

*Like a River towards the Sea: Writing the ‘Other’ and the Unfamiliar*

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## Summary

*Like a River towards the Sea: Writing the 'Other' and the Unfamiliar* is a PhD thesis composed of an historical novel, set in 1940s Italy, and of a critical component which functions as a toolkit for other practitioners looking to write historical fiction, or fiction interested in otherness, laying out aspects of my own process. The novel follows a young woman, Stella, loosely based on my grandmother. Stella's rejection of her family's traditional peasant life leads her to the city of Bologna, where she finds a typist position and a friend, Gianna Angeli. War breaks out and affects their lives in different ways; after 1943, Stella finds herself involved, through Gianna's brother, with the Italian partisans. The narrative explores questions of femininity, religion, political engagement, and the breaking of tradition. The critical component contains three chapters: the first one investigates reading as research, discussing several twentieth-century Italian novels and showing their impact on my own work; the second chapter looks at language, pondering the advantages and limitations of using intratextual translation to bring Italian language into an English narrative; the third chapter discusses some of the challenges inherent to writing the past, and more specifically the Italian Resistance. Together, the novel and the critical component explore the process of writing historical fiction set in a place that is 'other' to the author, offering specific ways to research a foreign culture through reading, to represent another language within an English text, and to approach the fictional re-creation of pivotal national movements such as the Italian Resistance.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Stella Zoia Primon, who always made me feel that I could achieve anything I set my mind to, and whose generosity and love I will never forget.

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## Introduction

This thesis is in two parts: an historical novel titled *Like a River towards the Sea*, set in 1940s Italy, and a critical commentary which articulates several problems and methodological questions involved in my creative process, in order to provide a toolkit that may inform the work of other writers interested in historical fiction and cultural otherness. As such, the commentary focuses, first, on the use of reading as research – and particularly, in my case, reading Italian novels as a way of researching, on the one hand, 1940s Italian culture, and on the other, themes of Italian literature; secondly, on the representation of a foreign language within an English-language text; and thirdly, on writing the past, and specifically the Italian Resistance. The initial aim of the novel was to explore women's lives in 1940s Italy; after my grandmother's death, I was curious to know more about her life, what her childhood, her teenage years would have been. Having chosen Bologna as a place of escape for the protagonist loosely based on her, I began researching the history of the city – and indeed, of Italy – through the Second World War. Until then, I had been unaware of the breadth and importance of the Italian Resistance after 1943, when Mussolini was dismissed from power. As I read further into the movement, and particularly into the role of women, it became obvious to me that the Resistance would have to feature in the novel, since I was interested in questions of gender and feminism.

*Like a River towards the Sea* opens just after Stella, a seventeen-year-old girl from Caorle, in the Veneto, has left her town, escaping at night to avoid a marriage she does not want. Inspired by the memory of her schoolteacher, who saw her intellectual potential, Stella makes her way to Bologna. After some difficulties, she finds work as a typist, and becomes friends with another employee, Gianna Angeli, the daughter of a banker. Gianna is upper middle class and beautiful, but lonely; she takes Stella under her wing. She also introduces

her to her brother Pietro, a socialist. The novel is a *bildungsroman*: Stella evolves as her relationships with Gianna and Pietro develop, her friendship with Gianna slowly undermined by her admiration for Pietro, who supports her dream of a university degree. After 1943, Pietro joins the Resistance and asks Stella to become involved. She cannot refuse him, but when a mission goes badly and a man is killed, she re-evaluates her participation. A Catholic, Stella believes in compassion and kindness; she cannot condone leaving an injured man to die, even if he is the enemy. Through Gianna and Stella, and eventually Marta, another typist, the novel explores different attitudes to the war and the Resistance, and different embodiments of femininity.

Giovanni Falaschi writes in his study of the literature on the Italian Resistance that there was a tendency, in memoirs published by former partisans, to glorify the movement; perhaps to some degree this explains the impact of the images that were released in the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> suggesting that the partisans had enacted as much violence as the opposing side, and should not be held as heroes. Elisabetta Calzolari's novel, *Sguardi sull'acqua*,<sup>2</sup> set in Bologna and published in 2013, is careful to depict all sides of the conflict: within one apartment building, she shows families involved with Fascism and with the Resistance, as well as characters caught in between. To some degree, this is what I have attempted to do in my own novel by showing Stella's doubts, as well as Gianna's diffidence and her unwillingness to become politically engaged. The ending of the novel highlights Stella and Marta's pride at having been involved in the Resistance – after reading the twelve testimonies of Piemontese women in *La Resistenza taciuta*,<sup>3</sup> I wanted to convey, to some extent, their quiet

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<sup>1</sup> Falaschi, Giovanni, *La Resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976) and Simone Neri Serneri, 'A Past to be Thrown Away? Politics and History in the Italian Resistance', *Contemporary European History*, 4 (1995), 367-381. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4 (pp. 97-100) – of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Calzolari, Elisabetta, *Sguardi sull'acqua* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> *La Resistenza taciuta: Dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi*, ed. by Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2016).

determination and courage, and their faith in what they were doing – but I hope that by placing Stella in the middle, involved but also questioning her role, I have created a balanced representation.

The critical component of this thesis contains three chapters, each linked to an important aspect of my creative process. Chapter One discusses the importance of reading as research, looking at my own experience of reading Italian fiction set in the 1940s and 1950s as a way of researching Italian culture and literary themes. Through a close reading of several contemporary Italian novels, including Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (1949), Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (1947), Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1962), and Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* (2012), I isolate common themes and features of these Italian narratives and highlight the way in which these themes were used in my own novel. Chapter Two looks at language, pondering the advantages and limitations of using Meir Sternberg's intratextual translation strategies to bring Italian language into an English narrative, looking at Penelope Fitzgerald's *Innocence*, Adam Foulds's *In the Wolf's Mouth*, Virginia Baily's *Early One Morning*, and Lindsay Clarke's *The Water Theatre* as examples. Finally, Chapter Three discusses some of the challenges inherent to writing the past, and more specifically the Italian Resistance, exploring questions of politics, gender, and personal connection. The three chapters of the critical component function as a toolkit for writers interested in crafting not just historical fiction, but also fiction interested in 'foreignness' or otherness. Together, the creative and the critical components of the thesis highlight the value of historical fiction as an enquiry into the past, and potentially into a different culture.



## Chapter 1 – Italy by Italian Writers: Reading as Research

After I decided to write my novel, *Like a River towards the Sea*, in English, I read other examples of British fiction set in Italy. Reflections on their representation of Italian language within an English text later led to the second chapter of my thesis; however, I was aware that my position as a French native with Italian grandparents meant that I sat in a strange, in-between place, writing from a different perspective to these British authors. Although my novel is written in English, it features exclusively Italian characters, and the narrative is set in Bologna. In an attempt to widen my knowledge of contemporary Italian literature and culture, I researched examples of modern Italian fiction which would serve a dual purpose: set in a similar time period to my own novel, they would flesh out my understanding of Italian society and conventions at the time, while also giving me insight into Italian writers' understanding and apprehension of their own nation.

In this chapter, I will discuss the four examples of Italian literature which influenced the writing of my novel, highlighting common themes – identity, gender, class difference, and a sense of place – which are present in these volumes and in *Like a River towards the Sea*. The novels under consideration include Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (1947), Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (1949),<sup>4</sup> Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1962),<sup>5</sup> and the first volume of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan tetralogy, *My Brilliant Friend* (2012). Set mainly between 1938 and 1960, they depict, as I intended, an Italy contemporary to my own novel. While Calvino and Viganò took part in the Resistance,

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<sup>4</sup> As Viganò's novel was never translated into English, and I read the novel in the original Italian, I will be using the original title, which translates literally to: 'Agnes is going to die.' In *Resisting Bodies*, however, Rosetta D'Angelo and Barbara Zaczek translate the title as *Agnes Goes to Her Death* (*Resisting Bodies: Narratives of Italian Partisan Women* (Chapel Hill: Annali d'Italianistica, 2008), p. xvi).

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to my friend and fellow scholar Silvia Caserta for bringing to my attention *L'Agnese va a morire* in the first place, as well as Bassani's work.

and engage with the war in their narratives, Bassani tells the story of a young Jewish man's first love in Ferrara at the time of the Italian racial laws; Ferrante's novel opens after the end of the war, and can be described as a dual *bildungsroman*, following the coming of age of narrator Elena and her best friend Lila in a poor neighbourhood of Naples.

### 1.1. Identity and Gender

At first glance, *L'Agnese va a morire*, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, *My Brilliant Friend* and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* have little in common. Even *L'Agnese* and *The Path*, published after the war within two years of each other, and whose authors were personally involved in the Resistance movement, tell very different stories: that of a boy teetering on the verge of adulthood, struggling to find his place in the world, and that of an aging peasant woman displaying unexpected courage, strength and dependability in her involvement with the partisan fight. However, I would argue that each of the novels contains elements of the *bildungsroman*, the novel of formation,<sup>6</sup> and that it is possible to think of each plot in terms of identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Tobias Boes defines the *bildungsroman* (a term coined by German professor Karl Morgenstern in 1819) as 'a kind of novel that focuses on the spiritual and intellectual maturation of its protagonist' (*Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 1). He also highlights three separate elements foregrounded by Morgenstern: 'an emphasis on change in the protagonist, a relationship between this change and the specific national setting in which the protagonist moves, and the positive effect that the depiction of this change will have on the reader' (p. 5). While the first element – the evolution of the protagonist – will be the main focus here, it is interesting to see that the second element – the relationship between the change in the protagonist and their national setting – also applies to my novel, *Like a River towards the Sea*.

### 1.1.1. Identity

When discussing language and identity in Calvino's first novel, Karen de León-Jones highlights the use of song throughout *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. The protagonist, Pin, is often asked to sing in the novel, and he adapts to his audience:

Pin modifies his choice of song to please the audience present at the time.

Throughout the novel there is a musical accompaniment to Pin's evolving identity. In the beginning, the brother of Rina the prostitute entertains the men at the inn with bawdy tales and songs. After his arrest and interrogation, Pin considers joining the Fascists because he is attracted by the lyrics of "E noi di Mussolini ci chiaman farabutti..."<sup>7</sup>

Afterwards, among the partisans, Pin sings about a mother killed by her son – the only song printed in the text in its entirety. He spends the course of the novel looking for his one true friend, the one who will share his interest for the spiders' nests, his secret hiding place. At first, Red Wolf, a little older and already a partisan, seems to qualify – but Pin is disappointed by his lack of interest in the nesting spiders. Other candidates, Pelle and Dritto, also prove unworthy – one chooses to betray the cause for the love of weapons, and one betrays his comrades by sleeping with the cook's wife. In the end, it is Cousin who earns Pin's trust; Cousin, the man who believes that women are the origin of all evil, and who, the narrative suggests, shoots Pin's sister under the pretence of sleeping with her. Although the ending of *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* seems full of hope – the man and the boy walking away hand in hand, surrounded by fireflies – Federica Pedriali agrees with critic Lucia Re on the ambiguity

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<sup>7</sup> Karen de León-Jones, 'Language and Identity in Calvino's *Il Sentiero dei Nidi di Ragno*', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 23 (1997), 360-368 (p. 362).

of this ending, and its darker undertones.<sup>8</sup> Pin's identity seems decided by his choice of Cousin, a clear misogynist.

Although he lived with a group of partisans, Pin has gained little understanding of the political nature of their struggle, of the ideals that some of the men fight for. As the conversation between Kim and Ferriera shows,<sup>9</sup> the men who have welcomed Pin in their midst are too uneducated, too unaware to grasp the long speeches made by the cook, Mancino. This is a vivid contrast to the character progression of Agnese in Renata Viganò's novel.

At the beginning of the narrative, it is Palita, Agnese's husband, who is involved in the political life of the village. Although Agnese suspects her neighbours of selling Palita to the Germans, his membership of the Communist party may be the reason he is arrested by German soldiers. As the narrative progresses and Agnese's involvement grows from hiding a fugitive, to hosting partisan meetings at her house, to providing money for the partisan struggle, her understanding also expands. Although her joining the Resistance is motivated by her hatred of German occupiers and by her need to hide after killing one of them, she comes to understand the class struggle that her husband and his friends discussed:

Now, on the other hand, she could talk with Palita. [...] She understood what she had called then "men's business," the party, the love of the party, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Pedriali writes that 'In her monograph Lucia Re correctly argues that most critics have 'glossed over' the ambiguity of *Sentiero*'s conclusion: the novel would tempt the reader to believe in a positive ending that is simply not there: the hope of Liberation, Pin's youth, and the fairy-tale exeunt wondrously predetermine our understanding of the scene and prevent us from perceiving its double-edgedness.' Federica Pedriali, "'Più per paura che per gioco?': Three Textual Explorations of Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*", *Modern Language Review*, 93 (1998), 59-70 (pp. 64-65); she is quoting from Lucia Re, *Calvino and the age of Neorealism: Fables of estrangement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 305-319.

<sup>9</sup> The conversation between Kim and Ferriera, and Kim's monologue (pp. 136-146), have been criticised for being the only section of the novel that departs from Pin's point of view. Claudia Nocentini discusses similarities between Kim's language and the narrator's language in 'Narrative and Ideological Function of the Narrator in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 33 (1997), 369-375.

willingness to die in defence of a beautiful idea. An inner, hidden strength that could elucidate all the difficult questions, the ones that were born with children and died with the old folk:

“Why can’t I have a doll?”

“Why do rich girls go to the ball in a new dress when I can’t go because of my old rags?”

“Why does my child only get to wear shoes on Sundays?”

“Why is my son going to die in Africa when the mayor’s son is staying at home?”

“Why can’t I have a beautiful funeral with flowers and candles?”

Now she knew, now she understood. The rich always wanted to get richer and make the poor poorer; they wanted to keep them ignorant and humiliated.<sup>10</sup>

Although the title has made Agnese’s fate clear, Viganò’s narrative suggests that it is the journey that matters, and that through her courage and her caring for others, her willingness to risk her life, Agnese has found a purpose. The commander’s last words and thoughts about her suggest that the memory of Agnese’s strength and determination will survive her,<sup>11</sup> that through her support of the Resistance, she has created a legacy that will outlast her physical existence.

*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* and *My Brilliant Friend* also deal with identity, but in a different way. In both stories – that of a first love, and of a life-long friendship – the reader is alerted to the dangers of building one’s identity in relation to someone else. The impossibility of ever fully understanding another person’s mind causes both narrators,

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<sup>10</sup> Renata Viganò, *L’Agnese va a morire* (Torino: Einaudi, 2014), pp. 165-66. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>11</sup> After leaving Agnese for the last time, the commander regrets not telling her how highly he thought of her, and he tells his companion that, once Italy is free, he will make sure the whole region knows who she was and what she did (pp. 225-26).

Giorgio and Elena, continual pain, as Giorgio refuses to believe that Micòl might not be happy with him, and Elena finds herself failing at school without Lila to compete with. A memorable scene in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* is the conversation between Giorgio and his father, late at night.<sup>12</sup> Until then, Giorgio has been dismissive of his father, unable to establish a connection with him; it is a sign of his personal evolution and maturation that he is finally able to listen to him and take his advice regarding Micòl. However, the fact that the novel is entirely focused on the narrator's connection with the Finzi-Contini family and his relationship with Micòl, recounting in minute detail their interactions, seems to suggest that despite Giorgio's decision to forget her, she remains an essential part of his life, more important than anything else. When the narrative hints at what happens afterwards – we get a glimpse of the Finzi-Contini mansion being used by refugees after the war (p. 18), and of the narrator being 'in jail' in 1943 (p. 153) – these passages are brief and matter-of-fact, as though anything that happened post-Micòl does not warrant lingering on.<sup>13</sup> Only the prologue, set in 1958, portrays the narrator's post-war reality, and as Brombert points out, 'the cemetery is the dominant image in these opening pages,' with 'the Etruscan cone-shaped tombs [recalling] the deadly German bunkers scattered all over the landscape during World War II'.<sup>14</sup> The narrator's life post-Micòl is haunted by death.

In both narratives, the role of the writer becomes that of a witness – Elena in *My Brilliant Friend* sets out to record the story of her friendship with Lila after her friend's

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<sup>12</sup> The scene – suggesting its narrative importance – occupies a whole chapter, from page 230 to 236 (Giorgio Bassani, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, trans. by Jamie McKendrick (London: Penguin Classics, 2007)). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that when Micòl turns down the narrator's advances, she recognises his fascination with the past as a shared trait between them: 'for me, no less than for her, the past counted far more than the present, remembering something far more than possessing it. [...] My anxiety that the present 'immediately' turned into the past so that I could love it and dream about it at leisure was just like hers, was identical.' (p. 187) The past, Micòl suggests, can be reshaped during the process of remembering, unlike the present.

<sup>14</sup> Brombert, p. 2.

disappearance, just as Giorgio commits to retelling in writing the story of his involvement with Micòl. Velleda Ceccoli describes the *Neapolitan novels* as

[dwelling] in Lena and Lila's internal spaces [and recounting] their intense love, hate, rivalry, and sisterhood. The power balance between them shifting constantly and often, violently, they each become the brilliant friend to the other as their lives unfold, and in the process we are made privy to their struggles with femininity, sexuality, identity, knowledge, and power.<sup>15</sup>

In each of the four novels, there is a visible shift in the protagonist's identity as the events of the narrative push the character in an unexpected direction: Giorgio's ban from the tennis club brings him closer to Micòl; Palita's arrest and subsequent death lead to Agnese working for the Resistance; Pin's stealing of a soldier's gun sends him into hiding; her teacher's support propels Elena towards an academic future. Gender is also a feature which affects the stories told in these novels, although in more subtle ways.

### 1.1.2. Gender

Perhaps unsurprisingly considering the time period – spanning from the late 1930s to the early 1950s – represented in our four novels, there are visible differences between the sexes in the narratives, both in terms of opportunities and of treatment. The limitations imposed on female characters were especially interesting to me, as my protagonist is a young woman.

The world painted by Calvino in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* is overwhelmingly male, and masculinity is built on its difference from, and antagonism with, femininity. The only two female characters of importance in the novel prove threatening to the established

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<sup>15</sup> Velleda C. Ceccoli, 'On Being Bad and Good: My Brilliant Friend Muriel Dimen,' *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 18 (2017), 110-114 (p. 111).

male communities: Pin's sister, Rina, is condemned by others for choosing to sleep with a German soldier; her sexuality, always on display, has made Pin grow up quickly and has complicated his relationship with women. Giglia, the wife of the partisans' cook, undoes the fragile balance of the group through her affair with the leader, Dritto. The female sex is synonymous with betrayal in the novel – women cannot be trusted. This is suggested several times by Cousin,<sup>16</sup> the partisan who speaks plainest and is the most predictable, appearing, therefore, the most reliable. Pin's decision to go with him at the end of the novel seems to validate Cousin's enduring mistrust and constant devaluation of women, emphasising the gap between the sexes.

While *L'Agnese va a morire* focuses on a female protagonist, Agnese is for the main part of the novel – bar the months when another staffetta lives with them – the only woman among a company of men, an anomaly. In *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, Rinaldina Russell writes that

While *L'Agnese* documents women's roles in the Resistance, and does so much more thoroughly than books by male writers like Italo Calvino, Cesare Pavese, or Beppe Fenoglio, it also endorses conventional notions of virtuous femininity. Figured as an earth mother (by association with the Po valley landscape where the story is set), Agnese is not only nurturing, but loyal and self-sacrificing as well. Typical of neorealist narratives, the novel portrays

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<sup>16</sup> Upon meeting Pin for the first time, Cousin tells him that “behind all the stories with a bad ending there's always a woman,” and that “War's all the fault of women...” (p. 85). This is echoed on p. 90, pp. 129-30, and p. 185 (Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nest*, trans. by Archibald Colquhoun and Martin McLaughlin (London: Penguin Classics, 2009)). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.



immoral female characters who, in opposition to Agnese's virtue, prostitute themselves to the Fascists.<sup>17</sup>

Russell may be referring here to Agnese's neighbours at the beginning of the novel, whose daughters are friendly with the German occupiers. While the representation of the daughters is somewhat more nuanced than Russell suggests – indeed, after their death Agnese mourns the little girls she once knew – it is interesting to note that the mother, and not the father, is deemed responsible for the girls turning out the way they did:

They were good little girls then, it was a shame they had gone bad when they grew up. It was because of Minghina, who was greedy and a liar, and had taught them to steal eggs, to take wood from the store. (p. 72)

The collaboration of women with the enemy seems to be given greater weight in the narrative, perhaps because it often involves romantic or sexual involvement with the Germans. While the novel, according to Russell, 'endorses conventional notions of virtuous femininity,' Simonetta Milli Konewko believes that Agnese's role goes beyond the traditional woman's part. She points out that 'despite the fact that [Agnese's] compassion is consistent with a Fascist model of nurturing woman, her work, being directed to nonfamily members and contributing to a specific political objective, represents a different model of female character'.<sup>18</sup> Agnese supports the Resistance by giving them money she has saved, a behaviour that, Milli Konewko suggests, would traditionally be – as the 'earning and managing of money' – a male prerogative.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rinaldina Russell, ed., *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 348.

