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«UNA TRAGEDIA DI LINGUAGGIO NON CORRISPOSTO»:
LANGUAGE BETWEEN FAMILY CRISIS AND TRANSNATIONALISM
IN VIOLA DI GRADO'S *SETTANTA ACRILICO TRENTA LANA*

FRANCESCO CHIANESE

ABSTRACT · This article investigates Di Grado's description of coming-of-age as an Italian girl living abroad in *Settanta acrilico trenta lana*. In her novel, she explores language as a context where cultures and identities encounter each other and at times become closer and more distant within the multicultural neighbourhoods of cities like Leeds. Di Grado's representation of the transnational dimension of language is analysed in this context as intertwined with the evolution of the relationship between Camelia and her mother through Lacanian theory. The article also focuses on how the overlap between Camelia's diasporic displacement and her family crisis determines a substantial failure of language as a means of communication within the family and outside. Ultimately, Di Grado's analysis of language and family is compared to that carried out by Pier Paolo Pasolini in the late 1960s and 1970s in his theatre, one which resonates with Di Grado's discourse on the impossibility of language building connections.

KEYWORDS · Viola Di Grado; language; transnationalism; Italian diaspora; Italian migration; family; otherness; contemporary Italian women's writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Viola Di Grado's debut novel *Settanta acrilico trenta lana* (2011) has constituted a breakthrough in Italian literature.¹ It was published in Italy by Edizioni e/o and shortly afterwards translated into English by Michael Reynolds under the title *70% Acrylic 30% Wool* for its international branch Europa Editions.² It was internationally recognized as a critical and commercial success, and at the age of twenty-three Di Grado became the youngest winner of both the Premio Campiello Opera Prima (2011) and the Premio Rapallo-Carige Opera Prima (2011), as well as the youngest ever finalist of the prestigious Premio Strega (2011).³ An instant best-seller, the novel presented Di Grado as a generation-defining author, as Clorinda Donato has pointed out in her introduction to this special edited section, for her ability to give a voice to the multitude of millennials in «a world where the molds have been broken, but there are no alternative proposals».⁴ Ten years in the making, Di Grado's *oeuvre* has reiterated and further explored many of the topics introduced in this foundational book. Among them, I will focus on her exploration of language in its complex and contradictory nature, as part of a wider meditation on family and death. The striking architectural coherence that undergirds her narrative world is confirmed in her latest novel, *Fame blu* (2022), where her interrogation of the Italian language in its interaction with Chinese in the multicultural and multilingual contexts introduced in *Settanta acrilico* continues while representing the most recent evolution of the Italian diaspora.⁵

In her fiction, Di Grado has often explored and reworked elements of her own biography from the transnational viewpoint of an Italian writer relocated abroad. In *Settanta acrilico*, the plot revolves

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¹ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico trenta lana*, Rome, Edizioni e/o, 2011.

² VIOLA DI GRADO, *70% Acrylic 30% Wool*, trans. Michael Reynolds, New York, Europa Editions, 2012.

³ See www.premiostrega.it. For more information on Di Grado's international circulation, see <https://www.violadigrado.com/i-libri-di-viola-di-grado>.

⁴ See CLORINDA DONATO, *Introduction*, in this volume.

⁵ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Fame blu*, Milan, La nave di Teseo, 2022.

around the young protagonist Camelia, born in Turin, who has emigrated with her family to Leeds, both cities belonging to Di Grado's diasporic background. Born in Sicily, Di Grado earned her BA in Chinese and Japanese at the University of Turin. Leeds was the first city in which she lived in the UK, the country where she continued to follow her interest in Asian cultures by pursuing an MA in East Asian Studies at the University of London. Currently based in London, Di Grado has also travelled extensively in many countries. Her journeys to China and Japan allowed her to make accurate descriptions of cities like Kyoto, where *Bambini di ferro* (2016) is set, and Shanghai, several parts of which we witness in *Fame blu*.⁶ The similarities between the author and her character Camelia in *Settanta acrilico* end when it comes to their personal and family histories. In the novel, Camelia's interior monologue tells us about her relocation to Leeds with her parents at the age of seven and how she loses her father in a car accident there when she was about to start her studies of Chinese at university. The death of the father has a devastating effect on both Camelia and her mother Livia, who, following the accident, gradually stop talking to each other, apart from occasional written messages and hand gestures, through which they build an original language based on expressive silent glances. We learn that Camelia has given up her new apartment and her desire to start university to look after Livia, whose only activity appears to be taking photographs of the holes that she finds in the clothing, curtains, and furniture surrounding her. Subsequently, Camelia's story evolves through describing the quirky love affair she embarks on with her Chinese neighbour Wen, with whom she starts learning Chinese, and his brother Jimmy. From this point on, the events develop circularly through new forms of disconnection and misunderstanding that rejoin daughter and mother through the silent language they shared at the beginning of the narration. In the surprising final chapter of the book, their seclusion within a uterine dimension – «dimensione uterina» – which pre-exists language, is sealed when Camelia kills her mother's new love interest just before the couple left for a journey to York.⁷

The first part of my contribution investigates Di Grado's description of coming-of-age as an Italian girl living abroad by reflecting on Camelia's experience. Di Grado focuses on language as a context wherein cultures and identities encounter each other, alternately becoming closer or more distant within the multicultural neighbourhoods typical of cities like Leeds. In the description of Camelia's displacement as an Italian migrant, we recognize Di Grado's own discomfort as a diasporic writer, embraced once again when describing the perspective of the Asian neighbors she met in the British cities where she has resided. As a result, the representation of those parallel experiences of dislocation suggests a universal condition of subalternity.⁸

The second part of my contribution focuses on Di Grado's representation of family language as a «trap», which is a definition provided by the author in an article published in 2012 in the Italian journal *La psicoanalisi*, in which she interprets passages of *Settanta acrilico* through Lacanian theory.⁹ In her narrative, the transnational dimension of the failure of language is intertwined with the evolution of the relationship between Camelia and her mother, which starts to deteriorate after the disappearance of the father figure. Through Lacanian theory, I demonstrate how conversely, a recurring theme throughout the narrative, the absence of the father – symbolized by the image of the hole, «il buco», – becomes the starting point for the building of a tacit alliance between mother and daughter in «una dimensione pre-linguistica o post-linguistica» which overcomes the boundaries built

⁶ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Bambini di ferro*, Milan, La nave di Teseo, 2016; EAD., *Fame blu*, cit.

