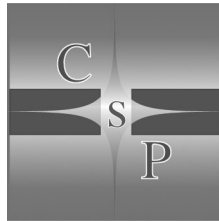


Trends in Contemporary Italian Narrative
1980-2007

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Edited by

Gillian Ania and Ann Hallamore Caesar



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2007 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN 1-84718-276-3; ISBN 13: 9781847182760

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INTRODUCTION

GILLIAN ANIA
AND ANN HALLAMORE CAESAR

Over the last twenty or so years, contemporary Italian narrative has seen the emergence of a variety of new genres. The early 1980s, point of departure for this collection of essays, is associated with the publication of two novels: Italo Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (*If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*) in 1979 and Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*) in 1980. Best-sellers in Italy and, particularly in Eco's case, abroad, both are characterized by a postmodern attentiveness to genre. Where Eco adopts the classic English detective story as frame for his postmodern metafiction, Calvino turns the frame into the story, with each new chapter a deviation into a different narrative genre. In his introduction to the excellent, author-based collection of essays on the novel of the '80s—*The New Italian Novel* (1993)—Lino Pertile explained that the intention was to celebrate the revival of modern Italian fiction which, helped by Eco and Calvino, was attracting critical attention and popularity in other parts of Europe, most notably France and Germany, but less so in the UK. Attitudes have changed since then here, as can be seen from the public and critical interest shown in Primo Levi's writings, and by the paperback translations into English of canonical writers such as Leonardo Sciascia or Antonio Tabucchi, and newer writers including Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli and Niccolò Ammaniti.

But it was not only readerships outside Italy that contributed to the growing market for the Italian novel. By the '80s the 'language question', which had continued to haunt Italian writers for many decades after the country had achieved political unification in 1861, was at last put to rest. School and university reforms that came in the wake of the 1968 protests helped create a substantial middle-class readership, while the rise of mass media and the increase in a newspaper-reading public all contributed to a more equal relationship between reader and writer. Now the question was no longer dialect versus language but one of register versus language: do modern writers corrupt language by adopting current registers? Can they,

as one writer put it, attain 'leggibilità' [readability] without relinquishing the 'assolutezza', the 'essenzialità' of the classics, their absolute or intrinsic qualities?

David Forgacs has suggested, in *Italian Cultural Studies* (285), that 1980 constituted a "second watershed in the history of cultural consumption" which he attributed to television's rapid multiplication of channels and programmes to produce, borrowing Eco's term, "neo-television", lazy and self-referential broadcasting (which helped sweep Silvio Berlusconi to power in 1994) and video, along with an unprecedented growth in newspaper readership. At the same time the '80s were characterized by a crisis in the book market, precipitated on the one hand by inflation and a steep rise in the cost of living, and on the other by turmoil in the publishing industry, which led to a re-structuring and re-organization of some of the large publishing houses. In 1990 the prestigious and powerful Mondadori was bought by Silvio Berlusconi Holdings which thereby brought together books, magazines and three television channels under one 'roof'. By the mid-'90s the publishing sector was back on its feet with an increase in the number of small publishing houses while the larger companies amalgamated or looked to new areas of activity. Much was lost in the process, first and foremost the distinctive identity previously enjoyed by publishing houses, but there was a marked increase in sales of the paperback helped first by the arrival of the *Millelire* (short, small books that cost, precisely, 1 000 lire) and then by the *Miti*, one of Oscar Mondadori's lists, a mixture of best-sellers and good writing for the most part by non-Italians. In the years that followed, dozens of publishing houses were launched, often dedicated to specialist areas such as feminist writing and prison writing. The number of book prizes, always an important feature in the Italian literary calendar, multiplied while 1988 saw the first Italian book fair, the *Salone del libro* in Turin. Now known as the *Fiera del libro* it is an important annual occasion open to the public and the industry.

The 'new Italian narrative' that began to be spoken about in the '80s was not associated with a single writer or movement but with an eclectic and varied production where the growth of readerships has been accompanied by the numbers of new writers who have brought with them unfamiliar cultures, backgrounds and experiences. Of the new genres emerging, such as migrant writing, regional writing, lesbian and gay fiction and crime fiction, the most enduring phenomenon, over the past fifteen years, has been, arguably, the popularity and newly acquired status of crime fiction. While the detective genre (the name *giallo* deriving from the Mondadori yellowbacks) has had a long history in Italy, following

British or American models, what has changed is that there is now a strong indigenous and regional tradition, with the newer novels, as **Luca Somigli** demonstrates, often dealing with topical issues or recent Italian history. From its classical beginnings, he argues, the Italian *giallo* has taken on more cogently the role of social criticism, and his investigation of works by Lucarelli, Augias, Gori and Angelino reveals societies on the brink of collapse, with consequent conflicting notions of responsibility, or duty—and the significance of this for present-day Italy. **Nicoletta Di Ciolla** also examines the status of the *giallo* in Italy, and its ‘offshoot’, the *noir*, and at the choice of historical or contemporary settings. In this context she looks closely at a recent prizewinner, a novel by Claudia Salvatori with an uncharacteristic chronological framework, which by bringing together detective fiction, the Gothic and pastiche embeds itself firmly within the Italian narrative tradition.

The generational nature of Italian literary culture has always been marked and continues to be so. Two well-established writers whose work, while located within a regional framework, raises issues which have far wider resonance and significance, are Gianni Celati and Vincenzo Consolo. **Marina Spunta**’s essay explores the representation of space, place and landscape in contemporary Italian fiction and photography through the work of a group of artists centred around Celati and the photographer Luigi Ghirri, who see the associations and characteristics of the Po valley as providing a suitable context for their investigation of the human condition today. At the core of Consolo’s work, a writer who notably abandoned fiction in the late ’90s, **Daragh O’Connell** identifies the struggle to find a means of representing an ethical stance within fiction, a position he argues the author can only reach through a ‘re-sacralization’ of language. The essay examines three novels by the Sicilian author, and their particular use of history, myth or the *giallo* form to comment, in addition, on questions of justice and culture in the “second” Italian Republic.

