istituto di Psicosintesi, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Paola Giovetti, *Roberto Assagioli: La vita e l'opera del fondatore della Psicosintesi*. Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1995/

<sup>10</sup> Roberto Assagioli, Considerator, *Il Mondo Interiore*, William Esposito. (Ed.). Vicenza, Italy: Edizioni Teosofiche Italiane, 2008, pp. 35-46. (All translations from Italian into English are mine.)

<sup>11</sup> Nella Ciapetti Assagioli, "L'amore della donna", *Ultra*, 1925, n. 4, p. 50 as cited in the Introduction by Esposito, W. in Roberto Assagioli, Considerator, *Il Mondo Interiore*, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Esposito in Assagioli, Considerator, *Il Mondo Interiore*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Giovetti, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Lunelli, p. 54.

(Continued from [page 19](#))

Similarly to Herron, Esposito notes Ciapetti's role as the coordinator of the women's movement "Portatrici di lampade" (Lamp-Bearers) in 1920. In 1924, Ciapetti held a conference on "Spiritual Motherhood," (Ilario was just a year old at the time). And in 1926, when the young couple relocated to Rome, their home became the seat of the Istituto di Cultura e di Terapia Psichica (Institute of Culture and Psychic Therapy), which in 1933 was renamed the Istituto di Psiconsintesi (Psychosynthesis Institute). In addition, the Assagiolis continued to hold theosophical activities at their home, courses for members every Tuesday evening, public conferences, meditations during the full moon, and annual festivals such as the "Festa del Loto Bianco" (The Festival of the White Lotus held on 8 May).<sup>15</sup>

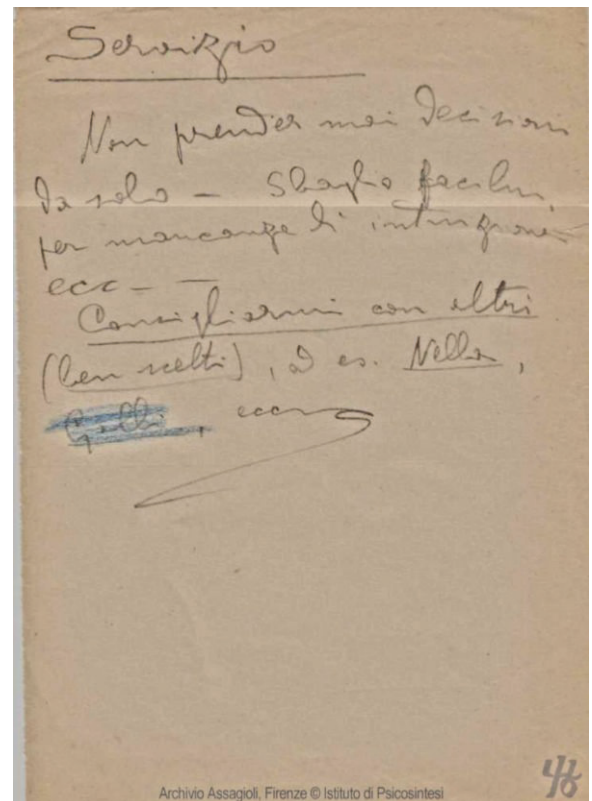
Lunelli relates a number of anecdotes about the couple in her book. Perhaps the one I find most endearing is her account of how "their long and loving couplehood conserved hints from their youth." Whenever Ciapetti would dress for an elegant event, after she finished with the selection of her bag, gloves and perfumed handkerchief, Assagioli would enter the room to help pick out her jewelry. He would then place the selected ring on her finger, latch her necklace around her neck and help her fasten her earrings. Once finished, he would withdraw slightly to take a good look at both the particulars and at her altogether. Lunelli remembers one time in particular:

He would look at Nella with the pleasure of a husband who is going to present a beautiful wife to his friends. Nella was very beautiful. And then I mischievously asked, "Roberto, when are you going on another honeymoon?" "We will put it in immediately on the program!" he lost no time in responding to me.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps this note (Figure 3) from Assagioli's archives speaks best about the couple's relationship:

Servizio – Non prender mai decisioni da solo. Sbaglio facilm. per mancanza di intuizione, ecc. Consigliarmi con altri (ben scelti), ad es. Nella, ecc.<sup>17</sup>

[Service – Never take a decision alone. I easily make a mistake for a lack of intuition, etc. Consult with another (well-chosen), for example Nella, etc.].