⁷ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico, trenta lana*, «La psicoanalisi», 52, 2012, pp. 239-245: 240.

⁸ For example, the condition described by Gayatri Spivak, when she expanded Antonio Gramsci's *questione meridionale* to identify a global condition of subalternity. See GAYATRI SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988; and ANTONIO GRAMSCI, *The Southern Question*, trans. Pasquale Verdichio, New York, Bordighera Press, 2015.

⁹ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico, trenta lana*, cit., p. 243. «La psicoanalisi» is the journal published in Italy by the European School of Psychoanalysis (Scuola Europea di Psicoanalisi). It is directed by Jacques-Alain Miller, the sole editor of Jacques Lacan's *Seminars*, and his internationally most renowned student and scholar.

worldwide by verbal language in patriarchal society.¹⁰ The fact that their silent language remains untranslatable into national idioms may be intended as a transnational alliance built by diasporic women, which Camelia unconsciously protects by undermining both her mother's and her own attempts to start new relationships beyond their special uterine dimension.¹¹

In the last paragraph, to reinforce my argument I compare Di Grado's analysis of language and family to a reflection carried out by Pier Paolo Pasolini in the late 1960s and 1970s in his theatre and his cinema. Despite radically differing in their outcomes, Pasolini's interpretation of language as a form of non-communication resonates with Di Grado's discourse on the impossibility of language to build connections outside the family and the home.

BUILDING THE TRANSNATIONAL SPACE IN LITERATURE: A TRANSLINGUAL FAMILY TRAGEDY

From the moment *Settanta acrilico* hit the bookshelves, Di Grado's fiction would hardly be recognized as a form of easy reading. While many may have been disturbed by the ways in which Di Grado's provocative writing style evokes images of decadence and urban desolation, loneliness and interior tribulation, others may be sidelined by the complexity of her argument expressed through the symbolically dense prose. Most reviewers agreed in defining *Settanta acrilico* as a reflection on language in the form of fiction.¹² This opinion was also corroborated by psychoanalyst C line Menghi in the short paragraph introducing an essay published by Di Grado in the Italian Lacanian journal *La psicoanalisi* shortly after her novel appeared: «La psicoanalisi e la letteratura si incontrano sulla grande strada del linguaggio».¹³

Di Grado's treatment of language parallels Menghi's understanding of language as a channel for the expression of identity, which defines us both inside the domestic space and outside of it, thus acquiring further relevance in Camelia's self-exploration as a diasporic individual.¹⁴ At the beginning, Camelia's unhappy life in Leeds highlights the analogous difficulties experienced by families in the multiethnic neighbourhood, which is recognizable as a recurrent topic in the narrative of Italian migration.¹⁵ The representation of a series of objects within the house intensifies her representation of the difficulties of finding a home in a house that looks so different and evidences a recurrent trope

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 240. The scholarship on language, women and patriarchy is extensive and has variously interrogated Lacan's thought from the feminist viewpoint, resulting in the opposition between a wide front criticizing Lacanian theory and an opposite, equally vast group of scholars defending its potential as an ally to undermine and overturn patriarchal narratives. For specific references, see DEBORAH LUEPNITZ, *Beyond the Phallus: Lacan and Feminism*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 221-237 and the further paragraph of this article, *Reading Lacan «Beyond the Phallus»: Language, Family and Otherness*, and related footnotes.

¹¹ Di Grado's mention of a uterine or pre/post-linguistic communication would shift my argument from Lacan's thought to Julia Kristeva's theories, which identify a pre-symbolic mother-child communication existing outside the linguistic domain defined by the father, in which processes of maternal abjection, rejection and repression lead to syndromes of depression, apathy and melancholia that may be recognized in the evolution of Camelia in *Settanta acrilico*. Nonetheless, given the prominence of Lacan in Di Grado's essay, I decided not to add further layers of complication to my argument and instead to limit my analysis to the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, representative of my background. For further information on Kristeva's interpretation of Lacan, see JULIA KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982.

¹² See for example GIULIO FERRONI, *Le lacerazioni della Di Grado*, «Il Manifesto», 27 March 2011, p. 16.

¹³ C LINE MENGHI introducing VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico, trenta lana*, cit., p. 239.

¹⁴ See DAN SMYER YU, *The Logic of the Diasporic Selfhood*, «MMG Working Papers», 13-15, 2013, pp. 1-22, https://www.mmg.mpg.de/60916/WP_13-15_SmyerYu_DiasporicSelfhood.pdf (last accessed 22 September 2022) and for the specific Italian case, JENNIFER BURNS, *Mapping Transnational Subjecthood: Space, Affects and Relationality in Recent Transnational Italian Fiction*, «Californian Italian Studies», 8, 2, 2018, pp. 1-17; and EAD., *Mobile Homes: Transnational Subjects and the (Re)Creation of Home Spaces*, in *Transnational Italian Studies*, eds Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2020, pp. 177-192.