For many young, new writers the anthology has been an important form of self-marketing. A new imprint by Mondadori for lesbian and gay writing offers, according to **Charlotte Ross and Derek Duncan**, marketability but also a springboard without which these new directions would not have opened up; their essay looks at identity politics and the problematics of categorization, as well as the subversive and non-subversive writing that falls within this category. Market strategy and literary transgression also informed the objective of a group of writers, known as the ‘Young Cannibals’, to revitalize literature and challenge orthodoxies. In this context **Monica Jansen and Inge Lanslots** focus on “the most

read, reviewed, loved and hated anthology of the nineties”—*Gioventù cannibale*—to revisit their often unsettling non-literary language and orientation towards cinema, pop music and slang. Large-scale immigration in Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon with the earliest writings about the experiences of migrants appearing in 1990. **Jennifer Burns** reviews the literature of the past fifteen years and the issues of inter-cultural awareness, Italian-ness, memory, mobility and language that it raises. As befits a collection of essays crossing the millennium, the last contribution, by **Gillian Ania**, is a study of apocalypse and dystopia in contemporary fiction. Looking at the works of both established and new authors which have been published in the last decade (Vassalli and Capriolo, Avoledo and Pispisa), the essay reveals some quite disturbing fin-de-millennium visions as well as possible ‘new’ roles for myth and mysticism in today’s fragile world.

This book developed out of a symposium held at the University of Salford in July 2005 on the occasion of the biennial conference of the Society for Italian Studies where colleagues with an interest in modern and contemporary prose fiction in Italy met to discuss recent trends. Alongside essays by some of the participants in that discussion are others that were commissioned subsequently to give a wider view and try to capture something of the vibrant and eclectic nature of narrative in Italy today. Among many Italian writers there is certainly a sense of the traditional culture in crisis. Consolo’s recent abandonment of literary narrative writing in favour of a more direct response, through essays, to the cultural poverty he perceives about him (associated, in particular, with ‘Berlusconismo’), is symptomatic. On the other hand, many young writers, such as the ‘Young Cannibals’, seek collaboration with—and/or are actively nurtured by—commercial publishers and the media so as to use the glare of publicity this brings to express their often contentious views. The divisions are real enough, and the trends are distinct. Yet underlying them, consistently, are ethical, aesthetic and social issues, fears—and hopes—for integration, for integrity, for the very future of literature and writers.

Through simple or complex—or singular—narratives, the writers considered here present their individual responses to the above issues, and on perennial questions such as memory, identity and language. We are convinced that the essays offer useful insights into the kinds of writing

being published in Italy at the turn of the millennium as we enter deeper into the brave 'new' future of the 21st century.¹

¹ In each essay primary sources are cited in both Italian and English; secondary sources appear only in English. Full references to all works cited appear at the end of each essay.

CHAPTER ONE

FIGHTING CRIME IN TIMES OF WAR: VISIONS AND REVISIONS OF FASCISM IN CONTEMPORARY DETECTIVE FICTION

LUCA SOMIGLI

1. Italian detective fiction: A “new social novel”?

One of the most peculiar and enduring phenomena of Italian literature in the 1990s was the sudden rise in status of detective fiction, or the *giallo*, as the genre has been best known in Italy since Mondadori launched the *Libri Gialli* series, devoted to mysteries, in 1929. In bookstores, the ever-expanding sections on detective fiction display home-grown examples of all the recognized sub-genres, from the traditional puzzle-narrative in the Agatha Christie tradition and the angst-ridden *noir* to the hyper-technical ‘procedural’ and the exotic historical mystery. It is, indeed, a good time to be a *giallista* in Italy, after all those years during which Alberto Savinio’s self-fulfilling prophecy that “Italian detective fiction is absurd in principle” (quoted in Covi: 10) was dutifully trotted out, either to salvage ‘real’ writers such as Leonardo Sciascia and Carlo Emilio Gadda from the netherworld of popular fiction, or to relegate to the margins of the literary system those stubborn novelists (Franco Enna, Lorian Macchiavelli, Renato Olivieri, Laura Grimaldi, to name but a few) who, from the ’60s on, insisted on testing out Savinio’s theory for themselves. Even the only apparent exception to this rule, Giorgio Scerbanenco, did not acquire a degree of legitimacy until he was awarded a *French* prize, the *Grand Prix de la Littérature Policière*, in 1968, a year before his death, confirming the Latin proverb “*nemo propheta in patria*”.¹

¹ The classic history of Italian detective fiction, Rambelli’s *Storia del “giallo” italiano* of 1979, can now be usefully integrated with Pistelli’s 2006 study, and, for

While the reasons for such a sudden and dramatic change in critical fortune are numerous, many commentators seem to agree that one of the most significant is the role of social criticism that the genre has gradually come to play over the last three decades, becoming a sort of “nuovo romanzo sociale,” as the title of a recent collection of essays aptly put it.² Already in 1992, at the dawn of the current renaissance of the genre, the perceptive critic Carloni had observed that one of the peculiarities of contemporary Italian detective fiction was the fact that it had come to fill a perceived void, covering “with craftsmanlike modesty, an area of fiction in the realist tradition that had grown progressively narrower in the ’60s and ’70s” (1992: 162).³ In a period characterized by the critical triumph of experimental fiction, first with the “neoavanguardia” in the ’60s and then with postmodernism, the element that sanctioned the marginality of genre fiction within the literary field became, paradoxically, its strength.⁴ The *giallo*’s apparently naïve belief in the mimetic power of language, in the capacity of narrative to bridge the gap between the linguistic code and reality in order to provide an accurate representation of a certain socio-cultural environment, made it possible for the genre to take on the function of immediate social description and critique that high literature seemed to have abdicated. This, in any case, is precisely the argument used by a number of writers of detective fiction to vindicate their work. Refuting the traditional perception of the genre as a form of pure and unadulterated escapism, several *giallisti* of both the ‘old guard’ active since the ’70s and the new wave of the ’90s have emphasized the critical thrust of their literary enterprise. For Loriano Macchiavelli, as he observes in a *RaiLibro* interview, “detective fiction has always been a possible source of disturbance, a virus within the healthy body of literature, authorized to speak ill of the society in which it developed”. Carlo Lucarelli has made a similar point: “detective fiction has always been political, and in Italy the genre has only recently discovered and become aware of its political dimension” (2002: 29). Likewise, writer Gianni Biondillo has remarked in an interview that “today, it is the ‘investigation’ of reality (because in the end it is precisely this, the ‘investigation’, that holds together a *noir*,

the period between 1966 and 1994, with that of Carloni (1994). For a broad, if unsystematic, overview of contemporary production, see Covi.

² I am referring to *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale* edited by Sangiorgi and Telò.

³ All translations are my own.

⁴ On the relationship between genre fiction and postmodern narrative, see in particular Benedetti.

giallo, crime novel or thriller) that best describes our desire for reality, for understanding the reality in which we live” (Milesi and Infante: 17-18).

