

Subtext and Context:

Pathways to Trauma Recovery in

Gianna Manzini's *Ritratto in piedi*

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Abstract

This thesis explores three pathways to trauma recovery detectable as a constant fabula in the writing of Gianna Manzini (1896-1974). The study begins with a close reading of Manzini's most widely recognised work, *Ritratto in piedi*, (*Full-Length Portrait*) (1971), a memoir based on the author's relationship with her father, the noted anarchist, Giuseppe Manzini. Manzini's longstanding intention was to write her father's biography but she was unable to fulfil her ambition for decades because psychosomatic symptoms repeatedly inhibited her and forced her to divert her efforts towards other tasks. The thesis contends that *Ritratto* was a pivotal artefact in her gradual recovery from trauma.

The study seeks to rehabilitate *Ritratto* within the genre of trauma narrative, which has recently received increasing critical attention, in part because advances in neuroscience and psychoanalysis have recalibrated our understanding of trauma. One under-examined circumstance occurs when trauma's genesis resides in early childhood as the result of repeated and unconscious micro-traumas, rather than those situations where the precipitants are dramatic and obviously damaging.

Hence, *Ritratto* is explored as an autobiographical account of such hidden childhood trauma, and also as one landmark within a longstanding process of recovery by narrative means. Although *Ritratto* is the centrepiece of the study, contextualising this text within Manzini's opus makes it possible to fully appreciate the enigmatic nature of her trauma and, especially, the emotional impasses she encountered during her attempts to complete the memoir.

Manzini's mother, Nilda, played a major role in promoting the author's recovery from trauma, and also in fostering her talent. Therefore, Nilda's representation in the critical literature as inconsequential to Manzini's formation as a writer is robustly challenged in this study. Nilda was as important, if not more so, than Manzini's father, Giuseppe, who has generally been portrayed as her pivotal influence.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the sub-textual pathways that enabled the Italian author, Gianna Manzini (March 24, 1896 – August 31, 1974), to complete her long-anticipated work *Ritratto in piedi* (*Full-Length Portrait*) (1971). The thesis focuses on neuroscientific, psychoanalytic, philosophical, and literary accounts of what it means to process trauma. Specifically, it employs concepts derived from those fields to understand how Manzini struggled for decades to complete a book about her father, Giuseppe Manzini (1853-1925), and why it was only towards the end of her career that she succeeded in writing *Ritratto in piedi* (hereafter *Ritratto*), (*Full-Length Portrait*) (hereafter *Full-Length*), a memoir centred on her relationship with her father.

Manzini's career spanned six decades during which she produced over twenty books. Her writing is characterised by an elaborate use of symbolism, meta-narrative and a highly intricate sentence structure. In "Parole povere" [Poor Words], a short story in the collection *Album di ritratti* [Photo Album], she wrote in an unusually frank and straightforward way that for years she longed to write about her father. However, with each attempt she was overcome by uncontrollable tremors that prevented her from fulfilling her task (Manzini *Album* 229).

In the context of twentieth-century Italy's plight involving catastrophic social and political changes, Italian authors have excelled at drawing attention to the personal upheavals occasioned by these wider realities. The century saw many authors describe, by both fictional and autobiographical means, experiences of trauma that occurred because of personal or collective events. One may think of Primo Levi's testimony of Auschwitz, Natalia Ginzburg's account of her husband's murder at the hands of the fascists, Oriana Fallaci's description of Alexander Panagoulis' torture by regime officials, or an even more recent (fictional) account of physical and sexual abuse within the family, as told by Elena Ferrante. All of these authors share

at least a few commonalities that place them within the current understanding of trauma narrative. One feature is that the author or a character has been exposed to deliberate forms of harm: discrimination, imprisonment, abuse and violence. Another feature is that the victims are aware of having been subjected to a traumatic experience and are able to describe both when and how it occurred.

By contrast, one area of trauma narrative that has not received so much attention is the way that trauma can also arise out of apparently innocuous contexts, devoid of intention to harm. The thesis argues that Manzini suffered such trauma. The symptoms she describes in “Parole povere” point to traumatic experiences that gave rise to her psychosomatic ailments and states of panic (Manzini *Album* 229). Such trauma frequently begins in childhood, may remain unconscious, and is often a consequence of cumulative micro-traumas.

To all appearances, Manzini’s early life was one of relative comfort and affluence provided by two loving parents within a bourgeois family. But those superficial appearances belie the reality of a deeply troubled childhood that was afflicted by rejection, grief and loss. A glimpse into the intractable nature of Manzini’s childhood anguish is captured in *Ritratto*’s closing utterance: “Sola: ho freddo, babbo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 227), “Alone, Father, I feel cold” (Manzini *Full-Length* 172). Despite her seventy plus years, Manzini, still at pains to understand the world around her, resorts to the default language that young children must often employ to convey their suffering: the language of the body.

Manzini’s writing is pertinent to trauma studies because it offers valuable perspectives on the ways that trauma, often subtle and insidious, insinuates itself into an author’s writing. The thesis examines those aspects of Manzini’s writing, thereby bringing her work into the light of current debates concerning trauma narrative.

Ritratto retraces Manzini’s relationship with Giuseppe by recourse to her memories and numerous re-imaginings of various events that took place prior to his death. Furthermore, in the memoir Manzini conveys the anguish caused by her parents’ separation, the consequences of her father’s

allegiance to anarchism, her tormented school life, and her remorse at having alienated herself from Giuseppe a few years before his death.

These issues are presented in a narrative comprised of three sections. The “Premessa” (“Introduction”) provides a brief description of some of Giuseppe’s ancestors who were powerful and influential in various ways but were also political outcasts. The second section, titled “Atto di contrizione” (“Act of Contrition”), describes Manzini’s fears and aversion to writing the memoir. The third and longest section, titled “Ritratto in piedi” (“Full-Length Portrait”), is presented over eight chapters in which Manzini recounts her father’s story beginning with his life working in his watch repair shop; the hostilities she heard expressed towards Giuseppe while living with her mother’s extended family; and her torment at witnessing parental arguments. The narrative then shifts to describe her life with her mother in Florence, a city where Manzini felt happy and accepted. The third section concludes with a re-imagined account of her father’s persecution and death whilst living in forced internal exile.

Overall, this study identifies and examines three pathways to trauma recovery in *Ritratto* and demonstrates how they transformed Manzini’s trauma via a progressive confrontation with her history, culminating in a new form of meaning-making. To achieve this aim, the thesis draws on the following works by Manzini: *Lettera all’editore* (1945) (*Game Plan for a Novel*), *Forte come un leone* (1947) [Strong as a Lion], *Arca di Noè* (1960) [Noah’s Ark], *Un’altra cosa* (1961) [Another Thing], *Album di ritratti* (1964) [Photo Album], *Ritratto in piedi* (1971) (*Full-Length Portrait*), and *Sulla soglia* (1973) [On the Threshold]. Out of those readings came recognition of the enigmatic nature of Manzini’s trauma and the covert way it inhabited her writing. Her gradual recovery took a literary form not so much with the conscious intent to heal herself as, largely, via repetitions of narrative and symbolic tropes, which both laid the foundations for and gave expression to the emotional adjustments that enabled Manzini to overcome her obstacles and to reconcile with her feelings about her father’s life and death.

Much of the older commentary on Manzini’s writing is circumscribed

by more conventional literary analyses and, although in recent years commentators have continued to pay attention to Manzini's work, it has overwhelmingly been as part of a broader study of Italian female writers. The thesis contends that the criticism devoted to Manzini may be enriched by aligning it with some of the far-reaching interconnections or conversations among the many disciplines pertinent to a modern understanding of trauma and trauma recovery, and by exploring how these processes can play out in literature. Hence, this thesis adopts concepts and perspectives from some of the most recent findings in such diverse disciplines as neuroscience, psychoanalysis, literary criticism and philosophy, all of which contribute to framing the terms of the investigation. A brief account follows explaining how the insights of scholars working within these various disciplines are used to further the core task of the thesis: namely to demonstrate how Manzini's life's work can be understood as her means of coming to terms with the early formative experiences of her life, even allowing for the fact that this was largely an unconscious enterprise.

The nexus between neuroscience and psychoanalysis has only recently emerged as a recognised, discrete discipline. Only at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century did newer technologies advance the discipline of neuroscience and lead to corroboration or correction of prior assertions about the nature of trauma, especially those enunciated by psychoanalysis (Sletvold 1019). It has been more widely acknowledged these two disciplines are in effect pursuing the same task of attempting to understand mental function. It is important to remember in this context that Freud abandoned his neuroscientific project because he acknowledged that the technology of his day was inadequate to further his intent. As neuroscience has gradually investigated those areas that were traditionally the preserve of psychoanalysis – the emotions, the unconscious, and interpersonal processes – the underlying commonalities between these fields have become more and more evident, along with their differences. Psychoanalysis has long concerned itself with psychological trauma. Now its insights are broadly corroborated by neuroscience, adding empirical validation to psychoanalytic insights into the nature of trauma including its causes, its symptomology, and various pathways to recovery. The thesis

therefore provides a brief description of some of the major theorists, theories, and conceptualisations utilised in this project.

One of the aims of this study is to establish the interconnections between Manzini's traumatic childhood and her psychosomatic ailments. For an exploration of these conditions, the expertise of trauma specialists Harold Blum, Paul Valent, Rick Curnow, and Bessel van der Kolk is drawn upon. In addition, the insights of the neuroscientist Joseph Le Doux allow the study to shed light on the triggers of the panic and anxiety that afflicted Manzini from childhood. It seems that Manzini's aversion to writing her father's memoir and her struggle to make meaning of her life's circumstances are demonstrably connected to these childhood beginnings. In an attempt to explain that connection, the thesis turns to the conceptualisations of another neuroscientist and commentator on the nature of the mind, Antonio Damasio.

As a prodigious figure in neuroscience, Damasio bridges biology and philosophy to demonstrate the value of both in understanding human nature. Damasio's theories are grounded in the philosophy of the seventeenth-century philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. By bringing Spinoza's accounts of ethics, emotions, feelings, and drives into our present awareness, Damasio corroborates, through neuroscience, Spinoza's intuitive understanding that feelings and emotions are powerful drivers of our collective humanity. Damasio's interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy provides the general backdrop to the exploration of Manzini's motivations in composing *Ritratto*. It is supplemented by recourse to arguments advanced by two philosophers, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Foucault's arguments allow for a more fine-grained examination of the underlying societal forces at play during Manzini's upbringing while Levinas' philosophical concept of *hospitality* informs the discussion of ethics conceived as an intuitive and pre-cognitive interaction.

The thesis also draws inspiration from Suzanne Nalbantian whose work in autobiographical studies sees neuroscience and literary analysis converge. Nalbantian has put the spotlight on memory research by arguing that if literary studies are to detach from the "stale theories" currently on

offer, they must consider recent neuroscientific developments that allow humanistic studies to shift away from purely subjective hermeneutic interpretations (Nalbantian et al. 2).

In return, autobiography offers neuroscience access to condensed information about the human experience, and it is via this exchange that the thesis interprets the role that mythopoeia occupies in *Ritratto*. That discussion is guided by the insights of literary commentator, Laurence Coupe, especially in Chapter One's analysis of Giuseppe's life narrated by Manzini as a biblical parable. The thesis also refers to the literary theorist, Edward Said, whose views on artistic creation in later life enlighten the interpretation of the narrative and stylistic developments Manzini employs in *Ritratto*.

Absence and grief hover throughout *Ritratto*, prompting its characters to deploy various coping mechanisms. In order to understand these processes, the thesis also turns to Robert Harrison's extensive study on grief and bereavement for a description of how these are expressed in the collective domain. Moreover, clothes and dressmaking feature in some detail in *Ritratto*, a trope whose narrative significance is explored by drawing on Patrizia Sambuco's study of Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto* (1999), (*Troubling Love*).

Finally, this thesis draws heavily on the thought of two very different but influential exponents of contemporary psychoanalysis: Antonino Ferro and Christopher Bollas. Ferro is a major figure in contemporary psychoanalysis who has integrated several psychoanalytic traditions as well as melding influences from literary studies, such as Umberto Eco's literary concepts. Ferro's conception of *narrative derivatives* is employed to analyse Manzini's writing as a gradual means of achieving transformation of trauma. One major strand of influence on Ferro's theories can be found in the pioneering work of the British psychoanalyst, Wilfred Bion. While Bion's opus is extensive and complex, this study draws selectively on some of his more accessible conceptualisations such as *reverie*. Used to describe the function of waking dream states, reverie is, according to Ferro, Bion's most important contribution to psychoanalysis (Vermote 245). Ferro's theories

provide the basis for the interpretation of Manzini's literary tropes, enabling her to "work through"¹ her trauma, while Bollas' theories inform the analysis of Manzini's enraptured response to Florence and how that sense of rapture was connected to the positive influence of Manzini's mother, Nilda, whose consistency of care in early infancy laid the foundations for Manzini's capacity to overcome the traumatic circumstances that plagued her childhood.

