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Cartographies of Estrangement:  
Transnational Female Identity and Literary Narratives between Italy  
and Eastern Europe

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Italian

by

Renata Redford

2016

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Cartographies of Estrangement:  
Transnational Female Identity and Literary Narratives between Italy  
and Eastern Europe

by

Renata Redford

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Lucia Re, Chair

This dissertation investigates a vital body of women's writing in Italian about the estranging effects of migration in order to emphasize the articulation of a literary discourse that undermines conventional depictions of the Eastern European female migrant. I provide evidence of the emergence in their work of a distinctly transnational approach to literary writing (narrative in particular), founded on a creative way of addressing questions of estrangement, the body, and memory. I consider the work of three authors, who have yet to be fully acknowledged in the Italian literary landscape: the Italo-Slovakian writers Jarmila Očkayová (1955-present; Italo-Slovakian) and Ingrid Beatrice Coman (1971-present; Italo-Romanian living in Malta), and Marisa Madieri (1938-1996; Italo-Hungarian from Istria), whose native language was Italian. My analysis focuses on the stylistic, thematic, and structural elements that Očkayová, Coman and Madieri employ to engage with and re-envision European models of female subjectivity and national belonging. The scope of the project is multi-faceted: I attempt to 1) highlight the

importance of these authors who have yet to be fully recognized by the Italian literary establishment; 2) demonstrate their critical engagement with transnationalism, illustrating how my take on transnationalism and the figure of the transnational are more appropriate to define their literary output than the traditional and racially charged figure of the “migrant” in Italian literature; 3) discuss their resistance to Eurocentric constructions of woman, emphasizing their feminist politics of location, which reflects new directions in European women’s ideas of intersubjectivity; and finally, 4) suggest how critics may conceive of new pathways for reading the literary identity of women as well as migrants. The authors highlighted in this dissertation, through their literary works, envision a transnational female subject and project new ways of “Italian” belonging that exist in a cultural and historical space of transcultural overlap, resisting patriarchal ideologies and drawing from the collective memories of various cultural traditions. Očkayová, Coman and Madieri not only use estrangement (as first defined by Victor Shklovsky) as a narrative strategy to interrupt Eurocentric ideologies, but also create new figurations of femininity that redefine belonging.

The dissertation of Renata Redford is approved.

John A. Agnew

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2016

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family, Dusty and Charlie. I am particularly grateful to my mother, Leah Balogh George, who risked everything and defected from the Ceaușescu regime with a small child. I did not know then, during those years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, that we would embark on a journey that not only would change the course of both of our lives, but would also inspire the subject of this dissertation. You inspire me, by example, to go boldly in the direction of my convictions. To my little sister Curstin, a special wish: *Buon viaggio!*

This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband, Nathan Taylor, whose endless support and encouragement may be felt in the tenor of these pages.



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Review of Deborah Amberson, *Giraffes in the Garden of Italian Literature: Modernist Embodiment in Italo Svevo, Federigo Tozzi and Carlo Emilio Gadda*. London: Legenda, 2012. Vol. 48, *Forum Italicum* May 2014, 133-135.

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## INTRODUCTION

Post-1989, Eastern and Western European migration systems merged in a way that led to the massive migration of people, predominantly women, across borders.<sup>1</sup> The contemporary feminization of migration from Eastern to Western Europe marks a significant trend in international patterns of mobility, which reflects not only a dynamic set of relations between places and cultures, but also a transgression of older divisions between the West and East of Europe. This phenomenon coincides with the transnational flows of information, culture, goods, and policies related to late capitalism that is taking place globally and affects lives locally. At the same time during the early 1990s, Italy experienced an influx of people coming from North Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, which repositioned it as a receiving country rather than as a country from which people emigrate. In response, Italian literary and cultural studies experienced a surge in texts by “migrant” writers that confirmed the central role of human mobility in the redefinition of Italian belonging and relations between Eastern and Western Europe. Despite the publication of numerous studies of “migrant” literature, few critics of Italian

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<sup>1</sup> My study is partially a response to Luisa Passerini’s focus on women’s migration from the East to the West of Europe. See the introduction to Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti and Ioanna Laliotou, eds. *Women Migrants from East to West: Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2007) 4. Based on the post-WWII division of the European geopolitical space, “Western and Eastern European” migration systems were almost separate entities (Hoerder 1990). Post-1989 these two systems merged in a way that has led to the massive migration of people across border (4). In the groundbreaking study *The Age of Migration*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [1998]), scholars Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller suggest that contemporary migration in Europe is influenced by major trends in migration: acceleration, diversification, feminization, and globalization. Similarly, Khalid Koser and Helma Lutz, in their introduction to *The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities* (London: Macmillan, 1998), recognize the “feminization of migration” as the leading trend in migration. In her *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 2006 [1997]), anthropologist Nira Yuval-Davis reveals how women, where their presence is acknowledged in migration studies prior to the Castles and Miller study, are often excluded from critical discussions of nationalism and treated as dependents and their contribution to the economies and societies of destination countries ignored (1-49).

literature embrace a transnational or feminist interpretation of these narratives. In this dissertation, I examine a vital body of women's writing in Italian about the estranging effects of migration in order to emphasize the articulation of a literary discourse that undermines conventional depictions of the Eastern European female migrant, who is often associated with human trafficking or the demand for domestic workers.<sup>2</sup> I consider the work of three authors who have yet to be acknowledged in the Italian literary landscape: Italo-Slovakian Jarmila Očkayová (1955-present), Italo-Romanian Ingrid Beatrice Coman (1971-present) and Italo-Hungarian Marisa Madieri, from Istria (1938-1996).

My analysis focuses on the stylistic, thematic, and structural elements that Očkayová, Coman and Madieri employ to re-envision European models of female subjectivity and transnationalism. The scope of the project is multi-faceted: I attempt to 1) highlight the importance of these authors who have yet to be fully recognized by the Italian literary establishment; 2) demonstrate their critical engagement with transnationalism, illustrating how my analysis of transnationalism and the figure of the transnational are more appropriate to define their literary output than the traditional and racially charged figure of the "migrant" in Italian literature; 3) discuss their resistance to Eurocentric constructions of woman, emphasizing their feminist politics of location, which reflects the new direction of feminine European

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<sup>2</sup> Critics speak of *East Europe*, *Eastern Europe*, and *eastern Europe*. However, post-1989 there is a growing resistance to "Eastern Europe." This is because, as Anca Parvulescu observes in *The Traffic in Women's Work East European Migration and the Making of Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 147: "the adjectives *eastern* and *western* imply a comparison. One *OED* definition of eastern explains the term as "designating the more easterly part of a country or region." Implying that *Eastern Europe* is more easterly than other parts of Europe, Parvulescu notes a solidification of a Western/Eastern dichotomy that encourages a hierarchy amongst those countries. Parvulescu rightly points out that *Eastern* continues the orientalizing resonances of Cold War baggage related to "the Eastern bloc." Indeed, an *OED* definition of the adjective "eastern" lists: "Of, relating to, or designating the Soviet Union and its allies, esp. the Communist states of eastern and central Europe. Now hist." I acknowledge efforts of various critics to avoid such anachronistic invocations of *Eastern Europe* and in my usage I attempt to avoid such an essentializing use of the phrase. For studies that examine female migration from East to West, see Koser and Lutz (1998). In the same text, Parvulescu examines the stereotypes associated with Eastern European women.

intersubjectivity; and finally, 4) suggest how literary critics may conceive of new pathways for female identity. The authors highlighted in this dissertation, through their literary works, re-envision the transnational female subject and project new forms of “Italian” belonging that resist patriarchal nationalisms and draw from the memories of various cultural traditions. Očkayová, Coman and Madieri not only use estrangement as a narrative strategy to interrupt Eurocentric ideologies, but also create new figurations of femininity that redefine belonging. In my analysis of Očkayová and Madieri, I examine the ways in which these authors investigate the notions of identity, memory, and femininity by showing how the memories and metaphors of the body relate to the reconfiguration of belonging. Očkayová’s novel envisions a fractured yet transnational notion of female selfhood that simultaneously illustrates the “other within” and women’s resistance to a nationalist and Eurocentric conception of belonging. Coman’s novel, written after the fall of the Berlin Wall and presenting a retrospective on Romanian women’s experience during Romanian Communism, builds on Očkayová’s notion of mirroring and invites her Italian audience to slowly recognize their own Fascist past in her narration of the recent Romanian past. She shows how women are connected across borders through transcultural memories of the body. In contrast, Madieri rethinks the border between Italy and Eastern Europe to reveal how the border may become a productive location from which to reconfigure identity. I go on to suggest that these three writers have contributed to the evolution of a transnational literature in Italian by producing styles, themes, and motifs that constitute forms of resistance to patriarchal conceptions of belonging and subjectivity. Their literature illuminates the act of narrating as a way for women to understand their migration, emphasize discourses of sexual difference, and confirm the central role of human mobility in the redefinition of relations and subjectivity between Eastern and Western Europe.

## The Peculiar Case of Italian “Migration” Literature

The process of migration generally refers to a wide range of “movements of individuals and groups of people across regional or national borders.”<sup>3</sup> Migration has been largely connected to an effort to improve the material conditions of life.<sup>4</sup> However, due to the intense diversification of population movements related to the economic and political processes of late capitalism, the concept of migration has expanded to include several forms of mobility across changing political, geographical and economic territories.<sup>5</sup> In addition, today women constitute an increasing percentage of intra-European migrants. Indeed, the study of the “feminization of migration” between Eastern and Western Europe has helped to rethink the relationships between these regions through gender, offering insight into migration flows whose importance is fundamental for the operations of culture and economy.<sup>6</sup>

In literary studies, “migration literature” generally refers to literary works that document

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller and Christina Szanton (*Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Passerini, *Women Migrants*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> The feminization of migration is related to a theoretical reorientation in the field. See, in particular, Saskia Sassen, “Counter-Geographies of Globalization: the Feminization of Survival,” *Journal of International Affairs* 53, (2): 503-24; Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2001) and Annie Phizacklea, “Gendered Actors in Migration” in Jacqueline Andall (ed.), *Gender and Ethnicity in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). Migration between Eastern and Western Europe has been a constant process in modern European history. Indeed, it has contributed heavily to the development of an international European state system. See Stephane Wlocewski, *L’installation des Italiens en France* (Paris, 1934); K.J. Bade, *Population, Labor and Migration in 19<sup>th</sup> Century and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987) and W.J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working-Class Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

the human condition of migration born of the feeling of estrangement caused by dislocation.<sup>7</sup> Originally named to distinguish itself from émigré literature, or exile literature, associated with highly educated writers such as Vladimir Nabokov or Czeslaw Milosz, migration literature generally refers to the work of any migrant who writes, regardless of whether they treat themes of migration.<sup>8</sup> Categorizations of writers, however, are historical products, shaped by the ways in which national populations imagine themselves. To redefine Italian migration literature, then, we must begin by analyzing and problematizing the figure of the "migrant" in Italy, in order to grasp the developing transglobal reality of the new European subject.

In *Letteratura italiana della migrazione* (1998), Armando Gnisci declares the birth of a literature of migration in the Italian context.<sup>9</sup> Suggesting that Italian "migration literature" was born the evening of South-African Jerry Masslo's assassination on August 24<sup>th</sup> in 1989, Gnisci labels subsequent non-native Italians writing in the Italian idiom "migrant writers."<sup>10</sup> Masslo, a

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<sup>7</sup> Mirjam Gebauer and Pia Schwarz Lausten, eds. *Migration and Literature in Contemporary Europe* (Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2010) 4.

<sup>8</sup> John Connell, Russell King, and Paul White (eds.). *Writing across worlds. Literature and migration* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Armando Gnisci, *Letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Rome: Lilit, 1998) 17. See also Gnisci's earlier texts *Noialtri europei* (Roma, Bulzoni 1991) and *Il rovescio del gioco* (Carucci, Roma, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Gnisci, *Letteratura italiana*, 32-34. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1989, South African Jerry Masslo's death inspired several other South African voices to narrate their deplorable conditions in Italy. In response, under the new "Martelli Law," the Italian government hastily granted foreigners (*situ* individuals) living in Italy a "permesso di soggiorno" (literally "permit to stay"). Law n. 39, Feb. 28, 1990, also known as the "Martelli Law," was proposed by Claudio Martelli, a former member of the now defunct PSI (Italian Socialist Party). Daniele Comberiati, in Chapter 1 of his *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro: La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia*, contributes to the impression that Italian "migration" literature began with Masslo's tragic end. Gnisci's analysis is also problematic because of his reliance on a now highly contested text in the Anglo-American literary tradition, *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, which claims that migrant writing occurs in "logical" phases and further assumes certain themes are present in all "migrant" texts. See Chapter 1 in John Connell, Russell King, and Paul White (eds.), *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 1995). In his later attempt to define "migrant writers" in *Lettere migranti & Diaspore europee* (2002), Gnisci does not fully problematize the notion of "migrant" writing; rather, he truncates his argument suggesting that what he

tomato-picker murdered by a group of Italians in Villa Literno, an agricultural town in the Campania region, had previously escaped the apartheid regime in South Africa. His racially motivated death received extensive coverage in the Italian news media and stirred Italian public opinion. Drawing from this image of migration to Italy, Gnisci's migrant writers consist of first-generation immigrants who arrive in Italy, predominantly from North Africa and the Middle East, for economic purposes and only begin writing *after* the experience of migration.<sup>11</sup> By defining them in this way, Gnisci simultaneously obscures the Italian colonial period and limits readers' memory of Italian emigration to the post-war phenomenon during which Italy experienced a significant internal migration from South to North. He ignores the earlier emigration at the turn of the twentieth century that inspired the Fascist government to restrict expatriation and create new laws to define and restrict internal emigration. Moreover, Gnisci's ahistorical declaration overlooks decades of non-native Italians who chose to write in Italian before 1990.<sup>12</sup>

This dissertation endeavors to address this and other gaps in the valuable work of migration literature scholars in the Italian tradition and beyond. Gnisci's *Letteratura italiana della migrazione* successfully signals the contributions of non-native Italians writing in Italian,

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previously labeled as "migrant" actually refers to a tendency in literature to write about life as a call to adventure (197). He does not unpack for his reader the meaning of this new "journey" or travel writing, but merely collapses "migrant writing" into writing that narrates "adventure," which is an altogether separate form of writing with its own complex history.

<sup>11</sup> Gnisci, *Letteratura italiana*, 13-48. In the Italian case, only a handful of critics have addressed Italophone East European women's writing. There are a few exceptions, namely Sonia Sabelli, Nora Moll, and Emma Bond; however, they have not (yet) theorized women's relationship with transnationalism. The majority of Italian migration studies critics focus on writers from Northern Africa and the Middle East, as in Parati's 2006 study *Migration Italy*, which only briefly references Albania and Romania.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, see Edith Bruck, *Chi ti ama così* (Milano: Lerici, 1959) and Giorgio Pressburger, *La legge degli spazi bianchi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989). Despite being associated with Jewish writing in Italian, Bruck and Pressburger are widely considered émigré writers beyond Italy.



but fails to more fully theorize “migration” writing in the Italian context. Gnisci is not alone. In Italian studies, a range of critics acknowledges the influx of migrants to Italy, but have yet to fully articulate the meaning of such a movement in Italian literature. These influential scholars, moreover, draw from Gnisci’s problematic understanding of “migrant writing” as a rupture from previous literary movements in the Italian context and tend to limit their readings of “migrant writers” to discussions of the sociopolitical dimension or merely questions of linguistics, rather than analyzing their aesthetics.<sup>13</sup> As a corrective, this dissertation offers a more nuanced interpretation of writing by Italophone women writers.

Located on the border between Eastern and Western Europe, Italy represents a new receiving country, in which the category of “the migrant,” according to Luisa Passerini, is used to redefine Italy’s place within Europe from marginal to more central as boundaries of inclusion

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<sup>13</sup> See the introduction and Chapter 1 to Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Corrado Bonifazi, *L’Immigrazione Straniera in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998); Franca Sinopoli, “Poetiche della migrazione nella letteratura italiana contemporanea: il discorso autobiografico,” in *Studi (e testi) italiani: Semestrale del Dip. di Italianistica e Spettacolo dell’Università di Roma ‘La Sapienza’, n.7* (2001) 189-206; Nora Moll, “Tra Autobiografismo ed impegno etico: La letteratura italiana della migrazione a vent’anni dalla sua nascita,” (2002); Sonia Sabelli, *Introduzione alla letteratura italiana della migrazione tratto dall’antologia in Alfabetica: la parola come luogo d’incontro*, a cura di Tullio Bugari, Gei, Jesi (2007) 13-23; Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell’altro. La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989-2007)* (P.I.E.-Peter Lang S.a, 2010); Maria Cristina Mauceri, *Nuovo immaginario italiano: Italiani e stranieri a confronto nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Rome: Sinnos, 2010); Silvia Camilotti, *Ripensare la letteratura dell’identità. La narrativa italiana di Gabriella Ghermandi e Jarmila Očkayová* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012); and Mia Lecomte, *Ai confini dei verso: Poesia della migrazione in italiano* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2006) and *Sempre ai confini del verso: Dispatri poetici in italiano* (Paris: Chemins des trasverse, 2011), among others. On sociopolitical readings of migrant writers, see Alessandra Di Maio, “Black Italia: Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa,” in Darlene Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, eds., *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 129. In the case of Očkayová, Silvia Camilotti, *Ripensare la letteratura dell’identità. La narrativa italiana di Gabriella Ghermandi e Jarmila Očkayová* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012) and Sonia Sabelli, “Transnational Identities and the Subversion of the Italian Language in Genevieve Makaping, Christiana de Caldas Brito, and Jarmila Očkayová,” in *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 29, no.3-4, September (2005) 439-451, limit their readings of Očkayová’s work to the sociopolitical and linguistics and do not address the aesthetics of her writing.

and exclusion are shifted, from Southern Europe to the East.<sup>14</sup> Often seen as threats to an already weakened national image and to “authentic” Italian culture, migrants continue to be discriminated against in an effort to maintain Italian culture’s homogeneity, and thus, its imagined identity as a white, Christian Western nation.<sup>15</sup> From the end of the nineteenth century until the 1970s, the number of Italians leaving northeastern and southern Italy for the United States and Latin America greatly exceeded the number of those who migrated to Italy.<sup>16</sup> However, as emigrants, Italians have also suffered racialization and discrimination well into the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> As northern Italy gradually increased in economic power after the Second World War, the internal emigration of Italians shifted towards a south-north movement; in the 1970s and 1980s, Italy became a destination culture for people migrating from other countries.<sup>18</sup> In recent

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<sup>14</sup> Passerini, *Women Migrants From East to West*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> The literature regarding the weakness of Italian national identity is vast. See, for instance, Giulio Bollati, *L’italiano: Il carattere nazionale come teoria e come invenzione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983); Remo Bodei, *Il noi diviso: Ethos e idee dell’Italia repubblicana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998); Silvana Patriarca, “Italian Neopatriotism: Debating National Identity in the 1990s,” *Modern Italy* 1 (2001): 21-34; and Massimo Salvadori, *Italia divisa: La coscienza tormentata di una nazione* (Roma: Donzelli, 2007). For an in-depth study of how racism, colonialism, and imperialism are not accidental facets of Italian national identity, see Lucia Re, “Italians and the Invention of Race: The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913,” *California Italian Studies* 1 (1) (2010): 1-58.

<sup>16</sup> In comparison to the estimated 1.5 million document immigrants living in Italy today, over 25 million native Italians emigrated beyond Italy’s borders between 1876 and 1975. See Gabbaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> On racism toward Italian emigrants, see Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008). On Italian racism toward new immigrants after Italy became a “receiving” nation, see J.J. Marchand, ed., *La letteratura dell’emigrazione* (1991); Marco Jacquemet, “The Discourse on Migration and Racism in Contemporary Italy,” in Salvatore Sechi, ed., *Deconstructing Italy: Italy in the Nineties* (Berkeley: International and Area Studies, 1995); Donna Gabbaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (2000); and Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy* (2010).

<sup>18</sup> Graziella Parati defines a “destination culture” not merely as a culture to which immigrants move, but as “a culture toward which migration moves, [...] a new hybrid culture that is the result of both the changes brought to a local culture by incoming people and the influence of that Western culture [...] on incoming cultures [...] A destination culture is, therefore, a projection and development into the future of present cultural turmoils and tensions. A destination culture in Italy is structurally grounded in processes of recolouring, that is, in the fluid boundaries between past and present cultural paradigms” (71-72).

years, however, as the country's uncertain economic and political conditions have degraded job prospects for Italians under thirty-five, Italian emigration has surpassed immigration into Italy for the first time since 1990, leading to a rapid brain drain.<sup>19</sup>

Given this history, it may appear surprising that few Italian writers and critics have given extensive attention to Italian emigration. In contrast, the *Risorgimento* and relative unification of Italy are frequent themes in many Italian novels and revisionist historical writing.<sup>20</sup> At the time of the *Risorgimento*, the young Italian nation could not afford to grant much space to discourses of migration and emigration. Similarly, Fascist ideology found migration to be unsuited to building Italy's historicity.<sup>21</sup> Instead, Mussolini's nationalistic speeches avoided discussion of migration and focused on building a resurgent *romanità*. Many novels throughout Italy's literary

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<sup>19</sup> "Gli Italiani All'estero Crescono Più Degli Immigrati," *Redattore Sociale*, 1 July 2015. Web. 10 July 2015. <http://www.redattoresociale.it/Notiziario/Articolo/486846/Gli-italiani-all-estero-crescono-piu-degli-immigrati-e-la-prima-volta-in-20-anni>; "No Italian Jobs," *The Economist*, 08 Jan 2011. Web. 2 July 2015. <http://www.economist.com/node/17862256>; See also Marco Mancassola, "Embracing the Other Italy," *The New York Times*, 10 March 2015. Web. 8 July 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/10/opinion/embracing-the-other-italy.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Stefania Lucamante, "The Privilege of Memory," 295. Although many Italian-American writers have written on Italian emigration outside of Italy, few Italian writers address the theme of Italian emigration. They include Luigi Pirandello, Maria Messina and Luigi Capuana. Another more recent example is Melania Mazzucco's *Vita* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003). Examples of Italian writers who privilege the *Risorgimento* or questions of Italian unity are too many to list here. See, for example, Edmondo De Amicis' *Cuore* and Luigi Pirandello's *I vecchi e i giovani*, as well as Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*. Giuseppe Mazzini was an early advocate of using literature as a launchpad for ideas of Italian nationalism. On the appropriation of "Mazzinianism" in Fascist ideology, see M. E. Moss, *Mussolini's Fascist Philosopher: Giovanni Gentile Reconsidered* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 2004) 59-60.

<sup>21</sup> See Lucamante, "The Privilege of Memory," 296. As Claudio Fogu notes in *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 10: "the institutionalization of fascist historic culture led to, and was sustained by, the formation of a collective *historic imaginary* that was at the root of facism's mass appeal and the intellectual challenge that, observers such as George Bataille recognized in the fascist politics of history."

history since have played the role of generators of national myths, obscuring matters related to emigration.<sup>22</sup>

In a parallel way, a collective “forgetting” of another history—that of Italy’s Fascist past—influences the contemporary Italian discourse surrounding migrants.<sup>23</sup> During the *ventennio*, Mussolini issued Royal Decree 773, titled “Approval of the Single Text of the Laws of Public Security,” which remained Italy’s single immigration regulation until it was finally repealed in 1989 by the Martelli Law.<sup>24</sup> The decree, which tied Italians’ legal understanding of the migrant to economic desperation, required foreigners to declare their presence to Italian

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<sup>22</sup> This is not the case in Italian-American, Italian-Australian, or Italian-Argentinian writing, whose problematization of the history of Italian emigration is well-documented. Some exceptions are Enrico Pugliese, *L’Italia fra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne* (Bologna: Mulino 2002 [2006 ed.]) and Donna Gabaccia’s *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> See Stefania Lucamante, “The Privilege of Memory Goes to the Women: Melania Mazzucco and the Narrative of the Italian Migration,” *MLN*, Vol. 124, Number 1, January 2009 (Italian Issue) 296. For decades after Fascism, Italians borrowed from Benedetto Croce’s elaboration of Italian Fascism as a “parenthesis” and external virus to Italian history. This perspective influenced official Italian historical records of the *ventennio* and legitimized the collective “forgetting” of the recent Italian Fascist past. On the politics of memory in Italian history, see Claudio Fogu, “‘Italiani brava gente: the Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory’ in Claudio Fogu, W. Kansteiner and R.N. Lebow, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Reale-Decreto 18 giugno 1931, n. 773 [Royal-Decree no. 773 of June 18, 1931], *Approvazione del testo unico delle leggi di pubblica sicurezza* [Approval of the Single Text of the Laws on Public Security], Gazz. Uff. (Supplemento), June 26, 1931. For a meticulous legal study of Italian immigration laws until 1989, see David Christensen’s excellent “Leaving the Back Door Open: Italy’s Response to Illegal Immigration,” *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal*, Spring (1997): 461-505. For a legal study of the Italian immigration *after* 1986 and the legal implications of the nativist Bossi-Fini Law, see Michele Torah, “Fortress Italy: Racial Politics and the New Immigration Amendment in Italy,” *Fordham International Law Journal*, Vol. 26/5 (2002) 1438-1504. For a literary examination of Italian immigration laws, see Chapter Four in Graziella Parati’s *Migration Italy*. Before Mussolini’s Fascist policy closed Italian emigration in the 1920s, about one-third of the Italian population fled elsewhere, largely from Southern Italy. In the 1950s immigration to Italy was limited (fewer than 150,000 people), while in the 1970s immigration to Italy doubled. During the 1980s, these numbers reached over 750,000. Today immigrants represent only about 5% of the Italian population, in contrast with the rest of Europe. However, immigration statistics remain difficult to interpret given that many immigrants to Italy are undocumented, temporary, or persons who have acquired Italian citizenship abroad. Paradoxically, due to Italy’s former immigration policies, it subsequently reflected the highest number of undocumented immigrants initially barring Italy’s admittance to the Schengen (Christensen, 462).

authorities within three days of arrival, after which public security authorities would issue a stay-permit.<sup>25</sup> Although at the time of the decree's enactment immigration to Italy was rare, the project of Italian colonialism and Mussolini's belief that Italian identity could be remade through war were, as Graziella Parati points out, intrinsically connected with a "discourse on migration, whether from or to Italy."<sup>26</sup> Critics and policy-makers, as well as authors, subsequently adopted a vision of the migrant that collapsed different kinds of migration into one associating the migrant with desperation.<sup>27</sup> As a result, due to Italy's legal definitions of the migrant, critics of Italian "migration" literature have adopted a critical discourse of the ailing migrant body. In effect, the Italian conceptualization of migration literature is the result of a collective forgetting of Fascism, colonialism, and Italians' former (and continued) emigrant reality.

Despite their own extensive and relatively recent history of migration, Italians continue to cope with their own anxiety regarding their often ethnically defined status in the world by

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<sup>25</sup> J.J. Marchand (ed.) first makes this observation in the introduction to *La letteratura dell'emigrazione: Gli scrittori di lingua italiana nel mondo* (Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1991) xviii.

<sup>26</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, 32. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat shows in *Fascist Modernities*, the Italian colonialist conquest of Ethiopia was meant to accelerate the creation of a Fascist model of modern existence; however, it only intensified anxieties about Italian subalternity. During a time when Italians were still recovering from a weak economy that had forced many to emigrate before 1931, the Italian Fascist state created strict demographic policies to counteract the loss of one-third of the Italian population to emigration. Paradoxically, Mussolini's demographic policies only further depressed the Italian economy, which only encouraged a post-war wave of Italian emigration.

<sup>27</sup> Until the late 1980s, immigration to Italy was uncommon. In fact, the number of documented immigrants in Italy totaled less than 781,100, only .5% of Italy's total population. See Id. at 35 (citing *OECD, Trends in International Migration: Continuous Reporting System on Migration 131*, Table 1 (1992)). Mussolini's Royal Decree 773 was inspired by visions of Southern Italians emigrating to Northern Italy or elsewhere to improve their economic situation pervaded Italian immigration law (see Christensen, "Leaving the Back Door Open").

casting immigrants as racialized others.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, Italians appear to have forgotten the hybrid nature of their own cultural roots.<sup>29</sup> By hybrid, I intend here to refer to a Bahktinian space of overlap. For Bahktin, hybridization “is a mixture...between two different...consciousnesses, separated from one another by...some other factor.”<sup>30</sup> If contemporary migrants have hybrid identities, as is often claimed, then they share this hybridity with native-born Italians, due to the similarity between Italian migrants’ experiences and those of more contemporary migrants.<sup>31</sup> And in this light, the contemporary Italian “migration phenomenon” is not evidence of a historical rupture from prior waves of migration, but of an *acceleration* of forces that have already been at work for centuries.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, before Gnisci’s declaration of “migration” literature’s seemingly sudden manifestation, writers coming from outside of Italy existed and were considered émigré or exile

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<sup>28</sup> As Re observes in her essay, “Italians and the Invention of Race,” citing Giulio Bollati (3), the character of “Italianness” is based on an ethno-racial imaginary, or an “etere etnico” (“ethnic ether”): “l’identità si definisce per differenza e si sostiene sulla svalutazione o la negazione dell’identità dell’altro” (*L’italiano*, 40).

<sup>29</sup> Italian culture and the Italian idiom have inherited, over centuries of external invasions, various cultural and linguistic influences from countries such Germany, France, Spain, the Middle East, and Africa. Indeed, during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor, Frederico II, southern Italy enjoyed a multiculturalism that gave birth to the Sicilian School of poetry. For a study of Italy’s inherent (and suppressed) multiculturalism, see Donna Gabbaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (2000).

<sup>30</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981) 358.

<sup>31</sup> On a mirroring effect between Italians and others, see Gian Antonio Stella, *Quando gli Albanesi eravamo noi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002). In the Italo-Romanian case, see Chapter Three of this dissertation on Ingrid Beatrice Coman. For a critical look at the “other within” that mirrors anxieties about national identity, see Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Paul Jay, *Transnational Turn*, 37. See also K. Calavita, “Italy and the New Immigration.” In W. A. Cornelius, J. F. Hollifield, and P. L. Martin, eds. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 303–29; L. Turco and P. Tavella, *I nuovi italiani: L’immigrazione, i pregiudizi, la convivenza* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005); and P. Verdicchio, *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Press, 1997).

writers.<sup>33</sup> However, after 1990, these writers were suddenly considered part of a new “migrant” category, despite the fact that many had moved for literary or personal purposes, rather than to improve their economic realities or escape political oppression. Due to the critical language surrounding Italian “migrant” writers, often recycled from Anglophone and Francophone post-colonial studies, the Italian literary establishment relegates the rich discourses inspired by movement, memory, and the changing concepts of space and place to a position of lesser literary and critical value – because this reading of migration does not fully realize the (im)migrant’s potential as an agent of change, and also has the ahistoricizing effect of associating all such writers with the sociopolitical context of the 1980s and 1990s, regardless of their actual context.<sup>34</sup>

Given that the term “migrant writer” in the Italian context is reductionist and plays into a narrative that obscures large parts of Italian history, as I have just shown, I propose that “transnationalism” is a better concept for understanding the writers in this dissertation. In his seminal *Modernity at Large* (1996), Arjun Appadurai defines transnationalism as the “flow of

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<sup>33</sup> For instance, Edith Bruck was considered a Jewish émigré writer rather than a migrant or exile writer (she was later able to return Hungary, but choose instead to live in Italy). According to Paul Tabori, in *The Anatomy of Exile* (1972) and the *OECD*, an *exile* writer generally refers to someone who has been forced to leave their native country on account of a fear of persecution and who would like to return home, but is unable or unwilling to return while unfavorable factors persist. In literature, exile writing often reflects a sense of alienation from the adopted culture. In contrast, an *émigré*, derived from the French *émigrer* (to emigrate), was originally someone who escaped the French Revolution (*OECD*); however, in contemporary usage, *émigré* often refers to someone who chooses their country of destination over origin (as in the case of emigrants). Thus, writers like the Senegalese Pap Khouma would have been considered émigré rather than “migrant” before 1990 in Italian studies. In recent years, however, “émigré” and “exile” have become highly contested terms that have become problematically interchangeable.

<sup>34</sup> As a consequence, even Italian publishing houses and literary magazines have absorbed this critical language, referring to Italophone as “migrant.” Indeed, the literary magazines *El Ghibili* and *Sagarana* often feature essays dedicated to the discourse, further ghettoizing its writers (with intending to do so as often these magazines are overseen by a compilation of migrant writers themselves, as in the case of *Sagarana*).

culture and capital that cross various national borders” in the contemporary global reality.<sup>35</sup> Transnationalism and migration are not identical, but neither are they separate processes. Rather, they overlap, but carry different implications: *transnational* implies that people or institutions are linked through multiple ties across the borders of nation-states, while *migration* is associated with linear movement from one location to another.<sup>36</sup> Transnational flows of information, goods, and culture have changed the traditional nature of migration in Europe.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, thinking about intra-European mobility as a form of transnationalism can help us rethink European belonging and envision new ways of being European, as mobility between Eastern and Western Europe gives rise to new transnational forms of subjectivity in Europe today.<sup>38</sup> While Anglo-American criticism on transnationalism is vast, this concept has yet to be fully theorized in the discourse surrounding Italian migration, despite a growing interest in migration studies.<sup>39</sup> This

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<sup>35</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> The term “transnationalism” was initially coined by American writer Randolph Bourne in his 1916 essay, “Trans-national America.” In the context of migration, “transnationalism” was first used in the 1990s and expanded upon by anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller and Christina Szanton, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994). During the course of the 1990s, “transnationalism” also came to imply that sending and receiving countries (of migrants) constituted the same field of analysis (Peggy Levitt and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, “The Transnational Turn in Migration Studies,” *Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) Working Paper Series*, No. 6, October 2004). According to Steven Vertovec, most social scientists agree that “transnationalism broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation people or institutions across the borders of nation states” (“Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (1999): 447-62). For an examination of “migration,” see Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Passerini, *Women Migrants East to West*, 4. Rosi Braidotti echoes the same sentiment in her essay “On Becoming Europeans” in the same anthology.

<sup>39</sup> As with Lidia Curti, transnationalism is used as a synonym for migration, forgetting the nuances associated with it and transnationalism; “Transnational itineraries in women's literature of migration in



dissertation offers a step in the direction of such a theorization. As Italoophone writers living in a "destination culture"<sup>40</sup> produce literature, critics of Italian literature must reimagine their interconnectedness with the mutable world of literature.<sup>41</sup>

I believe "transnational" defines the works of Jarmila Očkayová, Ingrid Beatrice Coman, and Marisa Madieri better than "migrant," because not only does each writer migrate for reasons other than work, but the subjects of their novels reflect a commitment to disrupting the traditional model of the novel as an incubator for national myths.<sup>42</sup> The word "migrant," while not only conjuring images of poverty in the Italian imagination, also implies a one-way movement towards a new destination. Unlike the desperate figure of the migrant or the placeless "nomad," the transnational does not lack a sense of belonging, but instead, experiences and expresses multiple belongings while moving between them and creates new paths between the countries of destination and origin.<sup>43</sup> In a literary context, transnationalism can also apply to writers who do not move between places, but instead contribute to the movement of culture and economics across borders. Through this lens, we can perceive the transnational ethos present in the works of Madieri, who has traditionally been labeled merely a "Triestine" writer. Moreover, in the works of these women writers, the same things are at stake.

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Italy," *Feminist Review*, Issue 87: 60-75. An exception, however, is Emma Bond's "Towards a Transnational Turn in Italian Studies?" *Italian Studies*, Vol. 69, November (2014), 415-424.

<sup>40</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> A destination culture is already multicultural; *Migration Italy*, 70-71.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, all three authors conceive of literary protagonists with identities that enjoy multiple-belongings, rather than identities that adhere one form of nationalism.

<sup>43</sup> In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Rosi Braidotti employs "nomadic thought" to theorize the nomad as a rhizomatic figure that resists fixity. For Braidotti, nomadism refers to an underlying rhizomatic logic of zigzagging interconnections (17) and informs a subject who "has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity" (NS 25).

## Eastern Europe in Italophone Women's Writing

Historically, and even today, the “East” is often understood as a limit, dangerously close to the *other*.<sup>44</sup> Throughout its history, the notion of “Europe” has been an elusive geographic reality that remains the outcome of several cyclical processes of dissolution and solidification.<sup>45</sup> The disintegration of the Cold War marks the most recent enlargement of European boundaries, which have subsequently led to the resurgence of micro-nationalist borders.<sup>46</sup> However, the borders between Eastern and Western Europe have always been vague and contested, as Italy's history of its Northeast border shows.<sup>47</sup> Through a paternalistic discourse surrounding Eastern Europe's “return” to Europe and lack of full access to the E.U. labor market, Eastern Europeans remain partial European citizens.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Eastern Europeans are further excluded through the ghost of Eastern bloc communism from which Italians, having experienced the strongest Communist membership in the West, sought to distance themselves in an effort to be associated with “good Communism” so they could achieve political legitimacy in Italy.<sup>49</sup> As a result of a

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<sup>44</sup> The literature on East Europeans as the *other* of Europe is vast. For critical overviews, see Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Maria Todorova's pioneering *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Parvulescu, *Traffic in Women*, 3. Parvulescu believes that the enlargement of European boundaries is a process “deeply invested in the Eastern European women's bodies, sexuality, and labor” (7). The literature on the history of Europe is extensive. For an overview, see Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Braidotti, “Unbecoming Europeans,” 25.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the contested nature of the Italian northeast border, see Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Parvulescu, *Traffic in Women*, 7. See also Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*. In contemporary Europe, the counterpart for producing “Eastern Europe” involves a process of applying for EU admission and funding, a paternalistic process that facilitates these countries' “return to Europe” (Vaclav Havel coined the slogan in 1990).

<sup>49</sup> For an overview of the PCI's presence in Italy, and the subsequent collapse of the Left in Italy, see

complex anti-Marxism and colonialist theory, transnational feminism has also tended to exclude Eastern European women from debates regarding European identity.<sup>50</sup>

The three authors I analyze all engage to some extent with this history. While at first glance the writer Marisa Madieri appears to come from a different cultural context than the Italoophone writers of Eastern Europe—Jarmila Očkayová and Ingrid Beatrice Coman—what unites all three women writers is two-fold: each shares a personal relationship to Central-Eastern Europe, and each claims that the novel, traditionally seen as a Western-invented reservoir for national myths that solidify national consciousness, should be dislodged from this function lest it slip into an irreparable provincialism.<sup>51</sup> These writers have all been critical of the rupture in the traditional European imaginary left by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that separated the "two" Europes, and the reawakening of older imaginaries that cast Eastern Europe as the *other* of the West. Though each of the women writers from Italy or Eastern Europe comes from a different literary tradition, they all show how women's experiences with intra-European migration from the East uncover formerly repressed histories that connect women across borders through the "situated" location of their protagonists, as I will to show. Očkayová configures the relationship between Italy and Slovakia as a belated traumatic manifestation of the estrangement associated with crossing the border. Coman uses the history and memories of Romanian totalitarianism—through a poetics of Foucauldian panopticism—to help Italian readers slowly recognize their

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David Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> On the exclusion of Eastern European women from the discourse surrounding transnational feminism, see Denise Roman, *Fragmented Identities: Popular Culture, Sex, and Everyday Life in Postcommunist Romania* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) and Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera* (Durham: Duke University, Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Seyhan, *Write Outside*, 8.

own Fascist past in the recent Romanian past in order to create a multidirectional discussion of the female body's experience of oppressive political regimes. Madieri elaborates a vision of "border-being" that reconfigures traditional representations of borders, revealing how Italian and Eastern European women are connected beyond and despite borders. By presenting a vision of female "becoming" that reveals women's situated, yet interconnected historical condition, these women writers destabilize stereotypical depictions of Eastern European women who are traditionally associated with sex and drug trafficking.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, they also reveal how memory and migration are gendered experiences that occur in the interstices of Western and Eastern European relations.

In addition, through a feminist theorization of the "politics of location," I question the relationship between Italian and Eastern European Italoophone women writers to re-envision a new female subjectivity. Originally conceived by Adrienne Rich, a "politics of location" refers to a feminist strategy created to make sense of the diversity among women.<sup>53</sup> In her essay "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," Rich examines her whiteness and location in the world against feminist politics. By challenging the idea that feminist theory is representative of all women, she

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<sup>52</sup> On the stereotype of Eastern European women's involvement in sex trafficking, see Anca Parvulescu, *The Traffic in Women's Work: East European Migration and the Making of Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a Politics of Location (1984)," *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985* (London: Virago Press, 1987). Rich suggests that instead of believing in abstraction (women are connected by their oppressed condition), we should ask "when, where, and under what conditions has the statement been true?" (639). Departing from her position as a white, American Jew, Rich focuses on the "locatedness" of her body to suggest that a woman's historic condition is shaped by her location in the world, which shapes the way in which she is perceived by other women coming from different life experiences. In this context, Rich questions Virginia Woolf's statement, written in *Three Guineas*: "...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (Woolf, 1938/1993, 234). Rich responds, rewriting Woolf: "As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by condemning its government or by saying three times 'As a woman my country is the whole world'"(212).

ultimately suggests that each woman's thoughts are shaped by her personal and public location in the world. In this light, as Rosi Braidotti observes, a "location" is not a self-designated subject-position.<sup>54</sup> Instead, it is a collectively shared and constructed territory, either imagined or real. Politics of location become "cartographies of power" that rest on self-criticism; they are relational in essence.<sup>55</sup> As a result, politics of location can be self-reflexive and, through a feminist theorization, can reveal a movement towards a multicultural model of society. In this way, feminist subjectivity can dislodge notions of the "same" from centers of power to create a self-reflexivity that deconstructs old notions of subjectivity and the social imagination that supports them.

Each of the writers of this dissertation practices accountability for both her embodied and embedded locations as a relational activity that undoes "power differentials."<sup>56</sup> In *L'essenziale*, Očkayová examines an Italo-Slovakian's corporeal manifestation of the belated trauma associated with leaving her country of origin. By underscoring the protagonist's location in Italy, which emphasizes her difference from native Italian women who do not necessarily share the same experiences of female becoming between Eastern and Western Europe, Očkayová reveals how women's multi-belonging(ness) can potentially act as an estranging experience that undoes dichotomies such as *us* and *them*, while respecting that a multiple "locatedness" offers a transnational perspective that can problematize identities without collapsing them into one another. In a similar movement, in *Verde acqua*, Madieri frames her search for origins in terms of a self-discovery of multi-ethnicity. In discovering that part of her belongs to "the other side"

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<sup>54</sup> Braidotti, "On Becoming Europeans," 31.

<sup>55</sup> Braidotti, "On Becoming Europeans," 27.

<sup>56</sup> Braidotti, "On Becoming Europeans," 27.

(Hungary and what was then the Iron Curtain), Madieri situates her identity in more than one location to observe how multiple-belonging enriches rather than fractures experience. However, in *Per chi crescono le rose*, Coman firmly locates women's self-formation in Communist Romania. These Italoophone women writers treat Europe as a transnational space of mediation and exchange by offering "situated" European perspectives on gender.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the transnational subjectivities of these Italoophone women from Eastern Europe enable them to free themselves from traditional power structures and reveal, instead, multiple ways of being European.<sup>58</sup>

I propose that the Italoophone and Eastern European transnational identities of the women writers of this project represent a form of belonging that has deviated from Eurocentric beliefs about the location of culture and moved beyond them to reflect a new subjectivity. As transnationals living between East and West Europe, the writers in this dissertation reveal a female becoming that loosens itself from the tethers of Eurocentric and Western centers of power.<sup>59</sup> Coman views her nomadism as rhizomatic and multilayered; however, in contrast to Rosi Braidotti's theories of nomadic subjectivity, she conceives of a nomadism that does not simply exist beyond various national ties, but is made possible because of her multiple

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<sup>57</sup> On the need for "situated" European perspectives on gender, see Etienne Balibar, *Nous, Citoyens d'Europe? Les Frontiers, L'État, le Peuple* (Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 2001). For studies on the need for a transnational mode of feminism that includes Eastern European women in the reformulation of Europe, see G. Campani, "Women and Social Exclusion: The Case of Migrant Women," paper given at the conference "Inclusion and Exclusion: International Migrants and Refugees in Europe," organized by the International Sociological Association, New York (1997), and Helen Lutz, "The Limits of European-ness: Immigrant Women in Fortress Europe," *Feminist Review* 57 (1997): 93-111.