At first glance, it might seem that the argument regarding the potential for social and even political criticism on the part of the *giallo* does not apply to historical detective fiction. Leaving behind, as it does, the dysfunctions of contemporary society, historical detective fiction safely transports the reader to another world—a past potentially as foreign in its remoteness as the far-off future of science fiction—which, at best, can only be related to the social institutions of our own times by way of allegory. Indeed, this is usually the case with the mysteries—of which there are many, of varying degrees of accomplishment—set in places such as Imperial Rome or Dante’s Florence, Renaissance Venice or a 14th-century abbey somewhere in Northern Italy. But what happens when the period in question is one with which contemporary Italian society is not fully reconciled? What happens when, instead of a distant and historicized past, the novelist chooses a period on which the historical and political debate remains, for whatever reason, open? This is clearly the case with those detective novels set against the background of the Fascist regime and World War II, many of which have enjoyed considerable success over the past twenty years.⁵ Leaving aside the lone example of Gadda’s *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957; *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1966)—a *giallo sui generis* if ever there was one, and in any case a novel that can hardly be considered an example of historical fiction given its closeness to the past it represents (its earliest version appeared in the journal *Letteratura* in 1946-47)—the beginning of this new narrative trend is marked by the appearance of Carlo Lucarelli’s *Carta bianca* in 1990.⁶ This book, the first volume in what would eventually become a trilogy about a policeman caught between the fall of the regime, the Resistance, and the rise of the Republic, demonstrated the remarkable adaptability of the detective novel: the author uses the conventions of the genre to investigate broader questions of personal and political responsibility in the administration of justice, to great effect. Lucarelli was rapidly

⁵ In spite of its popularity, not only in Italy, but also in the Anglo-American tradition, historical detective fiction has received surprisingly little critical attention. Some insightful theoretical suggestions can be found in chapter 6 of Scaggs, while Browne and Kreisner provide a useful survey of the major authors working in the genre (mostly English and American). For an Italian perspective on the often-remarked parallels between the work of the historian and that of the writer of detective novels, see Lucarelli 2004.

⁶ Recently translated into English, by Michael Reynolds, as *Carte Blanche* (2007. New York: Europa Editions).

joined by a fairly large group of writers, who, in different ways, explored the tensions between the straightforward formula of the mystery and the social and moral ambiguities of the regime. A partial list might include: Lucio Trevisan, whose Commissario Epifanio Pennetta investigates actual crimes such as the attempted murder of Mussolini by Violet Gibson in 1926, producing a not entirely convincing mixture of fact and fiction; Leonardo Gori, a capable *giallista*, who has chosen a dashing young captain of the *Carabinieri*, Bruno Arcieri, for his more conventional mysteries; historian Luciano Marrocu, who has chronicled the adventures of Eupremio Carruezzo and Luciano Serra, two functionaries of the dreaded Fascist secret police (*OVRA*) who bear more than a passing resemblance to Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin; Corrado Augias, author of *Quella mattina di luglio* (1995) [That July morning], to my knowledge the only case of his Commissario Flaminio Prati, set against the Allied bombing of Rome and the fall of Mussolini; and Edoardo Angelino, who, like Lucarelli, recreates the social and political divisions in the period of transition from Fascism to democracy.⁷

The enduring fortune of what is now a veritable sub-genre suggests that more is at stake here than the superficial exoticism of a different historical epoch. Indeed, the almost simultaneous development of this particular narrative trend and the recent so-called ‘revisionist’ debate on the interpretations of Fascism and the Resistance seems to be more than a coincidence. In this essay, my intention is to examine the ways in which detective fiction has intervened, both explicitly and implicitly, in the very public discussion on the meaning and on the moral and political implications of a series of pivotal moments and events at the twilight of the Fascist regime and its artificial continuation with the Italian Social Republic (“Repubblica Sociale Italiana”); this period encompasses the dismissal and subsequent arrest of Mussolini on 25 July 1943, the Armistice of 8 September of the same year, the formation of the ‘Salò’ regime (“Repubblica di Salò”), and the Resistance and civil war of the following two years. What I propose to show, then, through a reading of the aforementioned *Carta bianca* and *Quella mattina di luglio* as well as of Gori’s *Il passaggio* [The passage] (2002) and Angelino’s *L’inverno dei Mongoli* [The winter of the barbarians] (1995), is that it is specifically through the figure of the detective that the *gialli* set during this crucial phase of Italian

⁷ Another indication of the popularity of the genre is the anthology of short stories *Fez, struzzi & manganelli* [Fezes, ostriches, and cudgels], edited by Gianfranco Orsi and published in 2005 to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

history articulate those very same ethical issues that the revisionist debate has attempted to call into question.

2. “Io sono un poliziotto”: truth and justice among the ruins

Before turning to the discussion of specific novels, however, it is necessary to make some preliminary observations on the term ‘revisionism’, which in the previous paragraph I have used without adequate qualification. As many of the authors who have intervened on both sides of the debate have remarked (De Felice 1992: 112-13; Losurdo: 34; Poggio 1999: 22), the term is characterized by a constitutive ambiguity since a certain kind of ‘revisionism’ is an intrinsic part of the work of the historian. Significantly, on this score, Nicola Tranfaglia (2006: 90), a scholar who can be assigned to the anti-revisionist camp, quotes approvingly from a text of which he is otherwise extremely critical, De Felice’s controversial book-interview *Rosso e Nero* (1995: 17): “by their very nature, historians can only be revisionists, insofar as their work begins with what was established by their predecessors and tends to extend, correct and clarify the latter’s reconstructions of events.” That said, however, over the last twenty years the term has come increasingly to signify a far more precise and much less neutral perspective on the past, one in which what becomes central is not so much the ‘accuracy’ of the historical reconstruction, but rather the current political implications of competing interpretations. The subjects of such new (and often polemical) readings of history are many, ranging from the French revolution to European colonialism, from the Spanish civil war to the experiences of Nazism and Fascism, but the underlying motif, as Poggio has remarked, is discrediting “any historical experiment that is based on justice and equality” (1999: 32).⁸ More specifically, in Italy revisionism has come to indicate “in popular terms, a re-evaluation of the Fascist experience”, to quote another historian, Luigi Ganapini (128). This “re-evaluation” takes two forms: on the one hand, an emphasis on the Fascist *ventennio* as a phase of modernization of the nation and a re-interpretation of the regime as a “soft” dictatorship;⁹ and on the other, a parallel and symmetrical critique

⁸ For a broad overview of the different subjects of revisionist historiography, see Losurdo and, more specifically on its polemical implications, Detti and Flores. On the history of the term and its uses, see also Santomassimo 1999: 141-43.