Overall, this study identifies three sub-textual pathways that promoted Manzini's trauma recovery: Saliencies, Narrative tropes, and Nilda's maternal influence. While a single chapter of this thesis is dedicated to Saliencies and Narrative tropes respectively, Manzini's mother, Nilda, has been allocated two chapters on the basis of her extensive influence on Manzini's creative production. The four chapters are outlined below.

Saliencies

Chapter One brings together several neuroscientific and literary theories that contribute to understanding the paradigmatic and reparative role of autobiographical literature. The use of a combination of these theories permits an understanding of the complexities Manzini faced in overcoming her obstacles to writing *Ritratto*. One argument contends that Manzini's belief in her father's legacy developed concurrently with the calamitous events unfolding in Italy in the late 1960s. Underpinning that contention is the notion that Manzini's sense of meaning was not simply achieved through conscious design: it also derived from a discrete and subtler motivation born of our human biology.

Chapter One also draws upon Damasio's contribution to the understanding of feelings and emotions that has led him to create an original lexicon for exploring our biological processes and their functions. A major driver of these functions is his notion of *saliencies*, understood as emotion-based unconscious stimuli driving human decision-making. Saliencies are

¹ Where appropriate, this thesis utilises Freud's term, "working through". Freud coined the term as a means of describing the complex process of absorbing and resolving multi-layered emotional and conceptual blockages, especially those that were initially unconscious: not just by insight alone, but also by reconciliation to the emotional conflicts involved. It broadly accords with his concept of making the unconscious conscious (Freud "Remembering" 148).

fundamental to Damasio's conception of feelings and emotions as separate biological functions comprising a multifaceted and multilayered hierarchy of forces that constantly influence our decision-making processes. Chapter One relies largely on Damasio's *Looking for Spinoza*, which intertwines philosophy and neuroscience to illustrate how, in the context of our developed world, humans strive for *social homeostasis*: that is, humanity's collective survival, which is achieved through our capacity to feel empathy, and enacted largely through our singularly human skill of storytelling.

Narrative tropes

In Manzini's writing numerous tropes recur regularly, none more so than animal characters, especially dogs and horses. First appearing at the beginning of her career, Manzini's early dog and horse characters are debilitated creatures that passively accept the cruel conditions they are forced to endure. Upon reading through these stories, however, it becomes evident that with each new narration the horse and dog characters become progressively more self-reliant, self-aware and rebellious. Indeed, by the time her final dog and horse characters appear in *Ritratto* they are the embodiment of the cataclysmic emotions that had always thwarted Manzini's efforts to write her father's story. The chapter questions whether the factors that impeded Manzini in her attempts to write *Ritratto* might have been unconsciously embedded in her early horse and dog stories. Furthermore, the chapter asks whether the narrative evolution evident in these stories and "characters" was instrumental in furthering the author's capacity to resolve her underlying conflicts, either consciously or unconsciously.

Chapter Two adopts a psychoanalytic perspective to examine how trauma recovery can be realised through repetitive, literary means. Much has been written about the cathartic effect of writing one's experiences. While today's notion of catharsis has shifted from the familiar Aristotelian concept, it is nonetheless still understood as one in which the author undergoes purgative emotional relief in recounting a painful lived experience. A modern conceptualisation contends that writing is cathartic because it transforms trauma into a "coherent narrative" so that the sufferer can step

back from her/his experience and reintegrate it into a new sense of self and view of the world (Brison 13).

The thesis contends that due to the unconscious nature of her trauma, Manzini was left ill equipped to render her experience in the form of a coherent narrative in just one literary work. Rather, it took her many decades and numerous works to develop that capacity. Though slow and painstaking, this was a much more tolerable method of coping because it allowed Manzini to approach obliquely the source of her pain. Nonetheless, the evidence of that progress is discernible in the gradual evolution of self-awareness portrayed by her dog and horse characters.

These hypotheses are framed and articulated by recourse to Ferro's concept of narrative derivatives, which are understood to facilitate emotional transformation through the generation of "characters" that arise out of the discourse in the *analytic field* of psychoanalysis. By viewing the emotional exchange set up between Manzini and her unfolding texts as a process analogous to that between the analyst and patient, the chapter shifts away from the rather codified interpretations of traditional methodologies, while enunciating a new way of understanding the connections between emotions and meaning-making.²

The chapter demonstrates the various ways that trauma can insinuate itself into a child's mind as a result of early life experiences. Also, to facilitate an understanding of the evolution of those psychic states, the chapter includes descriptions of the meaning of trauma and containment within a psychoanalytic context. To that end, the discussion ultimately shifts into an examination of Wilfred Bion's concepts of *beta elements*, *alpha function*, and *alpha elements*, which furnish analysts with some "working tools" to explain the dynamics of transformation of the fundamental anxieties arising in life. The chapter employs those concepts to examine closely the function of Manzini's horse and dog characters as tropes promoting narrative transformation.

² Along with Damasio, Ferro's narrative concepts take centre stage in putting into effect insights generated by *Neuropsychanalysis*, a new discipline combining neuroscience and psychoanalysis, announced by the launch of a journal by the same name in 1999.

Nilda

Another recurring concern in Manzini's writing is her struggle to understand women's propensity for self-degradation and acceptance of subjugation. Superficially, Manzini's mother, Nilda, could easily be construed as representing those negative traits. Nilda has received almost universally negative evaluations from literary commentators who generally perceive her as weak, ineffectual, and even selfish: sweeping statements that underestimate Nilda's true character strengths and her beneficial influence on her daughter's upbringing.

Chapter Three examines one predominant misgiving about such criticism: namely, that Nilda's actions (or inactions) have generally been appraised from the point of view of our contemporary values and expectations, formed decades after the rise of feminism and the ensuing linguistic developments that made it possible to enunciate new ways of thinking. The endeavour to unpack these issues led to an investigation of the visionary insights of Michel Foucault who argues that truth and history have traditionally been defined by historians who conventionally assume a progressive view of the past: a propensity that risks adoption of overly simplified assessments of historical epochs. Therefore, Chapter Three advances an explication of Nilda's behaviour from her social-generational perspective with the aim of redressing the criticism levelled at her. A major omission, argues Foucault, is that existing historical accounts fail to recognise the pervasiveness of "invisible" forms of societal subjugation that covertly influence the outcome of people's lives. Foucault's models of *archaeology* and *genealogy* demonstrate how women of Nilda's generation were oppressively and unconsciously subjected to the inherent mores of their milieu. Accordingly, Nilda's apparently "weak character" is recalibrated against the overall trauma affecting the wider female community. The chapter further challenges criticism of Nilda by arguing that in contrast to the one-dimensional and idealised depiction of Giuseppe, Manzini's rendition of her mother is convincingly nuanced and denotes a deeply empathetic mother-daughter rapport.

The chapter then focuses on Manzini's considered depictions of her

mother's underlying qualities – her resolve and independence – encapsulated in her account of the toxic environment pervading their extended family and how it compromised the pair's emotional survival. To illustrate just how pernicious that influence was, the chapter revisits Bion's descriptions of the subconscious dynamics influencing group function. Bion's theory of *basic assumptions* relating to group life is employed to explore the dysfunction in Nilda's family, and their rejection of Giuseppe.

The chapter concludes with an epilogue inspired by Bion's *A Memoir of the Future* (1975) to highlight his contention that the collective can notionally reside within the individual as a complex of internal *basic assumption* potentials within a complex internal ecology of "objects": a view that goes a step beyond the more usual psychoanalytic position contending that family dynamics shape the psychology of the individual.³ This is pertinent whether we speak of Manzini or of her mother. Such dynamics replicate, reflect, and promulgate the standards, both overt and covert, of their era. Indeed, Bion saw basic assumption states of mind as a common human inheritance; that tend to generate "mindless" human behaviour within groups.

Maternal influences

While the importance of maternal influence in early childhood is well documented, Bollas' concepts stand as unique descriptors of maternal influence detectable in the *destiny drive* embraced by the adult.

The cities of Pistoia and Florence both feature in *Ritratto*. Manzini refers to the former throughout the memoir, but she dedicates an entire

³ The concept of "internal objects" is a complex one that is often identified with the theories of Melanie Klein and her theoretical descendants. As Bott Spillius and her co-editors explain, it is a concept virtually impossible to pin down to a final definition. The thesis simply emphasises those aspects of the concept that assist in following the line of argument pursued in this thesis. Internal objects are internalised mental and emotional images of others, and of one's experiences of others, which, inevitably, are coloured by one's own projections and instinctual biases and are therefore never simple, true representations of one's lived experiences with others. Obviously, the parents form the most common templates, but they by no means constitute the only origins of the internal object world. That world and those objects are experienced concretely by the infant/child, as if they were physically present within the body, though they may also be experienced as being more or less foreign to the sense of self. Furthermore, such objects are experienced as relating to one another, as if in a complex internal ecology. It is noteworthy that other analysts outside the immediate tradition of Klein and Bion et al – such as Winnicott and Bollas, for example – work with somewhat different conceptions of internal objects. But it is the intent of this thesis to simply utilise psychoanalytic concepts as they prove relevant to the argument being pursued.

chapter to describing her “felicità di essere viva” (Manzini *Ritratto* 199), “happiness of being alive” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144) in the Tuscan capital. Although no stranger to Florence up to that point, Manzini’s previous visits had always been limited to day shopping trips that involved her seeing people and things, but not the city itself. Everything changed in 1914 when she moved there permanently with Nilda to pursue her tertiary studies. The move proved to be a life-changing experience that provided Manzini with a sense of well-being and belonging previously unknown to her. She describes Florence’s architecture as “un’immensità accogliente” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “a welcoming immensity” (Manzini *Full-Length* 143) and, upon seeing the Duomo, she exclaims “sono innamorata” (Manzini *Ritratto* 192), “I am in love” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). Beyond these exuberant outpourings, much of Manzini’s account of her life in Florence is especially striking for its numerous maternal allusions, employed to convey the effect that her newly adopted city had on her. Manzini states that Florence held, rocked, embraced, and fed her: descriptions that evoke the experience of an infant in the care of a loving parent. Such references are too frequent to go unnoticed and so the chapter delves into the significance of such descriptions. These considerations corroborate the viewpoint of the psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas, whose work has profoundly influenced the understanding of the interconnection between foundational maternal experiences and perceptions in adult life.

In common with Damasio and Ferro, Bollas’ thinking required him to formulate a new lexicon to express his pioneering theories. Bollas’ concept of the *unthought known* contributes to understanding further the underlying influences in Manzini’s relationship with her father. Following on from those contentions, the chapter then applies Bollas’ distinction between *fate* and *destiny* to illustrate the outcomes of Manzini’s life while she remained in Pistoia. Despite the formidable obstacles arrayed against the possibility of either one achieving any significant form of self-determination, Manzini and her mother were able to chart a sometimes meandering but ultimately effective course towards a new destiny and self-realisation. In *Ritratto*, this is exemplified by Manzini’s account of life in Florence, which is replete with anecdotes that offer themselves as good illustrations of the

transformational object. By recourse to such concepts, the chapter investigates Nilda's importance in facilitating Manzini's development from a traumatised child to a vibrant young woman whose capacity to embrace the creative transformations offered by the Florentine environment was due, in large part, to the foundations laid down by the creative transformations provided by Nilda in Manzini's pre-verbal infancy. Taking a view of Nilda as Manzini's original *transformational object*, the discussion expands by recourse to three further concepts utilised by Bollas: the *destiny drive*, *idiom* and *the aesthetic object*, which are employed to illustrate and explain Manzini's rapport with her adopted city.

To further the discussion of that proposition, the chapter turns to a philosophical view of maternal influence and its role in determining Manzini's investment in her relationships with the world. The chapter expounds on the principle of ethics, fundamentally based on the notion of hospitality enunciated by Levinas.⁴ After losing members of his family to the Holocaust, the philosopher dedicated himself to the formulation of concepts that would interdict the belief patterns that led to the Shoah. Although Nilda died before the events of the Second World War, the chapter contends that much of her behaviour recounted throughout Manzini's narrative exemplifies Levinas' philosophy of an innate and unconditional hospitality in action. Specifically, Manzini's empathy for animals is perceived as being directly influenced by Nilda's example. Thus, Nilda's passivity is positively re-interpreted in Chapter Four as a condition of innate, welcoming hospitality that stands out as a powerful counterpoint to the intellectual stance and physical and/or emotional absence of Manzini's father. While Giuseppe possessed the male social status and sense of entitled voice necessary to communicate the nobility of his ideals, Nilda was, in practice, the embodiment of those ideals. Therefore, Chapter Four argues that, while apparently playing a minor part in *Ritratto*, Nilda's presence is a more subtle and pervasive influence, ready to contain and facilitate Manzini's adjustment to trauma. While Giuseppe features in *Ritratto*, Nilda features elsewhere in Manzini's opus such that it is possible to gain a fuller understanding of her subjectivity and, not least, her influence in Manzini's

⁴ By this Levinas implies maternal as a conceptual rather than literal function.

life. In light of these considerations, after Manzini grants her mother her share of narrative centrality, Nilda's marginality in *Ritratto* can be understood as the ultimate gesture of maternal hospitality whereby Nilda "steps aside" in that work to allow Manzini the voice she struggled to find for so many years. Hence, the contentions explored in Chapter Four elaborate on the argument that the evidence of Nilda's role and influence is present throughout Manzini's writing and should not continue to be discounted if scholars are to fully capture and comprehend the processes that allowed Manzini to face the contradictions inherent in her memory of her father.