<sup>58</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>59</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "On Becoming Europeans," *Women Migrants from East to West: Gender, Mobility, and Belonging in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti & L. Laliotou (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books) 23-45, 24.

belongings.<sup>60</sup> Očkayová's perceived "cosmopolitanism" develops as a mode of multiple-belonging that overlaps her Slovak and Italian selves, rather than placing them into a competitive hierarchy. Lastly, Madieri's formation as an Istrian-Hungarian woman who lived on the multicultural Triestine border between Eastern and Western Europe includes her in the formation of a transnational subjectivity that recognizes multiple-belonging at the core of her formation.<sup>61</sup>

Taken in this light, these writers' works can help re-envision Europe as a transnational space of mediation and exchange that defies the closed idea of the nation-state and reflects new possibilities for both female and supranational becoming. Following the end of the Second World War, the project of the "European Union" was grounded in anti-fascism, anti-nationalism and anti-militarism.<sup>62</sup> During and after the Cold War, the E.U. also played a role in streamlining the reconstruction of Europe's war-torn economy and in joining the "two" Europes. However, despite its anti-nationalist and anti-fascist roots, the E.U. has experienced a surge in nationalist debates and neo-fascist policies at the micro-level that seek to destabilize the broader project of a "European" community.<sup>63</sup> However, the authors featured in this dissertation imagine "Europe" as a potentially transnational space that – through the rapid movement of information, culture, and capital across national borders –reveals an undercurrent of changing kinship and cultural

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<sup>60</sup> See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Second Edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Until 1954, Trieste was not officially a part of Italy.

<sup>62</sup> Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, "Per un'Europa libera e unita. Progetto d'un manifesto" in Luisa Passerini (ed.) *Identità culturale europea. Idee, sentimenti, relazioni* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1998). For more on the anti-fascist and anti-nationalist roots of the E.U., see Altiero Spinelli, "La vie politique d'Ursula Hirschmann, fondatrice de Femmes pour l'Europe," *Textes et Documents*, numéro spécial, Brussels, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, du Commerce Extérieur et de la Coopération au Développement (1979) 11-15; *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988); and *Diario europeo*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992.

<sup>63</sup> In the Italian case, for instance, the neo-fascist Lega Nord regularly favors nationalist policies over European ones.

relations.<sup>64</sup> By incorporating questions of transnationalism into their texts, the authors of this dissertation show how transnationalism inflects the process of Europeanization. Thus, the chance to emerge from the periphery of Italian literary power and privilege does not necessarily depend on the ability to conform to the Italian literary tradition. Older traditions of literary patriarchy may be reconfigured, and their boundaries shifted by new transnational writers.

The writing of Italophone Eastern European women, however, occurs in a Todorovian space of “transculturation,” rather than in the “third space” or space “in-between” nations theorized by Homi Bhabha.<sup>65</sup> In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues for a concept of hybridity that creates a “third space” between nations that enables the emergence of multiple positions.<sup>66</sup> This concept suggests that cultural production by individuals who reflect multiple belonging exists *between* cultures rather than *through* them. In this context, Bhabha's theorization of transnationalism and globalization excludes, as Azade Seyhan observes, a gendered analysis of “actual social spaces where cultures interact and literature as an institution of cultural memory intervenes.”<sup>67</sup> In contrast, I argue that the transnational women writers of this dissertation, through a process of *transculturation*, write in a space of overlap between cultures

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<sup>64</sup> Umberto Eco has argued for the Europeanization of “Europe” through the Erasmus program, which he hopes will create a sexual revolution through hybrid kinship and economic ties despite nationalism. See, for instance, Gianni Riotta, “Umberto Eco: ‘It’s Culture, Not War, That Cements European Identity’: The Writer and Semiologist Advocates a Sexual Revolution to Make Us All European,” *The Guardian*, January 26, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> On “transculturation,” see Tzvetan Todorov, *L'uomo spaesato: I percorsi dell'appartenenza*, trans. Maria Baiocchi (Rome: Donzelli, 1997 [1981]). In his theorization of “transculturation,” Todorov borrows the term from Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who coined the term in 1940. See Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) (Original Spanish edition published in 1940. Original translation by Onís published in 1947, New York: Knopf.) On the “third space” (53-56) and theories of “in-betweenness” (159-165), see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 53-56.

<sup>67</sup> Seyhan, “Unfinished Modernism,” 5.



and collective memories. As Todorov observes, to lose one's original culture (*deculturazione*) is not a tragedy so long as the individual acquires another culture through a process of acculturation.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the act of migration does not cause individuals to forget their cultural formation, but instead calls the past into question during the formation of a transnational identity. Thus, transculturation implies movement across a cultural space in which elements of both cultural identities are present, although in varying proportions according to circumstances.<sup>69</sup> As a result, histories do not become fully erased, but layered by dislocation. This new space of transculturation thus offers Italian and Italophone women writers a perspective that ties them to the figure of the transnational writer, as defined by Azade Seyhan. For Seyhan, transnational writers, such as the writers of this study, aspire to free literature from the ideological baggage of national concerns and, by overlapping various literary traditions and lived experience, create new metaphors of cognition.<sup>70</sup>

### **Cartographies of Estrangement: Literature and Memory**

The notion of “estrangement” may be traced to Victor Shklovsky’s notion of *ostranenie* (in Italian *straniamento*).<sup>71</sup> For Shklovsky, the function of art is to serve as an instrument for dislodging habits and perceptions that have become automated and have therefore gone

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<sup>68</sup> Todorov, *L'uomo spaesato*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Thus, Todorov writes, “I live in a unique space, at once within and outside of it: a stranger ‘back home’ in Sofia, Bulgaria, and at home yet ‘in a foreign way’ in Paris” (10-12).

<sup>70</sup> I borrow and work from Seyhan’s notion of transnational literature. She argues that transnational writers “consider literature itself as a travelling phenomenon that changes the cultures of the spaces it enters and is itself changed by them in return” (13), in “Unfinished Modernism: European Destinations of Transnational Writing.”

<sup>71</sup> Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 3-24.

unquestioned. Shklovsky argues that an estranging representation is one that ultimately restores a new sense to human perception:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.<sup>72</sup>

Shklovsky believed that readers could be awakened from perception dulled by routine by showing the familiar in a different light meant to restore a critical gaze. According to Shklovsky, artists may use a variety of techniques to estrange perception: “complicating form” and drawing attention to language in order to make “perception long and ‘laborious’.”<sup>73</sup> In particular, he emphasizes the presentation of familiar material from the point of view of an outsider such as a child, animal, or a foreigner. Yet for Shklovsky, *ostranenie* means more than distancing and making strange: it also refers to a dislocation, a *dépaysement*.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, according to Svetlana Boym’s translation, “Stran” is the root of the Russian word for country – *strana*.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, *spaesamento* may also be translated as a *dislocation* from one’s country of origin. Like Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*, *spaesamento* may serve as a way of understanding otherness, caused by

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<sup>72</sup> Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” 778.

<sup>73</sup> Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” 778.

<sup>74</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg’s article “Making Things Strange: The Prehistory of a Literary Device.” *Representations* Vol. 56 (Fall 1996) 9. For background on the political agency of Shklovsky’s theory of estrangement and its historical importance, see Svetlana Boym, “Poetics and Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Ardent,” *Poetics Today* 26:4 (Winter 2005); and Cristina Vatulescu, “The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky’s Device through Literary and Policing Practices,” in *Poetics Today*, 27:1 (Spring 2006). In contrast with Ginzburg, both Boym and Vatulescu argue convincingly for the political agency of Shklovsky’s notions of estrangement.

<sup>75</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Estrangement as Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky,” *Poetics Today* 17:4 (Winter 1996) 515.

migration, in terms of a split from a specific, familiar geographical location, which can also disrupt one's ability to root the self spatially.

Madieri, Očkayová, and Coman use the literary technique of estrangement, both as a mode of representation and metaphor, to map how both the writer and their readers cross an invisible cultural frontier of memory and perception. Although various theories of estrangement, or *defamiliarization*, exist, I rely on Shlovsky's theory throughout this dissertation because my analysis has shown that the writers under consideration conceive of estrangement in predominantly Shlovskian terms.<sup>76</sup> If crossing a border is always a migration that implies an overlap of different cultural existences, then when a writer chooses a language different from his or her native tongue, the crossing implies the loss of a secret world that is now refracted into a new idiom. Such an operation implies the alienating experience typical of the expatriate writer who writes in a language that is not his or her native tongue, no matter how well it may eventually be learned.

This dissertation is organized into three chapters, each about a specific writer. Each chapter considers aspects of transnationalism and the complex reconfiguration of female identity and memory that occurs in crossing a border or thinking from the border. In particular, I consider the gendered experience of memory; the false dichotomy between notions of *us* and *them*; the situated "locatedness" from which each writer enunciates concerns about women's oppression and identity; and finally, the female body measured against Eurocentric conceptions of Europe. Throughout my analysis, I look at the ways in which each author evidences and problematizes transnational female identity by creating new processes of female self-identification.

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<sup>76</sup> For an in-depth study of the various theorizations of literary estrangement, see Doug Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

The first chapter examines the representation of the trauma of border crossing in Jarmila Očkayová's *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (1997). In contrast to previous readings of her work, I focus on the aesthetics of her narrative rather than its sociological potential. I analyze the estranging and traumatic effects of migration, the fragmentation of the narrative "I" and what I refer to as the aesthetics of estrangement. Through references to the critical work of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva, I argue that the female migrant's subjectivity can only free itself from the tethers of abjection and repression if in the act of forging a hybrid and transnational identity it can successfully imagine a transformative *jouissance*. I then refer to Cathy Caruth's writing on trauma to argue that Očkayová configures the experience of crossing the border between Slovakia and Italy as a trauma that resists naming and lives on in the migrant body as the uncanny trace of traumatic memory itself. Finally, I reveal how Očkayová transforms the potentially deformative experience of crossing national borders into a site of resistance and a source of new perceptions. In contrast to most other texts that treat border crossings, Očkayová portrays the crossing as a positive experience that not only ends in life, but also shows how Eastern/Western European identities overlap to create new forms of belonging that are European, rather than simply Italian or Slovakian.

In the second chapter I examine how Romanian-born Ingrid Beatrice Coman's *Per chi crescono le rose* (2010) uses the body as a poetic device to enter into a revisionary literary space inscribed with traumatic memories of communist Romania. I suggest that this inscription of Romania's cultural memory, as experienced by the body, destabilizes the notion of a hegemonic national literature and cohesive *italianità*. As a non-native Italian, Coman introduces new images into the Italian idiom that signify the emergence of an imagined transnational community. She uses the history and memories of Romanian totalitarianism to help Italian readers create a

multidirectional discussion of the body's experience of oppressive political regimes. This estranging, mirroring effect between the two cultures raises questions about how the body, memory, and history connect different countries across borders and form part of a larger, transnational imaginary.

In the third and final chapter I examine how in *Verde acqua* and *La radura*, Marisa Madieri elaborates a vision of "border-thinking" that reconfigures traditional representations of borders. Through references to the critical work of John Agnew, I argue that Madieri writes from a localized position of the northeastern Italian borderlands in order to transform the border into a productive site of identification with multiculturalism and transnationalism. Traditionally, literary critics cite the semiotician Walter Mignolo's brand of "border-thinking," which as Agnew's work shows, is limited in its scope and not grounded in the realities of current geopolitical debates on borders. In addition, this is the first study of Madieri that fully considers the role of borders. Lastly, although Madieri is traditionally marginalized as a regional writer, I suggest that her work is transnational and thereby joins a larger body of literature beyond Italy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The “Other Within” in Jarmila Očkayová’s *L’essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*

*Gli uomini? Il vento li spinge qua e là. Non hanno radici,  
e questo li imbarazza molto.*

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,  
*Il Piccolo Principe*, 1943

A strange sickness haunts the protagonist of Jarmila Očkayová’s *L’essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (1997).<sup>1</sup> The novel uses the illness as its central symbolic imagery for encoding the traumatic experience of migration and addressing its belated psychic trauma. In the novel, accounts of various alarming physical symptoms interrupt the narrative and impose themselves as moments of inarticulate rupture. The protagonist, whose name is Agata Jakub, is a Slovakian-Italian journalist who finds herself unable to grasp the source of her *malattia*. Yet her anxious self-questioning leads her on a journey of discovery. She begins to recall not only her stunted formation as a woman, but also years of repression that hint at a need for reconciliation with the idea of what I will call a hybrid self.<sup>2</sup> Očkayová sets her protagonist on a double journey of becoming-woman and becoming-transnational even as she struggles for an elusive “stable” identity.<sup>3</sup> In the novel, Očkayová dislocates the notion of national belonging, articulates a

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<sup>1</sup> Jarmila Očkayová, *L’essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1997). (All translations are my own.)

<sup>2</sup> The concept of “hybridity” enjoys a long history; however, for the purposes of this project, by “hybrid,” I refer to a Bakhtinian space of overlap between two things, as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> As the term is used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “becoming” refers to a process that implies a break from existing models of subjectivity that forces the subject to take unknown paths: *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

transnational ethos, and exposes the arbitrary nature of imagined divisions that separate humans across borders through her figuration of the female body.

This chapter examines the representation of the trauma of border crossing in Očkayová's *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*. I analyze the estranging and traumatic effects of migration, the fragmentation of the narrative "I" and what I call the "aesthetics of estrangement." I argue that Očkayová configures the experience of crossing the border between Slovakia and Italy as a trauma that lives on in the migrant body as the uncanny trace of traumatic memory itself. I ultimately reveal how Očkayová transforms the potentially deformative experience of crossing national borders into a site of resistance and source of new perceptions. First, however, I will provide a brief overview of the author's background and Slovakian history in order to situate her reading of the border between Slovakia and Italy. Then, I will examine her aesthetics of estrangement in related to her discourse of the body.

Although a work of fiction, *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* reveals traces of both Očkayová's life in Slovakia and her own migration to Italy. Born in Slovakia in 1955, Očkayová emigrated to Italy in 1974 to study Italian literature at the University of Bologna. She currently lives in Reggio Emilia and works as a writer and translator. Burdened by heavy state censorship, Očkayová initially decided to leave Bratislava in search of freedom of speech. She also chose to move to Italy due to a life-long passion for Italian literature.

According to Očkayová, *L'essenziale* grew from an intense period of literary silence.<sup>4</sup> Although she had already begun writing in her native Slovakia, predominantly publishing poetry and short stories, it would be over ten years before Očkayová would write again after moving to

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<sup>4</sup> Davide Bregola, *Da qui verso casa* (Roma: Edizioni Interculturali, 2002) 80.

Italy. Očkayová returned to prose writing, however, in 1987, translating two volumes of Slovakian fairytales, Olin Kozubek's *Abetello, Scheggina e il segreto degli alberi* and Pavol Dobšinský's *Il re del tempo e altre fiabe slovacche*, into Italian for the first time.<sup>5</sup> These initial translations reflect a long-lasting interest in the fantastic and various literary estrangement devices that she would cultivate beginning with *L'essenziale*.

When Očkayová first left Bratislava, it remained under authoritarian rule, Slovakia not yet autonomous from what was then Czechoslovakia. Like many people living in Eastern Europe during the twentieth century, Slovaks lived through traumatic experiences of radical change. Slovakia's borders were drastically shifted after the First World War. Austro-Hungarian rule in Slovakia ended in 1918 only to be replaced with a representative government from Prague upon the foundation of the Czechoslovakian Republic. During the early years of the Second World War, the "Slovak state" was restored, but under the authoritarian rule of the Germans. Democracy was briefly reinstated in 1945, following the restoration of Czechoslovakia, only to be overthrown in 1948 by the communists who plunged Slovaks into forty years of Soviet rule. However, democracy and political autonomy would finally return to Slovakia in 1993, when Slovakia officially separated from former Czechoslovakia to establish a parliamentary democracy.

Like Agata, the protagonist of her novel, Očkayová also left Bratislava for the first time during the 1970s. At that time, the region that now comprises Slovakia enjoyed relative economic stability due to its high levels of industrialization and to what Tomas Frejka calls "the

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<sup>5</sup> See Olin Kozubek's *Abetello, Scheggina e il segreto degli alberi* (Reggio Emilia: Age, 1987) and Pavol Dobšinský's *Il re del tempo e altre fiabe slovacche* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1988).



peculiar sociopolitical situation of stabilization” after the Prague Spring of 1968.<sup>6</sup> Unlike women in Soviet Romania, Czechoslovakian women benefited from more liberal policies during the 1970s that permitted them to learn about and legally obtain birth control and even abortion, and at the same time extensive, paid maternity leave that helped supplement lost wages.<sup>7</sup> In response to increased economic stability, the Slovakian region of Czechoslovakia experienced a boom in the national birthrate during the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> “Normalization” after the short-lived Prague Spring, however, entailed thoroughgoing political repression, and the return to stifling ideological conformity.

Today Slovakia still enjoys one of the strongest economies of the former Soviet satellite countries, on par with Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, which are all conceived as Central European rather than Eastern European, and therefore, less *other*.<sup>9</sup> Due to its economic stability, few people from Slovakia chose to emigrate to Italy, unlike Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria, whose economies still suffer from the fallout of of post-communist political

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<sup>6</sup> See Tomas Frejka, “Fertility Trends and Policies: Czechoslovakia in the 1970s,” *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1980) 73. Historically, Czechoslovakia was one of the leading economies in Europe. See Pavel Rybák, *Ekonomika ČSSR v letech padesátých a šedesátých*, 21 July 2011. Retrieved 2015-04-18. As the contributors to *Rebirth: A Political History of Europe since World War II* suggest, Czechoslovakia’s economy remained undamaged after the Second World War; see Cyril E. Black; Robert D. English; Jonathan E. Helmreich; and James A. McAdams, *Rebirth: A Political History of Europe since World War II* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Frejka, “Fertility Trends and Policies,” 69. In the introduction to *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Gail Kligman outlines how under the Ceausescu regime, Romanians underwent the most severe pronatalist policies in the world. Furthermore, she identifies Albanians’ and Bulgarians somewhat similar to that of Romanians’ experience of an authoritarian regime.

<sup>8</sup> Frejka, “Fertility Trends and Policies,” 69.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, after Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004, it enjoyed the highest GDP growth of all OECD countries. See “Gross domestic product in the 4th quarter of 2007,” *Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic*. 4 March 2008. Retrieved 2015-04-18. See also Maria Todorova, “Hierarchies of Eastern Europe: East-Central Europe versus the Balkans,” *South East European Monitor* (1995) 1-34.

corruption.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Očkayová does not view her migration from Slovakia as driven by desperation, but as an intellectual pursuit.<sup>11</sup> She left Czechoslovakia during the “chaotic” aftermath of Soviet-style communism in search of personal and creative pursuits, not economic stability. Despite Slovakia’s extensive industrialization, many imagine Slovakia as part of what is historically understood as the former “Eastern bloc” and therefore somehow intrinsically backwards in contrast with the more established national identities of the West.<sup>12</sup> For centuries, the borders Eastern European nations were often renegotiated, while the borders of many Western nations remained relatively intact. In effect, nationalism grew in the West while the constant border changes common in Eastern Europe prevented the rise of nationalist movements common to the West in the 1920s and 1930s. In this context, Slovakian identity, from the Western perspective, remains colored by forty years under Soviet rule, despite its contemporary efforts to rise from the ashes of the Cold-War era and rejoin “Europe,” which happened in 1993. Many scholars now consider Slovakia to be part of Central Europe, rather than what was traditionally the “Eastern bloc.”<sup>13</sup> As a result of its more central geopolitical location, Slovaks are generally perceived as perhaps less “other” than their Romanian or Bulgarian counterparts, yet Slovakian identity still maintains strong ties to its rural past.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, after the Second

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<sup>10</sup> Pietro Cingolani, *Romeni d'Italia: Migrazione, vita quotidiana e legami transnazionali* (Torino: Il Mulino, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Očkayová, personal interview, spring 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The literature on Eastern Europe as the “other” of Europe is vast. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> See Alezandra Bitušiková, “Slovakia: An Anthropological Perspective on Regional Reform,” *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Bitušiková, “Slovakia,” 40-44.

World War, Italians attempted to shed their rural past in an effort to “re-color” Italian identity and establish Italy as a homogenous, First-world nation.<sup>15</sup> Citing Tzvetan Todorov’s notion of “transculturation,” Očkayová suggests that state of becoming transnational represents a “third code [that acts as] an amalgam of two cultures, two imaginaries” without renouncing either the culture of origin or destination, as we shall see later.<sup>16</sup> Read in this context, Očkayová’s discourse on transnationalism evolves as a marriage between two different experiences of Europe emphasizing a European identity that moves beyond Eurocentric beliefs that have traditionally polarized Europe.

Očkayová now sees herself as “cosmopolitan” rather than just Slovakian or Italian.<sup>17</sup> She imagines her cosmopolitanism as a way of belonging to various “fraternities without borders” that offer a “common homeland” rooted in a deep love of the kind of literature that – in her eyes – teaches us that we are all indeed *others*.<sup>18</sup> She in fact has considered herself cosmopolitan “[u]n po’ da sempre da quando h[a] scoperto il [su]o amore per la letteratura”<sup>19</sup> (almost forever since [she] discovered [her] love for literature). Thus, Očkayová imagines her multibelonging not necessarily in terms of her Slovak or Italian selves or fluency in both languages, but in terms of an overlap between the literary metaphors, archetypes, and histories of both countries.

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<sup>15</sup> On the “re-coloring” of Italians, see Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 22.

<sup>16</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins. *Intervento della scrittrice Jarmila Ockayová. Sagarana*, 9 July 2008. Web. 15 January 2015. <http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario8/seminario2.html>. Ockayová’s notion of a “third code” differs greatly from Homi Bhabha’s notion of a “third space” in his *Location of Culture*. Unlike Bhabha’s third space, Ockayová’s “code” overlaps the experiences and memories of two cultures, rather than entering them into a dichotomizing space completely separate from the countries of origin and destination.

<sup>17</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 82.

<sup>18</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 82.

Specifically, Očkayová credits Slovakian fairytales, like those that she translated into Italian, and various Italian and European modernists as her key creative sources.<sup>20</sup> Long influenced by Italian literature, particularly Anna Maria Ortese's *Il mare non bagna Napoli* and *Corpo celeste*, Italo Calvino's later works, and Claudio Magris's *Microcosmi*, Očkayová attributes the cultivation of her interests in existentialism and dislocation not only to her own experiences, but also to the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Gilles Deleuze's work with Guattari, and Maria Zambrano's *Towards a Knowledge of the Soul*.<sup>21</sup>

Očkayová ultimately believes that due to the ability of digital media and literature to move ideas remotely across borders, we are all potentially “nomadic and hybrid beings” who can adopt new perspectives by crossing borders that are not necessarily physical, but rather imaginary.<sup>22</sup> In effect, Očkayová roots her identity beyond Slovakia and Italy in the global experience of literature, rather than in a single national ethos. In doing so, she destabilizes her birth identity and reimagines it as an experience that may also be affected by the dreamscape of readerly consciousness.

### **Stranger in a Strange Land: The Aesthetics of Estrangement**

*L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* traces the belated coming-of-age story of Agata Jakub, a Slovakian-Italian recently separated from her husband Angelo, an ambitious native Italian politician. The novel is divided into three separate parts that gradually reveal the maturation of Agata's perception of reality. In the first section of the novel, Očkayová explores the protagonist's recent separation from her husband. When Agata's marriage ends, the stress of her

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<sup>20</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 70.

<sup>21</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins, “Intervento con Jarmila Očkayová,” *VIII Seminario della Sagarana*, 09 July 2008. Accessed 10 January 2015. <http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario8/seminario2.html>.

separation triggers repressed memories of her emigration to Italy. As she creates a new life for herself, she experiences a series of strange physical sensations that are the symptoms of an existential crisis, which forces Agata to reevaluate her life experiences. As a result, she must find new ways of belonging in Italy. In the same section, Agata encounters her alter-ego, Elia, a Jewish exile with a past similar to her own; however, Agata flees his contemplations on exile, not yet ready to face her own. In the second part of the novel, Agata becomes fully estranged from herself and decides to return home to Bratislava so that she may discover the mysterious source of her *malattia*, which is eventually revealed to be a stillborn fetus that spontaneously self-aborts at the precise moment she crosses the national border back into Italy. In the third section, the fetus's uncanny presence, coupled with Agata's resolution to embrace her hybridity, creates a female becoming that ends in life as her newfound identity follows her into the "beyond" of the novel.

The plot of the novel is sparse and the action of the narrative is filtered entirely from the first-person perspective of the novel's protagonist and main focalizer, Agata. Told as a recollection of the distant past and set in an unnamed Italian city during the tumultuous years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the novel investigates the deformation of the narrator's identity and its subsequent transformation.<sup>23</sup> Očkayová's literary technique may be defined both as uncanny, in the double sense of the Freudian *Unheimliche*, and the Shlovskian sense of "spaesamento," or the effect of estrangement that Očkayová assigns to the experience of migration.<sup>24</sup> Agata initially becomes estranged from herself after her separation from her

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<sup>23</sup> In describing the novel's time period, Očkayová only refers once to the Tangentepoli crisis of the early 1990s in Italy. *L'essenziale*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, for Shlovsky, *ostranenie* means more than distancing and making strange: it also refers to a dislocation, a *depaysement*. According to Svetlana Boym's translation, "Stran" is the root of the Russian word for country – *strana*. Similarly, *spaesamento* may also

husband, when she questions her formation as a woman, and then again when she sees herself as an exile split between two different languages and cultures.

Očkayová offers a transnational perspective on identity, which estranges the familiar notion of Italian national identity or *italianità* by overlapping two separate identities and collective memories, Slovakian and Italian. To do so, she creates an interplay between Italian memories of emigration, as noted in Agata's questioning of the others she encounters, and contemporary memories of migration to Italy through a doubling of various elements from her past that live on in her body. In contrast to migration narratives that rely on traditional realist and mimetic modes of representation, including the diary or chronicle, Očkayová uses unusual literary devices. In fact, Očkayová effectively defamiliarizes for the reader the mode of migration narrative itself. As an exilic *Bildungsroman*, Očkayová's text uses the aesthetics of estrangement in order to narrate the internalized struggle of migration and possible pathways towards becoming transnational. Furthermore, Očkayová defamiliarizes the experience of the body and perception through her protagonist's surreal experience of alienation. As I will show, the moments in which Agata senses her alienation are manifested through an aesthetic filter, through an allegorical encounter with space, or through her body, all of which destabilize the subject's perception of reality through various surreal memories and dreams.

Očkayová begins the *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* with a scene of physical estrangement that emphasizes the protagonist's existential crisis and establishes the novel's disquieting tone. In the opening scene, the reader finds Agata on her way to the theater to see "*La morte Bianca di un marinaio blu*":

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be translated as a *dislocation* from one's country of origin. Like Shlovsky's *ostranenie*, *spaesamento* may serve as a way of understanding otherness, caused by migration, in terms of a split from a specific, familiar geographical location, which can also disrupt one's ability to root the self spatially.

[A]ttribuii quel disagio all'abito, al mio tailleur nuovo che all'improvviso non aveva più nulla di armonioso: sbirciai le mie gambe, la gonna mi sembrò esageratamente corta e temetti che, camminando, si sarebbe accorciata ulteriormente, che ogni mio movimento l'avrebbe tirata ancora un millimetro più su; [...] [I]l mio corpo infilato in quel tailleur era diventato tremendamente impacciato: mi sentivo una congeries di movenze scombacciate, un congegno meccanico, un robot costruito per rispondere a distanza agli ordini di chi lo manipolava [...] Era come se lo spazio attorno a me si fosse sdoppiato, riempito di ostacoli visibili solo al mio corpo, io vedevo certe cose... e non c'era modo di comunicarlo...<sup>25</sup>

(I attributed that discomfort to [my] clothing, to my new suit that all of a sudden no longer had anything harmonious [about it]: my legs peeked out, the skirt seemed too short and I feared that, walking, it would shorten even more, that every movement of mine would pull it up another millimeter; [...] [M]y body stuffed in that suit became tremendously hindered: I felt like a congeries of non-corresponding movements, a mechanical device, a robot built to respond from a distance to the orders of someone who was manipulating it [...] It was as if the space around me had split, filled with obstacles visible only to my body, I could see certain things...and there was no way of communicating it.)

By emphasizing the protagonist's physical movements, Očkayová estranges the sensation of walking and likens it to the "non-corresponding movements" of a "mechanical device, a robot" whose movements are not controlled by its own volition, but by some external force. In doing so,

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<sup>25</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 10.

Očkayová illustrates Agata's discomfort from a dislocated perspective. This perspective characterizes the protagonist's feeling of non-belonging and leads to an uncanny paradox: no longer at home in her own skin, the protagonist seeks Freudian homeliness externally by turning life into art, imaging her life as if it were a play on display, the novel itself organized as three acts.

When Agata finally finds her seat while caught in the glaring spotlight, her white suit reflects the light. The reflection causes her to feel herself lift off into the sky "as if" a seagull. Upon contact with air, Agata explodes into a multitude of other seagulls. She tries to scream, but cannot because:

coi polmoni pieni d'acqua, non riuscivo a farlo, tutte quelle grida soffocate e inghiottite mi appesantivano [...]. Ma le acque del mare erano talmente profonde che non riuscivo mai a toccare il fondo, [...] tornavo a gesticolare, ad aliare concitata per richiamare l'attenzione dei gitanti sulla barca [...]. Ma loro, corrucciati e severi, scuotevano la testa e dicevano no, no, tu no, tu sei troppo pesante. E così annegavo in mezzo a tutti quei corpi che erano il mio corpo e morii un'infinità di volte.<sup>26</sup>

(with lungs filled with water, I wasn't able to scream, all of those suffocated and ingested screams weighed me down, [...] But the water of the ocean was so deep that I was never able to touch the bottom, [...] I turned to gesticulate, to flutter wildly to call the attention of the boaters [...] But they, frowning and severe, shook their heads and said no, no, you no, you're too heavy. And so I drowned in the middle of all of those bodies that were my body and I died infinite times.)

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<sup>26</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 14-15.



When the “incanto” ends, Agata returns to her human form.<sup>27</sup> By portraying Agata’s self-perception as a robot and later, as a seagull, Očkayová estranges Agata’s perception of the world. Agata’s physical movements and reality become defamiliarized, freeing Agata of her reliance on human modes of perception. Looking at the world around her from the perspectives of both a machine and an animal, Agata is able to question the source of her mysterious illness. Configured as an exit from the logic of human language, Agata’s questioning moves beyond language. Agata’s subjectivity becomes metaphorically fractured and performed on an imagined stage for the reader. Ultimately, Agata’s self-anthropomorphization emphasizes her self-perception as an outsider through a sensitivity towards the audience’s gaze. In effect, the estrangement device reveals the protagonist’s inability to articulate the source of her pain in language.

By opening the novel with this hallucinatory scene, Očkayová inserts us directly into Agata’s neurotic way of seeing. Očkayová subsequently positions Agata’s existential crisis as an indistinct menace that pervades Agata’s life and dreams:

Qualcosa gravava su di me, qualcosa che aveva la morbidezza della coperta ma la pesantezza di una piattaforma di pietra, era come essere schiacciata da un gigantesco mantice rigonfio d’acqua che qualcuno teneva sospeso sopra il mio corpo e poi lo calava giù, pian piano, la pelle del mantice si slargava attorno a me, mi avvolgeva tutta e mi soffocava.<sup>28</sup>

(Something weighed heavily on me, something that had the softness of a blanket but the heaviness of a stone platform; it was like being flattened by a giant bellow filled with water that someone held suspended over my body and then lowered

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<sup>27</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 43.

down, little by little; the skin of the bellow extended around me, it enveloped all of me and suffocated me.)

This movement between reality and hallucination, like the disorienting physical and emotional effects preserved in the body after migration, are examples of how Očkayová sees the sense of estrangement that invades those who desire to belong to a larger collective identity. Očkayová's anaphoric repetition of the word "qualcosa" emphasizes the protagonist's inability to name the source of her alienation and is compounded by the adjective "schiacciata," which emphasizes the potential violence of the unknown. Both unknown and seemingly unknowable, the force behind this "qualcosa" marks a resistance to the logic of language. Očkayová roots this resistance in the body; its effects are felt as a crushing, consuming, and suffocating physical experience that culminates in a sense of unyielding mental and physical paralysis. This drowning imagery further reinforces the protagonist's feelings of oppression, which will peak as frenzied paranoia when Agata imagines that strange "outsiders" or spies take note of her every move, threatening her. Agata's career as a journalist, scripted with the task of writing about reality, Očkayová renders Agata's disorientation ironic – Agata's inability to differentiate between reality and dream-like visions turns her into an unreliable narrator whose outsider perspective subverts the reader's expectations, encouraging the reader to search between Agata's dreams and experiences in order to pinpoint the source of her sickness.

As Agata's perception of reality grows increasingly fractured, she loses the ability to root her experiences within language, with no way to communicate what ails her. Space literally seems to double around her, rendering Agata unable to differentiate between the external and internal, and trapping her instead in a disorienting vortex of internalized corporal and emotional pain. Thus, Očkayová highlights Agata's underlying existential condition by configuring it as a

“split” in the protagonist’s perception of space. In effect, Očkayová portrays a protagonist who suffers from a divided self driven by some inexplicable force that escapes language. As Agata further disassociates herself from her old life, she learns to depend on her body to root her experiences in space and time.

### **Double, Double, Toil and Trouble:<sup>29</sup> Estranging Border Conditions and Split Subjects**

Očkayová positions Agata’s self-estrangement as an existential crisis that divides the protagonist’s identity and manifests itself in the body. Initially, by portraying Agata as someone who imagines herself as a robot and then as a seagull, Očkayová successfully disassociates Agata from her former self – a mother, a politician’s wife, and a journalist. Despite her family, Agata concludes that the summer will be a difficult one for her not because of the distance from her daughter, who is mentioned only twice in the novel, but because “avrei dovuto trovare un modo nuovo di convivere con la città” (I would have to find a new way to coexist with the city).<sup>30</sup> After her separation from her Italian husband, Agata contemplates the effects of space on her own formation:

È incredibile, pensai, come cambiano gli spazi del luogo in cui viviamo quando cambia la nostra vita. Stesse strade, stesse piazze, stessi edifici, e ogni cosa è di colpo diversa, si ha la sensazione di dover reimparare a orientarsi, a memorizzare i nomi delle vie... È come se lo spazio fosse un involucro che avvolge la nostra identità, e quando noi cambiamo, quando facciamo delle scelte che buttano

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<sup>29</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Macbeth* (New York: Oxford Press, 1990) 169.

<sup>30</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 20.

all'aria le vecchie sicurezze e ci trasformano dentro, è come se anche i luoghi fossero costretti a ridefinirsi, a cambiare forma.<sup>31</sup>

(It's incredible, I thought, how the spaces in which we live change when our lives change. The same streets, same piazzas, same buildings, and everything looks suddenly different; one has the sensation of needing to relearn how to orient oneself, to memorize the names of streets...It's as if space were a shell that envelops our identity, and when we change, when we make decisions that throw old certainties to the wind and change us internally, it's as if even places were compelled to redefine themselves, to change form.)

Očkayová thus implies that Agata's sense of physical and existential disorientation may be located in a perceived lack of belonging to the Italian landscape. By estranging Agata from her physical surroundings, forcing her to see them anew, Očkayová suggests that there exists another underlying source for Agata's estrangement. Having left her daughter behind in the care of her mother-in-law, Agata moves out on her own for five months in order to leave her husband and to put her affairs in order. In the absence of the familial relationships that gave her life form, Agata is assigned a new task, which dominates the plot: to locate her belonging in the world.<sup>32</sup> In doing so, Očkayová not only emphasizes Agata's inability to make sense of her recent marital

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<sup>31</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Although few details regarding the nature of the mother-daughter bond are provided, Očkayová defines Agata's relationship with her daughter through physical distance and space. Indeed, the reader only encounters Agata's daughter through internal monologues that contemplate motherhood and belonging. As a result of her self-exile, Agata asks herself whether it was her daughter who changed her, or if it was "maternity that did nothing other than sharpen" an already preexisting "mode of being" (17). In other words, Agata questions whether motherhood instigated her current existential crisis or if it simply heightened her anxieties surrounding her outsider status. Očkayová implies that it is the latter situation that defines Agata's current outsider status: motherhood simply forced her to become hyper-vigilant of her own non-belonging to the Italian landscape.

separation, but also reveals Agata's return to a perceived status of difference first experienced when Agata emigrated to Italy. Očkayová never mentions whether Agata reconciles with Angelo or continues their plotline. Instead, standing on the border between Slovakia and Italy in the closing pages of the novel, Agata will finally feel stable enough to take on her maternal duties and return to motherhood only after resolving the question of her identity and its underlying malaise.

In order to make sense of the anxiety that deforms her identity, Agata relies on the primacy of her body's sensations to make sense of the world around her. As her sense of self erodes under the stress of self-imposed isolation and anxious questioning, visions and bodily sensations replace words and reveal a divided memory that blurs the borders between an abject inside and a transgressive outside. Barred from the logic of language, Agata must rely on other means of understanding to reorient herself in space and time. Instead, she relies on the primacy of her body's sensations to make sense of the world around her:

Sprofondavo nel sonno, per un attimo, e mi risvegliavo, subito dopo, con un senso di oppressione. O almeno credevo di svegliarmi, ma forse continuavo a dormire e sognavo di essermi svegliata, perché quell'oppressione diventava una cosa reale...Muoversi diventava impossibile, il peso mi teneva ferma e sentivo le gambe le braccia la testa il petto trasformarsi sotto quel peso, appiattirsi come una sogliola, sentivo la pelle ritirarsi nella carne, la carne scomparire dentro i muscoli, i muscoli farsi tutt'uno con le ossa, la carne i muscoli, i muscoli le ossa

assottigliarsi come sotto una pressa [...] Che cos'è che mi opprime così? Perché questa costante sensazione di minaccia?<sup>33</sup>

(I sank into sleep, for a moment, and I woke up right afterward with a sense of oppression. Or at least I thought I woke up, but perhaps I continued to sleep and I dreamt of being awake because that oppression became something real... Moving became impossible, the weight kept me still and I felt my legs arms head chest transforming under that weight, flattening themselves like a fish, I felt my skin recede into my flesh, flesh disappearing inside muscles, muscles becoming one with my bones, the flesh the muscles, the muscles the bones wear thin as if under a press [...] What is it that oppresses me so? Why this constant sense of danger?)

As Agata is overtaken by anxiety, her struggle becomes rooted in her body beyond the logic of language. As her syntax fragments, so too does Agata's sense of reality. To convey this effect, Očkayová combines several images into a single run-on sentence, withholding punctuation, to deform reality and reveal its subsequent breakdown. The resulting stream-of-consciousness technique successfully illustrates the internal disorientation caused by the residual effects of migration. In effect, the body becomes a blur of skin, bones, and muscles that lose the clarity of precise borders under the burden of introspection. Agata is unable to articulate the source of her pain, and her anxious questioning obscures the line between the physical interior and exterior of her body. Očkayová, thus, suggests that the body remains at the center of identity formation as one's principal location in the world. Ultimately, the lived experience of migration itself survives in the body as a disturbing trauma that resists naming.

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<sup>33</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 38-39.

Yet what is responsible for this shift towards a pre-lingual state? In subsequent pages, Očkayová elucidates the deeper significance of the opening theater scene by describing the importance of the color white for Agata:

Ma il bianco è un non colore... Simboleggia l'apertura, ma anche l'aggressività repressa. La purezza, l'innocenza priva di turbamenti, ma anche l'infelicità, il dolore, in alcune culture il lutto.<sup>34</sup>

(But white is a non-color [...] It symbolizes openness, but also repressed aggressivity. Purity, innocence devoid of turmoil, but also unhappiness, pain, and in some cultures mourning.)

If, as the philosopher Rosi Braidotti suggests, the body is a surface where “multiple codes are inscribed,” then the exilic body, cloaked in the symbolic whiteness of repression, becomes a “point of intersection” that negotiates its own cultural construction.<sup>35</sup> The duality of the color white, loaded with both positive and negative connotations, recalls the earlier “split” in space that Agata sensed around her body, so restricted that it could not accurately permit her to determine her orientation in space. By juxtaposing “openness” against “mourning,” Očkayová creates a dual force at play in the protagonist’s identity formation. “Openness,” which precedes mourning in the order of ideas, suggests an unleashing of hidden forces that remain to be seen. In

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<sup>34</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 27.

<sup>35</sup> See Rosi Braidotti’s *Becoming Woman*, 44 and *Nomadic Subjects*, 182. For Braidotti, the body is described predominantly as a nomadic vision. The body is “neither a biological or nor a sociological category, but rather a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions (*Becoming Woman* 44). While the body bears the mark of society, because the subject is nomadic, it can’t be merely reduced to the discourses of society. The subject as nomad can never be a finished project. In contrast with Braidotti’s idealistic view of migration, which releases the nomad from all tethers of belonging, Očkayová’s configuration of the transnational overlaps experiences and various cultural identities.

contrast, “mourning,” associated with loss, implies that a sort of death has occurred. Taken together, openness and mourning lead to a melting of the self-preservation techniques that have limited the self in its search for harmony. Thus, Očkayová establishes the narrator-protagonist as a divided subject who must face her exilic condition before she can achieve harmony within and without.

In response to this exilic condition, the philosopher Julia Kristeva believes that the stranger suffers from a gradual loss of identity, which renders him or her abject.<sup>36</sup> For Kristeva, the abject occurs when an individual can no longer differentiate between a threatening external and internal reality, which now appears repugnant to her.<sup>37</sup> This personal loss may be eased, she argues, only through the act of learning to love one’s own difference. Kristeva further suggests that the experience of strangeness is, like abjection, the sign of an incomplete separation from our first home – the mother’s body. This separation causes psychological impulses to return as estranging bodily symptoms. The foreigner accrues multiple identities when he or she crosses a border and, as a result, ambivalence colors his or her social relationships. Yet underneath this ambivalence remains a “flayed animal.”<sup>38</sup> By accepting that there is never a fixed dwelling, the foreigner learns to accept the strangeness of others since what enables us to live with foreigners is the knowledge that we are strangers to ourselves.<sup>39</sup> In other words, for Kristeva, identification produces knowledge. Humans can only respect “incompatible differences within communities” if they confront the fact that they, too, are “split subjects,” or as Anna Smith astutely suggests,

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<sup>36</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 4 and 8.

<sup>37</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 191.



“both desiring and desirable, mortal and death bearing, subject to the law, but by the same token to abjection.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, the state of abjection reveals a fragile self whose precarious status may be alleviated, according to Kristeva, by directly addressing the repressive forces that first caused the division.<sup>41</sup>

In older forms of Italian literature, particularly from the Northeastern border of Italy at the turn of the twentieth century, various Istrian and Triestine writers asked similar questions about belonging under the sign of the “io diviso.” As early as Scipio Slataper’s 1912 *Il mio Carso*, Triestine border literature imagined the self in terms of multiple ethnic belongings split between two or more ethnic parts. Indeed, Slataper conceived of the clash between his Slovene and Italian identities in terms of two refracted selves, which he named respectively Alboin and Pennadoro.<sup>42</sup> Later, in his 1960 novel *Materada*, Fulvio Tomizza set his narrative against the background of the Istrian exodus of 1955. The main protagonist and narrator, Francesco Koslovic, is a farmer whose name reveals his multiethnic Italian and Croatian backgrounds. Faced with his own multiple belonging, Francesco is uncertain whether he should leave his native region. Because Francesco considers himself hybrid from birth, as his name suggests, neither Italian or Slav but a combination of the two, his narrative lacks a bias towards either group, thus suggesting that Francesco’s is a regional identity with no state yet to represent it. The question of whether to leave his native region dramatizes the larger predicament of numerous

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<sup>40</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 9-14. See also Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1996) 22.

<sup>41</sup> Kristeva reads repression in terms of Freud’s contributions to the subject. Similarly, Freud contends that repression may be alleviated through a direct engagement with the object of fear.

<sup>42</sup> Alboin was a barbarian king who led Lombards through the Alps to Friuli. Pennadoro means Slataper in Italian. For Slataper, his invocation of the Barbarian invader connotes his own wild and earthy “Slavic” side, while Pennadoro speaks to his Apollonian or “Italian” impulse “seeking to harmonize disparities, to equilibrate them, to make [himself] classical and formed,” *Il mio Carso*, 13.

residents along the Northeast border in light of the political encroachment of Yugoslav communists. Francesco curses his land because of the internal divide it has caused his family, understanding that little good can come from an “io diviso.” Tomizza portrays the decision about whether to leave as a painful struggle that induces a border neurosis that questions multiethnic belonging.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar vein, Očkayová imagines Agata’s “borderline condition” as a somatic and corporeal manifestation and then upon engaging the past, as a smoldering hunger, which can only be satiated by belonging. Indeed, despite her ambivalence towards her dual identity early in the novel, Agata suggests that she is afraid to be seen “com’ero,” as she believes herself to be, because she sees herself as “fragile e irruente... clandestina ladra di spazi”<sup>44</sup> (fragile and impulsive... clandestine thief of spaces). Agata is a woman apart. Neither fully assimilated into Italian culture nor nostalgically holding onto her Slovakian past, Agata oscillates between her Italian and Slovakian identities until she learns how to live beyond the borders of both national identities and face her repressed memories. The protagonist’s perception of herself as a “hidden thief” establishes Agata’s perspective as an estranged outsider to the broader realm of Italian identity.