⁹ On this, see also Romanelli (339), who rightly speaks of a “mondanizzazione”, or normalization, of Fascism.

of anti-Fascism and of the Resistance, often described as dominated by its communist components, and for which a crucial text is Ernesto Galli della Loggia's *La morte della patria* [Death of the Fatherland] which we discuss in more detail below. The immediate political objective of such interpretations is Italian communism and the current parties that trace their roots back to it. Indeed, the revisionist debate has been remarkably attuned to the transformations of the political landscape that have characterized recent Italian history. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between a sound, scholarly form of revisionism, based on the protocols of the discipline and exemplified by the controversial but impeccably documented historical works of De Felice or Nolte, and the debate carried on in the public arena by the media and driven by competing needs for political legitimation.¹⁰ In fact, the Italian transition from the so-called "first" to "second" Republic, in the '90s, further complicated the matter, as it inextricably interwove the interpretations of Fascism and the Resistance with the political discourse used by the new parties thrust into the spotlight in the wake of the "Tangentopoli" scandals to legitimize themselves and simultaneously delegitimize their opponents before a confused and sceptical electorate. In Italy, we can thus distinguish at least two phases: in the first, the debate remained confined mostly to professional historians even in cases where it took a more popularized form, such as De Felice's well-known *Intervista sul fascismo* (1975); in the second, post-1992 phase, on the contrary, the historiographic context receded into the background, while the short-circuit between the interpretation of the past and the political necessities of the present became more evident.

Published between the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse in 1992 (with the beginning of the "Mani Pulite", or "Clean Hands" investigation) of the system that had dominated Italian political life since 1948, Lucarelli's *Carta bianca* lies at the juncture of these two phases and thus both reflects and anticipates the shifts in the critical debate on Fascism. In fact, the origins of the novel are closely linked to the historiographic research on the regime in the late '80s, as Lucarelli, then a university student, conceived the text while collecting material for a thesis on the police of the Italian Social Republic. As he has stated in an interview, his initial intention was not so much that of writing a mystery, but rather of presenting, through the fictional police inspector De Luca, the story of a real policeman whom he had interviewed in the course of his research, and

¹⁰ The bibliography on the role of Nolte and De Felice in re-orienting the historiographic debate is extensive. On Nolte, see, for instance, Poggio (2000); on De Felice, see Santomassimo (1999; 2000) and Tranfaglia 2006: 69-101.

whose career had spanned Fascism, Salò, the partisan police, and the first four decades of the Republic (he had retired in the '80s).

Arrivati alla fine [dell'intervista] io gli ho detto: Ma senta maresciallo, scusi, ma lei per chi vota, posso chiederlo? Come fa a uscire indenne? E lui m'ha guardato e m'ha detto: Che c'entra questa domanda, io sono un poliziotto. E questo è De Luca. Ora, io volevo scrivere quella storia lì, e non un giallo. È la storia di un uomo che ti dice "cosa c'entra?" (Bacchereti: 185)

[At the end [of the interview], I asked him: "Maresciallo, excuse me, who do you vote for, may I ask? How can you remain unaffected?" He looked at me and said: "What's that got to do with anything? I'm a policeman." And this is De Luca. I wanted to write *this* story, and not a mystery. It's the story of man who says "What's that got to do with anything?"]

The choice of the form of the detective novel allows the two questions—"cosa c'entra?" and "come fa a uscirne indenne?"—to emerge in all their complexity, as through this fiction the author articulates the terms and the limitations of what would soon become a *topos* in the revisionist vulgate: the dissociation of individual men and women from the responsibilities of the regime that they served in the name of perhaps misguided, but ultimately justifiable motivations such as professionalism or loyalty.

The *gialli* featuring De Luca, unlike much of Lucarelli's later production, follow the conventions of the traditional detective novel, with numerous and contradictory clues requiring the detective to exercise all his powers of deduction. In this sense, he seems to perform the role that Kracauer had theorized as early as 1925 in *Der Detektiv-Roman* (published posthumously in 1971), where the detective is the personification of reason and a sort of false God in a world dominated by the principles of rationalism. However Lucarelli, by shifting the focus from the bare reconstruction of the case to the emotional and psychological life of the detective, hints at the profound disconnection between reason and justice: the detective may be able to ferret out the truth, to give shape and meaning to the mass of disparate clues that are placed before him, but that does not in itself translate into an act of justice, since this would presume an insight into the moral implications of his own actions that De Luca simply refuses to have. In *Carta bianca*, where De Luca is called to investigate the murder of Vittorio Rehinard, an ambiguous figure with powerful connections, this blindness to his own involvement in the Salò regime, here portrayed in its dying days, is paradoxically what makes De Luca effective as a policeman: he is genuinely interested in truth, and thus not easily swayed by the political ramifications of his enquiry. The problem,

however, is whether this is enough to absolve him from his implicit responsibility as a functionary of a regime in which the administration of justice is dictated by political expediency rather than abstract principles.

De Luca defends himself from all accusations of collusion with Fascism with the mantra that all his actions, whatever their outcome, are motivated solely by his professional responsibilities. And so, repeated almost as a private exorcism, the phrase “io sono un poliziotto” punctuates the key stages of the investigation.¹¹ In a conversation with a suspect, Sonia Tedesco, he explains his involvement with the infamous “Brigata Muti”:

Quando mi hanno chiamato nella sezione speciale della Muti ci sono andato subito, di corsa. Perché là si lavorava *bene*, capisci? [...] Là era tutto efficientissimo, c'erano gli investigatori migliori, gli schedari migliori, c'erano fondi... Da sempre è così il mestiere del poliziotto ed è quello che ho sempre fatto io. Non si chiedono scelte politiche ad un poliziotto, gli si chiede solo di fare bene il suo mestiere. (*Carta*: 88)

[When they assigned me to the special division of the Muti brigade, I went immediately, at the double. Because one could work *well* there, do you understand? [...] It was all very efficient over there, with the best investigators, the best police files, and financial resources... The job of a policeman has always been like this, and this is what I have always done. You don't ask a policeman to make political choices, you just ask him to do his job well.]