The chapters in this thesis are deliberately set out in reverse order. Chapter One addresses the end goal of *Ritratto*, which is to enunciate a new world order in an era of chaos and instability. Chapter Four, on the other hand, centres on the importance of beginnings. It addresses the importance of maternal reliability and dependability, especially in the face of absence and uncertainty, without which Manzini could not have overcome the trauma induced by her childhood. The middle chapters discuss the issues encountered *en route* and describe how they gradually and progressively foster in Manzini sufficient insight for her to recognise and articulate the anguish engendered by her upbringing.

According to Alba Amoia, Gianna Manzini's place among Italy's leading female novelists is undisputed (28). However, much of her literary production can be difficult to read because she rarely follows a linear, progressive, narrative path. One way to renew interest in, and to gain appreciation of this original and intelligent observer of life, is through a new reading of her work. The means elaborated on in this thesis form another pathway to understanding Manzini's ability to contain her trauma responses creatively. Put simply, by writing of her demons she faced them and ultimately exorcised them.

Chapter One – Saliencies

Giovanna (Gianna) Manzini (March 24, 1896 – August 31, 1974) produced nineteen novels before stating in her 1964 work, *Album di ritratti* [*Photo Album*], that she longed to write a book about her father, Giuseppe Manzini, but had repeatedly failed in her intention.⁵ Seven years after that admission in 1971, Manzini published *Ritratto in piedi* (*Full-Length Portrait*) (hereafter *Full-Length*), a memoir centred on her relationship with her father.

Chapter One of this thesis examines the developments occurring in the years between *Album* and *Ritratto* that enabled the author to overcome her obstacles and fulfil her long-anticipated intention. According to some Manzini scholars, it was simply a matter of the ageing author's realisation that her time was running out.⁶ This view is understandable given that Manzini was seventy-five when she published *Ritratto*. However, it fails to account for the fact that despite her struggle to achieve her elusive goal by 1971, Manzini also managed to write and publish, at the age of seventy-eight, a further and final work, *Sulla soglia* (1973) [*On the Threshold*], consisting of four novellas. It seems that even after completing *Ritratto* and despite her advancing years, Manzini was able to continue her creative output.

The late 1960s were a turbulent time in Italy's history. The country was plagued by civil unrest and homegrown terrorism. Arising out of the anti-establishment movement, a young anarchist named Giuseppe Pinelli died in suspicious circumstances in 1969 while detained by the authorities. In his review of *Ritratto*, the journalist Carlo Faloci questions whether Pinelli's death, which closely echoes the circumstances surrounding the death of Manzini's father, might have played a role in spurring Manzini to

⁵ As stated by the author: "Da tempo, mi riprometto di scrivere un ritratto di mio padre. Rimando continuamente. Ce la farò, prima o poi?" (For some time, I've promised myself to write a portrait of my father. I continuously postpone. Will I ever manage it?) (Manzini *Album* 228). With the exception of *Ritratto* and *Lettera all'editore* all translations of Manzini's writing throughout this thesis are by me. In regard to *Ritratto* and *Lettera*, there has at times been the need to slightly alter Martha King's translation to better reflect Manzini's original Italian.

⁶ The Manzini scholar, Clelia Martignoni, suggested this in a conversation we had at Pavia University in September 2015.

write her father's story. In connection with this concern, Faloci states: "Pensai subito, allora, che in qualche modo la campagna becera contro l'anarchismo e in particolare la morte di Pinelli fossero riuscite a travolgere le difese di una coscienza che per troppo tempo aveva rimosso un appuntamento obbligato" (Faloci n.p.), (I immediately thought, that, somehow, the vile campaign against anarchism and in particular Pinelli's death, might have finally broken down the defences of a conscience that for too long had avoided an obligatory appointment). Apparently Faloci was unaware of Manzini's repeated attempts to write *Ritratto*, and thus of the obstacles that had always hindered those attempts. Nonetheless, if his speculation is correct, then the chapter's exploration of the factors that eventually prompted Manzini to write *Ritratto* must also encompass an understanding of how a person's intentions might be influenced by present circumstances.⁷

Ten years before *Ritratto*, Manzini opined through the protagonist of her novel *Un'altra cosa* (1961) [Another Thing] that writing encapsulates a perspective in relation to the world: an allusion, arguably, to the ever-changing interpretations inherent in the writer's perception of reality.⁸ Accordingly, two temporal perspectives stand out in *Ritratto*.⁹ On the one hand, the memoir constructs an account of a life lived: that of Manzini's father. On the other hand, it comprises an ongoing dialogue between Manzini and her father carried out over decades. Within that dialogue lie the clues to uncovering the factors behind Manzini's feelings and emotions that

⁷ This is so especially in light of Manzini's historical desire to write Giuseppe's story and the relatively few years elapsing between *Album* and the publication of *Ritratto*.

⁸ Throughout this thesis square brackets are placed around ellipses. This is to distinguish them from the ellipses Manzini often includes in her narrative.

⁹ Manzini's character Jole, in the book *Un'altra cosa* feels a pressing need to write a novel. In this regard the character states: "Un romanzo è anche un punto di prospettiva in rapporto al mondo. È una spiegazione [...] e anche nel suo diario registrava situazioni, spunti, eventuali soluzioni. Vedrai come saranno apprezzati i diari, a guerra finita" (Manzini *Album* 166), (A novel is also a point of perspective in relationship to the world. It is an explanation [...] and in his diary he recorded situations ideas, and potential solutions. You'll see how valued diaries will be, when the war is over). Through Jole, Manzini alludes to a notion of the author in constant evolution, and, whose views and writing are influenced by the developments in her reality. This observation also captured the attention of Giovanna Miceli-Jeffries who states: "Manzini tends to involve her self – both her life and her art – in her writing, as if the character's situation evokes episodes from her own biography and integrates them into the story" (Miceli-Jeffries 92). It seems that for Manzini, reality and fiction blended naturally.

for a long time delayed her attempts to write the memoir though they did, ultimately, culminate in the production of *Ritratto*.

In this regard, *Ritratto* shifts the conventional understanding of a memoir to one that sees it as a creation that engages much more than an account of the past, even allowing for individual bias. It may also be understood to reflect the author's perception of reality at the time of writing.¹⁰ If, then, a memoir can be viewed as a reflection of the past and also of the present, it may additionally be apprehended as a reflection of hope for the future. In order to explore these contentions, the chapter turns to the neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio, whose pivotal theories relative to feelings and emotions, as well as intentionality, and motivation, underpin the chapter's discussion on the evolution of Manzini's ability to compose *Ritratto*.

However, before these broader perspectives can be appreciated, it is useful to have some knowledge of the issues to be dealt with in Chapter One. The chapter therefore begins with a summary of Giuseppe's life, followed by an overview of the social issues plaguing Italy in the years leading up to *Ritratto*'s publication in 1971. The summaries promote an understanding of some of the parallels between Giuseppe's concerns and those of contemporary Italy at the time of the novel's publication. Some of the latter, the chapter argues, influenced Manzini's determination to complete *Ritratto*, despite the obstacles she continued to face.¹¹ From there, the chapter proceeds to a summarised explanation of Antonio Damasio's account of the diverse operations of feelings, as distinct from emotions;

¹⁰ Further to the previous footnote, since the dialogue in *Ritratto* between Giuseppe and Manzini is always in the present tense, the chapter contends that it mirrors Manzini's view at the time of writing. To this end, her view that narration provides a means to explain and understand life links to the influence of timing. After years of avoidance, Manzini's readiness is confirmed by her statement: "Adesso comincio davvero questa storia-ritratto. Mi provo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 51), "Now I will really begin this prose-portrait. I will try" (Manzini *Full-Length* 34).

¹¹ This can be understood from the following comment: "dopo anni e anni d'esitazione e d'ottusità, mi riscuoto con un sobbalzo e mi incito: ad ogni costo. Ho davanti un cerchio di fuoco. La frusta della morte mi sferza il groppone. Ne percepisco il sibilo. Ad ogni costo. Ad ogni costo. Magari sputando sangue. Riprendo così, tremante, la penna in mano" (*Ritratto* 212), "after years and years of hesitation and obtuseness, I am jolted and spur myself on: at any cost, at any cost. I face a circle of fire. The whip of death lashes my back. I hear its hiss. At any cost. At any cost. Even spitting blood. So trembling, I take up my pen" (Manzini *Full-Length* 160). Manzini's concern seems not to be so much her age, but, rather, the state of ill-health threatening her existence.

followed by a description of his theory of *primary emotions*. In the course of that discussion, the chapter problematises Manzini's relationship with her father and advances several hypotheses regarding the triggers that produced Manzini's panic reactions initiated by the mere thought of writing Giuseppe's memoir.

A description of *social emotions* follows, which then segues into an explanation of the *nesting principle of emotions*. Thereafter, the chapter introduces Damasio's theory of salencies. That section identifies and illustrates factors in *Ritratto*, which are interpreted as the salencies that coalesced to consolidate Manzini's motivation to write the memoir. From these concerns, the chapter turns to a description of Damasio's theory of *social homeostasis* and its influence on the evolution of human consciousness. Thus, the chapter includes a brief description of the evolution of human consciousness based on the findings of neuroscience. Such findings illustrate the prominent role that language and storytelling play in human consciousness.

Advancing from a neuroscientific to a humanistic interpretation, the chapter then turns to a discussion informed by literary theory in order to hypothesise the factors influencing Manzini's mythic portrayal of Giuseppe's life.¹² The chapter argues that by fashioning Giuseppe as a messianic archetype, Manzini ensured that his legacy be viewed as the way forward for a society in the midst of looming chaos. In doing so, Manzini attributes a higher purpose to the struggles Giuseppe faced in life and, moreover, allocates a rationale for the circumstances of his tragic and lonely death. From these concerns, the discussion establishes Manzini's rendition of Giuseppe in accordance with Laurence Coupe's theory of mythology based on the three requirements he identifies: *paradigm*, *perfection*, and *possibility*. Manzini's representation of Giuseppe fulfils each of these requirements of mythology in attempting to ensure that his story endures.

¹² According to Suzanne Nalbantian and her co-editors, neuroscience offers "interpretive information, which the memory process gives to both fundamental levels and the highest strata of artistic style and creativity" (Nalbantian et al. 2). Nalbantian also states that neuroscience has renewed the understanding of the memory processes operating in works of established authors such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Anaïs Nin, and Jorge Luis Borges. Given the autobiographical intent of *Ritratto*, the chapter maintains that a neuroscientific approach sheds light on the underlying factors that both impeded and, ultimately, sponsored Manzini's capacity to write her father's story.

Giuseppe

Giuseppe Manzini (1853-1925) was a prominent anarchist in his lifetime but information available about his life is limited and often contradictory.¹³ Giuseppe was born to affluent parents in Vicofaro, a suburb of Pistoia, Tuscany. In *Ritratto*, Manzini states that Giuseppe's year of birth was 1865 and the year of his death was 1925. Indeed, that is the year carved on her father's tombstone. As recently as May 2013, however, the topic of Giuseppe Manzini's tomb was broached during a conference dedicated to Manzini in her native city of Pistoia. It came to light that the tombstone that Manzini saw during her visit to the Cutigliano cemetery was a fake hastily created days before her visit (Ferrari).¹⁴ Municipal officials knew that Giuseppe's remains had been taken to an ossuary in the 1940s but hid this information only to admit subsequently that they acted out of *pietas* for the aging and renowned author. Giuseppe's real grave lies in an older and neglected corner of the cemetery and its tombstone displays nothing but the year of his death. Martignoni brings to light another curiosity in relation to Giuseppe's tomb. She states that among Manzini's papers there was a photograph of Giuseppe's original gravesite that Manzini makes no mention of in *Ritratto*. In Martignoni's view, Manzini's failure to mention the photo might be due to an involuntary memory lapse functioning to deviate Manzini from her mission of truth (Manzini *Ritratto* 19). Admittedly, it is impossible to know when or how Manzini came to have the photograph. Possibly it was after *Ritratto*'s publication. In any case, it seems that throughout his life and even after his death, Giuseppe was at the mercy of events that conspired to rob him of an identity and a home; and that both Manzini and her father were always forced to yield to the whims of those in authority.

¹³ In her Introduction to the 2005 edition of *Ritratto*, Clelia Martignoni states that official records show that Giuseppe was born in 1853 and died in 1925 (Manzini *Ritratto* 14).