The image shows a handwritten note on aged, yellowed paper. At the top, the word "Servizio" is written in cursive and underlined. Below it, the text reads: "Non prender mai decisioni da solo - Sbaglio facilm. per mancanza di intuizione, ecc. Consigliarmi con altri (ben scelti), ad es. Nella, ecc." There is a large, sweeping arrow drawn at the bottom of the page, pointing from left to right. In the bottom right corner, there is a small handwritten number "48". At the very bottom of the page, there is a small printed line of text: "Archivio Assagioli, Firenze © Istituto di Psiconsintesi".

Figure 3. Assagioli's note from his archives in which he talks about Ciapetti.

Nella's spiritual intuition and consultation as a wife was accompanied by a practical side. As described by Lunelli in *Freedom in Jail*, the night Assagioli was arrested in 1940, Ciapetti quickly went into action. She immediately called the prison to arrange for proper meals to be delivered to Roberto's cell, sent a telegram to psychosynthesis friends in the U.S., called friends in Rome, and tidied up the papers on his desk. Afterwards, she spent most of the night in prayer "for Roberto in jail and for Italy at war."<sup>18</sup>

(Continued on [page 21](#))

<sup>15</sup> Esposito in Assagioli, *Considerator, Il Mondo Interiore*, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Lunelli, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> Roberto Assagioli, *Archivio Assagioli, Istituto di Psiconsintesi, Florence*. ID # 9425.

<sup>18</sup> Roberto Assagioli, *Freedom in Jail*, pp. 78-82.

(Continued from [page 20](#))

## Rev. George D. Herron: Christian Socialist and Pacifist

I have included the excerpt of Herron's observations of Assagioli and Ciapetti in the next section. Meanwhile, you might be wondering who this Rev. George D. Herron was. And what was a preacher from Indiana doing in Florence hanging out with the Italian intellectuals of the day?

Herron was born of devoutly religious parents of Scottish origin. His childhood, as he describes it, was obsessed with premonitions of a religious world mission and of an imminent kingdom of Heaven on Earth.<sup>19</sup> In 1883 he married Mary Everhard, entered the ministry and further educated himself through reading and independent reflection. Herron first attracted public notice in 1891 when, as pastor of the First Congregational Church of Lake City, Minn., he addressed the state Association of Congregational Ministers upon the theme: "The Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth." This address, published that same year, was an earnest and moving appeal for the application of Christian ethics to business.



Figure 4. George Davis Herron in 1900.

As a result, he received a professorship of applied Christianity at Iowa College (later renamed Grinnell College). During the six years of his service, Iowa College became the center of nation-wide interest because of his attempt to translate Christianity into social, political, and economic terms. He brought to this work a fervor and eloquence which attracted students and impressed many men and women of insight and influence. His scathing criticism of existing institutions, however, aroused bitter antagonism and ultimately alienated many of his most loyal supporters. As a consequence, he resigned his professorship in 1899.

He then joined the Socialist party and tried to organize within it a "social crusade," hoping to give religious character to the movement. Mrs. E. D. Rand and her daughter, Carrie Rand (1867–1914) cooperated with him in various undertakings. This mother and daughter team were involved in social causes for most of their lives.<sup>20</sup> While Mrs. Rand helped to fund and create departments at Grinnell, her daughter Carrie was also prominently involved at the same college as a physical education instructor, "principal of women," and as a financial supporter of the construction of the E. D. Rand Gymnasium for Women.

In March 1901 Herron's wife divorced him for "cruelty culminating in desertion." Polite society was scandalized as Herron had abandoned his wife and five children to have a love affair with the younger Carrie Rand. The court ended up awarding his former wife and children Carrie Rand's personal fortune of \$60,000. Later that year, he and Rand were married in New York City by a ceremony wherein "each chose the other as companion," thus dramatizing his avowed opposition to "all coercive institutions." (It is interesting that Herron and Assagioli were both married, divorced, and remarried to second wives who were heiresses of vast estates.) Herron was at once defrocked from the ministry and shortly afterward, in order to escape publicity, took up permanent residence with his wife and her mother upon an estate near Fiesole, Italy.