<sup>18</sup> Simonetta Milli Konewko, 'L'Agnese va a morire and Meanings of Compassion in the Female Partisans' Struggle against German Nazis and Italian Fascists', *Forum Italicum*, 44 (2010), 385-404 (p. 388).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

For Agnese, Marina de Bellagente LaPalma writes, leaving home is both ‘a course of action dictated by external circumstances’ and ‘a movement away from her habitual passivity toward a measure of agency and responsibility’.<sup>20</sup> The movement from inside to outside symbolises the changed role of women, from purely domestic to benefitting a larger society.<sup>21</sup> However, the shift in roles and the possibilities available to women during the war were temporary.

Illustrating this return to the *status quo*, the Italy presented in *My Brilliant Friend* affords few opportunities for women. Fathers are the ones in charge: when Lila is thrown out of the window by her father, breaking her arm, the narrator comments, ‘Fathers could do that and other things to impudent girls’.<sup>22</sup> Although Elena and Lila are academically gifted, their families originally refuse to pay for them to take the test to middle school; Elena’s family relents (on the condition that, if she were to fail, they would pull her out of school), but Lila’s father cannot conceive of a girl being educated further than himself or his son. As a result, Lila divides her time between her father’s shoe shop and helping her mother at home, until, when her beauty blooms, she is besieged by men – in particular Marcello Solara, seven years older, who wants to marry her. Because of Solara’s money and his status in the neighbourhood, Lila’s family sees his courtship as an honour, while Lila refuses to marry a man she hates. The novel ends with her marrying, at sixteen, greengrocer Stefano – the only way out of Solara’s courtship – but Stefano’s unexpected alliance with the Solaras suggests that the marriage is doomed. In spite of Lila’s intelligence (she could read and write at six years old), the only option available to her is marriage – and while she marries the second most successful man of the neighbourhood and rises socially, she is still imprisoned by the

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<sup>20</sup> Marina de Bellagente LaPalma, ‘Leaving Home’, *Italian Culture*, 17 (1999), 165-174 (p. 168).

<sup>21</sup> This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

<sup>22</sup> Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*, trans. by Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa Editions, 2012), p. 82. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

small-mindedness of her family and neighbours. As Silvia Caserta points out, *My Brilliant Friend*'s 'central neighbourhood can be seen as a symbol of any enclosed space from which a person – and a woman, more specifically – needs to escape'.<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, Micòl, the Finzi-Contini daughter who the narrator is in love with, goes to university and graduates over the course of the narrative with top marks (p. 147). What plays against Micòl is not so much her gender as her race, which keeps her from being awarded the highest distinction; although she has graduated, she will not be allowed to teach. Micòl's status as the daughter of a wealthy, educated family grants her more freedom than is enjoyed by any of the women in the other texts, and there seem to be no difference between the way she and her brother are treated by their family. In spite of this, there are limits to what she can achieve; as if the text is reluctant to let her escape the confines of womanhood, we are told by her father that Micòl 'had a passion for [the general running of the whole household] almost as strong as for novels and poetry' and that she would 'do the accounts [at the end of the week]' (p. 123). She is even the one to slaughter the chickens in the kitchen, a fact that the narrator finds 'strangely [intriguing]' (p. 124). Although she is an intellectual, and academically gifted, Micòl retains traditionally feminine features such as an interest in household matters. Like Agnese, she is the sole female protagonist of importance in the novel: the rest of the conversations and interactions happen between the narrator, Giorgio, and her father, Professor Ermanno, or her brother Alberto, or his friend Malnate. None of the other female characters present any narrative depth, and ultimately, Micòl's intelligence, status and achievements are overshadowed by her Jewishness. She dies with her family in a German concentration camp.

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<sup>23</sup> Silvia Caserta, 'World Literature and the Italian Literary Canon: From Elena Ferrante to Natalia Ginzburg', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2019), 1-18 (p. 9).

In *L'Agnese va a morire*, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, *My Brilliant Friend*, and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, Italy is a world governed by men, where women struggle to find a place. To quote Karen de León-Jones, 'the only two women [in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*] are a prostitute and an adultress'<sup>24</sup> who disturb the established order. Although *L'Agnese* offers a few more options for its female characters, the role of Agnese among the partisan company is largely domestic, ensuring that the men are fed and clothed, and looking after their wellbeing. *My Brilliant Friend*, which opens six years after the war, shows two different fates for Lila and Elena: while the second manages to escape the pull of tradition, of her home and family, and to establish herself as a writer, the first – despite the extraordinary abilities that she displays throughout the tetralogy – fails to achieve any of her goals.

Another cause of tension in these narratives is the awareness of class. Bassani's narrator, despite coming from a well-to-do family who employs a servant, knows that the Finzi-Continis are much wealthier. In *My Brilliant Friend*, when teenagers Lila and Elena visit the centre of Naples with friends from the neighbourhood, they feel the difference between their own shabby dress and the elegant clothes worn by young people from wealthier families. Class difference, therefore, is also an important element in three of our Italian narratives, and as we will see, the stories are grounded in a specific place and time.

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<sup>24</sup> De León-Jones, p. 362.

## 1.2. Class Difference and the Role of Place

Calvino, Viganò, Bassani and Ferrante all portray a distinct world in their novels, grounded in place and in social conventions. Both Calvino and Viganò's portrayals of the Resistance show the various social strata that composed the movement, and in Bassani and Ferrante's novels, the characters are often angered or made uneasy by their awareness of class and their own status.

### *1.2.1. Class Difference*

Within the Neapolitan neighbourhood where Lila and Elena grow up, there is a hierarchy. When Elena is seen walking alone with Pasquale Peluso – a Communist and the son of a presumed murderer – her former teacher, Maestra Oliviera, informs her parents and recommends that Elena (who, with her academic successes, embodies hopes for a better future) be prohibited from spending time with Pasquale (pp. 125-26). Marcello and Michele Solara, sons of the owner of the Solara bar and pastry shop, are the only ones with a car, which places them at the top of the social order. Melina, the mad widow who cleans for a living, is at the bottom: her daughter Ada is 'kidnapped' for an hour in the Solaras' car, because she has no father to defend her, and her brother Antonio counts too little. It is revealed, later in the narrative, that the Solaras' business is supported by the Camorra and that the neighbourhood obeys them, voting according to the Solaras' instructions (p. 163). Lila and Elena come to understand that the complex mechanics of power were decided by events that happened before they were born – positions adopted and held during the war – which continue to determine the social order.

As the characters grow older, and venture into richer parts of Naples, the reader discovers a world in which the wealthy also display an inclination for violence and a quickness to anger. When Lila and Elena's friends, feeling inferior in their shabby clothes,

decide to retaliate by mocking the elegant dress of passers-by, a young man stands up for his companion and gets punched. After running away, he comes back with a group of his friends, intending to beat up the boys from the neighbourhood (pp. 194-97). While the reader might have expected this youth to recoil from physical violence, there is a sense of retaliation being necessary, of pride and status needing maintaining through brutality.

Although Ferrante shows through Elena that it is possible to rise above the working class through hard work and academic success, the narrator's fate is the exception rather than the rule. Despite all of Lila's schemes – first her dream of being a writer, then of opening a shoe factory, then the successful shoe shop on Piazza dei Martiri – she can neither leave the neighbourhood nor untangle herself from her family and acquaintances. In fact, the disappearance of Tina, Lila and Enzo's daughter, in the last volume of the tetralogy, *The Story of the Lost Child*, may be interpreted as a divine punishment for Lila and Enzo's attempt to rise above the neighbourhood through their successful computing business. After the loss of the little girl, the business fails, leaving them back where they started.

In *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, the layer of society represented is the comfortable middle class, although the Finzi-Continis stand well above the rest of Ferrara's Jews. To quote Victor Brombert, 'the family [...] spend their days in aristocratic seclusion, wilfully separating themselves from what they consider the vulgarities of the Fascist period. [...] The garden (in fact a park) and the imposing mansion nicknamed "magna domus" represent a privileged world'.<sup>25</sup> It seems as though the Finzi-Continis consider that fighting the Fascists is below them, and as a result, they are unable to avoid deportation and death. When the narrator, Giorgio, tries to distance himself from Micòl and stops visiting, he begins meeting up with another of the tennis players, Malnate, Alberto's friend from university. Malnate, the

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<sup>25</sup> Victor Brombert, 'The Presence of the Past in Giorgio Bassani', *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, 29 (2009), 2-17 (p. 12).

oldest of the group, works as a chemist at a synthetic rubber factory and rents a flat in Ferrara. Milanese-born, and a Communist, Malnate stands on the outside of Ferrara's closed circle, and although he holds a university degree, there is a sense of him ranking yet lower than Giorgio on the hierarchy, possibly because, unlike Micòl, Alberto and Giorgio, he is not an intellectual or a scholar.

Similarly, in *L'Agnese va a morire*, although the partisans seem to be on an equal footing, the commander is a man whom people call 'the lawyer'; 'someone educated, a man from the city, who had always hated the Fascists' (p. 57). Agnese initially struggles to express her opinion among the partisans, worried that she will say something stupid, make a fool of herself,<sup>26</sup> but through the course of the novel she gains confidence and finds it easier to speak. With the commander, however, she continues to blush and to hold back, always concerned that he will judge her.<sup>27</sup> While this might be due to his position of power, it is possible for the reader to assume that, despite the Resistance levelling differences, there is still a class system which will reappear once peace is made.

Calvino portrays a very different Resistance, in which the discrepancies between class and levels of education are still gaping holes, making communication and understanding difficult. The conversation between Ferriera and Kim represents a stark departure from the rest of the novel; their understanding of the world, of human psychology, is much greater than in any of Dritto's group. Men like Cousin, who blame all the world's problems on women, are unable to conceive that their resentment might be misdirected.

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<sup>26</sup> On p. 45, for example, Agnese struggles to put in a word of warning during the partisans' conversation, blushing and failing to complete her sentence: "'Near here live some untrustworthy people...'"

<sup>27</sup> On p. 222, when the commander's tone suggests his discontentment, Agnese feels 'a wave of heat run through her whole body, her round cheeks turning very red.' Her next question is asked 'timidly,' and she has 'a little girl's guilty, startled face.'

In all four novels, there is a clear sense of social hierarchy; the characters are aware of their social standing, as is apparent in the discomfort experienced by Ferrante's Neapolitan teenagers when visiting a wealthier area.

The narratives, as suggested by the treatment of gender and class difference, are grounded in a precise time and place, whether they portray the intricate world of the city or the open spaces of the Italian countryside.

### 1.2.2. *The Power of Place*

While the narrative of *My Brilliant Friend* is intimately linked to Naples, and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* is firmly grounded in the city of Ferrara, the two novels which deal with the Italian Resistance, *L'Agnese* and *The Path*, unfold in great part in natural spaces, the partisans finding refuge in the hills, the mountains or the marsh, terrains that are unknown or unfamiliar to their pursuers. Representations of the city and the natural world present differences, but side by side they offer a holistic image of Italy.

#### 1.2.2.1. Tales of the city

In the opening of *My Brilliant Friend*, the narrator comments on the fact that her friend Lila has never left Naples 'in her life' (p. 20). She is not the only character in the *Neapolitan Novels* to be metaphorically chained to her neighbourhood, suggesting the binding power that a place can have over a person. Similarly, Radcliff-Umstead argues that Giorgio Bassani's *Novel of Ferrara* establishes the city as a prison-like setting that is nearly impossible to escape: 'A sense of immurement comes to dominate the human places in this literary world. [...] To its natives Ferrara appears as a medieval fortress-prison in the tight bounds of its walls'.<sup>28</sup> Only outsiders such as Milan-born Malnate can escape the pull of Ferrara and find

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<sup>28</sup> Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, 'The Closed World of Giorgio Bassani', *Italian Culture*, 3 (1981), 103-130 (p. 112).



the strength to leave. Radcliff-Umstead points out that for Bassani's Ferrarese, the only peace will be found in death:

In its opening pages the tale [of Clelia Trotti] describes the square of Certosa, the former Carthusian monastery where the municipal cemetery is located, as a comforting place that makes death quite popular. Nothing grim or frightening oppresses the square, so unlike much of Ferrara.<sup>29</sup>

The cemetery of Ferrara is described as warmer and homelier than the city itself. The sense of place in Bassani's work is evoked through a methodical description of Ferrara, including street names and instructions on how to find specific buildings, as well as caf  s, brothels and churches, which dot the streets of the city.

In several cases, the identity of the setting is also built on past events: the location of the narrative is determined by its previous incarnations. In the first sections of *My Brilliant Friend*, the past occasionally emerges – for example in the form of a gas mask (p. 56) –, but it initially seems unrecoverable, unreachable: the girls never find out what Don Achille did to earn the combination of fear, hatred and respect that he inspires in their families. In their teenage years, however, Lila and Elena find out about the neighbourhood's past, and Lila in particular is profoundly shaken:

She pointed to people, things, streets, and said, "That man fought in the war and killed, that one bludgeoned and administered castor oil, that one turned in a lot of people, that one starved his own mother, in that house they tortured and killed, on these stones they marched and gave the Fascist salute, on this corner they inflicted beatings, these people's money comes from the hunger of others,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

this car was bought by selling bread adulterated with marble dust and rotten meat on the black market, that butcher shop had its origins in stolen copper and vandalized freight trains, behind that bar is the Camorra, smuggling, loan-sharking. (p. 154)

At this point in the narrative, the ramifications of past events gain importance and visibility: the hierarchy of the neighbourhood, the relationships between families all derive from the positions adopted by people during the war, and their actions are still bearing fruit after ten years. While Elena would rather forget about those terrible revelations, Lila seems to experience relief at being able to see the invisible fabric of the neighbourhood.

*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* is the third book in a series of six, all set in Ferrara, where Italian Jew Giorgio Bassani grew up. As the story opens, the 1938 racial laws ban the narrator from using the city's tennis club; he is then invited by Micòl Finzi-Contini to play tennis on the family's court. Descriptions of Ferrara in the novel also juxtapose a variety of timelines, which is particularly obvious in this passage:

to the right especially, facing the industrial zone, from 1945 on, scores of variously coloured workers' cottages have sprouted, in comparison with which, and with the factory chimneys and warehouses that compose the background, the brown, scrubby, half-rocky spur of fifteenth-century fortifications looks day by day even more absurd. (p. 41)

The strange contiguity of the fifteenth-century walls, of the chimneys and warehouses which likely date to the industrial era, built some fifty years previous to the workers' cottages, allows the reader to visualise the evolution of Ferrara over time. Earlier in the narrative, the description of the Finzi-Contini family tomb – considered an architectural disaster – shows a similar 'mishmash', including 'the architectonic echoes of Theodoric's mausoleum at

Ravenna, of the Egyptian temples at Luxor, of Roman baroque, and even [...] of the ancient Greek constructions of Cnossos' (p. 16). While the general consensus in the story is that the architect lost their head, it is possible to see, perhaps, in the description of the tomb and the descriptions of the city, the unpredictable movement of time and trends. Though the tomb's architect is laughed at, he may have sensed justly that there is no point in aiming for consistency and elegance, because time will ensure that they are overwritten.

Bassani's work, as Radcliff-Umstead indicates, is closely connected to his relationship with Ferrara, and expresses 'conflicting emotions between intense attachment to place and an anguished awareness of alienation'.<sup>30</sup> To some extent, this ambiguity is also visible in Ferrante's work: while Elena manages to escape from Naples, she frequently comes back to visit, and is unable to completely sever the ties that bind her to her birthplace.

While *My Brilliant Friend* and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* are both city-based novels, *L'Agnese va a morire* and *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* offer descriptions of the natural world; Pin moves from city to wilderness as he hides with the partisans in the mountains, and Agnese leaves her small village for the marshland.

#### 1.2.2.2. Nature and wilderness

The Italian Resistance was borne from a general weariness with the war and a desire to reclaim Italy after Mussolini's fall; in the north of Italy, which was under Nazi control until the spring of 1945, the partisans fighting in the Resistance were outlaws, who often had no choice but to take to the hills or the mountains. The cities, overseen by Fascists and Nazis, presented increased danger, while the wilderness offered better chances of survival, especially since a good number of partisans were locally based and knew the land.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

In *L'Agnese va a morire*, for example, the partisans choose to hide in the marshland, a place they know how to navigate, unlike their German enemies. Viganò's setting shows a marked departure from the paradisaic images of Italy found in some British novels. The marshland is a harsh environment, with no protection from the burning sun:

The sun was always overhead, beating down on their shoulders, burning their backs, blackening their faces. The earth, the reeds, the dry wood absorbed the heat; everything was boiling and dry even after sundown, until the night's mist came in thin layers to cover the still water of the canals. The ponds' rank smell rose up then, the scent of rotten walls, of wet rags, of mould, like in the homes of the poor. (p. 79)

Nature, although it provides a hiding place that the Germans are afraid of venturing into, is threatening. At the end of the summer, the marshland, dried out by the heat, turns yellow, and 'could catch fire from one moment to the next' (p. 88). The Germans set fire to the marshland to draw out the partisans, and the scene is described as 'sinister,' but also 'fantastical and beautiful' (p. 113). On many occasions, the weather complicates Agnese's task, rain, wind and snow making cycling through the countryside difficult and tiring. In the last section of the novel, after the partisans have left the marshland, the Germans destroy the dikes built under Mussolini to create more farmland. Water floods the fields and villages, but it only invades the ground floors, and the partisans use the higher floors as bases, moving in boats from one house to another. Isolation, restricted movement, and the constant sound of water weigh on the men's nerves:

When all was ready, the partisans sat down in the tidy rooms and looked at each other. Italians, Russians, Germans, New-Zealanders, Alsations, Czechs: fifty men from all over the world, stuck by the war between four walls,

surrounded by stagnant water. As they gazed through the window at the flooded landscape, it seemed evening would never come. (p. 135)

This passage emphasises the difficulty for the men to remain hidden in the same place without being able to leave, the claustrophobia that will drive the foreigners to try and escape, and the constant presence of water, protecting the partisans but imprisoning them in the house. Nature is an ally and a foe, an unpredictable force that, just like the Germans and the Fascists, must be contended with.

The narrative of *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* covers a shorter period of time than that of *L'Agnese*, and as a result the reader never sees how the winter weather affects the partisans. There are, however, vivid descriptions of the brigade's encampment in the woods:

Under the trees of the wood the ground is thick with chestnut husks and dried up pools full of hard leaves. In the evenings layers of mist spread between the trunks of the chestnut trees and shroud their bases, covered with the reddish sheen of moss and the bluish marks of lichen. The encampment can be sensed before it is reached, from the smoke rising above the tree-tops and the faint singing of a chorus [...]. (p. 99)

Like the partisans in Viganò's novel, Pin's detachment is exposed to the weather; when they move their camp into a barn, it is one whose 'roof has fallen in and lets the rain through' and every morning, they 'sun themselves among the rhododendrons [...] and take off their shirts to look for lice' (p. 120). Nature, however, is more often than not a comforting presence, reflecting perhaps Pin's young age and the pleasure he takes from discovering 'yellow and brown mushrooms growing damp in the earth, red spiders on huge invisible nets,' (p. 121) or 'a bush laden with blackberries' (p. 156).

While there are differences between the portrayals of nature in Viganò and Calvino's work, and while the geographical distance between Ferrara and Naples shows in the cities' population, traditions and dialect, all four narratives evoke a strong sense of place through the use of weather, the passage of time and the use of details such as street names and architectural features.

In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss the way in which I used these Italian themes – identity, gender, class difference and a sense of place – in my own novel, showing the impact of reading and research on my creative process.

### 1.3. Italianness in *Like a River towards the Sea*

In Bassani's novel, Ferrara is the setting of an unrequited first love and of the wealthy Finzi-Contini family's decline, despite its status. In Ferrante's tale, Naples is the violent, misogynist background to Elena and Lila's friendship, to their struggle to live their lives as they wish. Calvino portrays a dark male universe, in which Pin tries to find a place; Viganò tells the story of an ordinary woman at an extraordinary time, in which the journey matters more than the ending. In each narrative, Italy is a location in the present, a place that is deeply inhabited, and this is something I tried to replicate in my own novel, where Stella's fate is determined in part by the national upheavals of the time.

The title, *Like a River towards the Sea*, is a line from Umberto Saba's poem 'L'Ora Nostra',<sup>31</sup> translated by A. S. Kline.<sup>32</sup> The poem, titled 'L'Ora Nostra', translates to 'Our Moment' or 'Our Hour', which reminded me of partisan women's testimonies: despite the

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<sup>31</sup> Umberto Saba, *Songbook: The Selected Poems of Umberto Saba*, trans. by George Hochfield and Leonard Nathan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> A. S. Kline, trans., 'Our Moment,' *Poets of Modernity*, <[https://www.poetsofmodernity.xyz/POMBR/Italian/FiveItalianPoets.php#anchor\\_Toc326225679](https://www.poetsofmodernity.xyz/POMBR/Italian/FiveItalianPoets.php#anchor_Toc326225679)> [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020]. Although there are other translations in existence (George Hochfield and Leonard Nathan's version, is, in my opinion, superior to Kline's) other translations of the line I chose do not work as smoothly as a title.

hardships of the war, the Resistance offered opportunities that women never had before, making it ‘their moment’. The decision to use Saba’s poem was motivated, initially, by a desire to ground the story in Italian culture, and a fear that I, as an outsider, would be unable to represent it accurately.