¹⁵ See for example FRED GARDAPH , *Italian Signs in American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1996.

in the representation of Italian houses abroad.¹⁶ In Camelia's room, the narrator points out the presence of «Puccini e Verdi regalati da mia madre e l'intera discografia di Björk», identifying two separate spaces delimited by Camelia's own collection of international pop music alongside the Italian records received from her mother.¹⁷ Placing Björk among Di Grado's preferred musicians contributes to identifying the author's diasporic background in the description of Camelia. While keeping the Italian items inherited from her mother separate from the global music which Camelia has purchased, the tone of Di Grado's opening line is suspended between reality and the imaginary dimension of a fairy-tale or a parable, which introduces us to the house where the young Italian female protagonist lives with her mother. Fairy tales also physically appear in Camelia's room, connecting her childhood in Italy to the present in Leeds, alongside books on Asian philosophy – «I libri sul taoismo e le favole ingiallite di quando vivevo a Torino in via Vanchiglia» – as does a photographic album portraying Camelia's coming-of-age through the multiple trajectories of her migration:¹⁸

L'album fotografico di pelle con dentro me stessa che cresceva attraverso le pagine, cominciavo a sei anni, in piazza Castello a Torino, continuavo nei sette dell'arrivo a Leeds, e poi in cinque minuti mi ritrovavo di diciott'anni, in un appartamento antico di Victoria Road, con tre mesi di lezioni alle spalle e molti altri davanti, e un sacco di pagine bianche da riempire di foto.¹⁹

Therefore, at the opening of the novel Di Grado stresses the difficulties of being an Italian living in the UK by echoing common laments of adaptation, including the most recurrent complaint voiced by Mediterranean people who relocate to Northern European regions, i.e., the hostile weather. A page-long rant about the climate launches the narration, with Leeds described as a city where it is always December and where winter has prevailed for such a long time that nobody remembers what it was like before.²⁰ Beyond stereotypes and common sense, the hyperbolic description of the difficult adaptation to British weather allows Di Grado to fashion a secluded space where Camelia and her mother are buried outside language. It also introduces Camelia's tendency to reinvent language to support her desire and build a world mirroring her subjectivity, a point I shall return to later. For example, Camelia's desire to turn «inverno» into «inferno» by simply replacing a letter anticipates her further considerations on death and the afterlife:

E dire che non è l'inverno che la gente teme, è l'inferno, con quel calduccio di fiamme. Io li scambierei volentieri, scambierei la V di inverno con la F, se la vita si potesse gestire come uno dei miei esercizi di cinese.²¹

Regarding turning «inverno» into «inferno», F is not a letter chosen randomly, being the initial letter of the words *famiglia* and family in both Italian and English. We learn that December is not only the peak of «inverno», but also the gate to Camelia's family «inferno», coinciding with the death of her father: December was the moment time stopped and Camelia and her mother started living in their unreal Eliotian wasteland, in the *inVerno/inFerno* of their house.

As can be seen in the quotations from *Settanta acrilico* cited above, Di Grado's discourse on migration is multipronged, which makes her fiction the ideal case study for the transnational redefinition of Italian studies espoused by Charles Burdett, Jennifer Burns, Derek Duncan and Loredana Polezzi. Their approach allows for reconceptualizing the field along new critical lines

¹⁶ See FRANCESCO CHIANESE, *Italian Items in Domestic Spaces: Representing Italianness through Objects in the Fiction of Helen Barolini and Chiara Barzini*, «Translating and Interpreting Studies», 17, 1, 2022, pp. 134-153; and ROBERT VISCUSI, *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing*, Albany, State University of New York, 2006.

¹⁷ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico trenta lana*, cit., p. 15.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 49.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 1.

through the application of a new set of innovative critical tools.²² Alongside her investigation of language, Di Grado's fiction features diverse configurations of mobility. They elucidate the need to distinguish between mobility and migration as related conditions that do not necessarily coexist. As Burdett, Polezzi and Spadaro state, «we do not have to migrate in order to be mobile, and cultural mobility is just as fundamental a phenomenon in the history of Italy as are the geographic trajectories of its peoples».²³ Beyond fiction, the relentless mobility experienced by Di Grado, who has lived in many places without adopting any of them as a long-term destination, also encourages the study of both mobility and migration across multiple points of overlap and convergence. Furthermore, Di Grado's representation of the diasporic subject shifts the focus to the individual from the more established studies on collective movements. It investigates the self within the transnational context in its «synergic potential inherent in the kinesthetical nature of diasporic identity», resulting from the interaction of a diasporic individual and his or her territoriality, which are both «in motion».²⁴

Transnationally speaking, Di Grado's fiction aligns with the dominant narratives of Italian migration and recurring representations of the Italian diaspora.²⁵ While in *Settanta acrilico* she depicts a family migration to Leeds, in the more recent *Fame blu* we recognize an example of the generational migration of the highly educated to which the writer belongs, often defined as a brain drain, i.e., «fuga dei cervelli». In *Fame blu*, the unnamed protagonist is temporarily relocated to Shanghai, where she teaches Italian in a language school, like many talented young Italians migrating abroad in search of work that more closely matches their expectations. Despite the different types of mobility addressed, in both novels Di Grado's Italian background interacts with the multicultural environment of the destination country, and specifically focuses on the acquisition of Chinese, which becomes for her protagonists a way of escaping from family tragedies. In *Fame blu* too, the unnamed protagonist escapes from Rome to forget after the tragic death of her twin brother. If in *Settanta acrilico* Camelia learns Chinese to evade from the «trap of language» in her house when her father dies, likewise in *Fame blu* the protagonist learns Chinese because it is the language spoken in China where her brother was planning to move before dying. Furthermore, in both novels Chinese is the language which the protagonists use to get closer to characters ethnically defined by a Chinese background, with whom they attempt to build sentimental or sexual relationships. Chinese is the native language spoken by the two brothers who emigrated in Leeds in *Settanta acrilico* and by the native girl Xu in Shanghai in *Fame blu*. Consequently, in Di Grado's fiction we recognize the Chinese language as a liberating tool of escape from the family prison. Nonetheless, rather than helping them reach their love interests, it results in two tormented relationships full of suffering.

Di Grado's focus on the learning of Chinese points to her interest in multilingualism and translanguaging. In migration narratives migrants traditionally speak the language of their motherland within the home while adapting to the language of the country of emigration outside.²⁶ This implies

²² See *Transnational Italian Studies*, cit.; and *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook*, eds Jennifer Burns, Derek Duncan, Liverpool, Liverpool Press, 2022. Extensively investigated by Burdett, Polezzi, Burns and Duncan *et al.* in the AHRC-funded project *Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures* (2014-2017), the possibility to «transnationalize» Italian studies was introduced by Emma Bond's groundbreaking article exploring Paul Jay's definition of the «transnational turn in literary studies» in the Italian literary context. See EMMA BOND, *Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?*, «Italian Studies», 69, 3, 2014, pp. 415-424; and PAUL JAY, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2010.