In *Studies in Hysteria*, Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer ask what occurs when repressed ideas or memories move away from consciousness towards the primitive regions of the mind.<sup>45</sup> Although critics have questioned the scientific integrity of Freud’s theories of repression, only a

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<sup>43</sup> In contrast with Očkayová’s transnational vision, Tomizza offers a negative view of hybridity, which disrupts positive identity formation.

<sup>44</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> J. Breuer, J. and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria (1893-1895)*. Standard Edition, Vol.II. (London: Hogarth, 1895).

few have engaged the importance of his contribution.<sup>46</sup> According to Simon Boag, Freudian repression, rather than being an occurrence that merely provides a “*flight from pain*” often tied to traumatic memories, actually refers to “[a]n impulse or urge [that] is present [and] seeks to release pleasure from a particular source.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, repression reflects the need for a wish-fulfillment that, if stifled, leads to frustration and, ultimately, a perception of danger (or castration). While Freud asserts that repression is an essential part of human development, trauma or a fixation on earlier phases of human development can, however, cause a state of narcissism to develop in the individual. Yet Freud does not view neurosis as a negative state. Instead, experienced as psychosomatic or behavioral symptoms, neuroses simply refer to what

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<sup>46</sup> According to Boag’s essay “Freudian Repression,” repression theory (as used in literary and Freudian studies) often conceptualizes Freudian repression in terms of memories without any reference to conflicts, wishes, or primary and secondary repression (79). See also J.W. Schooler and A-M. Hyman, Jr. “A Psychoanalytic Theory of Repression and the Unconscious.” In J. Sandler & P. Fonagy, eds., *Recovered Memories of Abuse: True or False?* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1997). See also M.W. Matlin. *Psychology* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999) and P. Gray. *Psychology* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> See Freud’s *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. Standard Edition, Vol. VIII (London: Hogarth, 1905) 135. Freud’s initial theories of repression focused on repression’s relationship to trauma. Though Freud subsequently believed that adult neuroses could be traced to childhood sexual experiences, thereby formulating his “seduction hypothesis” in *Further Remarks on the Neuropsychoses of Defence*, Standard Edition, Vol. III (London: Hogarth, 1896), he later recanted his seduction hypothesis in a letter to Fliess dated September 21, 1897. Instead, he saw seduction as imaginative falsifications or “screen memories” (S. Freud, *Screen Memories*. Standard Edition, Vol. III (London: Hogarth, 1899), implying that the target of repression was not a painful memory, but instead desires and impulses were to blame. He begins to theorize that neurotic symptoms are compromises “between two mental currents” (Freud, 1906, 276-7) or “two opposing impulses” (Freud, *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*. Standard Edition, Vol. X (London: Hogarth, 1909) 192). Going forward, for Freud, repression, according to Simon Boag, “is no longer simply about forgetting painful memories, but instead reflects motivational conflict and the inhibition of ‘instincts’” (76). Freud later develops three states of repression: fixation, repression-proper, and the *return of the repressed*. The final phase constitutes repression’s failure and a resulting neurosis (return of the repressed) – see Freud’s article *Repression*. Standard Edition, Vol. XIV (London: Hogarth, 1915) 148. See Simon Boag’s thorough article, “Freudian Repression, the Common View, and Pathological Science” in *Review of General Psychology*. Vol. 10, No.1 (2006) 74-86. Boag argues that the theory of repression has not been sufficiently addressed in mainstream psychology, thus leading to several confusions regarding Freud’s theory of repression. He argues further that psychologists, who have misconceptualized Freud’s work, often refer to Freud’s early work, which Freud himself later recanted, and ignore the findings of his later work.

Freud considers “the *return of the repressed*.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, neuroses develop, suggests Freud, when wishes are improperly repressed or when external traumatic events occur to divide the body from the mind. In order to free oneself of a traumatic neurosis, then, Freud suggests that the individual must first acknowledge the root of his or her suffering before the original conflict can become transformed.

Following this model, Očkayová establishes Agata throughout the novel as a neurotic who becomes increasingly paranoid while her grasp on reality deforms. Očkayová develops several intrapersonal relationships that not only highlight Agata’s growing anxieties, but subsequently reveal the difficulties of creating a new identity in a foreign land. Specifically, Agata encounters three men whose presence forces her to contemplate her own difference. In the first section of the novel, Agata encounters Elia, a Jewish intellectual, at a conference about tourist itineraries that returns Jews to cultural sites of Jewish patrimony; in the second section, she encounters Siro, a financier and Slovakian transplant who is homesick, and an unnamed African man.

In the first section, Očkayová mirrors two seemingly disparate experiences of migration in order to establish an important parallel between the contemporary experience of Eastern European “migrants” and the historic exile of the Jewish diaspora. While discussing his own exilic condition, Elia unnerves Agata when he states that “Ho quarant’anni e non so che cosa fare di me stesso” (“I’m forty years old and I don’t know what to make of myself”).<sup>49</sup> Agata contemplates the echo of her own previously stated words in his: “Sono io che ho quarant’anni e

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<sup>48</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Repression*, Standard Edition, Vol. XIV (London: Hogarth, 1915) 154 and *Neurosis and Psychosis*, Standard Edition, vol. XIX (London: Hogarth, 1924) 125.

<sup>49</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 44.

non so che cosa fare di me stessa.”<sup>50</sup> From that day forward, Agata notices a strange occurrence: whenever she speaks on the phone, the sound of her voice returns to her as if “a boomerang of sound,” and shortly thereafter mysteriously stops.<sup>51</sup> Yet, days later, she recalls the “extraordinary coincidence” again when, during a conversation with Elia, it seems to her “che nel discutere con lui le mie parole mi tornassero indietro come quella eco nel telefono guasto che, in qualche punto della linea, trasformava la mia voce in quella di Elia” (“that while speaking with him my words returned back to me like the echo from the broken telephone that, somewhere along the line, transformed my voice into that of Elia”).<sup>52</sup> Too unnerved by the coincidences surrounding Elia’s presence, Agata decides to cut him from her life in one fell swoop. Although she considers that perhaps her fears are unfounded, ultimately Agata turns away from her “alter ego” Elia because she recognizes too much of her own exilic experience in his.<sup>53</sup> Elia aptly perceives her discomfort and concludes that Agata feels divided because she is afraid to “look at [herself] in the mirror.”<sup>54</sup> Although Elia and Agata come from different nationalities and religions, the trauma of migration haunts them both. Thus, Očkayová implies that regardless of the circumstances surrounding our need to migrate, the pain associated with movement connects us all despite the borders that separate humanity into definable and disparate categories.

As Agata further resists contemplating her origins, she subsequently grows more estranged from reality and becomes suspicious of others. Towards the end of the first section,

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<sup>50</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 55.

Agata receives a call from a Slovakian financier named Siro who recently moved to Italy for business. After reading a news article of hers, Siro recognizes her last name – the last name of a favorite sculptor whose work he once admired in a church back in Slovakia.<sup>55</sup> Although the sculptor happens to also be Agata’s grandfather, Siro emphasizes that, because he feels “spaesato,” or disoriented and without country, he yearns for some familiarity.<sup>56</sup> Yet Agata doubts his sense of estrangement because she never reminisced about “la lontana patria, che peraltro [visitava] regolarmente un paio di volte all’anno, era per [lei] una specie di isola che non c’è, assieme alla fattoria dei nonni da anni abbandonata che, nei [suoi] brevi viaggi, non [aveva] mai voluto rivedere” (the distant homeland, that for that matter she visited regularly a handful of times a year. For her, it was a kind of island that was no longer, together with her grandparents’ farm abandoned for years that, in her brief visits, she had never wanted to see again).<sup>57</sup> Instead, Siro’s discussions of geography and language only bore Agata, who has repressed her otherness. In the end, Agata tolerates Siro momentarily because although she understands his “nostalgia,” her ambivalence prevents her from wanting to remember Slovakia.<sup>58</sup> Through the glare of her cynicism, she assumes Elia sent Siro to upset her and calculates her revenge against Elia by tricking Siro into meeting her in a cemetery only to watch him walk around, alone, while she laughs from her car with her friend Cristina.

By introducing Siro, a fellow countryman, into Agata’s uncertain world, Očkayová highlights Agata’s ambivalence towards her own exilic condition. Agata’s ambivalence,

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<sup>55</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 68.

<sup>56</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 69.

<sup>57</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 72 and 73.

however, turns into a denial of the past through her cruel, misplaced vendetta and only worsens the symptoms of her *malattia*. In the chapters that follow, every person and every shadow becomes an anxious sign of danger ahead. Uncertain if Angelo, her estranged husband, is to blame or an elaborate political conspiracy to undo Angelo's political career through her, Agata displaces personal accountability for her state of denial onto other people. From the maddening game of "guess who," Agata's behavior emerges as a false model for how to deal with experience – despite her acts of evasion, she subsequently remains trapped by an inability to consolidate her Italian and Slovakian identities. Indeed, the more she ignores thoughts of Bratislava and her own migration, the more her *malattia*, felt both existentially and corporeally, takes hold of her psyche, forcing her to consider visiting the doctor. Like the neurotic male protagonist of Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923), Očkayová's female protagonist evolves as an unreliable and neurotic anti-heroine who is introspective, evasive, and repressed and who constructs for herself an inner life that at first glance, does not seem to be entangled in history. As in Svevo's text, "place" in Očkayová's narrative becomes a frame of mind that reveals the gap between different identities.

At this point in the novel, a radical shift in perception occurs, as menacing spies "following" Agata turn into amusing theater characters that cross her path while she vacations in Rimini to escape the stress of her divorce. This shift marks Agata's increasing disassociation from herself as her mental state deteriorates rapidly, blurring the line between reality and unreality, the body and its wandering double that haunts it. When she refuses to acknowledge the past, she relies merely on sight to decipher reality:

La realtà si trasformava, diventava più interessante, più intensa, ogni cosa che vedevo era una casellina enigmistica da riempire, ogni persona che incontravo un

rebus da decifrare... (n)on ero mai sicura di niente: quanti e quali sguardi mi seguivano? <sup>59</sup>

(Reality was transforming, it became more interesting, more intense, everything that I saw was a puzzling little box to fill, every person that I encountered a puzzle to decipher... I was no longer sure of anything: how many and which gazes followed me?)

Reality becomes animated again, unlike the fixed immobility to which Agata had accustomed herself during her marriage when she became a “statue,” unable to act.<sup>60</sup> The purpose of various strangers’ appearances still remains ambiguous at this point in the novel, for their presence may be a hallucination in Agata’s mind, or an actual threat. Strangers are, in either case, an omen of danger, and time seems to stop as Agata pauses to contemplate an elegantly dressed African man walking behind her:

Che ci facciamo qui, noi due? Mi ponevo spesso quelle domande, negli anni in cui le città italiane avevano cominciato a pullulare ed echeggiare di volti e di accenti stranieri. Mi chiedevo che cosa avevo in comune con loro, e che cosa avevamo in comune insieme con milioni di persone che nella storia remota e recente cambiarono il paese, recisero le proprie radici... Che cosa avevo in comune con l’esiliato che duemila anni fa veniva mandato, per punizione, dalla civilissima Roma in una qualche colonia lontana? O con un altro che, sempre per punizione, poco più di mezzo secolo fa, veniva relegato dalla polizia fascista al confine in qualche paese sperduto fra le colline lucane o nelle isole? Che cosa avevo in

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<sup>59</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 104.

<sup>60</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 53.



comune con il profugo che invece fuggiva da solo, abbandonando un angiporto economico e la fame a cui era costretto, trovando nella società avanzata avanzi di cibo ma nessuno con cui mangiarselo? Che cosa avevo in comune con l'intellettuale, come mio padre, che fuggiva da un regime politico e nell'esilio volontario trovava la sua libertà ma non gli spazi a cui applicarla? Che quell'uomo dalla faccia nera come il cioccolato fondente fosse un criminale che commerciava le armi, gli esplosivi, o una pedina pagata da qualcuno per recitare una parte, soltanto questo avrei voluto chiedergli: non ti manca la luminosità dei cieli sudafricani? [...] Camminiamo, io e te, avrei voluto dirgli, camminiamo sotto i pini mediterranei, con nel cuore io la mia esile betulla, tu il tuo contorto baobab, e il bisogno di farli riconoscere, e accettare, le nostre betulle e i nostri baobab, ci tormenta peggio della fame.»<sup>61</sup>

(What are we doing here, the two of us? I often asked myself those questions during the years in which Italian cities had begun to grow and to echo foreign faces and accents. I asked myself what I had in common with them, and what we had in common with millions of people who in remote and recent history change countries, severing ties...[w]hat did I have in common with the exile of two thousand years ago who was sent, as punishment, by the very civilized Rome to some distant colony? Or with another who, always as punishment, not even a half a century ago, was relegated by fascist police to some isolated country between

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<sup>61</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 105-106.

the Lucanian hills or to the islands?<sup>62</sup> What did I have in common with the refugee who instead fled alone, abandoning impoverished situations and the hunger to which he was constrained, finding in advanced society leftovers, but no one with whom to eat them? What did I have in common with the intellectual, like my father, who fled a political regime and, in voluntary exile, found his liberty, but not the spaces in which to apply it?

That that man with the black face like dark chocolate was a criminal that sold arms, explosives, or a pawn paid by someone to play a character? Only this I would have wanted to ask him: don't you miss the brightness of the South African skies? [...] Let's walk, you and I, I would have wanted to tell him, let's walk under Mediterranean pines, with in my heart a birch exile, and in yours your twisted baobab,<sup>63</sup> and the need to make them know, and accept, our birches and our baobabs torments us worse than hunger.)

The pause signals a disjunction in modes of perception and reveals a symbolic examination of difference and degrees of separation. In one dramatic stroke, Očkayová superimposes generations of historical *others* – Jews, *fuoriusciti*, homosexuals, refugees, intellectuals, exiles – and assembles them into a single, unified image of non-belonging that reveals, in fact, how the *other* indeed lives within us as the familiar face of shared experience. To do so, Očkayová employs a poignant tree metaphor, each genus of tree congruent with the characters' geography, that ties both figures to their respective pasts and geographies, however different. Trees,

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<sup>62</sup> In Italian, “lucano” refers to the ancient Roman region of Lucania, which is considered present-day Basilicata, a region in southern Italy bordering Campania, Puglia, and Calabria.

<sup>63</sup> A baobab is a type of tree that grows in South Africa near Madagascar.

throughout Očkayová's oeuvre, function as a powerful metaphor that suggests that reality, like wood, may be sculpted into whatever one would like to believe.<sup>64</sup>

Yet it is the pain of leaving familiar landscapes behind and the need to give their differences a voice, instead of abandoning them to the annals of history, that ties Agata and the South African man, two perfect strangers, together in a shared separation from their homelands that burns "worse than hunger." Such a separation from the homeland, suggests Julia Kristeva, evolves into metaphors of indigestion and incomplete introjection that describe this borderline condition: the stranger feels a "burning sensation" and an "unassuaged sense of hunger."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Agata's borderline condition is first manifested as bodily symptoms, and then when she engages the past, becomes a smoldering hunger which can only be satiated by belonging. Indeed, despite her ambivalence towards her dual identity earlier in the novel, Agata still believes herself to be a "fragile" other of the Italian community who searches for belonging. This search, in turn, evolves under the notion of "the essential" as "invisible," which estranges the notion of seeing throughout the novel.

*L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, one of Očkayová's best-known novels has its source in a novella by the French aristocrat and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*.<sup>66</sup> Saint-Exupéry's story traces the tale of a stranded pilot and his encounter with a "little prince" in

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<sup>64</sup> Očkayová echoes this sentiment in her later work, specifically *Occhio a Pinocchio* (2006), in which she inverses the traditional story of Pinocchio, created as an instructive text regarding Italian nationalism and brotherly love, and empowers the little wooden puppet to speak from his subaltern position, thus giving voice to hidden histories present in Italian history. Indeed, Silvia Camilotti considers the novel a "parody" of the original Collodian text in her "Per una scrittura eccentrica: Occhio a Pinocchio di Jarmila Očkayová," *mediAzioni* 6 (2009) <http://mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it>.

<sup>65</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 4 and 23.

<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Očkayová even quotes Saint-Exupéry at the beginning of the second section: "*Gli uomini? Il vento li spinge qua e là. Non hanno radici, e questo li imbarazza molto.*"

the Saharan desert who shares with the pilot the story of his life. During the course of eight days, the little prince tells the pilot about his planet, an asteroid with three volcanoes and a mysterious rose flower. Although the boy-prince falls in love with the rose, he leaves her behind in order to explore the rest of the universe, only to learn that there exist fields of roses on Earth.

Disappointed by his discovery, the little prince seeks the Wise Fox's secret: "One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes."<sup>67</sup> "Essentiel" in French is a cognate of the English "essential," akin in meaning to that which constitutes essence; however, *essential* reveals a double meaning: not only referring to that which constitutes essence, it refers to that which is most important. While the "essential" of Saint-Exupéry's text remains ambiguous, understood as either a love for time spent on things that sustain purpose or a love for the inherent essence of what is most important, the "essential" nonetheless refers to what exists below the mechanized habit of seeing. The little prince reminds the pilot that "People where you live [...] grow five thousand roses in one garden...yet they don't find what they're looking for [...] (a)nd yet, what they're looking for could be found in a single rose [...] (b)ut eyes are blind. You have to look with the heart."<sup>68</sup>

Saint-Exupéry's text, which assumes that children see the world more clearly than adults, proposes a model of the world that defamiliarizes adult reality and official history. The narrator-protagonist, a pilot based on Saint-Exupéry's personal experiences as both a French aristocrat and pilot for the French Air Force during the Second World War, reminds the reader that while adults, having left the penetrating sight of childhood behind, can no longer see possibility in the world, children *can* do so, although "it is exhausting for children to have to provide explanations

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<sup>67</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Little Prince* (New York: Harcourt, 63).

<sup>68</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Little Prince*, 71.

over and over again.”<sup>69</sup> Clouded by the promise of upward mobility, progress, and nationalistic fervor, adults too easily forgo the essential because they examine lived experience from above, while children can easily see from below, so close to the essential. In addressing this theme, Saint-Exupéry positions his main protagonist, a little boy, as the *other* of adulthood by imagining access to power in terms of verticality. Saint-Exupéry wrote his story in 1943, at the height of French imperialism. Thus, Saint-Exupéry places in binary opposition those individuals who determine recorded history and those who are left to experience it or are forced to remain at its margins.

In contrast, Očkayová takes only the key lesson regarding “others” from Saint-Exupéry’s novella and borrows its iconic phrase: “Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the novel’s title, *L’essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, is a close translation of Saint-Exupéry’s memorable phrase. However, the “essentiel” of Saint-Exupéry’s novel assumes for Očkayová a different meaning. Očkayová’s story articulates the “essential” as that which can occur only once the self recognizes its plight by looking beyond the surface of life and acknowledging one’s similarity to others. Therefore, while potentially similar to Saint-Exupéry’s construction of the essential as that which estranges sight and provides clearer, hidden truths – such as the importance of curiosity and love – Očkayová makes explicit the importance of looking below the surface of appearances and habit in order to discover that “Tutto ciò che vediamo è qualcos’altro” (“Everything that we see is something else”).<sup>71</sup> One of several variations of Saint-Exupéry’s quote, the phrase implies both a doubling of experience – that under every experience

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<sup>69</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Little Prince*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Little Prince*, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Očkayová, *L’essenziale*, 107.

lies another possible way of seeing – and also suggests that what we perceive as reality is actually an illusion imagined to keep chaos at bay. Offering another variation, Agata’s grandfather, a Slovakian sculptor trained in the restoration of Italian religious art, would remind her as a child in Bratislava that “ciò che accade davvero non è visibile” (that which really happens is not visible).<sup>72</sup> Thus, Očkayová suggests that reality is both malleable and doubled: it grants us the power to condemn ourselves either to nostalgia or to the illusion of what once was, and it gives us the power to imagine new possibilities for existence that move beyond closed constructions towards knowledge through Kristevian identification.

From the novel’s onset, Očkayová sets her narrator-protagonist to the task of transforming not the world itself, but “il (suo) modo di stare al mondo, e consider(a) questa la vera rivoluzione”<sup>73</sup> (her way of being in the world, and (she) considers this the true revolution). As Agata stares into the Adriatic sea on the beach in Rimini, her memories of Bratislava return one by one from the oblivion into which she had cast them. She senses a change within her that “cominciò a prendere forma, pur se ancora inafferrabile” (began to take form, even if it was still incomprehensible).<sup>74</sup> Later, the uncanny figure of her father returns from the dead to warn Agata about the dangers of *not* conversing with individuals like herself who have crossed a border permanently. When Agata communicates her fears, suggesting that she is not yet able to understand their source, her father begs her to “cerca gli altri...[p]arla con gli altri,” or seek others who suffer from the estranging effects of migration.<sup>75</sup> In other words, Očkayová argues

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<sup>72</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 183.

<sup>73</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 43.

<sup>74</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 107.

<sup>75</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 118 and 119.

for a model of belonging that exists within the constructs of a Kristevian identification with the other and encourages the overlapping of various national identities into a hybrid, transnational one. For Očkayová, then, the basis for transnationalism becomes a “brotherhood of guests who soothe [...] their difference.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, Očkayová creates a model for self-formation that hinges not merely on locating one’s belonging in the world, but specifically locating belonging in a transnational community that does not find multiple belongings problematic. Taken in this context, the “essential” of Očkayová’s novel becomes a poetic meditation on the exilic condition of those individuals who migrate.<sup>77</sup>

### **The *Other* Within: Trauma and the Plight of Uncanny Bodies**

With *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, Očkayová sets herself the task of problematizing migration to Italy. Unlike her other novels – *Verrà la vita e avrà i tuoi occhi* (1995), *Requiem per tre padri* (1998), and *Occhio a Pinocchio* (2006) – all of which provide limited insight into the complex experience of migration and avoid any autobiographical element, *L'essenziale* attempts to convey both the overall sense of Očkayová’s personal

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<sup>76</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Freud first used this term “narcissism of minor differences” in his 1917 “The Taboo of Virginity,” in which he builds on the writings of British anthropologist Ernest Crawley. Freud later develops his notion of “the narcissism of minor differences” in his 1930 essay “Civilization and Its Discontents,” in *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: Penguin, 2002) 305. Greek mythology portrays the figure of Narcissus as a vain and beautiful individual whom the goddess Nemesis condemned to fall in love with his own image as it was reflected in water. Freud initially uses the word “narcissism” to refer to a morbid kind of self-love which builds on exaggerated notions of how one differs from others. When Freud applies the term in his 1930 essay, “narcissism” is applied to relations among groups of nations who embrace their nationalism with excessive patriotism since they view themselves as radically different from surrounding groups. As John Dickie suggests, “Nations need Others, images of what they are not” in order to exist (23). Dickie, “Imagined Italies,” *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 23.

experience of migration without lapsing into memoir.<sup>78</sup> Seen through Agata's eyes, the experience of Italian culture becomes an estranging vision of otherness that renews the reader's perception of Italian identity. The text re-envisioned Italian identity not as a single, homogenizing entity, but as a multicultural one that coincides with older visions of Italian identity. Two specific occurrences in the novel illustrate the disquieting nature of such a struggle: Agata's imaginary encounter with the disembodied figure of her father and, later, the ambiguous and spontaneous miscarriage Agata experiences upon crossing the border between Bratislava and Italy.

In the first example, Agata has recently returned to her apartment after her trip to Rimini. Upon returning home, Bratislava beckons to Agata in the ghostly embodiment of her father. That is, Očkayová dislocates place by embodying it as a familiar individual whom Agata associates with Bratislava. By embodying place as a ghost that warns Agata, Očkayová suggests that not only does place live on in space itself, but its memory lives on in those who migrate from their country of origin. More precisely, as philosopher Dylan Trigg suggests in *The Memory of Place*, "places live in our bodies, instilling an eerie sense of our own embodied selves as being the sites of a spatial history that is visible and invisible, present and absent."<sup>79</sup> As a result, for Trigg, experience becomes doubled in essence – what we believe we remember inhabits us.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>78</sup> See *Writing across Worlds. Literature and Migration* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995). King and White believe that writing by "migrant writers" develops in phases: from autobiography to memoir. They argue for a hierarchical orientation of gradual stages in "migrant" writing. See also Armando Gnisci, ed. *La letteratura della migrazione* (Rome: Lilith, 1998). Gnisci argues for a similar view of migration literature.

<sup>79</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012) 33.

<sup>80</sup> Trigg, *Memory of Place*, 22-33. See also Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).



nature of experience itself, Očkayová suggests, is estranging as memory itself becomes a double of the “real.”

Indeed, upon returning to Bratislava, Agata discovers an old letter she wrote at the age of fifteen to her grandparents. In the letter, she responds to questions about her recent experience of migration and her life in Italy with a *fabula*.<sup>81</sup> The fable references a mythic people named the *oliamondi* whose origins are so “ancient” that they are unknown.<sup>82</sup> Tasked with curing others of “language paralysis” and “bad sight,” the *oliamondi* carry magical potions.<sup>83</sup> Perpetually caught in a dark tunnel that connects two unnamed countries, the *oliamondi* scurry back and forth in an “infernal hell” of frenetic movement that causes “a strange sickness:” *nostalgia*, or the *pain of return*.<sup>84</sup> Although the *oliamondi* are endowed with healing qualities, the diseases manifest themselves as memory loss and a mental disorientation that causes everything – space, language, food – to feel as if it has been doubled.<sup>85</sup> Ultimately, the *oliamondi*’s frenetic migration condemns them to permanent memory loss, which in turn defamiliarizes both countries of origin and destination. Ultimately, tasked with taking care of strangers, the *oliamondi* forget their own needs, the richest among them assimilating so well that all memories of their country of origin become obliterated. At this point in the story, Agata inserts her fifteen year-old self, “Aga,” into the fable. Aga, like the *oliamondi*, travels back and forth, carrying magic potions. However, once harassed by shadows along her journey, Aga stops, terrorized by their presence. She learns,

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<sup>81</sup> See Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975 [1973]).

<sup>82</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 192.

<sup>83</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 192-7.

<sup>84</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 193.

<sup>85</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 195.

however, that the shadows are actually her memories, externalized and embodied. Eventually, Aga refuses to recall them and one by one they disappear from the dark tunnel of her mind. After reading the story, Agata falls asleep in the abandoned home of her grandparents only to awaken the next day hallucinating the noise of three little girls, the memory of herself, running through the house. She avoids them by closing her eyes, as she did in childhood, believing that “things unseen could not exist.”<sup>86</sup>

Očkayová includes various elements of the fable in order to demonstrate:

gli spazi interiori della coscienza, dove puntano il dito sulle nostre potenzialità  
[...] E ci insegna anche [...] il cammino verso la nostra propria méta: con le sue  
infinite metamorfosi, con le sue alchimie ordinario e straordinario, la fiaba ci  
stimola ad avere uno sguardo inedito sulla realtà, più acuto, più penetrante.<sup>87</sup>

(interior spaces of consciousness, where they point a finger at our potentiality [...]  
and it teaches us also the journey towards our own purpose: with its infinite  
metamorphoses, with its ploys of the ordinary and extraordinary, the fable  
encourages us to have a fresh look at reality that's more acute, more penetrating).

For Očkayová, then, the fable of the *oliamondi* becomes a mode of truth-searching meant to examine the larger struggle of coming to terms with hybrid identities and the burden of memory. Although Očkayová takes migration as the subject of the fable works against the naturalism found in Italophone writing from North Africa or the Middle East. The fable depicted in the letter to Agata's grandparents ultimately doubles her personal struggle to forge a new identity.

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<sup>86</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 203.

<sup>87</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 80.

Aga, as Agata's fictive alter ego, serves as a naïve focalizer that defamiliarizes Agata's struggle to learn the source of her existential sickness while also bringing it into question. The strange fable, structured as a brief story that explains Agata's repression of her migratory past, illuminates for the reader the possible source of Agata's sickness and foreshadows the importance of Agata's miscarriage at the border between Italy and Slovakia. The fable suggests Agata as Aga became "ill," fracturing her identity, in the first place because she did not reconcile her memories of Bratislava earlier with her new, Italian reality. Aga's fragmentary vision of migration and the alienation and disorientation that she experiences over the course of her journey motivate the reader to fill the gaps in Agata's vision of herself and the past by locating a possible explanation for what appears inexplicable to her adult self. To do so, the reader must reexamine not only the common experience of migration and its subsequent estrangement, but also the very logic of the perceivable effects of migration that has affected humans across millennia.

Immediately after the *oliamondi* scene, in a second example of ghostly embodiment, Agata miscarries a fetus at the precise moment she crosses the Slovakian border back into Italy. Reminded of the terror that her family experienced twenty-five years earlier at the Italian border, afraid they would be turned away, Agata feels her legs tremble "come venticinque anni prima e lungo le (sue) cosce, strette in un paio di jeans, si riversò un liquido caldo e appiccicoso" (like twenty-five years earlier and along her thighs, tight in a pair of jeans, a warm and sticky liquid poured out).<sup>88</sup> Agata passes out and when she awakens, doctors inform her she has suffered a miscarriage. Yet Agata does not initially accept the doctor's diagnosis, as she does not recall having had sexual relations with anyone. Wild with disbelief, she counts backwards and recalls

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<sup>88</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 221.

the evening she accidentally over-medicated herself with sleeping pills. It was Angelo, her estranged husband, who found her in her apartment. She assumes that he took her by force, perhaps hoping for a last chance at reconciliation. However, the fetus's origins remain notably ambiguous. Its conception is neither shrouded in fantasy nor delusion, as with Agata's prior anxieties, but is a mystery with no solution. Thus, Očkayová opens the miscarriage to interpretation by relieving it of the necessity for a concrete explanation. Instead, Očkayová highlights Agata's inability to believe in the miscarriage and positions this sense of denial in terms of Agata's larger refusal to accept her own otherness. When Agata tells the doctor that she had no idea that she was five months pregnant, the doctor suggests that perhaps she did not want to know and that, instead, she wanted to die. The narrative thus implies that repressing any aspect of one's identity is akin to death.<sup>89</sup>

Where language fails Očkayová's protagonist, the body ruptures through memory and imagination, rooting the subject in trauma. As an ambiguous and almost magical figure, the miscarried fetus becomes the embodiment, or anxiety made flesh, of the exile's inner border neurosis and is experienced as an internalized estrangement. According to Cathy Caruth, when we return to the memory of trauma, the traumatic memory itself withdraws and "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it."<sup>90</sup> Thus, for Caruth, what is fundamentally peculiar about trauma is its post-temporal structure.<sup>91</sup> "[T]he fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting

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<sup>89</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 225.

<sup>90</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 4.

<sup>91</sup> Already this structure is evident in Freud's account of unexpected accidents, such as those of a train collision, whose victims are said to register the event only as a "series of grave physical and motor symptoms" a considerable time after the event," quoted in Caruth, *Unclaimed Experiences*, 16.

of a reality that can hence never be fully known,” notes Caruth, “but in an inherent latency within the experience itself” that becomes fully evident only in connection with a different place and time in the future.<sup>92</sup> Yet, the symptomatic reappearance of the past, as evident in Očkayová’s text, is made possible through a passage of time that creates a wedge between past and present. In this way, latency acts as a defensive shield that protects the subject from the trauma. However, as Caruth argues, “[t]rauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival.”<sup>93</sup> This is because the subject survives trauma not through his or her own fortitude, but through an uncanny aftereffect of the original traumatic event. Trigg, drawing on Caruth’s work, suggests this is because in experiential terms, the event cannot be said to have truly occurred.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the deferral of trauma’s violence, suggests Trigg, establishes a radical split in time and creates a present that is continuously haunted by the past.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, for exiles, as Russian writer Alexander Herzen poignantly notes, historical time often stops at the precise moment individuals leave their homeland; that moment remains forever as a kind of privileged point of departure.<sup>96</sup>

The object of memory remains in an uneasy position in the present as it has yet to be registered by consciousness. As a result of the trauma the self sustains during formation, the traumatic event produces a crisis through the subject’s survival. For Caruth, the result of this

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<sup>92</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experiences*, 17.

<sup>93</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experiences*, 58.

<sup>94</sup> Trigg, *Memory of Place*, 83.

<sup>95</sup> Trigg, *Memory of Place*, 101.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Svetlana Boym, “Estrangement as a Lifestyle,” 525. See original in *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Mysl). Freud echoes a similar sentiment in *The Uncanny*, 112.

crisis is an “impossible history,” whereby the traumatized subjects “become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.”<sup>97</sup> In this process, the traumatic event becomes an unnamable thing that can only be experienced belatedly, rather than assimilated fully at the moment of its inception.

Unlike other transnational women writers from Central Eastern Europe – like Nobel Laureate Herta Müller, Italo-Romanian Ingrid Beatrice Coman, or Franco-Albanian Ornella Vorpsi – Očkayová does not explicitly place the processes of history at the center of her plot. Indeed, she largely withholds the characteristics that would enable her reader to place her novel in any specific era with the exception of a single reference to the tumultuous *Tangentopoli* years that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Očkayová places a greater emphasis on the estranging aesthetics at play in her novel and their effects on the protagonist’s internal self-formation than on the external forces that shape human identity.<sup>98</sup> By locating Agata’s experiences of the world around her in the body, and not in the external forces that shape the self, Očkayová highlights the importance of the body’s role in the formation of identity as it provides a filtered history of historical and social experience.

Očkayová’s inscription of trauma onto Agata’s body offers an alternative, private history of migration that exists outside both official Italian and Slovakian history. When Agata crosses the border into Italy on her final return, the trembling of her legs and cascading blood signal a return to the original traumatic experience of migrating to Italy. Očkayová represents the

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<sup>97</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experiences*, 5.

<sup>98</sup> However, neither is Očkayová’s restraint evidence of an apolitical view of estrangement. Although Očkayová does not conform to a Marxist commodification of the body, as Coman does in *Per chi crescono le rose*. Očkayová’s doubling techniques, reflected in the body’s experience of personal history, reveals the revolutionary potential of estrangement and alienation. Following Svetlana Boym, estrangement can lead to a personal revolution in the light of the effects of politics on the body.

unnameable *malattia* as a mysterious fetus that haunts Agata's consciousness. It simultaneously renders the trauma of leaving one's homeland accessible to rational reflection, and through its uncanniness, opposed to that act of reflection. If trauma represents a wound of experience that prohibits the work of restoration, as for Caruth, then only in its symptomatic appearance can the memory of trauma return to consciousness. As the belated traumatic embodiment of migration, the fetus of Očkayová's text serves as an uncanny metaphor for the "truth" about Agata's otherness that will not remain hidden. Indeed, the miscarriage reconfigures the traumatic point of departure from the homeland and creates a *negative double* of the experience of migration itself. Yet, even if things are hidden in the world, as Husserl reminds us, they nevertheless remain ever present, spatially and temporally; upon returning, however, that which is hidden undergoes a modification, the original a space of distortion.<sup>99</sup> The miscarriage also marks a metaphorical death of the homeland in which the homeland is not actually eradicated from memory, but instead, represents a morbid attachment to anxieties surrounding a lack of rootedness within the self.

Through both examples of ghostly embodiment – Agata's father and the fetus – Očkayová's process of estrangement directly recalls Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny, which rests upon an inherent ambivalence. For Freud, the association between "Heimlich" and "unheimlich" results from a movement between the two, reminding us that the word "Heimlich" is not ambiguous but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but contrasting – the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed

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<sup>99</sup> Trigg, *Memory of Place*, 32. Edmund Husserl has spoken of the truth of things being "hidden." See Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) 103-118.

and kept hidden.”<sup>100</sup> For Očkayová, then, the mother’s body becomes what Madelon Sprengnether calls the “prototypical site of uncanniness which represents both home and not home, presence and absence, the promise of plenitude and the certainty of loss.”<sup>101</sup> This shift from Heimlich to the unheimlich reflects an internal movement of consciousness that enables Agata to become aware of her body’s position as an object independent of history or experience.<sup>102</sup> If the body serves as a container of automated experience, as Trigg suggests, then the relationship we have with our bodies can become one of radical estrangement.<sup>103</sup> In one gesture, Očkayová connects notions of estrangement, the maternal body, and death in one scene and inverts them into new, life-bearing terms that help the protagonist-narrator to transform her sight, thus propelling her towards an eventual transnational becoming. The fetus becomes a poetic border between an external outside and abject inside that articulates Agata’s former repression. For Očkayová, memory literally materializes itself in the body. Only when traumatic memory becomes expelled from the body does Agata renounce her former apprehensions towards a perceived division in her identity. The miscarriage, an act of violent psychic expulsion, ultimately enables a new birth – a transformation of identity – in an ironic reversal of death by revealing that which is most essential to the protagonist’s self-formation: the gift of new sight.

### **Towards a Transnational Becoming**

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<sup>100</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132.

<sup>101</sup> Madelon Sprengnether. *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 232.

<sup>102</sup> Trigg, *Memory of Place*, 35. Similarly, Freud observes that a neurotic fixation on a “particular phase in the past” induces repetition in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 315-316.

<sup>103</sup> For Trigg, “automation” refers to instances of recall, in which the body’s recollection of experience manifests itself to the subject as a “thing” in the world, rather than “an interwoven aspect of that subject’s history” (*Memory of Place*, 33).



Očkayová's inscription of Agata's migration-related trauma onto her body offers a model of transnational becoming in which the body not only holds a record of its veiled history, but also reveals new ways of overcoming the potentially destructive and obliterating forces of the alienation felt by those who cross borders permanently. If the border between countries may be imagined as a transition not only between nations, but also, as Azade Seyhan suggests, between "different ways of remembering," then borders and borderlands are more than just a line on a map.<sup>104</sup> Taken in this light, the border between Eastern and Western Europe signifies a "shift in historical conditions and perceptions," creating a metaphor for the tension between cultures.<sup>105</sup> For Očkayová, the body of deep memory overcomes trauma, creating a "new flesh" that essentially doubles the self and creating a new, transnational becoming that layers the past and present in a more harmonious equilibrium. As a result, for Očkayová, the exile becomes transnational only through a violent melting away of anxieties.

With *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, Očkayová essentially inverts the normative tale of migration. Returning to one's origins, for Očkayová, is neither life-affirming nor estranging, as in the case of many other Italoophone and exile writers. Instead, in returning Agata to Bratislava, Očkayová suggests that trauma may be not only interrupted, but confronted. To do so, Očkayová frames the return home in terms of a deathly doubling of experience. While initially Agata does not find the return home particularly estranging, having returned many times already, this final return home inspires a familiar sensation of "lightness," or calm.<sup>106</sup> The estranging return home found in Ornella Vorpsi, Herta Müller or other well-known Central-Eastern

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<sup>104</sup> Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 19.

<sup>105</sup> Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 161.

European transnational women writers is almost entirely absent in Očkayová's text. Očkayová reminds the reader that this is not, in fact, Agata's first return home, but merely her first return home after her separation from her husband. Očkayová focuses, instead, on Agata's intimate relationships with others and with herself by concentrating on the deaths of her parents and grandparents and the "death of a house and the death of a courtyard."<sup>107</sup>

Upon Agata's final return to Bratislava, Očkayová reveals Agata's changing relationship to her own otherness by introducing the figure of an old Slovakian woman. Agata recognizes her own "tiredness" in the face of the elderly woman who, in contrast, never left Bratislava.<sup>108</sup> Očkayová extends her mirroring technique used earlier to define Agata's relationship to others, all male, and withholds internalized contemplations of others. In contrast, in the old woman's face, Agata does not recognize her Slovakian connection to the woman, but a similar "tiredness of memories" that weighs people down, obliterating the potential to see the present in new terms.<sup>109</sup> As Agata visits the places and people of her childhood, she realizes that it is the stories that we tell ourselves and not what we think we remember that has the power to transform our realities. Thus, Očkayová charges memory, and not physical space, with the true ability to alter perception; memory lives and evolves within the body. Indeed, as Očkayová suggests in an interview, once we cross borders permanently,

il nostro rapporto con il paese d'origine diventa [...] un rapporto temporale, molto più che spaziale, diventa un rapporto tra il presente e il passato, ha a che fare più con la distanza nel tempo [...] Abbiamo nostalgia di luoghi, di persone care, [...]

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<sup>107</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 189.

<sup>108</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 192.

<sup>109</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 169.

ma forse più di tutto di noi stessi – di ciò che eravamo in quei luoghi, accanto a quelle persone, a quel tempo.<sup>110</sup>

(our relationship with the country of origin becomes [...] a temporal relationship, much more than spatial, [it] becomes a relationship between the present and past, [which] has to do with distance in time [...] We have a nostalgia for place, beloved people, [...] but perhaps more than anything for ourselves – for what we were in those places, next to those people, at that time.)

Once back in Bratislava, Agata visits her remaining family member, her cousin Peter. He shares several photographs with her, yet three catch her attention. In the first, Agata is three years old, her arms raised above her head like the petals of a sunflower whose appendages move in correlation with the wandering sun. In the second picture, Agata is eight years old, reciting a poem. In the final picture, at age thirteen, Agata stands on the steps of her school. When she goes to bed that evening, while facing herself in the mirror, she recalls the pictures and finds the “riflesso del [suo] volto adulto [come] una maschera, rimpicciolita e deformata dalla superficie irregolare dello specchietto, una maschera dal materiale mediocre che si accartoccia”<sup>111</sup> (reflection of her adult face [like] a mask, shrunken and deformed by the irregular surface of the hand mirror, a mask made of inferior material that curls up). In doing so, she recalls the words of her alter ego Elia, who once accused her of being unable to face herself in the mirror. As Agata’s anxieties about her own otherness dissipate, so too do the masks she has worn to survive living beyond Slovakia. While asleep that evening, Agata hallucinates that her three selves – the toddler, the little girl, and the adolescent – have come to save her from gigantic noses that have

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<sup>110</sup> Bregola, *Da qui verso casa*, 84.

<sup>111</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 175.

come to snort Agata into a dark oblivion.<sup>112</sup> Ultimately, the contemplation of the three pictures, and their ensuing hallucinations, signal a return to the time before Agata's migration when, at the age of fifteen, her formation into a woman was abruptly interrupted by the trauma of migration, thereby stunting her personal development. The three, younger "Agatas" succeed in saving Agata from the "vortex" of voracious sniffing after her adolescent self carries the adult Agata on her back through what feels like a labyrinth of glass stairs in a glass castle.<sup>113</sup> In order to illustrate the process of unmasking oneself, Očkayová fractures Agata's identity into several imagined selves that evacuate the fragile adult from the glass house that her identity has become. The culmination of this state of existential crisis triggers a "relaxing" of Freudian repression. When this occurs, the body "takes over from language," causing the individual to see visions or hallucinations that may lead to an epiphany.<sup>114</sup> Unlike Freud, Kristeva believes, as we have seen, that leaving strange experiences unexplored ignores possibilities for psychic growth, "as well as to run the risk of being permanently estranged from language."<sup>115</sup>

Only once one allows for the passage of the body (visions, archaic memories, jouissance) into language, suggests Kristeva, can the human condition of uprootedness be eased. Similarly, only upon facing her border neurosis does Agata's anxious questioning lead to an epiphany regarding borders and otherness:

Senza più paura di guardare, e senza più paura di essere guardata. Senza più cercare solo gli specchi [...], forse finalmente mi riuscirà di vedere, nelle pupille

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<sup>112</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 179.

<sup>113</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 181.

<sup>114</sup> Smith, *Estrangement in Kristeva*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers*, 298.

dell'altro, altro. Mi sentirò ancora viandante, [...] ma non terrò più gli occhi abbassati [...]. Li spalancherò e terrò le palpebre ben sollevate e sarà come abbattere un mio personale Muro di Berlino, le ciglia alzate come i picconi che fecero a pezzi quella muraglia mostruosa che dimezzava una città, e un paese, e un continente.<sup>116</sup>

(Without any more fear of looking, and without the fear of being looked at. Without looking for [...] mirrors anymore, perhaps finally I will be able to see, in the pupils of the other, other. I will still feel like a wanderer, [...] but I will no longer keep my eyes lowered always [...]. I will keep [my eyes] open and keep my eyelids raised. It will be like tearing down my own personal Berlin Wall, my eyelashes raised like picks that destroy that monstrous wall that divided a city, and a country, and a continent.)

It is only when Agata learns to accept the disquieting nature of her own otherness, as encapsulated in the charged metaphor of her own self-estrangement, that she finally learns how to blend her Slovakian and Italian selves into a transnational identity thereby overcoming her own “Berlin Wall.” In order to overcome this haunting and move towards a transnational becoming, suggests Očkayová, the stranger must first perform a crucial unmasking. Without a home, Agata multiplies several “false selves” and “masks” over time in order to protect herself from the radical fracture her identity sustains when she initially crosses into Italy.<sup>117</sup> Only once Agata accepts her own difference, acknowledging her connection to the “infinite of being,” does she gain the self-knowledge necessary to set her free from the trauma lodged in her body’s

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<sup>116</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 228.