During World War I, Herron was greatly valued for his intelligence and analyses of the Italian and German situation. Having the confidence of both President Wilson and the German emissaries, Herron helped to forge negotiations

(Continued on [page 22](#))

<sup>19</sup> The condensed description in this section comes from C. M. S., *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. VIII as cited by "Indiana Authors and their Books," retrieved 10 May 2018 from <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inauthors/view?docId=encyclopedia/VAA5365-01.xml&brand=ia-books&brand=ia-books&field1=text&freeformQuery=herron&startDoc=1&chunk.id=ina-v1-entry-0399&toc.id=ina-v1-entry-0399>

<sup>20</sup> This condensed description of the Rands comes from: Herron, Carrie Rand. (n.d.) *The Cambridge Dictionary of American Biography*, by John S. Bowman. (1995). Retrieved April 27 2018 from <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Herron%2c+Carrie+Rand>

(Continued from [page 21](#))

for peace in 1918. Through his influence on the German representatives, he was able to convince them to trust Wilson's power to enforce upon the Allies conditions favorable to Germany.

Towards the end of his life, Herron turned to Italy as a final Utopian hope. During the 1920s, Herron probably met Assagioli while attending one of the events held at the Philosophical Library where "crowded audiences gather to hear lectures upon innumerable subjects."<sup>21</sup> Herron published articles in European and American periodicals, expounding his "ecstatic confidence" that Italy would become a "more Christly society than the world has yet known."<sup>22</sup> He died in Munich in 1925 at the age of 63.

### Excerpt from *The Revival of Italy* by George D. Herron<sup>23</sup>

... But the Modernist Movement is only one of numerous kindred activities in Florence. Of especially fair portent are the groups gathering about the Philosophical Library, founded some years ago by Mrs. Julia H. Scott,<sup>24</sup> a revered and remarkable American woman. These groups are led and inspired by Dr. Roberto Assagioli, a young psychologist known to English and Americans, and possessed of an unusual discernment of mind as well as purity and power of spirit; and also by Professors Ferrando and Marrucchi.<sup>25</sup> Under their direction, the Library is the centre of varied intellectual pronouncements and efforts, each with a spiritual purpose, and all marking a high tide in the spiritual springtime. Crowded audiences gather to hear lectures upon innumerable subjects—upon the social psychology of Christ; upon Buddha and Buddhism; upon Tagore<sup>26</sup> and Young India<sup>27</sup>; upon William James<sup>28</sup> and Walt Whitman; upon sexual education and civic morality; upon whatever men and movements may, in any and every part of the world, be making for the reconciliation of classes and nations. Also at the Philosophical Library was created the Association for Religious and Moral Progress, instituted by Professor Puglisi.<sup>29</sup> It was initiated by a

(Continued on [page 23](#))

<sup>21</sup> Herron, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-109.

<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Julia H. Scott was a wealthy American theosophist and friend of Harriet Isabella Cooper-Oakley (1854-1914), prominent theosophist and author. Scott founded the Philosophical Lending Library in Florence. She spent many years teaching theosophy, despite ill-health and advancing years, first in England, then in Italy, and finally in Switzerland.

<sup>25</sup> Guido Ferrando (1883–1969) and Father Salvatore Minocchi (1869–1943) were both speakers at the Philosophical Library. Minocchi was an important exponent of Catholic modernism. Ferrando taught English language and literature at the University of Florence until the early 1930s. In 1935 he moved to the US, where he became a philosophy professor at Vassar College, New York State. During the Second World War he moved to Ojai, California, and in 1946 participated, together with Aldous Huxley and J. Krishnamurti, in the creation of a school inspired by Theosophical pedagogical methods, Happy Valley School, later renamed Besant Hill School. This had been a long standing project initiated by A. Besant herself in the late 1920s. (Marco Pasi, "Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Italy during The First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Theosophical History*, XVI: 2, April 2012, p. 95 and fn. 78, p. 115.)