Identity is central to *Like a River towards the Sea*, because as I mentioned previously, the novel is a *bildungsroman* set against the backdrop of the war. The initial choice which propels Stella forward – severing family ties and breaking with tradition in a quest for greater independence – also sets up recurring emotions of guilt and remorse. The narrative teaches Stella that complete independence is not possible, and that human beings have to rely on others; Gianna and Marta’s help, in particular, makes Stella’s existence in Bologna possible. Her final conversation with Marta, which mentions the trip back to Caorle that Stella is soon to take (pp. 371-72), brings the reader full circle: Stella has acknowledged that she has a responsibility to her family, and that she needs them. The parallel evolution of Stella and Gianna was, to a degree, inspired by Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan tetralogy, which charts the lives of Lila and Elena, and where things rarely go well for both of them at the same time; the upwards and downwards curves of their lives cross repeatedly over the course of the four novels. While Stella’s character is more central than Gianna’s in *Like a River towards the Sea*, and the novel is less ambitious in terms of timeline, Gianna was intended to present a certain mystery, like Lila, whom the reader never fully gets to know.<sup>33</sup> Ferrante has been praised for her realistic portrayal of female friendship: the relationship between Lila and Elena is often ambiguous, their friendship mixed with jealousy, admiration, need. This appealed to me and I tried to emulate it in my novel. Gianna needs Stella’s admiration, her worship; when Stella stands up for herself, or goes against Gianna, the fragile structure of

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<sup>33</sup> Ferrante’s tetralogy is told by Elena in the first person, which largely contributes to the mystery presented by Lila. While I chose to write in third person, the limited point of view – which closely follows Stella’s perceptions – achieves, I hope, something similar.

their friendship collapses. Gianna, while smart and good-looking, suffers from low self-esteem and has a disposition towards depression. Ferrante's tetralogy focuses mainly on Lila and Elena, but in *Like a River towards the Sea* a third character, Pietro (Gianna's brother), plays an important part in the plot. By offering two different perspectives – one that rejects Mussolini and embraces political diversity, and one which accepts Mussolini and refuses to become politicised – Pietro and Gianna present Stella with a choice. The structure of the novel reflects this: in the first part, Gianna's world view and attitude appeal to Stella, but in the second part she adopts some of Pietro's beliefs, choosing to work for the Resistance. In the third part, embodied by Marta's character, Stella comes to make her own decisions, regardless of outside influences.

Gender also plays an important part in the novel. Stella's flight is caused by her determination not to accept the marriage that her father has agreed to on her behalf. The options before her – she could join a convent, like her older sister, or resign herself to the marriage – are limited, and her running away is an attempt at creating her own fate, a third alternative which involves more than living the same simple life, working the soil, as her parents. While Bologna does indeed offer more options for unmarried young women, there are also limitations there: Stella's colleague Donata quits her job as a typist after marrying, and Gianna, who is trapped between modern and traditional views, cannot commit to either marriage or independence, and struggles in the latter part of the novel with motherhood.

Class difference is embodied by the discrepancy between Stella and Gianna's backgrounds. In the first draft, this appeared most strikingly when Stella moved into the Angeli house after the pension's closure. Because of the shift in timeline, this was edited out of the current novel, and happens sometime between Part I and Part II. When Part II opens, Stella has been living at the house for several months and has become used to its comforts. However, I tried to show the difference between the Angeli house and Marta's studio in Part



III, when Stella, now living with Marta, returns to the house: ‘Could she really have lived here and not felt grateful, every day, for her luck? How quickly men got used to things and took them for granted’ (p. 292). Stella’s first visits in Part I also show her being impressed and intimidated by the size of the house and its furnishings (pp. 147-48, p. 164) and being reluctant to return because of the way in which the house highlights the material difference between herself and Gianna.

The Angeli family is upper middle class and was prosperous in early drafts. Later, I decided that Gianna’s fragility might be better justified if they were instead on the decline. The death of Gianna’s upper-class mother created a break between the families; in this way, Gianna and Pietro grew up with a shifting status. This works to isolate Gianna further – as shown during the gathering in Chapter Seven – and also gives Pietro a sharper awareness of class, which might have contributed to his interest in socialism. This decision was influenced in part by Penelope Fitzgerald’s *Innocence*, a novel which will be discussed in the following chapter, in which the Ridolfi family are on their way out, their houses falling to ruin, their philosophy no longer sustainable in a modern world.<sup>34</sup> The parallel between Gianna and Stella is made stronger by the Angeli’s decline: they are both in a precarious position, sitting uncomfortably at the boundary between well-defined social categories.

When I started writing the novel, I had never been to Bologna. While the two week-long trips I took over the course of the PhD programme were useful in terms of getting a sense of the city’s geography, as well as gathering materials and meeting people, I feel that staying in the city for a longer period of time would have helped create a stronger sense of place in the narrative. I used specific street names and included architectural features of the

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<sup>34</sup> Fitzgerald writes that ‘Ridolfi and his sister were totally left behind by Italy’s forward movement into the leadership of style and European culture. What they needed, really, was dusting off and rehabilitating, a recall to the present from the fading afterglow of old Florence’ – but it can be argued that the ‘dusting off’ never really takes place (Penelope Fitzgerald, *Innocence* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 142). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

city such as the San Petronio basilica and the *portici* in order to establish visuals for the reader, as well as the canals (on Via di Reno, for example). I also used sensory detail to describe the cold winter of 1944-1945, made even harsher by the shortages in firewood, coal, and gas, hoping that the weather would help ground the story and bring out the sense of place.

#### 1.4. Conclusion

Reading Italian fiction was an essential part of my writing process for this project. The four very different narratives crafted by Calvino, Viganò, Bassani and Ferrante brought out issues of identity, of gender, of class difference and of place, and I gained a much sharper understanding of the way in which these issues related to the Italian society of the 1940s and 1950s.

The portrayal of Italy as a living, breathing place, struggling with its past and its contradictions, was illuminating as it marked a striking departure from representations of Italy as ‘other’, as a museum or paradise removed from daily, mundane life.<sup>35</sup> In Viganò’s narrative, the Italian countryside is a wild place where the elements can work against protagonists, and bring about their deaths – as in the case of the snowstorm which ruins Agnese’s company’s attempt at crossing the front lines, driving them instead to a minefield.

In the latter part of this chapter, I have shown how reading Italian fiction led me to include the themes of identity, gender, class difference, and the power of place, in my own

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Vassallo writes that, in E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*, Italy is for Lucy Honeychurch ‘the realm of possibilities and fresh experience and perception’ (*British Writers and the Experience of Italy (1800-1940)* (Malta: Malta University Publishing, 2012), p. 71). Joseph Luzzi suggests that in the Romantic view of Italy, the country was a ‘geographically remote classroom’, in which ‘European exiles and Grand Tourists could educate themselves and experiment with their identities for a fixed amount of time before returning to their homelands’ (‘Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth,’ *MLN*, 117 (2002), p. 50). This idea of experimenting with one’s identity for a fixed amount of time appears, for example, in Billy Wilder’s 1972 comedy *Avanti!*, in which a straitlaced American businessman goes to Italy and discovers the ‘dolce vita.’

novel, creating a gap between Gianna and Stella's places in society. Reading fiction set in the historical period that I was seeking to represent – and, since my project was set abroad, fiction written by authors belonging to that specific culture – was a useful way of probing themes and conventions of the time, while absorbing aspects of the culture, and I think it would be a worthwhile undertaking for any writer with a historical project, whether or not grounded in a different culture.

## Chapter 2 – ‘Italianness’ in English-language novels: intratextual translation as a representational tool

Writing about modernist fiction, Juliette Taylor-Batty points out that ‘the emblematically modernist themes of exile, travel and intercultural encounter lead, inevitably, to the necessity of representing different languages’.<sup>36</sup> In contemporary literature, the themes of travel and intercultural encounter are still prevalent. While Tilmann Altenberg suggests that ‘the language an author chooses to write in need not at all be motivated by the story told’,<sup>37</sup> matters of realism and authenticity might induce an English-language author, if their story is set abroad or rooted in another culture, to incorporate some of the ‘original’ language spoken by the characters. When I began work on my novel, I felt a strong need to reconcile the story language, which was Italian or dialect, with the discourse language, English.<sup>38</sup>

This chapter investigates strategies for representing multiple languages – using Italian as an example – in an English-language text, and the impact that narrative themes and aims might have on the writer’s choices. Using the translational approaches proposed by Meir Sternberg in his 1981 article, ‘Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis,’ I will discuss the ways in which Adam Foulds’s *In The Wolf’s Mouth*, Lindsay Clarke’s *The Water Theatre*, Penelope Fitzgerald’s *Innocence*, and Virginia Baily’s *Early One Morning* feature the Italian language in their texts, showing the range of options available to writers interested in multilingual fiction. Finally, I will discuss the question of dialect within the context of 1940s Italy, using Italian fiction from the previous chapter, before touching on the use of Italian in my own novel.

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<sup>36</sup> Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Tilmann Altenberg, ‘Bolaño against Babel: Multilingualism, Translation and Narration in 2666,’ ‘La parte de los críticos’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 95 (2018), 217-233 (p. 221).

<sup>38</sup> I am using here the structuralist distinction between story (the events of the narrative) and discourse (the narration itself) as defined by Benjamin Chatman in *Story and discourse: narrative structure in fiction and film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

## 2.1. Translation and Terminology

Writing on the topic of fictional multilingualism,<sup>39</sup> Meir Sternberg suggests that ‘literary art finds itself confronted by a formidable mimetic challenge: how to represent the reality of polylingual discourse through a communicative medium which is normally unilingual’.<sup>40</sup> If they wish to emphasise the multiplicity of languages in their fiction, a writer will resort to what Sternberg terms ‘intratextual translation’: they will use translational approaches to reproduce all or part of the ‘original’ speech, or suggest in other ways that an utterance is being translated into the main language of the text. This attitude, which seeks to represent linguistic diversity or conflict rather than eliminate it, is, in Sternberg’s words, ‘vehicular matching’.<sup>41</sup>

The other alternative is simply to ignore the polylingualism of the fictional reality, which Sternberg calls the ‘homogenizing convention’: fictional utterances made in a different language are absorbed into the language of the text, without being signalled in any way.<sup>42</sup> Between the two ends of the spectrum, homogenizing convention and vehicular matching, Sternberg provides, in the words of Juliette Taylor-Batty, ‘a useful categorisation of the ways in which fiction can represent linguistic diversity’,<sup>43</sup> which we will now study more closely.

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<sup>39</sup> ‘Heterolingualism’ is another term used to describe the use of several languages in a single work of fiction. Grutman defines it as ‘the textualization of foreign idioms as well as varieties (social, regional, historical) of the authorial tongue’ (‘Effets hétérolingues dans le roman québécois du XIXe siècle’, *Littérature*, 101 (1996), 40-52 (p. 40, my translation). In their introduction to *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism* (*Linguistica Antverpiensia*, 4 (2005), 11-35), Delabastita and Grutman discuss the link between fictional multilingualism and translation: ‘Multilingual writing can be linked to translation in more than one way. First of all, translation is a welcome tool for writers who feel the need to use foreign languages yet do not want to exceed the linguistic competence of their presumably monolingual audience. Translating all or even part of the heterolingual utterances allows them to do just that – to have their cake and eat it too, as it were’ (p. 17).

<sup>40</sup> Meir Sternberg, ‘Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis’, *Poetics Today*, 2 (1981), 221-239 (p. 222).

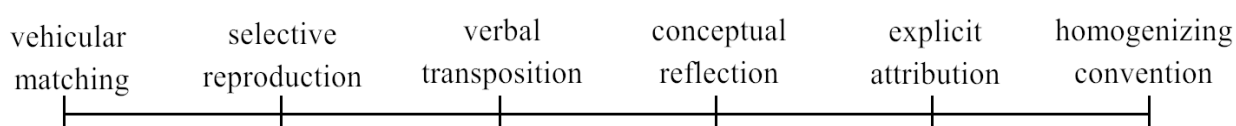
<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222-23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 41.

### 2.1.1. Intratextual Translation

The scale below is taken from Sternberg's article and displays a selection of intratextual translation processes: apart from homogenizing convention, described above, they suggest in different ways that the language of a fictional utterance (story language) is translated into the language of the narration (discourse language), and the text bears the marks of the process.



*Figure 1*

If we read the scale from left to right, the first strategy – vehicular matching – is the reproduction of foreign speech on the page, exactly as it happens in the fictional world: if a character launches into a tirade in Italian, for example, an author using vehicular matching would reproduce the full tirade on the page.

The second strategy, selective reproduction, differs only from vehicular matching in that the writer might choose to include some, but not all, of the foreign speech on the page. If we continue with our Italian tirade example, this might result in including a sentence or two, and then summarising the rest of the character's speech.

Moving away from reproducing foreign speech on the page, the third strategy, verbal transposition, involves suggesting through the main language of the narration that an utterance was made in a different tongue, using, for example, irregular grammar or a strange word order to evoke foreignness. If a writer wanted to suggest that an utterance was made in Italian, for example, they might have the character say, 'That man stole the bag of that lady,'

rather than ‘that lady’s bag,’ to reflect the difference between possessives in the two languages.

The fourth strategy, ‘conceptual reflection,’ suggests foreignness not through the language itself, but through the frame of reference, which indicates a different culture. Sternberg uses the example of *Gulliver’s Travels*: the Lilliputian people are unacquainted with the concept of a watch, and therefore describe Gulliver’s watch in a long periphrasis.<sup>44</sup>

Lastly, the fifth strategy, ‘explicit attribution,’ is the use of a speech tag, such as ‘she said in Italian’ – the last step before homogenization.

The difference between homogenization and the other strategies proposed by Sternberg, Taylor-Batty points out, is that ‘[these forms of translational mimesis] explicitly signal the polylingual nature of the scene and/or characters that they are depicting.’<sup>45</sup> Rather than allowing the reader to ignore the polylingual nature of the story, they show a desire on the author’s part to represent ‘otherness’, to convey a sense of difference in language and culture.

### 2.1.2. *Theories of Translation*

If we compare Sternberg’s article with more recent work on translational approaches, such as Michael Cronin’s book *Translation and Globalization*, the approaches that Cronin suggests for a ‘travel writer [...] faced with the fact of interlingual communication’ show similarities with Sternberg’s strategies.<sup>46</sup> ‘Mimesis’ is the reproduction of foreign speech on the page, equivalent to Sternberg’s vehicular matching; ‘defamiliarization’ is the use of isolated words in the narrative, creating lexical exoticism, like Sternberg’s selective reproduction.

‘Periphrasis,’ which consists of expressing through indirect speech what is said in a foreign language, is not mentioned by Sternberg, and can therefore be added to the strategies

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<sup>44</sup> Sternberg, pp. 225, 227, 230, 231.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor-Batty, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 159.

mentioned above, which will be referred to when looking at the texts in the second part of this chapter.<sup>47</sup> As we can see, the choices suggested by Cronin for a travel writer intent on representing the language of a foreign location are similar to the options proposed by Sternberg, with the exception of periphrasis.

Before moving on from the topic of translation, it is worth mentioning a distinction made by Cronin and other translators between two translational approaches: ‘naturalizing’ (also called domestication or normalisation) and ‘exoticizing’ (also called foreignising). When Venuti establishes the difference between the two in *The Translator’s Invisibility*, he quotes German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher who, according to him,

allowed the translator to choose between a domesticating practice, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values, bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing practice, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad.<sup>48</sup>

The four novels that will be considered in the next section use, to some extent, an exoticizing approach, since the authors could have chosen to write in English with no trace of the ‘original’ Italian; but as we will see, the degree of exoticism and translational strategies vary depending on the novel.

## 2.2. Intratextual Translation in Context

The novels in this section were selected because of their different representations of Italian, and in some cases, of other languages. It is worth pointing out here that language is not

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Periphrasis, however, would need to be combined with verbal transposition or explicit attribution; otherwise it could easily fall into the homogenizing convention.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 15.



necessarily a central concern in these novels – as is the case, for example, with the authors studied by Rebecca Walkowitz in *Born Translated*<sup>49</sup> – but that the writers, nevertheless, make an effort to reflect the tongue that would be spoken in the setting chosen for their fiction. Adam Foulds’s war novel, *In the Wolf’s Mouth*, uses Sicily as one of the theatres for World War II, where internal and external conflicts occur simultaneously. In Lindsay Clarke’s *The Water Theatre*, Italy is primarily a setting that is ‘other’, a place that enables the protagonist to reflect on his own life and make important changes; this element is also present in Virginia Bailey’s *Early One Morning*, but it is interwoven with questions of identity and individual responsibility. Lastly, Italy is the setting for most of Penelope Fitzgerald’s novel, *Innocence*, which features two conflicting worldviews and approaches to life.

### 2.2.1. *In the Wolf’s Mouth*

*In the Wolf’s Mouth* is divided in two parts, the first taking place in North Africa, and the second in Sicily;<sup>50</sup> the prologue, set in 1926, also takes place in Sicily. The novel recounts the lives of four men through the Second World War: Will Walker, an English Security Field officer, Ray Marfione, an Italian American infantryman, Sicilian shepherd Angilù, and Mafioso Cirò Albanese.

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<sup>49</sup> In *Born Translated* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), Walkowitz discusses, among other things, multilingualism in fiction, looking closely at the work of writers such as Junot Díaz, J. M. Coetzee and Jamaica Kincaid, who use language(s) in their fiction in unexpected ways, refusing to let Standard English be the dominant tongue of the text.

<sup>50</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, Sicily is understood as being part of Italy, although there are cultural differences and the Mafia is originally Sicilian (Naples has its own version, the Camorra). In the definition of ‘vendetta’, an important concept in Foulds’s novel, the Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable points out that vendetta is ‘traditionally prevalent in Corsica and Sicily’. ‘Vendetta’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001/acref-9780198609810>> [accessed 20 May 2020]

The title of Foulds's novel reflects his approach to intratextual translation. Foulds includes few Italian words in the discourse language, perhaps to ensure that the novel is perfectly readable for an English-only speaker – but he also employs a process halfway between verbal transposition and conceptual reflection, using literal translations of Italian expressions and phrases. *In the Wolf's Mouth* is a translation of the Italian phrase for 'good luck,' *in bocca al lupo*. For the non-Italian speaker, the title simply suggests a place of danger, closer to the meaning of the matching French phrase, *la gueule du loup* (a trap). In this way, although Foulds's title conveys further meaning for the Italian or the French speaker, it makes sense for the intended English-speaking audience. The strangeness of the phrase might even induce a reader with no foreign language skills to look up the wording.

Foulds's technique appears more strikingly in the following excerpt from the prologue, set in Sicily in 1926:

Angilù put his hands to the side of his mouth and sang, 'Who's singing over there? Sounds like a sick dog.' There was a pause, then Gino's voice drifted back. 'Who's that singing up there? You sound like you've got toothache in every tooth.'

For a while they sang insults.

'You know nothing about singing. You'd better go and learn at school in Palermo.'

'You don't know how to sing. You need to go to school in Monreale.'

'When you were born behind a door I thought you were a stillborn dog.'

'When you were born in the middle of the street there was a terrible stink of shit.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Adam Foulds, *In the Wolf's Mouth* (London: Vintage Books, 2015), p. 5. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

While these insults are written in grammatically correct English, they are clearly not native to the language. ‘Toothache in every tooth’ sounds odd because of the repetition of ‘tooth,’ which a native speaker might have tried to avoid; this is also true of the ‘born behind a door/stillborn dog’ line. The absence of speech tags helps the reader notice these strange turns of phrase. The improvised insults and their being sung – a rather surprising fact – are powerful in creating a sense of place and otherness.

Explicit attribution is used at various points in the narrative, sometimes to denote a difference between Italian and Sicilian dialect, as is the case here: ‘The tall man said, in good Italian, ‘He isn’t here?’ Angilù answered, as he had to, in Sicilian. ‘No one answered’” (p. 17). The use of ‘as he had to’ suggests a difference in class and status; Angilù, despite being a shepherd, can speak Italian, but he chooses not to as a mark of deference toward the ‘tall man,’ who turns out to be the local landowner and prince. Explicit attribution also denotes the difference, in the second section of *In the Wolf’s Mouth*, between English and Italian, when Cirò, a Mafioso who has returned to Sicily with the American army after a twenty-year absence, acts as a translator (pp. 175, 228), and when Italo-American soldier Ray communicates with the locals, or reads inscriptions on ‘posters of Mussolini’ (pp. 178, 217). Cirò takes advantage of his privileged position as a speaker of Sicilian, Italian and English to re-establish his former influence in the town, even in front of the Allies: ‘Albanese said something to him in Italian and the two men exchanged words too rapidly for Will to understand [...]. Afterwards, Albanese said in English. ‘We are going to work great together. Greco here understands me [...]’” (p. 228). This episode illustrates Sabine Strümper-Krobb’s assertion that translation ‘is a ‘weapon’, because it generates knowledge and insight and is able to secure a favourable position for those who control it’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Sabine Strümper-Krobb, ‘The Translator in Fiction’, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 3 (2003), 115-121 (p. 120).