²³ CHARLES BURDETT, LOREDANA POLEZZI, BARBARA SPADARO, *Introduction*, in *Transcultural Italies: Mobility, Memory and Translation*, eds Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi, Barbara Spadaro, Liverpool, Liverpool Press, 2020, pp. 1-22: 3.

²⁴ DAN SMYER YU, *op. cit.*, p. 7. For the introduction of the term diaspora within the studies of the Italian migration and mobility, see DONNA GABACCIA, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000. In the twenty years since the publication of Gabaccia's work, this term has been explored largely and its definition has been variously discussed by multiple sources; for an accurate reconstruction of the debate on Italian diaspora and transnationalism, see STEFANO LUCONI, *The Pitfalls of the «Italian Diaspora»*, «Italian American Review», 1, 2, 2011, pp. 147-176.

²⁵ See *Transnational Italian Studies*, cit.; and ROBERT VISCUSI, *op. cit.*

²⁶ While multilingualism identifies the coincidence of multiple languages in a context, translanguaging defines the ability of constantly moving between and among languages. See STEVEN G. KELLEN, *The Translingual Imagination*, Lincoln,

that in the multilingual neighbourhood outside the home, a multiplicity of languages may become sites of affiliation to other linguistic and cultural groups through similar dynamics.²⁷ Nonetheless, Di Grado's fiction stands out as original in the context of ethnic literatures for recognizing the deepest nature of language in the failure of its basic function: communication. Although mother and daughter speak the same mother tongue, they are unable to communicate in it and in fact their mother tongue even separates them. Camelia and her mother encounter each other outside verbal language and find an original way to understand each other beyond words: «Feci un sorriso che nella mia lingua madre si dice *Non credo* e in quella di mia madre si dice con uno sguardo obliquo».²⁸ Subsequent images show Camelia literally vomiting words in Italian, English and Chinese and underscore her urgency to build a new language, which describes a state of unease that parallels the silence which she embraces with Livia. Nonetheless, the girl is constantly pushed back to the uterine linguistic dimension in which she can only communicate with her mother, which is corroborated by Camelia's inability to establish a connection with other characters who speak Chinese, the language that she tries to learn, underscoring a failure of connection and communication even through the acquisition of a new language. In truth, this separation only appears as such if we conceive of language as a system of verbal and visual signs conventionally established within a community.

Multilingualism and translanguaging are then further features which Camelia shares with Di Grado, who speaks four more languages in addition to her native Italian: English, Chinese, Japanese and Icelandic. She belongs to a transnational circle of London-based Italian women writers of the same generation, including authors Claudia Durastanti and Livia Franchini. Like them, Di Grado has also worked as a translator, an aspect that often goes hand in hand with linguistically defining their identity as individuals and writers. While Di Grado has chosen to write in Italian, at times her translanguaging identity emerges in the recurrent use of words and phrases from English and Chinese, often all combined together with her native language: «Ciao, Hello, Ni hao».²⁹ At the same time, throughout her narrative she carries out a sophisticated meditation on the structure of Chinese. More widely, the nomadic character of the writer is mirrored in the selection of diverse geographical settings for each of her novels; from the UK, we are brought to her native Catania, in Sicily, in her second novel *Cuore cavo*;³⁰ then to Japan in her third work, *Bambini di ferro*;³¹ to Russia in her fourth, *Fuoco al cielo*;³² and to China, where she recontextualizes the Italian-Chinese (dis)connection introduced in her first book in Shanghai, in *Fame blu*.³³ Nonetheless, the deep fascination for languages which Camelia shares with her author also reveals the discomforts of language learning and a radical pessimism about the possibility of understanding and being understood through language. Here it becomes clear that Di Grado's revolutionary use of language goes beyond translanguaging and rather defines a sort of anti-translanguaging, in which words are not recognizable in any language. In this respect, she acknowledges the arbitrary nature of the meaning behind words in contexts where they lose their social significance, pointing out a universal condition of loneliness.

READING LACAN «BEYOND THE PHALLUS»: LANGUAGE, FAMILY AND OTHERNESS

University of Nebraska Press, 2000. For the identification of separate linguistic contexts inside and outside the immigrant house, see PASQUALE VERDICCHIO, *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora*, New York, Bordighera Press, 1997 [2016], p. 135.

²⁷ See GAYATRI SPIVAK, *op. cit.*

²⁸ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico trenta lana*, cit., p. 32.

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 49.

³⁰ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Cuore cavo*, Rome, edizioni e/o, 2013.

³¹ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Bambini di ferro*, cit.

³² VIOLA DI GRADO, *Fuoco al cielo*, Milan, La nave di Teseo, 2019.

³³ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Fame blu*, cit.

Beyond its transnational relevance, Di Grado's narrative explores the ways in which language builds our family relations as well as relations with those who do not belong to our family. Inside the house, different idiolects define the interactions within a family language that engender intergenerational gaps. In this respect, Di Grado emulates authors like Natalia Ginzburg, who in *Lessico familiare* recalled her father's unique lexicon, and its pitfall of separating her and her brothers from their parents.³⁴ While the jargon developed by the younger generation may drive a wedge between them and their families, at the same time it serves to connect them to their peers in external spaces. In the first part of the book, Camelia's desire to learn Chinese seems to fulfil this purpose; studying Chinese at university was in fact part of her plan to emancipate herself from her family and her home before her father's death. Likewise, it becomes the language she tries to use in building her relationship with Wen when she feels trapped with her mother in their silent domestic routine. When Camelia starts learning Chinese, she fills the silence of her domestic space by covering the walls of her house with Chinese ideograms:

Come le vespe, che se le fai a pezzi continuano a camminare. Immaginai gli ideogrammi di casa mia staccarsi dal muro in volo, e immaginai mia madre che li mutilava con le forbici.³⁵

Meant as a language that is neither English nor Italian and which she can use to reinvent herself and the place where she lives, in Camelia's choice we also recognize the opposite experience described by diasporic writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, who embraced Italian as a foreign language to reject both her mother tongue and the language of her family relocation first to the UK and later to the US.³⁶ Nonetheless, in Camelia's experience this choice does not result in a moment of empowerment. Her linguistic rebirth is indeed built on feelings of awkwardness and hesitation, which Di Grado represents as blank spaces signifying moments of multicultural and multilingual silence. Consequently, Camelia's failed attempts at building an alliance through a translingual dialogue in Chinese with Wen, within the English-speaking context in which they live, ends up again in a universal inability to be understood, which leads to the tragic conclusion of the book. The only possible finale for Di Grado's macabre parable seems to be then to restore the silent, uterine prison built by mother and daughter.