<sup>26</sup> Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Bengali poet and Nobel Prize winner, was invited by Mussolini in 1926 to visit Italy. Assagioli was part of the entourage, along with Carlo Formichi and Giuseppe Tucci (both eminent scholars in oriental studies from the University of Rome), accompanying Tagore during his two-week visit. Assagioli wrote three articles about Tagore: 1) "Tagore", *Il progresso religioso*, VII-VIII, 1922, pp. 161-178. 2) "Impressioni sulla visita di Tagore in Italia", *Ultra*, 4, 1926, pp. 234-239. 3) "Rabindranath Tagore poeta, mistico, educatore", *Rassegna Italiana*, CI, 101, 1926, pp. 684-694.

<sup>27</sup> It is unclear exactly what Herron is referring to here, but *Young India* was the name of the weekly Indian journal published by Gandhi from 1919-1931, in which he spread his unique ideology and thoughts with regard to nonviolence in organizing movements.

<sup>28</sup> William James (1842–1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist, and the first educator to offer a psychology course in the United States. In 1906 James published in the *Journal of Philosophy* his well-known paper on "G. Papini and the Pragmatist Movement in Italy" in which he vividly describes the enthusiasm for pragmatism of Giovanni Papini and the small band associated with the journal *Leonardo*. *The Philosophical Library was a meeting place and conference center for the Leonardians. Assagioli was intensively involved with this group. By 1907, he was the magazine's administrator, one of its financiers and the chief editor* (Guggisberg Nocelli, pp. 6-8).

<sup>29</sup> Professor Mario Puglisi Pico (1867-1954) was a philosopher, theologian and ecumenical Methodist. The Association for Religious and Moral Progress (Associazione per il Progresso Morale e Religioso) had branches in Torino, Palermo, Genova, and Rome, and from 1922-1931 issued the bimonthly *Il progresso religioso*. In 1922, the magazine published Assagioli's article on Tagore (see footnote 27) and in the March-April 1931 issue, there is a summary of a talk Assagioli gave in Rome entitled *Le crisi di Crescenza spirituale* (The Crises of Spiritual Growth; p. 66). To see a copy of the 1931 issue, go to [http://www.tpsalomonreinach.mom.fr/Reinach/MOM\\_TP\\_129645/MOM\\_TP\\_129645\\_0001/PDF/MOM\\_TP\\_129645\\_0001.pdf](http://www.tpsalomonreinach.mom.fr/Reinach/MOM_TP_129645/MOM_TP_129645_0001/PDF/MOM_TP_129645_0001.pdf)

(Continued from [page 22](#))

powerful appeal on the part of Senatore Alessandro Chiappelli<sup>30</sup> for the creation of a spiritual synthesis of the east and the west, of inner regeneration and constructive activity. This appeal has appeared in the review, *Il Progresso Religioso*, published by the Association.