<sup>117</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers*, 8.

deep memory. In effect, crossing the border between the two countries becomes a productive site of experience that overlaps various cultural identities and serves as a baptismal rite of passage towards a transnational becoming.

Očkayová reveals that in crossing a border, strangers hold the potential to change their discomforts into a base for what Kristeva calls “resistance” and create a “citadel of life” that affirms life through identification.<sup>118</sup> Očkayová imagines Agata’s acknowledgement in the form of a passage from a reliance on body memory to the articulation of pain in language, ultimately signalling Agata’s return to language. Thus, her internal monologue reveals a new perception of belonging that is ironically rooted in her transience as a woman who no longer lives divided by borders, but beyond them as a transnational. Finally comfortable with her hybridity, having acknowledged that her border anxiety was merely a “shadowy projection of [her] imagination,” Agata disappears into the beyond of the novel, content with her new “revelation” as she looks at the Italian border from a rental car still in Bratislava ready to cross back into Italy.<sup>119</sup>

Ultimately, the creation of an *other* evolves as a sort of negative-double, a notion that is closely linked to the sentiments of alienation that affect individuals who return to their native countries after living abroad. For Očkayová, migration estranges the subject from material reality and produces a split in space and time. Yet moving beyond borders and left without specific ways of seeing the world, the individual becomes better positioned to envision new possibilities for reality. The individual becomes liberated from stifling ways of seeing reality and can potentially learn to see community, nation, and self anew.

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<sup>118</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers*, 8.

<sup>119</sup> Očkayová, *L'essenziale*, 232-233.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Multidirectional Visions in Ingrid Beatrice Coman's *Per chi crescono le rose*

*To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone—to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink—greetings!*

— George Orwell, 1984 (quoted in the preface of *Per chi crescono le rose*)

In Ingrid Beatrice Coman's novel *Per chi crescono le rose* (2010), an all-seeing entity reminiscent of the Foucauldian figure of the panopticon affects the lives of each of the characters.<sup>1</sup> When the main protagonist—Magda Corbin, a seventeen-year-old Moldavian high school student—encounters Catalin Muresan, a Romanian dissident turned high school teacher, they both embark on a journey toward deformation and alienation. For Coman, living under a totalitarian regime induces an estranging sense of “irreality” that calls the legitimacy of collective memory into question.<sup>2</sup> While she does not directly compare the two forms of totalitarianism, she nonetheless investigates the body's private history of it so that her Italian reader may draw similarities between Romania and Italy. In doing so, Coman estranges the

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<sup>1</sup>I wish to thank Professor Lucia Re, whose graduate seminar at UCLA, *Gli anni '30: Confine, confino, confinamento, sconfinamenti, trauma e memoria nella letteratura degli e sugli anni '30*, prompted initial reflections on this text by Coman and stimulated my interest in transnational and border studies. I presented an earlier version of this chapter at the 2013 California Interdisciplinary Consortium of Italian Studies (CICIS); Ingrid Beatrice Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose* (Milan: Edizioni Uroboros, 2010). All translations of *Per chi crescono le rose* are my own. In his classic *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), French philosopher Michel Foucault observes that the panopticon ultimately serves as a mechanism that “automizes and disindividualizes power” to strengthen “social forces,” in order to multiply societal production, education, and morality (202-203).

<sup>2</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 54.

project of national belonging through a multidirectional vision of trauma that connects both Italy and Romania and dispels it across the borders of two different nations.

This chapter examines how *Per chi crescono le rose* uses the body as a poetic device to enter into a revisionary literary space inscribed with traumatic memories of Communist Romania. I argue that this inscription of Romania's cultural memory, as experienced by the body, destabilizes the notion of a hegemonic national literature and cohesive *italianità*. As a non-native Italian, Coman introduces new images into the Italian idiom that signify the emergence of an imagined transnational community. She uses the history and memories of Communist Romania to help Italian readers enter a multidirectional discussion of the body's experience of the oppressive forces of totalitarianism.<sup>3</sup> The estranging, mirroring effect she creates in the novel between the two cultures raises questions about how the body, memory, and history connect different countries across borders and form part of a larger, transnational imaginary. First, I will provide a historical overview of contemporary Romanians and Romanian identity in Italy. Then, I will examine Coman's aesthetics of estrangement and memory, which permit her Italian audience to gradually recognize its own fascist past in the narration of the Romanian recent past, as in a kind of riddle.

Coman's own history informs the project she undertakes in *Per chi crescono le rose*. Like millions of other Romanian citizens, Coman spent entire winter nights in ration lines after the fall of Soviet communism in 1989 and lived without regular heat, food, or privacy—a life similar in

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<sup>3</sup> In her preface to *Per chi crescono le rose*, Ingrid Beatrice Coman suggests Italians are connected to Romanians through the memories of two oppressive forms of totalitarianism: Italian Fascism and Communist Romania. This relationship comes to light through the shared experience of trauma “suffered by the body” (3-4).



its quotidian details to the one *Per chi crescono le rose*'s protagonist Magda leads.<sup>4</sup> In this, she contrasts with Italo-Slovakian Jarmila Očkayová, who left Slovakia decades before the fall of Soviet communism, remaining in Romania until 1994, and thus witnessing the chaotic fallout of Soviet communism in Bucharest.

With her head “filled with dreams,” Coman left the Romanian capital at the age of twenty-four to study Italian literature and creative writing in Milan, and later scriptwriting in Turin. She had extensively read Italian literature and poetry in translation, in particular that of Alessandro Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi, before emigrating.<sup>5</sup> Coman writes of this period:

Trovai un'Italia che niente c'entrava con la letteratura dell'ottocento, ma che comunque, lentamente, mi sarebbe entrata nel cuore. La mia vita in Romania era una normale vita da studentessa...Ma non mi bastava. Cercavo qualcosa di diverso.<sup>6</sup>

(I found an Italy that had nothing to do with the literature of the eighteenth century, but that anyhow, slowly, would enter into my heart. My life in Romania was [that of] a normal student.... But [what I found in Romania] was not enough for me. I was searching for something different.)

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<sup>4</sup> Coman, personal interview, 2 June 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Coman, personal interview, 2 June 2015. Coman cites among her influences Luigi Pirandello, Cesare Pavese, Italo Calvino, Primo Levi, Italo Svevo, and Giovanni Verga. From Romanian literature, she cites Mihai Eminescu, George Bacovia, Lucian Blaga, Nichita Stănescu, Camil Petrescu, and Marin Preda. In our conversations, her citation of all male authors is attributed to the fact that predominately canonized, consequently male, Italian authors were translated into Romanian when she was young. Similarly, given the patriarchy-dominated censors under the regime, fewer female Romanian authors succeeded in publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Coman, personal interview, 2 June 2015.

Yet being an “excommunitaria” during the years in which the Italian Left collapsed proved challenging against the specter of Marxism’s failed promise in Italy.<sup>7</sup> Coman established a productive career as a poet and novelist in Italy, but she would uproot herself again in 2008 to move to Kappara in Malta, attracted by its cosmopolitanism and landscape. She writes that Malta “chose her,” and she now divides her time between Romania, Italy, and Malta.<sup>8</sup> Quoting Edward Said, Coman says that her self-proclaimed state of nomadism has helped her to see the “entire world as a foreign land,” thereby renewing her perspective on reality.<sup>9</sup> She writes in both Romanian and Italian and has recently begun writing in English in order to bring her work to English-speaking audiences. The Italian idiom, however, has become Coman’s “second skin,” and she has chosen to raise her children speaking Italian, Maltese, and Romanian.

### **Identity between Romania and Italy**

Exclusion mediates Coman’s experience of Europe. While critics have analyzed writers from the Middle East or North Africa who write in Italian, they have largely overlooked Romanians among Italoophone writers.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Italo-Romanian writers remain almost

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the Italian PCI and its background, see Stephen Gundle and Simon Parker, eds. *The New Italian Republic: from the fall of the Berlin Wall to Berlusconi* (London: Routledge, 1996); John Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980–2001* (London: Penguin, 2001); John Agnew, “Remaking Italy? Place Configurations and Italian Electoral Politics under the ‘Second Republic,’” *Modern Italy* Vol. 12, No. 1, February 2007, 17–38, among many others; on the influence of the Left’s implosion on culture, see Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000) and David Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Coman, personal interview, June 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Reflections on Exile: and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 148.

<sup>10</sup> The pioneering books by Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in A Destination Culture*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) and *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration*

completely unknown despite the extensive presence of Romanians in Italy.<sup>11</sup> While the number of Romanians entering Italy during the same period as Coman was limited,<sup>12</sup> the global effect of 9/11, and then the subsequent admission of Romania into the European Union in 2007, contributed to the increase of Eastern European, particularly Romanian, immigrants to Italy.<sup>13</sup> Today, Romanians consistently comprise the largest population of migrants in Italy.<sup>14</sup> However,

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*Literature in Italy*, (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999) briefly mention the portrayal of Romanian immigrants in Italian cinema as evidenced in the female protagonist of Corso Salani's *Occidente* (2000), Malvina (*Migration* 95). Parati's *Migration Italy* focuses only on writers of African and Middle Eastern descent. Similarly, Armando Gnisci predominately limits his critical scope to a discussion of authors from North African and Middle Eastern origins. See Gnisci's *La letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Rome: Lilith, 1998) and *Diaspore europee e lettere migranti* (Rome: Interculturali, 2002). The critic Alessandro Pannuti identifies Ingrid Beatrice Coman as a migrant writer in Italy who has succeeded in publishing work in Italian in *Cenni sulla letterarietà e su alcune questioni linguistiche relative alla letteratura migrante italiana*. *Kúma* 12, October (2006). <http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/kuma/interculturali/kuma12pannuti.html>. The Brazilian author Julio Monteiro Martins, founder and editor-in-chief of *Sagarana*, cited Mihai Buctovan, a fellow editor and activist, as an example of a Romanian writer producing literature in Italian in *Sagarana*'s 8<sup>th</sup> Seminar that took place on July 8<sup>th</sup> of 2008. See also "Trittico bizantino del terzo millennio." *Bucarest-Roma: Capire la Romania e i romeni in Italia* (Rome: Asino, 2011) 22-42. Romanians, however, are more widely examined in contemporary Italian cinema. The anthologies edited and published annually by Daniela Finocchi since 2006, *Lingua madre, racconti di donne straniere in Italia*, include stories by Italo-Romanian writers, for example Ana Maria Stratulat's "La mia storia."

<sup>11</sup> Albanians have been the most successful population from Eastern Europe in publishing widely in the Italian literary market. For instance, in 1997 Italo-Albanian poet Gëzim Hajdari won the Eugenio Montale Prize, the highest literary prize available to native Italians in poetry. The works of Albanian Ornella Vorpsi, although better known outside of Italy, have also received extensive distribution in Italy, as well as Anilda Ibrahim, extensively published by Einaudi, and the Italo-Albanian Carbine Abate, extensively published by Mondadori.

<sup>12</sup> Cingolani, *Romeni d'Italia*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Cornel Ban, "Economic Transnationalism and its Ambiguities: The Case of Romanian Migration to Italy," *International Migration*, 29 Sep 2009, accessed 1 July 2015. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00556.x

<sup>14</sup> *Istat* January 1, 2011 *Italy's Resident Foreign Population*; *Istat* January 1, 2014 *Linguistic diversity among citizens in Italy*.

acceptance has not followed.<sup>15</sup> Instead, a violent spike in Italian anti-immigrant discrimination directed at Romanians has led to their criminalization and persecution.<sup>16</sup>

Italians' misunderstanding of Romania's difficult political past under the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (in power from 1965 to 1989) problematizes Romanian identity in Italy.<sup>17</sup> When Coman first left Romania, the regime's dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena had just been publically executed. While Ceaușescu was in power from 1965 to 1989, his secret police, the Securitate, were arguably the most brutal in the world.<sup>18</sup> After a one-hour military tribunal

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<sup>15</sup> See Pietro Cingolani's *Romeni d'Italia*; Miruna Cajvaneanu, "2007: L'immagine dei romeni nella stampa italiana tra stereotipo e verità"; Franco Pittau's *Gli immigrati romeni e la criminalità* and Marco De Giorgi's "La cooperazione Italia-Romania per il contrasto alle discriminazioni il Protocollo d'intesa Unar-Cncd," *Caritas Italiana*, 2008; Nadia L. Neagu and Antonio Ricci, "Due percezioni a confronto: gli immigranti dalla Romania visti con gli occhi dei romeni e degli italiani" (Rome: Caritas Italiana, 2008). See also Vittorio Nozza, *Caritas Italiana e Confederatia Caritas România: I romeni in Italia; tra rifiuto e accoglienza* (Roma: Sinno Editrice, 2010) 10.

<sup>16</sup> In 2007 alone, according to Cingolani in *Romeni d'Italia*, 792 hate crimes were reported against Romanians living in Italy (82). It is unknown how many more crimes went unreported. See also "Boom di furti e rapine," *Il Giornale*, 6/11/2007, 1: "Doina già espulsa, ma era rimasta. Bufera sull'immigrazione romena." *Il Giornale*, 1/05/2007; "Florin, Un romeno di meno," *Il Manifesto*, (4/07/2007) 1. There is also the infamous incident in 2011 of Maricica Hăhăianu, a 32-year-old Romanian nurse in Rome, who received a fatal blow to the head at the Rome train station from a 20-year-old Italian male who had run into her. Before he was sentenced, several signs were attached to his home and the train station that read "one less Romanian;" In his 2015 novel *Un uomo bruciato vivo: storia di Ion Cazacu* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2015), adapted from Nobel Laureate Dario Fo's 2012 play *Il teatro degli orrori* and written with Florina Cazacu, Fo traces the story of a Romanian tile worker who was burned alive after asking for a raise. In the novel, he also discusses Romanian identity.

<sup>17</sup> The critics Andrea Bajani and Mimmo Perrotta, in their introduction to *Bucarest-Roma: Capire la Romania e i romeni in Italia* (Rome: Asino, 2011), examine the confusion about Romanian identity in Italy. Italians's understanding of Romanian identity is limited to its association with the regime. See, for instance, the RAI produced special, "Nicolae Ceaușescu - La storia siamo noi serale," *RAI*. RAI, 30 December 2011. Web accessed 15 July 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Stan Lavinia, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London: Routledge, 2009) and Cosmina Tanasoiu, "The Tismaneanu Report: Romania Revisits its Past," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 54, Issue 4, (2007) 60-69. Romania became a nation-state only in 1878 with the Treaty of Berlin. Historically divided into three regions – Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia – Romania's identity remains an ongoing process of unification.

that found husband and wife guilty of genocide and economic sabotage, Romanians and citizens from all over the world watched as the country disposed of the Ceaușescu, their bodies riddled with bullets lying in pools of blood.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, this bloody image of Romanian collective memory eclipses other aspects of their identity. In addition, Italians' confusion of Romanians' cultural identity with the “rom” and their association with the alleged historical barbarism of Eastern Europe and sex trafficking further render Romanian identity ambiguous to Italians.<sup>20</sup>

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For a meticulous study of the fragile nature of Romanian identity, see Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvania Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Although prior to 1918 Romania flourished economically and culturally under the monarchy, the rise of the nationalist Iron Guard, overseen by King Carol I, ushered a new age of despotism and totalitarianism that decimated the Romanian economy during the Second World War. With the rise of Soviet occupation in Romania after 1947, the country experienced a rapid loss of resources to the Soviets that would further weaken Romanian unity and identity under the First Secretary of the Romanian Worker's Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. In contrast to the rest of the former Soviet satellite countries, Romania distanced itself from the Soviets with the condemnation of the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of former Czechoslovakia. Ceaușescu's rise to power in the same year, however, created the conditions for the destruction of the Romanian economy that occurred at the cost of both Romanian life and freedom.

<sup>19</sup> After the assassination of the Ceaușescu, Romania outlawed death by execution. See Alina Duduciuc and Ilarion Țiu, "Evoluția constituțională a României", *Sfera Politicii*, 149 and Roger Hood, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 28.

<sup>20</sup> On Italians' identification of Romanians with the *rom*, see “La gente vuole legge e ordine, e vota i “sindaci-sceriffo,” *Il Giornale*, 1 May (2007) 12. For further evidence of the increased criminalization after Romania was annexed to the EU, see “Lo spettro dei «mostri» venuti dall' Europa,” *Corriere della Sera*, 1 November (2007)1: “Lo spauracchio del romeno è destinato a diventare il nuovo incubo degli italiani? Il suo fantasma scaccerà nell' immaginario nazionale quello del marocchino e dell' «albanese stupratore»? Un mostro tanto più minaccioso in quanto cittadino neppure più extracomunitario, ma europeo a tutti gli effetti [...] “i cittadini romeni, in particolare i circa 800mila zingari con passaporto di quel Paese che aspettavano solo il suo ingresso nella Ue per trasferirsi da noi e stanno già arrivando in massa.” See also Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti and Ioanna Laliotou, eds. *Women Migrants from East to West: Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford: Brghahn, 2007); Anca Parvulescu, *The Traffic in Women's Work: East European Migration and the Making of Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Scholars like anthropologist Piero Cingolani suggest that identification lies at the root of Italian bigotry toward Romanians.<sup>21</sup> In his *Romeni d'Italia*, Cingolani argues that Romanians' experience of having left an agricultural society behind for Italy's industrialized economy strongly resembles the Italian experience of emigration. Italy, once a nation from which Italians emigrated, only became a receiving country to which people emigrate after the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> Other critics, both Romanian and Italian, have drawn similar conclusions about the relationship between Romania and Italy. The Romanian-Swiss author Catalin Dorian Florescu, for example, points out the similarities between Italians' and Romanians' ambiguous ethnicities:

La Romania è un'altra Italia. Che l'Italia vi si riconosce come in uno specchio e— per non odiarsi [...] per non svegliarsi dal sogno—proietta questa parte in altri, la esorcizza nei romeni. Un italiano—men che meno un politico italiano—che dicesse “Siamo così anche noi.” Quello che attribuiamo ad altri, lo facciamo anche noi e già da molto tempo,” un italiano del genere sarebbe poco amato [...] [A]nche l'Italia è stato ed è ancora un paese d'emigrazione, anche gli italiani all'estero soffrivano per la sua fama. Con i romeni ora si ripete semplicemente la storia.<sup>23</sup>

(Romania is another Italy. That Italy recognizes itself as if in a mirror and—to not

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<sup>21</sup> Gian Antonio Stella makes a similar claim in the case of Albanians in Italy. See *L'orda: quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Cingolani, *Romeni d'Italia*, 54. For a background on the Italian diaspora and the hybrid roots of Italian identity, see Donna Gabbaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). For a discussion of Italy's transformation into a destination country, see Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Catalin Dorian Florescu, “Le prima pietra” *Bucarest-Roma: Capire la Romania e i romeni in Italia*. (Rome: Asino, 2011) 51-52.

hate itself [...] to not wake up from the dream—projects this part onto others, dispels it onto Romanians. An Italian—much less an Italian politician—who says “We are also the same. That which we attribute to others, we do it too and already for a long time,” an Italian of this kind would be little appreciated [...] [A]lso Italy was and still is a country of emigration. Italians abroad also suffered because of its reputation. With Romanians now, history is simply repeating itself.)

Under the influence of this mirroring effect, Italians project their anxiety about their ambiguous ethnicity onto Romanians. This anxiety revolves around economic status, as well as physical and visible differences. Predominately an agrarian society for centuries until shortly after the Second World War, Italy did not fully incorporate market capitalism until after the United States extended the Marshall Plan to the country, thereby aiding Italian post-war reconstruction.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the Italian journalist Andrea Bajani, invoking Pasolini’s notion of cultural genocide, positions Italians’ anxiety about the *other* in the context of Italians’ difficult relationship with their own agricultural past.<sup>25</sup> He implies that Italians’ recognition of others’ agricultural pasts invokes the specter of the “pre-modern,”<sup>26</sup> also associated with Fascism:

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<sup>24</sup> Rigas Raftopoulos, “Italian Economic Reconstruction and the Marshall Plan,” *PIFO Occasional Papers* No. 3 (2009).

<sup>25</sup> Bajani himself has written a novel about Romanian issues in Italian. See his *Se consideri le colpe* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007); Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999) 260-261.

<sup>26</sup> In a similar movement, Italians generally associate Romanians with the “agrarian/mystical” religious fascism of the Iron Guard, which was mixed with the “totalitarianism” of the Communist regime. For many Italians, this image of Romanians stuck in a pre-modern limbo reminds them of the same limbo from which Italians spent decades escaping. For a discussion of the Iron Guard’s “mystical” brand of Fascism, see Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson (eds.), *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and Raul Carstocea, “Breaking the Teeth of Time: Mythical Time and the ‘Terror of History’ in the Rhetoric of the Legionary Movement in Interwar

L'abiura del mondo contadino in Italia, l'abiura del comunismo in Romania, che a sua volta era cominciato con un'abiura del mondo che l'aveva preceduto [...] Il genocidio culturale italiano [...] è iniziato quando ci siamo vergognati di essere un popolo di contadini, e abbiamo accettato...di essere un popolo di cittadini e consumatori...[N]ella dimenticanza forzata,...c'è tutto lo smarrimento di questi tempi, in cui non ci si può permettere di mescolarsi con l'altro per paura di non saper più dire "io sono."<sup>27</sup>

(The rejection of the agricultural world in Italy, the rejection of communism in Romania, that in its time began with a rejection of the world that preceded it [...] [led to] the Italian cultural genocide [...] [that] began when we became ashamed of being an agricultural people, and we accepted [...] [being] a people of citizens and consumers [...] [In] forced forgetting, [...] there is all of the disorientation of these time in which we cannot permit ourselves to mix with the other for fear of no longer knowing who "I am.")

It seems, then, that Italians' anxious suppression of their own hybrid nature has led to a displacement of their history onto contemporary migrants. In order to maintain dichotomies such as "us" and "them," Italy sustains artificial constructions of *italianità*, revealing its constructed and contested nature.<sup>28</sup> Yet, as Julia Kristeva shrewdly observes, "strangely, the stranger inhabits

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Romania," *Journal of Modern European History* 13 (2015), 1. For more on the mystical/agrarian dialectic, see Mircea Eliade's *Treatise on the History of Religions* and influential *Myth of the Eternal Return*. Eliade was an open supporter of the Iron Guard since 1936; in fact, his support forced him to defect to the United States.

<sup>27</sup> Andrea Bajani, "Ad abiurare si perde solo il passato. La Romania di oggi, l'Italia degli anni cinquanta," *Bucarest-Roma: Capire la Romania e i romeni in Italia* (Rome: Asino, 2011) 21.

<sup>28</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, 22-29.



us: as the hidden face of our identity.” She concludes that “in recognizing them in us, we render ‘us’ problematic, perhaps impossible.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Italy, a nation of emigrants, unconsciously mirrors itself in the figure of immigrants, while ignoring or suppressing cultural memories that would reveal that some of them come from ex-colonies or have returned from other historical sites of migration like Latin America. However, mirrors have a deformative quality that alters whatever is reflected. Perhaps because Italians recognize themselves in Romanians’ struggle, Italians’ anxiety about their own struggle with their “ethnic” and economic status compels them to oppress Romanian migrants, as well as other immigrants, in an unconscious act of self-loathing.<sup>30</sup> This oppression encourages the marginalization of Romanian identity, while Italian medias blame the demise of the *primato* Italians had enjoyed during the economic boom on the immigrant *other*. Politicians subsequently react to it through racist anti-immigration laws and openly racist public discourse.

The Italian media perpetuates the image of Romanian immigrants as the menacing *other*.<sup>31</sup> They depict Romanians as criminal and dangerous, as well as the harbingers of the end of Italian culture, although the frequency of charges against Romanian immigrants has dropped since 2003.<sup>32</sup> In articles like the one published in the July 2002 issue of *La Repubblica*, titled

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<sup>29</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 7-9.

<sup>30</sup> Parati, in *Migration Italy*, mentions Cardinal Biffi’s expression that “immigration to Italy should be limited” (23). There are also the anti-immigration decrees of 1995 and 1997 proposed by the Lega Nord, which called for the deportation of many Romanians after the 1996 murder of a Roman woman by a *Rom*.

<sup>31</sup> Franco Pittau, “Gli immigrati romeni e la criminalità,” *Caritas Italiana* (Rome: Idos, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> See the introduction by Egidiu Condac and Livio Corazza to *Caritas Italiana e Confederatia Caritas România: I romeni in Italia; tra rifiuto e accoglienza* (Rome: Sinnos Editrice, 2010) 5-8. Romanians have not fully replaced Moroccans or Albanians as the inheritors of the media’s discrimination; instead, they have inherited the brunt of the media’s most pernicious headlines. For a discussion of the statistics on the xenophobic treatment of Romanians’ in the Italian print media, see the thorough article by Miruna

“Tre Italiani su quattro con l’incubo immigrati: ‘Colpa loro se aumenta la criminalità,’”<sup>33</sup> (“Three out of four Italians with immigration nightmare: Their fault if criminality increases”), a discrepancy persists between the impact that immigration actually has in Italy and native Italians’s perception of migration. Similarly, in an article titled “Morte di una nazione” (“Death of a Nation”), the editor of *Il Giornale* insists that “racial differences” persist between the Italian population and other immigrant populations: “le caratteristiche di un popolo, d’ogni popolo, si tramandano a livello genetico, non soltanto fisico, ma anche culturale” (“the characteristics of a people, of every people, are transmitted at the genetic level; not just physical, but cultural”).<sup>34</sup> Ironically, the Italian news media perpetuates outdated concepts of race that emphasize a false genetic correlation between biology and belonging.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the alarmist reports regarding Romanian migrants echo past visions of the “knife-wielding” Sicilian, which once attracted the attention of readers from northern Italian and American newspapers.<sup>36</sup> After centuries of colonization by foreign powers, Italians attempted to “recolor” themselves during fascism in an anxious quest to attain their objects of desire: whiteness and a first-world identity.<sup>37</sup> Italian cultural identity grew in response to the same racist

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Cajvaneanu, “2007: L’immagine dei romeni nella stampa italiana tra stereotipo e verità,” *Caritas Italiana* (Rome: Idos, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Giovanni Maria Bellu, “Tre Italiani su quattro con l’incubo immigrati: ‘Colpa loro se aumenta la criminalità,’” *la Repubblica*, 22 July (2002), 12.

<sup>34</sup> Cajvaneanu, “Morte di una nazione,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Cooper and Richard David, “The Biological Concept of Race and its Application to Public Health and Epidemiology,” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, Vol. 11, 1 (1986) 97-116.

<sup>36</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 1-4.

<sup>37</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, 33. For an examination of the weakness of the Italian national identity, see Remo Bodei’s *Il noi diviso: ethos e idee dell’Italia repubblicana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998) and Giulio Bollati, *L’italiano. Il carattere nazionale come teoria e come invenzione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983).

framework that defined *italianità* well into the 1970s. Italian identity was in fact racialized and ethnically defined well into the 1960s in most of the world, and Italians themselves were often subjected to discrimination.<sup>38</sup> As Lucia Re observes, Italians' ambiguous ethnic status has caused them a sense of anxiety rooted in Italy's "traditional inferiority complex vis-à-vis the world's more powerful nations," which, she argues, has contributed to the Italian tendency toward racism evident, for example, in reporting by some Italian news media.<sup>39</sup> Italy arguably continues to perpetuate racist models by acting as an agent of oppression. It seems, then, that Italians have all too easily suppressed their own memories and experiences of migration.

Images of Romanians' alleged barbarism and the specter of Soviet rule that still affects Romanian identity aside, Romanians and Italians share many cultural similarities. Romanians' quick assimilation to Italian culture is rooted in a historic, shared Latinicity and cultural values that are tied to family and religion.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the rest of Eastern Europe, Romanians share Italy's claim to *romanità*. Indeed, one of Romania's national symbols is the Column of Trajan in

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<sup>38</sup> See the essays in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Gugliemo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003). About racism against Italian emigrants after Italy transitioned into a "receiving nation," see Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) and Marco Jacquemet, "The Discourse on Migration and Racism in Contemporary Italy," in Salvatore Sechi, ed., *Deconstructing Italy: Italy in the Nineties* (Berkeley: International and Area Studies, 1995). On the "whiteness" of Italians, see Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> Lucia Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race: The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913," *California Italian Studies Journal*, 1:1 (2010) 1-58. See also Arjun Appadurai's *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) 43.

<sup>40</sup> Cingolani, *Romeni d'Italia*, chapters 1 and 2.

Rome, which for many Romanians signifies the fusion between the Roman Empire and the Dacians, and consequently, the beginning of Romanian identity.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast with Coman's own wishes to bridge Italian and Romanian memories of the communist regime and totalitarianism, the publisher's afterword undermines the objectives of the novel and perpetuates the racism of the criticism surrounding Italian migration literature. Coman, writing from within a context of racism, has managed to publish her work through the modest Italian publishing house Uroboros, which advertises itself as importing "alternative" voices into Italian culture.<sup>42</sup> Yet, due to the ambiguity of Romanian national identity, Uroboros's edition of *Per chi crescono le rose* includes an afterword by Italian journalist Luca Bistolfi, as a means to package Coman's Romanian identity and appeal to Italian audiences. The afterword, which outlines the history of Romania under Ceaușescu's regime, oscillates in tone between the pedantic and the sentimental, emphasizing Coman's difference from the Italian literary establishment by defining her as a "migrant writer"—rather than as simply a writer, as Coman identifies herself.<sup>43</sup> Bistolfi's preface, although seemingly complimentary to Coman's novel, emphasizes the difference between Italian and Romanian identity:

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<sup>41</sup> For an in-depth study of the Column of Traian's importance to both Romanian identity and as a site of political contestation, see Marinella Lorinczi, "La Colonna Traiana nel pensiero politico e storiografico romeno," *Diacronia*, Apr. 2009. Web. 18 July 2015. <http://www.diacronia.ro/%2Ffro%2Findexing%2Fdetails%2FA1026%2Fpdf>; see also Rando Devole and Franco Pittau, "I neocomunitari romeni e l'immaginario degli italiani: riflessioni sociologiche e statistiche," *Caritas Italiana e Confederatia Caritas Romania: I romeni in Italia tra rifiuto e accoglienza* (Rome: Sinnos, 2010) 49-60.

<sup>42</sup> Uroboros's mission statement on its website reads: "Siamo partiti e rimaniamo ben ancorati ad una convinzione di fondo: il libro come mezzo di superamento delle barriere, delle differenze, la parola stampata come spunto mai fuori moda di dialogo e miglioramento, la cultura come occasione di conoscenza reciproca e di se stessi."

<sup>43</sup> Coman, personal interview, July 2011.

Lo dico senza timore di apparire di parte: amo la Romania e il suo popolo, amo la sua storia gloriosa. Ed è per questo che [...] non ho esitato [a scrivere], provando al contempo orgoglio e un po' di timore.<sup>44</sup>

(I say this without fear of looking different: I love Romania and its people, I love its glorious history. And it is for this [reason] that [...] I do not hesitate [to write], showing at the same time pride and a little bit of fear.)

Bistolfi does not clarify the source of this fear. Instead, he avoids a critical examination of Italo-Romanian relations and applauds Uroboros for publishing a novel by a Romanian migrant writer, implying that the novel would not have been published otherwise. He says that “la stragrande maggioranza degli italiani, anche colti, ritiene che dall’Est e in particolare dalla Romania [...] si possano importare solo la delinquenza e le badanti, al massimo qualche muratore”<sup>45</sup> (“the large majority of Italians, even the cultured, maintain that from the East and in particular from Romania [...] there can be imported only delinquency and caretakers, at the most some construction workers”). By emphasizing Romanian identity’s racialized status in an Italian context, rather than offering new ways of looking at so-called “migrant writers,” Uroboros restricts Coman’s literary output to a stratified understanding of her work.<sup>46</sup>

### **Estrangement in *Per chi crescono le rose*: Panopticon as Irreality**

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<sup>44</sup> Luca Bistolfi, *Postfazione a Per chi crescono le rose*, 174.

<sup>45</sup> Luca Bistolfi, *Postfazione*, 173.

<sup>46</sup> The online literary magazines *Sagarana* and *El Ghibli*, in which Coman is doubly published, refer to the writers they publish as “scrittori migranti.” While these magazines, and various others, are dedicated to bringing into light the works of Italophone writers, they paradoxically perpetuate the same categorizations to which other Italian critics like Armando Gnisci have relegated “migrant” writing by treating it as separate from the larger Italian literary establishment.

Divided into twenty-two vignette-style chapters, *Per chi crescono le rose* overlays the experiences of six characters. Coman structures each chapter as a brief vignette so that, when these vignettes are coupled with the novel's plural perspectives, the action of the novel unfolds quickly. Each chapter is narrated from a third-person limited perspective, and each examines the process of corporeal and mental deformation that occurs under the Ceaușescu regime. Set in September 1989 in rural Moldavia, Romania, the novel opens with Catalin, a thirty-five-year-old history professor with a past of anti-communist activism. During a clandestine mission in an undisclosed Romanian city, he encounters Magda, a seventeen-year-old high school student, whom he mistakes for another woman to whom he was supposed to give a package. After the mission fails because of this confusion, he renounces his life as a dissident and retires to Moldavia to teach history. To their surprise, Magda becomes his student some weeks later. An illicit love affair develops between Catalin and Magda that destabilizes both of their lives. Their affair becomes the main plot point around which all of the novel's characters circulate.

Initially naïve and withdrawn, Magda comes of age under an oppressive regime. Although Magda's mother—Ileana, a former midwife—attempts to protect her daughter from the regime's pronatalist control by educating her about the consequences of being sexually active, Magda disregards her mother's warnings and pursues an affair with Catalin. In an effort to buy Catalin's freedom and keep him out of prison, she submits to rape at the hands of a wealthy classmate, Stefan, the son of a high-ranking party official. During this process, Magda gains the painful self-knowledge necessary to become an adult. The focus of the novel, however, is not solely on the unstable love affair between Catalin and Magda, but also on the destructive forces of totalitarianism that act directly on the body. The novel portrays Ceaușescu's Romania as a place where normal occurrences become inverted and all are entombed in perpetual silence.

As the communist regime crumbles in Romania, Catalin and Magda's story disappears into the beyond of the novel, in which all of the characters are left to heal wounds that remain in their memories.

Told dialogically, the plot of *Per chi crescono le rose* is filtered through the perspectives of six different characters. The chapter-vignettes appear as if torn from the chaotic pages of actual accounts of the regime's collapse. Indeed, the novel's strategic setting during the months immediately preceding the collapse of Ceaușescu's regime emphasizes Coman's deliberate attempt to incorporate the sense of chaos that still colors the memories of many Romanians and East-Central Europeans today. Told as a recollection of the recent past set during the months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the novel primarily examines both the deformation of Magda's identity and its subsequent transformation in relation to her corporeal experience of totalitarianism.

In order to obscure the national origins of her characters, Coman conveys a sense of defamiliarizing placelessness. With the exception of the novel's time period, set at the height of the regime's most brutal policies in September of 1989, Coman largely withholds any characteristics that could identify the novel's setting. In fact, despite the ordinary realism of the first few chapters, she does not include details that would enable the reader to place the characters' cultural identity until Chapter Fifteen. Here, she hints at their nationality as the "fatica di essere rumeno" that has become tied to a "passato che non muore e del futuro che non nasce mai" ("past that does not die and to a future that never begins").<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Coman rarely references Romania in the novel—mentions or implications related to the novel's setting occur

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<sup>47</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 65.

fewer than half a dozen times.<sup>48</sup> In effect, she presents the reader with a totalizing “nowhere” of experience that could have taken place “anywhere” beyond the novel’s historic setting during the Ceaușescu regime. Thus, Coman destabilizes the very idea of collective memory and proposes a transcultural model for memory that moves beyond facile discourses of national memory. In doing so, Coman effectively avoids a competitive model of memory, as we shall see later, that would victimize either Romanians or Italians.

Coman’s literary technique may be defined as uncanny, both in the Freudian sense of *Unheimliche* and both the Brechtian and Shklovskian sense of estrangement that Coman assigns to the experience of totalitarianism.<sup>49</sup> By disclosing the fictive qualities of the medium, Brecht suggests, artists can alienate their audience or readership from an emotional and passive acceptance of the work. Thus, readers enter a critical space meant to teach them that the work is not a self-contained narrative, but a highly constructed medium that is contingent upon cultural and economic conditions. In contrast to Marisa Madieri’s *La radura* or the brief fable featured in Jarmila Očkayová’s *L’essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, Coman’s novel entirely avoids the Soviet double-speak and Aesopian language that was common not only to the Romanian intelligentsia, but also to the rest of Eastern European literature before 1989.<sup>50</sup> As a post-

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<sup>48</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 42, 49, 77, 81, 163, 169.

<sup>49</sup> John Willet, trans. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 99. Originally based on Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky’s notion of *ostranenie*, the Shklovskian aesthetics of estrangement serve as a mode for disrupting familiar perceptions of reality and “laying bare [...] the device” as a sign of its self-reflexivity.<sup>49</sup> While it shares facets similar to Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*, the German Bertolt Brecht’s notion of *Verfremdungseffekt* examines the “laying bare of society’s causal network.”

<sup>50</sup> In his *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991[1964]) 96-98, Herbert Marcuse defines “Aesopian language” as language that refers to the idea that certain usages of language work to “suppress certain concepts or keep them out of the general discourse within society” (96); see Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1984); Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Marchel Cornis-



communist novelist, Coman estranges reality for her characters through different techniques. As I will show, the moments in which the characters sense their alienation are manifested through space, an aesthetic filter, or the body, in order to destabilize the subject's perception of reality.

The novel, influenced by the writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and George Orwell, examines, as we shall see, the deformation of perception and the body under totalitarianism.<sup>51</sup> While *Per chi crescono le rose* is not the first of Coman's novels to examine totalitarianism, it is the first to imply parallels between Eastern European and Italian women's experiences of totalitarianism.<sup>52</sup> In effect, Coman, writing in Italian about totalitarianism negotiates a new, imagined space *beyond* both Romania and Italy by deterritorializing and estranging the alleged homogenous nature of both nations and their cultures and languages.

Catalin's description of Romanian life as a panopticon establishes the perturbing tone for the remainder of the novel.<sup>53</sup> In an early post-classroom discussion with Magda, Catalin he describes the political indoctrination of Romania as "a veil" that blinds Romanians to reality and

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Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004), among others.

<sup>51</sup> Coman, interview, 2 June 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Coman, in fact, writes about totalitarianism in Afghanistan in *La città dei tulipani* (Ferrara, Luciana: Tufani Editrice, 2005) and in Russia with *Té al samovar: voci dal gulag sovietico* (Turin: L'Harmattan Italia, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault traces the cultural shifts that led to the proliferation of modern penal systems in the West. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's notion of the "panopticon"—a type of prison institution designed to observe many individuals at one time through full visibility—Foucault elaborates on the disciplinary functions of Bentham's theory of panopticism. For Foucault, the modern panopticon serves as an apparatus of power. Not necessarily a closed institution, the panopticon is any mechanism of discipline that "induce[s]" in the individual a self-conscious sense of being watched, which confirms "the automatic functioning of power" (201). Thus, to render this sense of surveillance permanent, the apparatus of power itself (guards, etc) is unnecessary because the "inmate" themselves becomes the bearer of the power situation.

confines them to a daily “inferno” from which there exists no escape.<sup>54</sup> Shortly thereafter, Catalin defines living under the Ceaușescu regime as a classically panoptic experience:

Sa che significa vivere soffocati nella fitta rete di questo minuscolo sistema che tutto vede e tutto sa, senza altra scelta che filare dritti su traiettorie decise da altri come un giocattolo a molla? [...] Girare per le strade con un numero sempre appeso ai vestiti per poter essere riconosciuto e individuato, come un anonimo carcerato dentro a una prigione a forma di città? Alzarsi tutte le mattine con l'unico pensiero di riuscire ad aggiustare il tuo modo di essere, tutta la tua vita, per farli stare dentro la cornice che hanno già preparato per te, imparando a parlare senza dire niente per non essere frainteso e sospettando di ogni essere vivente sulla faccia della terra...<sup>55</sup>

(What does it mean to live suffocated in the deep trap of this miniscule system that sees everything and knows everything, without any choice but to obey the rules of others like a toy on a string? [...] To go around the streets with a number always stuck to your clothes so you can be recognized and detected, like an anonymous prisoner inside of a prison in the form of a city? To wake up every morning with a single thought, to succeed at justifying your mode of being, all of your life, to stay inside the frame that they have already prepared for you, learning to speak without saying anything [in order] to not be misunderstood and suspecting every living being on the face of the earth.)

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<sup>54</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 29.

For Michel Foucault, panopticism invokes a self-surveillance mechanism within each member of society, creating “docile [bodies]” that submit to control without “recognizing the body’s implication in such mechanisms.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly for Coman, people who absorb this self-surveillance become dehumanized “anonim[i] carcerat[i] dentro a una prigione a forma di città” (“anonymous prisoners inside of a prison in the form of a city”).<sup>57</sup> As a result of this “perfected and well-oiled machine,” Coman suggests that bodies become devoured whole, a process that deforms them beyond recognition.<sup>58</sup> Because of this devouring, Catalin further suggests that only those who inherit the right to narrate history decide how the story of individual, private memory is told, while those who do not win the power to tell their own histories die in silence.<sup>59</sup> With this, Coman suggests that memory projects that constitute narratives of the self act as sites of resistance against memory regimes that relegate private histories to oblivion.

In order to emphasize the estranging mental and physical effects that occur when the subject internalizes the panopticon, Coman portrays the subject’s indoctrination as a totalizing experience that both destabilizes reality and creates “docile bodies.” When Radu, a friend of Magda’s parents Ileana and Marius, characterizes himself as a goldfish while speaking to Catalin one afternoon, he reveals himself to be a stalwart Romanian socialist and classic Marxist who trusts the state system to provide Romanians with stability and equality:

Pensi che lo sappia? disse, fissando i minuscoli occhi del pesce che sembravano  
due perline nere.

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<sup>56</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136. For Foucault, a docile body is one that may be “subjected, used, transformed” (136). Thus, the body becomes open to being both analyzed and manipulated.

<sup>57</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 29.

<sup>58</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 47.

Cosa?

Di essere chiuso là dentro.

E chi può dirlo? E poi, non è forse meglio?

Meglio? Girare in tondo dentro una bolla di vetro per tutta la vita?

Gli dò da mangiare, gli cambio l'acqua tutti i giorni e non ha nemici che possano dargli fastidio. A parte, forse, la mia distrazione?

Già. Ma non è libero.

Lì dentro è al sicuro.

Una bella prigionia.

Chi la vorrebbe una libertà che uccide? Non è forse meglio rimanere in vita? In fin dei conti, anche la morte è una prigionia.

A sentirlo, sembra quasi il punto di vista del pesciolino!<sup>60</sup>

(Do you think it knows? he said, staring at the two miniscule eyes of the fish that seemed [to be] two black pearls.

What?

To be closed inside there.

And who can tell? And then, isn't it perhaps better?

Better? To move around inside a glass bowl for life?

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<sup>60</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 53-54.

I give him food, I change his water everyday and he doesn't have enemies that can bother him. Apart from, perhaps, my distraction?

Indeed. But he's not free.

Inside there he's safe.

Who would like a liberty that kills? Isn't it perhaps better to stay alive? When all is said and done, even death is a prison.

Hearing it, it almost seems like the goldfish's point of view!

Coman draws a psychosocial portrait of Radu entirely through dialogue, the actions of the characters, and the order of events, rather than through the inner workings of the characters' minds. Radu confirms Catalin's suspicion of Radu's fraternity with the goldfish: "[I]l pesciolino rosso sono io. [...] [S]iamo uguali. Ci muoviamo...per la gioia del nostro padrone" ("[The] goldfish is me! [...] [W]e're equal. We move...for the amusement of our master").<sup>61</sup> In this, Radu self-reflexively reveals how he, unlike Catalin, has internalized and assimilated himself to a totalitarian vision of reality by adopting a self-governing system of surveillance. Unable to see through the panopticon's ability to prevent thinking about power relations, Radu acknowledges the panopticon's deathly presence as a familiar one in his life. In the process, he learns to prefer the predictability of his prison, so that eventually he can no longer distinguish between an object inside and outside. By dutifully resigning himself to his role as a state accountant, Radu ironically embodies the goldfish's struggle in human form. Although Catalin rages against Radu's conformity early in the novel, when Catalin experiences a real prison later in the novel,

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<sup>61</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 54.

uncertain whether death or trial await him, he too shows signs of being goldfish-like, fearful of moving on in a post-communist future.