Explicit attribution also appears in a conversation between Angilù and British officer Will Walker, once the Allies have gained control of the Sicilian town:

‘Good morning, can I help you at all? If it’s the medical officers you’re after I’m afraid they won’t be here for a day or two.’

Angilù answered in Italian. ‘Do you not speak Italian? I don’t speak English and I’m not going to be able to make you understand anything if you can’t speak Italian.’

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to speak a good deal slower than that if I’m going to understand you.’

‘I said, do you speak Italian? I need to talk about my house and the old landlord. I should have got the Prince to come with me.’

‘Did you say “Prince”? There is a local prince, isn’t there? Look, stay here, and I’ll get someone who can help. I can read a newspaper perfectly well, but you don’t sound like what I’m reading. Stay here.’ (p. 237)

The limits of speech tags are obvious here. We know that Angilù is speaking in Italian, but we have to guess which language Walker answers in; the line about speaking slower may be in Italian, since Angilù repeats his question. However, the fact that the dialogue is written in idiomatic English makes it unclear why they are struggling to communicate. Our attention is drawn to the fact that Angilù’s speech is being translated by Foulds from the original Italian, but the reader is given no sense of what the words might have sounded like.

While discussing the English translation of the German novel *The Magic Mountain*, Kate Briggs brings up a similar issue. As a reader, she is made to notice, because of the novel’s multilingualism, that she is reading a translation, a story which originally happened in a different language:

This is the belief-suspension that reading a translation requires: even when all logics point to the characters speaking, acting and interacting, to the prose having been written, the feelings and ideas having been articulated, in German (the story of an unassuming young man making his way, in midsummer, from his native city of Hamburg to Davos-Platz), here it all is in English, and here I am being invited – expected? – to go with it.<sup>53</sup>

This ‘belief-suspension’ is also required, I would argue, of readers engaging with a novel written in English, but set in a different place – in the case of my novel, Italy – and following native characters who would not, in the fictional world of the novel, be able to speak English.

Finally, verbal transposition is a rare occurrence in the novel, happening once when American soldiers come in contact with the Sicilian population: ‘Sicilian men slapped their chests and declared, ‘My cousin – Chicago!’ Or ‘America best! Is best!’’ (p. 216). The other episode unfolds when Ray, having seen his friend killed, takes shelter in the house of the local aristocrat, and interacts with his daughter, Luisa. This is a section of their dialogue:

‘You are American soldier.’

‘That’s right.’

‘You are young.’

[...]

‘There is a place,’ she said. ‘Do you speak French? French is better.’

‘I don’t speak no French. Are you French?’

‘You put blood everywhere,’ she said. ‘The servant will want to know. But it is fine.’ (p. 223)

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<sup>53</sup> Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), p. 23.

Luisa speaks not only Italian and English, but also French. Her only mistake in English is forgetting the indefinite article before ‘American soldier’; the use of full verbal forms (‘it is fine’ rather than ‘it’s fine’) also denotes awkwardness. In a later exchange, she tells Ray, ‘I go now’ (p. 257), a common tense error for Italian speakers of English, since Italian does not have an equivalent to the English present continuous. Once Luisa finds out that Ray understands Italian, they agree that she will use Italian when she doesn’t know a word in English (p. 241) – but since their dialogue unfolds in English, it is left to the reader to guess what language she might be using, and her mistakes are few. Jane Hodson discusses this type of inconsistent representation in *Dialect in Film and Literature*, pointing out that writers might choose to represent characters ‘using a lot of dialectal features to begin with, [and] once the basic principle of their dialect has been established, the density with which it is marked diminishes.’<sup>54</sup> This, she argues, is caused in part by ‘reader resistance’, as the representation of dialect – or, in our case, of non-native English – on the page might irritate the reader, and might have the additional and unwanted effect of making the character seem less intelligent.

Overall, Foulds’s use of conceptual reflection, explicit attribution, and the occasional verbal transposition manages to convey a sense of place and of otherness despite his decision not to include Italian in the text of *In the Wolf’s Mouth*. However, as the interaction between Walker and Angilù shows, the consistent use of English in the novel sometimes requires greater suspension of disbelief on the reader’s part. The story of the novel is one of cyclical, senseless violence, and of a failure of understanding (the Allies’ inability to grasp the complex workings of the Sicilian society and the Mafia lead to Angilù’s death). Perhaps Foulds’s decision to retain English as the only language of the text is a way of prefacing the

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<sup>54</sup> Jane Hodson, *Dialect in Film and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 110.

end of the novel, showing that the dominant language, spoken by the Allies, will not accept compromise or difference.

### 2.2.2. *The Water Theatre*

*The Water Theatre* tells the story of a war reporter, Martin Crowther, and of his complex relationship with long-time friends Adam and Marina Brigshaw, whose father, Hal Brigshaw, was Martin's mentor. Estranged from Marina and Adam, Martin is tasked by Hal to talk his children into forgiving his mistakes and visiting him on his deathbed. The novel chronicles, among past events, the story of Martin's journey to Umbria, where Adam and Marina live. The community they foster and belong to believes in local myths such as that of the Sibyl;<sup>55</sup> this is where Clarke's Italy begins to resemble the setting for a Shakespearean play rather than a contemporary place.<sup>56</sup> The events that take place are difficult to explain through science and hold a magical or spiritual quality that Martin eventually accepts. While the setting may be imaginary, however, Clarke includes actual Italian language in his English text. When Martin arrives in Fontanalba, he asks for directions to Marina's cottage:

Two small boys appeared. They stood on thin legs, their glossy hair cropped short over faces which stared aghast as I cobbled together a question in Italian; then they fled into the house. [...]

I was about to turn away when a woman in a black frock came out of the house, wiping her hands on an apron. She called off the dog, then asked something –

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<sup>55</sup> When discussing the surroundings of the village, Fontanalba, local aristocrat Gabriella points out to Martin a nearby cave to which the '*Sibilla cumana*' – a creature referred to in Virgil – moved after the advent of Christianity in Naples (Lindsay Clarke, *The Water Theatre* (London: Alma Books, 2010), p. 55. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text).

<sup>56</sup> In the author's note at the end of the novel, Clarke claims that 'the Umbria to which [he] has shifted [the] legend [of a revenant] is as imaginary as are, say, the Italian settings of Elizabethan plays [...]' (p. 434).

presumably what business I had frightening her children in the dusk. I tried again.

She tipped an ear and lifted a thin, worried hand to her cheek. “*Ah, la signora inglese,*” she exclaimed at last. “*Marina! Sì, sì.*”

“*Sua casa?*” I pressed. “*Dove?*”

Her wrists twisted. Her tongue sped. As best I could I picked my way through the torrent of help and, when I thought I’d got things clear, she added more. (pp. 9-10)

Clarke is using selective reproduction, including some but not all of the fictional conversation in Italian. Since the narrative is in the first person and reflects Martin’s perceptions, the choice of selective reproduction is justified by what is happening: only the Italian that Martin understands can be reproduced on the page, while the ‘torrent of help’ is beyond understanding and therefore reproducing. This has the effect of placing the reader, no matter their language competency, in the same position as the narrator (unable to understand what the woman is trying to communicate: that Marina’s cottage is currently uninhabited).

This short episode is essentially the only time when local Italians with no knowledge of English appear in the narrative. As emphasised in Clarke’s author’s note, his aim is not to represent contemporary Italy; it is the mythical aspect of the place, the pagan beliefs inherited from the Etruscans, that matter to his story. The one Italian character who plays a part in the story, Gabriella, can speak English. A close friend of Marina and Adam, she is a *contessa*, a member of the aristocracy, and although she has a good command of English, Martin is prompt to correct her mistakes. The following extract is taken from their first conversation:

“I see. You wished to jump a surprise on them!”

“Spring.”

“Excuse me?”



“Spring, not jump.”

“Ah yes. Forgive me... my English... I am Gabriella.” (pp. 16-17)

Clarke uses verbal transposition, in the form of a wrong word choice, to reflect Gabriella’s non-native English, although her meaning is clear to the reader. Martin’s immediate correction of her mistake (unasked for) is indicative of his character: rather than showing gratitude for the fact that they can communicate, he chooses to focus on the mistaken use of ‘jump’. Certainly, there are other elements at play here; Martin is frustrated that he has not managed to meet with Marina or Adam, and it has been suggested that Gabriella knows them and is acting as a gatekeeper. The antagonism, therefore, comes up in the conversation; but the exchange also establishes Martin as someone who expects things to go his way and will correct the grammar of someone he has recently met.

Verbal transposition is used repeatedly in Gabriella’s speech in *The Water Theatre*, sometimes through her use of tenses. She tells Martin, for example: “I am forgetting. You are famous for your *ardimento*. [...]” (p. 18), when ‘I was forgetting’ would sound more natural. Selective reproduction is also used consistently; Gabriella may not know the occasional English word, or there might be no satisfying translation in English, as with the following: “[...] There is salad, cheese, *prosciutto* and bread. If you like, he will make us omelettes with *tartufi neri* [...]” (p. 22). It is worth emphasising that Clarke, although he uses the accepted convention of italics to signal the presence of a different language, provides no translation of the Italian words included in the text; the reader relies on context and on their own language skill.

Clarke’s language choices serve the narrative and the characterisation in different ways, sometimes serving to place the reader in the same position as the narrator, sometimes working to suggest a tension between characters. However, the main characters’ English background does limit the opportunities for including Italian in *The Water Theatre*.

### 2.2.3. *Innocence*

The main narrative of Penelope Fitzgerald's *Innocence*, set in 1955 Florence, follows the romance and marriage of Chiara Ridolfi, daughter of a penniless Florentine count, and Salvatore Rossi, a neurologist from the south of Italy. Although *Innocence* is set largely in Florence, its universe has a cosmopolitan feel. Chiara Ridolfi's mother was American; Chiara's aunt Maddalena was for a time married to an Englishman; Chiara herself was educated in England, has an English best friend, and can 'spell incorrectly in four languages' (p. 239). Perhaps for this reason, Fitzgerald inserts Italian words into the narrative without signalling them – she does not use italics, and there are no footnotes. The same happens with French when Chiara's father is addressed, at a party, by a French author:

'Tell me, que font les jeunes?'

'I'm afraid I haven't asked them what they're doing.'

'Do they still think of me, Pierre Aulard, as young?' (p. 154)

The context helps the reader work out some of the meaning: even if they don't know that 'les jeunes' means 'the young' in French, the reply involves what someone is doing. The presence of 'young' in the next question is another clue. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald's choice not to use italics might seem surprising, and somewhat confusing for the reader. On one occasion, italics *are* used, but to signal a quote from a different source, rather than a difference in language: "It wouldn't make any difference how often. Do you remember "*amor segnoreggio la anima, la quale fu si tosto a lui disponata*"?"' (p. 162). Chiara, talking to her best friend Barney about her soon-to-be husband, references a quotation that, as readers, we must assume is linked to the education she and Barney received together. The presence of the word 'amor' suggests it is something to do with love, but in the absence of further context or a footnote, only by researching the quote might the reader find out that Chiara is (mis)quoting

from Dante's *La Vita Nuova*. Including such a sentence – in fourteenth-century Italian, which may prove difficult to decipher even for someone with an understanding of contemporary Italian – may be a way of suggesting the depth of the education that Chiara and Barney shared, the length of time spent together at the convent. It is also, perhaps, a reminder of Chiara's Italianness.

The next two examples, which I would like to set against one another, are taken from the narration. The first refers to a moment when Salvatore's colleague, Gentilini, pauses at the entrance of the Ricordanza, the country mansion owned by Chiara's family. There is an inscription above the doors, readable 'in part':

Maggior dolore è ben la Ricordanza –  
senti' dire di lor con sì alti sospiri –  
o nell' amaro inferno amena stanza? (p. 91)

In keeping with the rest of the novel, Fitzgerald does not help the reader derive meaning from the inscription. We get a description of the house through Gentilini's eyes, and a glimpse of Salvatore, whom his colleague is ashamed to see skulking around the area; then the narrative moves on.

In another episode, Salvatore, having travelled to his hometown in order to sell his share of the family land, visits an abandoned factory: 'An inscription in painted lettering, MUSSOLINI IS THE MAN WHOM NEITHER GOD NOR MAN WILL BEND could still just be made out on one of the inner walls at the entrance to the workers' recreation room' (p. 165). There is no reason why this inscription – painted, we assume, during the rise of Fascism, a regime that exalted Italy's national unity and strength – would be in English; the narrator must be translating it for us. Why did Fitzgerald choose to reproduce the inscription from the Ricordanza in its 'original' Italian, but to translate the one in the factory? In both

situations, the man reading the inscription is Italian, with presumably little understanding of English. Perhaps the decision reflects the struggle between old and new that underpins the novel. The Ricordanza's inscription is much older than the factory's: in the opening chapter, set in the sixteenth century, the ancestors of the Ridolfi already live in the mansion.<sup>57</sup> The Mussolini inscription, on the other hand, dates back to the late 1920s or early 1930s, a time when colonisation and a world war have already happened, and when boundaries between countries are more elastic (think, for example, of Chiara being educated in England, or of her American mother living in Italy long enough to have a child). This might be why the two inscriptions are treated differently: one belongs to the old world, linked to the Ridolfi family, and the other to the new, represented by Salvatore and Barney. Another reason might be that the second inscription holds more weight in the narrative, and Fitzgerald wants to ensure that her English-only readers will understand it: indeed, 'the man whom neither God nor Man will bend' might well apply to Salvatore, whose inflexibility offers a stark contrast to Chiara's 'tendency to fragment [...] into other existences' (p. 82).

Overall, the dialogue in *Innocence* does not contain as much Italian as one might expect, considering that most of the novel takes place in Italy. Conversations between Chiara and her cousin Cesare, for example, are related to the reader in English.<sup>58</sup> Only at the end of the novel, when Chiara phones Cesare to ask him where Salvatore is, does Italian appear in one of their exchanges: "[...] I'm just asking you what to do, *come sempre*" (p. 238, my emphasis).

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<sup>57</sup> 'Ricordanza' itself is, in Italian, an archaic word for 'memory,' something that is remembered, which further anchors the Ridolfi in the past. The Ricordanza, no longer inhabited and falling to ruin, is a memory of a distant, more prosperous time, and the fact that it is the place where Chiara and Salvatore make love for the first time is significant.

<sup>58</sup> They have a conversation in idiomatic English (pp. 137-41), and a further interaction (pp. 274-79), when Chiara and Barney go to the farm. Similarly, the conversation between Cesare and Salvatore (pp. 330-39) would likely be taking place in Italian, but is reported in English.

Italian also erupts into the English text when the wife of Salvatore's colleague, Signora Gentilini, faints at Chiara and Salvatore's wedding. Barney and Cesare rescue her:

As she scrambled upright Signora Gentilini opened her eyes, with their large yellowish whites, and said:

‘Non so capacitarmi... mi vergogno...’

‘What's she ashamed of?’ asked Barney.

‘She wants to recover,’ Cesare said.

‘You mean that she's afraid of embarrassing her husband. You mean he hardly ever takes her out with him in public and she's afraid that if she screws it all up and calls attention to herself she'll never be allowed out again. [...]’

Cesare did not deny this.

[...] Signora Gentilini sat up, and clinging to Cesare's arm began to talk in a rapid, broken manner. (p. 227-8)

The exchange between Barney and Cesare makes it clear what Signora Gentilini is saying, regardless of the reader's competency in Italian. The rest of Signora Gentilini's ‘broken’ speech is reported as ‘periphrasis,’ in Michael Cronin's words – indirect speech – through Cesare's point of view, as a long sentence that stretches over eight lines: ‘Anyone would think that she was not used to going out, not used to company, but the fact was that she hadn't eaten or drunk anything although everybody had pressed her...’ (p. 228). This enables the reader to follow Signora Gentilini's monologue (giving them an advantage on Barney) and to realise that Barney's interpretation is, on the whole, accurate.

As Julian Barnes points out in his introduction to the novel, ‘*Innocence* is constructed around and through a number of masterly scenes, usually between two people, in which

minor to major misunderstandings occur [...].'<sup>59</sup> Miscommunications, or failures of understanding, are an important theme in Fitzgerald's novel, and this is reflected on some of the occasions that Italian appears in the text, or when attention is drawn to language.

Consider, for example, this section where Barney calls Chiara 'weedy':

At this damning word, of which she didn't know the Italian equivalent, Chiara hung her head. She accepted it absolutely. To be weedy, as she understood it, is to be alien, not to grow in the right place, but at the same time to lack stoutness and self-reliance. She knew her tendency to fragment, often against her will, into other existences. (p. 82)

Although Chiara does not know the Italian translation of 'weedy,' she has developed her own understanding of the word, merging the two definitions given by the OED: 'of the nature of or resembling a weed', but also 'lacking strength of character; spineless, weak-willed.' This difficulty – or perhaps impossibility – of translation is something that appears again in the narrative, most strikingly when Barney comes back to Italy in order to tell Cesare that she loves him. Chiara, unsure of the venture's success, tries to understand where Barney's feelings originated:

'What did he do at the wedding?' Chiara called out. 'What did he say?'

Barney answered over her shoulder. 'He said, "Brava Lavinia."'

'Was that all?'

'How would you translate that into English?'

'I don't think you could.' (pp. 276-77)

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<sup>59</sup> Julian Barnes, 'Introduction,' in Penelope Fitzgerald, *Innocence* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), vii-xv (p. xi).

Barney's love for Cesare is rooted in those words that cannot, or will not, translate well into English. What the words convey – approval, a sense of admiration – is considerable for quiet, even-tempered Cesare, and yet for the receiver, this expression of admiration took on a meaning of romantic love that was not the speaker's intention.

Because the world represented in Fitzgerald's novel is multi-cultural and multi-lingual, her choice not to differentiate stylistically between languages – in the narration or the dialogue – is understandable. Chiara, who '[spells] incorrectly in four languages,' is unlikely to make a distinction between these languages, unless an issue of translation arises; therefore the text does not draw a line between Italian, French, or English, instead including foreign phrases fluidly into the English-language narrative.

#### 2.2.4. *Early One Morning*

Virginia Baily's *Early One Morning* juxtaposes two timelines: the first, set in Rome during the wartime years, follows Chiara Ravello, an Italian woman who, witnessing the rounding up of Roman Jews in the ghetto in 1943, rescues a little Jewish boy, Daniele. The second, set in 1973, follows Maria, the daughter of Daniele and Welsh Edna. Having discovered the identity of her birth father, Maria travels to Rome in order to explore her Italian heritage; this is where she and Chiara meet.

Baily has two approaches to representing elements of the Italian language and culture in the novel. In the wartime sections, where all characters are Italian, less attention is drawn to language. Baily creates a sense of place using selective reproduction, with street names, landmarks, celebrities of the time, and family names being presented in Italian ('Babbo' for 'Dad,' 'Nonna' for 'Grandma').<sup>60</sup> The formatting of Chiara's address on her identity papers –

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<sup>60</sup> Examples include 'the statue of Bruno Giordano' (p. 3), the 'new favourite matinée idol, Gino Bechi' (p. 5), 'the view of the tower of San Lorenzo from the window' (p. 6), 'her Olivetti typewriter' (p. 41), and 'Nonna's house' (p. 63). All page numbers are taken from Virginia Baily, *Early One*

‘Via dei Cappellari 147’ – is suggestive of Sternberg’s conceptual reflection in its difference from the English model, creating a sense of unfamiliarity and otherness for the reader by referring to a different system. When Italian words appear in the narrative, Baily offers a smooth translation through Chiara, as with this briefly glimpsed character: ‘[Chiara] doesn’t know her real name but everyone calls her Nonna Torta – which might mean Granny Pie or Granny Wrong; both epithets would suit’ (p. 7). In those wartime sections, when Italian family names are used in dialogue, they are not italicised: ‘Mamma,’ he screams [...]’ (p. 21). This seems justified: the Italian word ‘mamma’ belongs to the characters’ native language and they would not single it out, which the use of italics might suggest.