As I previously pointed out, Menghi has highlighted the relevance of psychoanalysis in Di Grado's discourse on language. In particular, Lacanian theory supports my interpretation of Di Grado's argument based on the radical impossibility of communicating with the other, which has followed two different and yet intertwined paths. In *Settanta acrilico*, the difficulties of finding a common ground between different cultures and languages in a foreign country and Camelia's family crisis introduced by the loss of her father sustain each other in furthering the discomforts of Camelia's transnational relocation. Scholars have recognized family as one of the predominant elements in traditional Italian culture, and more specifically as the most prominent feature of the culture of Italians in migration since the establishment of Italian diaspora studies as a field.³⁷ Di Grado's interpretation of language analyzes how the demolition of the traditional and patriarchal configuration of the Italian family is accelerated in Italian family narratives of emigration by questioning the transformation of

³⁴ NATALIA GINZBURG, *Lessico familiare*, Turin, Einaudi, 1963.

³⁵ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico trenta lana*, cit., p. 72.

³⁶ See MRIDULA NATH CHAKRABORTY, «There was a Woman, a Translator, Who Wanted to be Another Person»: Jhumpa Lahiri and the Exchange Politics of Linguistic Exile, in *Translating Worlds: Migration, Memory, and Culture*, eds Susannah Radstone, Rita Wilson, London, Routledge, 2020, pp. 85-100.

³⁷ While the studies of the Italian family in its evolution and in its transnational reconfiguration abound in history and sociology, its representation in literature has rarely been addressed in literary criticism. See for example PAUL GINSBORG, *Italy and its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State 1980-2001*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; and VALERIA BONATTI, ALVISE DEL PRA', BRUNELLA RALLO, MADDALENA TIRABASSI, *Famiglie transnazionali dell'Italia che emigra. Costi e opportunità*, Turin, Celid, 2019.

fatherhood.³⁸ Accordingly, Camelia's dislocation results from being unsettled by both the loss of her father and her relocation abroad.

Family is also the main focus in psychoanalysis from Sigmund Freud's earliest published studies. These in turn inspired Jacques Lacan to update and adapt Freud to more recent times.³⁹ Di Grado's treatment of overlapping diasporic displacement and family crisis together with the subsequent repercussions on language fits the Lacanian model's focus on language and family, thus propelling my reading of *Settanta acrilico* to yet a deeper level. Di Grado herself intervened to confirm the implications of Lacanian theory in *Settanta acrilico* in her contribution to *La psicoanalisi* mentioned above.⁴⁰ The linguistic deadlock I have discussed is substantiated in the following passage:

È la madre a eliminare per prima il linguaggio, e la figlia impara il suo silenzio. Ma la cura della figlia non è una cura che mira alla crescita: tutto è bloccato, perché il linguaggio è bandito.⁴¹

Many elements of Di Grado's essay intensify the depth of her analysis of language. She clarifies that *Settanta acrilico* has been intentionally set in a reality that is either pre-linguistic or post-linguistic:

è post-linguistica perché la realtà delle due donne è passata attraverso il linguaggio e ne è uscita a seguito di un trauma – la morte del padre di Camelia – che ha bloccato le impalcature della percezione della realtà e successivamente la loro elaborazione nel linguaggio. [...] È pre-linguistica perché il silenzio poggia su un rapporto strettissimo, uterino tra madre e figlia: le due costanti però sono invertite, perché Camelia, la figlia, si prende cura della madre.⁴²

In Lacanian terms, trauma is a specific concept; the tragic disproportion between the traumatic reality and its representation causes the failure of language, which resonates in Di Grado's statement: «Le parole non funzionano più».⁴³ In her essay, Di Grado addresses Camelia's behaviour as a sort of «anoressia verbale», expanding her argument to the relationship between psychological disorders and language.⁴⁴ By interpreting Di Grado's novel through her reading of Lacan, we recognize Camelia exiting this space when she encounters her Chinese neighbour Wen, with whom she aims to build an original language which may emancipate her from the languages defining her family misery. She replaces the diasporic, broken language of her interrupted family with the language of another diasporic identity, rather than building their relationship on the English that they share. For Camelia, bridging their identity through the language of their elective homeland, which reminds her of the cold, grey and unwelcoming Leeds where her parents decided to move, would imply yet again a language corrupted by family and a status of unease. Nonetheless, Chinese also fails and identifies another broken house, one that is intended as an artificial linguistic space that Camelia attempted to build, wherein the world is replaced by its representation. In this way, Di Grado's focus on the symbolic power of language ushers us into the context of Lacan's interpretation of language with its social and

³⁸ See LUIGI ZOJA, *Il gesto di Ettore. Preistoria, storia, attualità e scomparsa del padre*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2016; and MASSIMO RECALCATI, *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna*, Milan, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2017.

³⁹ See JACQUES LACAN, *Les Complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu*, Paris, Navarin, 1984, which reprints his contribution *La famille* in *Encyclopédie française*, vol. 8, Paris, 1938.