Coman subverts the Marxist project of emancipation from a system of alienation based on labor. Through the goldfish metaphor, Coman suggests that the panopticon deforms subjects' perceptions of reality, so that they can no longer differentiate between freedom and prison, life and death. Catalin and Radu experience total alienation from others, from society, and from themselves, as a kind of "Stockholm syndrome" from which they cannot recover. By configuring the goldfish as a parallel for human experience under the regime, Coman reveals that once the subject adopts a model of discipline that robs citizens of their liberties and threatens their ability to remember events, the subject becomes subsumed in a complex mechanism of power relations that damages the ability to see beyond an imposed reality. In effect, natural human bonds, from which humans draw comfort and a sense of community, become thwarted, and unfamiliar perversions of life alienate them from their own humanity. The deforming presence of the panopticon seems to carry Radu and each of the characters further away from the buried memories of life before Soviet-style communism; however, it also turns the familiar into the unfamiliar in an ironic inversion of reality. Thus, one of the main themes of *Per chi crescono le rose* is precisely this opposition between the Freudian *Heimliche*, or uncanny, and the way in which each of the characters becomes motivated by a deeper relationship (or lack thereof) with memory.

For Coman, the internalization of the panopticon leads to an inability to decipher reality. Once a renowned midwife, Ileana, Magda's mother, spends her days as a bedpan nurse, not even permitted to touch patients—a punishment for her husband's political dissidence. Forced to divorce Marius under the threat of confiscating the family's food ration card, Ileana struggles to

raise her two daughters alone.<sup>62</sup> Accustomed to helping desperate women abort fetuses, Ileana finds newborns strange creatures that appear otherworldly—not a part of the natural cycle of life. When she witnesses an infant emerges from its mother’s womb and gasp for life, crying like a small animal, she feels herself become reanimated at the unfamiliar sight of a live birth. As a result, Ileana gasps in pure bewilderment. Emphasizing Ileana’s alienation from the organic, cyclical nature of life, Coman configures Ileana’s momentary reanimation as if she were a cuckoo clock that “all’improvviso viene risvegliato dalla voce rauca” (“all of a sudden becomes awakened by a gruff voice”).<sup>63</sup> The infant’s scream momentarily shatters the cycle of oppression and death to which Ileana had grown accustomed, the sound momentarily disorienting her. In characterizing Ileana as if she were a machine whose internal “tic-tac metallici” (metallic pitter-patter) has suddenly come to life, Coman interrupts Ileana’s process of estrangement, revealing that another reality remains beneath the alienated bodies of Romanians that have succumbed to the deforming effects of the regime’s “well-oiled machine.” The epiphany interrupts Ileana’s mode of perception, and although Ileana appears horrifically “emaciated and aged,” she remembers that she still has a “cuore [che] non ha mai smesso di battere” (“heart [that] never stopped beating”).<sup>64</sup> Thus, briefly able to perceive her estrangement and alienation from her own body, Ileana simultaneously finds herself unrecognizable and stirred by another reality that exists beneath a life of political alienation. Coman positions the strange crying of the infant as a brief rupture in the text that awakens Ileana to the totalizing effects of her self-alienation under the regime.

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<sup>62</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 74.

<sup>63</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 97.

<sup>64</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 98-99.

Despite the regime's collapse, Magda's father Marius also succumbs to a panoptic deformation of reality. The regime sends Marius, who was once a professor of philosophy, to a mental ward for expressing his anti-communist ideals. Fearing for his life, Ileana visits him in the hopes of convincing him to renounce his political convictions; however, convinced that remaining silent is akin to death, Marius does not acquiesce to his wife's pleas. Dedicated to the staunch Marxism that grew all over Europe from the ashes of the Second World War, Marius finds himself implicated in a paradoxical system of Soviet communism that has turned him into a "nemico del comunismo" ("enemy of communism").<sup>65</sup> In order to resist the absorption of the panopticon that threatens to rewrite Romanian collective memory, Marius becomes hyper vigilant concerning his ability to remember because he is convinced that the asylum's doctors will chemically erase his memory, thereby cancelling his resistance to the regime.<sup>66</sup> In response to Marius's stubbornness, the regime concludes that, despite his having never presented any signs of mental illness, Marius now suffers from a "paranoid syndrome, political delirium."<sup>67</sup> Upon his release after the regime's collapse, Marius contemplates the sudden, seemingly innocuous noise of people walking beyond the gates of the mental asylum in which he has been held captive. As the gates of the hospital close behind him, Marius is filled with a "panico a vedere tutta quella gente che camminava liberamente avanti e indietro, senza il vincolo del silenzio e delle file ordinate e senza essere guardati a vista da uomini in camice bianco" ("panic to see all of those people walking freely forward and backward, without the obligation of silence

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<sup>65</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 39.

<sup>67</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 155.



and organized lines, without being seen by men in white coats”).<sup>68</sup> As soon as he enters the street, disoriented by a chemically induced amnesia, Marius experiences a strong desire to return to the hospital, where life is familiar and largely devoid of the sounds associated with regular life. He concludes, however, that his strange reaction to quotidian sounds reveals the “perversion” of life under the regime.<sup>69</sup> In depicting this reaction, Coman implies that another reality exists for both Ileana and Marius beneath the one to which they have accustomed themselves. For Coman, the chemical erasure of Marius’s memory marks his passage from dissident to alienated subject, further emphasizing the regime’s panoptic effects. By defamiliarizing Marius’s ability to root himself in space and time, folding the familiar into the unfamiliar, Coman successfully reveals Marius’s alienation not only from himself, but also from perception itself. As a result, Coman suggests that under totalitarian regimes, life becomes a potential perversion of the natural world.

Coman develops the irony of this inversion in an extended metaphor, which reveals the extent to which life under totalitarian rule may become destabilized and even surreal. Through sound, Coman effectively defamiliarizes the totalizing effects of the panopticon that have entombed the novel’s characters in a bizarre, alternate reality and then momentarily frees them of the panoptic mode of perception. Thus, the two moments of epiphany associated with Ileana’s and Marius’s reanimation act as brief, ruptures in the text that remind the reader, who has implicated him- or herself in the perspectives of the characters, that another reality exists beyond the confines of the text at hand. These seemingly innocuous moments, which do not facilitate the

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<sup>68</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 156.

<sup>69</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 156.

plot, instead emphasize the depth of the characters' alienation from themselves and from other humans in response to the political machine that governs every aspect of their lives.

Coman employs defamiliarization in two different, but interrelated ways. She calls the reader's attention to the nature of reality itself under totalitarianism through a poetics of panopticism and placelessness that intersect both historical and "unreal" time, in order to remind the reader of the text's artificial construction and, indeed, the artificial construction of reality itself. Coman's *unreal*, however, does not engage the fantastic, but instead points to a sense of "irreality" drawn from decades living under a clockwork society behind the Iron Curtain that erases the subject's memory and sense of normative time.<sup>70</sup> In a world where "the past never dies and the future is never born," Coman's characters' sense of time expands into an infinite sense of nothingness without end that incites a sense of "irreality."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, for Coman, Ceaușescu's Romania is a strange world in which, due to severe pronatalist policies and food scarcity, more children are "brought into the world dead, than alive."<sup>72</sup> Soviet communism, with its promise of liberty and equality through the realization of a utopian, socialist reality, ultimately fails the subject in Coman's text. Trapped between a past that is inaccessible and a future that seems out of reach, Romanians' sense of time dilates as they wait, hoping for change. As a result, Coman emphasizes how each character adopts an estranging logic of reality under the regime that reflects an internal decomposition of their ability to orient themselves in space and time.

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<sup>70</sup> Coman refers to liberty and communism as "favole" three times: 128, 142, and 163.

<sup>71</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 42. See Gail Kligman's *Politics of Duplicity*, in particular chapters 1 and 2.

In this light, Coman frames Catalin and Magda's illicit love affair as a symptom of their alienation, rather than as an authentic and healthy attraction. Although Catalin insists several times that their love is "mistaken," Magda does not acquiesce until the final pages.<sup>73</sup> As the concluding pages of the novel culminate in the residual chaos that occurred after the fall of Soviet communism in Romania, the nature of Catalin and Magda's relationship runs parallel to the historic sense of instability that characterized the end of the Ceaușescu era. In order to escape a world in which food is scarce and every human relationship is imbued with a sense of suspicion, Magda permits herself to become pulled into the immediacy of the present, disregarding her mother's warnings about her sexuality. Magda defines the future as

...qualcosa che ti anebbia la vista come una nuvola colorata per non farti vedere il presente. È una promessa spiccia di un domani migliore che si sovrappone al tuo misero oggi e non ti lascia respirare.<sup>74</sup>

(...something that clouds your sight like a colored cloud to prevent you from seeing the present. It is a brusque promise of a better tomorrow that superimposes itself over your misery today and doesn't let you breathe.)

Magda concludes that for her, only "this day, this instant" exists.<sup>75</sup> Disregarding her mother's efforts to educate her about the regime's violent alienation and construction of their political rhetoric built upon the bodies of women, Magda only grows more certain of her convictions. Sensing the potential deformation of both her body and her perspective, Magda pursues the affair

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<sup>73</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 39.

with Catalin in defiance of her mother's warnings, seeing it as a means to free herself from the regime's oppression. Born of resistance, the affair dissolves after seven weeks. As Coman suggests in the novel, because the past and the future have ceased to exist for so many Romanians, a sense of vastness marks their perspective of time as individuals perpetually wait in the daily ration lines for food without knowing if there will be food left.<sup>76</sup> In this context, Coman suggests that sex, for Magda, becomes a way to regain control over her body and feel as if "anything could be possible," as if she may still gain control over her reality.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Magda's body becomes a site of resistance against the effects of the regime. That is, sexual relations become transgressive acts against the regime's strict pronatalism that seek to root the self in a discernible present. However, Magda's reactions evolve as a false model of behavior, as Coman eventually positions an exit from totalitarianism in narrative memory projects.

## **Memory and Biopolitical Control of the Body under Romanian and Italian**

### **Totalitarianism<sup>78</sup>**

In her preface to *Per chi crescono le rose*, Coman affirms memory's role in revealing

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<sup>76</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 128.

<sup>77</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 95.

<sup>78</sup> First coined by Italian philosopher Emilio Gentile, the term "totalitarianism" is a highly contested and loaded political concept applicable to Fascist Italy and post-war Communist Romania. Although Italy and Romania experienced "totalitarianism" in historically different ways, I use the term "totalitarianism" to refer to the phenomena by which Italy and Romania were both, in Gentile's words, "*experiment(s) in political domination undertaken by a revolutionary movement, with an integralist conception of politics that aspires toward a monopoly of power and that, after having secured power, whether by legal or illegal means, destroys or transforms the previous regime and constructs a new state, based on a single party-regime with the chief objective of conquering society. It seeks subordination, integration and homogenization of the governed on the basis of an all-encompassing politicization of existence, whether collective or individual. The politicization of existence is interpreted according to the categories, myths and values of a paligenetic ideology, institutionalized in the form of a political religion that aims to shape the individual and the masses through an anthropological revolution*" (292). Italics in original. See Gentile's "Fascism and the Italian Road to Totalitarianism," *Constellations*, Vol. 15, Number 3 (2008).

how we are all “others” from a different perspective. In death, suggests Coman, the victims of history may find restitution in a confraternity of suffering that unites victims with their oppressors. She concludes that in the end, “everyone has had their piece of history and of pain.”<sup>79</sup> In a 2015 interview, Coman clarifies her preface and suggests that regardless of the side of history on which we fall, humans are all connected beyond borders and even despite them, in both a common struggle against the corrosion of memory and through the human experience of suffering.<sup>80</sup>

*Per chi crescono le rose* is not only a novel about totalitarianism’s alienating and traumatic effects, but also about coming of age under an oppressive regime. The plot of the novel intertwines the formation and maturation of the final months of the Ceaușescu regime with Magda’s own self-formation and maturation into adulthood.<sup>81</sup> By focusing on the rite of passage into adulthood, Coman intersects collective history with the private history of a young woman in order to examine how the body and its desires become sites of agency. Therefore, *Per chi crescono le rose* is also a *Bildungsroman* that focuses on female “becoming” under Ceaușescu. With its focus on women, the novel examines how the female body becomes an active site of both resistance and positive transformation, connecting women across borders.

Coman implies that sexual difference is *the* determining factor in the economic and sexual oppression of women in Romania. The development of Magda’s story coincides with the history of the Ceaușescu regime itself, and as a result, the narrative’s development follows a

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<sup>79</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Coman, personal interview, 2 June 2015.

<sup>81</sup> While the novel’s dialogical structure overlaps the perspectives of various characters, Coman writes predominately from Magda’s perspective or about her.

chronological unfolding of historical events. Thus, Magda's female becoming coincides with the historic marginalization of women under Ceaușescu.<sup>82</sup> In this light, the female protagonist's "progress" is not a positive movement toward self-realization, but instead a deformative process experienced from within and without, implying that the body acts as a border between external and internal forces that determine becoming. Magda's story begins in 1989, at the height of the regime's most oppressive policies toward female reproductive health. By that time, Ceaușescu had enacted reforms that further restricted women's bodies to the cultivation of the public "good," transforming them into the procreators of the nation against their will. Thus, Coman provides a gendered view of the regime that challenges the Romanian myth of femininity.

Gail Kligman's pioneering text, *The Politics of Duplicity*, outlines the policies that the Socialist Republic of Romania used to enforce what she reveals as "one of the most repressive pronatalist policies known to the world."<sup>83</sup> The regime expanded its co-optation of women's bodies over time, beginning with the Decree 770 in 1966, which banned abortion and severely limited birth control in almost all circumstances. As Kligman observes, Ceaușescu's policies brought the state into intimate contact with the bodies of its citizens, and its citizens into the social organization of the state.<sup>84</sup> All members of the Republic were required to contribute to the project of socialism "according to [their] abilities"; disabled people might be condemned to state institutions where they would receive minimal care.<sup>85</sup> The state usurped basic parental roles,

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<sup>82</sup> Coman repeatedly refers to the historic condition of women under the regime as "massacred" (68).

<sup>83</sup> Gail Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998) 2.

<sup>84</sup> Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity*, 4-7.

further transforming the family unit into an instrument of control.<sup>86</sup> Ceaușescu's strategies of regime-building had far-reaching repercussions on women's well-being and health, in particular on the working-class and peasant majority. In fact, the regime's ideology was centered on a rhetoric of the family that was predicated precisely on sexual difference, as we will later see with Mussolini's Fascism.<sup>87</sup> In order to drive Ceaușescu's aggressive demographic campaign, women's subjugation was necessary, the regime believed, in order to create a new Socialist race that could remake the world through *homogenization*.<sup>88</sup> Although the regime gave the appearance of gender equality, permitting women to work alongside men and to receive an equal education, it was the female body that was most vulnerable to the punitive repercussions of not fulfilling its "productive" potential.

Initially, the female bodies of *Per chi crescono le rose* express a similar fate to those of their male counterparts as they, too, become "spent visions of their former selves."<sup>89</sup> Indeed, all of the bodies of Coman's novel appear deformed and alienated by years of systemic oppression and silence. For instance, Magda's early awareness of Ileana's aging motivates her to take on a parental role in the family, so that her six-year-old sister, Angelica, has another caretaker should anything happen to their mother. In turn, Ileana's aging body, which belies her chronological

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<sup>86</sup> See chapter 2 of Kligman's *Politics of Duplicity* for a discussion of social practices that were implemented to control the familial unit and the body.

<sup>87</sup> Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991). Verdery suggests the regime's policies of reproduction oppression were rooted in a rhetoric and philosophy of sexual difference.

<sup>88</sup> According to Kligman, while the regime's rhetoric of homogenization referred to the "eradication of social difference," it maintained a patriarchal understanding of sexual difference that did not lead to women's equality (4).

<sup>89</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 22, 29, 35, 39, 40, 51, 63, 74, 81, 119, and 154.

youth, reflects years of state abuse incurred due to her husband's refusal to recant his political ideals.

However, *Per chi crescono le rose* differentiates between the conditions that apply to men and women. Under the regime's oppressive forces, the male body, in particular, loses all signs of vitality, only to become a shadowy version of itself. Because he chooses to forget his life prior to the regime, Radu the accountant never regains his former vitality. Rather than feel relief at the regime's collapse, he seems to wither in his office chair upon learning that his life's work as a high-ranking accountant to the regime has lost its purpose. Without his mental "fish bowl" to provide his life with form, Coman condemns Radu's body to petrify at his desk, "transfixed there forever" in an eternal hell where his body becomes ossified by habit.<sup>90</sup> Marius meets a similar fate. Locked away to die in a mental institution under a constant threat to his family, Marius loses the battle against his memory; he no longer remembers his life or convictions from before the institution. Instead, Marius submits to a chemically induced amnesia. As a result, his body becomes permanently estranged from himself, his body devoured and "spent" by his time in the hospital.<sup>91</sup> As penance for his lack of active remembering, Coman sentences Marius to what seems a permanent state of bewildered estrangement that causes him to fear familiar, human sounds and pine for the quiet of his former captivity. Similarly, after the collapse of the regime, she sentences Catalin to wander forever as he tries to come to terms with the memories of Soviet communism. Having internalized their alienation from themselves at the

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<sup>90</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 148.

<sup>91</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 155.



hands of the regime's biopolitical control, Coman's male bodies become grotesque inversions of healthy, able bodies.<sup>92</sup>

For Coman, the experience of being a woman under the regime is defined not only by the threat of constant physical violence, but also by a lack of access to appropriate family planning. In the novel's most graphic scene, Ileana asks Magda to accompany her on a clandestine mission so that they may help Lidia, a woman hemorrhaging after a botched abortion. Magda becomes a part of a group of women who work together to save Lidia from bleeding to death. Ileana, Magda, and Lidia's mother become

...un movimento unico di [...] cuori che in quel momento condividevano la stessa preoccupazione [...] Tre donne gemelle della stessa trasgressione, dello stesso reato grave contro l'ordine prestabilito di quella società di cartapesta che appoggiava le sue fondamenta su cuori spezzati.<sup>93</sup>

(...a united movement of [...] hearts that in that moment shared the same preoccupation [...] Three women identical in the same transgression, the same crime against the predetermined order of that paper-mâché society that leaned its foundation on broken hearts.)

Ileana has Magda help with the abortion, in order to expose her daughter to the consequences of the communist regimentation of sexuality and to the risk of becoming a victim of the same fate

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<sup>92</sup> While the study of how life can be manipulated and controlled spans thousands of years, the term "biopolitics" originates with Michel Foucault's theorization of *biopower*. For Foucault, biopower consists of various devices of biological control and protection that sometimes resort to violence based on the discrimination between the *us*, or those included within the perimeters of a defined community, and the *other*, or those who are excluded from the whole of society and perceived as a danger to the homogenized society. See Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 210-212.

<sup>93</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 68.

as Lidia, whose blood covers Magda's hands. Blood, dark and warm, bears the sign of "the great war" for women's rights that was lost in Romania "many years earlier," suggests Coman, as the better part of women in the same situation "era già finita in un anonimo container di rifiuti da bruciare" ("had been thrown in an anonymous container of trash to burn").<sup>94</sup> Through this image of women working together, Coman suggests that while female bodies are all subject to the same dangers, it is only through women's unity against patriarchal centers of power that women can reclaim their subjectivity for themselves.

Magda, initially a naïve focalizer, lacks the knowledge necessary to protect herself, not only from the policies that regulate her body and sexuality, but also from men programmed by the patrilineal regime of the nation. Before her relationship with Catalin, she often appears on the cusp of consciousness, unable to stake her own claim to her sexuality and reclaim it from state control. She wonders, at the onset of the novel:

Cos'era tutta quella storia della verginità [...] che roba era il sesso e come sarebbe stato perdere quella cosa su cui tutti la mettevano in guardia e che sembrava più preziosa di una medaglia al valore per una giovane donna? Tante volte si era chiesta come fosse mai fatto l'imene, lodato come un sigillo di candore e purezza.<sup>95</sup>

(What was all of that story about virginity [...] what was sex and what would it be to lose that thing that everyone warned her about and that seemed more precious

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<sup>94</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 68-69.

<sup>95</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 21.

than a medal of honor for a young woman? Many times she asked herself how was the hymen ever made, lauded as a seal of candor and purity.)

Magda remains unaware of the sway that her sexuality holds over Catalin, often misinterpreting or being unable to decipher his advances and love letters. In her diary entries, Magda expresses her frustrations over her sexuality. Indeed, her fury demonstrates her frustration with the “gioco sconosciuto e incomprensibile degli adulti” (“unknown and incomprehensible game of adults”).<sup>96</sup> Magda feels barred from the adult game of love that she does not yet understand how to navigate. In effect, Coman associates Magda’s preoccupation with her body, and its growing signs of womanliness, with Magda’s growing awareness of sexuality and the patriarchal system that governs it. If the body represents, as Rosi Braidotti suggests, “an inter-face [...] of material and symbolic forces,” the body in Coman’s text becomes a surface onto which “multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed.”<sup>97</sup>

Ultimately, Coman’s female characters experience not only different conditions from those of men, but also different fates. Coman places the female body at the center of the collective national struggle for deliverance from biopolitical control. The body becomes the canvas upon which Coman illustrates the struggle for a redefinition of female subjectivity as Magda and the various women of the novel experience history on the surface of their bodies. Under the destructive pronatalist policies of totalitarianism, Magda’s body emerges as a micropolitical site of women’s struggle. By underscoring the regime’s failure to protect women’s health and create new pathways towards female emancipation, Coman inverts the myth of

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<sup>96</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 33.

<sup>97</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 124 & 219.

Marxist equality.<sup>98</sup> Magda only becomes fully aware of the value of her body after she is raped. When Stefan pins her down, and threatens to have Catalin sent to prison and killed, Magda, desperate and in tears, allows her body to become an instrument of Stefan's lust. She hopes to be able to buy Catalin's safety; however, her decision to submit turns her into an object of exchange.<sup>99</sup> The rape represents a property battle over her body, marking Stefan's intention to "brand" Magda as communist rather than private property.<sup>100</sup>

However, Magda refuses to see the rape as fully deforming; rather, she understands it as a necessary act to prevent Catalin from being imprisoned. Magda remains resolute in her early conviction that "[t]utta la repressione del regime non era riuscita a farle diventare nemico del suo corpo" ("all of the regime's repression had not succeeded in making her an enemy of her own body").<sup>101</sup> Although the rape initiates her initial deterioration, unlike her father or Radu, Magda does not succumb to the alienating effects of the regime because she strives to actively remember what has happened to her by writing about her experiences. In this way, Coman explores

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<sup>98</sup> Karl Marx's Hegelian theory of alienation, or *Entfremdung*, refers to the estrangement of people due to human labor within a stratified system. Marx insisted that it was human labor that ultimately determined culture and history, not the other way around. Therefore, the idea of the spirit was conceived as a product of humanity. For Marx, mankind was, above all, a *homo faber*. See *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1927), Karl Marx identifies four types of alienation: alienation of the worker from the product of his work, from the act of producing, from his *Gattungswesen* (species-essence), and from other workers.

<sup>99</sup> See Gayle Rubins, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", ed. Rayna Reiter, *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1975). In her now classic essay, Rubins considers the trafficking of women a result of the "Sex/gender system," which refers to a "set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (159). Through Claude Levi-Strauss and Marxism, Rubins argues that "Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes" (179).

<sup>100</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 69. Stefan discusses how he wants Magda for himself, although understands that he cannot possess her fully because she will need to fulfill her "productivity" as a member of the Party.

<sup>101</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 22.

women's creative function, primarily through the figure of Magda. This attention to Magda is particularly significant because she is also the only character in the novel who continues to unproblematically imagine and remember what occurs to her.

In contrast to her portrayal of the male body, Coman imbues the female body with regenerative properties linked to both physical and symbolic creation. In the novel, the female body functions as both a site of resistance and as a container of memory. Like the ailing female migrant body of Jarmila Očkayová's *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, the bodies of Coman's text deteriorate and break down under the weight of their historical condition when they do not assume the task of remembering. However, unlike the failing masculine bodies of the novel, the female body, despite enormous external pressures, reveals a capacity for life-affirming regeneration.<sup>102</sup>

By prescribing a different fate for women than men—one rooted in memory projects that resist potential regimes of memory—Coman subverts Communist Romania's rhetoric of woman. Magda's father Marius loses his mind, Radu becomes ossified by habit, and Catalin's consistent self-doubt paralyzes him. After the collapse of the regime, none of the male protagonists appear to overcome their conditions of political alienation and estrangement. Thus, she creates a world in which women are more resilient than men. While Coman displaces Ileana's and Angelica's stories into the background of the novel (indeed, after the regime collapses, the reader never sees them again) in order to bring Magda's story into the light, the novel emphasizes Magda's capacity to remember by identifying memory as a creative narrative project.

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<sup>102</sup> Since Rita Felski's pioneering 1989 chapter on the female *Bildungsroman* in her work *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, it has become increasingly clear that a possibility exists for the female novel of formation to end in life, rather than metaphorical or literal death.

Coman ultimately locates exit strategies from the panopticon in projects of memory and imagination. At the beginning of the novel, Marius exhibits a compulsive fear of forgetting the past, his family, and his life before totalitarianism took hold of Romania and plunged it into three decades of economically and socially devastating oppression. Through Coman's configuration of Marius, she concludes that "memory" is a defense against the "teeth" of official history that threaten to chew at and dissolve the importance of lived experience.<sup>103</sup> Precisely because Marius permits himself to forget the past, he becomes consumed by his mind, his body ravaged. In contrast, in a final letter to Magda at the end of the novel, Catalin encourages Magda to write about her pain for future audiences who will not remember this time in Romanian history.<sup>104</sup> Coman implies that memory not only links people to their past, endowing them with a sense of belonging and place, but through storytelling it also acts as a defense against future "regimes of memory."<sup>105</sup> Memory exists, for Coman, as an imaginative process that can shield the body and the mind against the deformative projects of history that often silence or neutralize suffering. "Storytelling," then, becomes the ultimate form of memorialization through which to combat the neutralizing distortions of the historical process. In *Per chi crescono le rose*, storytelling underlines memory's capacity to access not simply an externalized, collective reality, but a

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<sup>103</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 38.

<sup>104</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 163.

<sup>105</sup> Susannah Radstone and Katherine Hodgkin, "Regimes of Memory: An Introduction," *Regimes of Memory*, Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 1-22. Similarly, for Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, in the introduction to *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), a *memory regime* refers to "a set of cultural and institutional practices that are designed to publically commemorate and/or remember a single event, a relatively clearly delineated and interrelated set of events, or a distinguishable past process" (14, 16). Specifically, they are interested in *official memory regimes*, "that is, memory regimes whose formulation and propagation involve the intensive participation of state institutions and/or political society" (16).

private, internalized one. Thus, Coman approaches the crisis of representation by superseding it with the process.

Coman suggests that after the regime's collapse, "non c'erano vincitori né vinti, ma soltanto esseri umani capitati nell'ingranaggio di un meccanismo complesso e misterioso che per anni li aveva deformati e distorti" ("there were no winners or losers, but only human beings that ended up caught in the gears of a complex and mysterious mechanism that for years had deformed and distorted them").<sup>106</sup> She thus implies that the biopolitical control of the regime, coupled with the instability left behind by Ceaușescu's public execution, created a sense of lasting doubt within each protagonist, male and female, and by extension, Romanians themselves. Coman utilizes this inconclusiveness as a narrative tool that causes the reader to question history's role in the self's formation. She leaves it to the reader to imagine how each of the characters will reclaim him or herself from what will become official accounts of history. Indeed, the project of history, Coman suggests through her portrayal of Magda, is to learn how to reclaim and rewrite one's memories of private history, so that memory is understood as an ongoing creative process, rather than as a process that restores meaning.

Thus, in *Per chi crescono le rose*, Coman anticipates a view of memory that makes memory possible because it evokes another memory. In *Memory and Totalitarianism*, Luisa Passerini suggests that the work of oral history (and history in general) has moved beyond the earlier assumptions that one of its tasks was to

simply give voice to those who had been silenced by history [...] Fighting silence is not enough; "silence" is not even an appropriate term for the task

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<sup>106</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 154.

to come: what is to be fought is not only silence but distortions [...] Part of the memory that is emerging now, because it is no longer impeded, is sometimes just as ‘false’ as the one it seeks to oppose or displace.<sup>107</sup>

For Coman, the laughter and screams of the crowd that gathers in the final pages of the novel to witness the execution of Ceaușescu and his wife Elena on Christmas Eve signal a return to barbarity that risks breaking this requisite chain.<sup>108</sup> While Coman does not condemn the people in the crowd themselves, she implies that this kind of barbarity, common to all populations, occurs when people do not strive to actively remember the past.<sup>109</sup> As a result, Coman suggests that forgetting the past invites, even welcomes, potentially dangerous forms of totalitarianism that can alter perception indelibly. Thus, in order to protect against potential distortions of memory, an intergenerational chain of remembering must be activated.

Coman, writing about Romanian Communism, confirms memories of women’s oppression similar to those of Italian women writing about fascism. By employing similar literary tropes and imagery evidenced in Italian women’s writing, Coman enables her Italian audience to draw comparisons between women’s condition under the forces of totalitarianism to show how women are connected across borders.<sup>110</sup> During Italian fascism, as well as afterwards,

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<sup>107</sup> Passerini, *Memory and Totalitarianism*, 16.

<sup>108</sup> See the final two chapters in Coman’s *Per chi crescono le rose*. Interestingly, the details surrounding Ceaușescu’s death echoes that of Mussolini, as both were assassinated with their corpses displayed for all to see. For a comparison of Mussolini’s and Ceaușescu’s deaths, see John Borneman, ed., *Death of the Father: An Anthropology of the End of Political Authority* (New York: Berghahn, 2004).

<sup>109</sup> Luisa Passerini draws similar conclusions regarding barbarity in her introduction to *Memory and Totalitarianism* (2).

<sup>110</sup> Although Coman does not consider herself a “feminist,” the parallels between Italy and Romania that the reader can draw from her text confirms the current debates of transnational feminism. Indeed, several critics reading works of Western Literature have confirmed Eastern European women’s absence from the debate. For instance, see Denise Roman, *Fragmented Identities: Popular Culture, Sex, and Everyday Life*



many Italian women writers detailed the effects of women's oppression and subjugation to pronatalist policies. Despite the gaps in memory created by the Italian literary establishment after "liberation," Italian women writers were highly productive, as many critics have shown.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, writers from Sibilla Aleramo to Fausta Cialente, Marise Ferro, Alba de Cespedes, Paola Drigo, Paola Masino, Amalia Guglielminetti and many more focused on women's subjectivity under Italian fascism, offering a largely sociopolitical vision of womanhood that undermined the regime's rhetoric of femininity and motherhood.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante,

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in *Postcommunist Romania* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) and Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>111</sup> For instance, see Anna Santoro and Francesca Vegliione, *Catalogo della scrittura femminile a stampa presente nei fondi library della Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli* (Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1984); Santoro, *Narratrici italiane dell'Ottocento* (Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1987); Michela De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi: modelli culturali e comportamenti sociali* (Roma: Laterza, 1992); Rinaldina Russell, *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) and *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997); Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (London: Athlone, 1995); Luisa Ricaldone, *La scrittura nascosta: Donne di lettere e loro immagini tra Arcadia e Restaurazione* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 1996); *Il Novecento: Antologia di scrittrici italiane del primo ventennio* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1997); Robing Pickering-Iazzi (ed.), *Mothers Of Invention: Women, Italian Facism, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); *Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture, and Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Marina Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998); Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, eds., *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge [England], New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); and Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008), among many others. For a discussion of potential reasons why Italian women's texts, widely acclaimed during the *ventennio*, were subsequently left out of the Italian canon, see the afterward in Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Unspeakable Women: Selected Short Stories Written by Italian Women during Fascism* (New York: Feminist Press, 1995); Mariolina Graziosi, *La donna e la storia: identità di genere e identità collettiva nell'Italia liberale e fascista* (Napoli: Liguori, 2000); Perry Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Ioana Larco Raluca and Fabiano Cecchini, eds. *Italian Women and Autobiography: Ideology, Discourse and Identity in Female Life Narratives from Fascism to the Present* (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), among others. For a history of women's press during Italian Fascism, see Elisabetta Mondello's *La nuova italiana: La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio* (Rome: Riuntini, 1987).

<sup>112</sup> See Sibilla Aleramo, *Amo dunque sono*, (1927); Anna Maria Ortese, *Angelici dolori* (1937); Fausta Cialente, *Natalia* (1930); Alba de Cespedes, *Nessuno torna indietro* (1938); Pia Rimini, "A Boy," (1933);

Milena Milani, and Clara Sereni have offered a retrospective reassessment of women's subjectivity under fascism.<sup>113</sup>

In a way that mirrors Coman's depiction of Communist Romania, Paola Drigo specifically locates women's experience of fascism in the body. In her *Maria Zef* (1936), the fourteen-year-old main protagonist, Mariutine, is subjected to repeated acts of sexual violence at the hands of her paternal uncle Barbe Zef, whom she beheads in the final scene of the novel.<sup>114</sup> Situated in the rural Friuli-Veneto region during the 1930s, the novel explores the effects of rural poverty under Fascism on female becoming and the subsequent deterioration of a young girl living at the farthest margins of the regime. When her mother Cantine dies after years of sexual abuse and complications from syphilis, which she contracted from her brother-in-law, Mariutine's experiences at the hand of Barbe Zef become identical to those of her mother. Thus, Mariutine is left to experience through her own body what her mother underwent, which results in her physical and psychological deformation.<sup>115</sup> When her little sister Rosute is away at a

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Grazia Deledda, "Portrait of a Country Woman," (1926); Amalia Guglielminetti, *I serpenti di Medusa* (1934), and Marisa Ferro *Disordine* (1932), *Trent'anni* (1941), and *La guerra è stupida* (1949) among many others.

<sup>113</sup> In particular I am referencing Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), Milena Milani *La ragazza di nome Giulio* (Milan: Longanesi, 1964); Elsa Morante's *La Storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), and Clara Sereni, *Il gioco dei Regni* (Firenze: Giunti, 1993).

<sup>114</sup> Paola Drigo, *Maria Zef* (Milan: Treves, 1936). In her 1925 short story "Man and Death," Marinella Lodi tells a similar story of female becoming, sexual abuse, and the female protagonist's successful rebellion against the Fascist patriarchy through a physical act of self-assertion.

<sup>115</sup> Cantine, Mariutine's mother, who shows the signs of physical deformation, is aged beyond her years by difficult conditions: "Vecchia forse non era, ma così logora e malandata da sembrare decrepita. Tossiva continuamente, e camminava trascinando i piedi, ma pareva facesse fatica anche a rispondere a chi la salutava [...] le tremava la bocca sulle gengive sdentate" ["She was not that old, but so worn out and in such bad condition that she seemed almost decrepit. She coughed continuously and dragged one of her feet when she walked. Even her response's to the people's greetings seemed labored [...] so did her toothless mouth over her gums"] (*Maria Zef*, 50-1). Throughout the *Maria Zef*, Mariutine references a shared predetermined destiny that she equates to being "attaccato alla catena" ["in chains"] (*Maria Zef*,

convalescence home while her foot heals, Mariutine and Barbe Zef descend from the mountain to do business with Compar Guerrino, a local client. During the evening's festivities, Guerrino suggests to Barbe Zef that he hire her out for labor. The proposition, marking Mariutine as an object of exchange, inspires a kind of masculine anxiety in Barbe Zef who subsequently lays claim to Mariutine. In response to a perceived attack on his virility, Zef pursues Mariutine in a game of "cat and mouse."<sup>116</sup> He succeeds in entrapping Mariutine and raping her violently, ultimately branding her as Fascist property. His "branding" initiates Mariutine's rapid physical and mental deterioration. Since both the Catholic women's organization and the local volunteers have failed her and Rosute, Mariutine has nowhere to go.<sup>117</sup> However, before Rosute's return, Mariutine ends the cycle of violence. In the final pages of the novel, Mariutine picks up the ax and hovers over her drunken uncle, momentarily feeling pity for him, someone who has lived the same hardships as she; however, she cuts off his head in one decisive blow.

Drigo also offers a gendered perspective of Italian Fascism that reveals women's oppressed condition. In both *Per chi crescono le rose* and *Maria Zef*, the authors anticipate a

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101). Indeed, under the same weight of abuse and geographical isolation, Mariutine's body mirrors her mother's corporeal and psychological deformation: "Sofferenza che non era esclusivamente morale: i lineamenti stanchi, il pallore del volto, la piega amara della bocca, non riflettevano soltanto il profondo mutamento ch'ella, senza definirlo, sentiva in sé, devastazione di tutto ciò che poteva significare letizia, speranza, amore—ma anche uno strano malessere fisico che la spossava in tutte le membre." ["A suffering that was not exclusive to emotions: apparent in her tired features, the pallor of her face, the bitter crease of her mouth— all reflected not only the profound change, without definition, that she felt inside herself: the devastation of anything related to joy, hope, love—but also a strange, physical illness that exhausted her whole body"] (*Maria Zef*, 162).

<sup>116</sup> For a discussion of Italian Fascism's rhetoric of virility, see Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>117</sup> Drigo depicts the nuns' temporary care of Mariutine and her sister as a situation marked by misunderstanding and frustration, even futility, due to a difference in class. The volunteer efforts of the nuns, educated women who are accustomed to the city, do not recognize the needs and limitations of the girls due to their rural background. The mother superior understands, "con un misto di sorpresa e di biasimo," that Mariutine lacks any formal education and cannot sew (*Maria Zef*, 29).

socio-cultural reading of women's experience that undermine traditional constructions of woman by representing women's bodies as micropolitical sites of struggle under totalitarian oppression. Indeed, as in *Per chi crescono le rose*, Mariutine's formation into a woman and subsequent deterioration coincide with the historic marginalization of women under Italian Fascism. Because both Magda and Mariutine lack the corporeal knowledge necessary to protect themselves from the patriarchal order that regulates their femininity and sexualities, they become victims of misogynistic pronatalist policies that fail to ensure women's welfare.<sup>118</sup> However, the female body, marked by oppression and subjected to violence, becomes for Drigo, as for Coman, an active site of resistance. While Coman locates acts of resistance in projects of memory and imagination, Drigo locates Mariutine's resistance to oppressive ideologies in an act of literal and symbolic castration.

A brief overview of the poetics produced by Italian women writers testifies to their representation and reconfiguration of the body, pronatalism, and women's subjugation.<sup>119</sup> In such texts as *Nessuno torna indietro* (1938) by Alba De Cèspedes, *Nascita e morte della massaia*

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<sup>118</sup> Under Italian Fascism, pronatalist policies began as early as 1926. A punitive tax was placed on male celibacy. Within a Fascist reproductive rhetoric that targeted both sexes, demographic and economic issues were recast as civic duties, such as in the "Battle for Births." In 1925, the regime established OMNI (Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia) and sent Fascist women to educate rural women on proper hygienic practices and encourage procreation. Due to a reliance on volunteer efforts, OMNI and related Fascist women's organizations ultimately failed to support women. Moreover, because Fascism valued quantitative mothering over nurturing the relationship between mother and child, women's mortality rates escalated. OMNI was not responsible for educating women about how their bodies and fertility actually worked. Rather, Italian women's role was to "defend the race" by producing as many children as possible. As in the case of Communist Romania (Gail Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity*), Italian Fascism's focus on increasing the birthrate exacerbated an already precarious economic situation that followed the Great Depression. Thus, many Italians chose to emigrate elsewhere. In *How Fascism Ruled Women*, Victoria De Grazie offers a meticulous history of Fascist pronatalism.

<sup>119</sup> On women writers under Fascism, see for instance, Lucia Re, "Women and Censorship in Fascist Italy: From Mura to Masino" in *Culture, Censorship, and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*, Guido Bonsaver and Robert Gordon, eds. (Oxford: Legenda, 2005).

(1945) by Paola Masino, and *Natalia* (1930) by Fausta Cialente, the authors create an array of narrative and images that recall Italian women's lived experience of Italian Fascism and acts of resistance to ideological Fascist constructions of woman. Many of these women writers pay intimate attention to social critique, which brings into light memories of rural poverty, adultery, sexuality, incest, urban women workers, maternity, and crises surrounding the Italian family under Fascism. Take, for example, Paola Masino's *Nascita e morte della massaia*, which focuses on one girl's resistance to becoming a woman under the regime. Simply named the "massaia," the female protagonist, in a twist of magical realism, chooses to live in a trunk, preferring to read and write rather than concern herself with the appropriate steps toward becoming a *sposa* and *donna esemplare*.<sup>120</sup> Eventually she marries a wealthy uncle and moves to the countryside, in charge of a small army of servants. Throughout the course of the novel, Masino's *massaia* dreams of returning to her trunk rather than adhering to her domestic duties, which appear to entomb her in the home that she hopes will disappear. Ultimately, the novel dramatizes the effects of the subordination of women and subjugation to performing one's gender.<sup>121</sup> Masino continues the same focus on women's subjugation in *Monte Ignoso* (1930) by underscoring the allegorical implications of Italian Fascism's desire to regulate gender roles and sexuality. By employing the fantastic and magical realist modes, Masino frames the main female protagonist's

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<sup>120</sup> For a critical study of the Italian Fascist ideology surrounding the "donna esemplare," see Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare: Ideologia e politica della donna della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Florence: Guaraldi, 1975).

<sup>121</sup> For critical studies of *Nascita e morte della massaia*, see Paola Blaloch, "From Trunk to Grave: the Hallucinated Story of a Housewife" in *Nemla Italian Studies* (1989); Lucia Re, "Fascist Theories of 'woman' and the Construction of Gender," (1995); and "Fame, cibo e antifascismo nella *Massaia* di Paola Masino," in *Il cibo e le donne nella cultura e nella storia: prospettive interdisciplinari*, edited by Giuseppina Muzzarelli and Lucia Re (Bologna: CLUEB, Biblioteca di Scienze umane, 2005) 165-182;

Tristiana Rorandelli, "Nascita e morte della massaia di Paola Masino e la questione del corpo materno nel fascismo," in *Forum Italicum* (2003) and Silvia D'Ortenzi, "*Nascita e morte della massaia*: Paola Masino" in *Quaderni Del '900* (2005), among others.

self-exploration in a literary style that undermines Fascism's sacralization of maternal sacrifice through conflict and ambiguity.<sup>122</sup> In the novel, the main protagonist Emma responds to her daughter Barbara's hallucinations, resulting in a series of strange events. Barbara dies, and Emma seeks to punish her husband Giovanni for barring her from her daughter's room. Giovanni goes mad for a time, and seemingly restored, strangles Emma to death for her adultery in the closing pages despite Emma's renewed hopes for the future. Although Emma never achieves emancipation from the patriarchal system in which she is implicated, Masino nonetheless illustrates women's subjugation to the Fascist rhetoric of woman. By representing a form of corporal violence reserved for women, as revealed in the metatext of paintings featuring Judith attacking Holofernes, Masino re-envisioned maternity as a parallel to the bloody sacrifice of Italian soldiers.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the trope of blood occurs frequently in Masino's novel as even the change in seasons appears to take on the red color of blood, which Masino associates with the violence of childbirth.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, in Milena Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio* (1964), Milani associates the color red not only with violence, but also with female vitality. In the novel, a

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<sup>122</sup> See Allison Cooper, "Gender, Identity, and the Return to Order in the Early Works of Paola Masino," in Luca Somigli and Mario Maroni (eds.) *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture between Decadentism and Avant-Garde* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) and F.A. Namer, "La terra e la discesa: l'immaginario di Paola Masino," *Otto/Novecento: rivista quadrimestrale di critica e storia letteraria*, vol. 24 (2000) 161-188. For an examination of the sacralization of maternity under Italian Fascism in Masino, see chapter two in Carmen Gomez's "Women Writers and Italian Fascism: Figures of Resistance in Paola Masino, Paola Drigo and Milena Milani" [UCLA 2013].

<sup>123</sup> Coman anticipates this potential for women's violence in the scene where Magda, Ilena, and the group of women deliver Lidia, their patient, to safety by aborting the fetus. The abortion itself is an act of violence not against Lidia, but against the regime's policies. Several critics have examined the trope of maternity in Masino's *Monte Ignoso*. See Flora Maria Ghezzi, "Fiamme e follia, ovvero la morte della madre arcaica in Monte Ignoso di Paola Masino" in *Esperienze letterarie* 28.3 (2003): 33-55; Louise Rozier's *Il Mito e l'allegoria nella narrativa di Paola Masino* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2003); and Lucia Re, "Fame, cibo e antifascismo nella *Massaia* di Paola Masino," in *Cibo e le donne nella cultura e nella storia* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2005).