¹⁴ The confusion over Giuseppe's birth year is not helped by Martha King's Introduction in *Full-Length* which states that Giuseppe was born in 1853 (Manzini *Full-Length* vii). This is even though in her translation proper and without providing an explanation, the translator states that Giuseppe was born in 1872 (Manzini *Full-Length* 36). According to Martignoni, Giuseppe's birth year was in fact, 1865 (Manzini *Ritratto* 18). Adding to the conundrum, Martignoni also says that the first ever publication of *Ritratto* claimed, as does King, that Giuseppe was born in 1872 and died in 1929. By way of explanation, Martignoni suggests that Manzini's publishers may have changed the date in an effort to rejuvenate the noted anarchist (Manzini *Ritratto* 14). It seems that the tendency to idealise Giuseppe was not only Manzini's.

Giuseppe was an atheist and pacifist committed to the plight of the poor and exploited. He abandoned his secondary school studies to train as a mechanic before joining his brother-in-law in his thriving smallgoods business based in Grosseto, Tuscany. That was a short-lived collaboration after which Giuseppe subsequently opened a watch repair shop in via degli Orafi in central Pistoia. Manzini recounts her father's efforts to help educate those who were too poor to attend school. He travelled considerable distances to teach those who lived too far away to attend school. Giuseppe's actions bespoke his conviction that everyone had a right to an education but, crucially, they also demonstrated the extent of his vision in understanding that, despite society's best intentions, they are meaningless if people lack the means to access resources.

To have achieved secondary-school level in a period of Italian history when much of the population was illiterate was already an achievement, and very likely assisted Giuseppe's formation as a writer. In the 1880s he wrote for republican and internationalist journals such as *La Favilla*, [The Spark], *Il Sempre Avanti* [Forever Forward], and *La Lotta di Classe* [The Class Struggle]. In 1883, Giuseppe founded *L'Illota*, a pamphlet favouring socialist and revolutionary ideals. For this activity he was imprisoned and publication of the pamphlet was suspended. Giuseppe's imprisonment was due to the illegality of all forms of political dissension under the reign of King Umberto 1. In 1884, Giuseppe was again tried for publicly protesting the imprisonment of his close friend, the notorious anarchist Errico Malatesta. Sentenced to fourteen months' exile, Giuseppe fled to Switzerland. *In absentia*, he was sentenced again to twenty-three months' imprisonment but then granted amnesty in 1887, which prompted his return to Italy where he immediately resumed his political affiliations. Consequently, Giuseppe was exiled to five years to the town of Porto Ercole, in the province of Grosseto. Until the early mid-1920s political exiles were detained in generally isolated and poverty-stricken outposts with little more than a church and a few houses. While only about twenty kilometres away from Pistoia, exile in Porto Ercole meant an almost complete loss of freedom for Giuseppe who would have been forbidden to travel more than a few hundred metres from his domicile.

In 1895, he was granted leave from Porto Ercole for good behaviour and in that same year he married Leonilda (Nilda) Mazzoncini. Nilda was the daughter of conservative, wealthy merchants and even though her family opposed the marriage, Nilda, by all accounts, always loved and remained loyal to Giuseppe. In 1896 their only child, Gianna, was born.

In light of the instability Giuseppe's activities brought upon his family, Nilda's brother, the family patriarch, invited Giuseppe to become a partner in the family business with the intention of safeguarding Nilda's future.¹⁵ Giuseppe accepted the invitation and even contributed a small amount of money toward the venture. However, Giuseppe soon devoted himself to finding ways to improve the working conditions of their employees. Although it was already a common practice in many industrialised countries, Giuseppe's campaign to achieve an eight-hour workday was viewed by his brother-in-law as a personal betrayal and a public humiliation. He accused Giuseppe of being a terrorist for his actions.¹⁶ Defeated, Giuseppe was forced to leave and, landing a final blow to his brother-in-law's pride, he refused to take back the share of money he had contributed to the business. This refusal was perceived as worse than Giuseppe's actions on behalf of the employees. His only surviving relative, Isolina, an elderly spinster aunt, claimed that Giuseppe's actions imposed a fateful doom over the entire family. In a fiery exchange with Nilda, Isolina sides with Nilda's brother rebuking Giuseppe's refusal to take back his share of the money stating "il danno di quello scherzo, tuo fratello lo patisce e lo patirà finché campa. E non lui soltanto. Tutti, ne risentiranno. Per sempre" (Manzini *Ritratto* 154), "Your brother suffers and will suffer until the day he dies from the damage of that prank. And he's not the only one. Everyone will feel it. Always" (Manzini *Full-Length* 115).

Ever progressive in outlook, Giuseppe and Nilda subsequently opened a shop selling Singer sewing machines, which were, at the time, a pioneering invention. Endless hours spent sewing by hand meant that women suffered

¹⁵ As stated by the uncle: "avevo creduto di assicurare l'avvenire di mia sorella" (*Ritratto* 107), "I believed I was ensuring my sister's future" (Manzini *Full-Length* 77).

¹⁶ The brother-in-law's refusal to accept his employees' requests prompted, with Giuseppe's support, a protest strike.

terrible ailments, so the machines provided enormous relief and the shop proved a popular enterprise. Unfortunately, the shop was set on fire, bringing that initiative to an end. In any case, and without knowing who was responsible, Giuseppe was shortly thereafter exiled again to Porto Ercole. During that period of exile, Nilda legally separated from him and she and Manzini went to live with Nilda's sister and nieces in the family home in Pistoia. By the beginning of Italy's fascist regime in 1921, Giuseppe was again exiled: this time to Cutigliano, Tuscany, which was to be his final destination. In Martha King's view, the relatively lenient sentence of exile rather than imprisonment was influenced by Giuseppe's friendship with Mussolini (who came into power in 1922), when the latter was a supporter of socialism. Both Giuseppe and Mussolini wrote for the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* (*Forward!*), which may have mitigated Giuseppe's punishment (King *Full-Length* ix).

In 1925, Giuseppe was ambushed by a group of fascists who shadowed his movements as he made his way home after a visit to friends. The "black shirts" hurled rocks and stones at Giuseppe as he tried to reach home. Manzini re-imagines her father's desperate attempt to escape his persecutors:

Infine parecchia, parecchia salita; la salita che porta al paese, al principio del qual si apriva il portone della casa dove lui abitava. Molta strada, anche per un giovane che non fosse inseguito. Ma il babbo aveva sessant'anni e si sentiva braccato. (Manzini *Ritratto* 215)

Finally, a long climb; the climb that led to the village and the house where he lived. A lot of ground to cover, even for a young man who wasn't being hounded. But my father was sixty years old and felt trapped. (Manzini *Full-Length* 162)

In order to reach his home, Giuseppe needed to cross a bridge and that left him exposed to the hail of stones. On that bridge Giuseppe felt the first pang in his chest. With a final shower of stones reaching him from all directions, his tormentors seemingly decided to abandon their attack. Giuseppe struggled home but some hours later, on September 25, he died of heart failure, presumably brought on by the attack. Originally, Manzini was told that her father had simply died of heart failure and it was not until years

later that she inadvertently learnt about her father's persecution.

Italy in the late 1960s: A summary of the social climate

According to the journalist Michele Brambilla, the uncertain social climate in Italy in the late 1960s gave rise to the formation of neo-fascist and extreme left-wing groups such as the Red Brigades.¹⁷ Such groups were active in the period known as the *anni di piombo* (*years of lead*), a reference to the bullets used by the extremists in their terror campaign, the *strategia della tensione* (*strategy of tension*). Christopher Duggan explains that the strategy of tension was primarily initiated by right-wing terrorists whose aim was to spread “chaos and frustration and so trigger a military crack-down and an end to democracy” (Duggan 208). Their campaign is generally considered to have begun in 1969 with the bombing of the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura (National Bank of Agriculture) situated in Milan's Piazza Fontana and terminated with the bombing of Bologna's central station on August 2, 1980. Prior to the bombings of 1969, there were other violent attacks throughout Northern Italy, but these were considered criminal rather than terrorist acts on the basis that only a few casualties were involved. The period was also marked by the assassination of noted activists Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a leading publisher and communist supporter murdered in 1972, and of Italy's former Prime Minister and President of the Christian Democrat Party, Aldo Moro, who was kidnapped and murdered in 1978.

After the end of World War Two, the 1950s and 1960s are often referred to internationally as the “economic miracle”, which saw Italy's economy prosper due to industrial growth largely located in the country's northern regions. Brambilla remarks that, on a par with the rest of the Western world, by the mid-1960s the vast majority of Italians finally had not only the means to eat three meals a day, but they also gained freedom of expression and the right to vote (Brambilla 7). In Giorgio Romano's view, however welcome these changes to people's lives, Italy's growing economy also exposed a side of social reality that accentuated rather than resolved

¹⁷ Brambilla explains that the two decades of reparation following the Second World War placed Italians in a position to review the numerous inequities and injustices across society: labour exploitation, lack of tertiary infrastructure, and women's rights were some of the issues motivating Italians to voice their frustration (Brambilla 7).

Italy's innate contradictions and inequalities (Romano 249). According to Duggan, while it is true that on some levels consumerism helped Italy to integrate by providing a new set of unifying symbols such as cars and television, that did little to break down the divisions that education, military service, propaganda, religion and even war failed to eradicate (Duggan 274).

Although unemployment markedly declined, salaries remained low and much of the population continued to endure poor quality housing, transport, education, and healthcare. Equipped to service the needs of only a few thousand students each, Italian universities saw their enrolment numbers swell with no provision for adequate infrastructure. Italy's white-collar workforce was also growing exponentially, creating in its wake a sense of instability and restlessness constantly hovering between contrasting aspirations (Romano 246). The situation came to a head in the latter half of the 1960s when workers began demanding increased rights and better conditions. Much of northern Italy's workforce erupted into militancy with organised strikes, factory occupations, and demonstrations.¹⁸ Duggan summarises this situation as the "judgment of a generation on the Republic and specifically on the failure of the politicians to meet the needs and expectations of a society that had undergone such rapid changes in the preceding decade" (Duggan 269).

In response to the unrest, workers were eventually granted economic concessions and higher wages. Italy passed a new pension law and created changes to the tax system. Moreover, decades after its inclusion in the Italian Constitution, regional government was finally introduced in 1970, which saw the emergence of Italy's "red zone" (Duggan 272), the broad area of communist sympathies in the regions of Tuscany, Umbria and Emilia-Romagna. Nevertheless, despite these attempts to appease citizens through constitutional and industrial reform, Italians remained disaffected by the failings of their democracy.

¹⁸ Unlike anti-establishment protests staged throughout the rest of Europe, according to Duggan, Italy was "unique in the breadth and also the duration of its culture of protest: in one form or another, and with varying shades of intensity, militant opposition to the State continued for many years after it had abated elsewhere" (270).

Out of that disaffection grew a number of political protest groups such as *Potere Operaio* [*Workers' Power*], *Lotta Continua* [*Perpetual Struggle*], and *Il Manifesto* [*The Manifesto*]. These groups shared Stalinist or Leninist leanings but they were unable to cooperate or collaborate and spent much of their time arguing over their complex theoretical positions, which, in any case, as Romano explains, were drawn from a narrow and schematic analysis of society (271). The opacity of these theories made them unintelligible to most people. Hence, groups aspiring to be the “new left” inevitably failed to reach a mass following. By the 1970s some of the members of these groups turned to terrorism in the hope of securing with violence what they had failed to achieve by means of the printed word (Romano 271). In 1969, Milan and Rome were struck by several consecutive bomb blasts within an hour. The most damaging was in Milan's Piazza Fontana in which eighteen people died and dozens more were injured.¹⁹

Despite the lack of evidence, in the days following the attacks members of Italy's anarchist movement were blamed. Immediately following the bombings, police arrested a railroad worker called Giuseppe Pinelli who was unknown to police and therefore did not have a criminal record. While he was detained for interrogation, Pinelli died by allegedly falling from a window of Milan's Police Headquarters.²⁰ Many public voices picked up on the inconsistencies in police accounts. In 1970, the year in which Manzini completed *Ritratto*, the playwright Dario Fo brought attention to the murkiness of Pinelli's death in his acclaimed satire *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (*Accidental Death of an Anarchist*).

Feelings and emotions: a neuroscientific view

Descartes famously announced “Cogito, ergo sum” and, for centuries, convinced the world that the mind constituted the essence of human

¹⁹ Although no one has ever been formally convicted, Duggan states that evidence pointed to neo-fascist terror groups as being responsible (280).

²⁰ In December 2019, the Italian Government formally apologised to the family of Giuseppe Pinelli.

existence. As a leading voice in neuroscience, Antonio Damasio re-defines the vast landscape of human consciousness studies from one that is traditionally framed in philosophical terms to one that must also consider the discoveries advanced by neuroscience. Specifically, Damasio's contributions expand the humanistic discourse to incorporate current knowledge of the role that biology and psychology, combined, play in humanity's interaction with the world. In his pivotal work *Descartes' Error*, Damasio first writes about the influence of feelings and emotions on one's mental outlook and decision-making processes (Damasio *Error* xvii).²¹ The author states that the "obligate participation of emotion in the reasoning process can be advantageous or nefarious depending both on the circumstances of the decision and on the past history of the decider" (Damasio *Error* xii). Damasio's statement goes to the heart of this chapter's quest to understand the ways in which Manzini is able to overcome her historic difficulties in writing her father's biography.