⁴⁰ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico trenta lana*, cit. The special issue collects the contributions presented at the event *Con Lacan. L'Altrove della scrittura: femminilità e solitudini*, held in February 2012 at the Casa delle Letterature in Rome. The event was organized to present the Italian translation of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore – On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, New York, Norton, 1998. This book of the seminar addresses the relationship between language, psychoanalysis and femininity. See also *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, eds Suzanne Bernard, Bruce Fink, New York, SUNY Press, 2003.

⁴¹ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico, trenta lana*, cit., p. 240.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

psychoanalytical implications. Di Grado's view brings Lacanian theory back to the basics of Lacan's thought, and specifically addresses Lacan's reflection on language, which is arguably the most renowned section of his thought.⁴⁵ Lacan's exploration of the unconscious structured as a language inspired his reading of Freud in the context of Structuralism, and specifically in connection to Ferdinand de Saussure's innovative conception of language. On those premises, Lacan aimed to reverse the study of language to identify the ways in which language undermines our relationship with the Other and how it strengthens the perception of our subjectivity by shaping the way we perceive our unconscious. Not only, therefore, did Lacan build his psychoanalysis on the assumption that the unconscious is structured like a language, but he developed his theory from the perception of the socially determined and regulated nature of language, which recognizes the existence of two separate levels distinguishing the language system (defined as *langue*) and individual speech acts (*parole*).⁴⁶

According to Lacan, our first encounter with the father figure introduces us to the Symbolic Order, which can be defined as the social world of linguistic communication, intersubjective relations, knowledge of ideological conventions, and the acceptance of the Law constituting our ability to interact with the other.⁴⁷ This father figure is embodied by the first person a child encounters outside the self-sufficient dimension inhabited with the mother, the first person with whom a child needs to find a way to communicate. By engaging with Lacanian theory, in *Settanta acrilico* Di Grado builds a private linguistic dimension where Camelia and her mother reject the symbolic depth of language associated with Camelia's father, which may be interpreted as resulting from Camelia's desire to remain confined within the imaginary dimension of her own selfhood. Di Grado brings Camelia back to the world of the father but undermines it, when she shows Camelia's intention to represent the Symbolic without the Law, arbitrarily reassigning her own meanings to existing Chinese words. In this way, Camelia does not discover the world in another language, but abuses the Symbolic to re-signify her own world. In this context, Dany Nobus maintains that subjectivity affects the possibility of being understood or not, clarifying that in this case Lacan refers to the subject of the unconscious:

The subject should not be understood here as the unified, self-conscious being or the integrated personality [...] but as the subject of the unconscious – a subject that does not function as the centre of human thought and action, but which inhabits the mind as an elusive agency, controlling yet uncontrollable.⁴⁸

This form of egocentrism is at the basis of the failure of her communication with Wen. This unconscious drive controls Camelia's actions, pushes her to escape from encountering people and to seek refuge in the pre-linguistic/post-linguistic place she can inhabit with her mother within a golden prison of self-sufficiency. On the other hand, Wen too contributes to the failure of this exchange, because he does not make any attempt to understand Camelia's act of resignification and its potential by refusing Camelia's invitation to join her in her world as an interlocuter and a partner. This behavior rather identifies a persistence to adhere to a concept of Chinese dictated by the word of the father. Ultimately, Camelia confirms her intention to secure the fatherless world which she shares with her mother by removing her mother's fiancé from her family picture. Therefore, Di Grado is right when she concludes, «Forse a Lacan Camelia sarebbe piaciuta».⁴⁹ Lacan would have justified her propension to distort language as a form of self-affirmation against her subjection to the Other, and

⁴⁵ See JACQUES LACAN, *The Function and the Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, in ID., *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006, pp. 197-268. Also see JOHN P. MULLER, WILLIAM J. RICHARDSON, *Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Écrits*, New York, International University Press, 1982.

⁴⁶ I draw here from JACQUES LACAN, *The Function and the Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, cit., pp. 197-268.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ DANY NOBUS, *Lacan's Science of the Subject: Between Linguistics and Topology*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, cit., pp. 50-68: 61.

⁴⁹ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico, trenta lana*, cit., p. 241.

indeed, as an act of empowerment strengthening her silent struggle against the word of the father. In this respect, central to Di Grado's reading of Lacan is Freud's interpretation of the unconscious as a rebus, in which one recognizes the complex system of symbols which give access to Camelia's identity crisis, and of which Di Grado herself provides multiple keys of access in her article.

Furthermore, by engaging with Lacanian theory in a novel conceived from the female point of view, Di Grado contributes to tackling recurrent feminist critics of Lacanian thought which mainly sprang from the hostility of second-wave feminists towards Freud in the 1970s.⁵⁰ Follow the interpretation I have laid out here, Di Grado's argument aligns with scholars like Juliet Mitchell, who defended Lacan and encouraged feminist intellectuals to problematize Freudian psychoanalysis rather than stigmatize it, by pointing out how the rejection of psychoanalysis and Freud's works could be «fatal» to feminism.⁵¹ Mitchell identified the potential of Lacanian thought in the antipatriarchal alliance between genders: «However it may have been used, psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it».⁵² Likewise, psychotherapists like Elizabeth Wright guided a Lacanian-based post-feminism, while Judith Butler revised and contested Lacan as she forged her own original ideas, nonetheless acknowledging Lacan's relevance to feminism.⁵³ Only a Lacanian interpretation of Di Grado's novel can reveal her radical view of language escaping from its symbolic depth to turn into a linguistic context where only Camelia and her mother are conceivable and can build an alliance against the language of Camelia's dead father. Through Lacan, we understand how Camelia's repulsion for Leeds becomes a way of refuting her father's decision to emigrate, which has ultimately imprisoned them in their linguistic and transnational nightmare.