<sup>124</sup> I am indebted to Carmen Gomez for this observation in Masino's work.

retrospective of Italy's fascist past, the female body emerges as Milani's primary symbolic instrument for articulating the physical unease associated with women's oppressed condition under Fascist Italy.<sup>125</sup> Like *Per chi crescono le rose* and *Nascita e morte della massaia*, Milani adopts the female *Bildungs* to structure her examination of female becoming and sexual difference under the regime. In contrast from Masino, however, Milani's symbolic representation of female vitality occurs through the red color of menstruation, which reappears when the female protagonist watches the sun set, the sky aflame. Towards the end of the novel, frustrated with the political ideologies that exclude her "deviant" sexuality as a non-heterosexual, and unable to ultimately achieve pleasure with men, she mirrors the destruction of the regime and her frustration with its oppressive ideologies by literally disfiguring the phallus of an unknown man.<sup>126</sup> Thus, in various ways, each novel intersects questions of gender and the female body that may challenge or intersect Fascist ideologies of gender and sexuality and recall Italian women's memories of the fascist past.

Similar to Romania, Italy was also subject to the social projects of a totalitarian leader—that of Benito Mussolini—who, during Fascism, enacted several social reforms that defined women by their reproductive abilities and restricted their uteruses to the cultivation of the national "good." In his *Discorso dell'ascensione* on May 26, 1927, Mussolini referred to the political policies necessary to transform Italy from the racialized *other* of Western Europe into a First World country, like France. This speech, which marked the beginning of the first of many

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<sup>125</sup> Milena Milani, *La ragazza di nome Giulio* (Milano: Longanesi & Co., 1964). For critical studies of Milani's novel, see Gianfranco Barcella, *Invito alla lettura di Milena Milani* (Empoli: Ibiskos, 2008); Carmen Gomez, "Milena Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio*: A Forgotten Feminist Novel" in *MLN* 125.1 (January 2010); and Lorenza Rossi, *Milena Milani: Una vita in collage* (Turin: Seneca Edizioni, 2012).

<sup>126</sup> Milani, *La ragazza*, 293-294.

pronatalist campaigns, sought to directly mobilize the Italian people toward procreation, so that Italy could better position itself as a First World power. Italian women under the regime, however, enjoyed a contradictory position prior to 1927, as Fascism even advocated for women's right to vote.<sup>127</sup> However, Mussolini's speech reflected a turning point in the regime's attitude toward women, "inaugurating its policy of antifeminist repression."<sup>128</sup> Mussolini's speech ultimately reflects the belief that procreation would breed the necessary demographic that would bring Italy to First World national glory. In her study *How Fascism Ruled Women*, Victoria De Grazia details the regime's oppressive, anti-feminist policies that shaped women's experiences and discusses how "[e]very aspect of being female was held up to...the state's interest and interpreted in the light of the dictatorship's strategies of state building."<sup>129</sup> Indeed, various critics have supported the claim that Italian women under Fascism were defined by their reproductive capacity and seen as the "producers" of the nation's citizenry.<sup>130</sup> In her article "Fascist Theories of Woman," Re specifically considers the Fascist theories that positioned gender as a cultural construction, rather than as an essentialist vision, in order to refeminize and condemn Italian women to the private, familial sphere.<sup>131</sup> Citing the philosopher Giovanni Gentile's 1934 essay

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<sup>127</sup> Lucia Re, "Fascist Theories of Woman," *Mothers of Invention*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 78. On the contradictory nature of the discourses surrounding the Fascist woman and sexual difference, Re cites Pier Giorgio Zunino, *Lideologia del fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985) 290-293.

<sup>128</sup> Re, "Fascist Theories of Woman," 78.

<sup>129</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 7.

<sup>130</sup> A growing body of work exists on women under Fascism in Italy. See Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *La donna "nera": "Consenso" femminile e fascismo* (Milan: Fetrinelli, 1976), among others. For a discussion of women's literary contributions, see Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>131</sup> Re, "Fascist Theories of Woman," 81-82.



“Woman in Modern Consciousness,” Re argues that Fascist ideology rested on a paradoxical rhetoric of sexual difference that avoided the traditional inferiority of women theorized by Lombroso and firmly established woman as the necessary *other* and complement of man in a modern, Fascist state.<sup>132</sup> Re argues that, in doing so, the foundation of Fascist ideology rested precisely on gender difference. Since Mussolini’s demographic campaign hinged on the assumption that the Italian race should increase its demographic, lest *others* overwhelm its identity as a white and Christian nation, women’s role under the regime became redefined by biological contribution to the state’s replenishment.<sup>133</sup> Re emphasizes the cultural importance of literary acts that destabilized Fascist theories, which defined the cultural construction of gender by resisting them. She argues that women’s writing under the regime, which often occurred at the margins of Fascist ideology after 1927, became acts of “localized resistance” that reasserted the importance of a singular self.<sup>134</sup>

Under Italian Fascism, as under Romanian Soviet communism, women were defined by their roles as the procreators of the nation’s children.<sup>135</sup> Legitimization of both Soviet communism and Italian Fascism was constructed over the bodies of women. Romanian women’s experience of Soviet communism bred an ailing body politic that similarly reflects Italian

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<sup>132</sup> Re, “Fascist Theories of Woman,” 81-82.

<sup>133</sup> Re, “Fascist Theories of Woman,” 78.

<sup>134</sup> Re, “Fascist Theories of Woman,” 81. On the institutionalization of a Fascist historic culture that led to the formation of a collective *historic imaginary* rooted in Fascism’s mass appeal and the intellectual “challenge,” see Claudio Fogu’s *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>135</sup> De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 44 and 147. While a full comparative study of totalitarianism and Fascism remains outside the scope of this dissertation, please see Roger Griffin’s excellent edited anthology, *Fascism, Totalitarianism, and Political Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005). See Radu Ioanid’s essay, “The Sacralized Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard,” in the same volume.

women's experience of Fascism fifty years prior. By writing about Romanian women's experience of totalitarianism twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Coman effectively reconfigures both women's bodies and literary acts as sites of resistance that have the potential to undermine patriarchal constructions of gender and, therefore, re-envision memory. It appears, then, that in Coman's work female bodies are connected across borders through the memorialization of the traumatic experience of female becoming under totalitarianism.

### **Imagi(nation): Toward a Multidirectional and Transnational Becoming**

The literary output of Ingrid Beatrice Coman negotiates a new space for itself, one that Italy has not yet fully accepted, and that also exists outside of Romania. Coman negotiates an alternative, imagined space between Romania and Italy through which she disrupts the otherwise apparently homogenous nature of each nation. Her writing exists as an overlap of women's memories of totalitarian regimes that creates a transcultural form of gendered memory.<sup>136</sup> In fact, her writing does not merely exist in the symbolic space between Romania and Italy, but rather puts the two nations into conversation with one another. This space, for Coman, acts as an imaginary canvas on which writers can reconfigure and critique their countries of origin and destination.

Coman's writing obscures the line between the Italian West and the Slavic East. In restaging the histories of Soviet Romania, Coman introduces different cultural spaces and images into the body of Italian literature, a body that is always in the process of revision. By implying a

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<sup>136</sup> Astrid Erll, "Traveling Memory," *Parallax*. Special Issue *Transcultural Memory*. Ed. Rick Crownshaw 17.4 (2011): 4-18. Erll defines "transcultural memory" as a phenomenon, which reaches both *across* and *beyond* cultures (13). She claims that "all cultural memory must 'travel', be kept in motion, in order to 'stay alive,' to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations" (17). For Erll, memory can only exist because it travels.

confraternity between Romania and Italy's memories of totalitarianism, Coman does not necessarily seek a reductionist approach. She does not parse the ideologies of either totalitarian government. Rather, by defamiliarizing the Italian experience of totalitarianism through a Romanian lens written for an Italian audience, Coman emphasizes not only the potential similarities between the two cultures, but also the artificial nature of both historical narratives and the text's construction. In *Per chi crescono le rose*, Coman's defamiliarization technique creates an ironic, Brechtian vision of the Ceaușescu regime by "laying bare [...] society's causal network," rather than just laying bare her writing techniques.<sup>137</sup> The novel's poetics of panopticism work against the depiction of historical reality inasmuch as it underlines the fragmented and contingent nature of private memory from which historical accounts are often drawn. In doing so, Coman destabilizes history's claims to truth and reveals its constructed and mercurial nature by exposing the self-reflexive nature of her own narrative. The characters' fragmentary visions of totalitarianism and alienation motivate the reader not only to re-evaluate the history of the regime itself or what accounts for the characters' pain, but also to question the significance of the way history evolves as a chronological narrative of real events. Thus, for Coman, memory evolves as a fragmentary and revisionary practice that undermines dominant historical narratives through its ability to rearrange and deterritorialize events.

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<sup>137</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 99. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, or *V-Effekt*, is indebted to Marxism, which understood alienation as the Hegelian condition of dehumanized labor and social relations under capitalism. Ultimately, Brecht sought to transcend Marxism's desire to create a critical philosophy of revolution that had the potential to transform social relations through ideological struggle. Indeed, in his essay "The Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting," Brecht maintains that the *Verfremdungseffekt* "can take account of what is special, different [...] History applies to the environment, not to Man.... [The V-Effekt helps to] underline the historical aspect of a specific social condition" (98). For Brecht, the aestheticizing *Verfremdungseffekt* acts as an antidote against the Marxist struggle, in an effort to reveal alienation's historical nature and to reveal a "suppressed or unconsidered alternative" and contradiction from the original. Thus, Brecht suggests that human condition of political and economic alienation is historically produced, and therefore open to transformation.

In contrast to Jarmila Očkayová's *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (1997) or Marisa Madieri's *Verde Acqua* and *La radura* (1998), Coman does not defamiliarize migrant or exilic reality itself, but instead effectively estranges reality under totalitarian regimes to reveal both the failed project of Soviet communism and the burden of memory that further ties Romania to Italy. Unlike many Italoophone writers, Coman does not describe the migrant experience *after* the moment of migration into Italy.<sup>138</sup> Instead, she *reimagines* the community from which she migrated, recalling the strategy adopted earlier by other émigré writers from Eastern Europe, such as Günter Grass, Herta Müller, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Czesław Miłosz.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Coman's earlier novels, *Té al samovar* (2005) and *La città dei tulipani* (2008), respectively reimagine war in Afghanistan and life in a Soviet gulag, rather than generate clichés about migrant identity that often polarize discussions of migration literature in Italy today. Rather than defamiliarize the experience of migration itself, it appears that Coman places the contested nature of memory at the center of all of her novels. Indeed, throughout her oeuvre, she estranges the very experience of the body's perception of reality through her characters' defamiliarizing experiences of political and economic alienation. In *Per chi crescono le rose*, Coman uses the aesthetics of estrangement in order to narrate the private history of the Ceaușescu regime and describe possible pathways toward a transcultural memory of totalitarianism that avoids a totalizing perspective of suffering.

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<sup>138</sup> Italian literature committed to estranging migrant or exilic reality is vast. See the introduction to this dissertation.

<sup>139</sup> Azade Seyhan, "Unfinished Modernism: European Destination of Transnational Writing," in Gebauer, Mirjam and Pia Schwarz Lausten, eds. *Migration and Literature in Contemporary Europe* (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2010) 16. Coman only describes Romanian migration to Italy in her most recent novels, *Il villaggio senza madri* (2012) and *Badante pentru totdeauna (Caretaker for always)* (2014). In fact, in a similar movement in Marisa Madieri's *Verde acqua*, Coman configures the return home as a return to "Ithaca."

Although Coman does not directly reference the similarities between Romanian and Italian totalitarianism, she speaks to a universal pain that connects Romanians to the rest of humanity: “Alla fine tutti [hanno]...la loro fetta di Storia e di dolore” (“In the end, everyone [has]...their share of History and pain”).<sup>140</sup> She sustains this evident universalism through a restrained effort to minimize details about the novel’s setting, thereby blurring the lines of Romanian identity in order to invite comparisons of the nature of totalitarianism. As a result, Coman’s discourse concerning memory, history, and the body in the context of totalitarianism becomes unencumbered. Instead, Coman warns against competitive models of suffering: “Sarebbe come voler dare voti alla sofferenza e costruire una graduatoria del dolore umano” (“It would be like wanting to give grades to suffering and creating classifications of human pain”).<sup>141</sup>

In his *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Michael Rothberg highlights how ongoing processes of decolonization and civil rights movements in the United States, Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and elsewhere galvanize the memory of the Holocaust. Rather than subscribe to *competitive* memory—a “zero-sum struggle over scarce recourses”—Rothberg argues in defense of *multidirectional* memory—in other words, memory that is subject to an ongoing and cross-referencing negotiation.<sup>142</sup> Borrowing from Richard Terdiman’s notion of memory as a discussion of the “past made present,” Rothberg

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<sup>140</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 4. When I asked her about the significance of this universalism in an interview in July of 2011, Coman emphasized her commitment to narrating the human condition in a way that enables readers to draw cross-cultural comparisons. Interview with Ingrid Beatrice Coman, private residence, July 2011, Rome.

<sup>141</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 144.

<sup>142</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonialization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009) 3.

orients his text on the idea that memory is a mode of working through lived experience.<sup>143</sup>

Because the “borders of memory and identity are jagged,” Rothberg maintains that what first appears like one’s own “property” actually reveals itself to be a “borrowing or adaptation from a history that might seem foreign or distant.”<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Rothberg suggests that memory’s creative power rests precisely on its anachronistic qualities.<sup>145</sup>

Coman implements a multidirectional ethic that combines the transnational experience of totalitarianism with a discussion of memory’s creative powers. In *Per chi crescono le rose*, she establishes various comparisons with Italian Fascism, predominately through a discourse of universal suffering, totalitarianism, and the body. By writing the memories of another culture’s experience of totalitarianism into the Italian idiom, Coman holds an imaginary mirror to womens’ experiences under Italian Fascism. This doubling technique ultimately might enable the reader to consider other potential connections between the two nations despite Italy’s current racialization of Romanians.<sup>146</sup> Positioned as a Freudian “screen” memory, the Romanian experience of totalitarianism acts as a stand-in for Italian Fascism.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, the collective forgetting of Italy’s Fascist past that began in 1945 is transfigured in Coman’s text into a transcultural coming to terms with the legacy of totalitarianism.

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<sup>143</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 4. See Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>144</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.

<sup>145</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.

<sup>146</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memories,” *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin, 2003) 5-6.

<sup>147</sup> Rothberg suggests his notion of multidirectional memory is partially derived from Sigmund Freud’s work on “screen memories” (12-14). See Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memories,” 5-6.

In this, *Per chi crescono le rose* becomes a kind of estranging experience for Italians, which further enables the reader to draw comparisons between the two cultures outside of the novel and to consider how trauma is not necessarily unique, but part of an ongoing negotiation of memory. Coman does not create an image of suffering that competes with Italian collective or private memory. At the end of the novel, she clearly advises her reader *against* such totalizing subjectivisms. After Romania has overthrown Ceaușescu and Catalin is released from prison, Catalin contemplates his actions during the regime, and concludes: “Forse il nemico non ci è poi così estraneo come sembra, e il confine tra bene e male non passa lontano nel mondo, ma attraversa il cuore di ognuno di *noi*” (“Perhaps the enemy was not as strange as he seems, and the border between good and evil doesn’t pass through somewhere far away in the world, but through the heart of each of *us*”).<sup>148</sup> Coman reminds the Italian reader through a Kristevian mirroring effect that the stranger does indeed strike at the core of all of us.<sup>149</sup> By emphasizing “*noi*,” the novel blurs distinctions between *us* and *them*, *same* or *other*, and unifies all beings through a universal “*noi*.” Thus, she collapses Western exceptionalism into a universal view of human experience that unites Romanians, the novel’s referent, with the novel’s audience, predominately an Italian public, through the Italian idiom. The emphatic *noi* creates an imaginary space of community that connects people across borders through a transculturation of memory, and yet simultaneously renders the text strange to Italian readers who, not having lived through Romanian totalitarianism, can still see themselves reflected in the experiences of the *other*. Ultimately, by not drawing direct parallels between Italian and Romanian memories of totalitarian oppression, Coman avoids a hierarchy of suffering.

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<sup>148</sup> Coman, *Per chi crescono le rose*, 167.

<sup>149</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 9.

Thus, the process of writing about the Romanian memories of abortion and anti-woman policies in Italian has the potential to create a new, critical gaze on the largely ignored social and political differences and similarities between two nations, while helping to shape a literature with a larger project in mind—one that connects different nations and cultures and re-examines racism. This process can take the reader beyond him or herself into a revisionary transnational space that configures new possibilities not only for literature, but also for ways of imagining culture, as well as the ways in which human beings are connected across borders and may live together—even within borders.



## CHAPTER THREE

### “Border-being” in Marisa Madieri’s *Verde acqua* and *La radura*

*[The Mediterranean’s] boundaries are drawn in neither space nor time. There is in fact no way of drawing them: they are neither ethnic nor historical, state nor national; they are like a chalk circle that is constantly traced and erased, that the winds and waves, that obligations and inspirations expand or reduce.*

– Predrag Matvejevic, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*.

Published in 1987, *Verde acqua* (*Water-green*) is Marisa Madieri’s most influential text, a work she began in 1981 after being diagnosed with breast cancer at age forty.<sup>1</sup> A volume published after her death in 1996, *Verde acqua, La radura, e altri racconti* (1998), included both works under Einaudi’s new imprint dedicated to women writers, Nuovi Coralli.<sup>2</sup> As her husband, the internationally known writer and scholar Claudio Magris, writes in his afterword to the 1998 collection, Madieri felt the two works should be read together because “they function as two parts of the same whole.”<sup>3</sup> The journalist Ermanno Paccagnini, who wrote the introduction, concurs, underlining a continuation of themes between *Verde acqua* and *La radura* and their

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<sup>1</sup> Cristina Benussi and Graziella Semacchi Gliubich, in *Marisa Madieri: La vita, l’impegno, le opera* (Empoli: Ibiskos Editrice Risolo, 2011), attribute the outpouring of Istrian and Triestine texts after 1987 a response to Madieri’s re-examination of the border in *Verde acqua* (43).

<sup>2</sup> Marisa Madieri, *Verde acqua, La radura e altri racconti* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006 [1998]). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Claudio Magris, *Afterward to Verde acqua*, 287. From here on, any citations from *Verde acqua* or *La radura* are from the 1998 volume; however, I cite the works separately in order to differentiate between the two works.

culmination in *La radura*. Both describe the daisy-protagonist of *La radura*, Dafne, as a micropolitical reinterpretation of Madieri's girlhood in Istria and point to what Paccagnini terms the "indissoluble knot" that ties together "love, death, pain, birth, and metamorphosis" at the heart of both texts as sources of continuity.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter examines how in *Verde acqua* (1987) and *La radura* (1992), Marisa Madieri elaborates a vision of "border-being" that reconfigures traditional representations of border. Through references to John Agnew's concept of "border-thinking," I reveal how Madieri writes *from* the localized position of the northeastern Italian borderlands in order to transform the border into a productive site of identification with multiculturalism and transnationalism.

Both *Verde acqua* and *La radura* center on the interconnected cyclical nature of life to create a literary representation of "border-being." While *Verde acqua* traces Madieri's own Istrian exodus from the Northeast borderlands of Italy, *La radura* is an allegorical fable that reconfigures and magnifies the same journey towards a discovery of origins through the experiences of an anthropomorphized daisy named Dafne who sets out to learn not only about her own origins, but about the origin of all living things. The two texts examine the nature of exploration and search for origins that are at the heart of not only the experience of migration, but, for Madieri, at the heart of all lived experience. While at first glance these two texts employ very different structures, when read in light of one another, they form a centripetal tension that reinforces and enriches shared themes. Not quite an "animal tale," as defined by the Aarne-Thompson index from which Vladimir Propp drew his inspiration, *La radura* is a "floral" fable that personifies Madieri herself as a daisy named Dafne. Part-animal (as anthropomorphized by

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<sup>4</sup> Ermanno Paccagnini, *Introduction to Verde acqua, La radura e altri racconti*, xviii.

Madieri), part-vegetable, Dafne continues and mediates upon a journey begun in *Verde acqua*. In contrast with various texts that examine the effects of dislocation on identity formation, neither of Madieri's works focuses on the difficulty of migration itself. Rather, the meditative function of dislocation, and how it transforms our understanding of belonging and *otherness*, provides a focus. Through a "poetics of aurality," Madieri reveals how all life answers to a higher natural law that applies across national borders. Before turning to the poetics of *Verde acqua* and *La radura*, I will provide an overview of their publication and reception in the context of Triestine literature.

Madieri was born in Istria in 1938 of an Italian mother; her father was an Italian of Hungarian descent. She spent her childhood in Fiume with her family until 1947, when Madieri departed in the Istrian exodus with her mother, sister, and grandmother. After living in Venice for a year, she rejoined her mother and sister in 1949 in Trieste where they lived together in the "Silos," a granary silo left over from the Hapsburgs that served as temporary housing for refugees and exiles from Istria, Dalmatia, and Fiume. The poverty and discrimination they experienced as *profughi* in Trieste imprinted itself deeply on Madieri. As a result, she would remain publically silent about her exilic past until the publication of her first work, *Verde acqua*.<sup>5</sup> The family did not achieve permanent housing in Trieste until 1954. Afterwards, she became a teacher of literature and married Claudio Magris in 1963. The couple remained in the city, raising two sons, until Madieri's death in 1996 at the age of fifty-eight.

Madieri began to write only when she was forty in order to leave her sons a record of her life after learning she had breast cancer, a disease that would claim her life.<sup>6</sup> Written over the

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<sup>5</sup> Benussi, *Marisa Madieri*, 43.

<sup>6</sup> Benussi, *Marisa Madieri*, 43.

course of fifteen years, Madieri's *oeuvre* numbers less than three hundred pages. Journalist and literary critic Geno Pampaloni would term *Verde acqua* a "contemporary classic" upon its publication, and the Triestine literary establishment gave it a warm welcome.<sup>7</sup> However, while *Verde acqua* attracted an underground cult in Northeastern Italy, the book did not gain Italian acclaim until the 1998 publication of *Verde acqua, La radura e altri racconti*. The collection was subsequently translated into several languages.<sup>8</sup> Although it has continued to attract a large international audience – particularly in Spain, France, and the Czech Republic – Madieri's works remain unacknowledged in the Italian literary establishment beyond Trieste.<sup>9</sup>

### **Triestine context and literature**

During the twentieth century, the border area known as the Julian March – the zone between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia – evolved into a geopolitical area of ideological contestation between East and West Europe, with Trieste at its political and economic center.<sup>10</sup> The area's ensuing reconfiguration after the end of the Second World War provoked the Istrian exodus (*l'esodo istriano*), during which at least 200,000 ethnic Italians, Croats, and Slovenes migrated elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> While under Venetian jurisdiction Trieste was only a provincial harbor, under

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<sup>7</sup> See Geno Pampaloni quoted in Benussi and Gliubich, *Marisa Madieri*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> The collection was translated into Croatian, Slovakian, French, Spanish, Hungarian and German.

<sup>9</sup> Since Madieri's death in 1996, several international conferences in Spain, Trieste, Paris, and Croatia have been dedicated to her work.

<sup>10</sup> In *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Pamela Ballinger stresses that the Julian region of which Trieste is a part not only embodied the memory of Fascism, resistance, and the Communist war of liberation, but also the memory of post-war exoduses (21).

<sup>11</sup> Standard statistics endorsed by Istrian exiles put the number at 350,000 (Colella 1958). More recently, estimates state that 200,000 Italian refugees fled Istria (Donato 1997; Nodari 1997). In his "Storiografia e pubblicista sull'esodo: Considerazioni critiche," *Quaderni di Centro di Ricerche Storiche* 10 (103-110),

Venetian jurisdiction it became an imperial port city in 1719 under Austrian Emperor Karl VI.<sup>12</sup> As the only Austrian-Hungarian *porto franco* on the Adriatic, Trieste had been an international commercial hub of maritime trading in the latter part of the eighteenth century and all of the nineteenth. The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the close of World War I severed Trieste's cosmopolitanism associated with *Mitteleuropa* and trading links with the Balkans and Danube, leading to economic decline that aggravated ethnic and border issues stirring within and around its borders. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Versailles assigned Trieste to Italy in 1919 for a period of time during which Italy sought to Italianize the local Slav population.<sup>13</sup> During the *ventennio*, the Italian Fascist regime continued to reclaim Trieste and its borderlands from then-Yugoslavian and Croatian majorities through force, imposing Italianization on Slavs, in this case defining *italianità* in terms of anti-slavism.<sup>14</sup> When Italian forces surrendered at the end of the Second World War in 1945 to Germany, Fiume, Istria, and Dalmatia became part of Yugoslavia under the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, which led to the mass

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Antonio Miculian summarizes the various estimates at play in the debate and provides a bibliographic synthesis of works related to the exodus. See Amedeo Colella, *L'esodo dalle terre adriatiche: Rilevazioni statistiche* (Rome: Stab, 1958); Sergio Donato's paper "Problemi di quantificazione dell'Esodo Istriano," and Pio Nodari's paper "I flussi migratori dalla Venezia Giulia nei due dopoguerra," both presented at the conference "Compulsory Removals of Populations after the First and Second World Wars: Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkan-Aegean Region, the Istro Dalmatian Region," Trieste, September 1997; and see also Raoul Pupo, "L'esodo degli Italiani da Zara, da Fiume e dall'Istria, 1943-1956," *Quaderni del Centro Studi 'Ezio Vanoni'* 3-4: 127-163. In Chapter 3 of *History in Exile*, Ballinger notes how the Istrian *exodus* took place over the course of a twelve-year span, a drawn-out process, which reveals the complex shift in politics in Northeastern Italy (77).

<sup>12</sup> For more about Trieste as a mirror for the historical decay of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, see Elio Apih, *Il ritorno di Giani Stuparich* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1988), 103.

<sup>13</sup> See the introduction to Ballinger's *History in Exile*.

<sup>14</sup> Ballinger, *History in Exile*, 76-81. See also Anna Maria Vinci, "Il fascismo di confine," *I viaggi di Erodoto* 34 (1998): 100-105.

exodus of Istrians to Italy of which Madieri was part.<sup>15</sup> The question of which country would claim Trieste remained, so the United Nations and Italy established the Free Territory of Trieste, dividing the city into Zones A, governed by the U.N. and American forces, and B, governed by the Yugoslavians, in order both to both accommodate a varied local ethnic population and to cool growing territorial claims between Italy and Yugoslavia over various areas of Trieste.

Ultimately, the “Trieste Question” resulted in a recodification of irredentism and cosmopolitanism by placing communism in opposition to democracy, pitting East against West.<sup>16</sup>

Through its emphasis on the northeastern Italian frontier and cultural hybridity, Madieri’s work joins a conversation inaugurated in Trieste by Scipio Slataper.<sup>17</sup> From its beginnings,

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<sup>15</sup> From 1954 to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Istrian exodus remained largely forgotten outside of Northeast Italy. In *History in Exile*, Ballinger underlines how esuli were “remembered merely as ‘fascists’ forced to flee Istria once it passed to Yugoslavia;” however, this labeling reveals, suggests Ballinger, the on-going Italian coming-to-terms with Fascism as a “system within which most people proved...complicit (see Passerini 1979)” (104).

<sup>16</sup> As Ballinger observes in *History and Exile*, several American and British military officials claimed that the “Cold War began in northern Italy” (77). Citing the head of the Allied Military Government Alfred Bowman, Ballinger suggests that the focal point of the “Trieste Question” was (77), in Bowman’s words, “the political and doctrinal confrontation at Trieste” (Alfred Connor Bowman, *Zones of Strain: A Memoir of the Early Cold War* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982) 7. David Campbell [*Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992)], suggests these Cold War bipolarities were necessary to the production of symbolic boundaries. Indeed, as historian Glenda Sluga has observed, this dichotomy and assumption that the Cold War began over the Trieste border dispute on the Americans’ part derives from the acceptance of long-standing Italian nationalist constructs, i.e. West versus East, civilization versus barbarism. See Sluga, “Trieste: Ethnicity and the Cold War, 1945-54,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994) 285-303. Sluga further notes that according to British and American officials, as for Italian nationalists, “Slavs were a political communist threat from the East. The two connotations of the term [Slav] overlapped politically and emotionally, enabling a rapport to be formed between the Allies and pro-Italian Triestines” (286).

<sup>17</sup> Claudio Magris, *Afterword to Verde acqua, la radura*, 283. Specifically, Magris states: “Verde acqua si inserisce nella ricca tradizione della letteratura triestina di frontiera, da Slataper a Stuparich, da Bettiza a Tomizza a Velgiani e a tanti altri” (“*Water-green* inserts itself in the rich tradition of Trieste literature of the border, from Slataper to Stuparich, from Bettiza to Tomizza to Velgiani e to many others”)(283). In

“Triestine” literature drew inspiration from the cultural and political tensions that grew from Trieste’s position as a border city between Italy, Croatia, and Slovenia. Most critics attribute the initial recognition of “Triestine” literature to Pietro Pancrazi, who in a 1934 essay dedicated to the writer Giani Stuparich, declared:

Mi pare proprio si possa affermare che esiste oggi una letteratura triestina... negli ultimi trent’anni, si è rivelata a Trieste una famiglia di scrittori, poeti e prosatori, diversi, ma in qualche modo consanguinei...

(It appears to me that it is possible to confirm that a Triestine literature exists today...in the last thirty years, a family of writers, poets and prose writers, varied, but in some way blood related...)<sup>18</sup>

Triestine literature was conceived in large part beyond Trieste in Florence during Scipio Slataper’s tenure at *La Voce*, first as a contributor in 1909, and then as its editor in 1910.<sup>19</sup> *La Voce* called for the modernization of literary culture to enable Triestine literature to, in Slataper’s words, allow its writers to “act as catalysts” in order to discover and examine their “Triestine

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the fourth letter of his *Lettere triestine (Triestine Letters)*, which appeared in *La Voce* (1909), in *La vita dello spirito (Spiritual Life)*, Slataper writes about Trieste’s “two souls” (Italian and Slav), its peculiar brand of *italianità*, or italianness, and the need for a new, local brand of literature that emphasizes a hybrid identity (3). Later, in his book *Il mio Carso* (Florence: La Voce, 1912), Slataper contemplates his soul “split” between a Slav and Italian self, which is “tormented,” like Trieste, due to its hybridity (2, 7); In *A City in Search of an Author*, Katia Pizzi also identifies Marisa Madieri’s work as a continuation of Triestine literature (167).

<sup>18</sup> See Pietro Pancrazi, “Giani Stuparich triestino,” in *Scrittori d’oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1946) 103-14; first published in *Scrittori italiani del Novecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1934) 204-220. For an extensive bibliography related to the definition of Triestine literature, see Bruno Maier, “Caratteri, motivi, aspetti della letteratura triestina del Novecento,” in *La letteratura triestina del Novecento* (Trieste: Lint, 1969) 7-31. See also Bruno Maier, “Letteratura triestina: storia di un concetto critico,” in *Dimensione Trieste: Nuovi saggi sulla letteratura triestina* (Milan: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1987) 11-20.

<sup>19</sup> Many Triestine intellectuals lived in Florence for the same reason in this period, including Giani and Carlo Stuparich, Virgilio Giotti, Biagio Marin, Gemma Harazim, Guido Devescovi and Alberto Spainì, all of whom were Slataper’s colleagues at *La Voce*.

soul;” however, the regional movement was eclipsed by the upholders of *toscanità* that already dominated the Italian literary establishment.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the constructed notion of *triestinità* rose out of a desire to bring more international, rather than national, concerns into the Italian literary corpus. At the same time, Italian Fascism, by drastically reducing international trade in Trieste, seemingly enclosed the circulation of ideas and goods to a *cul-de-sac*, forcing the literary ambitions of Triestine writers to turn inwards.<sup>21</sup> As a result, *triestinità* functioned as a coherent framework based on an intensely local “system of identification” that was meant to replace multiple national allegiances.<sup>22</sup> Based on the “myth of Trieste,” *triestinità* reinvisioned the city as a “privileged theater [...] of the mind,” which recalled a nostalgia for *Mitteleuropean* cosmopolitanism and the economic prosperity enjoyed under Hapsburg rule.<sup>23</sup> In their seminal *Un’identità di frontiera: Trieste*, Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris analyze the constructed nature of *triestinità* by emphasizing the contradictions inherent to Triestine identity – at once nostalgically Hapsburg and cosmopolitan, both “Eastern and Western European,” but also a hotbed for the convergence of multiple ethnic identities – and focus on the irreconcilability inherent in the search for a consolidated identity. As a result of its constructed nature, Ara and Magris

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<sup>20</sup> Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> See De Castro, “Considerazioni sul futuro” in *La questione di Trieste: L’azione politica e diplomatica italiana dal 1943 al 1954* (Trieste: Lint, 1981) 158. For a discussion of Triestine literature’s insularity, see also Walter L. Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 48. In his dissertation turned book, *Il mito asburgico. Umanità e stile del mondo austroungarico nella letteratura austriaca moderna* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963), Claudio Magris examines the reasons behind the Hapsburg myth and its presence in the works of various writers such as Rilke and Musil. The “mito di Trieste” is often linked to a nostalgic longing for the city’s imperial and cosmopolitan past. For more on the myth of Trieste, see Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Un’identità di frontiera: Trieste* (Florence: Einaudi, 2007 [1982]) and Elio Apih, *Trieste* (Bari: Laterza, 1988).



argue that *triestinità* exists only in literature, its singular home.<sup>24</sup> While Triestine literature of the early twentieth century did not adhere to a specific set of formal or stylistic rules, many works tended to recycle themes relating to the border, hybridity, and heavily borrowed from other Triestine writers creating an often self-referential literature.<sup>25</sup>

Although early Triestine women writers enjoyed a higher degree of emancipation and access to higher education than their Italian counterparts, women's writing in Trieste before the 1970s only gently criticized the patriarchal literary establishment.<sup>26</sup> In fact, most early Triestine

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<sup>24</sup> See Ara and Magris, *Un'identità di frontiera*: "Svevo, Saba, and Slataper are not so much writers who are born in it [Trieste] and out of it, but writers who generate and create it, who give it a face, which otherwise, by itself, would not exist. The anti-literariness of Triestine [writers] translates the attitude of men who demand from writing not beauty but truth, because in their eyes writing means acquiring an identity, not only as individuals, but also as a group" (15-16). In contrast to the highly theorized nature of Triestine identity, Ara and Magris suggest that Triestine's actual experience of the border may be articulated as the *confine dentro*, or the border within, a sentiment, which articulates the provisional status of its borders and ideological allegiances that have surrounded Trieste for centuries.

<sup>25</sup> Magris employs the term "endogamy" to describe the cross-reference and promotion of Triestine writers amongst other Triestine writers. Indeed, Magris observes the extremely close links shared by writers in Trieste and their tendency to promote and refer to one another's works and literary themes obsessively. See Magris and Ara, *Trieste*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of Triestine women's education, see Curci and Ziani, *Bianco, rosa e verde: Scrittrici a Trieste fra '800 e '900* (Trieste: Lint, 1993) 152-154, and Favetta, "L'apporto femminile nella vita di Trieste," 3-18. According to Katia Pizzi, Triestine women enjoyed better access to education than the rest of Italian women (chapter 4 in *A City in Search of an Author*). This was due in large part to the Austro-Hungarian model of education that was established in Trieste. As a result of Triestine women's greater emancipation, Triestine cultural circles enjoyed a high degree of active female participation in the arts between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, several Triestine periodicals addressing women's issues flourished during this time. For a full list of women's periodicals printed during this time, see Silvana Monti Orel, *I giornali triestini dal 1863 al 1902: Società e cultura di Trieste attraverso 576 quotidiani e periodici analizzati e descritti nel loro contenuto storico* (Trieste: Lint, 1976) and Aurelia Gruber Benco (ed.), *Umana: Le istituzioni di cultura della Trieste moderna*, 7 (1958), 201. As noted in Roberto Curci and Gabriella Ziani's *Bianco rosa e verde: Scrittrici a Trieste fra '800 e '900* (Trieste: Lint, 1993), during this period, various Triestine women writers were active: Elisa Tagliapietra Cambon (1842-1913), Caterina Croatto Caprin (1840-1922), Emma Conti Luzzatto (1850-1918), Rina Del Prado (1851-1943), Nella Doria Cambon (1872-1948), Caterina Croatto Caprin (1840-1922), Enrica Barzilai Gentilli (1859-1936), Elda Gianelli (1856-1921), Luigi di San Giusto (Luisa Macina-Gervasio) (1856-1936), Giuseppina Martinuzzi (1844-1925), Gemma Harazim (1876-1961), Luisa Gervasio (1865-1963), Beatrice Soeraz (1843-1923), Ida Finzi "Haydee" (1867-1946), Ave Giorgianni (1884-1948), Willy Dias

women's writing tended to conform to the male-dominated local literary establishment and *Mitteleuropean* nostalgia.<sup>27</sup> Many women modeled their writing on that of well-established male Triestine writers who had already been accepted into the canon.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Triestine women's writing before the 1970s tended to position Trieste and questions of the border at the center of their texts by recycling distinct echoes of earlier, male Triestine writers.<sup>29</sup> Relegated to the margins of Triestine literature, many women writers wrote in dialect as a way to begin a tradition outside of the one that excluded them.<sup>30</sup>

However, a small body of early women's writing from Trieste was critical of the male-dominated discourse surrounding *triestinità*. For instance, Anita Pittoni's work, *Lettere al professore: L'anima di Trieste* (1968) expands Triestine history by challenging stereotypical views of the city.<sup>31</sup> A force in Triestine and Italian literary and publishing circles, Pittoni hosted

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(1872-1956), Ermina Bazzochi (1848-1914), Carolina Luzzatto (1837-1919), and Elody Oblath Stuparich (1889-1971) among many others.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Pia Rimini, *Il diluvio* (Rome, Campitelli, 1933). Many Triestine women were active in the literary scene for many centuries in Trieste, often responsible for organizing various literary salons at home that served as incubators for Triestine literature; however, as Curci and Ziani suggest in *Bianco rosa e verde*, until the Great War, most Triestine women writers were fervent nationalists exposing an *amor di patria*. Thus, rather than focus on developing their own Triestine literature *al femminile*, they prioritized the nationalist and irredentist debates occurring in Trieste over their own emancipation. See, for instance, the works of Adele, Sofia, and Argella Butti in Curci and Ziani, *Bianco verde e rosa*, 59-73.

<sup>28</sup> Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 140. See, for instance, the work of Lia Maier whose poetry closely resembles that of Stelio Mattioni.

<sup>30</sup> See Roberto Damiani and Claudio Grisancich (eds.), *La poesia in dialetto a Trieste* (Trieste: Italo Svevo, 1989). Importantly, many of the Triestine women writers of this time were Jewish. As a result, many of their works were destroyed after being sent to concentration camps.

<sup>31</sup> Anita Pittoni, *Lettere al professore: L'anima di Trieste* (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1968). In Curci's and Ziani's words, she was the 'unica *femme de lettres* veramente militante' of the post-war period. See Roberto Curci and Gabriella Ziani, *Bianco rosa e verde: Scrittrici a Trieste fra '800 e '900* (Trieste: Lint, 1993) 375.

in Via Cassa di Risparmio perhaps the most influential literary salon in post-war Trieste.<sup>32</sup> In addition, together with her partner Giani Stuparich, she funded and ran the local publishing house 'Lo Zibaldone' until her death.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Nora Poliaghi, one of the most celebrated feminist Triestine writers, criticized Trieste's tendency to look backwards in the formation of its literary identity in her collection *Città amara* (1960). Throughout her writing career, Poliaghi was highly aware of her outsider condition in relation to Triestine literature on account of her gender. In *Colore di Trieste* (1967), Poliaghi describes *triestinità* as a phenomenon of limitations rather than one of openness that denounces those same limitations.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Delia Benco, wife of famed Triestine writer and journalist Silvio Benco, wrote the autobiographical *Ieri* (1937), which narrates the difficulties of the narrator's tortured inner life and women's oppressed position in Trieste.<sup>35</sup>

Fausta Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze Wieselberger* (1976) marks a turning point in Triestine writing.<sup>36</sup> Although born in Cagliari and raised between various Italian cities due to her father's military career, Cialente identified with her maternal roots in Trieste, which the novel explores. Under the Hapsburgs, Cialente's maternal family belonged to the petit-bourgeoisie of Trieste, which Cialente associated with bigotry and the *irredentist* movement, advocacy for

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<sup>32</sup> Curci and Ziani, *Bianco rosa e verde*, 378.

<sup>33</sup> Magris and Ara, in their *Trieste*, note Lo Zibaldone's positive and far-reaching impact on both Triestine and Italian literature and mourn its loss (171).

<sup>34</sup> Nora Poliaghi, *Colore di Trieste* (Trieste: Società Artistico Letteraria, 1967). Poliaghi, "Colore di Trieste," in *Colore di Trieste* (50 and 53): Non è essa [*triestinità*] forse la denuncia delle limitazioni avvertite dagli artisti stessi quanto limitazione di pratica linguistica, di tradizione culturale, di contatti geniali, di inserimento nella vita spiritual italiana [...]? *Triestinità* dunque come fenomeno di isolamento e di limitazione."

<sup>35</sup> Delia Benco, *Ieri* (Milan: Ceschina, 1937). See more on Benco in Curci and Ziani, *Trieste*, 317-330.

<sup>36</sup> Fausta Cialente, *Le quattro ragazze Wieselberger* (Milan: Mondadori, 1976).

Trieste's inclusion in Italy.<sup>37</sup> In what Graziella Parati has termed a "reverse movement," Cialente reflects public history within the private, familial sphere.<sup>38</sup> In the first section of the novel, Cialente overlaps the otherness of her mother with that of Slovenians to examine how the othering of Slavs, especially middle class Triestine women, ironically includes them. Women in Cialente's family pass knowledge on to one another by transgressing patriarchal impositions through the generations. The second section finds the Fausta-narrator living in Egypt, a decision that ultimately helps her to explore how cultural difference determines the location and formation of her own nomadic identity.<sup>39</sup> Thus, as Parati suggests, Cialente ultimately challenges the idea of *triestinità* by destabilizing its associations with insularity and nostalgia and projecting new terms for identity formation that looked outwards beyond Trieste rather than inwards.

While Cialente's text is set largely beyond Trieste, it weaves various Triestine literary techniques with an emphasis on questions of identity, difference, and the border. In particular, Cialente borrows from Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923). As in Svevo's novel, Cialente's text features a group of sisters whose names all begin with "A," like the Malfenti's daughters. In both authors' texts, lives unfold within the claustrophobic confines of the private

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<sup>37</sup> Cialente, *Le quattro*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> See Graziella Parati, "From Genealogy to Gynealogy and Beyond: Fausta Cialente's *Le Quattro Ragazze Weiselburger*," in *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 73.

<sup>39</sup>In the essay "Painting, Politics, and Eroticism in Fausta Cialente's Egyptian Narratives," [in *Symbolism: An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics*, edited by Rudiger Aherns and Klaus Strerstorfer, vol. 8 (New York: AMA, 2008) 105-140] Lucia Re identifies Cialente as a nomad whose hybrid identity made it difficult to place her within the Italian literary establishment (105-111). Re suggests that the Italian literary establishment's difficulty in placing Cialente's work within its confines may be due to Cialente's lack of strong identification with an Italian city, as in the case of Moravia with Rome (105). Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto, citing Re, echoes a discussion of Cialente's "hybridity" and nomadism in *Fascist Hybridities: Representations of Racial Mixing and Diaspora Cultures Under Mussolini* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

sphere until the end, when the plot explodes outwards against the local landscape. Whereas in *La coscienza di Zeno* Svevo emphasizes the border between Trieste and the then Austro-Hungarian Empire, Cialente emphasizes the border between the land and the sea. Moreover, in contrast with Svevo, Cialente is critical of a *triestinità* that looks inwards, obsessively self-referential and nostalgic, preferring a *triestinità* that looks to the future and forges new connections with the world beyond its borders. For Madieri, the figure of the border becomes a meditation on life itself rather than, as for Svevo, sickness and war. Like Cialente's works, Madieri's *Verde acqua* and *La radura* support a *triestinità* that looks outwards, albeit towards a beyond that reveals how we are all comprised of the same cosmic dust.

A number of critics have acknowledged Madieri's *Verde acqua* as the first literary text in Italy to usher in a wave of writers who have, since the 1960s, written about Northeastern Italian identity.<sup>40</sup> However, they have overlooked Madieri's plural identity and the hybrid qualities of her works, deeming her strictly a Triestine writer, rather than an Italian or transnational writer. As her husband's primary editor, she had a deep familiarity with Triestine and Central European literature as part of her intimate knowledge of Magris's literary corpus.<sup>41</sup> Magris cites Franz

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<sup>40</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the PCI in Italy, coupled with the *Tangentepoli* scandal, Italians once again took up the question of Trieste and Triestine identity. See, for instance, Gianfranco Sodomaco (*Avventure di un pover istro*, 1992); Luigi Pap de Montona (*E fu l'esilio, una saga istriana*, 1993); Enzo Bettiza (*Esilio*, 1996); Corrado Belci (*Nona Marieta. Ricordi dignanesi*, 1998), Anna Maria Mori e Nelida Milani (*Bora*, 1998); Ranieri Ponis (*In odium fidei*, 1999); Myriam Andreatini Sfilli (*Flash di una giovinezza vissuta tra i cartoni*, 2000); Graziella Fiorentin (*Chi ha paura dell'uomo nero?* 2001); Piero Taticchio (*Nascinguerra*, 2001), Lina Derin (*Capodistria addio. Lettere di un'esule 1945-1956*, 2002), and Anna Maria Mori (*Nata in Istria*, 2006) among others.