It is of some import, therefore, that despite the great admiration and affection Manzini felt for her father, she was physically prevented from persevering with her goal on account of "il tremore che ancora mi sconvolge se penso a mio padre" (*Album* 229), (the tremor that still overwhelms me every time I think of my father). Manzini's physical response denotes a psychosomatic reaction, engaged by a deep trauma surrounding the memory of her beloved father. Trauma arouses fear and it is possible to glean in *Ritratto* a sense of the fear characterising the author's attempts to write Giuseppe's story:

Ammettere una generica incapacità da parte mia, intendo di persona di penna, sarebbe comodo, ma falso e vile. Certo è che il ritratto del babbo (eppure con i ritratti mi pareva di averci un po' la mano) l'avrò interrotto almeno cinquanta volte. Ogni pretesto per fare altro lo colgo a volo. (Manzini *Ritratto* 32)²²

²¹ Damasio states that emotions and feelings assist in the prediction of "an uncertain future" whereby accordingly, individuals are prompted to plan their actions (Damasio *Error* xvii).

²² Well practised as she was at constructing narrative portraits, it seems that only *Ritratto* presented itself as a frightening enterprise forcing Manzini to adopt a survival tactic by "fleeing the scene" as it were. Besides Manzini's description of tremors, in *Ritratto* she describes other reactions suggestive of a psychosomatic response, such as the capacity to attract "un malanno o una malattia" (Manzini *Ritratto* 14), "a misfortune or illness" (Manzini *Full-Length* 4).

To admit to a general inability on my part, I mean as a writer, would be an easy way out, but false and cowardly. I have probably interrupted the portrait of my father at least fifty times (and yet I had a certain way with portraits). I grab at any excuse to do something else. (Manzini *Full-Length* 19)

Even though the terms are often used interchangeably, one of Damasio's most illuminating clarifications is his distinction between feelings and emotions. Simply stated, emotions come before feelings because in evolutionary terms they are the reactions that promote human survival. To this end, humans are able to perceive emotions because they are visible "externalities" that can be detected in a person's voice, facial expressions, and specific behaviours such as body postures (Damasio *Spinoza* 63). Feelings, on the other hand, are impossible to detect and occur as a secondary state that follows emotions. Damasio and Carvalho describe feelings as:

mental experiences of body states. They signify physiological need (for example, hunger), tissue injury (for example, pain), optimal function (for example, well-being), threats to the organism (for example, fear or anger) or specific social interactions (for example, compassion, gratitude or love). (Damasio and Carvalho 143).²³

A metaphoric definition states that emotions play out in the theatre of the body, while feelings play out in the theatre of the mind (Damasio *Spinoza* 28). To illustrate how feelings work, one can consider Damasio's example. When a person imagines a beautiful, tropical beach, the positive emotional response aroused by the image is internally reflected in the form of a neural map (Damasio *Spinoza* 83). Neural maps are representations of the internal state of the body following the experience of an emotion. The role of feelings is to convey information relative to a person's internal physical response to an event. In the instance of the beach this might take the form of

²³ Homeostasis refers to the processes maintaining our internal milieu – such as temperature, nutrient levels, and pH balance – which are all aspects of biological systems that facilitate general functions, and therefore, survival. The corrective response relates to the organism's propensity to achieve, in service of physiological survival, an "optimal homeostatic range" (Damasio and Carvalho 143).

a slower heartbeat and calm breathing. It is these internal affects that are processed biologically as experiences of well-being, and subsequently verbalised as pleasurable.

The emotional arousal after experiencing a negative image will necessarily involve an adverse physical response, and these will convert into neural maps opposite to a sense of well-being (Damasio *Spinoza* 83). When this happens, the body automatically seeks to correct this imbalance by adopting “corrective responses” (Damasio *Spinoza* 143). The chapter contends that when Manzini attempted to write about her father, her neural maps reflected a state of discomfort, brought on an array of symptoms that forced the author to deploy a corrective response to avert the fear aroused by her trauma. That tug-of-war between desire to write *Ritratto* and the ensuing psychosomatic ailments persisted, as Manzini states, over many years. Fortunately, however, she was eventually able to achieve her goal, an achievement that heralded for the author a state of physiological balance. In an interview with Lia Fava Guzzetta, Manzini states that after completing *Ritratto*, she received a message of “bontà e amore” (goodness and love): arguably a state of internal well-being translated into the language of emotions (Fava Guzzetta 4).

Although the span of human emotions is vast, for ease of understanding Damasio categorises them into three separate groups: background emotions, primary or basic emotions, and social emotions.²⁴ Primary emotions denote some of the most recognisable emotions such as fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and happiness, which are identifiable by facial expressions and are equally identifiable across cultures, and in some non-human species such as primates. Fear, in particular, is one of the most commonly studied emotions, perhaps because it is crucial to our survival, but also because it is tethered to so many other emotions. According to Joseph Le Doux, fear “is lurking in the background of many kinds of emotions”, even some that on the surface seem to be the antithesis of fear, such as courage which humans employ to overcome states of fear

²⁴ Background emotions relate to regulatory reactions involving metabolism and other internal needs such as hunger and thirst, cold, etc. (Damasio *Spinoza* 44).

(Le Doux 130). The philosopher and psychologist, William James (1842-1910) once stated that nothing demonstrates “the ascendancy of man from beast more clearly than the reduction under which fear is evoked in humans” (James quoted in Le Doux 129). In other words, modern humans have created ways of living that enhance the chances of avoiding predators. Despite such advancements, fear continues to underpin much of human experience, as is clear in Manzini’s case.²⁵

Human memory systems

The Italian literary critic, Emilio Cecchi, described Manzini’s narrative as similar to a Chinese writing desk filled with hidden compartments, false bases, and secret drawers (Cecchi 922). The complicated operation of human memory also lends itself to Cecchi’s analogy. Memory used to be simply described as either long-term or short-term. Indeed, humans do possess two main memory systems that are described broadly as explicit and implicit memory (Solms and Turnbull 81). The explicit or declarative memory system refers to memories that can be consciously recalled. On the other hand, the implicit or non-declarative memory system refers to memories that cannot be consciously recalled.²⁶ Furthermore, it is also known that both memory systems are intertwined with, and impacted by, a flurry of feelings, emotions, perceptions and motivations unconsciously experienced by a person.²⁷

A characteristic of unconscious human memory is that, sometimes,

²⁵ Fear has been so pervasive in human existence that not only have many languages devised a myriad of terms to describe it – alarm, anxiety, anguish, trepidation, etc. – in modern life, it has also occupied the thoughts of philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, whose concerns – dread, angst, etc. – aim at the core of human existence (Le Doux 129).

²⁶ The psychoanalysts/neuroscientists Solms and Turnbull state that although Freud lacked the technological means to prove his contention that “life operates unconsciously”, modern cognitive science has proved that his intuition was correct (Solms and Turnbull 79). They stress, however, that implicit memory should not be confused with Freud’s notion of repressed memory. Over time and with effort, repressed memories can potentially be brought to consciousness, whereas implicit memories can never be consciously recalled. By and large, the implicit memory stores events of early childhood, the traces of which, however, are constantly activated, and “serve as templates around which all later memories are organized” (Solms and Turnbull 148).

²⁷ To this end, theories employed in this discussion centre on the role of feelings and emotions apropos of the fluidity of human emotions and their effect on the subjectivity of memory (See Le Doux, Solms, Turnbull, Damasio).

what is falsely perceived as a danger in a person's present reality is in fact a sense of danger activated by implicit memories. In these instances, a person may be confounded by their response and struggle to prevent a sense of panic (Le Doux 181).²⁸ The following example, borrowed from Le Doux, illustrates how implicit memories are formed in the wake of an intensely emotional situation. During a terrible car accident, the car horn may become stuck. It may happen that, even years after the event when the person feels that she/he should have overcome the trauma, the sound of a car horn activates both the explicit and implicit memory systems (Le Doux 201). The explicit memory is responsible for bringing to mind the details of the accident: for example, the day and time, where it happened, and who was present. However, the sound of a car horn continues to elicit physical responses that typically occur in situations of danger, such as "muscle tension (a vestige of freezing), changes in blood pressure and heart rate, increased perspiration, and so on" (Le Doux 201). Such reactions are known as conditioned fear stimuli, which are activated upon hearing, in the present example, the sound of car horn (Le Doux 143). "Despite the emotionally disruptive nature of a conditioned fear stimulus, it accomplishes an evolutionary purpose by detecting danger and producing responses that maximise the probability of surviving a dangerous situation in the most beneficial way" (Le Doux 128). Le Doux's explanation helps to shed light on an episode, an example of a conditioned fear stimulus, which plunges Manzini into a state of panic and prompts her to flee the scene of danger.

Manzini and her mother moved to Florence in 1914 so that the young student could complete her tertiary studies. Although life in Florence proved an enriching experience, Manzini's attitude towards Giuseppe began to change. The pride and adoration she felt for him growing up in Pistoia are transformed into embarrassment and pity. In reference to her new reality, Manzini confesses: "la cosa tremenda è che tu non ci fossi, babbo, perché io potessi finalmente calarmi tutta nella mia repentina, rapinosa giovinezza. Ti allontanavo. Chiudevo gli occhi sul pensiero di te" (Manzini *Ritratto* 194),

²⁸ As explained by Le Doux, fear plays a major role in understanding modern psychopathology in the form of anxiety, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (30). Manzini's childhood experiences arguably induced something akin to PTSD.

“the awful thing is that it was necessary for you not to be there, Papa, so I could finally sink myself completely into my sudden, rapacious youth. I pushed you away. I put you out of my mind” (Manzini *Full-Length* 146). It becomes apparent that Manzini conceals from her friends her father’s status as a political exile.

Manzini’s experience occurs on a day when she and a friend are in Florence’s Piazzale Michelangelo gazing at the Arno River. Unexpectedly, Manzini spots her father exiting a nearby doorway: “ecco che ti vidi. Stavi uscendo dal portoncino di faccia al nostro muretto e frugavi nelle tasche della giacca. Aggrottai la fronte per rendere più acuto lo sguardo e raccapazzarmi: che cosa cercavi?” (Manzini *Ritratto* 195), “that’s when I saw you. You were coming out a little door opposite our low wall and you were rummaging in your jacket pocket. I frowned to make my sight sharper and to understand: what were you looking for?” (Manzini *Full-Length* 147). In that moment, Manzini notices that after searching his pockets, Giuseppe throws away his cigarette paper. What follows exemplifies a response characteristic of a conditioned fear stimulus: “Il tabacco” (Manzini *Ritratto* 195). As with the example of the sound of a car horn, tobacco elicits Manzini’s panic because it connected to the trauma occasioned by the circumstances of Giuseppe’s political allegiances. According to Le Doux, in experiences of conditioned fear stimulus, “all the bodily responses associated with fear and defense” become aroused (201). Manzini’s description captures her flight from the scene: “Di botto voltai le spalle al paesaggio [...]. Mi buttai giù per le rampe, di corsa. Fuggivo quell’immagine, fuggivo il mio dolore, la paura di altro dolore (Manzini *Ritratto* 195), “Suddenly I turned my back to the landscape [...] I ran down the flight of stairs. I was running from that image. I was running from my pain, the fear of more pain” (Manzini *Full-Length* 147).

The concept of fight, flight, or freeze has become familiar in modern parlance and Le Doux sheds light on the reasons behind Manzini’s sudden flight from the scene: “escape from danger [takes] place before the brain has had the chance to start thinking about what to do. Thinking takes time but responding to danger often needs to occur quickly and without much

mulling over the decision” (175). Although imbued with all the alarm and drama experienced by Manzini at the time, the tobacco episode also resonates with her need to escape from her task of writing Giuseppe’s story, albeit understood as a subtler but, nonetheless, repeated form of flight.

As the “tobacco” narration unfolds, Manzini describes a sequence of images that, on the surface, appear to be unrelated snapshots of life glimpsed as she runs: “di colpo muraglie di verde, insidie di curve, scivoli di erbe, gradini. Le fronde d’un albero: una galleria; fulmineamente l’attraverso; di nuovo luce aperta, bianca, troppo bianca” (Manzini *Ritratto* 195), “great walls of green, sinister bends, slippery grass and steps. Tree branches, a tunnel: the mad running through; again, open light, white, too white” (Manzini *Full-Length* 147). Manzini’s description is elaborated further in the account: “Grandi macchie di fiori mi vengono incontro: le affastello, bordi di primule scrivono colorati itinerari: li scavalco. Fra l’erba, merli fiduciosi saltellano [...] segni di nero su un bianco altrettanto violento” (Manzini *Ritratto* 196), “Great patches of flowers come to meet me; I embrace them, borders of primroses write coloured itineraries. I jump over them. Trusting blackbirds hop in the grass. A bright dress swirls behind a tree [...] the marks of violent black on an equally violent white” (Manzini *Full-Length* 148). It seems that in her adrenaline-fueled attempt to reach safety, Manzini becomes hyper-alert to her immediate environment, its colours, sounds, and objects. Manzini’s acute observation denotes a heightened cognitive function in response to the brain’s “mental arsenal” so the individual can shift quickly from “reaction to action” (Le Doux 175), explaining Manzini’s combination of mental keenness and physical speed in her effort to remove herself from the perceived danger.