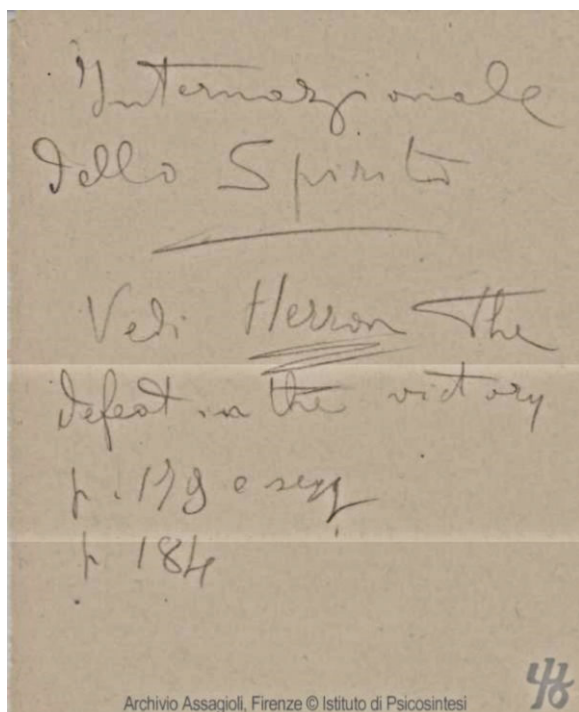


Figure 5. Assagioli's note from his archives in which he cites Herron's book *The Defeat of Victory*: "Internazionale dello Spirito - Vedi Herron, The defeat in the victory, p. 179 e segg. p. 184" (Doc # 19372).<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Assagioli would accredit the spiritual ferment in the Italian Youth to their "great dissatisfaction with old forms and old methods in every field: religion, philosophy, education, social and political activities. There is in them a deep yearning, a passionate impatience, for something new and better." They are "eagerly searching, looking into the past and toward the future, to the East and to the West," for something to satisfy their spiritual hunger. "There is still confusion and groping," but the young men and women "are finding their way," and finding it through a quest that is at once "spiritual and practical, mystical and constructive." And Assagioli himself, if asked for his purpose, and if asked to state wherein it is typical of the Italian revival, would say that he is seeking the formation of a true "science of the soul" — in which science may be included a vital synthesis of all recent discoveries and developments of scientific psychology with the intuitions and inner experiences and methods of oriental spiritual experience and Christian mystical consciousness. He has recently expressed his conceptions in a course of lectures on "The Phases and Methods of Spiritual Development."

movement centres, in the person of Countess Matilde Marfori Savini.<sup>31</sup> The movement was founded and is inspired by Miss Nella Ciapetti, a young woman of great spiritual and intellectual power. But the work of the Lamp-Bearers was preceded and predicated by the admirable movement started in Rome, under the name of *Vita Morale*, by Professor Guglielmina Ronconi,<sup>32</sup> a true apostle of love, knowing the hearts of the women of Italy, and understanding the Italian peoples, even unto the down most outcasts. The movement has taken its motto from Mazzini,<sup>33</sup> and has

(Continued on [page 24](#))

<sup>30</sup> Alessandro Carlo Francesco Roberto Bruno Chiappelli (1857-1931) was a philosopher, Italian scholar, and university professor. From 1910-1913, he was a City Counselor of Florence charged with the mission of research and study on Florentine Renaissance art throughout the archives and libraries of Florence. (Retrieved 5 May 2018 from "Senato della Repubblica," <http://notes9.senato.it/web/senregno.nsf/1574bd814f1ff77dc12571140059a42d/86785fb59833a2b24125646f005a16cf?OpenDocument>)

<sup>31</sup> Countess Matilde Marfori Savini was the wife of Filippo Malfori Savini (1877-1952), painter and engraver. In 1916 he founded the International Academy of Painting and Graving in Florence. In the same year he was given the silver medal of the *Belle Arti* Society of Florence.

<sup>32</sup> Guglielmina Ronconi (1864-1936) was an Italian philanthropist who devoted herself to welfare work at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1907 she founded the *Vita Morale* (Work of Moral Life), an educational organization whose goal was the moral elevation of the Italian people. Later, she carried out intense philanthropic activity in many Italian prisons, in particular in Rome, at the Mantellate prison. There she created an educational and rehabilitation system to reintegrate minors into society.

<sup>33</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was an Italian politician, journalist, activist for the unification of Italy and spearhead of the Italian revolutionary movement. His efforts helped bring about an independent and unified Italy. Assagioli has a picture of Mazzini in his office, hanging alongside photos of his wife and son. Assagioli greatly admired Mazzini, seeing him as a leader of spiritual internationalization. Many of Mazzini's beliefs reflect psychosynthesis concepts. For example, Mazzini formulated a concept known as *thought and action*, in which thought and action must be joined together, and every thought must be followed by action. One quote of Mazzini's from Assagioli's archives is: "Credo in una religione futura che rivelerà i rapporti dello spirito colla società universale. (I believe in a future religion that will reveal the relationship of the spirit with the universal society.)" (Assagioli Archives, Istituto di

(Continued from [page 23](#))

made of his writings somewhat of a gospel. “We desire to feel,” so runs a sentence in a Lamp-Bearer prospectus, “that there exists, under all the diversities of races, creeds or tendencies of thought, the same fundamental and sacred humanity.” These young women have a very complete programme of inner spiritual work, of individual regeneration, of mutual spiritual and practical help, of education on modern advanced subjects, such as the new free methods of teaching in the schools, sexual instruction, social work among the children of the workers. They also devote themselves to prison reform and moral help among the prisoners. And one of their chief purposes is the promotion of international goodwill and fraternity, through seeking to bring together, in mutual understanding and various services, the women of all nations and races.