BACK TO THE 1970S: DI GRADO ENCOUNTERS PASOLINI

The transnational resonance of Di Grado's writing and her reflection on the diasporic self, make it difficult to situate Di Grado's fiction within the mainstream developments of contemporary Italian literature. We do not recognize in *Settanta acrilico* the patterns and narrative tropes identified by the most updated critical interpretations of Italian novels.⁵⁴ Looking back to previous literary examples that that, like hers, stand out from the main tendencies of contemporary literature, I believe it is appropriate to compare Di Grado's *oeuvre* to another standalone author who, not coincidentally, appears to be the only writer in Italian literature to have pursued an analogously thorough investigation of family and language, despite crucial differences in the approach and in the outcome: Pier Paolo Pasolini. Pasolini demonstrated an interest in language early on, which in the development of his *oeuvre* manifested itself through a fascination with foreign cultures, Asian cultures in

⁵⁰ DEBORAH LUEPNITZ, *Beyond the Phallus*, cit.

⁵¹ JULIET MITCHELL, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1974. On Lacan and feminism, see also *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992; and ELIZABETH WRIGHT, *Postmodern Encounters: Lacan and Postfeminism*, London, Icon Books, 2000.

⁵² JULIET MITCHELL, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁵³ See JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990; and EAD., *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York, Routledge, 1993. Also see GAVIN RAE, *Questioning the Phallus: Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler*, «Studies in Gender and Sexuality», 21, 1, 2020, pp. 12-26.

⁵⁴ Di Grado's focus on the self and the overlaps between autobiography and fiction in her *oeuvre* may find similarities in the development of recent Italian fiction as interpreted by Daniele Giglioli and Raffaele Donnarumma, the latter interpreting Italian literature through Gilles Lipovetsky's theories based on hypermodernity: see DANIELE GIGLIOLI, *Senza trauma: scrittura dell'estremo e 10 narrative del nuovo millennio*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2011; and RAFFAELE DONNARUMMA, *Ipermodernità*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012. Conversely, I believe her fiction would hardly fit with other conceptualizations of the most recent Italian literature, such as the one elaborated by Gianluigi Simonetti or Carlo Trinanzi de Medici. See GIANLUIGI SIMONETTI, *La letteratura circostante*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2018; and CARLO TRINANZI DE MEDICI, *Il romanzo contemporaneo*, Rome, Carocci, 2018.

particular.⁵⁵ Like Di Grado, Pasolini demonstrated a remarkable openness to dialogue, and in his study on language and family briefly encountered Lacan.⁵⁶ In his theatre and cinematic works from the late 1960s and 1970s in particular, which consistently overlapped during the last ten years of his *oeuvre*, Pasolini questioned the contradictory forms of language and its power to undermine family relations rather than strengthen them. From the very title itself, his «teatro di parola» – a cycle of six tragedies written between 1965 and 1975 – highlighted a concern for language. In one of his most often quoted sentences from the poem *Una disperata vitalità*, Pasolini stated that death does not signify the inability to communicate, but that of being understood: «La morte non è / nel non comunicare / ma nel non essere compresi».⁵⁷ In this way, he underlines the paradoxical nature of language, whose effectiveness not only resides in one's ability to speak but also in the will of one's interlocutor to listen and comprehend. A hundred years after Pasolini's birth, his meditation on language thoroughly resonates in the fiction of Di Grado, who revived the darkest depths of Pasolini's message of human loneliness, recognizable in the many occurrences of the image of Christ's crucifixion in his works. Even more profoundly, Di Grado's exploration of language resonates with Pasolini's tragic representation of the ways it affects family dynamics in the only work he wrote as both theatre and cinema, *Porcile*, written as a drama in 1966 (but only published in 1979) and then adapted for the screen in 1969.⁵⁸

In *Porcile*, Pasolini stages the crisis of a typical upper middle-class family of industrial entrepreneurs in Germany in 1967. The story revolves around the mysterious figure of Julian, defined by his refusal to either obey his father or rebel against him and his desire to devote himself completely to his zoophilic attraction to pigs, that completely devour him by at the end of the play. The relationship between father and son in this drama is entirely built on their distance and inability to communicate; Julian's isolation in a self-sufficient monological dimension recalls the one built by Camelia. It is unknown to me whether Di Grado has read Pasolini, and Pasolini's *Porcile* in particular; nonetheless, the condition of aphasia in which both Camelia and *Porcile*'s teenage protagonist Julian decide to isolate themselves may be seen in both cases as a generational answer embraced by two generations of youngsters rejecting the word of the father. *Porcile*'s plot make it easily recognizable as a parable of family crisis, as with *Settanta acrilico*, which in many ways recreates the unreal, claustrophobic atmosphere of Pasolini's dramas, in which we also recognize the main theme of the other tragedies from *Teatro di parola: Affabulazione, Bestia da stile, Calderòn, Orgia, and Pilade*. My Lacanian reading of *Porcile* underscored the gridlock at the basis of patriarchal society through the failure of language to connect fathers and sons, while also pointing out the unease of children towards their parents at a moment when Italy was radically changing, which we also recognize in Di Grado's fiction.⁵⁹ This work belongs to a wider analysis of the transformations of fatherhood in Pasolini's *oeuvre*, coupled with his examination of the destabilization of the conventional uses of language.⁶⁰ While refusing any interaction with his father, Julian relentlessly mocks and destabilizes language in the text, ending up in a prolonged silence that symbolizes the absence of the father as an empty signifier in a world in which the father figure has progressively become inconceivable:

Col tuo essere tu ti esprimi.
Chiama come vuoi quel tuo modo di comunicare

⁵⁵ See, for example, PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *L'odore dell'India*, Milan, Garzanti, 1962.

⁵⁶ Pasolini mentions the name of Lacan just once in his works, in connection with language: «Parlare / la parola (Lacan) è ormai la nostra prima nuova qualità». PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Bestia da stile*, in ID., *Teatro*, Milan, Mondadori, 1999, pp. 759-867, p. 833.

⁵⁷ PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Una disperata vitalità*, in ID., *Poesia in forma di rosa*, in *Tutte le poesie*, vol. 1, Milan, Mondadori, 2003, pp. 1182-1209, p. 1209.

⁵⁸ PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Porcile*, in ID., *Teatro*, cit., pp. 575-644; ID., *Porcile*, 1969.