Damasio and Carvalho note that from antiquity to the present “philosophical writings, literary works and scientific observations reveal that descriptions of feelings tend to reference states of the body” (Damasio and Carvalho 143). This is only appropriate, given that from a physiological perspective the senses are directly connected to the internal milieu and the functions of the heart, gut, lungs and skin (Damasio and Carvalho 143). One particular account captures, albeit through one of her characters, the visceral

quality of Manzini's response: "Dietro un albero volteggia un vestito chiaro: appartiene a una ragazza, che gorgoglia un riso torbido, sporco. Scaglio cose dentro di me; agglutino impressioni" (Manzini *Ritratto* 196), "A bright dress swirls behind a tree; it belongs to a girl who burbles a thick, dirty laugh. I hurl things inside me: clumping impressions together" (Manzini *Full-Length* 148). A final description of the covert meaning of tobacco as a conditioned fear stimulus clinches the unconscious nature of Manzini's dread: "spio il minuto, spaventata dal timore di non fare in tempo: a cosa non so bene. So che bisogna correre" (Manzini *Ritratto* 196), "I wait for the time, frightened by the fear of not doing it in time – in time for what I'm not sure. I only know I have to run" (Manzini *Full-Length* 148).

Tobacco links specifically to Giuseppe's trip to Spain in aid of his comrades and the country, where he learns to roll his own cigarettes. The tensions arising out of Giuseppe's involvement in illegal political activities impact on the infant Manzini who was too young to make sense of her father's comings and goings. In reference to one of his Spanish comrades, Manzini asks her father whether this comrade also had a daughter: "una bambina ce l'aveva?" (Manzini *Ritratto* 68), "did he have a little girl?" (Manzini *Full-Length* 45), to which Giuseppe replies "Può darsi. Se avremo un po' di soldi, torneremo a Madrid io e te, a cercarlo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 68), "Maybe. If we had a little money you and I could go to Madrid and look for him" (Manzini *Full-Length* 45). In light of Manzini's exposure to frequent experiences of abandonment owing to her parents' separation, her father's travels, and his periods of exile, the apparent neutrality of Manzini's inquiry conceals her fear that Giuseppe's love for Manzini could easily be usurped by the affection of another child.

Yet, even before tobacco obtrudes to produce a conditioned fear stimulus, Manzini conveys the dread that haunted her childhood. Like the heightened functions experienced in an effort to escape danger, Manzini's description speaks to the state of mind of a child constantly vigilant. Visits with her parents are described as follows,

ero sopraffatta da apparenze insospettate. Avviene alle forme e

ai colori di liberarsi e sciogliersi all'improvviso (non è questo il succo tremendo delle favole?): e la scacchiera delle mattonelle prolungarsi in una fuga da mozzare il fiato, e le finestre diventare voragini, o sigillarsi per seppellirci, fra una ridda di rette scattate da pacifici oggetti, come lo stocco si sfilava dal bastone o lo scheletro si rivela in controluce. (Manzini *Ritratto* 164)

I was overwhelmed by startling appearances. It happens when the shapes and colors are suddenly liberated and set free (isn't this the terrible essence of fables?); and the squares of the checkered tiles extend in a breathtaking whoosh, and the windows become chasms or are sealed to bury us in a confusion of straight lines springing from the peaceful objects, like a sword unfurled or a skeleton revealed against the light. (Manzini *Full-Length* 123)

It seems that rather than alleviating her fears when he was present, Giuseppe unwittingly contributed to them. Unaware of the defensive shell Manzini had to develop in order to cope, he adds to her burden by opining that she, like him, would never give up (Manzini *Ritratto* 163).

To avert the tension arising out of her father's assertion, Manzini sought a distraction: "scavalcavo un fossatello; o mi buttavo giù a cogliere un fiore fino a rasentare l'acqua" (Manzini *Ritratto* 163), "I jumped over a ditch; or I jumped down to pick a flower next to the water" (Manzini *Full-Length* 122). However, the idyll of those moments quickly dissolves into a vista of foreboding landscapes: cliffs, ditches, embankments, and chasms.²⁹ Just as a child might communicate her trauma unconsciously through her drawings, these horrifying perspectives convey the state of hyper-arousal compelling Manzini to constantly monitor her environment for signs of danger.

Social emotions include shame, sympathy, guilt, envy, pride, humiliation, admiration, embarrassment, compassion, empathy, and contempt (Damasio *Spinoza* 45). In the following example, which depicts

²⁹ As Manzini recalls, "saltavo da un margine all'altro del fossatello. Il movimento monotono e cadenzato risvegliava parole nella mia coscienza; pur senza contorno, né senso, esse rigavano con dolore il mio silenzio" (Manzini *Ritratto* 166), "I jumped from one side of the ditch to the other. The monotonous and rhythmic movement awoke words in my conscience; though without clear-cut outlines or meaning, they etched my silence with sorrow" (Manzini *Full-Length* 124).

the prejudices and hostilities that Manzini was subjected to at school, an overlapping of primary and social emotions is apparent. Manzini states:

Basta quello che so, che accade giornalmente a scuola, che mi riguarda: basta per farmi tremare, mentre un gran caldo mi avvampa le orecchie. Ira, pietà, amore, vergogna, paura, tutto insieme. Legato da una specie d'accecamiento, questo tutto, forma blocco. È sorprendente accorgersi come, a un certo stadio di sofferenza, tanti sentimenti si fondano. (Manzini *Ritratto* 78)

What happened to me every day at school is enough to know. It's enough to make me tremble and burn my ears. Anger, pity, love, shame, fear all together. All these, bound together in a sort of blindness, form a block. It is surprising to notice at a certain stage of suffering so many feelings blend together. (Manzini *Full-Length* 54)

Damasio explains that with few exceptions such as sympathy, which is innate, for most social emotions there needs to have been considerable and appropriate exposure to environmental conditioning for them to become entrenched. For better or worse, social emotions are more complex because they are enacted within relationships (Damasio *Spinoza* 45).

In relation to Manzini's school life, the emotional complexity depicted in her description, engages a process that Damasio refers to as the *nesting principle* of emotions (Damasio *Spinoza* 45). The nesting principle refers to the process in which primary emotions are contained within social emotions. It is a process of containment that allows primary emotions to be "worked through", ideally resulting in the restoration of well-being (Damasio *Spinoza* 45). The nesting principle promotes the working through of emotions, which ultimately impacts the individual's vision of "*future outcome*" in the form of punishment or reward (author's italics, Damasio *Spinoza* 45).

Similarly, Solms and Turnbull also adopt the term "reward" in reference to the human biological mechanism associated with curiosity and expectation that is aroused perceptually by our interaction with the world (115). The reward concept resonates with Damasio's theory of "positive" neural maps and it is in this spirit that the chapter turns to a description of the factors hypothesised to be influential in determining Manzini's resolve to publish *Ritratto*.

Finding meaning

According to Damasio, despite the trappings of wealth, health, love, faith and friendship, most humans require some clarity about the meaning of their life, a pursuit that is as deeply rooted in human makeup as is the instinct for self-preservation (Damasio *Spinoza* 268-69).³⁰ Various events occurring in the years leading up to *Ritratto* arguably promoted Manzini's sense of purpose in the telling of Giuseppe's life. By finding a sense of purpose in telling Giuseppe's story, the positive emotions that resulted aligned with her perceptions.³¹

Manzini's "hate" for her native Pistoia, for example, juxtaposed against her sense of attachment to it, may be explained by the function of the nesting principle: "Non c'è dubbio: dovrei odiarla quella città [...]. E invece non ce la faccio (Manzini *Ritratto* 21), "There is no doubt: I should hate that town [...]. But I can't" (Manzini *Full-Length* 10). This constant re-evaluating and re-adjusting steadily navigate from an attitude of sympathy towards an attitude of empathy.³² Damasio refers to the shift from sympathy to empathy as the "as-if-body-loop" mechanism (Damasio *Spinoza* 115). In a further example, the "as-if-body-loop" mechanism is exemplified by Manzini's response to her mother. Manzini opposed her mother's decision to obey her siblings and separate from Giuseppe. Nonetheless, the author is seen to have come to terms with her mother's decision and in effect, identified with her mother's suffering: "la mia mamma, per esempio, ne uscirebbe un po' graffiata. Oh no, questo no, non fatemelo fare: non ne ho la forza, né il diritto. E poi siamo giusti, ogni sua lacrima riscatta chi sa quante debolezze. E ne ha versate tante" (Manzini *Ritratto* 16), "my mother, for example,

³⁰ The yearning for meaning is expressed by Damasio as "a deep trait of the human mind. It is rooted in human brain design and the genetic pool that begets it, no less so than the deep traits that drive us with great curiosity towards a systematic exploration of our own being and the world around it, the same traits that impel us to construct explanations for the objects and situations in that world" (Damasio *Spinoza* 269).

³¹ And, to this end, the unconscious pursuit of self-preservation by literary means is, of course, in Manzini's case, a given.

³² As Damasio states, "the brain can simulate certain emotional body states internally, as happens in the process of turning the emotion sympathy into a feeling of empathy" (Damasio *Spinoza* 115).

would come out a little scarred. Oh, no, not that. Don't make me do it. I don't have the strength or the right to do that. And anyway, let's be fair. Each tear redeems an unknown number of weaknesses. And she has shed so many" (Manzini *Full-Length* 5).

For Damasio empathy allows humanity to open "the door to sorrow" (Damasio *Spinoza* 270). Although sorrow is usually perceived as a tragic dimension, in reality it is precisely through an experience of sorrow that positive outcomes in the form of a life examined can be anticipated (Damasio *Spinoza* 115). Recalling Manzini's imaginative description of her father's final hours, it is possible to perceive the empathy/sorrow overlap imbuing Manzini's portrayal. Even Giuseppe, after a lifetime of single-minded pursuit of his ideals, turns his thoughts to his wife who, along with Manzini, bore the brunt of his choices: "Rivide sua moglie, così fragile e così spesso sofferente. 'Questo gran male, oggi, mi rischiera la mente. Ma è tardi. È tardi'" (Manzini *Ritratto* 218), "He saw his wife again, so fragile and so often suffering. 'This great pain today clears my mind. But it's late. It's late'" (Manzini *Full-Length* 165). Similarly, Manzini's musings about her father's final hours nudge her towards an examination of her place in his thoughts. Giuseppe states:

Appena a casa, scrivo tutto. Non aspetto più. Gianna lo deve sapere. Lo deve sapere; deve, deve, deve. Che errore certe reticenze tra padre e figlia. Perché si tace? A volte il momento che passa è troppo chiaro e si teme di offuscarlo con una parola. O perché non abbiamo fiducia né in noi, né in chi ci ascolta [...]. O perché alcune cose vanno perfezionandosi in noi, vanno cercando la loro giusta prospettiva. (Manzini *Ritratto* 220) ³³

As soon as I get home I'll write everything down. I won't put it off any longer. Gianna must know. She must know; she must, she must, she must. Sometimes reticence between father and daughter is a mistake. Why do we remain silent? Sometimes because the passing moment is too crystal clear and we are afraid of clouding it with a word. Or perhaps we don't have faith in ourselves or in the person listening [...]. Or because some things are being perfected in us, they are seeking their correct perspective. (Manzini *Full-Length* 166)

³³ Manzini also describes the silence that existed between her and Giuseppe metaphorically as a ruby that, in order to reveal its beauty, must be caught in the right perspective (Manzini *Ritratto* 220). Manzini's comment may be taken as an allusion to the need, as mentioned, for the right time for father and daughter to speak; with *Ritratto* therefore, the time to speak had presented itself.

Giuseppe's comment that Manzini must be told everything could well be perceived as empathy for how his daughter fared as a result of his choices. Crucially, Manzini's closing statement in *Ritratto* that without her father she feels cold flags the primordial nature of her feelings. As mentioned, children lack the vocabulary to describe their pain and often convey their anguish through bodily reactions. Feeling cold, a reaction derived straight from our most basic, regulatory functions vital to our survival, illustrates Manzini's sorrow.

Although Manzini's revelation that she felt cold comes at the end of *Ritratto*, it serves to open the door to her sorrow, an admission reflecting a growing capacity for self-empathy, and marking a beginning rather than ending. By articulating the sorrow imbuing her existence, Manzini overcame her emotional impasse, freeing her to draw on the following timely saliencies coalescing within her orbit.