And throughout the cycle, De Luca will insist that he had no involvement in, or even knowledge of the torturing of anti-Fascists for which the “Mutini” were grimly known. The implications of his selective will to truth—all-consuming during an enquiry but apparently absent when it comes to the world surrounding him—is brought home by another suspect, Valeria, with whom he has a brief relationship: “In mezzo a tutta questa confusione pochi sanno veramente chi sono e cosa fanno ed è per questo che ti tieni così attaccato al tuo ruolo, tu che ce l'hai, da dirlo ogni volta che puoi, sono poliziotto, sono poliziotto” [In this mayhem, very few people really know who they are and what they do. That is why you hold on to your role, since you have one, and repeat at every opportunity: I am a policeman, I am a policeman] (*Carta*: 57). In the chaos of the war—both

¹¹ Significantly, De Luca first pronounces the phrase to distinguish himself from a colleague, Commissario Lenzi, executed by the Germans for what a collaborator calls “errors” committed after the armistice of 8 September 1943 (*Carta*: 28). The implication is that Lenzi, unlike De Luca, took sides politically.

the World War at large and the civil war in the part of Italy under Salò—individuals are called to re-think their role, whether out of opportunism or sincere political belief, and to make choices of an ultimately moral nature regarding the side to be on and the reasons for their choice. De Luca, on the contrary, seeks to remove himself from the conflict altogether, defining himself as above the political struggle, and is thus genuinely taken aback when he finds out that he is on a list of targets drawn up by the partisans.

In a review of the De Luca series De Federicis (23) has criticized Lucarelli for “a certain propensity for abandoning old myths in favour of new ones such as that of the innocent Fascist”. However, it is precisely the hollowness of such new mythologies that Lucarelli exposes, without necessarily accepting the old ones uncritically: the ‘innocence’ of this new archetype, so dear to the culture of the right, is in fact a conscious and deliberate blindness which, far from absolving the character from his responsibilities, implicates him all the more in the injustices of the regime. By the time De Luca uncovers the solution to the initial mystery—at the very end and after pursuing a number of red herrings as the genre requires—he has to admit that throughout the investigation he and his assistant, Maresciallo Pugliese, have been manipulated by various factions of the collapsing Salò regime and are responsible, albeit indirectly, for several deaths, including the murder of one of his own men and the suicide of Sonia and her fiancé. Moreover, De Luca will never be able to make his truth known, and through it triumph over the deceits and the machinations of the Chief of Police and the local secretary of the Fascist party leader, who have been pulling the political strings of the investigation all along: the reality that he had stubbornly refused to consider finally overwhelms him, and his moment of victory is turned into defeat as he is forced to flee in order to escape being summarily executed by the partisans who are about to take the city.

Corrado Augias’s novel *Quella mattina di luglio*, like Lucarelli’s, is set in a society on the brink of collapse and portrays the conflict between social and individual responsibility. Augias, best known for his work as a journalist for periodicals such as *L’Espresso* and *La Repubblica* and as creator and host of several television programmes, returns here to the genre of the historical mystery that he had already practised with success in the ’80s when (well in advance of the genre’s recent flourishing) he published a trilogy of novels; through the adventures of former police commissioner Giovanni Sperelli (brother of the better known Andrea, the protagonist of d’Annunzio’s *Il piacere*), the trilogy charts the decline of the Liberal state in the decade between the Libyan war (1911) and the rise

of Fascism. The title of his new *giallo* refers to 19 July 1943, the date on which the book opens, but also, and most importantly, the date of a devastating Allied bombing of Rome in which about three thousand people lost their lives. Also destroyed during the attack is the building where that very morning Commissario Flaminio Prati had begun investigating the murder of a young woman, Franca, but which the blaring of the air-raid sirens had forced him to flee. With the *corpus delicti*, the crime scene and almost all the clues now obliterated, Prati seems to have no choice but to drop the case, yet finds himself reluctant to do so. Like De Luca, he is driven by a sense of professional duty as well as by the awareness that his “mestiere” can serve as a defence against encroaching chaos, and is “il solo elemento di certezza di cui poteva disporre” [the only certainty left to him] (*Quella mattina*: 89). However—and here is where the comparison with his better known colleague becomes interesting—simply doing his job does not allow Prati to insulate himself from the wider context in which he operates, and he eventually finds himself forced to question the motivation and moral validity of his obsession with the investigation: “C’erano in giro cumuli di cadaveri insepolti o nuovamente dissepoliti dalle loro tombe che ammorbavano l’aria, occuparsi di quell’unica morta poteva anche essere considerato un’ingiustizia, un affronto alla tragedia che la città sta vivendo” [Everywhere, piles of corpses, unburied or newly dug up from their tombs, fouled the air. Concerning oneself with that single dead woman might even appear as an injustice, an insult to the tragedy that the city was living through] (27). But it is precisely when set against the thousands and thousands of nameless victims of the war that Franca’s death becomes especially significant. The ‘other’ deaths of that day of destruction, the men, women and children whose existence was obliterated by the bombs, “sarebbero finite nei conti giganteschi della storia, ridotte a un segno statistico di cui nessuno avrebbe mai accertato la veridicità” [would end up in the colossal balance sheets of history, reduced to a mere statistical sign the veracity of which would never be determined] (21). Investigating Franca’s death, then, becomes a way of resisting the terrifying objectification of human lives that occurs in times of war, when victims are turned from individuals into mere statistics. The act of giving back dignity and value to the dead thus serves as a reminder of the immorality of violent death in a context where it is dangerously close to becoming a kind of perverse ‘normality’. Thinking about the poor and disparate things that make up his own personal history, Prati muses: “la vita di un uomo, per chi la vive, assume il suo significato solo nel momento in cui è ricordata e ricostruita” [the life of a person, for the one living it, becomes meaningful only when it is remembered and re-

constructed] (45). The investigation, the reconstruction of a life through the assemblage of what the victim has left behind, is thus not a formalist, obstinate search for truth for its own sake, as it was for De Luca, but rather an ethical task that attempts to preserve the memory of a severed existence and endow it with meaning.

In the epilogue, set in the '80s, the narrative voice shifts abruptly from the third to the first person. The new narrator explains that the novel is in fact a true story, the names having been suitably disguised to protect the innocent, and relates a conversation with a now long-retired but still vigorous Prati during which, in an almost meta-narrative moment, the old policeman comments on the investigation and its aftermath. Indeed, one of the questions asked by the narrator regarding the eventual fate of Franca's murderer, the *gerarca*, or Fascist party leader, Attilio Zanna, killed in his turn by her 'on-and-off' boyfriend Gino Tiberi, goes right to the heart of the conventions of traditional detective fiction, according to which the detective should bring the wrongdoer to justice but remain personally detached from the investigation. "Arriviamo al punto fondamentale", says the narrator. "Lei sapeva chi aveva ucciso Attilio Zanna. Perché non denunciò Tiberi? Perché non lo fece cercare?" [Let's get to the crux of the matter. You knew who had killed Attilio Zanna. Why didn't you denounce Tiberi? Why didn't you get your men to look for him?] (233). Of all the mysteries in the novel, the crucial one, the one that requires an answer—"il punto fondamentale", indeed—regards the investigator himself, and his apparent failure to perform his duty. But, as Prati explains, duty and responsibility are not abstract notions; rather, they are contextual to the situation in which the investigation is carried out. He describes his reasons for not apprehending Tiberi thus:

Era molto difficile e non mi parve giusto. Una ragione tecnica e una per così dire morale. Nello sfacelo generale, fare valere il normale codice penale nei confronti di quell'uomo, ammesso che fossimo riusciti a rintracciarlo, era come se... mi sembrò che... insomma non me la sentii. So che un funzionario di polizia o un giudice devono avere come solo riferimento la legge. Sapevo allora di infrangere con il mio comportamento il precetto fondamentale. È stato più forte di me. Pensai che, al di là della legge, Tiberi... non voglio dire altro a questo proposito, preferisco fermarmi qui... (233)

[It was very difficult and I didn't think it was right. One technical reason and one moral, as it were. In the general havoc, bringing the normal penal code to bear upon a man, even if we could find him, was as if... I felt that... well, I couldn't do it. I know that a police officer or a judge must have the law as their only guide. I knew at the time that I was breaking a

fundamental principle by behaving in this way, but I couldn't help it. I thought that, over and above the law, Tiberi... I don't want to say any more about this. I'd rather stop here...]

Prati's indecision is significant: it sets this moment apart from the rest of the conversation, throughout which he is otherwise quite eloquent, and emphasizes the uncertainty resulting from the institutional breakdown following the fall of the regime, and the necessity for each individual to re-negotiate his or her social role. Divided between the "normale codice penale", difficult to apply in times that were decidedly abnormal, and the dictates of his own conscience, the "al di là della legge", Prati chooses the latter, and thereby makes not only a moral but also a political decision.

3. After the fall: two detectives and the "Death of the Fatherland"

As already mentioned, after 1992 and the advent of the "second" Republic the question of the interpretations of Fascism and anti-Fascism spilled over from the realm of scholarly dispute into that of the media (newspaper articles, television programmes, both fiction and non-fiction, popular books on history, and well-publicized personal memoirs), acquiring in the meantime a clear and immediate political valence.¹² Among the many texts that could illustrate the new repercussions of the debate, one of the most significant and, in the long term, influential, is Galli della Loggia's volume *La morte della patria* (1996), the expanded version of a paper of the same title first given at the conference "Nazione e nazionalità in Italia" in 1992 and then published in the proceedings (1994). Taking a cue from a now famous passage of Salvatore Satta's *De profundis* (16), "La morte della patria è certamente l'avvenimento più grandioso che possa occorrere nella vita dell'individuo" [The death of the fatherland is certainly the grandest event that can occur in the life of an individual], Galli della Loggia interpreted the period between 8 September 1943 and the end of the war as a crisis that irredeemably marked the country for the rest of its history, inflicting a wound upon its political body that never fully healed. If the events of the final two years of the war affected "the whole organism of the Italian state, almost causing—in reality and, most importantly, in the imagination—its virtual disappearance" (Galli della Loggia: 4-5), the postwar foundation of the Republic, according to this reconstruction, did not suture the rifts and divisions, because the new state simply

¹² On the role of the media, see both De Luna and Crainz.

legitimized itself in terms of its opposition to the defeated Fascist enemy rather than on the basis of a shared idea of nation. Indeed, for Galli della Loggia (72) the Resistance was almost by its very nature unable to be “connected directly or immediately to the idea of fatherland” because its disparate factions in the end served the interests of their more powerful sponsors—the Anglo-American Allies or, in the case of the communists (which the author in his more polemical moments tends to identify with the Resistance *tout court*), the USSR.¹³ These divisions continued throughout the life of the Republic, at the very least until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, as the major Italian parties subordinated national interests to those of the supra-national blocks that faced each another across the Iron Curtain. In this context, and with the support of what Galli della Loggia calls, with undisguised contempt, the “vulgata resistenziale” [Resistance vulgate] of postwar historiography, anti-Fascism became a sort of foundational myth which was used very effectively to repress the contradictions of the Resistance and the civil war dimension of the 1943-45 period, but which, at the same time, could not recreate the sense of a shared nationhood of all Italians.

The thesis of the “morte della patria” quickly became a slogan and, while often detached from the more complex articulations of Galli della Loggia’s argument, demonstrated great versatility as a rhetorical and ideological weapon. Its short-term implications for the changing political landscape of the early ’90s have been pointed out by Isnenghi (72), who notes that the success of this interpretation in the media is closely related to a “kind of journalism that aims to sever the roots of the ‘first Republic’, a Republic, that is, ‘born out of the Resistance,’ out of a refusal, in fact, to see the crisis of Fascist Italy as a death of the fatherland”. Naturally, this delegitimizing operation was instrumental to the mid-’90s restructuring of the political system, one of its most salient characteristics being the full legitimation of the party that traced its origins directly back to Fascism, namely, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, which in 1996 changed its name to *Alleanza Nazionale*.¹⁴ More in general, however, the “morte della patria” theory called into question the notion that anti-Fascism was the founding value on which the new, postwar Italy had been built.

¹³ “The disintegration of the Italian state after 8 September created a scenario which recalls not only the pre-unification period, but even, I am tempted to say, the 17th century, in which each national political agent was forced [...] to represent a foreigner” (Galli della Loggia: 67).

¹⁴ On the relationship between the debate on anti-Fascism and the transition from *Movimento Sociale Italiano* to *Alleanza Nazionale*, see for instance Romanelli: 340-43.

Paradoxically, the nation had not “died” (to stay with Satta’s metaphor) when, for instance, some its members had single-handedly disenfranchised others, as had happened with the anti-Semitic racial laws promulgated by the Fascist regime in 1938.¹⁵ Rather, for Galli della Loggia and his followers this “death” supposedly occurred when the Fascist vision of the nation—according to which only those who identified with the regime could be full citizens—was challenged and defeated from within, with the Resistance.

The contradictions of the “morte della patria” leitmotiv are explicitly addressed in Leonardo Gori’s *Il passaggio*, the second novel in the series featuring Bruno Arcieri, the Carabinieri captain introduced in *Nero di maggio* [May black] (2000). Already in his first adventure, set in 1938, Arcieri had privately expressed reservations about the Fascist regime, and here we find him, in August 1944, on the side of the anti-Fascist forces, attached to the Psychological Warfare Branch of the British Army where, as an agent of the Badoglio government, he functions both as a liaison with the Allies and as an information officer for the so-called “Kingdom of the South”. A skilled and shrewd storyteller, Gori constructs a fast-paced thriller that takes his protagonist and several other characters back and forth across the lines of a Florence still divided between the encroaching Allied armies and the retreating Nazis who occupy much of the city, in search of a fabled work of art, the path to which is, in the best tradition of the genre, littered with corpses. As in Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisà* (1946)—clearly a source for Gori’s reconstruction—Florence, literally split in two by the now impassable Arno, is a metaphor for a war-torn Italy in which foreign armies battle against each other with ill-disguised contempt or downright disregard for the Italian citizens caught between them, while the partisans on one side and the Salò Fascists on the other are subordinate to their respective allies.