In the 1973 timeline, the situation is different. The plot revolves around teenager Maria finding out about her Italian father, getting in contact with, and visiting, Chiara in Rome (Maria’s father is the Jewish boy Chiara saved during the war). With the arrival of Welsh Maria, language is brought to attention in a different way: the conversations between Maria and Chiara, conducted partly in English and partly in Italian, bring up issues of translatability, (mis)communication, and false friends. When Chiara addresses Maria in English, she uses verbal transposition, with sentence structure and word choices often reflecting the Italian ‘original’. The common confusion between simple present and present continuous appears in examples such as ‘Maria, I go out one minute’ (p. 283). The use of ‘one’ here rather than ‘a’, more natural in English, is another indication that Chiara’s thought process is happening in Italian (where *una* is the translation of both ‘one’ and ‘a’). Sometimes Chiara uses words of a high register: ‘renounce’ (p. 118) is close to the Italian *rinunciare* and is not immediately understood by Maria, because it is not commonly used in conversational English.

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*Morning* (London: Fleet, 2016), and further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.



Language, in this section of the narrative, is not fixed but rather fluctuating; it changes depending on the state of the speaker. On the day of Maria and Chiara's first meeting, Chiara's English is affected by an accident that occurred in the morning (a car caught her ankle as she stepped off the curb). This is illustrated by Chiara confusing the words 'accident' and 'incident,' and by her frustration when she fails to find her words:

'I am not myself today. Because of the incident. My English on this day is' – the signora paused, searching for the word. She scrunched her face up, puffed out her cheeks. She made a flapping gesture with one hand and drummed on the taxi window with a manicured fingernail – 'is very little,' she said, eventually. She held her finger and thumb close together to indicate how reduced it was. (p. 272)

Chiara's broken speech, interrupted in the prose by the representation of her body language as she tries to retrieve the words, effectively places the reader in the same position as Maria, waiting for the end of the sentence while 'watching' Chiara's struggle.

In the short section retracing the love story between Maria's mother and Daniele, language even becomes superfluous: 'They knew only a few words of each other's languages. Mostly, they bypassed words' (p. 95). Despite this, Baily chooses to show in one instance the language Daniele is speaking, providing the translation afterwards: "'Corri,' he said. Run' (p. 95).

*Early One Morning* is a narrative interested in language learning. On the train to Rome, Maria attempts to communicate with an Italian family, but the language – which she had thought 'would rise up once she was in Italy' – fails her, with only the one inappropriate sentence coming to mind ("Do you have that handbag in another colour?" p. 241). The shortcomings of phrases learned in a classroom or a book become apparent here, when the

learner is confronted to native speakers in the real world. Maria's language learning also justifies, on a few occasions, the apparition of Italian language in the English text, as is the case here: 'She had practiced her Italian on that cat. *Ciao, bella. Come stai? Mi chiamo Maria*' (p. 86). Identity is an important theme in the novel, and Maria, upon learning that she is half-Welsh, half-Italian, decides to go looking for this 'Italianness,' seeking out the part of herself that has just been unveiled.<sup>61</sup> In the same way that identity can be split, multiple, language can also be porous, as suggested by this comment, made by Maria's mother: 'Precious' was one of those words that could be said in an Italian way with a roll of the R and an O on the end, and it was the same, more or less. *Prezioso*' (p. 95).

Baily's use of translational mimesis serves not only to create a realistic sense of Chiara's Italianness, but also to draw attention to the challenges of communication, and the pitfalls of language learning. In a serpentine conversation, Maria's question about a hat owned by Chiara leads to a discussion about mushrooms, and to the eventual realisation that *porcini* does not seem to have a translation in English.<sup>62</sup> This highlights a failure of language itself, as well as its rootedness in geography and local history. The consistent use of verbal transposition in Chiara's speech, throughout the 1970s timeline, is Baily's way of showing that despite Chiara's command of English, her thought process is still happening in Italian.

The four novels examined here show that, as Sternberg suggested, the range of techniques within the frame of translational mimesis will be used differently depending on a narrative's themes and aims.<sup>63</sup> Whereas Lindsay Clarke uses Italy as the setting for an alternative way of life and belief system in *The Water Theatre*, thus choosing to highlight difficulties of

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<sup>61</sup> Baily uses the word 'Italianness' in a passage when Maria, having just arrived in Rome, is selecting clothes to wear on her first day: 'Everything looked too hot and too British. None of it expressed how she was now, her burgeoning Italianness' (p. 284).

<sup>62</sup> Baily, pp. 314-15. Chiara theorises that perhaps porcini 'do not grow in Wales.'

<sup>63</sup> Sternberg, p. 236.

communication between English and Italian speakers, Adam Foulds focuses on the way language can be used to manipulate and influence people, which fits with his subject matter – war, and the exercise of power. Fitzgerald and Baily are both interested in the failures of language as a means of communication, and use Italian (and, in Fitzgerald’s case, French) in their texts to draw attention to the polylingual reality of the narrative world. On several occasions, the texts point out the impossibility of translation; while languages can be porous and near transparent, the gaps between the cultures they represent cannot always be bridged.

Of these four novels, only *In the Wolf’s Mouth* addresses the difference between Italian and the local dialect of Sicily. While this is a further issue that English writers, understandably, may ignore in order not to overcomplicate their narratives, I will discuss briefly how Italian narratives include or ignore dialect, before turning to intratextual translation in my own novel.

### 2.3. Language within language: the question of dialect

Italy was only unified in 1861. Although Italian was taught in schools and the Fascist government pushed the idea of a single Italy, united by one language, regional dialects were the language of choice in the 1940s – in rural communities especially.<sup>64</sup> The question of dialect within the Italian language is, on a smaller scale, the question this chapter revolves around: the polylingualism of the fictional world compared to the presumed monolingualism of the narrative. Elena Ferrante, Giorgio Bassani and Italo Calvino, discussed in Chapter One, use dialect in their narratives, but in different ways.

Ferrante indicates the presence of dialect through speech tags, as Kate Briggs points out, asking her reader to imagine the dialect, rather than showing it on the page. The story told in the *Neapolitan* novels begins in a poor neighbourhood of Naples, where most people speak in dialect,

but rather than producing passages of dialect on the page, Ferrante [...] asks her readers [...] to hear the switch, to hear the sudden change in cadence, in vowel-sounds, in familiarity, in violence and urgency [...] but without actually seeing it or hearing it or reading it.<sup>65</sup>

This is an interesting decision on Ferrante's part. It could be argued that by leaving the dialect out of the narration, the author gives it greater power. The story of the four novels is told in the first person by Elena Greco, who becomes a novelist over the course of the narrative. At various points, Elena feels ashamed of her neighbourhood and resents the power

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<sup>64</sup> Massimo Cerruti, Claudia Crocco and Stefania Marzo write that 'Italo-Romance dialects were essentially the sole languages for daily use until at least the Unification of Italy (1861)' while 'Italian was used almost exclusively in writing and formal styles, and only by a small minority of the population'. However, they point out that 'since the political unification, and in particular during the twentieth century, a great number of dialect speakers have shifted to speaking Italian'. (*Towards a New Standard: Theoretical and Empirical Studies on the Restandardization of Italian*, ed. by Massimo Cerruti, Claudia Crocco and Stefania Marzo (Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 5).

<sup>65</sup> Briggs, pp. 26-27.

it holds over her, bringing her back to the child that she was, rather than the successful author she has become.<sup>66</sup> The absence of dialect on the page might also be intended to seal the illusion of Elena writing the *Neapolitan Novels* herself; it is easy to imagine her reluctance to include dialect in the discourse language, as it would be acknowledging the place she comes from.

In *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, Bassani uses italics to signal the appearance of Ferrarese or Venetian dialect on the page, and the presence of other languages, French in particular. In Jamie McKendrick's translation, the two are treated differently: while dialect is starred and translated in footnotes, other references (for example, when the characters are quoting from Leconte de Lisle or Baudelaire, on pp. 41, 94, 186) are explained in endnotes, requiring the reader to flip to the back of the novel if they want an explanation. On occasion, instances of foreign speech are not translated at all: for example, this is Micòl's reported speech when she and the narrator are wandering around the park: 'Now, *ça va sans dire*, there was no point in thinking of using the canoe any more: it was partly stove-in, covered in dust, reduced to being 'the ghost of a canoe'' (p. 93). The French phrase *ça va sans dire* (it goes without saying) is not translated, perhaps because it is not essential to the reader's understanding of Micòl's point. Nevertheless, the insertion of such words and phrases establish a sense of the characters' education, of their being well-read.

The use of dialect serves to ground the story in Ferrara, and to indicate social order. Micòl's great-grandfather 'was nicknamed *al gatt*, the cat' (p. 21), whereas his son's nickname was '*al matt mugnana*, the apricot nutcase' because of 'the colour of his eccentric fur-lined coat' (p. 20). Those words of dialect reflect the way in which the townspeople

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<sup>66</sup> In *The Story of a New Name*, the second volume of the *Neapolitan Novels*, the narrator has to 'forcibly regress' when she comes back to Naples, '[resorting] to the most violent dialect of the neighborhood' in order to reach her destination on the bus (p. 456). In *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, Elena reacts violently when she finds her daughter listening to a child speaking dialect, 'coarse words, the same horribly vulgar words [she] had learned as a child' (p. 307).

perceive the Finzi-Contini family. There are multiple instances of dialect in the narrative, sometimes Ferrarese, sometimes Ferrarese-Jewish, and sometimes Venetian. Even when reading the English translation, the reader gets a sense of different idioms being spoken, dipped into, and adapted (Micòl's uncles, for example, speak a mixture of Spanish and Venetian dialect, p. 33). Micòl herself, however, uses local dialect only to describe the garden's trees or the servants:

For the fruit trees, [...] Micòl nursed an affection very like – I'd noticed – that which she showed towards Perotti and all the members of his family. She spoke to me of them, [...] often having recourse to local dialect, which she adopted only in her relations to Perotti, or to Titta and Bepi [...]. (p. 92)

The fact that Micòl only uses dialect with the servants – and their being likened to the trees in the garden – reinforces the privileged position of the Finzi-Continis, the sense of their being above the rest of Ferrara.

Lastly, in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, Calvino uses dialect as a tool for characterisation, in much the same way that it is used in cinema.<sup>67</sup> In the novel, 'the varied dialect forms of Italian, regional terms, cadences, rhythms and idiomatic phrasings [...] create an audio portrait of each character,' according to Karen de León-Jones.<sup>68</sup> While this might prove problematic for readers unfamiliar with the dialects used in the novel, she writes that Calvino integrates them into the text 'so that the meaning becomes self-evident from the context: the sheer repetition of words like the locus "carrugio", incorporated into the epithet

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<sup>67</sup> Sarah Kozloff suggests that 'recognizable, clichéd dialects are used on-screen to sketch in a character's past and cultural heritage, to locate each person in terms of his or her financial standing, education level, geographical background, or ethnic group.' (*Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 82).

<sup>68</sup> De León-Jones, p. 360.

for Rina (“la Nera del Carrugio”), convey their meaning without the need to provide a translation or definition’.<sup>69</sup>

However, an issue with the use of multiple dialects is that when the novel is translated into another language, the diversity of the text might be difficult to maintain. The nickname of the protagonist’s sister, Rina, thus becomes in English ‘the Dark Girl of Long Alley’ (p. 65). The use of adjectives to retain the original meaning makes her nickname longer, and the fact that the word ‘alley’ is common in Standard English means that the English reader will not have to work to derive the meaning of *carrugio* from context.

While there are similarities between the textual relationship between English and Italian examined in the second section of this chapter, and the relationship between Italian and dialect in several Italian novels examined in Chapter One, it is interesting to see that the translator of *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* chose to deal with dialect and foreign languages differently in the English translation. This decision seems to suggest that dialect, being more closely linked with the original Italian, is therefore more essential to the narrative than other quotes in foreign languages. Nevertheless, it is clear that among Italian authors, the choice to use dialect – where, and if at all, in which proportion – will vary depending on plot, subject matter, and the author’s personal interests, just like the use of intratextual translation in English-language texts.

When it came to writing my own novel, I chose to acknowledge the presence of dialect through explicit attribution, but to feature only Italian in my English language text; I will now discuss the process in more detail.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

#### 2.4. Language and dialect in *Like a River towards the Sea*

My novel uses Italian names for places (Bologna, Venezia, Firenze) in order to reflect the way in which the characters would speak and think about them. This was initially the only trace of Italian language in the text, but after a year-long course allowed me to brush up my command of the language, I thought it could appear more often in the narrative. The novels discussed in this chapter were useful examples. In Fitzgerald and Baily's cases, the presence of two languages in the text is justified – in Baily's novel, through the encounter between Italian Chiara Ravello and Welsh Maria, and in Fitzgerald's text, through the international world of the Ridolfi family. Since my novel was set in Italy and comprised only Italian characters, I wondered how to justify bringing Italian into the English text. As the characters were (mostly) speaking and thinking in one language, perhaps it made sense to mirror this in the narration, using only English. After all, many writers have chosen to write, in English, stories set in different countries which include foreign characters.<sup>70</sup>

The creative impulse behind the story, however – exploring the setting of my grandmother's youth, immersing myself in her culture, her country's history – made it feel important to bring Italian into the text. A strategy I adopted was the brief introduction of a British soldier in the third part of the novel, who stays with Stella and Marta while his broken leg mends (pp. 334). This let me draw attention to language, as Stella and the injured soldier teach each other some Italian and English words. This also brought the character closer to my grandmother, as she was skilled with languages (she learned French by herself after moving to France in 1951). In earlier sections of the novel, I used Italian names for specific architectural features (the 'portici' of Bologna, which I felt could not be described accurately by the word 'arcades'), historical figures – such as Mussolini, 'Il Duce,' and Vittorio

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<sup>70</sup> Tilmann Altenberg discusses this briefly in his article 'Bolaño against Babel', using Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities* as an example (p. 221).



Emmanuele III, the King – and the titles of novels (*Piccole donne* for *Little Women*).

Occasionally, I also used Italian words in the narrative prose, and chose to offer a translation in English when it felt unobtrusive, in a similar way to Virginia Baily's strategy in the wartime sections of *Early One Morning*.<sup>71</sup>

Stella, who comes from a poor, rural background, would have grown up speaking dialect, only learning Italian in school. Moving to Bologna requires her to learn a different dialect. I indicated this in the narrative, showing her struggle to adjust (pp. 127, 130, 136, 154), but I also focused on her good command of Italian – she was the star pupil at school. Her encounter with Gianna, who belongs to the upper middle class, leads to Stella speaking more Italian, with her friend and at their workplace. The Venetian and Bolognese dialects are not represented on the page, but they are alluded to in the narration and indicated through explicit attribution, for example when Stella meets a young soldier from the Veneto (pp. 235-38).

The question of italics also posed itself. Italics are used widely to differentiate between languages – Jennifer De Leon refers to them as 'the barbed wire fence in our writing'<sup>72</sup> – but some writers, such as Penelope Fitzgerald in *Innocence*, choose not to use them, thus ensuring that there is nothing visually separating languages on the page. In the case of American-Dominican writer Junot Díaz, this decision is political, as De Leon points out: 'After all, if a writer from the majority culture uses specific terminology from polo or tennis, the reader is expected to look it up. [Junot Díaz] wanted to flip this and change the identity of the privileged reader'.<sup>73</sup> The second part of De Leon's article shows that each writer has a different attitude towards italics; some use them sparingly and some, like Grace

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<sup>71</sup> I discussed Baily's approach earlier (p. 48). An example of translation through the narration can be found in my novel on p. 277: "'Basta,'" she told herself softly. Enough.'

<sup>72</sup> Jennifer De Leon, 'The Borderlands of Language: Using Italics for "Foreign" Words (Part I)', Ploughshares at Emerson College <<http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/the-borderlands-of-language-using-italics-for-foreign-words-part-i/>> [accessed 23 April 2020]

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Talusan, feel that the readers ‘know when they come across a word that’s unfamiliar or “foreign” [...] without [the author] having to tell them in italics’.<sup>74</sup> The conversation about italics, in De Leon’s words, brings up ‘ideas of access, privilege, audience, and history—specifically, colonialism’.<sup>75</sup> While, in the case of my novel, the relationship between Italian and English is perhaps less complex, and less fraught with history than the relationship between Spanish and English in the context of the United States, I chose not to use italics because I agreed with many of the points made in De Leon’s article. Context often allows the reader to understand foreign words, and if not, they are free to look up their meaning. While my novel is written in English, a dominant language, I wanted Italian to appear in the text and not look ‘foreign’, as it is the characters’ language.

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<sup>74</sup> Jennifer De Leon, ‘To italicize or not to italicize? Authors speak up on the use of ‘foreign’ words in prose (Part II)’, Ploughshares at Emerson College <<http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/to-italicize-or-not-to-italicize-authors-speak-up-on-the-use-of-foreign-words-in-prose-pt-ii/>> [accessed 23 April 2020]

<sup>75</sup> De Leon, ‘The Borderlands of Language’.

## 2.5. Conclusion

The British authors discussed above do not always provide translations of the Italian language in their texts, but they tend to ensure – Fitzgerald being the notable exception – that context or periphrasis will make their meaning intelligible for their readers. Reed Way Dasenbrock suggests, however, that there is a difference between intelligibility and meaningfulness, and writes that to ‘make [a text] unintelligible is not to make it unmeaningful; the use of opaque foreign words can be part of a deliberate artistic strategy’.<sup>76</sup>

The italicising of foreign words, a convention that Fitzgerald is the only one to ignore, also presents issues. Jennifer De Leon, discussing various writers’ perspectives on the use of italics, points out that

Italics are much more than a slanted font on a computer screen [...]. They are the borderlands of language. We let in *taco*, but we don’t let in *pepian*. This conversation [brings] up ideas of access, privilege, audience, and history—specifically, colonialism.<sup>77</sup>

De Leon is writing about the use of Spanish words in American fiction, and while her point about colonialism may not apply to different contexts, it is worth questioning what italics do: signalling words as being other, foreign, marking them apart from the rest of the text.

Both Dasenbrock’s article and Hodson’s book on *Dialect in Film and Literature* point out that the question of the reader, of the resistance that the reader might offer to the presence of dialect or non-English language on the page, is one that authors have to consider when

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<sup>76</sup> Reed Way Dasenbrock, ‘Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English’, *PMLA*, 102 (1987), 10-19 (p. 15).

<sup>77</sup> Jennifer De Leon, ‘The Borderlands of Language’.

choosing to include dialect or a foreign language into their narration.<sup>78</sup> While we saw the limits of explicit attribution in Foulds's dialogue between Sicilian Angilù and British Will Walker, the alternative – including entire sentences in Italian when Angilù is talking – must have posed too great a risk of losing the reader. While the use of translational mimesis in Foulds', Clarke's, Fitzgerald's and Baily's work shows an awareness of, and a desire to go against what Delabastita and Grutman call 'the unwritten rule of monolingualism in the literary realm',<sup>79</sup> concerns about readership and 'publishability' may limit the representation of polylingualism in literature.

The setting of a novel might also work against the use of translational mimesis. While the four English novels in this chapter have in common the presence of both English and Italian characters, which enables the exploration of themes such as (mis)communication and misunderstandings, *Like a River towards the Sea* is almost exclusively comprised of Italian characters. As I have shown in the last section of this chapter, this made me question whether the use of Italian in the text was justified; however, when I took into account my own motivation for writing the novel – an investigation into my grandmother's past – I decided that the presence of Italian in the text was required.

This chapter has offered insight into intratextual translation as a way of representing a foreign language in an English text, and shown, through a variety of examples, including my own work, that this tool can be made to fit the purposes of a writer looking to set their narrative in a place that is foreign or unfamiliar.

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<sup>78</sup> Hodson uses Michael Toolan's term, 'reader resistance', and explains that the readers may react negatively to dialect because 'there is a close cultural association between Standard English and literacy' (Hodson, p. 107, quoting from Michael Toolan, 'The Significations of Representing Dialect in Writing', *Language and Literature*, 1 (1992), 29-46).

<sup>79</sup> Delabastita and Grutman, p. 11.

### Chapter 3 – Writing the Resistance: Politics, Gender and Working with the Past

Writing fiction set in the past, however close or distant, involves working with historical sources; these might include diaries, historical accounts, interview transcripts, photographs – the list goes on. When it comes to the Italian Resistance, Italian partisans recorded their experiences in autobiographies, diaries, interviews; the inner workings of the organisation are detailed in collected documents such as Luciano Bergonzini's *La Resistenza a Bologna*.

However, writing about the Italian Resistance requires more than in-depth research and study of historical sources; one should also consider existing literature and the politics involved in representing the movement. An important question is that of gender: the lived experience of the Resistance was mainly recorded, until the 1970s, by male voices, while women's stories and participation were overlooked.<sup>80</sup>

After looking at the use of reading as a research tool, and the possibilities afforded by intratextual translation, this chapter articulates challenges linked to writing fiction rooted in the past: it underlines the importance of looking into the politics involved in representing the past – in this case, the Italian Resistance and its literature – as well as the matter of gender, and brings into question notions of creativity, research, and truth, illustrating the process of using the historical record to create fiction through examples drawn from my own experience. Doing so, it provides elements of methodology and discusses possible approaches to writing historical fiction which will be useful to other writers.