⁵⁹ FRANCESCO CHIANESE, *The Ambivalence of Julian: The Paradox of Fatherhood in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Porcile*, «Italian Studies», 73, 1, 2018, pp. 66-80.

⁶⁰ See FRANCESCO CHIANESE, «Mio padre si sta facendo un individuo problematico»: padri e figli nell'ultimo Pasolini (1965-1975), Milan, Mimesis, 2018.

che tuo padre chiama «né obbedire né disobbedire»:
fatto sta che ‘molti santi hanno predicato
senza dire una sola parola – col silenzio,
con l’azione, con il sangue, con la morte’.⁶¹

While Pasolini focuses on the relationship between son and father, rather than daughter and father, both Di Grado and Pasolini highlight the interaction of the absence between father and children. Differing from *Settanta acrilico*, in *Porcile* Julian’s mother tries to establish communication with the son, especially in the moment he is portrayed as refusing to speak. In Di Grado’s words, conversely, we recognize that the character of the mother is overturned in accordance with the viewpoint of the millennial generation, in which children are often portrayed as abandoned by their parents or taking care of them, rather than rebelling against them.⁶²

LIKE MANY OTHERS:
THE REVERSE OF ANY WESTERN CONCEPTION OF LANGUAGE

In conclusion, Camelia’s circular parable identifies a linguistic prison in which everybody is doomed to the tragedy of unrequited language, «una tragedia di linguaggio non corrisposto».⁶³ The «buco» represented by Di Grado in her narrative assigns to it a variety of allegories representing death through both the inability of being understood and heard, an existential void that cannot be filled by any language. If at first one may attribute this outcome to the displacement of diasporic identity, during the evolution of the book we recognize that it instead identifies a universal condition of loneliness that underscores the impossibility of language to fulfil its original requirement and, moreover, a more radical pessimism related to the human ability to communicate. If we follow the evolution of Di Grado’s fiction, in her second book, *Cuore cavo*—with a reference to a “hole” in its very title—she relocates her discourse on miscommunication beyond transnational displacement while representing the interior monologue of a dead Sicilian girl in Catania.

Furthermore, in her article in *La psicoanalisi*, Di Grado also mentions a source which shares a little with Lacan but a lot with her view of language – Chinese Taoist philosopher Zhuāngzǐ.⁶⁴ At least superficially, Di Grado’s position appears to be closer to Zhuāngzǐ’s pessimism than to Lacan’s optimism. As Di Grado reports, according to Zhuāngzǐ, language’s self-referentiality undermines all attempts at exchange, obstructing, rather the flux of reality identified with the Tao:

Il saggio deve ricongiungersi al Tao, e lo può fare solo «dimenticando il linguaggio» (*wang yan*): cioè, usandolo senza cadere in quelle che Zhuangzi chiamava «trappole per pesci». Camelia dimentica il linguaggio: all’inizio del romanzo ne è totalmente priva. Poi ne trova un altro, che pur essendo il cinese è completamente suo, personale.⁶⁵

Nonetheless, Lacan agrees with Zhuāngzǐ in underlining the dangers in Camelia’s use of language to build her own prison:

Ma allo stesso tempo è la cosa opposta, perché Camelia non si riconcilia con la realtà, non fa ciò che in termini taoisti sarebbe riunirsi al Tao, al flusso delle cose, al contrario opera una reificazione della realtà che più partecipativa che è voyeuristica, e ancor più che voyeuristica è strumentalizzante come l’azione dell’artista.⁶⁶

⁶¹ PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Porcile*, cit., p. 636.

⁶² In this resonates a classic of the millennial generation: LARRY MCCAFFERY, *A Conversation with David Foster Wallace*, «Review of Contemporary Fiction», 13, 2, Summer 1993, pp. 127-150.

⁶³ VIOLA DI GRADO, *Settanta acrilico, trenta lana*, cit., p. 243.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid em*.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

In fact, Di Grado's main themes are alienation and the ego's illusoriness, in which Camelia's inability to communicate resides. This aspect is explored linguistically in the intricate net of symbols which Di Grado assembles to demonstrate, as she states, that language is like a fish trap.⁶⁷

This point leads to my conclusive argument. If we read Camelia's story as just one among many others of the millennial generation, we recognize in her discomfort in Leeds the portrait of the transnational malaise of Italian millennials who identify their families as the reason for their unhappiness and failure. Perturbing and disturbing, existentialist in its perception of a condition of life that always keeps us in check with no solution, Di Grado's fiction arguably provides one of the most faithful portraits to date of contemporary Italian youth. Here again she crosses paths with Pasolini in describing the difficulties of transnational Italian youth in varying stages of their fight against the patriarchal tradition which can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s and is still display in Italy today.

Nonetheless, in both Pasolini's *Porcile* and *Settanta acrilico*, we can interpret the final scene in at least two opposing ways, both of which see the protagonists' silence as an act of rebellion rather than surrender. The first acknowledges the tragic dimension of loneliness in which Camelia and her mother find each other in their apathetic silence; the other interprets Di Grado's fiction in light of Jean Paul Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, which reconciles Lacan and Zhuāngzǐ and connects the extremes of their thought. By reversing the existential anxiety that haunts us when we see the empty sky over our heads and realize that we are lonely in a world orphaned by God, Sartre underscores the freedom that we have to build our own world, which is closer to our imaginary view.⁶⁸ Following my reading of Pasolini's *Porcile*, Camelia's existential escape from the world of the father can be interpreted as a new millennial humanism, because it opens up a world of possibilities, in which a strong mother-daughter alliance does not need to adjust its communication to fit the roles dictated by patriarchal society. This revolutionary transition cannot be painless and is achieved through a series of multiple traumas, of which Camelia's experience represents one possibility. If in Pasolini the father becomes an empty signifier, in Di Grado his disappearance unlocks a context wherein a girl learns how to cope with the difficulties of diasporic subjects and seek her answers in herself rather than outside.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007; and FRANCESCO CHIANESE, *The Ambivalence of Julian*, cit.

⁶⁹ See FRANCESCO CHIANESE, «*Mio padre si sta facendo un individuo problematico*», cit.