The work of the Lamp-Bearers is, of course, but part of the great awakening and amazing progress among Italian women in recent years. Among these kindred movements may be named the *Unione delle Donne Cattoliche*,<sup>34</sup> whose large membership is well organised and kept in hand by the Church authorities. These are doing useful social work, though of a restricted kind, and also somewhat in opposition to the more progressive feminist movements. Then there is the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*, which promotes and co-ordinates the activities of all other free feminist movements. It is ably led by Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi,<sup>35</sup> an indeed superior woman, who combines genuine religious fervour with clear intellectual insight and practical efficiency and adaptability. Under her wise leadership, the Italian feminist movements have avoided the excesses of militant feminism of other countries; and this while working vigorously for all the rights of women as citizens and for their education and preparation for public activity and position.



Figure 6. Contessa Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi, the first President of the Psychosynthesis Institute in Rome.

## Final Thoughts

Nearly 100 years later, we can wonder at this vibrant, active community of philosophers, writers, and spiritual thinkers – men and women – who gathered at the Biblioteca Filosofica in Florence. Assagioli and Ciapetti were both not only present, but leading others towards a new vision of humanity as well as what it might mean to be a couple. The early 1920s were born out of “The War to End All Wars,” which garnered the hope needed to catapult a period of social, cultural and spiritual transformation. Windows were metaphorically thrown wide open and anything seemed possible. As a new European republic, Italy, was especially poised to assume its role and Florence, the city of Dante and the Renaissance, even more so. Today we can only imagine the sound of the philosophers’

(Continued on [page 25](#))

Psiconsintesi, Florence, Italy, ID#12800.)

<sup>34</sup> In 1908, the *Unione delle Donne Cattoliche* (Union of Italian Catholic Women; UDACI) was organized by Catholic women under the guidance of the Marquise Maria Cristina Giustiniani Bandini, and continued to operate until 1970. They had a more conservative agenda in line with the Catholic Church’s directives than the National Council of Italian Women *Consiglio Nazionale Donne Italiane* (See also footnote 34.)

<sup>35</sup> Contessa Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi (1853-1931) was the first President of the Institute of Psychosynthesis in Rome, which in 1926 was initially called the *Istituto di Cultura e Terapia Psichica* (Institute of Culture and Psychic Therapy). Assagioli greatly admired her and her work as an international leader. In 1904, she founded and was president of the National Council of Italian Women (*Consiglio Nazionale Donne Italiane*; CNDI), an organization that promoted women’s labor equality and justice in terms of legal, social, familial rights and occupational safety. They also believed in women’s suffrage. (Catherine Ann Lombard, “Psychosynthesis Granny Power.” Retrieved 8 May 2018 from <https://loveandwill.com/2018/03/04/psychosynthesis-granny-power/>)

(Continued from [page 24](#))

mingled voices, envision their nodding of heads, feel their excitement upon learning of oriental spirituality. We can only imagine ... and yet we can also prosper from what we have inherited from them — the opportunity to synthesize high intellectual understanding with worldwide spiritual perceptions. ■



Catherine Ann Lombard, MA, is a psychosynthesis psychologist, counselor, and researcher. She has published numerous articles on psychosynthesis, including a detailed comparison of Jungian psychology and psychosynthesis. You can download this article (along with others) and follow her bi-monthly blog at [loveandwill.com](http://loveandwill.com). You can also join her from September 17-23 for Journey to Places of the Higher Self. The focus of this journey is to calmly and peacefully allow for encounters of the Higher Self in majestic forests and sacred places found in the beautiful region of Umbria, Italy. For more information, visit [poeticplaces.org](http://poeticplaces.org).



Without forgiveness life is governed by . . . an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation.

— Roberto Assagioli