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<sup>80</sup> In the preface to *La Resistenza taciuta*, Anna Bravo writes that 'in the tens of thousands of pages written in the sixties and the seventies there is [...] an effort to build a new anthropology of the partisan,' but that 'he is necessarily male [...]'. ('Prefazione,' in *La Resistenza taciuta*, ed. by Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina, vii-xv (p. vii, my translation)). In *Resisting Bodies*, Rosetta D'Angelo and Barbara Zaczek discuss 'the virtual absence of women's stories in major representations of the war (historical or fictional)' ('Introduction,' in *Resisting Bodies: Narratives of Italian Partisan Women*, ed. by Rosetta D'Angelo and Barbara Zaczek, xii-xviii (p. xvii)).

### 3.1. Politics and the Italian Resistance

After Mussolini's dismissal in July 1943, and the armistice between the Italian government and the Allies on September 8<sup>th</sup>, Italy found itself in a difficult position. Its former ally, Nazi Germany, moved swiftly to occupy the north of the country, rescuing Mussolini from prison and setting up a puppet regime, the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI) on September 14<sup>th</sup>. Pietro Scoppola describes the period that followed:

For twenty months the confrontation line between the two armies moved slowly north, stopping twice: first on the 'Gustav line' in the winter of 1943-44, and again on the 'Gothic line' in the winter of 1944-45. In Italy two conflicting governments fought each other, the Badoglio government in the south, and the Mussolini government in the north, both tied legally to the two foreign armies occupying the national territory. North of the front dividing the two armies, a movement of Resistance developed, in Italy as in the rest of Europe.<sup>81</sup>

The Italian people – soldiers especially – had to choose sides: they could continue fighting for Mussolini alongside the Germans, or desert and join the partisans. In his study of the Resistance, Claudio Pavone discusses the controversy around the terms 'civil war,' which 'met with hostility and reticence on the part of the anti-Fascists'.<sup>82</sup> The alternative phrase, 'war of liberation,' is problematic, in his opinion, because it 'conceals that part of reality that sees Italians fighting Italians'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Pietro Scoppola, 'Introduzione', in *25 aprile. Liberazione* (Turin, Einaudi, 1995), as quoted in Philip Cooke's *The Italian Resistance: An anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 176 (my translation).

<sup>82</sup> Claudio Pavone, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance*, trans. by Peter Levy and David Broder (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 269.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

In the postwar period, attitudes toward the Resistance varied greatly. Immediately after the armistice, a number of partisans were put on trial;<sup>84</sup> yet the Resistance was described later as the foundation for the new Italian Republic. It allowed politicians, and indeed the rest of the country, to forget about Fascism and focus instead on the segment of the Italian population who had fought alongside the Allies.

This section explores different attitudes to the Resistance and discusses their literary representations, bearing in mind the identity of the authors and the impact of their own beliefs on their work.

### 3.1.1. *Resistance and Revisionism*

While the postwar years were not kind to former partisans, the myth of the Resistance was born, as mentioned, in the 1960s. As in other European countries, focusing on the Resistance made Italy's role in the war more palatable for the collective memory: the partisans were heroes who had fought to liberate their country. Suzanne Branciforte's description of the Resistance exemplifies the way the movement was presented:

In many ways the Resistance [...] in Italy represents the moment of greatest cooperation and purest collaboration among those who opposed Mussolini and his regime. The partisan war brought together people from all social strata and it broke across regional boundaries as people united in the fight against Fascism [...]:

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<sup>84</sup> This is the theme of the short story 'Acquitted' in Viganò's collection *Partisan Wedding*, inspired by her own experience. As the translator points out, Viganò's husband was a partisan leader who spent several months in prison after the end of the war (p. 183). Paolo Pezzino also describes 'the movement to 'put the Resistance on trial', which began by taking advantage of the amnesty law pushed through by Togliatti; the systematic denigration of the Resistance [...] continued, at least by moderate public opinion and in the statements of a number of governing politicians, until the middle of the 1950s [...]' ('The Italian Resistance between history and memory', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10 (2005), 396-412 (p. 400)).

divisions of class and gender, political orientation, and educational background mattered little in the Resistance.<sup>85</sup>

It is easy to see the appeal of such a picture; however, Paolo Pezzino suggests that in Italy ‘the public exaltation of Resistance unity and patriotism never succeeded in fusing together experiences that in reality had been very different’. The experience of the Resistance was ‘culturally’ in the minority,’ he writes, with ‘most of southern Italy [...] involved only in a very small degree, and the population of central Italy for only a few months’.<sup>86</sup> There was therefore a rupture between the people who had participated in, or supported the Resistance, and those who had not.<sup>87</sup> Even within the communities who were largely supportive of the Resistance, there can be discrepancies in the stories told, or in the ways specific events are remembered. When researching her family’s involvement with the Resistance, Sarah De Nardi found that some of the stories were ‘less than glorious’ and ‘diverted from the Resistance myth’; she herself felt affected by the discovery ‘that the ‘clean’ Resistance had not been altogether free from arbitrary violence’.<sup>88</sup> Although the Italian Resistance played a crucial part in making democracy possible in the postwar period, memories and understandings of the movement vary greatly depending on geographical location and family history.

In the 1980s, a surge of revisionism followed declarations made by Renzo De Felice, Mussolini’s biographer, who ‘criticised the identification of anti-Fascism with democracy,’ suggesting that ‘Fascism should be put back into the context of Italian history, given certain

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<sup>85</sup> Suzanne Branciforte, ‘Introduction,’ in Renata Viganò, *Partisan Wedding*, trans. by Suzanne Branciforte (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp. 4-5.

<sup>86</sup> Pezzino, p. 404.

<sup>87</sup> This is at the heart of Pietro Scoppola’s reflection over the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation in the introduction of *25 aprile. Liberazione*, referenced in footnote 138.

<sup>88</sup> Sarah De Nardi, ‘When family and research clash: The role of autobiographical emotion in the production of stories of the Italian civil war, 1943-1945’, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 17 (2015), 22-29 (p. 25).



of its positive aspects and its substantial difference from Nazism'.<sup>89</sup> Simone Neri Serneri views this as an attempt to moderate the extremes of the twentieth century, allowing for 'the reconstruction of an autonomous identity for moderate public opinion'.<sup>90</sup> A large-scale press campaign brought to the forefront historical footage that displayed violence committed by the partisans and the Communist Party, making it seem, as Serneri puts it, 'that there was nothing to distinguish the historical meaning and ideal values of the two warring parties'.<sup>91</sup> While historians disproved De Felice's claims, Serneri's concern is that viewers are likely to have been struck 'much more strongly' by the 'vividness of the filmed material' than by 'the subsequent, more complex, explanations'.<sup>92</sup> This example supports Paolo Pezzino's point that the 'historical interpretation [of the Resistance] was often if not completely subordinate to, at least knowingly functional to, the ongoing political struggle at any given time';<sup>93</sup> in other words, the idea of the Resistance was, over time, adapted, twisted, or made to fit the purpose it was intended to serve, in political discourse and elsewhere.

If we take into account the complexity of the Resistance phenomenon, and the different ways in which it has been interpreted, representational choices made by authors writing fiction and non-fiction about the period of Fascism and the war seem even more important.

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<sup>89</sup> Simone Neri Serneri, 'A Past to be Thrown Away? Politics and History in the Italian Resistance', *Contemporary European History*, 4 (1995), 367-381 (p. 368).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>93</sup> Pezzino, p. 397.

### 3.1.2. *Non-fiction and the Resistance: Memoir, diary and autobiography*

Memoir was a widespread genre after the war, and Italian partisans published first-person accounts of their experiences with ‘small publishing houses all over Italy’. The problem with such memoirs, Philip Cooke argues, was ‘their tendency to glorify the Resistance at the expense of the objective ‘truth’’. The writers claimed to tell the story exactly as it had happened, making no allowances for ‘the workings of memory’ which ‘selects, rejects, and reworks experience’.<sup>94</sup> This discrepancy between an author’s best intentions and what memory allows is at work in Giovanna Zangrandi’s autobiography, *I giorni veri*. In ‘Truth and the Resistance in Giovanna Zangrandi’s *I giorni veri*,’ Penelope Morris points out that Zangrandi’s account, presented as ‘autobiographical and, moreover, as a diary written at the time of the Resistance,’<sup>95</sup> was only published in 1963. Given the type of life Zangrandi led during the armed struggle, she suggests, it is unlikely she could carry a diary or spend time writing.<sup>96</sup> Even if we disregard the publication date and ignore the fact that the account might not be a diary, the issue remains, Morris writes, that ‘the preface implies an attitude to truth and autobiography that considers neither to be problematical. Truth is fixed and accessible, and, provided it is approached with honesty [...], it may be transmitted to the reader’.<sup>97</sup> But as Morris demonstrates, unless Zangrandi wrote down the contents of entire conversations on the days when they happened, there must be gaps that she is filling in, considering that *I giorni veri* holds many instances of direct speech. The Resistance lasted from September

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<sup>94</sup> Philip Cooke, ed., *The Italian Resistance: An anthology* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> Penelope Morris, ‘Truth and the Resistance in Giovanna Zangrandi’s *I giorni veri*’, *The Italianist*, 11 (1991), 105-127 (p. 105).

<sup>96</sup> Morris doesn’t seem to consider that Ada Gobetti’s *Partisan Diary* was indeed made of notes written during the war. Certainly, Gobetti and Zangrandi’s experiences were different: Gobetti’s husband was an ELAR engineer with a laissez-passer, and most of her work consisted in liaising between different groups and bringing people together. Nevertheless, what was possible for one woman might have been so for another. The delay in publication, however, does add credit to Morris’s theory, considering Gobetti’s diary was published in 1956.

<sup>97</sup> Morris, ‘Truth and the Resistance’, p. 111.

1943 to April 1945, and no one could remember after the fact the exact wording of conversations, especially over such a period of time. Zangrandi believes in a fixed truth that can be communicated to the reader and downplays the creative work that went into the crafting of her autobiographical account, including the reconstitution of conversations and the selection of specific events in order to create a compelling narrative.

Discussing the surge in the publication of memoirs ('memorialistica') between 1945 and 1947,<sup>98</sup> Giovanni Falaschi writes that 'the partisans [were], in short, convinced that the facts [could] speak for themselves, and it [was] enough to report them with faithful humility'. A command of language, of literary techniques, did not matter as much as having participated in the struggle. Because of this, less educated partisans were able to 'overcome their inner resistance to writing'.<sup>99</sup> Like Cooke, however, Falaschi observes in the prefaces of ex-partisans' accounts a tendency to defend themselves, reflecting the 'mistrust and disillusion' that many experienced after the end of the war.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.1.3. *Fictional Representations*

The revisionism debate, in Barbara Pezzotti's opinion, prompted crime writers to respond by using the 1930s and 1940s as a setting for their novels:

in using a genre where [...] the dichotomy between good and evil, and themes such as violence and justice, are central, many writers highlighted the contradictions and flaws of the Mussolini regime in terms of civil rights and personal freedom [...].<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Giovanni Falaschi, *La Resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), p. 25. Falaschi suggests that publication was concentrated in those years because, once their testimonies were written, the participants had nothing more to say, and because of the 'demobilization' and 'defeat' of the left after 1948 (my translation).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 27, 28.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Pezzotti, *Investigating Italy's Past through Historical Crime Fiction, Films, and TV Series: Murder in the age of chaos* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 66.

Series such as Carlo Lucarelli's trilogy, *Inspector De Luca*, and the adventures of Benedetto Santovito, a collaboration between Lorian Macchiavelli and Francesco Guccini, represent the necessity of taking sides during the Fascist era. According to Pezzotti, 'the Sansovito series delivers a strong affirmation of the core values of a movement [the Resistance] that, with all its flaws, fought against a dictatorship and a brutal Nazi occupation of Italy'.<sup>102</sup> However, Pezzotti demonstrates that not all crime writers are committed to presenting an accurate vision of the Fascist Ventennio. Maurizio De Giovanni, for example, offers what she calls a 'sanitized version' of life under Mussolini's rule, '[downplaying] the control of the Fascist party over Italy, [and] portraying [...] an Italy of the 1930s where the police were completely independent from the regime and the press could freely express criticism'. This attitude, she suggests, might have more to do with a desire to grant the protagonist 'freedom of movement' as well as 'an unambiguous and satisfying solution to his cases'.<sup>103</sup> One might query, however, De Giovanni's choice of the Fascist years as an historical backdrop to his detective series, considering that an accurate representation of the historical 'truth' of Fascism might prove problematic to the narrative.

Writers who were involved in the Resistance took different approaches to representing the movement in fiction. Italo Calvino's first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, published in 1947, presents a male-focused perspective: the protagonist, Pin, is a young boy raised by his sister, a prostitute. The group of partisans that he joins mid-way through the novel is not shown as heroes: they drink and fight, and it is obvious, especially during the visit of the brigade commandant and the political commissar, that they have little idea what they are fighting for. The only woman who lives among the partisans, Giglia, is the cook's wife, and she becomes the instrument of the brigade's undoing through her affair with

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

the leader. While the novel is not in any way representative of women's involvement in the Resistance, the juxtaposition of the different group members – the cook, who is politically aware, Cousin, whom Pin chooses to emulate and who hates women, and the leader, Dritto – indicates the varying levels of awareness and engagement displayed by the partisans.

By contrast, Renata Viganò's novel, *L'Agnese va a morire*, focuses on the unlikely character of Agnese, a middle-aged washerwoman who becomes involved with the Resistance following her husband's deportation to a German work camp. While the question of gender in *L'Agnese va a morire* will be explored in more depth in the second part of this chapter, it is worth noting here that Viganò represents the partisan life in a way that, although it shares some particularities with Calvino's, departs from the representation in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. Agnese's group of partisans also suffers from long periods of inaction (especially when hiding in isolated houses in a flooded area, accessible only by boat), but the figure of the commandant inspires trust and respect in the men, and there is a sense of brotherhood, an awareness that they are fighting for a common goal, even though they might lack the political awareness displayed by their leader. Viganò's collection of short stories, *Partisan Wedding*, is marked by the same sense of unity and determination. While the Resistance is certainly portrayed by Viganò as a noble endeavour, the partisans themselves are not flawless heroes: in 'Campalbo,' a partisan's illness leads to his thirteen-year-old sister taking on the task of delivering newspapers; in 'The House on the Ice,' the partisans suffer from being shut up, inactive, in a snowed-in valley, until one of them runs off and nearly freezes to death. The short episodes narrated by Viganò, which revolve in large part around the lives of Resistance fighters, '[focus] on unheroic characters, simple, real people'.<sup>104</sup> Out of the eighteen collected short stories, ten feature a female protagonist, and eight a male

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<sup>104</sup> Suzanne Branciforte, 'Introduction', in Renata Viganò, *Partisan Wedding*, trans. by Suzanne Branciforte (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 1-17 (p. 11).

protagonist, showing Viganò's desire to represent a variety of experiences and paths into the Resistance, going beyond her own involvement. 'The Portrait of Garibaldi' follows Brando, a father of three who, following the death of the man who was setting up a partisan brigade in the valley, goes to recruit an old friend to the cause; in 'Red Flag,' protagonist Amedea joins a city brigade after her husband's death, and uses her soiled period underwear to conceal ration cards and weapons. The protagonists' ages, backgrounds, situations and gender show a real diversity.

In this section I have shown why the memory of the Resistance has been the subject of much disagreement, and the way in which it failed to unite the Italian people after the war because of their vastly different experiences. This fracture is visible in Resistance narratives, which can portray the movement in an extreme way and use their text as justification, although, as we have seen, several authors who participated in the Resistance avoided glorifying their experience. While reading Italian novels, as I discussed in my first chapter, was useful in terms of learning about Italian literary themes and culture, reading non-fictional, historical material about the Resistance helped me understand, as a writer, the subtleties of the topic I had chosen, and the importance of representation.

As the comparison between Italo Calvino and Renata Viganò's novels suggests,<sup>105</sup> the experience of the Resistance, as well as its retelling, varied greatly depending on gender, and this is what we will now turn to.

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<sup>105</sup> Ann S. Gagliardi explores the ways in which Calvino and Viganò's representations differ, highlighting the fact that 'when Viganò pronounces a severe judgement on a character, she seeks to offer motivations which are not linked to a stereotype but rather to the difficulties of life, the promiscuity between civilians, partisans, Fascists and Nazis, the upheavals and dangers caused by the war'. In Viganò's novel, Gagliardi writes, there is 'more attention paid to the details of everyday life, and a greater emphasis on feelings'. ('Come raccontare la Resistenza? Figure femminili e forme di autorappresentazione nei « racconti » della Resistenza di donne dell'Emilia Romagna,' in *Donne guerra politica*, ed. by Dianella Gagliani and others (Bologna: CLUEB, 2000), 131-138 (p. 132), my translation).

### 3.2. Women and the Resistance

At the end of the war, the Resistance was composed of ‘about 250,000 armed men’.<sup>106</sup> Although women were a minority, estimated at around 35,000 combatants, and 20,000 in ‘supporting roles’, Jane Slaughter writes that they ‘were visible in all areas of resistance activity [...]’. They created and staffed medical services, recruited and organized the populace, arranged demonstrations, distributed anti-Fascist literature, worked in the information services, or simply collaborated by supplying provisions [...].<sup>107</sup> In the aftermath of the war, little attention was paid to their stories. It was not until projects such as *La Resistenza taciuta*, a collection of testimonies by Piedmontese female partisans edited by Rachele Farina and Anna Maria Bruzzone in 1976, that historians began to pay closer attention to the functions held by women in the struggle. This section will look at gender within the Resistance – women’s reasons for joining, their roles, and the significance of their participation – and the impact of gender on Resistance writing.

#### 3.2.1. Resistance and Gender

As shown in Renata Viganò’s short story collection *Partisan Wedding*, and in *La Resistenza taciuta*, a number of factors caused women to join the partisan cause. Some belonged to antifascist families and had witnessed firsthand the persecutions of the Fascist regime; some had grown up in poverty and already belonged to political parties opposing Fascism. Other women joined because of a male relative’s involvement, and were overtly or covertly supporting a husband, a son, a father, an uncle. In the case of Tersilla Fenoglio Oppedisano, the Fascist education she received instilled such a strong belief in Italy as an independent

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<sup>106</sup> Neri Seneri, p. 367.

<sup>107</sup> Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance, 1943-1945*, Denver: Arden Press (1997), p. 51.

nation that, after September 1943, she joined the Resistance in order to drive out the German invaders.<sup>108</sup> Partisan Anna Bechis remembers in *Compagne*, edited by Bianca Guidetti Serra, how women's involvement started after September 8th, 1943, when soldiers began to arrive in villages, 'looking for civilian clothes so they could return to their homes.' This is when, she writes, her activity began: 'I went from house to house, asking everywhere, where I knew... people who I had seen for myself were on our side on July 25<sup>th</sup>, who were clearly not Fascists...' Bechis, it seems, was motivated by compassion rather than a personal connection.<sup>109</sup>

In *Volontarie della Libertà*, Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Beltrami highlight the fact that women partisans were truly volunteers, while men were forced to choose a side because of the military draft. 'By staying at home,' they write, 'women were safe; and if they collaborated, they benefitted from it: collaborators were rewarded with sugar, coffee, cigarettes, coal; things which, at a time of shortages, had a value difficult to imagine now'.<sup>110</sup> Participating in the Resistance, on the other hand, meant risking everything.

It was often a combination of reasons, rather than one single motive, that precipitated women's involvement. With her fictional character Agnese, Renata Viganò shows a woman who is initially motivated to help the Resistance because of grief and a desire for revenge, but who gradually gains political awareness over the course of the narrative. Agnese's reasons for helping the partisans evolve between the beginning and the end of the novel.

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<sup>108</sup> Tersilla Fenoglio Oppedisano, in *La Resistenza taciuta*, ed. by Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina, pp. 156-175.

<sup>109</sup> Anna Bechis, 'Ecco io ricordo tutto questo', in *Compagne*, ed. by Bianca Guidetti Serra (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 495-499, as quoted in *The Italian Resistance: An anthology*, ed. by Philip Cooke, p. 80 (my translation).

<sup>110</sup> Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Beltrami, 'Ma abbiamo scelto la Resistenza', in *Volontarie della Libertà* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1981), p. 26, as quoted in *The Italian Resistance: An anthology*, ed. by Philip Cooke, p. 63 (my translation).