Saliencies

According to Damasio, saliencies are what influence a person's decision-making for the purpose of better anticipated outcomes (Damasio *Spinoza* 145). Put more simply, saliency is a neuroscientific term that describes an unconscious stimulus or object in a person's line of vision that captures the focus of attention (Soltani and Koch).³⁴ A saliency may be as simple as a black line over a white background. Like much of what has been discussed in this chapter, saliencies are also an aspect of our evolutionary survival, presumably because they help humans to detect danger. During these evaluative moments, the brain processes objects as salient, which in turn influences decision-making in favour of a perception of safety (Damasio *Spinoza* 178).³⁵ Emotional life is also impacted by the salient ability

³⁴ As summarised in Soltani and Koch, saliencies are a "crucial computational strategy of the primate visual system [that allocates] processing resources to a region, feature or object with the many overlapping and partially occluding objects in natural scenes" (Soltani and Koch 12831).

³⁵ A realistic example of visual saliency is provided by current understandings of the stereotypical depiction of animals in Paleolithic rock art. It was once believed that rock art depended on cultural factors. Recent research demonstrates that the predominance of animals depicted in profile was in fact due to cognitive and perceptual processes deriving from the brain's visual functions which were "crucial to the survival of hominids" (Hodgson n.p.).

triggering one's sense of presence, constituted by the emotions and feelings aroused in the present moment as seen, for example, in Manzini's flight from Piazzale Michelangelo (Damasio *Spinoza* 178).³⁶

In agreement with Faloci, the chapter contends that the death of Giuseppe Pinelli may well have prompted Manzini, at least unconsciously, to re-examine her father's life within the context of her own lifetime. Unconsciously spurred on by the commonalities between her father's death and that of Pinelli, *Ritratto* was a way to ensure that Giuseppe's legacy remained distinct from the questionable circumstances surrounding Pinelli's death. Conversely, *Ritratto* allows a differentiation between the anarchism of her father's era and the tarnished reputation of contemporary anarchism. As if to highlight those differences, Giuseppe declares: "È verso la grande speranza di questa unità che io mi getto, attingendo una forza che è anche garanzia di salute. L'unità che io dico, contiene il seme di una splendida, progressiva continuità" (Manzini *Ritratto* 35), "I throw all my hope in this community, drawing strength from it that also generates health. The community I speak of contains the seed of a splendid, progressive continuity" (Manzini *Full-Length* 21). Accommodating a hopeful future for Giuseppe's vision for anarchism, Manzini announces:

Pochi? Che conta? Appartengono alla storia; hanno questa fatale importanza. A dispetto di quelli che osano trovare il nostro mondo senza ragione, trottola che gira su se stessa, loro gli anarchici, tracciano una linea decisa. Anni secoli avanzano; e, nel presente, è già l'incandescente domani che palpita. (Manzini *Ritratto* 19)

Only a few men? Why does that matter? They belong to history; they have this fatal importance. In spite of those who find no sense in our world, a top spinning around itself, they, the anarchists, tread a straight line. They have been advancing for years, for centuries; and in the present, the vibrating tomorrows already glow. (Manzini *Full-Length* 8)

A further saliency is encapsulated by Manzini's encounter with Alighiero Ciattini, one of Giuseppe's young comrades. The following

³⁶ Salient events cannot be planned but are always spontaneous, and can intrude just as unexpectedly, for example, as Proust's memories about his happy holidays spent at Combray that were triggered by the fragrance of his madeleine dipped in his cup of linden tea. A more recent example of memory saliency is represented by people who recall where they were on the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

passage depicts Ciattini's regard for his elder comrade:

Viveva solo, adattandosi nel miglior modo alle necessità della vita, e sempre con dignità (non sembri esagerazione) di cavaliere antico. Del cavaliere aveva infatti il fisico, l'ardimento, la prestantza, conservata fino in vecchiaia, pur dopo una vita mai facile, né comoda. Lo spirito cavalleresco e l'attitudine più mite e generosa. Il senso di pietà e l'avversione più aperta per ogni ingiustizia. La fierezza e la modestia del vivere; l'amicizia cordiale e cortese; il disinteresse più assoluto di sé; il possesso, la pienezza della libertà vera; quella che rende l'uomo insensibile ai sacrifici, alieno da ogni basso timore. (Manzini *Ritratto* 183)

He lived alone, doing the best he could for life's necessities, and always with the dignity (it didn't seem an exaggeration) of an ancient knight. In fact, his physique of a knight, the presence and boldness, were retained up to an old age, even after a life that was never easy or comfortable. A chivalrous spirit and the mildest and most generous attitude. A sense of compassion and an open aversion to any form of injustice. He lived a proud and modest life, was a cordial and courteous friend, absolutely disinterested in himself; he possessed the fullness of true freedom, which makes a man insensible to sacrifices, alien to every base fear. (Manzini *Full-Length* 137)

These statements were drawn from a notebook that Ciattini gave to Manzini, who admits her surprise at meeting someone who knew her father. Gone are all references to her ubiquitous shame and humiliation. Finally, Manzini can speak in terms of joy and gratitude.³⁷ Indeed, Manzini concedes that her meeting with Ciattini is instrumental in motivating her to overcome her obstacles:

Caro amico Ciattini, venendomi incontro, con una grazia tanto affettuosa, e porgendomi il gran dono di queste paginette, mi hai dato, con una sola garbatissima frase, il filo che può sciogliere la matassa del mio complicato rimorso. Il filo del mio labirinto. Eccomi dove, per anni ed anni, avevo ostinatamente, attraverso mille trucchi incoscienti, evitato di entrare. (Manzini *Ritratto* 188)

Dear friend Ciattini, by coming to see me with such affection, and giving me the great gift of those pages, you have given me, with a single sentence, the thread that can loosen the tangle of

³⁷ In Manzini's words: "Mi giunse di sorpresa. Turbamento, confusione, gioia, gratitudine" (Manzini *Ritratto* 182), "It took my by surprise. Emotion, confusion, joy, gratitude" (Manzini *Full-Length* 137).

my convoluted remorse. The thread of my labyrinth. Here I am where for years and years I had stubbornly avoided entering by means of a thousand unconscious tricks. (Manzini *Full-Length* 141)

Words, without which Ciattini could not annotate Giuseppe's character, lead into the final saliency. Although both Manzini and Giuseppe felt a pressing need to write, their opposing writing styles constituted a point of contention. Martha King states that for Giuseppe the purpose of writing is to communicate and inform by means of "unambiguous meaning", whereas for Manzini "literature [serves] no specific purpose beyond its own requirements" (Manzini *Full-Length* xi). The tensions arising out of this stylistic divide went back decades, and ultimately caused Manzini much chagrin for the manner in which she belittled her father's writing.³⁸ With *Ritratto* Manzini expiated some of that regret by adopting a literary style closer to Giuseppe's. Those developments are noted by Georges Güntert who states that in *Ritratto* Manzini abandoned her habitual style for one that employed words that were more suggestive of Giuseppe's style, seen in her use of nouns such as "oggetti", "azioni", "forze" rather than adjectives (Güntert 67). *Ritratto* presents Manzini with the opportunity to honour her father by adhering, at least in principle, to his belief that writing must communicate without superfluous embellishments. To that end, Manzini declares: "Ebbene, mi rendo conto che a tale ragione di superiore divertimento (a volte basta la collocazione arbitraria d'una parola per creare prospettive inaspettate), a questo gusto di simili rischi, col racconto del babbo non c'è neppure da pensarci" (Manzini *Ritratto* 42), "Well, I realize that such a high dose of high-tone divertissement (at times the arbitrary placement of a word to create an unexpected perspective is enough), and a taste for similar risks, is unthinkable in this narrative about my father" (Manzini *Full-Length* 27).

³⁸ So much so that Manzini wrote about her regretful attitude: "io a spiegarmi con una vivacità, con una prontezza, con un'eloquenza, di cui arrossisco [...]. Giovane e convinta com'ero, riuscì facile a darmi ragione, sì che il babbo rimase, privo di consensi, un po' mortificato" (Manzini *Forte* 43), (explaining myself with such vivacity, readiness and eloquence that causes me to turn red [...]. Young and convinced as I was, it was easy for him to agree, so much so that deprived of any consensus, daddy became a little mortified).

Related to Manzini's disposition to convert her writing style, the final saliency is the fact of her being the last in her family line. Literary critic Edward Said surmised that in old age some artists, composers, and writers manifest in their art a renewed verve and creativity as a measure against the looming forces of despair and meaninglessness. Stylistic conversions in late life represent a pathway to meaning-making in accordance with Said's stipulation that "all of us, by virtue of the simple fact of being conscious, are involved in constantly thinking about and making something of our lives, self-making being one of the bases" (Said 3). Said's view resonates with Damasio's view on the importance of meaning in a person's life.

To exemplify his contention, Said refers to Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, stating that, although it is not an experimental novel, its major technical innovation lay in the discontinuous composition of its narrative presented as "a series of relatively discrete but highly wrought fragments or episodes" (Said 96). Lampedusa thus allowed himself "a measure of freedom from the exigencies of the plot, which is almost primitive, freeing him to work instead with the memories and future occasions (for example, the Allied landing in 1944) that radiate from the simple events of the narrative" (Said 96).³⁹ A similar process seems to have influenced Manzini's timeline in *Ritratto*. By beginning her account at the end, as it were, with her visit to her father's grave at Cutigliano cemetery and ending with her comment that without her father she is cold, Manzini depicts a perspective of events aligned with her emotions as they arose in the narrative trajectory of *Ritratto*. More broadly speaking, however, the loss of order experienced by Italy in the period leading to *Ritratto*'s publication is reflected in a more direct style, in line with the sense of progress engendered by Giuseppe's values. It is arguable that Manzini's unconscious response derived from her experience and in common with Lampedusa, was due to the fact that the world order was crumbling around them as they aged.

³⁹ Although Said's theory belongs to the field of literary interpretation rather than neuroscience, it helps to account for Manzini's linguistic developments and narrative structure. Furthermore, it demonstrates, as Nalbantian has argued that neuroscience and humanistic interpretation may be adopted side by side to deepen understanding of autobiographical processes.

Interestingly, both *Ritratto* and *Il Gattopardo* became bestsellers soon after their publication. Their success may well be due to the fact that both reflected a social yearning for a return to an older, predictable order. Touching something central in the Italian *zeitgeist* of the early 1970s, Manzini's decision to convert her literary style also represents, as acknowledged by Güntert, an awareness of the artistic and cultural code of her era (Güntert 59).⁴⁰ Combined, these saliencies underscore Manzini's determination to write *Ritratto*. Like Lampedusa's account of Don Fabrizio, it was up to her to attest to Giuseppe's legacy and ensure that it survived beyond the climate of social disintegration towards which Italy seemed to be heading.

Social homeostasis

In order to understand Damasio's theory of social homeostasis, a brief description of biological homeostasis may prove useful. Homeostasis denotes any living organism's process of maintaining a condition of physiological stability in a quest for survival, carried out via a sequence of automated and coordinated chemistries ranging from blood circulation right up to feelings (Damasio and Carvalho 143).⁴¹ In an article written in collaboration with his wife Hanna, Damasio explains that biological homeostasis served living beings very efficiently for at least seven hundred million years right up to the Pleistocene era when humanity entered an intense period of growth resulting in the need for major homeostatic adaptations to cope with the increased functional problems facing growing populations (Damasio and Damasio 125).⁴² In response to these challenges, society gradually developed processes of life regulation ranging across judicial, political, commercial, educative, and health care fields, including the vast scope of artistic creation (Damasio *Spinoza* 166).

⁴⁰ In Güntert's words: "nella scrittura della Manzini, c'è un denso strato di razionalità, propria di chi domina perfettamente il codice aristico e culturale del suo tempo" (Güntert 59), (in Manzini's writing, there is a strong layer of rationality, appropriate to one who completely dominates the artistic and cultural code of her times).

⁴¹ Sweating and shivering are two examples of automated responses in the body's homeostatic attempt to stabilise body temperature.

⁴² For example, in response to the societal need to find ways to avoid confrontation incurred by the competition for resources.

Although barely a moment in evolutionary terms, around seven hundred thousand years ago, the development of larger and smarter brains meant that humans had acquired the cognitive means to accumulate knowledge about their environment deposited as memories, and to develop subjectivity expressed by such means as language, imagination and reason (Damasio *Self* 182). As the ability for conscious reflection developed, so too did the capacity to formulate plans of action over and above the requirements of biological homeostasis (Damasio *Self* 292). With his descriptor *social homeostasis* Damasio refers to humanity's collective drive to restore homeostatic balance within social and cultural spheres (Damasio *Self* 292). Memory allows people to evaluate whether experiences are either positive or negative in relation to social behaviour, of which ethical behaviour is a subset (Damasio *Spinoza* 160). Ethical behaviour is founded on situations that call for co-operation and, in Damasio's view, humans come equipped with the necessary "repertoire of emotions and whose personality traits include cooperative strategies" all geared towards the likelihood of survival (Damasio *Spinoza* 162).