Arcieri is himself both a product and a victim of the ambiguous positioning of the Italian nation, or rather of its divisions. Considered with suspicion by his new British associates, he is also not trusted by the partisans—for whom he represents the interests of the Allies now biding their time just south of the river while the rest of the city, still occupied by

¹⁵ The notion of “patria” articulated by Fascism is clearly summarized by Gentile (80-81): “the liberal nationalist ideal of the nation-state as a homeland for all Italians without ideological, religious or ethnic discrimination was rejected and replaced by the ideal of a totalitarian State, a state, in other words, where only those who were fascists were considered ‘true’ Italians and could have been granted a ‘complete citizenship.’ Those who did not swear allegiance to the fascist State ceased being part of the Italian nation.”

the Germans, slides further and further into chaos. “La situazione di Arcieri era la più scomoda: il suo compito di saggiare la lealtà e l’affidabilità dei suoi stessi connazionali, vestendo una divisa britannica, lo rendeva odioso sia ai partigiani che agli altri ufficiali alleati” [Arcieri’s situation was the most uncomfortable of all: his task of testing the loyalty and reliability of his fellow Italians while wearing a British uniform made him disliked both by the partisans and by the other Allied officers] (*Il passaggio*: 53). The contradictions that characterize Arcieri, however, are not simply a result of the division of the country after the armistice and of his choice to side with the king, but are an immediate consequence of his own role as a member of the armed forces.¹⁶ While De Luca sees his identity as a policeman as giving him political neutrality, Arcieri knows from direct experience that this ambiguous position is ultimately untenable. In addition to his official mission as a representative of the Kingdom of Italy, Arcieri is also driven by another, personal, mission in his wanderings through the ravaged city: the quest for Elena Contini, a young Jewish woman with whom he had fallen in love in the previous novel, and whom, as we now find out, he had left upon being transferred to Rome. Confronted by a friend of the girl who suggests that he abandoned her, Arcieri replies, in his defence: “Non l’ho abbandonata. Sono stato costretto ad andarmene, è un’altra cosa. Non potevamo più sposarci, dopo le leggi razziali. Sarebbe stato uno scandalo troppo grosso per l’Arma, probabilmente mi avrebbero costretto al congedo” [I didn’t abandon her. I was forced to leave, which is a different matter. We could no longer marry after the racial laws. The scandal would have been too great for the Corps, and I would probably have been forced to resign] (70). In order to maintain his social role as a *carabiniere*—in effect, to be able to say “sono un poliziotto”—Arcieri is thus forced to identify explicitly with, and assume responsibility for the policies of the regime by banishing Elena from his own life; in this he is privately performing a gesture akin to the enactment of the racial laws and the banishment of Jews, suddenly officially sanctioned as ‘other’, to be kept apart from the social life of the nation.

Not surprisingly, Arcieri cannot see his own choice after 8 September as an act of treason but, more simply, as an attempt to make up for his previous wrongs. “A un certo punto ho sentito l’obbligo di fare una scelta, non fosse altro perché non esisteva più alcuna mediazione possibile” [At a certain point I felt obliged to make a choice, if nothing else because there

¹⁶ It may be useful to recall that even though they performed police tasks, the *Carabinieri*, unlike the *Guardie di Pubblica Sicurezza* (the current *Polizia di Stato*), were, and remain today, an army corps.

was no longer the possibility of mediation], he tells an American journalist who reminds him that Italians are considered traitors by the Germans. And he adds: “Come carabinieri avevo giurato fedeltà al re, e lo Stato legittimo, dopo l’8 settembre dell’anno scorso, si trova a sud. Ammetto che non si trattava di una prospettiva entusiasmante” [As a *carabiniere* I had sworn loyalty to the king, and after 8 September of last year the legitimate State is in the South. I’ll admit that it was not a thrilling prospect] (38). While clearly conscious of the shortcomings of the king and his handling of the armistice, Arcieri also sees 8 September as signalling the rebirth of the nation rather than its end, because it marked the final stage in the process of the separation of the institutions of the State from the Fascist regime and its policies. Significantly, he rejects the notion of “guerra civile” [civil war] as applying to the situation of these years, seeing himself involved, rather, in a war “per cacciare l’invasore dal suolo del Paese” [to throw the invader out of the country] (102). If anything, he characterizes the years between 1921 and 1925 as a period of civil war, that is, from the early instances of Fascist violence and the March on Rome, to the Matteotti murder and the establishment of the regime with the first repressive “leggi fascistissime”, or ultra-Fascist laws. Clearly, Arcieri is not blind to the disastrous results for the nation of the armistice and subsequent division of the country:

Aveva già provato, insieme ai suoi commilitoni, il sapore amaro dell’abbandono da parte dei suoi superiori, il disfacimento della catena gerarchica, il disordine e lo sbando, materiale e morale. Aveva combattuto senza ordini, osservando la dissoluzione dello Stato e dello stesso Esercito in cui aveva creduto per tutta la vita. (153)

[Along with his fellow officers, he had already felt the bitter taste of being abandoned by his superiors, the dissolution of the chain of command, the material and moral disorder and chaos. He had fought without orders, watching the disbanding of the State and even of the Army in which he had believed throughout his life.]

However, what drives him is his firm resolve not to accept passively this condition of defeat; he will not intone a *de profundis* and retreat into the realm of private mourning. The symbols of the nation, including the king—as an institution rather than as an individual—thus come to constitute the perhaps shaky foundations on which to rebuild a new idea of nation. History has not ended, as Galli della Loggia seems to imply in his work; the task is to re-found the nation by giving meaning and purpose back to the institutions corrupted and perverted by Fascism. The most evident symbol of this process of re-appropriation is Arcieri’s attire. At the

beginning of the novel his British uniform is a visible sign of his submission to the authority of the Allies, of his subordinate status which, in the rigid hierarchy of the officers' mess, places him on the level of the colonial troops. This uniform is traded for a pair of workman's overalls as he enters the occupied city and becomes involved directly in the struggle for its liberation, and it is only at the height of the insurrection against the retreating Nazi-Fascist army that he is able to put on his *carabiniere* uniform once more. In other words, Arcieri can re-claim his social role only after he has endowed it with new meaning through personal engagement and sacrifice. Instead of existing in the abstract, the institutions that form the nation—in this case, the Italian army—are embodied in, and vindicated by the actions of their members.