Regardless of their reasons for joining the partisans, women's participation in the Resistance affected their lives: it allowed them to step out, for the first time, of their traditional role as 'angels of the hearth', and to move from the private and into the public sphere. While Giovanna Zangrandi describes the Resistance in *I giorni veri* as a war 'nested in kitchens',<sup>111</sup> it marked a decisive change for many women involved. As Bernadette Luciano points out, 'in World War II Italy, the clear demarcation man/battlefront - woman/home front faded as new military technology and civil war [...] brought the battlefield to the home front'.<sup>112</sup> While in WWI women had been safe in their homes, looking after children and often doing men's work, WWII put their homes were under attack, placing women in the midst of war. The symbolic image of the Italian Resistance – a *staffetta*, a courier, on her bicycle, taking essential information from central command to brigade, travelling fifty miles a day – is a vivid illustration of this movement from inside to outside. While this move towards emancipation did have limits – Simona Wright mentions that after the end of the war, there was a 'return to normal', to the traditional functions of women<sup>113</sup> – it was novel and significant for Italian women. Some of them fulfilled traditional functions, providing safe houses where partisans could be certain to find a place to sleep and something to eat, but others carried weapons and fought alongside men in the partisan brigades.<sup>114</sup> Women were chosen as *staffette* because they could circulate more freely, and drew less attention than men; in this way, the Resistance took advantage of 'age-old sexual assumptions,' as Slaughter suggests:

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<sup>111</sup> Giovanna Zangrandi, *I giorni veri, 1943-1945* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 1963), p. 213, as quoted in Jane Slaughter's *Women and the Italian Resistance, 1943-1945* (Denver: Arden Press, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>112</sup> Bernadette Luciano, 'Women Writing War: Storia domestica', *Italian Culture*, 15 (1997), 181-191 (p. 181, my translation).

<sup>113</sup> Simona Wright, 'La guerra al femminile, tra esperienza e comunicazione letteraria: *L'Agnese va a morire*, *Lessico familiare*, *Prima e dopo*', *Forum Italicum*, 32 (1998), 63-85 (p. 77, my translation).

<sup>114</sup> Jane Slaughter's chapter on 'Gender and Women's Functions in the Resistance,' particularly the section on 'The *Partigiane* with Brigades and Action Squads,' gives the names of women involved in the fighting – Carla Capponi, Marisa Musu, etc –, showing that they were not merely exceptions.

Carrying bombs became a female activity; they could be hidden in baby carriages or shopping bags, and women could also carry food, small arms, and dispatches in their underclothes, purses, and packages. In Bologna, a young woman member of the 7th GAP was stopped by a Fascist patrol. “An officer looked her squarely in the face, and noting the closed bag she was carrying, asked what it contained. She returned his look, and with a smile said, ‘bombs.’ The officer, amused and reassured, let her pass”.<sup>115</sup>

The thought of a woman transporting bombs was not conceivable, and the partisan in Slaughter’s example used this to her advantage, both relying on a traditional understanding of women (charming, non-threatening) and subverting it through her actions.

For women belonging to brigades, there was a sharp contrast between this traditional conception of women and the demands of partisan life. As Slaughter points out, this discrepancy is visible in Zangrandi’s autobiography: Zangrandi spent ‘the last winter of the war living in extreme hardship with a mountain ski patrol’ and was surprised when a comrade said,

“You can’t continue with this life; it is not for a woman.” For her, after all she had been through, it was very strange to think of herself as a woman, and her thoughts were only of some “far off nostalgia of unreachable childhood”.<sup>116</sup>

The association of womanhood with an ‘unreachable childhood’ shows that Zangrandi’s perception of herself was disconnected from others’ perception of her. Just as she was no

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<sup>115</sup> Slaughter, p. 63. She is quoting from Manzela Sanna’s account in *L’altra metà della Resistenza*, ed. by Lydia Franceschi, Isotta Gaeta et al. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1978), p. 103.

<sup>116</sup> Slaughter, p. 70. She is quoting from Giovanna Zangrandi, *I giorni veri, 1943-45* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 1963), p. 183.

longer a child, she felt she was no longer a woman – or at least, not in the way a woman was conventionally defined at the time.

In the introduction to *Pane nero* (Black Bread), a collective history of Italian women during the Second World War, Miriam Mafai mentions a statement made by many women interviewed: “...però, in fondo, è stato bello” (“but, in the end, it was a beautiful time”).<sup>117</sup> The word *bello*, which translates to *beautiful*, *lovely* or *good*, may seem surprising considering the living conditions during the war – food restrictions, bombings, concern for male family members fighting on the front. Mafai suggests that perhaps ‘in the end, it was a beautiful time’ because despite the fear, danger and poverty, these women had to ‘learn to decide, in those years, for themselves, without the help and protection of husbands, fathers, fiancés,’ and became ‘their own women’.<sup>118</sup> Despite the hardships, it was a time that was synonymous with greater independence, and responsibility for things beyond the domestic realm. According to Simona Wright, participation in the Resistance contributed to increasing women’s awareness of, and involvement in the political life of the country.<sup>119</sup> They were given the right to vote in 1945, and some women played a prominent part in political life: Ada Gobetti became vice-mayor of Turin after the war.

As we have seen, women’s involvement in the Resistance was a significant step. Not only did it allow them to step out of their traditional role in the household, but it also gave them a part to play in a large-scale political movement. Although, in the postwar period, conventional gender roles were largely restored, the Resistance’s subversion of typical feminine attributes is visible in women’s writing about the Resistance.

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<sup>117</sup> Miriam Mafai, *Pane nero: Donne e vita quotidiana nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Roma: Ediesse, 2008), p. 10 (my translation).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Wright, p. 64.

### 3.2.2. *Women and Resistance writing*

As stated in my introduction, little attention was paid to the testimonies of women in the decades following the war. The typical partisan was male, as evidenced by the protagonists of Italo Calvino or Beppe Fenoglio's novels. However, even if they did not always receive recognition, women did write about their experiences: Ada Gobetti's diary, Giovanna Zangrandi's autobiography, and Renata Viganò's novel and short stories are a few examples.

Ada was the wife of Piero Gobetti, an Italian journalist and opponent of the Fascist regime. After Piero's journal was closed down and he was beaten up by the Fascists, the couple fled to Paris, where Piero died in 1926. When Italy entered the Second World War, Ada had remarried and lived in Turin, but she remained a fervent anti-fascist with political connections; she was one of the founders of the Action Party. In her diary, she relates her efforts to act as a go-between for various partisan groups, as well as her involvement in creating the Gruppi di difesa della donna (GDD, Women's Defence Groups) in Turin. Gobetti's diary was published in 1956 and translated into English, nearly sixty years later, by Jomarie Alano in 2014.

Giovanna Zangrandi's autobiography, *I giorni veri* (The True Days), was published in 1963, twenty years after the official end of Fascism. Zangrandi (born Alma Bevilacqua) had already published two novels, including *I Brusaz*, for which she won the Deledda prize in 1954. Prior to joining the Resistance in 1943, Zangrandi had no anti-fascist history; indeed, as Penelope Morris shows, as a middle-class young woman, she belonged to the Fascist party and her writing (she was a journalist) can be seen, to some extent, to feed into the Fascist spirit.<sup>120</sup> *I giorni veri*, however, tells the true story of her involvement in the Resistance and

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<sup>120</sup> Morris discusses Zangrandi's early journalistic career, highlighting that some of the themes – her praise of nature, fresh air and exercise, for example – supported the Fascist message. However, as Morris points out, it is possible that Zangrandi, in her attempt to make a living, was simply

her time spent living in the mountains with her brigade. While Zangrandi later published collections of short stories based on the Resistance, Morris also points out that her novels *I Brusaz* and *Orsola nelle stagioni*, which are set in part during the Fascist *ventennio*, ‘contain very few direct references to the fascist regime, [giving] the impression that fascism did not necessarily impinge on the lives of her characters and was not of great relevance to their communities’.<sup>121</sup> There is a difference, therefore, between Zangrandi’s attitude to Fascism in her autobiography and in her novels, although one might expect that Fascism would play a more important part in her short stories about the Resistance. Despite her winning the Deledda prize, and the relative success of her fiction, Zangrandi’s work has not been translated into English.

Renata Viganò published *L’Agnese va a morire* in 1949; the novel won the Viareggio Prize. While *L’Agnese* is a work of fiction, Viganò wrote that she ‘invented none of it’ and called it her ‘war testimony’.<sup>122</sup> Both Viganò and her husband, Antonio Meluschi, were involved in the Resistance, he as a brigade commander, and she as a *staffetta* and nurse, which was her training. After the war, Viganò continued to publish both fiction and non-fiction, including a reference book about women in the Resistance (*Donne nella Resistenza*, 1955). Her collection of short stories, *Matrimonio in brigata*, published in 1976, was translated into English as *Partisan Wedding* in 1999 by Suzanne Branciforte. Despite being made into a film in 1976 by Giuliano Montaldo, and translated into fourteen languages, *L’Agnese va a morire* has never made its way into English.<sup>123</sup>

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conforming to the rules and writing to avoid censure (Penelope Morris, ‘Giovanna Zangrandi: Negotiating Fascism,’ *Italian Studies*, 53 (1998), 94-121).

<sup>121</sup> Morris, ‘Giovanna Zangrandi: Negotiating Fascism,’ p. 98.

<sup>122</sup> Renata Viganò, ‘My Resistance,’ *Partisan Wedding*, trans. by Suzanne Branciforte (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 205.

<sup>123</sup> Branciforte asks in her essay ‘In a Different Voice’: ‘What happened to *L’Agnese va a morire*? When it came out in 1949 it was recognized as a part of that first wave of neorealist prose that included Vittorini’s *Uomini e no* (1945), Calvino’s *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947). Yet the other texts seem to have garnered all the critical attention.’ Branciforte, ‘In a Different Voice: Women

As Falaschi points out in his study of the Resistance, there were hundreds of partisan memoirs published with small presses which never garnered much literary attention; in this respect, gender might have played no part in the late (or non-) translation of the works above. Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, however, which is arguably the most successful Resistance novel, was translated into English by Archibald Colquhoun as early as 1956.

Since Ada Gobetti's book is a diary, and Giovanna Zangrandi's an autobiography, the narrator is, of course, female; and as we have established, Viganò also chose a woman as the protagonist in her novel. The way in which women are represented is therefore of particular interest. Is it possible, when looking at Gobetti, Zangrandi and Viganò, to use the term 'feminism'?

Ada Gobetti's diary portrays her as a Resistance leader, but also as a wife and mother. She describes her concern when her son, Paolo, who fought in one of the brigades, failed to contact her for a prolonged period. Her home in Meana was used as a safe house, and she was the one ensuring that partisans seeking shelter got something to eat and drink (although she describes in her diary the mixed results of her cooking). Gobetti is occasionally harsh on herself, minimising her own courage and heroism. She describes having to walk for miles when the trains were stopped; she was constantly coming and going between Turin and Meana, and in the winter of 1944, she crossed over to France with a group of men to establish links between the Resistance and the French military. The qualities she demonstrates – endurance, determination, bravery – are not traditionally associated with femininity. However, on the way back from France, Gobetti relates her exhaustion and her wish for the presence of another woman:

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Writing World War II,' in *Studies in Dante: Essays in Honor of Dante Della Terza*, ed. by Franco Fido and others (Florence: Edizioni Cadmo, 1998), 433-442 (p. 435).

I felt dirty, unkempt, and in tatters. I had on trousers in rags. It seemed to me that only a woman could understand all these things and help me, if only with her silent affection, a woman who would prepare something for us to eat, who would fix up a couch for us, to whom I would be able to cede the responsibility (that I felt, even without completely executing it) for organizing the basic necessities of life for the others.<sup>124</sup>

Despite her exceptional position in the Resistance – which led to her nomination as the vice-mayor of Turin after the Liberation – Gobetti feels that, as a woman, she is responsible for ‘organizing the basic necessities of life’ for others, and that only another woman would be able to lift this burden from her. The conventional understanding of men and women’s roles, therefore, permeates her diary, in spite of her own strength and her trust in women’s abilities.

In her fiction, Renata Viganò portrays women of varying ages, involved in the Resistance in different ways. Agnese, the protagonist of her best-known novel, is intended as a ‘synthesis,’ a ‘representation of all the women who left a simple, defined life of hard work and a poor family, to go beyond their limited scope, opening their minds and leaving behind the small things [...]’.<sup>125</sup> Carolyn Daly notes the emphasis on Agnese’s physicality, pointing out the ‘repeated [references] to Agnese’s large size, her wide face, her massive hands, her muscular thighs, [and] her heavy, strained heart’.<sup>126</sup> Descriptions of Agnese as a large-sized woman, and the emphasis on her hands remarked on by Daly,<sup>127</sup> serve to emphasise Agnese’s status as a peasant, and the physicality of her work as a washerwoman. While this focus on Agnese’s body corresponds to traditional understandings of femininity – the woman is linked

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<sup>124</sup> Ada Gobetti, *Partisan Diary: A Woman’s Life in the Italian Resistance*, trans. by Jomarie Alano (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 298.

<sup>125</sup> Renata Viganò, ‘My Resistance,’ *Partisan Wedding*, trans. by Suzanne Branciforte (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 205-233 (p. 205).

<sup>126</sup> Carolyn Daly, ‘Dissimulation, Female Embodiment and the Nation: Renata Viganò’s *L’Agnese va a morire*,’ *Carte Italiane*, 1 (1994), 98-109 (p. 101).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-02.

to earth, to the realm of the physical which men must transcend – Daly points out that Agnese’s size, as well as her ‘big hands’, make her ‘androgynous’. She writes:

On the one hand, Agnese is childless, fearless, mentally and physically strong and hard – in short, virile; on the other, she is matronly, heavy-set, and she cries and mourns – although less than other women and less than some of the men. She is then ambiguously gendered for she denotes fecundity and virility, femininity without lack.<sup>128</sup>

Viganò’s short stories in *Partisan Wedding* present women who are, according to Suzanne Branciforte, ‘mothers, wives, lovers, sisters’ and who ‘maintain their outstanding ability to nurture and to care, fighting [...] to preserve their female qualities in the face of war’, often pictured in the midst of ‘cloth-based activities like sewing, knitting, and doing laundry, or food-related activities like cooking’.<sup>129</sup> This description, however, seems to overlook the stories which show women assuming active roles in the Resistance: in ‘Peter,’ the first-person narrator, a woman partisan posing as a refugee with her husband and child, leads a Russian prisoner of war to the partisans in the middle of the night; in ‘Campalbo,’ a thirteen-year-old girl hides forbidden newspapers under her clothes and delivers them to the brigade, in the mountains. In ‘Argelide,’ the eponymous character allows the Resistance to use her parents’ house as a base, posing as a prostitute to justify the coming and goings of the men, while also acting as a *staffetta*.

The tension between conventional and unconventional notions of femininity present in the works discussed above is embodied by the short story ‘La ragazza se ne va con Diavolo’ (“The Girl Goes Away with Devil”). Published by Marcello Venturi in 1946, the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>129</sup> Branciforte, ‘Introduction,’ p. 14.



story follows a young partisan woman who uses her charms to lure a Fascist soldier into a trap, shooting him in reprisal.<sup>130</sup> As Rosetta D'Angelo and Barbara Zaczek point out, this story

raises the question of gender within the partisan experience. It makes a woman's body the key element of the plot, the force which builds up the suspense and carries the narration towards its final resolution: Diavolo's assassination. Since the success of Vera's mission depends solely on her ability to seduce him without raising any doubts about her intentions, Vera has to play out a sexual fantasy. As an object of male desire, Vera's body fulfils social expectations and conforms to the common perception that a young, attractive woman would naturally seek and respond to male attentions. But Vera, as the story shows, is not merely a passive body: she is a partisan who deftly orchestrates a sequence of events to carry out her assignment.<sup>131</sup>

In this short story, Vera does more than rely on the expectations surrounding her gender to go through a checkpoint undetected; she subverts those expectations by taking action and shooting an enemy. If we define feminism as 'a set of ideas that recognize in an explicit way that women are subordinate to men and seek to address imbalances of power between the sexes,' with 'the view that women's condition is socially constructed, and therefore open to change',<sup>132</sup> these Resistance narratives may fall short of recognising *explicitly* the imbalance of power; by putting women in position of power, however, and showing them as active participants, essential to the smooth running of the movement, they challenge the conception of womanhood prevalent at the time. Using elements of traditional femininity – women as

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<sup>130</sup> Marcello Venturi, 'La ragazza se ne va con Diavolo', *L'Unità*, June 30th 1946.

<sup>131</sup> *Resisting Bodies*, p. xiv.

<sup>132</sup> June Hannam, *Feminism* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 7.

physically weak, non-threatening, needing protection<sup>133</sup> – the female characters or narrators manage to do their partisan work undetected, and subvert gender expectations through their strength, bravery and audacity. Although their roles still, occasionally, revolve around domestic tasks – as is the case with Agnese in Viganò's novel, providing meals and overseeing resources for the partisans – the movement from inside to outside, and from private to public sphere, put them, in some cases, on an equal footing with the partisan men.

The Italian Resistance was experienced differently depending on gender: while for the men it did, to some extent, allow for a lessening of social differences, for women it enabled a movement out of the home, towards political involvement. Women's roles within the Resistance involved traditional functions, but they also spread beyond the responsibilities that had been women's under Fascism: looking after the house and raising children. Gender played a part in the critical reception and interest afforded to women's testimonies and publications after the war, as well as in their representation on paper. While often retaining elements of a conventional understanding of femininity, Italian women's writing offers a much more detailed and nuanced representation of women's roles in the Resistance.

In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the challenges that come with writing about 'true' events, and about the past, lingering in particular on the apparent contradiction between the concepts of truth and fiction, as well as my own experience of writing the Italian Resistance.

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<sup>133</sup> In *The Man of Reason*, Genevieve Lloyd discusses 'the conceptual alignment of maleness with superiority, femaleness with inferiority' (p. 32), showing how many philosophers presented 'femininity as somehow derivative in relation to a male paradigm of rational excellence' (p. 75).

### 3.3. Writing the Past

In her first Reith Lecture, ‘The Day is for the Living,’ Hilary Mantel discusses the position of historical novelists, who

face – as they should – questions about whether their work is legitimate. [...] The reader asks, is this story true? That sounds like a simple question, but we have to unwrap it. Often the reader is asking, can I check this out in a history book? Does it agree with other accounts? Would my old history teacher recognise it?<sup>134</sup>

This idea of ‘truth’ was one that I struggled with when I began working on my novel. After deciding that the Italian Resistance would play a part in my story, I spent a long time reading historical accounts, analysis, and testimonies, feeling that I would never accumulate enough knowledge to write on the subject. Always present in my mind was the thought that I was not a historian or an expert, and, despite my family’s history, was not Italian.

While my command of the language made reading Italian texts possible, reading in Italian took considerably longer than reading in English. Where possible, I read translations; when none was available, I went through a process of selection, reading only segments of Bergonzini’s *La Resistenza a Bologna*, focusing on young women’s testimonies, or choosing books such as Miriam Mafai’s *Pane nero* to gain an understanding of women’s lives during the war. What this reading did was spark further questions: what would writing creatively about women in the Resistance achieve? If my intention was to generate greater awareness of the women involved in the Italian Resistance among an English-speaking audience, then why should I not simply begin translating *L’Agnese va a morire*?

In this section, I will discuss elements of answer to this question, focusing first on what fiction can contribute to explorations of the past. I will also explore the distinction between

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<sup>134</sup> ‘The Day is for the Living’, *The Reith Lectures*, BBC Radio 4, 17 June 2017, 10.15pm.

the true and the real, the apparent contradiction between truth and fiction, and finally, the idea of appropriating one's heritage, highlighting some of the challenges I encountered when writing the novel.

### 3.3.1. *The value of creative reimagining*

In his article 'Fiction for the Purposes of History,' Richard Slotkin discusses the way in which he uses fiction in parallel to his scholarly work, in order to explore aspects of a topic that he feels 'cannot be fully developed in a scholarly mode'.<sup>135</sup> When writing his novel *The Crater*, which explores the battle of the Petersburg Crater during the American Civil War, Slotkin describes being 'engaged [...] in a very different way of imagining [his] subject,' and '[seeing] it from within'.<sup>136</sup> Far from dismissing the value of historical fiction when compared to scholarly historical work, therefore, Slotkin believes that both forms can offer, in different ways, valuable explorations into the past:

a novel can be as accurate as a history in telling what happened, when and how. It can, and should, be based on the same kind of research and rigorous analysis of evidence. But the [...] truth the novel seeks is poetic rather than historiographical: it sacrifices fidelity to non-essential facts in order to create in the reader a vivid sense of what it may have been like to live among such facts—and also a sense of what those facts mean in some larger sense—and to achieve that in a flash of recognition, rather than as the conclusion to a necessarily laborious argument.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Richard Slotkin, 'Fiction for the Purposes of History', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 221-236 (p. 224).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-26. Mantel also suggests that 'the historian, the biographer, the writer of fiction work within different constraints, but in a way that is complementary, not opposite' ('The Day is for the Living', *The Reith Lectures*).

What changes for the reader, then, is their position: while the history book acknowledges that the facts it recounts took place in a distant time, the novel seeks to place the reader in the midst of the past. Through the characters' eyes and ears, they can experience another time – and perhaps another place – as though it was their reality.