<sup>41</sup> Remarking upon Madieri's succinct editorial style in his *Afterward* to *Verde acqua*, *La radura* e altri racconti, Magris states: "L'essenziale risiede nel non-detto, nell'inespresso, secondo la poetica dell'iceberg, cara a Hemingway, in base alla quale soltanto un ottavo di ciò che viene raccontato sporge dall'acqua ossia viene detto esplicitamente. Marisa Madieri è maestra nell'arte di levare e di potare; lo faceva anche con le mie pagine, nessuna delle quali – sino alla sua morte – è stata pubblicata senza esser stata prima vagliata (e spesso sfrondata) insieme e molte delle quali, come *Danubio* e *Microcosmi*, sono nate da una sua intuizione" (288-289).

Kafka, Cristina Campo, Maria Zambrano, and Teresa Gracia, as well as various Triestine writers such as Svevo, among his wife's literary influences.<sup>42</sup>

### *Verde acqua*

*Verde acqua* traces Marisa Madieri's autobiographical transformation from a self-identified exile to a transnational woman living in Trieste. Several diary entries, dated from November 24, 1981, to November 27, 1984, comprise the text, which appears as a "family document" addressed to Madieri's two sons, Paolo and Francesco. Interweaving stories from before, during, and after the three year period the text nominally covers, *Verde acqua* intertwines stories of Madieri's happy childhood in Istria and her exilic adolescence with her coming-of-age and later maturation and content married life in Trieste. The text explores how the hybridity that characterizes northeastern Italy includes her as both a Hungarian and as an Istrian-Italian. In addition, her family's genealogy reflects many inter-ethnic marriages that incorporate Hungarian, Slav, Romanian, Croatian, German, Italian, and Istrian identities. She describes her return to Fiume, the land she fled as a child, while weaving stories of the present in light of the past. As she contemplates her exilic past and her family's future without her, Madieri also weaves into the texts reflections on the nature of time, memory, and death. Although the entries are dated chronologically, the narrated events themselves oscillate rapidly between time periods. As a result, the nonlinear narrative mimics the process of human memory recall and finally produces, as we shall see, a metaphysical overview of life's scope.

Narrated from what Magris calls the "epic perspective of childhood," the events of Madieri's past become part of a flow of time in which past, present, and future become

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<sup>42</sup> Magris, *Afterword to Verde*, 289.

interchangeable.<sup>43</sup> Set predominately in the water-green Northeast region of Italy from 1938 to 1984, *Verde acqua* is structured as a journey that explores Madieri's search for origins, which she locates at the Northeast border of Italy. The text's experimental style, which Ermanno Paccagnini terms "anomalous," combines autobiographical elements of Madieri's life with the memoir, epistolary novel and short-story.<sup>44</sup> Closer inspection, however, reveals that many of the entries are meditations that place the past in the context of the present, while others read like pages in a novel, complete with a plot and character development.

*Verde acqua* and *La radura* employ an uncanny literary technique both in the sense of "spaesamento"—the effect of estrangement that Očkayová assigns to the experience of migration—and in the Freudian *Unheimliche*.<sup>45</sup> In both texts, the narrator becomes estranged from herself as she embarks on a journey of self-formation, and when she finds herself uprooted, the two narratives are estranging in the Shklovskian sense of seeing an object anew: not as it really is in its own essence, but as a device that lends the reader a new vision of the object rather than, as Victor Shklovsky writes, a "means for knowing it."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Magris, *Afterward to Verde acqua, La radura*, 283.

<sup>44</sup> In his introduction to the 1997 reprint of *Verde acqua* and *La radura*, Ermanno Paccagnini defines reading Madieri as a "singolare esperienza letteraria, anomala, fuori dagli schemi consolidate" [singular literary experience, anomalous, outside consolidated frameworks] (v). See also Graziano Benelli, "Marisa Madieri Magris, Esordire con l'esodo. Conversazione al Caffè Tommaseo," *Il Lettore di Provincia*, Vol.20/72, September 1988 (34) and Guido Morpugo Tagliabue, "Deduzioni letterarie della famiglia Magris," *aut-aut*, n.222, Nov./Dec. 1987 (133).

<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, Trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 18-20.

Madieri employs an “auroral gaze” that sees everything as if for the first time, while simultaneously remaining conscious of life’s ephemeral nature.<sup>47</sup> This gaze functions on two levels. First, the auroral employs the child’s perspective, or minor perspective which views experience “dal basso della Storia”— from the ground floor of History— often the very perspective of women, children, and a daisy, all of which inhabit a marginalized position beyond Italy.<sup>48</sup> Second, Madieri’s use of an “auroral” perspective lets her “hover” over her text from a vertical position of “superior disinterest” located outside of History and personal events.<sup>49</sup> As a result, seen from a position that considers the whole of life in light of her terminal illness, Madieri is able to take into consideration simultaneously both the minute and metaphysical aspects of life by revealing how traces of the past are part of an unrelenting continuity that undoes neat conceptualizations of human time. Ultimately, this perspective, as we shall see, enables Madieri to reconsider the past in terms of a vertical, cosmic perspective that encompasses the whole of life and that is informed by a present and future desire to cling to the fleeting moments of her life. In this way, the particularities of private experience give away to a metaphysical contemplation of birth and destruction connecting all life across borders.

### **Transnational “border-thinking” in *Verde acqua***

“Sometimes the experience of the border,” observes Claudio Magris, “leads to the discovery that one is also from the other side.”<sup>50</sup> Such is the case in Marisa Madieri’s writing; in

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<sup>47</sup> In his introduction to *Verde acqua, La radura e altri racconti*, Paccagnini observes the “auroral” quality of Madieri’s work, as evidenced by her narrative gaze (*Introduction to VC*, xiv). See also Ernestina Pellegrini, “Transparencies,” 53.

<sup>48</sup> Magris, *Afterward to VC*, 283.

<sup>49</sup> Pellegrini, “Transparencies,” 53.

<sup>50</sup> Magris, “The Self that Writes,” 3-4.



recounting the exodus of her family, she discovers that her family is part Hungarian and Slav, even though the Slavs persecuted them for being Istrian-Italian.<sup>51</sup> When she finds her paternal grandparents' marriage license, she learns of the Italianization of her Hungarian origins:

Discendente di Giorgio Madjarić, commerciante di legname ungherese di  
Varaždin, il cui cognome subì nel tempo due aggiornamenti, prima in Madierich e  
poi in Madieri.

(Descendent of Giorgio Madjarić, Hungarian wood worker from Varaždin, whose  
last name underwent through time two revisions, first in Madierich and then in  
Madieri).<sup>52</sup>

Thus, Madieri discovers that part of her belongs to the “other side” of the Iron Curtain, to the very part of the world that threatens her.<sup>53</sup> In this way, *Verde acqua* positions the formation and transformation of the self in terms of a search for the meaning of a plural identity, of belonging to more than one cultural legacy. However, with their emphasis on the local and on the right to a decent life, her narratives also support thinking *from* the border.

As a “need, a fever, a curse,” Magris sees the border as an imagined division between nations that gives necessary form to identity and sets national narratives against others, defining national space.<sup>54</sup> The border features prominently in discussions of Triestine literature, due in

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<sup>51</sup> Magris, “The Self that Writes,” 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> In his essay, “The Self that Writes,” Claudio Magris echoes the same sentiment of a defamiliarizing moment in his childhood in which he learned that part of him, too, belonged to the other side of the Iron Curtain (2).

<sup>54</sup> Claudio Magris, *Microcosms*, trans. Iain Halliday (London: Harvill Press, 1999) 107.

part to Trieste's geopolitical position. Magris, as well as Katia Pizzi, have pointed out the provisionality of Triestine cultural identity, and by extension, the identity of its hinterlands.<sup>55</sup> Following Homi Bhabha, Pizzi believes this ambiguity, or "undecidability," gives rise to a "border neurosis," or anxiety evidenced in Triestine literature as well as other literatures associated with borderlands or border-crossings.<sup>56</sup> Richard Robinson reads the Italian borderlands as a "nowhere" that is defined politically and given aesthetic form.<sup>57</sup> For many Triestine writers, the border becomes a "stage" condemned to the repetition of family dramas entangled in ethnic and ideological battles.<sup>58</sup> Against this stage, the border becomes both a mutilated body and wound.<sup>59</sup> For Triestines Fulvio Tomizza, Enrico Morovich, and Enzo Bettiza, the Triestine border explodes reality onto a stage of contradictory forces where historical subjects lose a stable identity.

The political geographer John Agnew, in his article "Borders on the mind: re-framing border thinking," observes that while borders exist for a multitude of reasons, they are ultimately "complex human creations that are perpetually open to question" because they are inherently 'problematic.'<sup>60</sup> Agnew indicates that current border studies generally examine borders in terms

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<sup>55</sup> Magris, *Trieste*, 72. Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 74-76.

<sup>56</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [199]) 51. See also Pizzi, *A City in Search*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Robinson, *Narratives of the European Border: a history of nowhere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 4.

<sup>58</sup> Ballinger, *History in Exile*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> In *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923), Italo Svevo imagines the borders between the then Austrian-Hungarian Empire and Italy as a "gangrenous wound" (433).

<sup>60</sup> John Agnew, "Borders on the mind: re-framing border thinking." *Ethics and Global Politics*, 1 (4) (2008) 2.

of identity and interests based on *cross-pressures*, rather than looking at them in terms of their “equivocal character.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, Agnew suggests that discussion of borders, or “border-thinking,” should:

open up to consider (a) territorial spaces as “dwelling” rather than national spaces and (b) political responsibility for pursuit of a decent life as extending beyond the borders of any particular state. Borders matter, then, both because they have real effects and because they trap thinking about and acting in the world in territorial terms. They not only limit movements of things, money, and people, but they also limit the exercise of intellect, imagination, and political will.<sup>62</sup>

By abandoning an *either/or* rhetoric of borders, Agnew suggests both sides can see the positive from one another’s perspectives, while also finding new terms for thinking beyond borders. Ultimately, Agnew believes borders (and their discourse) should serve human dignity rather than undermining it.<sup>63</sup> In contrast with the Italo-Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo, who reads borders as the fruits of rational political instrumentalization that sprang up in the late 1500s and 1600s, Agnew sees the current debate on borders as a part of contemporary and internationally related developments.<sup>64</sup> However, in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Mignolo argues for a “border thinking” that encourages

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<sup>61</sup> Agnew draws from Etienne Balibar’s *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso, 2002) 76. For an understanding of how Agnew reads cross-pressures, see his review of Peter Sahlins’s *Boundaries: the making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (1989) in his article “No borders, no nations: making Greece in Macedonia,” 398-422.

<sup>62</sup> Agnew, “Border-thinking,” 2. See also Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 2000.

<sup>63</sup> Agnew, “Border-thinking,” 2. See also Jonathan Seglow, “The ethics of immigration,” *Political Studies Review*, 3, (2005) 329.

<sup>64</sup> Agnew, “Border-thinking,” 4. See also Agnew, “No borders,” 398-422.

knowledge creation at the local level rather than at the often compromised national level, which complements Agnew's argument.

In *Verde acqua*, Madieri meditates on how the experience of the border encourages new terms for identity by focusing on the local and a "decent life." While Madieri does not directly focus on national debates regarding borders inherent in the "Trieste Question" and Istrian exodus in a literal sense, she echoes Agnew's notion of "border-thinking" by focusing on the specific, aqueous landscape of Northeastern Italy – both its overlapping Eastern and Western European cultural identities – and her private experiences of it. Upon her initial post-exodus return to Fiume as an adult, Madieri frames her recognition of her identity against the localized physical landscape:

In realtà era me stessa che trovavo, guardando, come in uno specchio, quel paesaggio mutevole di asprezze e di incanti.<sup>65</sup>

In reality, looking at that shifting landscape of bitterness and enchantment, as though in a mirror, it was myself that I discovered.

For Madieri, not only does the return to her native land create a harmonious 'epiphany' of identification with the landscape itself, but also serves as a point of reference for her identity formation. Indeed, she concludes that many of her family's thoughts "hanno assunto il colore e i contorni di quel paesaggio" ("assumed the color and the contours of that landscape").<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 136.

According to Claudio Magris, the sea forms part of the sentimental education of a Triestine.<sup>67</sup> For Magris, the sea is a challenge, a symbol of life's adventure, and a suggestion of dangers that we must all face. Most of all, due to the body's dependence on and beginning in water, the sea informs the very fiber of human life. Due to the sea's ability to impart "a sense of life as a vast unity," Magris believes "the sea is close to the Epic" form.<sup>68</sup> As for Magris, the sea informs Madieri's identity, and by extension, *Verde acqua*. While in exile, she visits the Venetian coastline for the day and, looking into the horizon, imagines herself already at home, connected by the same water and sky hovering above Fiume. The sea retains a fundamental importance throughout her adult life and becomes the place where she brings her sons annually in the summers in order to extend the same sentimental education that she received living in Fiume and Trieste.

Throughout Madieri's work, water maintains an important literary trope that blurs neat distinctions between lightness and darkness, insider and outsider. In the essay "Acqua è poesia" ("Water is Poetry"), Madieri suggests that water is a synonym for poetry:

La sua chiarezza fa apparire le cose nella loro verità, ma il limo dei fondali nasconde relitti di naufragi e torbide storie del cuore.<sup>69</sup>

Its clarity make things appear in their truth, but the silt of the sea floor hides shipwrecks and torbid stories of the heart.

Water informs Madieri's poetic declaration. With its play of chiaroscuro, its superficial and submerged qualities, the complexity of humanity reverberates in the duplicitous essence of

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<sup>67</sup> Magris, "The Self that Writes," 17.

<sup>68</sup> Magris, "The Self that Writes," 18.

<sup>69</sup> Marisa Madieri, "Acqua è poesia –Water is Poetry," *Cigahotels Magazine*, 81(1989) 64.

water. The small waves that form on the water's surface mirror, for Madieri, hidden passions and thoughts, birth and death. Ultimately, for Madieri, water symbolizes human origin itself as the primordial womb of all life. Rebirth and death convene under the sign of the same element for Madieri. Indeed, Madieri reminds us that Aphrodite, symbol of beauty and fertility, came forth from the sea.<sup>70</sup>

In both *Verde acqua* and *La radura*, Madieri extends the transparency of water and its ability to hide the unknown and its wreckage by implementing “vortices” (the word presents itself at these moments) that – through the dual forces of light and dark, birth and death – reveal how various moments, place, and people are connected beyond borders. For instance, after her cancer diagnosis, Madieri retires from teaching and remains home to focus on writing, other passions, and her family. During this period, the nature of time appears to change through a play of transparency and subterfuge:

Il tempo, prima quasi senza dimensioni, ridotto a mero presente da una vita frettolosa, [...] di gioie strappate e di affanni, ora si distende in ore leggere, si dilata e sprofonda, si popola di risonanze e ricordi che a poco a poco si ricompongono a mosaic, emergendo in piccoli vortici da una magma indistinto, che per lunghi anni s'è andato accumulando in un fondo buio e inascoltato.<sup>71</sup>

(Time, nearly without dimensions earlier, reduced to the mere present of a busy life, [...] of forced joys and anxiety, now loosens into light hours, dilates and sinks, populates itself with resonances and memories that little by little recreate a

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<sup>70</sup> Maderi, “Acqua è poesia,” 71.

<sup>71</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 7.

mosaic, emerging in small vortices from an indistinct magma that, for many years, accumulated in a dark bottom, unheard.)

These images of “vortices” combine the light and shadow, scrambling distinctions between them. In this way, Madieri harnesses the symbolic powers of the sea to estrange experience and untether it from the terrestrial world, projecting it into a transcendent, cosmic plane of experience that connects life, rather than dividing it into nationalistic categories that risk *othering*. Ultimately, like the Nevoso forest of Magris’s acclaimed *Microcosms* (1997), the symbolic and literal sea of Madieri’s *Verde acqua* emerges as a “nullification of borders” by blurring nationalistic distinctions of ownership.<sup>72</sup>

The use of a naïve focalizer in *Verde acqua* allows Madieri to present certain facts of the Istrian exodus and the metaphoric experience of dislocation and difference as discoveries. From the opening scene in *Verde acqua*, in which a young Madieri (I will henceforth refer to the narrator-protagonist as “Marisa”) explores the “segreti giacigli di polvere” (“secret graves of dust”) of her paternal grandmother’s luminous atrium, her small hands investigating the hidden angles of furniture. Thus, Madieri initially estranges reality for her readers by employing a “child’s” perspective of reality that emphasizes a view of the world from below and produces an auroral gaze.<sup>73</sup> An interest in low angles and in all marginal forms of life spans Madieri’s *oeuvre*.<sup>74</sup> For Madieri, this interest in *vita minore*, or minor life, refers to:

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<sup>72</sup> Magris, *Microcosms*, 107.

<sup>73</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 3. See Ernestina Pellegrini, “The Transparencies of Marisa Madieri: Autobiography as Farewell,” *Quaderni d’italianistica*, Volume XXXII, No. 1 (2011): 49-64 (52). Specifically, Pellegrini refers to Madieri’s narrative perspective as “ground level literature.”

<sup>74</sup> Whether taking the perspective of a deformed fetus still in its mother’s womb, as in the short story *Il bambino con le ali* (*The Child with Wings*), or from the perspective of a little boy, as in the short story

ciò che resta appunto al margine della storia e dell'ideologia, la vita che non può parlare, far sentir la propria voce; *questo profondo interesse per tutto ciò che è minimo, ai margini, alla periferia della vita, in qualche modo escluso della Storia...è una componente essenziale della mia visione del mondo.*<sup>75</sup>

that which rests right at the margin of history and of ideology, the life that can't speak, makes its own voice heard; *this profound interest for all that which is minimal, at the margins, at the periphery of life, in some way excluded from History...is an essential component of my vision of the world.*

Madieri's writing reflects an interest in the world as seen from below. Not accidently, she suggests a correlation exists between the beginning of life and the ground perspective common in youth that informs our first impressions of space and place.<sup>76</sup> Through simple, paratactic sentence structure, she recaptures the sense of naïveté and closeness to physical objects and events that is characteristic of childhood. From the interior spaces of Nonna Madieri's apartment in Fiume, Madieri recalls the mysterious dining room, which her paternal grandmother kept locked:

Attraverso il buco della serratura cercavo curiosa di capirne i segreti [...] ma ai miei occhi nulla aveva maggior fascino del trofeo di frutta in vetro colorato che ornava il centro del grande tavolo da pranzo. La scarsa luce che riusciva a filtrare

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*Riccardo e la sirena (Richard and the mermaid)*, Madieri examines reality from the perspective of life's most marginal characters.

<sup>75</sup> Graziano Benelli, "Marisa Madieri, Conversazione sulla Radura," *Lingua e letteratura*, n.20, 1993. Italics my own.

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of the differences between "space" and "place," see Chapter 23 of John Agnew and David Livingstone (eds.) *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* (London: Sage, 2011).



dalle finestre sembrava raccogliersi tutta nelle trasparenze elusive, nei riverberi, ora sanguigni ora languidi [...] mi suggerivano opulenze lontane e fiabesche. Quella stanza resterà per sempre una terra mitica ed inesplorata, l'Atlantide della mia infanzia.<sup>77</sup>

Through the hole of the lock, I tried to understand [the dining room's] secrets [...] but to my eyes nothing held more fascination than the trophy of colored glass fruit that adorned the center of the large dining room table. The insufficient light that succeeded in filtering through the windows seemed to concentrate itself completely in all of the elusive transparencies, in the reverberations, now sanguine, now languid [...] suggested to me distant and fairy-tale riches. That room will forever remain a mythic and unexplored land, the Atlantis of my childhood.

Although Madieri does not maintain this naïve perspective throughout the course of *Verde acqua* – in fact, she interweaves different time periods of her life with their subsequent variation in perspective – the initial perspective of a naïve focalizer frames the autobiography's structure as a journey by emphasizing the origin of private history in terms of an awe-struck child's perspective of reality. As a result, with its emphasis on the physical interiors of her childhood as a “mythical Atlantis,” Madieri positions Fiume, a place she mourned in exile, beyond the reaches of physical inquiry and locates it in an imaginary, nostalgic space bred by the conditions of exile and providing the exploratory vein of the text.

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<sup>77</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 9-10.

In *Verde acqua*, a naïve, female protagonist sets out to “know the world” and its origins in order to improve her understanding of herself in relation to it.<sup>78</sup> Throughout literary studies the journey has been associated with the beginning of origins.<sup>79</sup> Madieri’s journey of return towards her own *Ithaca-Trieste* in *Verde acqua* will become in *La radura* an allegorical journey to understand the origins of all life.<sup>80</sup> This Homeric quality in *Verde acqua* is not accidental. Indeed, as both Ermanno Paccagnini and Claudio Magris point out, she recuperates the past through references to Homer that structure her own story in terms of an epic journey.<sup>81</sup> In narrating the “odissea della mia famiglia,” (odyssey of [her] family), Madieri retraces the “odissea degli spazi” (“odyssey of the spaces”) of her life.<sup>82</sup> That is, she recalls her life in terms of the spaces she has inhabited, thereby implying that domestic spaces influence the self’s formation as much as traveling itself. From the “primo spazio avventuroso” (“first adventurous space”) of her life to her “true” Ithaca (in the final pages, Madieri hints that the initial return to *Ithaca-Fiume* evolves into a different “Ithaca” – that of her final resting place) Madieri frames

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<sup>78</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 180.

<sup>79</sup> For an overview, see Percy G. Adams, ed. *Travel Literature Through the Ages: An Anthology* (New York and London: Garland, 1983).

<sup>80</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 149.

<sup>81</sup> Significantly, *Verde acqua* describes the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the only two books that Madieri could take with her in exile. She chose these books because they were her favorite and because she was not permitted to carry more with her. Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 80. Paccagnini, *Introduction* to VC, x. Magris, *Afterwards* to VC, 288.

<sup>82</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 80, 116.

her life as an “adventurous” journey towards knowing and origins.<sup>83</sup> As a result, both books join a conversation of women writers who rewrite Odyssean myths from the female perspective.<sup>84</sup>

Ultimately, with her emphasis on “minor life,” Madieri treats “il non-luogo della donna della Storia” (the non-place of woman in History) in both works.<sup>85</sup> According to Claudio Magris, “*Verde acqua* è anche – senz’alcuna ideologia, anzi ironizzata nella *Radura*... un viaggio verso la Storia attraverso l’astoricità dell’oppressa condizione femminile” (*Verde acqua* is – without any ideology, in fact rendered ironic in *La radura*... a voyage towards History through the astoricità of the oppressed female condition).<sup>86</sup> Like *Le Quattro ragazze Wieselberger* (1976), Madieri does this by narrating the project of her memoir through a matrilineal mode of interpretation. In other words, Madieri narrates her process of self-formation by beginning her experiences from an overlap with the stories of the women in her family. Madieri begins with her paternal grandmother, enunciating her story from within the scope of Nonna Madieri’s “strange and enigmatic” no-nonsense survivalism.<sup>87</sup> Faced with raising six children alone after her husband gambles away the family home and savings, Nonna Madieri goes to work cleaning houses, an avenue made possible with her knowledge of Hungarian, German, Serbo-Croatian, and Italian. In

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<sup>83</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> See Anne Sexton’s *Transformations* (1971), Adrienne Rich’s *Dream of a Common Language* (1978), and Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* (2005) among others. Traditionally, mobility has been associated with men. Female mobility, on the other hand, has been confined to the private sphere. “From its very beginning,” as Luigi Monga notes, mobility “appears as a ‘phallic’ voyage” because it “has always been considered a conquest of some sort, and therefore a male activity” (Monga 29, 31). As Cinzia Sartini Blum observes in *Rewriting the Journey in Italian Women’s Contemporary Literature* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2008): “Oscillating between representations of a castrating threat and of a seductive trap,” as Cinzia Sartini-Blum points out, “women’s mobility is synonymous with unruliness” (80).

<sup>85</sup> Claudio Magris, *Afterward to Verde acqua, La radura*, 287.

<sup>86</sup> Claudio Magris, *Afterward to Verde acqua, La radura*, 287.

<sup>87</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 5.

an ironic twist of fate, Madieri emphasizes her grandmother's unlikely economic and spiritual "emancipation" at a time when women possessed few choices for stability outside of the bounds of marriage.<sup>88</sup> Her depictions of her mother's side follow this vein: she tells of the mysterious causes of Aunt Nina's suicide and tender scenes in which her mother takes care of Madieri's grandmother, wiping streams of drool from Nonna Quarantotto, who "mumbled all day, demented, toothless." Shortly after Nonna Quarantotto's death, Madieri's mother exhibits early-onset Alzheimer's, as well, and her sister and daughters clean her up as she did Nonna Quarantotto. Madieri narrates the difficult condition that women faced at the Italian borderlands, at the farthest margins of Italian culture before Trieste was considered Italian. In this way, the chain of women Madieri depicts are linked not only by blood, but by their "minor" condition at the edges of the Italian policies that never reached them. By adhering to a oral tradition that passes down family history through the female members of her family, Madieri offers a gendered memory of the Istrian exodus that reveals how the discourse of difference includes women. In order to overcome their oppressed condition, Madieri suggests that women must create projects of female community outside of a patriarchal order that has traditionally excluded them.

### **Memory in *Verde acqua***

*Verde acqua* and *La radura* are both studies of memory. For Madieri, however, the study of memory is neither an accurate reflection of the past nor a mystification of the Istrian exodus. As Marisa observes, invoking the past through the figure of vortices, suggests the past "mi galleggiano nella memoria come relitti in un oceano" (float[s] in [my] memory like wrecks in an ocean) because the future presents a threat that "trasforma [la memoria], logora e...divide e ricompono in forme diverse, come un caleidoscopio" ("transforms [memory], frays and...divides

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<sup>88</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 6.

and recomposes [its] in different forms, as in a kaleidoscope”).<sup>89</sup> While the narrative seeks to endow the past with a cohesive order, the real nature of memory reveals its ability to transfigure reality.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, for Madieri the work of memory is not to provide a cohesive depiction of the past, but to understand how “the secret string of time” reveals the “tenacious continuity” of lost moments because “everything is still present”—or as Richard Terdiman suggests, a nostalgic “present past.”<sup>91</sup>

*Verde acqua* avoids ideological positions or historical interpretations through an auroral, child’s perspective that focuses on private rather than collective memory. Seen from Madieri’s retrospective child’s point of view, History and its contents appear estranged. Indeed, Madieri recounts how, as a girl, the Second World War appeared to her as if it were:

*una curiosa avventura: bombardamenti, incendi, allarmi, corse nei rifugi mi apparivano indecifrabili episodi che non minacciavano ma solo movimentavano la mia vita. I soldati mi sembravano tutto buoni, da quando, verso le fine della guerra, un giovane militare tedesco, innamorato di una ragazza che abitava nel*

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<sup>89</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 13, 47.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984). I am also indebted to memory as a (trans)figuration of reality. As Re observes in *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*: “Historical events can never be portrayed in a narrative as they actually occurred, precisely because they are continually interwoven with the images, verbal echoes, and cultural memories that come to the writer’s mind at the moment of writing. The historical referent, as a result, may be assumed within the confines of the text only as the locus of an interpretive act and forever eludes exact reproduction within the text itself” (171-172).

<sup>91</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 42. See also Richard Terdiman, *Present-Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

nostro stabile, venne di nascosto ad avvisarci, affinché potessimo prendere le nostre precauzioni [...]”<sup>92</sup>

(a curious adventure: bombardments, fires, alarms, races into shelters appeared to me indecipherable episodes that did not threaten me, but only moved (around) my life. The soldiers all seemed good to me, from when, towards the ends of the war, a young German soldier, in love with a girl that lived in our building, came hidden to warn us [...])

Similarly, Madieri emphasizes how she had never differentiated between soldiers nor understood their intent as a girl. Thus, when the Oznas, the Yugoslavian secret police, knocked on her family’s door looking for small arms, her mother and father did not disclose the location of a hidden pistol, and, with a child’s trust of authority, Marisa reminds her mother aloud of its hidden location. In *Verde acqua*, Madieri presents her family as fearful of the Oznas, escaping their inquiry only after her mother receives reprieve by crying on her knees, begging the Oznas to spare their lives.<sup>93</sup> The event signals the beginning of a period of persecution by Yugoslavians seeking revenge against Italians for the actions of the Italian Fascists.<sup>94</sup>

Marisa recalls that this period established her “difficile rapporto con la Storia” (“difficult relationship with history”).<sup>95</sup> Because war and migration interrupted Marisa’s education, her early knowledge of the historic events befalling her family was intermittent. In addition, due to having learned different versions of specific historical events depending on whether she lived

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<sup>92</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 12-13. Emphasis my own.

<sup>93</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 37.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter 5 in Pamela Ballinger’s *History in Exile*. See also Petacco Arrigo, *Tragedy Revealed: The Story of Italians from Istria, Dalmatia, and Venezia Giulia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.)

<sup>95</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 37.

under Slav or Italian rule, Madieri's parents would find it necessary to get tutoring for their daughter in order to sort out conflicting versions of history. This is because she could not untangle the versions of history that she had been taught at her Yugoslavian-controlled elementary school from the later Italian schools. She implies that the sensorial, private experiences of events, rather than official accounts, help to orient her retrospective understanding of history as a result.

Despite fleeing the rising tensions in Istria, exile did little to alleviate the persecution Madieri's family experienced. The narrative describes the manner in which the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty divided Trieste into Zone A and B, resulting in intense "marginalization and persecution" towards the family in Fiume and Trieste.<sup>96</sup> Having chosen exile over the risk of being massacred by the Yugoslavs, the Madieris were forced to remain in Fiume until they could decide where to go next. Madieri describes the months before they left for Trieste as a period of "vita sospesa" ("suspended life") in which the family is no longer at home, but not yet elsewhere, a period time of "irreality" that enabled Marisa to "esplorare una città" ("to explore a city"), her native Fiume, that until then she had hardly known.<sup>97</sup> In 1949, Marisa left with her mother, sister Lucina, and her sick Nonna Madieri for Trieste, where they joined her maternal Nonna Quarantotto, Aunt Teresa, and others. Upon their arrival, with nothing but the clothes on their backs, the family divided itself into two due to a housing shortage. As a result, Lucina and Madieri's mother remained in Trieste, while Madieri attended a Catholic girl's school in Venice for a year near her aunts and uncles before later joining her mother and sister in Trieste.

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<sup>96</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 42.

<sup>97</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 42-43.

The division and a subsequent life in exile signal a turning point in Marisa's self-formation. Indeed, as Marisa observes, "la bambina partita da Fiume giunse a Venezia adolescente" ("the little girl who left Fiume arrived in Venice an adolescent").<sup>98</sup> Thus, Madieri positions her female becoming in terms of the radical uprooting of her family. Madieri presents her family's diaspora matter-of-factly, without *pathos*. She describes how a "strange sense of estrangement" fills Marisa in her parents' absence and causes her to "dissolve into herself" so that she would take up as little space as possible in such an unfamiliar place.<sup>99</sup>

Yet the family's experience in the Silos, a makeshift refugee camp located in a former Hapsburg granary, marked Madieri's period of deepest estrangement. Through defamiliarization, Madieri transforms the Silos into a dramatic site that encapsulates some of the more painful paradoxes of life in post-war Trieste, especially (but not exclusively) for women. Seen from Madieri's retrospective adolescent point of view, the "Silos" becomes a frightening and Dantean inferno of suffering where Istrian, Dalmatian, and Venetian characters struggle to survive.<sup>100</sup> The first two floors of the Silos are submerged almost completely in darkness, and only the third floor receives any light, where the Madieri family lived. On every floor, however, wooden walls divided space into numbered areas called "boxes." For Madieri, darkness characterizes her time in the Silos:

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<sup>98</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 51, 59.

<sup>100</sup> See Giovanni Ruzzier, *Per una storia dei campi profughi istriani, fiumani e dalmatici in Italia (1945-70)* (Trieste: ICRI, 2004) 67: "All'epoca, era il più complesso "condominiale" della città di Trieste. Vi risiedevano oltre 1800 persone, esuli dall'Istria, da Fiume e dalla Dalmazia...mancavano le finestre. Le poche esistenti consentivano un'aerazione precaria, specie per coloro che alloggiavano nei box interni, lontani, appunto, dalle finestre. I servizi igienici erano problematici; dalle cinque alle dieci famiglie con un gabinetto."



Entrare al Silos era come entrare in un paesaggio vagamente dantesco, in un notturno e fumoso purgatorio. Dai box si levavano [...] odori disparati, che si univano a formarne uno intenso, tipico, indescrivibile, un misto dolciastro... di minestre, di cavolo, di fritto, di sudore e di ospedale. Di giorno, dall'intensa luce esterna non era facile abituarsi subito alla debole luce artificiale dell'interno [...] del tenebroso villaggio stratificato e dell'andirivieni incessante di persone che si muovevano nelle sue strade e nei suoi crocevia [...] le labirintiche strade del Silos, dove era difficile orientarsi.<sup>101</sup>

(Entering in the Silos was like entering a vaguely Dantean landscape in a nocturnal and smoky purgatory. From the boxes disparate odors rose, that united to create an intense, typical, bittersweet mix...of soups, cabbage, fried food, sweat and of hospital. During the day, from the intense external light it wasn't easy getting used to the weak, artificial light of the inside [...] of the shadowy, stratified village and of the incessant bustle of people that moved on its streets and on its intersections [...] the labyrinth paths of the Silos, where it was difficult to orient oneself.)

This hallucinatory effect, when contrasted with Marisa's experiences at school, becomes uncanny. At school, the girls wear fine clothes and new shoes, and speak of family trips and private lessons.<sup>102</sup> The Trieste these schoolmates inhabit appear to Marisa's child eyes as a brief "paradiso terrestre, in una terra promessa" ("terrestrial paradise in a promised land") of plentitude: food, newspapers, books, and elegantly dressed men and women seem to be

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<sup>101</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 69, 80.

<sup>102</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 112.

everywhere.<sup>103</sup> The music from the Triestine streets that wafts into the dark, humid center of the Silos proves jarring and unfamiliar for Madieri, for whom reading the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* is typically her only escape.<sup>104</sup> Unlike literary predecessors such as Betizza and Cialente, Madieri does not comment bitterly on her experiences, or reveal simple truths learned through suffering at the hands of Italians. From within the Silos, Marisa watches her mother struggle to boil gallons upon gallons of water in the winter to stave off disease and freezing temperatures. Instead, Madieri's comparison of life in a refugee camp with life in Trieste is estranging precisely because it focuses on the incongruences of life as experienced by its most minor characters. Life in the Silos, despite the changes outside, goes on as if nothing ever happened as the "rhythms of desolation" march on within its walls.<sup>105</sup> Yet, unlike fellow writers Scipio Slataper and Italo Svevo, Madieri does not idealize Trieste as a hub of multiple-belonging, but as a place of contradictions.<sup>106</sup> She also lacks the maternal rhetoric of *triestinità* and the border present in the works of Biagio Marin and Fulvio Tomizza.<sup>107</sup>

Madieri remains connected to her roots by actively finding ways to re-imagine it. Rather than lament the exilic period of her life, and present it as an existential crisis, she describes the pleasure of drawing and filling notebooks with the flowers and colors of the landscapes of her homeland while living in the Silos. The anxiety and disorientation present in Jarmila Očkayová's *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, and found in much exile and migrant writing, is almost

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<sup>103</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 96. For a similar description of post-war housing in Italy, see Anna Maria Ortese's short stories, "Un paio di occhiali," and "La città involontaria."

<sup>105</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 116.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Scipio Slataper's *Il mio carso* and Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno*.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Biagio Marin *Le litànie de la Madona* (1949) and Fulvio Tomizza's *La città di Miriam* (1972) and *I rapporti colpevoli* (1997).

completely absent from Madieri's autobiography. Instead, for Madieri, what remains of her exilic experience is a lesson regarding the nature of memory: place, different from space, exists in memory only because we seek to integrate the past into the present. As a result, her childhood home on via Piccardi becomes but an "empty shell."<sup>108</sup> In this way, Madieri suggests that perception of "place" ultimately exists in the mind through a process of memory keeps it alive.<sup>109</sup> This is because, as she describes, time is an "illusion" that "engulfs" and displaces what was once familiar to us through an inevitable process of destruction and rebirth.<sup>110</sup> "Remembering the house in which an uprooted culture originated and developed," observes Joelle Bahloul in *Architecture of Memory*, "involves reversing history and sinking symbolic roots into a vanished human and geographical world. The remembered house is a small-scale cosmology symbolically restoring the integrity of a shattered geography."<sup>111</sup>

Thus, for Madieri, "roots" can really only exist in memory because place reveals the passage of time through a material destruction of the past, while memories live on in our bodies, enriched by their continuation in our imaginations. Take, for instance, this entry from *Verde acqua* that describes Madieri's return to *Ithaca-Fiume* in adulthood:

È così che ricordo la mia Fiume [...] una città di familiarità e distacco, che dovevo perdere appena conosciuta. Tuttavia quei timidi e brevi approcci, pervasi di intensità e lontananza, hanno lasciato in me un segno indelebile. Io sono ancora

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<sup>108</sup> John Agnew, "Space and Place," in John Agnew and D. Livingstone (eds.) *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* (London: Sage, 2011).

<sup>109</sup> In this, Madieri anticipates John Agnew's ideas on "place," different from "space."

<sup>110</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 149.

<sup>111</sup> Joelle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: The Jewish-Muslim household in colonial Aleria, 1937-1962* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996) 28.

quel vento delle rive, quei chiaroscuro delle vie, quegli odori un po' putridi del mare e quei grigi edifice [...] ma quando ho avuto nuovamente l'occasione di passare per Fiume e quel tratto di costa che porta a Brestova [...] ho provato la chiara sensazione di ritornare nella mia verità [...].<sup>112</sup>

This is how I remember my Fiume [...] a city of familiarity and separation that I had to lose barely having known it. Nevertheless the shy and brief approaches I made to it, both intensely and distantly, left an indelible mark on me. I am still the wind of the shore, the chiaroscuro of the streets, those odors a bit putrid from the sea and those grey buildings [...] but when I finally had the occasion to pass by Fiume and that piece of coast that takes one to Brestova [...] I had the clear sensation that I was returning to my truth.

Madieri describes the return home not in estranging or existential terms, as in the works of her predecessors or Jarmila Očkayová. Instead, Madieri frames the literal return to her origins as an “epiphany of harmonious identification” that she recognizes in Brazilian writer João Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão* (1956).<sup>113</sup> Thus, through active remembering that renders *Ithaca-Fiume* the place of “memoria ritrovata” (“found memory”), Madieri suggests that the return to one’s origins is not only accessible, but also enriched by recall and new experiences.

Ultimately, for Madieri, the past dissolves into a “realm of change” that blurs the “contradictions” inherent in the past.<sup>114</sup> Memory transforms the places of our lives and removes

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<sup>112</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 43.

<sup>113</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 43. See also João Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Jose Olympio Editora, 1956), as quoted in Madieri (43): “Mi volsi e vidi il mio sorriso sulle sue labra.”

<sup>114</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 23.

their contradictions. Against the fleeting nature of time, observing her young sons playing in Lido, Madieri desires a “time that doesn’t pass, the hour of ‘persuasion’” because nothing is more beautiful than the present.<sup>115</sup> Here, Madieri echoes Carlo Michelstaedter’s *La persuasione e la rettorica (Persuasion and Rhetoric)* (1910), in which the persuaded does not live for the future, which may never come, but prefers instead to live intensely for the present.<sup>116</sup> It is in this cross-roads between a lost past and a fleeting present and future that a “piccolo presente si unisce ad uno sconfinato passato [...] a contemplare il mistero dell’Eterno” (“small present unites with a boundless past [...] to contemplate the mystery of Eternity”).<sup>117</sup> In this light, the perceived exile of youth becomes sacred in adulthood through a process of memorialization that takes into consideration the *longue durée* of the entirety of private human experience, not just its historical events.<sup>118</sup>

In *Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (1971), the religion historian Mircea Eliade distinguishes between sacred and profane time.<sup>119</sup> According to Eliade, for traditional man things “acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a

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<sup>115</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Carl Michelstaedter’s *La persuasione e la rettorica* (Genova: Formiggini, 1913 (1910)): “Whoever wants to possess his life as his own for an instant, to be persuaded for an instant of what he does ... must view every present as the ultimate one, as though it were sure beyond death: and create his life on his own in the darkness” (69-70) [as quoted in T. Harrison, 1022]; see Thomas Harrison, “Carlo Michelstaedter and the Metaphysics of Will,” *MLN*, Vol. 106, No. 5, *Comparative Literature* (Dec., 1991): 1012-1029, and Cristina Benussi, *Negazione e integrazione nella dialettica di Carlo Michelstaedter* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo & Bizzari, 1980).

<sup>117</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 101.

<sup>118</sup> Paccagnini, *Introduction to Verde acqua*, ix.

<sup>119</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956 [2005]).

transcendent reality.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, things are “real” to the extent that they conform to patterns established by the Sacred, or Gods and mythical heroes. “Sacred time,” different from historical linear time, for Eliade refers to moments in which myths describe “breakthroughs of the sacred (or the Supernatural) into the World.”<sup>121</sup> In the medieval worldview, the power of a thing resided in its origin so that knowing its origin was equivalent to acquiring control over it.

Eliade’s tendency to idealize the mythical age aside, Madieri’s narrative time can be identified as cyclical, rather than linear. A devout Catholic, Madieri destabilizes the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of time as linear by emphasizing the cyclical nature of organic life because “[o]vunque la vita si rinnova” (“everywhere life renews itself”).<sup>122</sup> This rebirth, suggests Madieri, is inevitable because all life connects to a mysterious “Eternity” that perpetuates its renewal.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, in a passage dated December 8, 1983, Madieri contemplates how private memory unites with collective memory through the sign of a cosmic “eternal,” which, for Madieri, evolves through the “Grande Memoria” (Great Memory) of God.<sup>124</sup> In this light, memory becomes not a fact of nature, but a sacred “dono,” or gift that asks to be, as

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<sup>120</sup> Eliade, *Eternal Return*, 5. See Chapters 2 and 3 of Eliade’s *Myth of the Eternal Return*. In ancient Greece, Plato and Aristotle both suggested that the past is eternal. Aristotle claimed that time had no beginning because we always can imagine an earlier time. Although the Bible references circular time (see for example Ecclesiastes 1:9: “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun”) most Christian and Islamic theologians adopted the notion of linear time. It was not until 1602 that the concept of linear time was clearly formulated, by Francis Bacon. In 1687, Newton represented time mathematically. Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, Barrow, Newton, Leibniz, Locke, and Kant all adopted this view of time as linear. The notion of linear time dominated the fields of science and philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, influencing Einstein’s theory of relativity. In particular, see Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space, & Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Barry Dainton, *Time and Space*, Second Edition (McGill-Queens University Press: Ithaca, 2010); and Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Updated and Expanded Tenth Anniversary Edition (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

<sup>122</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 47.

<sup>123</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 101.

<sup>124</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 101.

Ermanno Paccagni observes, “searched, conquered, activated, solicited and legitimized.”<sup>125</sup>

Indeed, the act of remembering is a form of *pietas* that honors the past by reconfiguring it in the present.

In the final passage of *Verde acqua*, Madieri emphasizes the cyclical nature of time through the memory of her mother. Against the lined and dying portrait of her mother, Madieri foreshadows her own impending death. In those same wrinkles, Madieri envisions

quelle rughe simili ai segni che il mare lascia sulla sabbia, in quei lineamenti antichi e irriconoscibili, in quei capelli ostinatamente folti e vigorosi, vedevo [...] i solchi della terra, l’illusione del tempo, i fiumi, gli alberi e le città della mia vita, le strade che la sua carità aveva tracciato, i petali bianchi delle mie viole d’infanzia, l’amore tenace e doloroso che i suoi baci mi avevano insegnato [...] L’ora è tarda. Le stoviglie della cena sono riposte, le stanze, ordinate e avvolte nell’ombra, sono pronte per l’intervallo notturno. I ragazzi non dormono ancora [...] molta parte della mia storia affonda in questa dolce oscurità, simile forse a quella, grande e buona, che mi accoglierà un giorno nella pace in cui già dimorano mio padre e mia madre.<sup>126</sup>

(those wrinkles similar to the signs the sea leaves on the sand, in those ancient and unrecognizable features, in that hair stubbornly thick and vigorous, I saw [...] the groves of the earth, the illusion of time, the rivers, the trees and the cities of my life, the streets that [my mother’s] compassion had traced, the white petals of my

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<sup>125</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 138. See also Paccagnini, *Introduction to Verde acqua*, xxiv.