Ultimately, then, Gori's novel, like that of Augias, foregrounds the moral consequences of the actions and choices of an individual caught up in the fall of the regime—precisely the aspect of the debate on Fascism and the Resistance that has become increasingly blurred in the crepuscular light of the “*morte della patria*” thesis of Galli della Loggia. If the Resistance failed to create a new sense of shared national identity, and even worse, entrenched the divisions of the civil war within the life of the Republic, then—so the argument goes—the only way to get out of the impasse and come to terms with the Fascist past is through a process of understanding and assimilation of the reasons of those who sided with the losing faction and whose voice has since been silenced. While the legitimating rhetoric of the “first” Republic had been that of the rejection and exclusion of Fascism from public life, that of its successor should be the rhetoric of reconciliation, of the “discursive tendency to dissolve all distinctions, often through an appeal to individual experience and to the emotions”, as Romanelli (343) has rightly defined it. This tendency can already be perceived in *La morte della patria* where, in a rare reference to the Italian Social Republic, Galli della Loggia (12) describes the choice of both those who fought for Salò and those who joined the anti-Fascist Resistance as resulting from “a burning sense of humiliation and a desire for truth and involvement”. It is not particularly significant, apparently, that this common sentiment led some to be complicit in the Holocaust, and others to bring about its end. The line between the two sides was further blurred by the simultaneous publication on the one hand of memoirs or accounts of the personal stories of various “ragazzi di Salò”, and, on the other, of often highly publicized studies and newspaper articles casting doubt on the good faith and integrity of central figures of anti-Fascism, from Norberto Bobbio to Ignazio Silone, and documenting episodes of

partisan violence.¹⁷ The result, then, is not the recognition of the responsibilities, both individual and collective, of the two sides in the conflict, but rather a kind of generic rejection of responsibility on the basis that since no one is totally innocent, then everybody is equally guilty. In a recent well-documented but also impassionate small book, *La crisi dell'antifascismo*, historian Luzzatto has clearly articulated what is finally at stake in this debate. With regard to Roberto Vivarelli's much discussed memoir *La fine di una stagione* (2000), in which the well-known historian recounts his experiences as a young soldier of the Italian Social Republic, Luzzatto (23) writes:

The Vivarelli case is a perfect example of the confusion that exists today between shared memory and shared history, or more generally, between the need for memory and the need for history. [...] Without turning it into a play on words, it should be explained that the *collective* memory on which the brilliant mind of a scholar like Marc Bloch laboured is not necessarily the same thing as the *shared* memory praised by the exponents of the "Nuovo Conciliatore" [...].¹⁸ One implies a common past, which no one can escape and which coincides, precisely, with our history, while the other seems to presume a more or less forced operation to cancel out identities and conceal difference. A shared memory risks being a "negotiated oblivion", a communion in forgetfulness (original emphasis).

The danger of this "negotiated oblivion" is the utter decontextualization of the stories of the combatants on the two sides of the divide, as if their self-asserted purity and integrity, the very act of having chosen a side for supposedly idealistic reasons, could absolve them from the atrocities committed by the regime or the army for which they fought. Good people

¹⁷ The political objectives of these historiographic 'scoops' are discussed by De Luna (447-50), who also describes the role of the newspapers—and of the *Corriere della sera* in particular—in their construction. As he observes, examining the debate on the massacre of Malga Porzûs on the occasion of the release of Renzo Martinelli's 1997 film *Porzus*, one of the most troublesome aspects of this "public use of history" is the fact that, in order to substantiate the thesis of a "conspiracy of silence" on the part of a Communist-dominated intellectual establishment, it disregards, in cavalier fashion, the existence of a consolidated historiographic tradition on this and other atrocities committed by Communist partisans. See also Franzinelli's analysis of a case of journalistic revisionism (97-105).

¹⁸ For Luzzatto, as he explains (21), the ironic expression "Nuovo Conciliatore" indicates those historians, journalists and politicians who, in their call for a reconciliation between "the children of the Partisans and the children of the Salò soldiers", aim to "water down the ideological, psychological and ethical motivations of both sides in the ocean of a general *embrassons-nous*".

can make bad decisions, and the resulting evil cannot simply be redeemed by professing one's good faith, as is exemplified by the last figure that I want to examine briefly, Pietro Contini, the Salò officer and accidental detective in Angelino's *L'inverno dei Mongoli*.

In this novel, the murder of a retired *gerarca* in a small village in the Ligurian Apennines threatens to unleash the reprisal of a German unit quartered there during an operation against the partisans. The situation for Contini, who is attached to the German contingent, is stark: either he finds the assassin within thirty-six hours or the village will be razed to the ground. The novel unfolds like a traditional mystery; with the help of a group of local dignitaries, a sort of collective Watson representing the different political positions of the inhabitants of the valley, Contini patiently pieces together the various clues, until they all fit. The murderer is Fantoni, a Jewish music teacher who had fled to the village to escape deportation and whom the *gerarca* had threatened to denounce to the authorities. All's well that ends well: the killer is apprehended, the village is saved and, in the best tradition of Agatha Christie or Rex Stout, everyone lives happily ever after—except that in Fascist Italy things are a bit more complicated. At the end of the inevitable dénouement in which all mysteries are solved, Bellini, one of Contini's assistants, comments to Fantoni:

Lei ha i nervi ben saldi. [...] Passi il delitto [...] ma accidenti, con la minaccia della rappresaglia anche il demonio in persona sarebbe andato a costituirsi. Ne andavano di mezzo molti innocenti, un intero paese stava per essere distrutto... Era suo preciso dovere...

[You have remarkably strong nerves. [...] I don't mean the murder [...], but, heavens! With the threat of reprisal, even the Devil would have turned himself in. Many innocents might have been involved, a whole village was about to be destroyed... It was your specific duty...]

To which the music teacher retorts:

Dovere? Non siate ridicolo! Nessuno ha aperto bocca quando Mussolini ha promulgato le leggi razziali, nessuno ha mosso un dito quando i tedeschi hanno portato via la mia famiglia, eppure erano anche loro innocenti. Per chi avrei dovuto sacrificarmi, io?

[Duty? Don't be ridiculous! Nobody said a word when Mussolini passed the racial laws; nobody moved a finger when the Germans took my family away, and they too were innocent. Who should I have sacrificed myself for?]