Linked to this idea is the function of the author in an historical novel: while the historian's position might be to step back, and to examine the facts from a distance, the author's role is to take the facts and absorb them, digest them, and turn them into story. Writing about Toni Morrison's approach to her novel *Beloved*, Maria Margaronis quotes an interview Morrison gave to Marsha Darling:

I did not do much research on Margaret Garner other than the obvious stuff because I wanted to invent her life, which is a way of saying I wanted to be available to anything the characters had to say about it.<sup>138</sup>

This idea of the writer needing the space to listen to their characters, rather than trying to fill the page with historically accurate details, was important to my process. Confident in her ability to inhabit her characters, Morrison believes that what she can contribute to the story is just as valuable as the historical information garnered from official accounts. As Margaronis puts it, 'far from being compromised by subjectivity, the truth, for Morrison, is most accessible through it'.<sup>139</sup> Reading about Morrison's writing process for *Beloved* helped me understand that, while the historical research I had done would be useful to establish a sense of time and place, I could not rely on it to flesh out characters or put together elements of the story. As the writer, my role is not simply to provide accurate details, but to breathe life into

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<sup>138</sup> Marsha Darling, 'In the Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison', in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. by Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 246-254 (p. 248), as quoted in Maria Margaronis, 'The Anxiety of Authenticity: Writing Historical Fiction at the End of the Twentieth Century', *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008), 138-160 (p. 149).

<sup>139</sup> Margaronis, p. 149.

the story I plotted out and make it possible for the reader to experience this particular corner of the past along with the characters, rather than as an outside observer.

In short, reading Margaronis and Slotkin's articles helped me understand that, as a novelist, my focus should not be on including non-essential details but rather on ensuring that the facts I did include worked to re-create, for the reader, a believable version of the past. Hayden White's distinction between the true and the real was also particularly useful when it came to blending fact and fiction.

### 3.3.2. *The distinction between true and real, veracity and verisimilitude*

Writing about history and historical fiction, Hayden White distinguishes between the 'true,' which he defines as 'what the documentary record permits one to talk about' with regards to a specific place and time, and the 'real,' which is 'everything that can truthfully be said about [the actuality of reality] plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could *possibly* be'.<sup>140</sup> It is possible, he suggests, to think about 'the difference between history and fiction in terms of the difference between enquiry directed at the provision of the true and enquiry designed to give access to the real'.<sup>141</sup> Giving access to the real, however, requires in-depth knowledge of the true, in order to allow the writer to theorise about what could possibly be true.

In the case of the Italian Resistance in Bologna, the true is contained, for the most part, in Luciano Bergonzini's collection of documents and testimonies.<sup>142</sup> Five volumes of accounts from participants, ranging from members of the CLN (the committee overseeing the Resistance) to journalists writing for underground presses, to students who were part of the

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<sup>140</sup> Hayden White, 'Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 147-157 (p. 147).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>142</sup> *La Resistenza a Bologna: Testimonianze e documenti*, 5 vols, ed. by Luciano Bergonzini (Bologna: Istituto per la Storia di Bologna, 1964-1980).

GAP units in the city. Initially, the sheer amount of information collected by Bergonzini felt paralysing. *Like a River towards the Sea* had emerged from my desire to write about my paternal grandmother, through a fictional character with a similar upbringing, coming from the same town. I had a broad idea of the story's arc and themes before I started researching the Resistance, and I knew that the principal characters would be fictional: my aim had never been to write about a specific partisan. It made sense, however, to use Bergonzini's information about individual Bolognese partisans for secondary characters, or at least as names mentioned in the novel. The character of Gianna's brother, Pietro, is a socialist, twenty-six years old at the opening of the story, who finished university in 1935. He would likely know other anti-Fascists. The sense of responsibility that came with using 'true' names – names from the documentary record – made me hesitate. The accounts gathered in Bergonzini's collection are usually a few pages long, no more, and they were my only source of information about the people who had written them. I did not want to represent these people 'wrongly', even though it was unlikely that one of their descendants might somehow, one day, read the novel and disagree with the image I had presented.

Eventually, I found a way to compromise. I used first names from the testimonies collected by Bergonzini, as well as street names and specific anecdotes, in the way that I felt served the novel best. The figure of Vittoria, whom Stella meets in Chapter Eleven, is inspired by Vittoria Guadagnani, a woman who was instrumental in organising the GDD (Groups for the Defence of Women) in Bologna.<sup>143</sup> Since anonymity was a primary concern of anti-fascists at the time, I did not feel that last names needed mentioning; this allows for a certain fluidity in the narrative, without the identity of this man or that woman having to be pinpointed. Stella's activity in Chapter Thirteen, her waiting in a park to exchange

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<sup>143</sup> Vittoria Guadagnani's testimony is in *La Resistenza a Bologna*, ed. by Bergonzini, I, 475-478.

newspapers with another partisan woman, is based on Renata Tubertini Zarri's testimony;<sup>144</sup> I only changed the name of their meeting place. Marta's discovery of a dead body on the street in Chapter Eighteen was inspired by Verenin Grazia's testimony; his daughter Poljana, who worked for the Resistance as a *staffetta*, saw the body of a tortured partisan when she went to deliver sensitive documents.<sup>145</sup> In this way, by weaving true elements of history into my own 'enquiry into the real,' but keeping the characters of the novel fictional, I was able to retain the creative freedom that I felt was necessary to my writing process. This left space, as Toni Morrison suggests, for the characters to speak, and the story to unfold.

The distinction between truth, veracity, and verisimilitude is important to address here. In his chapter 'Literature and Truth,' Peter Lamarque plays devil's advocate and exclaims, 'Fiction, surely, is the very opposite of truth! Truth is the province of science or history, poetry resides in creativity and make-believe'.<sup>146</sup> However, as he goes on to discuss, there is a long tradition of evaluating literature in terms of truth, although this 'truth' can mean a variety of things. Truth can be 'acceptability' or 'ringing true', Lamarque says, but it can also be 'truthfulness or honesty', as opposed to 'sentimentality or affectation' – the idea of 'seeing things clearly, without illusion'.<sup>147</sup> There is the idea of being 'true to life', which Lamarque connects to "'verisimilitude," a conception of truth implying resemblance to fact or "realistic" description'.<sup>148</sup> Veracity can also mean 'truthfulness', but in 'How and What We Can Learn from Fiction,' Mitchell Green uses the word, rather, to mean factual accuracy. As he points out, some genres of fiction 'mandate certain standards of veracity'; he gives the example of 'a detective novel [requiring] rough accuracy about the ways of criminals and

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<sup>144</sup> Renata Tubertini Zarri's testimony, in *La Resistenza a Bologna*, ed. by Bergonzini, I, 239-241 (p. 239).

<sup>145</sup> Verenin Grazia's testimony, in *La Resistenza a Bologna*, ed. by Bergonzini, I, 27-45 (p. 37).

<sup>146</sup> Peter Lamarque, 'Literature and Truth', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, ed. by Garry Hagberg and Walter Jost (Malden: Wiley, 2009), 367-384 (p. 369).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.



detectives'.<sup>149</sup> With such genres, Lamarque suggests, where 'departure from fact [...] can seriously affect the overall achievement', it might be best 'to treat these cases [...] as breaches in genre conventions, rather than as general failures of literary truth'.<sup>150</sup> In this way, then, we might define veracity as factual accuracy – required to varying extents by certain genres of fiction – while verisimilitude, the 'appearance' of truth, could arguably be achieved for the reader regardless of the novel's standard of veracity (although, admittedly, the latter might help the former). Truth, Lamarque and Olsen argue in *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, is not a major feature of literary works, unlike their creative-imaginative and mimetic aspects.<sup>151</sup> While the historian, as Hayden White pointed out, is concerned with the true, historical novelists might decide to prioritise veracity, knowing that, as Lamarque writes, 'authors will sometimes deliberately distort fact for literary ends,' and that 'even scrupulously researched historical novels involve fabrication when invented dialogue is attributed to historical characters'.<sup>152</sup>

In my own novel, I tried to avoid this type of fabrication by keeping the characters of the novel fictional, but I also came to terms with the idea that literary ends might justify distorting the facts. Lamarque's conclusion that truth is not an essential element of literary value felt, in this way, empowering.<sup>153</sup>

Historical research, beside adding to the veracity of my novel, also helped increase my confidence in my Italian identity.

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<sup>149</sup> Mitchell Green, 'How and What We Can Learn from Fiction', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, ed. by Garry Hagberg and Walter Jost (Malden: Wiley, 2009), 350-366 (p. 356).

<sup>150</sup> Lamarque, 'Literature and Truth', p. 375.

<sup>151</sup> Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 449.

<sup>152</sup> Lamarque, 'Literature and Truth,' p. 375.

<sup>153</sup> Lamarque ends his chapter on 'Literature and Truth' by saying that 'readers like to be imaginatively involved with the narrative or subject content, they like to find coherence and interest at a broader thematic level, they enjoy and look out for formal qualities of structure and design. Do they seek truth as well? Some do, some don't' (p. 383).

### 3.3.3. *Appropriating my heritage*

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned one of the issues I faced when I began working on this project: my non-Italianness. The fact that my father's parents were Italian did not, in my opinion, automatically give me a right to Italian history – especially the celebrated experience of the Resistance. Was I allowed to write about this period of history? And who exactly did I think was the authority doing this 'allowing'?

What I failed to acknowledge at the time was the nature of this writing project: an enquiry into the real, to borrow Hayden White's words. What mattered was not so much the obtention of answers as the setting out in search of them. After all, the original idea behind the novel had been, simply, to gain a better understanding of my grandmother's youth: what was it like to grow up a young woman in 1930s and 1940s Italy? What was the political climate, the day-to-day reality of Fascism? My grandmother's passing in 2012 meant that I could no longer ask her about her childhood; this is what prompted the writing of the novel. While the questions I had did not all find answers over the course of the project, my understanding of recent Italian history certainly developed, as did my interest in women's experience of the Resistance. By giving me a reason to take up Italian classes again, and a chance to practice the language on my visits to Bologna, this PhD has brought me closer to my grandmother.

Sally Keenan, in her article 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-appropriating the Past,' highlights the way in which Morrison set out, in *Beloved*, to re-appropriate the past of African Americans, offering a 'reconstruction' of slavery's impact to 'those who have inherited its legacy'.<sup>154</sup> While my project is certainly not as ambitious as Morrison's *Beloved*,

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<sup>154</sup> Sally Keenan, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-appropriating the Past', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 4 (1993), 154-164 (p. 156).

and does not inscribe itself into such a painful history as that of slavery, I feel that it has helped me to re-appropriate my heritage by forcing me to take ownership of the stories that I found in historical documents and books, and to recreate imaginatively the 1940s in Italy.

In this regard, whether or not the finished product goes on to be published, the project has been successful. My grasp of recent Italian history has grown fuller and deeper; I have read not only history books but also novels by Italian writers of the period, and diaries of women who were involved in the Resistance. The fact that, while researching for the novel, I travelled to Bologna and to Caorle, the town where my grandmother was born, and met some of my relatives for the first time – my grandmother’s niece and her daughter – has certainly reinforced my own sense of identity, as well as my link to Italy. Translating Renata Viganò’s *L’Agnese va a morire* would be a worthy literary enterprise, but it could not have brought me the same sense of connection or generated the same knowledge as writing *Like a River towards the Sea*.

In the last section of this chapter, I will further discuss some of my creative choices in *Like a River towards the Sea*, especially in relation to the historical record and the materials I read.

### **3.4. *Like a River towards the Sea* and the historical record**

The four volumes which were most helpful to my understanding of women’s reality during the Second World War were Ada Gobetti’s *Partisan Diary*, translated by Jomarie Alano; the collected testimonies in *La Resistenza taciuta*; Miriam Mafai’s *Pane nero*, and Renata Viganò’s novel *L’Agnese va a morire*. Gobetti’s diary juxtaposes in a striking way the dangerous situations she found herself in, during bombings or her crossing to France, and details of daily life such as the ‘usual dessert’ that she ‘made with a glass of yellow flour, one

of white flour, one of milk and one of jam, without eggs and sugar'.<sup>155</sup> The testimonies collected by Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina showed a variety of backgrounds and experiences among female partisans and cemented for me the fact that poverty often created a greater awareness of the regime's unfairness, thus giving my protagonist a strong motivation for gaining interest in antifascist ideas. *Pane nero* ('Black Bread') gives a comprehensive overview of Italian women's lives during the war, regardless of class, race or age. It helped with the creation of the novel's world, providing a sense of the political and personal scenery, as well as small details such as the blackout rules being enforced from Thursday 6<sup>th</sup>, June 1940, or descriptions of the period's bathing suits, 'woolen, covering the thighs, supporting the breasts with wide shoulder pads'.<sup>156</sup> *L'Agnese va a morire*, through its portrayal of the Resistance and its unlikely heroine, reinforced my understanding of the Resistance in the countryside, as well as building a sense of the movement's inner workings, and of the atmosphere among partisan groups.

Unexpectedly, timing was a crucial element in my research process. In some cases, I stumbled upon information long after I had stopped looking for it. Finding out which bombings damaged which areas of the city, or the time of day when they occurred, for example, was more difficult than expected. Months after I had decided to exploit, within my narrative, the bombings I knew best, I found a website that had escaped my previous searches. Focusing on the history of the workers' movement, it provided detailed information – day by day – about Italy throughout the war.<sup>157</sup> The July 16<sup>th</sup> 1943 entry, for example, mentions that bombs fell on the north-west periphery of Bologna, mainly in Via Agucchi, striking the houses of workers and carters, resulting in nine dead and twenty injured. This

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<sup>155</sup> Gobetti, p. 163.

<sup>156</sup> Mafai, pp. 23 and 28 (my translation).

<sup>157</sup> Amabile, Carlo, 'I giorni del lavoro: cronologia,' *Storia del Movimento Operaio* <<https://sites.google.com/site/storiadelmovimentoooperaio/cronologia/1943-1-luglio---31-dicembre>> [accessed 20 January 2020]

was the sort of information I wanted. Since the novel was unfinished, I was able to work some of the details in, but the timing of this discovery was frustrating. Language played a part in this: the website is entirely in Italian, and at the beginning of my research, I was not confident enough to type Italian queries into the search bar.

Linked to this question of timing and to the issue of language is a structural change I made to the second part of the novel. Early in the project, I contacted Dianella Gagliani, a scholar at the university of Bologna who specialises in women's recent history. She recommended two volumes in Italian: a history book which I procured through the library and a novel, *Sguardi sull'acqua*.<sup>158</sup> I bought the novel; it remained unread on my shelves for two years, until I realised, halfway through my Italian course, that I had the skills to read it. Since I was planning to visit Bologna for the second time in September 2019, I contacted the author, Elisabetta Calzolari, and she agreed to meet me. During our conversation, she emphasised how, in 1942, there had been little political activity; the Resistance had really begun after Mussolini's dismissal, in 1943. The second part of the novel was then set in 1942, purely because I had not wanted too large a gap after the first part, set in 1940. As Stella was supposed, in Part II, to be involved in the Resistance, Elisabetta's words meant I had to change the date and to shift the narrative forward by a year. This involved editing out some of the existing scenes, as well as reshuffling the order of events, and writing new material. While it took time, a positive outcome was being able to include the fall of Mussolini in the narrative, as well as that strange, uncertain summer of 1943, during which all of Italy expected the war to end.

Conflict sometimes arose between historical accuracy and narrative potential. I hesitated to place Stella and Pietro in a relationship because, in *La Resistenza taciuta*, several

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<sup>158</sup> Gabriele Bonazzi, *Bologna nella storia* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2011), and Elisabetta Calzolari, *Sguardi sull'acqua: storie di guerra nella Bologna dei canali* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2013).

women highlighted the fact that relationships in the Resistance were mostly platonic; men and women were comrades in arms, brothers and sisters.<sup>159</sup> The story of the novel is not that of the Resistance, however, although they intersect. Pietro, as the brother of Stella's friend, is not another partisan: since they meet before the Resistance comes together, I felt that it was not implausible for a relationship to develop between them.

Stella's character is loosely based on my Italian paternal grandmother, whose name she shares. The initial creative spark was the idea of writing an alternative story for my grandmother, a story in which, instead of marrying, moving abroad, and having children, she made a life for herself in Italy and got accepted into a university, where her sharp mind was given a chance to thrive. Over the course of the project, the character moved away from the reality of my grandmother, borrowing some character traits from myself, and becoming her own entity. To reflect this, I changed her last name – from Zoia, my grandmother's maiden name, to Zanni. The choice was also motivated by a visit to Caorle, my grandmother's hometown, where I met several relatives for the first time. The novel does not seek to represent specifically my grandmother's childhood or her teenage years; it follows a fictional character in an attempt to explore the life of a young woman in 1940s Italy. Using my grandmother's name, therefore, seemed unnecessary, as it could potentially have offended family members with a greater knowledge of our family's history.

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<sup>159</sup> Anna Cinanni tells the story of her brother replying to their mother, who complained about him 'throwing his sister into the arms of the young partisans,' that 'Anna [was] not a woman,' but 'a Communist, and she [was] not considered as a woman' (p. 123, my translation).

### 3.5. Conclusion

Writing about the past involves finding a balance between the true and the real, between documentary sources and the story the writer is seeking to tell. This chapter has explored the challenges of portraying the Italian Resistance, linked in part to the different ways in which the movement was experienced by the Italian people, and to the ‘myth’ of the Resistance that was created in the 1960s. As we have seen, gender affected both the partisan experience and its retelling: while greater critical attention has been paid to the testimonies of Italian women in recent years, this was not always the case. Literary representations of partisan women challenge, to an extent, conventional understandings of femininity, but their value as documents within a feminist historiography is limited by the outlook of the time, when being a woman was equated with motherhood.

Reading about the varied representations of the Resistance and understanding their political significance helped me decide how to position my own narrative, taking inspiration from Elisabetta Calzolari’s novel *Sguardi sull’acqua*. I would argue that this process is essential for any historical writer; the reading of both historical materials and historical fiction will enable them to absorb the facts as well as to understand how they might be used in a dynamic re-creation of the past. As my own approach has shown, understanding the difference between concepts of truth, veracity and verisimilitude can also be empowering for a writer of historical fiction, and the process of writing an enquiry into the past can lead, in cases like mine, to claiming ownership of one’s heritage.

## Conclusion

*Like a River towards the Sea* offers a glimpse into the life of a young Italian woman during the 1940s, delving into issues such as religion, gender roles, the class system, and the struggle between Fascism and its opponents. Through the fictional character of Stella, I have tried to show the difficult position in which most Italians – especially inhabitants of the north – found themselves after 1943, having to choose between loyalty to Mussolini, a near-impossible neutrality, or involvement in the Resistance.

In my critical component, I have offered a narrative on the problems and methodological questions which arise for writers of historical fiction and of fiction embedded in a different culture, and how they might be answered, using my own experience. In Chapter One, I discussed the way in which reading Italian novels written during or about the period of my own project influenced the workings of my own narrative, bringing out themes relevant to Italian life at the time: a preoccupation with class difference and a sense of place, a focus on identity, and the subtle workings of gender. I argued that the reading of these novels constituted useful research into the culture in which I sought to ground my own novel and highlighted how the knowledge I gathered appeared in my creative work.

Chapter Two discussed the use of one or several foreign languages within an English-language text, termed ‘intra-textual translation’ by Meir Sternberg. I applied Sternberg’s terminology to several British novels set in Italy, in order to establish the aims and limitations of multilingualism in fiction. The writers considered tend to use selective representation and verbal transposition; rather than using footnotes, they either provide a translation in the body of the text, through the narrator or the protagonist, or they ensure that their meaning can be derived from context. Penelope Fitzgerald is the only author who does not signal instances of foreign language through italics; she inserts Italian words and phrases in the narrative, which



remain cryptic. While this establishes the world of the novel as foreign – not everything can be translated or understood – there is a risk of alienating the reader; indeed, reader resistance is one of the factors that must limit the representation of multilingualism in fiction. Through the theory and the examples given in the chapter, including my own writing, I have aimed to give any writer interested in portraying cultural otherness the means to do so thoughtfully through the use of intratextual translation.

Finally, Chapter Three discussed the challenges of writing fiction set in the past, focusing on the case of the Italian Resistance. A complex phenomenon, the Resistance has been described as the keystone of the Italian Republic, but in reality it was an experience that was not common to all Italians and divided the population. The politics involved in the Resistance itself – the strong Communist presence among the Resistance leadership – and, in the following decades, the ‘public use’ of the Resistance as a myth on which to ground Italian identity, make the movement subject to various interpretations. Gender also influenced the experience of the Resistance and the retelling of it, and I showed that the stories of and by women, left unattended for a period of time, are now the focus of greater critical attention, and in some cases, of translation into English. In the final section, I highlighted some of my own issues with writing the past and showed how the process of researching the novel resulted in claiming my Italian heritage, while understanding that the process of enquiry involved in writing history was as valuable as the final product. Again, I believe that my experience of reading both historical and fictional materials, as well as my reflection on the impact of politics and gender on representation, and my discussion of key terms, can be used by historical writers to frame their project and research, prompting them to question the representation of the figure, event or period that they want to fictionalise.

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