<sup>126</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 149.

childhood violets, the tenacious and painful love that her kisses taught me [...] It's late. The dishes from dinner are put away; the rooms, organized and enveloped in darkness, are ready for the nightly pause. The kids are not asleep yet [...] much of my story sinks into this sweet obscurity, similar perhaps to the one, great and good, that will welcome me one day into the peace in which my father and mother already dwell.)

The death of Madieri's mother in the final passage of *Verde acqua* foreshadows her own impending death despite the renewal of the seasons and of life itself. As Madieri observes, all life carries within it "the seed of its own destruction."<sup>127</sup> Thus, the immutable cycle of destruction and renewal that governs life reveals that time is an "illusion" because immutable laws repeat themselves.<sup>128</sup> As a result, with its emphasis on the destruction and renewal of life, *Verde acqua* begins in childhood and evolves towards adolescence, a transition punctuated by the death of Madieri's mother. By structuring life as an endless return of events, Madieri adopts a cosmic perspective, which reveals the innerconnected nature of existence beyond borders and nationalisms.<sup>129</sup>

In *Verde acqua*, Madieri's discourse on difference reveals how people are not only connected across borders, but fundamentally interconnected. Prior to living in exile, Madieri

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<sup>127</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 67.

<sup>128</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 149.

<sup>129</sup> Madieri's understanding of time resembles some of Friedrich Nietzsche's thoughts about it. In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche professes a desire for the "eternal return" of all events, which would mark the ultimate affirmation of life (341). To comprehend eternal recurrence, Nietzsche believes the individual must develop an *amor fati*, or love of fate, which enables individuals to abandon themselves to its process, but events must be repeated differently in order to allow for a variation in atoms. See *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).



reveals how her once child's perspective of reality did not not perceive differences easily, as her experiences with the Ozna revealed earlier. However, after she and her family join the Istrian exodus, the experience clarifies her vision of the world and reveals its contradictions. Oppression towards the *other*, according to Madieri, corrupts one's ability to differentiate between the *other within*.<sup>130</sup> As an Istrian of Italo-Hungarian origin, Madieri presents her family as *other* to an Italian establishment that does not recognize its own hybridity as a nation whose origins are multiple. As Istrians, not yet legally Italian, but identifying as such, they experience countless humiliations, such as a lack of running water in the Silos.<sup>131</sup> Her experiences in school further reveal the contradictions of life: the carefree Triestine girls at school happily wear new clothes and never lack for school supplies, while Madieri uses one pair of shoes for years. Associated with the "backwards" East Europe as an Istrian who complies with multiculturalism, Madieri's adolescent self learns about the painful condition of exile that separates her from her Triestine classmates.<sup>132</sup> As a result of her shame, Marisa never reveals to anyone her exilic condition until adulthood, nor does she invite friends home to witness the squalor of her exile. Ultimately, Madieri implies that a fear of the Iron Curtain, and what lies beyond it, prevents Italians from seeing that a part of themselves exists within the *other*, even after the 1954 signing of the London Memorandum that conceded Trieste Zone A to the Italians.

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<sup>130</sup> For a discussion of the "other within" in Triestine literature, see Luiza Bialasiewicz and Claudio Minca, "The 'border within': inhabiting the border in Trieste," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 1084 -1105.

<sup>131</sup> Although the 1954 London Memorandum would cede Trieste Zone A to the Italians, it would not be until 1975, and the Treaty of Osimo, that made the division final. The 1954 Memorandum was ultimately provisional in nature.

<sup>132</sup> For a discussion of "Eastern Europe" as a bed of multiculturalism, due to constant border shifting, rather than a bed of staunch nationalisms as in West Europe, see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

Thus, Madieri's sense of memory, does not necessarily disregard History; however, neither does she transpose a naturalistic depiction of the past onto her narratives, especially in *La radura*. As we shall see, Madieri infuses *La radura* with the sense of nostalgia for the present through an uncanny doubling of events taken from *Verde acqua* that continues to emphasize life's eternal return and its interconnectedness.

### **Estrangement in *La radura***

In *La radura*, Madieri traces the coming-of-age fable of a daisy named Dafne. With the help of her schoolteacher Venanzia and her sisters, also daisies, Dafne seeks to learn about the origins of the world around her. Within the confines of her meadow, Dafne feels safe to explore the world until she crosses the meadow's borders and learns about the perils present in their lives: the lawnmower, storms that flatten flowers, insects that devour, humans that take daisies in order to put them on display far away from the meadow, serpents that eat birds and other animals, and the "yellow threat"— displacement by the growing population of dandelions. After learning about the nature of death, Dafne crosses a new threshold in her understanding of the world around her and partakes in a series of trials that teach her about the origins of all life. However, her plans to are interrupted when a human family picnics in the meadow one day. A little girl plucks Dafne and her sisters and weaves from them a crown, which she leaves on a rock. Dafne's tragic death marks her descent into an ironic understanding of the true source of origins from which she emerges, momentarily, reborn and transformed by her new insight.

Estrangement functions on two levels in *La radura*. First, by continuing the same search for origins begun in *Verde acqua*, Madieri creates an unsettling *double* of the same journey in the form of an extended metaphor for the experience of *spaesamento*. Next, by alternating between an auroral and cosmic perspective, Madieri defamiliarizes the memory of the Istrian exodus and

many events of her life in order to more deeply reflect not only upon the hidden nature of borders and difference on identity formation, but also the eternal cycle of destruction and rebirth that connects all life despite its inherent differences.

In this light, the clearing in which Dafne lives and dies, which is located in an unidentified section of the Karsts of northeast Italy, evolves through the fable's events as a site of painful meditation upon and mirror for human experience. Like *Verde acqua*, *La radura* continues the protagonist's search for origins against the inevitability of destruction that resides in all living things. The plot unfolds over Dafne's two-month life span, during which summer shifts to fall. Seemingly outside the boundaries of measured, human time, the clearing and the lives of its daisies adhere to the cyclical time of the natural world. Structured as a journey, the novel combines metaphor with autobiographical elements of Madieri's life to instruct its reader about the nature of destruction and, subsequently, life itself. Indeed, although the narrative filters the world through the perspective of a daisy, Dafne explores the same questions Madieri posed in *Verde acqua*—questions about the process of becoming a woman and establishing a world perspective and also challenging the notion of otherness and borders.

*La radura* reveals the “familiar” understanding of the dividing nature of borders as a mysterious and unsettling discovery. In a conversation with the school librarian Basilio, Dafne learns of the existence of borders that surround her beloved meadow:

Dalle sue spiegazioni Dafne scoprì che i confini del mondo non coincidevano con i confini della sua radura, già di per sé un labirintico universo difficile da esplorare. In luoghi lontani esistevano prati ancora più grandi, distese immense che l'occhio non riusciva ad abbracciare, e boschi e foreste in cui crescevano

specie così varie e numerose di piante che neppure Basilio era in grado di elencarle tutte.

In quelle terre remote esistevano fiori con livree sontuose, colori accesi e profumi inebrianti. Alcuni di questi non nascevano in libertà ma venivano allevati in serre or in giardini di città [...] [I fiori coltivati] (v)ivevano in un ambiente asettico e innaturale [...] Una prigione dorata era la loro, una vita all'insegna della forma perfetta e dell'efficienza, che tuttavia non li risparmiava da una morte precoce [...] Dafne rabbriviva a queste rivelazioni e si proponeva di riferirle quanto prima a Celeste.<sup>133</sup>

(From his explanations, Daphne discovered that the borders of the world did not coincide with the borders of her clearing, already in and of itself a labyrinthic universe that was difficult to explore. In faraway places even larger meadows existed, stretched out so far that the eye could not grasp them, and woods in which so many varied and numerous plants grew that not even Basilio was able to list them all.

In those remote lands existed flowers with sumptuous patterns, inflamed colors, and intoxicating fragrances. Some of these were not born free, but were raised in greenhouses or in city gardens [...] [Cultivated flowers] lived in an aseptic and unnatural environment [...] Theirs was a gilded prison, a life in pursuit of the perfect form and of efficiency that nevertheless did not save them from a premature death [...] Dafne trembled at these revelations and set out to report them to [her friend] Celeste right away.

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<sup>133</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 213-214.

In *La radura*, the Istrian exodus and the Triestine discourse surrounding borders and difference take on a metaphorical dimension and are thereby defamiliarized within the estranging logic of Dafne's child and vegetable perspective. Her estranging vision of the Istrian exodus, and her vision of borders and difference, renews the reader's perception of not only historical debates regarding the Italian borderlands, but also the nature of borders and national belonging. Thus, the reader's expansion of knowledge coincides with Dafne-Madieri's discovery of the world. Neither *Verde acqua* or *La radura* offer an explanation of these debates in terms of an official, historical explanation of events; rather *Verde acqua* offers a private explanation and *La radura* a metaphorical one. Indeed, the world, seen from the marginalized position of a naïve female, presents the reader with an alternative version of Istrian history that inserts itself among widely contested accounts of the Second World War in Italy that do not speak to the struggles of the Northeastern Italian borderlands.

In *La radura*, Madieri appropriates several elements of the fairy-tale to defamiliarize for her reader the experience of the Istrian exodus and virulent debates on ethnic identity. In his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp suggests that the fairy tale subordinates all aspects of narration to a single principle of the syntagmatic development of the action.<sup>134</sup> Of thirty-one identified *functions* in the fairy tale performed by the *dramatis personae*, Propp believes the writer can omit or repeat some of them; however, the writer is

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<sup>134</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968). Propp defines fairytales as “those tales classified by Aarne under numbers 300 to 749” (19). Propp largely based his study on study on Aleksandr N. Afanás'ev's classic collection *Russian Folktales* (1855-64). See Leonard A. Magnus's early translation, *Russian Folk-Tales* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1915), which only contained only 73 of Afanas'ev's tales. The standard American reference, *Russian Fairy Tales*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York: Pantheon Books 1945), offered less than a third of the original collection. For a complete translation, refer to *Cuentos populares rusos in 3 vols.*, trans. Isabel Vicente from the 6th (1957) Russian edition (Madrid: Anaya 1983).

ultimately not at liberty to “make substitutions for those functions” bound by “absolute or relative dependence.”<sup>135</sup> Critical of Propp’s formalist understanding of fairy tales, in his essay “Structure and Form: Reflection on a Work by Vladimir Propp” (1958), the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that the reader’s task is to see below a superficial, linear structure of narrative “reduces” the relationship between elements to permutations of form. For Lévi-Strauss, examining the nature of the narrative’s content rather than the linguistic “grammar” that controls meaning may reveal the abstract relationship between elements, such as the play of light and dark found in Madieri’s texts that surface as meditations on the human condition.<sup>136</sup> This is because, according to Lévi-Strauss, different languages have different linguistic morphologies.<sup>137</sup> Rather than adhering to the traditional structure of the fairytale, Madieri appropriates several elements of the marvelous.<sup>138</sup> However, ultimately, Dafne’s tragic death and the moral the book provides distinguish *La radura* from the genre of a fairy-tale and position it firmly as a fable. The marvelous filter through which Dafne sees both the landscape and beings of her native

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<sup>135</sup> Propp, *Morphology*, 64.

<sup>136</sup> Critical of Propp’s formalist understanding of fairy tales, in his essay “Structure and Form: Reflection on a Work by Vladimir Propp” (1958), the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that the reader’s task is to see below a superficial, linear structure of narrative the “reduces” the relationship between elements to permutations of form. For a comparison of Propp and Lévi-Strauss’s positions on the fairy tale, see Serge Shishkoff, “The Structure of Fairytales: Propp vs Lévi-Strauss,” *Dispositio, Soviet Semiotics of Culture*, Year 1, No. 3 (Otoño 1976): 271-276, and Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 108-118. For Lévi-Strauss’s original review of Propp, see “L’Analyse morphologique des contes russe,” *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, 3, 1960. Before Lévi-Strauss’s review of Propp, Propp was largely unknown. According to Shishkoff, Lévi-Strauss’s review ironically propelled Propp from relative obscurity to a leading position in the study of folklore both in the West and the former U.S.S.R. As Lévi-Strauss notes, “nothing prevents the making up of tales where fairies have a role, without the narrative’s conforming to the previous form” (125). For Lévi-Strauss, “*Formalism destroys its object*” (132).

<sup>137</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, Vol. II*. trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 137.

<sup>138</sup> Tzvetvan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: Case Western University, 1973) 52.

clearing works to defamiliarize even the most regular aspects of human life, as in the following dialogue between Dafne and her sisters in which Dafne asks what fairies wear:

Che vai raccontando alla piccina, - si intromise Amanda. – Non riempirle la testa di sciocchezze. Le fate non esistono.

Ma cos'era stamane quel velo lucente?

La tela di un ragno, mia cara. Costruita per accalappiare gli stupidi insetti, che vedono nelle margherite solo un oggetto e vorrebbero relegarle al ruolo riproduttivo.

Ma senti quell'esaltata. Sei invidiosa e nient'altro, - sbottò Camilla. – Gli insetti...sanno bene dove stanno i colori più seducenti, il nettare più genuino...I ragazzi hanno bisogno di sognare, Amanda. Come sta la tua amica Olimpia? – Rachele cercava di sviare il discorso.

Con Olimpia ieri abbiamo stilato un documento molto importante sui diritti delle margherite [...]

Dafne di tutto questo discutere di diritti e di insetti capiva solo che le sorelle non credevano nelle fate.

(What are you telling the little one? intervened Amanda. Don't fill her head with foolishness. Fairies don't exist.

But what was that shiny veil this morning?

A spider's web, my dear. Constructed to snare stupid insects who see in daisies only an object that they would like to relegate to their reproductive role.

Listen to that hothead. You're jealous and nothing else," burst Camilla.

Insects...know well where the most seductive colors are, the most genuine nectar...

Kids needs to dream, Amanda. How is your friend Olympia?" Rachel tried to divert the discussion.

We worked with Olympia and drafted a very important document yesterday on the rights of daisies. [...]

In all of this discussion about rights and insects, Dafne only understood that her sisters did not believe in fairies.

Marvelous elements do not make *La radura* a fairy tale. Instead, they help the reader perceive the ironic difference in perspectives between the implicit narrator and the naïve focalizer.<sup>139</sup>

Before she learns about the immutable laws that govern the clearing, Dafne dreams of uncovering the secret habits and origin of fairies and references Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, Dafne's delight in fairy tales and her sisters' admonitions against them serve instead to reveal the forces at play in childhood that preserve a sense of innocence with which readers may engage and helps them to participate in the rediscovery of the world.

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<sup>139</sup> Lucia Re, in her reading of Italo Calvino's 1958 essay, "Natura e storia nel romanzo" ("Nature and History in the Novel"), calls attention to the role of this kind of irony as "an essential component of defamiliarization" (Calvino 195). See also Italo Calvino, "Natura e storia nel romanzo," in *Una pietra sopra*, 1958.

<sup>140</sup> Madiere, *La radura*, 156, 157, 162, 170, 179, 199, 200, 204, 227.



The choice of a daisy, rather than an animal, is significant.<sup>141</sup> As a symbol of innocence and sexual awakening, the daisy displaces the animal figure typical of fables and repositions Madieri's protagonist on both the cusp of consciousness and of sexual awakening.<sup>142</sup> As a result, Dafne's function in *La radura* is to estrange traditional conceptions of the Istrian exile and female mobility generally by engaging the reader in an imaginative decoding of events. In this way, Dafne's clearing evolves as a mirror for the fragile human condition that is subject to the destruction that folds all life into itself. Therefore, *La radura*, structured as a fable, tells the "truth" of Madieri's exile and coming-to-terms as an extended metaphor, which exposes the divisive aspects of social and human nature that impose notions of difference and borders on self-formation. What Dafne ultimately discovers, instead, is that because "love, death, pain, birth, [and] metamorphosis" are all tied together, all life is connected despite differences.<sup>143</sup>

### Memory in *La radura*

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<sup>141</sup> For a study of the garden and flowers in *Verde acqua* and *La radura*, see Ernestina Pellegrini, *Le città interior* (Bergamo: Moretti & Vitali, 1995).

<sup>142</sup> For the early meaning of flowers and the daisy's association with innocence, see Frances S. Osgood, ed. *The Poetry of Flowers and Flowers of Poetry, A Simple Treatise on Botany, and a Copious Floral Dictionary* (New York, J. C. Riker, 1841). In British and American accounts, see also Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, *Flora's Interpreter* (Boston, 1832); Louis Arm Martin, *The Language of Flowers* (London, 1835, 3rd ed., revised); W. Wirt, *Flora Dictionary* (Baltimore, 1835, Louis Arm Martin, *The Language of Flowers* (Philadelphia, 1846, 7th American from the 9th London edition); from France, Jeane I. I. Grandville, *Les Fleurs Anides* (Paris, 1847, 2 vols.); Anon., *The Language and Poetry of Flowers* (London, 1876). The study of flowers as symbolic of sexuality is vast. See Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O'Keeffe and the Calla Lily in American Art, 1860 – 1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 14-15; Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 221; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 4th edition (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2007), 377; Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975); and Rufus C. Camphausen, *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Wisdom: A Reference Guide to the Symbolism, Techniques, Rituals, Sacred Texts, Psychology, Anatomy, and History of Sexuality* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, Ltd., 1991) among others.

<sup>143</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 194.

As a narrative “Every(wo)man,” Dafne grows up in an unidentified clearing, an “ordinary meadow.”<sup>144</sup> Within this universal space of enunciation, Dafne is born amongst so many fellow daisies that she remains undistinguishable from the crowd. Dafne’s meadow, however, is not a *locus amoenus* typical of fairy-tales, but a mirror for the human experience of destruction.<sup>145</sup>

Dafne first learns of the destruction of all life from the neighborhood gardener and unprofessional “medical expert,” Oscar, who cares for the flora and fauna of the clearing. When she asks him why the elders of the community are so bent and twisted, Dafne learns from Oscar how all life ages and degrades, how he, too, will “go away.”

Andato dove?

Ritornato alla terra, da dove sono venuto.

Dafne non capiva, ma Oscar si era incupito.

Com’era possibile ritornare alla terra, se su di essa già stava ogni cosa? La terra era una madre generosa che ospitava nel suo grembo e reggeva sulla sua superficie tutte le creature, dalle più piccolo, come le erbe e i fiori, alle più monumentali, come gli alberi [...] No, da lei nessuno poteva allontanarsi e quindi non aveva senso parlare di un ritorno. Oscar doveva essersi sbagliato.<sup>146</sup>

(Gone where? [asked Dafne.]

Returned to the earth, from where I came.

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<sup>144</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 153.

<sup>145</sup> With its emphasis on destruction, Dafne-Madieri’s clearing inverts the idealized *locus amoenus* into a *locus terribilis*, first gleaned in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. In Ovid’s text, the garden becomes a place of violent encounters rather than a place of respite.

<sup>146</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 164.

Dafne did not understand, but Oscar saddened.

How was it possible to return to the earth, if on it everything was already there?

The earth was a generous mother that housed in its womb and supported all creatures on its surface, from the smallest, like the grasses and the flowers, to the most majestic, like the trees [...] No, from her no one could remove themselves and thus it did not make sense to speak of a return. Oscar must have been mistaken.

Days later, when rain overpowers the delicate flora of the clearing, everything appears different, overturned, and desolation remains. When Dafne's sister Rachel begins to cry, Rachel tells her: "Vedi, bambina mia, domani saremo di meno" ("You'll see, my child, tomorrow we will be fewer").<sup>147</sup> The next day, when Dafne realizes many of the elders have disappeared in the full light of day, she asks Rachel where they have gone. In response, Rachel tells her that they have gone to lie down on the earth. Still not understanding, Dafne finds the idea disgusting because for daisies, lying down invites insects and dirt to ruin their petals. She hopes, instead, that sooner or later, the elders, too, will learn that it is better "to remain standing at all costs."<sup>148</sup> However, one night while the meadow sleeps, Dafne hears a small chirp waft from a shrub. She notices two blackbirds flying frenetically over a hatchling that has fallen from the nest. As the sun sets, darkness envelops the meadow. The next morning, the hatchling's crying ceases and Dafne assumes all is well; however, to her horror, she sees a snake in the process of swallowing the fallen blackbird hatchling. Like the darkness that enveloped the Silos in *Verde acqua*, the darkness of the meadow and the destruction of the innocent hatchling undoes Dafne's

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<sup>147</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 166.

<sup>148</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 168.

understanding of life. In a sudden reversal, Dafne's home, once familiar and welcoming, becomes frightening and unfamiliar as the light reveals the shadowy remnants of tragedy.

Transposed in terms of an allegorical fable, this scene echoes Madieri's first childhood encounter with death, portrayed in *Verde acqua* when Marisa and her sister care for an injured bird.<sup>149</sup> The bird's health improves under the meticulous care of Madieri and her sister Lucina; however, when the two sisters exit the Silos to take their bird on a walk in a basket to get fresh air, a cat grabs the bird and mortally wounds it. The bird lives a few more days, only to die in Madieri's sleeping palm during the night, resting there in refuge. Madieri recalls this same theme in *Verde acqua* when her sons, Paolo and Francesco, learn about death after having cared for a bird that fell from its nest.<sup>150</sup> *La radura* continues the examination of destruction and dislocation, estranging the destruction of life and objects for her reader and encoding it as a mode of discovery linked to the beginning of life.

In *La radura*, the blackbird's death signals a turning-point in the fable that hinges on Dafne's gradual process of formation by which the "immutable laws" of life are revealed to her. Having noticed that something has perturbed Dafne, her teacher Venanzia organizes the day's lesson on the "immutable law" of life.<sup>151</sup> "All living beings," she emphasizes, "have a beginning and an end."<sup>152</sup> The only way to avoid trauma is to learn about the dangers in the world in order to avoid them. Venanzia goes on to name all of the shadowy dangers a daisy could face: the scythe that occasionally cuts grass and flowers down, humans, parasites, and predators like

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<sup>149</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 83.

<sup>150</sup> Madieri, *Verde acqua*, 92.

<sup>151</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 192.

<sup>152</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 192: "Tutti gli esseri viventi [...] hanno un inizio e una fine."

caterpillars. Here, Madieri emphasizes the irony of living in that the caterpillar that once ate daisies, transforms into the beautiful butterfly that Dafne so admires and hopes to attract one day. What Dafne discovers, instead, is that “love, death, pain, birth, [and] metamorphosis” are all tied together.<sup>153</sup> In this way, the text emphasizes the power of transforming not only herself, but her perspective.

Dafne-Madieri’s lesson about death’s destruction of life signals the beginning of the protagonist’s initiation into adulthood. In the wake of baring witness to mortal destruction, Dafne the daisy develops an indescribable “nostalgia” for the “days already far gone in her life in which all was mystery and adventure, those in which she believed in fairies.”<sup>154</sup> By emphasizing a nostalgia for the ephemeral qualities of life, *La radura* continues the same nostalgia that takes hold of a dying Marisa in *Verde acqua* – the laughter of her children, the companionship of her partner and friends, the morning light over her beloved northeastern Italian waters. Through the doubling of the birds’ image, Madieri underscores the same plight of terrible discovery about the shadowy presence of destruction present in *Verde acqua*. In one stroke, Madieri not only transforms the benevolent *locus amoenus* turned into a *locus terribilis*, or the treacherous garden, but also turns the known into the unknown. However, Madieri implies that the presence of darkness in Dafne’s life heightens her memories and enriches them by revealing to Dafne both their ephemeral value and the “profundity of life.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, in *La radura*, memory, against all forces of destruction, becomes a mode of holding on to the ephemeral aspects of life that escape

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<sup>153</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 194.

<sup>154</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 198: “i giorni già lontani della sua vita in cui tutto era mistero e avventura, quelli in cui credeva nelle fate.”

<sup>155</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 199.

us as soon as we experience them. Just as in *Verde acqua*, time occurs cyclically, guaranteeing the destruction and (perhaps) renewal of life.

*La radura* includes “Cuore di pietra” (“Heart of Stone”), a fable within a fable, in which time dilates and memory becomes cosmic. In the story, a resplendent white rock, ancient in its origins, is proud of its immutability. She looks upon the living with distinterest, distrustful of their constant movement. One day, however, a squirrel comes to rest on the white rock to eat its acorn. The rock, amazed at the speed with which the squirrel unravels the nut, begins to admire the squirrel’s prodigiousness. However, it appears to the rock that the squirrel leaves as soon as it has arrived. In the squirrel’s absence, the rock feels a strange split take hold of its body. The rock feels “nostalgia per il tepore di quel corpo” (“nostalgia for the warmth of that body”).<sup>156</sup> From a distance, the little rock continues to desire the squirrel’s warmth, wishing it could move between trees like its warm acquaintance and feel the squirrel’s strange fingers again. But the squirrel never returns. The encounter with the squirrel transforms the rock’s perspective of living beings and instills in the rock a new appreciation for happiness, sorrow, and change. Having experienced the fleeting warm touch of the squirrel, the rock begins to change and transforms under the constant pressure of the elements. Time, for the rock, begins to dilate and expand outwards so that the presence of all of life fills the rock with an appreciation for its fleeting beauty.

The ironic doubling of Dafne’s journey and eventual metamorphosis mirrors the process of formation that Madieri narrates in *Verde acqua*. With its focus on the ephemeral, “Cuore di pietra” is a fable about transformation that acknowledges the potential destruction of the past and the importance of memory. All that remains of life, implies Madieri, are memories that scintillate

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<sup>156</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 210.

in the mind's eye. Like Dafne-Madieri, the rock, too, becomes transformed through its acknowledgment of memory as a gift that connects to the “più vasto e arcano concerto delle cose” (“more vast and arcane concert of things”).<sup>157</sup> Thus, the rock's fond memories of the squirrel reveal a cosmic perspective that transcends the earth—the minor perspective of both the rock and Dafne.

### **Transnational border-being in *La radura***

As an allegorical fable, the clearing of *La radura* emerges as a micropolitical site of memory that reveals Madieri's recognition of the contradictions regarding difference learned in exile. For the majority of her brief life, Dafne does not perceive differences as negative. To Dafne's inexperienced eyes, everything in the clearing appears wonderful and mysterious. She wonders, “[c]os'erano quelle piccole luci tremule che s'erano ... e quel disco argenteo che illuminava debolmente il prato” (“what were those small, trembling lights that were lit...and that silver disk that weakly illuminated the meadow”).<sup>158</sup> As she ponders the confines of the meadow in which she lives, in a moment of certainty and beauty, the soft movement of the clouds rocks her to sleep in a moment of “perfect happiness.”<sup>159</sup> However, as she grows, Dafne notices the various flowers and insects that catch her interest by their stark difference from her own vegetable body.

Dafne's witnessing of the black bird hatchlings' death matures Dafne's perspective and enables her to gradually see contradictions and differences in her world. One day she encounters a “strange being” who is slimy and green. She marvels at the frog's body and is simultaneously

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<sup>157</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 198.

<sup>158</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 159.

<sup>159</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 161.

disgusted by it. The frog, near tears, asks why she looks upon him with such disgust. Because she has a “soft” heart, Dafne cannot resist the frog’s pleas for acceptance.<sup>160</sup> As a result, she learns to appreciate its glistening body, which attracts the sunlight.

Madieri implies that beings are taught to fear difference. In a different encounter, Dafne meets a grasshopper, which her vain sister Camilla, calls an “assassin” that she avoids in order her to protect the beauty of her petals.<sup>161</sup> Yet, Madieri suggests that Camilla fears the grasshopper’s because she was taught to do so, rather than being inherently opposed to the bugs that rest on her petals. Similarly, when the elder daisies assemble one afternoon, they warn against the “yellow threat” that has migrated to the meadow “in masses.”<sup>162</sup> The president of the meadow warns against the new visitors:

Al post del bianco delle margherite avanza il giallo dei soffioni, che riempiono i vuoti da noi lasciati. I soffioni, signori, ci stanno sommergendo. Il taraxacum officinale [...] sarà il futuro signore della radura, se non corriamo ai ripari. È un essere forte, tenace, prolifico. I suoi semi giornalmente si alzano [...] alla conquista di nuovi territori. Chiedo agli esperti di esaminare le ragioni del nostro declino [...]<sup>163</sup>

In the place of daisies’ whiteness, advances the yellow of the dandelions, that fill up the empty spaces we’ve left behind. The dandelions, ladies and gentlemen, are drowning us out. The taraxacum officinale [...] will be the future of master of the

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<sup>160</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 172.

<sup>161</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 177.

<sup>162</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 183.

<sup>163</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 184-185.



meadow if we do not hurry to act. It is a strong being, tenacious, prolific. Its seeds lift (off) [...] to conquer new territories. I ask the experts to examine the reasons for our decline.)

Although in *La radura* Madieri avoids discussion of political ideology, she implies that the meadow is a micropolitical site of contestation in which the daisies concern over the “yellow threat” mimics the racialized discourses surrounding *others* present in Italy and elsewhere. In doing so, Madieri reveals the distorted logic behind *othering* and a language based on fear similar to the anti-immigrant rhetoric present in Italy today, as well as the anti-Jewish propaganda of the Third Reich, or the staunch italianization of Slavs living in northeastern Italy under Italian Fascism and the regime’s emphasis on increasing birthrates to combat the invading non-white or Christian presence in Italy.

The gardener and “doctor,” Oscar scratches his head and tries to calm the daisies, reminding them that they cannot think only of themselves when the dandelions have many young to raise. In response, Dafne learns that dandelions do not exist for the enjoyment of daisies, but alongside them, as equal. Unphased by anti-dandelion rhetoric, Dafne continues to celebrate plurality and difference, against many family members’ warnings. While the parents of her friend Celeste punish her for playing with forget-me-nots, demanding she play “with her kind,” Dafne and Celeste continue seeing the forgetmenot, who reveals to them that even though the meadow is filled with enough space, she fears life there because so many prejudices exist against outsiders. The girls, against their families’ wishes, enjoy and support the differences in smell and color between flora and desire a clearing in which multiple species of flora and fauna can flourish in harmony while raising their families and escaping persecution from elsewhere. Thus, Madieri advocates for difference and the right to a decent life for all beings. Madieri plays with

this dialectic between Dafne's romantic perception of difference and the real implications of difference to which she finds herself increasingly involved, insinuating that the difference between the two may be less real than apparent.

Madieri inverts the logic that borders are beneficial to identity formation. Specifically in *La radura*, borders become limitations on the ability to imagine life beyond them, thereby restricting ethnicity to homogeneity. In the beginning of *La radura*, Madieri defines the clearing by its concise borders. Pine trees, juniper bushes, and mounds of earth, or hills, define the clearing's borders. In the center, without trees, the daisies are free to populate and spread within its confines. However, when the daisy elders convene to discuss and fight against the "dandelion invasion," one of the daisies, Maricò, observes that due to the dandelions' presence, it is no longer possible to distinguish "day from night" because the influx of new species has blurred the borders of the clearing. The daisies rise up in a panic that "outsider" populations are quickly compromising the borders of their clearing. As a result, they engage in vitriolic discourse that argues in favor of borders, which they believe help to give form to their identities as daisies and to protect their "imagined community."<sup>164</sup> In the absence of clear borders, the daisies fail to imagine their fraternity with flora and fauna and, by viewing new species as contributors to the "pollution" of the clearing, perceive the lack of clear borders as an invitation for chaos. Here, Madieri implies that while many believe borders are necessary to give identity form, the

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<sup>164</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). For Anderson, a nation is *imagined* because: "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6-7). The nation is a *community* because: "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (6-7).

restrictive but evolving nature of borders is ‘equivocal’ in that new life is required to sustain the health and beauty of the meadow, without which even the daisies may disappear.

Dafne, turned off by the noninclusive discourse of her elders, grows suspicious of an adult war of anti-dandelion rhetoric revealing her growing ability to perceive power dynamics. Rather than limit Dafne’s thinking, Madieri suggests that borders inspire Dafne to rethink life *from* them. In this, Madieri supports a model for identity formation that abandons *either/or* rhetoric thereby complementing John Agnew’s “border-thinking.” Through Dafne’s ability to see the positives of all perspectives of the clearing, from that of slimy frogs to humble forgetmenots, Madieri implies that new terms can be found for thinking about borders in order to serve the greater dignity of humanity, here anthropomorphized as flowers.

However, Madieri’s “border-thinking” also considers the interconnectedness of all life by reflecting on the ultimate border between life and death. While Ernestina Pellegrini ultimately reads Dafne’s death as a rewriting of the myth of Daphne and Apollo, I believe that Madieri goes a step further.<sup>165</sup> In the final scene of *La radura*, the text explores the role of metamorphosis through dislocation. The incoming human presence, of a family picnicking for a day, seen from Dafne’s perspective, defamiliarizes the reader’s perspective of the clearing by underlining the irony inherent in looking at ourselves through the point of view of a Daisy. In this way, Madieri intends for this estranging perspective to help her reader perceive the difference between Dafne’s naïve perspective and that of an implicit narrator. The human’s presence also functions as an exciting mystery for Dafne to unfold. Captivated by the little girl’s blue dress and strangeness,

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<sup>165</sup> Pellegrini, “Transparencies,” 60.

Dafne is so distracted that she does not register the significance of the children's "game" of picking flowers:<sup>166</sup>

Prima fu il turno di Rachele, poi di Camilla e di Amanda. Non si udì neppure un lamento. Tutto si svolgeva con la semplicità di un accadimento lungamente atteso, con la calma e l'eleganza di un rito necessario. A Dafne pareva di sognare [...] Ebbe solo il tempo di vedere lo sguardo sbigottito di Celeste, che avrebbe voluto dire qualcosa. Chiuse gli occhi e rabbrivì [...]

Uno strappo, un dolore intenso proprio al centro del creato.

Si sentì sollevare, scuotere, stringere e infine adagiare, in un solido abbraccio con le altre compagne, su un cedevole giaciglio.

Dov'era l'umida e compatta zolla materna? Dove lo spazio definito e rassicurante in cui era cresciuta? Dove la luce chiara del sole che la riscaldava? Tutto era d'un tratto vago, spento, indecifrabile [...] Era questo la fine del tempo?

Sì, - le parve di udire, - anche per te, amica mia, anche per te.

Il dolore non durò a lungo [...] Ad uno sfibrato languore subentrò un dolce finale abbandono. [...] Il prato, senza più certi confini, ondeggiava come se un ritmo vento si fosse levato [...] <sup>167</sup>

First it was Rachel's turn, then Camilla and Amanda's. Not even a lament was heard. Everything unfolded with the simplicity of an occurrence long awaited with the calmness and elegance of a necessary rite. To Dafne it appeared she was

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<sup>166</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 227.

<sup>167</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 227-228.

dreaming [...] She only had enough time to see Celeste's dismayed stare that would have liked to tell her something. She closed her eyes and shivered [...]

A split, an intense pain at the center of [Dafne's] being.

She felt herself lift up, shake, squeeze and in the end lie down in a strong embrace with her other companions on a soft bed.

Where was the humid and compact, maternal clump? Where was the definite and reassuring space in which she had grown up? Where was the clear light of the sun that warmed her? Everything was blurry, spent, indecipherable [...] Was this the end of time?

Yes, she seemed to hear, also for you, my friend, also for you.

The pain did not last long [...] to an exhausting languor followed a final, sweet abandon [...] The meadow, without anymore clear borders, rippled as if the rhythm of the wind had risen.

In the final scene, Madieri configures Dafne's death as a potential exile from her beloved clearing and ironic return to origins. Through the violent splitting Dafne feels at the "center of her being," Madieri allegorizes the painful splitting that exiles, her family included, experience upon departure. While in Madieri's *Verde acqua* the split from Fiume creates an emotional response (indeed, Madieri views the moment of exile as a turning point in her formation), for Dafne the experience is purely physical. However, by returning Dafne to the clearing as part of a crown of daisies that the human girl returns gently to the meadow, Madieri implies that all living beings are interconnected through death's totalizing forces.

Death, the ultimate equalizer, reunites Dafne with her true origins indefinitely and, in the closing line of the fable, her death ultimately fulfills her wish of never leaving the clearing.<sup>168</sup> Thus, Madieri portrays this image of nature's cyclical forces as an ultimate return to origins. This final image points to Madieri's own life foreshadowing her own impending death. In this way, Madieri transfigures the Istrian exodus and transforms it, as Claudio Magris observes, into a universal precariousness that reflects a much larger and ambivalent exodus that reflects the human condition of living."<sup>169</sup> In an ironic reversal of perspectives, Madieri reflects Dafne's death in the eyes of the little girl:

Mentre le ultime voci andavano spegnendosi, sempre più fioche e lontane, la bambina dai capelli bruni ricomparve all'improvviso. Si fermò a fissare, con gli occhi d'ambra ridivenuti pensosi, la conca affondata nell'ombra. Tolsse dal capo la ghirlanda di fiori che l'aveva quel giorno incoronata regina e la depose delicatamente su un cespuglio.<sup>170</sup>

(As the last voices were fading, ever weaker and distant, the girl with the dark hair reappeared suddenly. She stopped for a moment to stare intently, her amber eyes once again pensive, at the hollow engulfed in darkness. She took off the garland that had crowned her queen that day, and delicately left it on a bush.)

Madieri closes with an image similar to the end of *Verde acqua*, in which a chain of women, ending with Madieri's mother, connects the higher truth of the inevitable cycle of death and

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<sup>168</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 229: "Dafne non lasciò mai la sua radura."

<sup>169</sup> Magris, *Afterword to VC*, 287.

<sup>170</sup> Madieri, *La radura*, 228-229.

rebirth. “Only with death,” observes Magris through Karl Rahner, “does the *status viatoris* of mankind, his existential condition of travel, cease.”<sup>171</sup> Therefore, to travel means to face reality and its alternatives, with History and others stories that go unheard.<sup>172</sup>

*La radura* creates a complex parallel for *Verde acqua*. The play of lightness and darkness and the cycle of rebirth and destruction between the two texts create a pendulum of tension. This tension is created by narrating the past from a perspective that alternates between a naïve, auroral point of view and a vertical, metaphysical perspective that creates both an interlocking self-reflexivity and moments of remembrance.

With its focus on the local regionalism of the northeastern Italian border and minor perspectives, which avoid a totalizing universalism, Madieri’s texts propose a metaphysical vision of border-being that celebrates multiple-belonging.<sup>173</sup> Madieri’s texts offer a unique, poetic transnational vision of border-being that draws from her experiences in the Italian borderlands.

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<sup>171</sup> Magris, *L’infinito viaggiare*, viii.

<sup>172</sup> Magris, *L’infinito viaggiare*, xv.

<sup>173</sup> As Caren Caplan observes in her *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000): A viable alternative must be found for totalizing universalism through a practice of compromises and negotiations, underlying which is: “the recognition that political necessity, even urgency, requires the theorization of a meaningful tension between universal and particular, similarity and difference” (169).

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate how the feminization of migration in Europe has affected the literature of Eastern European Italoophone women in Italy from the 1980s to the present. By feminization of migration I mean the recent trend of a higher percentage of women among voluntary migrants in Europe, noted by historians such as Luisa Passerini. In surveying Italian migration literature, I argued that the contemporary figuration of “migrant writers” requires a more nuanced interpretation. In spite of the general tendency in Italy to forget or ignore Italy’s own national past as a country of emigrants and immigrants, this past nonetheless ties national identity closely to migration. The oblivion of Italy’s own migrant identity has contributed to the relegation of Italoophone women from Eastern Europe—among other immigrant groups—to a subordinate political and cultural position. I suggest that the writers discussed in this dissertation responded to such treatment by creating through their narrative works counter-discourses that engaged with problematic Eurocentric paradigms while also dismantling outdated forms of national identities through what I call a new ethical politics of location. The creative contributions of these Italoophone women writers respond to nationalist ideologies through a transnational ethos that helps to configure new subjectivities for women, bridging the East and West of Europe through various forms of engagement.

If we are to read Europe, in part, as a discursive entity that merits the attention of not only political scientists and historians, but also literary scholars, then we may also interpret the resistance to Eurocentric conceptions of belonging through literature as a significant aesthetic endeavor that rethinks contemporary notions of Europe. Intra-European mobility exists today as a form of transnationalism – through the movement of goods, culture, bodies, and transcultural



memory – which can help us to rethink European belonging and envision new ways of overlapping different forms of subjectivity, rather than perpetuating a system that would place these subjectivities in a dichotomizing “in-between” space (to use Homi Bhabha’s terms). By examining the memories surrounding border-crossing and their estranging effects on the formation of these women’s narrative identities and their politics of location, focusing in particular on the symbolic and historical investments of women writers connected to Eastern Europe, I hope to have helped literary critics and readers in general to better appreciate the aesthetic value and importance of Italoophone women writers. By approaching literary texts by Italoophone women from Eastern Europe in this way, we can identify the ways in which women respond to the transculturation of their multiple belongings and create new subjectivities despite national borders, which threaten to impose dichotomies such as *us/them*.

Julia Kristeva’s notion of the other “within,” or the experience of recognizing that a part of ourselves exists in our encounter with foreigners, offers a way of reinterpreting the collision of cultures that occurs when individuals invoke different perspectives of their location in the world. In approaching literary texts by women from Eastern Europe in this way, we are able to perceive not only how women have responded to the feminization of migration, but also how they have responded to the deterritorialized memories of the female body’s condition. Women have been migrating on their own for thousands of years; however, the accelerated recent feminization of migration has contributed to reshaping the transnational flows of information, goods, and culture, changing the traditional nature of migration and identity in Europe and subsequently their representations in literature. Histories that make visible Eastern European women’s presence in Italy underscore their exclusion from European centers of power, yet such histories recount women’s participation in the creation of a contemporary European identity preserved through

letters, memoirs and literature that together construct a transnational historical imaginary that has yet to be fully explored.

One of the goals of this dissertation has been to highlight Eastern European Italoophone women's critical engagement with transnationalism, illustrating how the traditional figure of the female migrant in Italian culture is insufficient to define their literary output. Migration has compelled a number of women to reexamine female subjectivity in and against Eurocentric conceptualizations of woman. In illuminating women's literary participation in the construction of new transnational subjectivities that consider the influences of one's country of origin as well as destination on the formation of a female self, I am suggesting that the creative act of writing provides these women with an imaginary space in which to resolve competing nation-bound visions of being a woman and a European. That is to say, the authors included in this project contribute to the discourse of transnationalism by recognizing that European female identity often involves a process of transculturation that overlaps different cultural traditions to create hybrid identities, which destabilize and correct stereotypes associated with Eastern European women through a local enunciation of space and place. Although economic and political development in Eastern European remains different from that in the West of Europe, the authors I discuss in my dissertation imagine a Europe that does not adhere to nationalist visions of personal identity, but bridges women's historic condition across borders by revealing the weakening of literature as a nationalist project. Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva, and Rosi Braidotti have laid a foundation for a feminist practice and theory that introduces a feminist politics of location highlighting relational modes of existence. Očkayová, Coman, and Madieri all contribute to a vision of Europe through a "politics of location" that cultivates multiple ways of belonging and identification and implicitly responds to historians' Luisa Passerini and Anca

Parvulescu's call for the critical re-examination of female subjectivity between Eastern and Western Europe. Each author examined in this dissertation has a personal connection to Eastern Europe, yet still they differ from one another in many ways. Thus, their literary enunciation of female subjectivity occurs from specific locations and relationships with Italy that reveal nuanced ways of understanding identities that dialogue with the histories, memories and literatures of specific Eastern European nation-states. Indeed, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary generate different ways of being "Eastern European" based on each country's different marginality and historical exclusion.. For these writers, borders are not necessarily sites of negation, but rather, seen from a hybrid perspective, become productive sites of meaning that reveal how various cultures can exist together despite borders.

In this dissertation, I have focused on literature as a crucial site for the rethinking of female subjectivity that has inspired women not only to dialogue with and resist Eurocentric visions of woman, but also to create a new space for the critical rethinking of Europe and women's identities within its borders. As women who cross borders from Eastern Europe into Western Europe are increasingly recognized, it is my hope that the writers examined here – Jarmila Očkayová, Ingrid Beatrice Coman, and Marisa Madieri – may be further recognized for how their own acts of transnationalism contribute to the ways in which women are perceived more broadly in Europe. As the forces of change currently threaten to destabilize not only Europe's borders, but our basic understanding of nation-states, and issues surrounding migration and transnationalism are catapulted to the forefront of political debates and policies that determine citizenship, I hope that other critics will examine women's migration and their literary representations. Read in this context, Očkayová, Coman, and Madieri not only destabilize and dissect nationalistic discourses in their texts, but also reveal innovative ways of thinking and

writing about women, infiltrating the European imagination with fluid subjects charged with the power to change nationalist narratives.

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