After this brief overview, the focus can now turn to the contribution of Baruch Spinoza to Damasio's theorisation of social homeostasis. According to Damasio, when Spinoza states that "*love is nothing but a pleasure state, joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause*",⁴³ the philosopher is expressing the understanding, prescient by modern neuroscientific standards, that feelings and emotions are two distinct functions (author's italics, Damasio *Spinoza* 11).⁴⁴ Although the notion of neural maps was obviously far from Spinoza's imagination, the statement demonstrates the philosopher's grasp of the process of feelings as distinct from "an idea that an object [can] cause an emotion" or, expressed in simpler terms, the notion that joy was one thing but "the object that causes joy is another" (Damasio

⁴³ Spinoza's notion of "idea" is synonymous, Damasio explains, with the modern understanding of an "image or mental representation or component of thought" (Damasio *Spinoza* 211).

⁴⁴ Spinoza lived in an era that viewed mind and body as two separate functionalities. In Damasio's opinion, Spinoza "intuited the principles behind the natural mechanisms responsible for the parallel manifestations of mind and body" (Damasio *Spinoza* 12).

Spinoza 11).

Indeed, Spinoza's relevance to modern neurobiology extends beyond the physiology driving emotions and feelings. Especially pertinent to social homeostasis is the philosopher's overarching concern directed beyond the well-being of the individual, to the survival of society as a collective, without which the individual could not survive (Damasio *Spinoza* 15). One of Spinoza's precepts is that human salvation rests in the capacity to fight a "negative emotion with an even greater but positive emotion" (Damasio *Spinoza* 13). Another concept advanced by Spinoza is that joy and sorrow promote a life of reflection.⁴⁵ Virtue (*virtutis*), which to Spinoza signified power accompanied by volition to act rather than a moral value, is fundamental. Empathy delivers the right passage between virtue and joy (*felicitem*), referred to as "greater perfection" in Spinoza's idiom, or, borrowing Damasio's definition, "contact with the God or nature *within* ourselves" (author's italics, Damasio *Spinoza* 12).⁴⁶ Damasio borrows from Spinoza's *The Ethics*, which asserts, "action that might be personally beneficial but would harm others is not good because harming others haunts and eventually harms the individual who causes the harm" (Spinoza quoted in Damasio *Spinoza* 172). Spinoza's vision of collective well-being founded on principles of social regulation driven by compassionate behaviour articulates, according to Damasio, a solution that is "immediately compatible with the view of the universe that science has been constructing for the past four hundred years" (Damasio *Spinoza* 277).

In the following example, Giuseppe's compassion for the plight of the poor and powerless echoes Spinoza's concept of virtue as the result of deliberate acts of kindness. Obvious examples are Giuseppe's efforts to implement an eight-hour work shift for the factory workers, and his travels to remote villages to teach the farmers. In a statement that could have been

⁴⁵ According to Damasio, Spinoza was a versatile character and possessed at least four identities: Spinoza, the radical religious scholar; Spinoza, the political architect; Spinoza, the philosopher who employed science to formulate a conception of the universe; and, lastly, Spinoza, the protobiologist (Damasio *Spinoza* 14). Although much of the philosopher's thinking is grounded in Aristotle's thought, his concepts remarkably prefigured modern neurobiology (Damasio *Spinoza* 14).

⁴⁶ Damasio's comment is understood here as a reference to humanity's innate empathy rather than as a religious comment.

vocalised by Giuseppe himself, Damasio opines that in response to the seeming cruelty and indifference of life, humanity does well to engage in a “combative stance, more so perhaps than the noble illusion of Spinoza’s blessedness, seems to hold the promise that we shall never feel alone as long as our concern is the well-being of others” (Damasio *Spinoza* 287).

Such considerations lead to an inquiry into the role that social homeostasis plays in the evolution of human consciousness. On the basis that Damasio is one of the most prominent contributors to current neuroscientific understanding of human consciousness, what follows is a simplified description of his theory of the evolution of human consciousness, pivoting an understanding of the importance of storytelling in the evolution of human consciousness.

In recent decades, advances in brain imaging technology – made possible because we are now more able to look inside the brain of a living individual – have allowed neuroscience to become a prominent contributor, from a biological point of view, to the understanding of human consciousness. According to Damasio, homeostatic balance is central to a modern conceptualisation of consciousness, and, an activity intrinsic to homeostasis is humanity’s storytelling propensity. While storytelling pervades the entire fabric of human societies and cultures, it may come as a surprise to learn that it originated as an automatic and implicit activity generated by human biology (Damasio *Self* 293). Indeed, storytelling existed long before words.⁴⁷ Following Damasio, Randall and McKim state that humans are born with the neurological apparatus to support a narrative self (Randall and McKim 31). Contrary to what may appear as a common-sense understanding of narration as a secondary activity that is “simply a verbal recounting of factual or fictional events”, narration is, in fact, a “primary activity that precedes language” (Randall and McKim 31).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The earliest forms of music, dance, and painting for example, were an advanced form of wordless storytelling communicating not only information about threats, but also emotions such as joy and sadness, opportunities, and ways to shape social behaviour: a *tout ensemble* homeostatic response that contributed to the creation of one’s sense of self within one’s culture, and the beginnings of an explicit concern for life (Damasio *Self* 293).

⁴⁸ At its most basic level, narrative was a pre-cognitive form of automatic informational processing

According to Damasio, human consciousness stems from a notion of the mind as a flow of associated mental images that are the product of multiple sensory processes encompassing visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory cues (Damasio *Self* 106). This flow of mental images works alongside brain regions known as dispositional areas, which are responsible for the formation of memories, emotions and the readiness for action or, conversely, inaction (Damasio *Self* 143).⁴⁹ In support of Damasio's conjecture, Randall and McKim explain that, at its most primitive level, narration is limited to a pre-cognitive form of "informational pick-up" supporting biological survival, and, as such, apprehended as both a physiological as well as an emotional experience (Randall and McKim 143). More broadly speaking, the constant flow of images, combined with memory, and also combined with emotional arousal, is metaphorically described by Damasio as a "film-in-the-brain" (Damasio *Self* 20). The metaphor of a film is particularly apt because, as natural storytellers, humans draw from their personal "film" to construct the narrative that underpins the individual experience humans construe as a self, which is, in any case, engendered as a result of the relentless formation of images (Damasio *Self* 203).

More recently, Damasio has expanded his concept of the film-in-the-brain. Accompanying the imagery, the brain also constructs a matching "verbal track" translating everything "into words and sentences" (Damasio *Strange* 146).⁵⁰ This verbal track is not only endless, but the interpretation attributed to it allows an ascendancy "to new meanings, higher than those of the separate components of the story, by virtue of so much narration" (Damasio *Strange* 146).⁵¹

supporting survival in the primitive organism (Randall and McKim 31).

⁴⁹ In the neurological lexicon the combination of mental images and dispositional areas is referred to as Convergence-Divergence Zones (CDZ) (Damasio *Self* 143).

⁵⁰ The scope of this discussion allows only for a brief summary of Damasio's theories. While his concepts of the film-in-the-brain and verbal track are intended for an understanding of a modern self, they may conceivably be applied to the entire evolution of human consciousness.

⁵¹ Damasio clarifies that humanity's identity of self, matured slowly and gradually, and, it is certain that the "process was taking place in several parts of the world, not necessarily at the same time" (Damasio *Self* 288).

The greatest paradigm shift in the evolution of human consciousness occurred with the development of language. Humanity was thus provided with the means to develop complex thought processes making it possible to reflect on “the drama of human existence and of its possible compensations” (Damasio *Self* 291).⁵² Crucially, language also contributed to the evolution of the autobiographical self, largely because it enriched humanity with the capacity to hold extensive memory records (Damasio *Self* 289). Combined, language and memory promoted intellectual notions centred on humanity’s status in the universe, “something akin to the *where from* and *where to* questions that still haunt us today” (author’s italics, Damasio *Self* 291). To Damasio’s *where from* and *where to* inquiries may be added a further query: *what if*? Such a question allows the exploration of a multitude of potential scenarios in the process of narration.

One of the ways humanity has been able to explore the *what ifs* of life is through the creation of mythological stories. Through the mythopoeic genre, humanity has found a way to account for the human condition and its workings. This made it possible in turn, for social conventions and norms to evolve, akin to a morality sitting “over and above promoral behaviours such as kin altruism” (Damasio *Self* 291).⁵³ Drawing from an endless font of cause and effect schemas, mythopoeia makes it possible for humanity to explore *what if* scenarios and examine *a priori*, the potential outcomes of human endeavours and exploits, at least in literature (Damasio *Self* 291). At this point the chapter moves from a neuroscientific to a literature-based interpretation of *Ritratto*.

While in the modern era the term mythic has come to describe anything from ideology to fantasy entertainment, according to Laurence

⁵² Writing developed about five thousand years ago, providing evidence, in Damasio’s view, that by the Homeric era, the notion of a subjective self had achieved full maturation in the human mind (Damasio *Self* 289).

⁵³ ‘Promoral’ is an unusual adjective whose meaning can be deduced from the definition of its prefix *pro*, from the Latin meaning *advancing from*. Therefore, the term can be understood in reference to innate moral behaviours, such as those advancing from kinship connections. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ‘proethical’ as serving the end of ethics but not ethical in nature. Presumably promoral means, then, serving morality as an end, but not necessarily moral.

Coupe the basic tenet has held fast through time. Coupe quotes the British theologian Don Cuppitt when he says that mythology represents:

[the] primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more-or-less unified vision of the cosmic order, the social order, and the meaning of the individual's life. Both for society at large and for the individual, this story-generating function seems irreplaceable. The individual finds meaning in his life by making of his life a story set within a larger social and cosmic story. (Cuppitt quoted in Coupe 6).

Although Cuppitt's philosophical definition of mythology is distinct from Damasio's biological theory of homeostasis, an overlap is evident in the shared goal of balance, order and meaning-making. As a means to an end, mythopoeia gives rise to a series of archetypal heroes, ranging from the comedic to the tragic.⁵⁴ Deriving from the Greek, the prefix *archi* meaning original and the suffix *typum* meaning pattern or model, archetypes symbolise the *what if* of human behaviour that, over time, transform into generalised aspects of human culture. Thus, archetypes are ensured their status as exemplars of behaviour and the possessors of a special insight into the nature of the world. It is on this basis that archetypes ultimately lend structure and function to mythology (Schmidt n.p.).

As the etymology implies, archetypal heroes often represent rebellious characters that transgress the prevailing norms of behaviour. Of these, one of the most widely recognised and enduring is the messianic hero. A cursory study reveals that from the Zoroastrian tradition to the Abrahamic, to the Christian and Buddhist traditions, the major world religions have all drawn on the archetype of the messianic saviour. Conventionally associated with notions of self-sacrifice and salvation, the messianic archetype, however, is, at heart, a rebellious character whose life, deeds, and beliefs derive from a counter-cultural stance. On this note, the discussion now turns to Manzini's

⁵⁴ Mythic archetypes appear to have received little attention in literary studies. Film and media studies, however, have seemingly granted more attention to archetypes. Pointedly, after Manzini received the Campiello Prize for literature, Italian film producers approached her in the hope of producing a film based on Giuseppe's life (Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya 29). Although the project never came to fruition, the proposal suggests the universality and appeal of Giuseppe's character. Underscoring these tendencies, Giuseppe has more recently attracted attention with the publication of a book centered on his writings (Baldassare, Bernardini and Mori).

portrayal of Giuseppe.

Manzini's mythic interpretation of Giuseppe

In her essay on the father-daughter relationship in *Ritratto*, Daria Valentini states that Manzini intentionally blurs details about Giuseppe's life so that she can "to transform him into a mythical hero" (Valentini 368). Following from Valentini's view, it is conceivable that, in Manzini's intent to mythicise Giuseppe, the end result is a portrayal of Giuseppe as a messianic saviour whose life paralleled that of Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Like Christ, Giuseppe dedicates his life to the needy and oppressed. Like Christ, Giuseppe supports a radical ideology that provokes the ire of many enemies. And, finally, like Christ, Giuseppe is, metaphorically speaking, crucified for his beliefs.

Nonetheless, a glimpse into the fallibility of Giuseppe's character is possible. Long before *Ritratto* Manzini made it known that she strongly opposed her father's predilection for hunting, especially bearing in mind his purported respect for all living things. She was so horrified by the activity that she wrote a short story titled "La civetta" ("The Owl"), centred on the traumatic experience of accompanying her father on one of his hunting expeditions (Manzini *Arca*). It seems, however, that in the interests of re-casting Giuseppe as a messianic hero such details were necessarily of little consequence to an idealised vision of Giuseppe.⁵⁶ Rather, Manzini's portrayal of him rests on the message the author ascribes to his actions always involving those in need: "verso tutti, che modo unico di offrire attenzione e appoggio, che largo partecipare e far proprie le pene e i problemi altrui. Ed è così che il cuore si adegua alla misura di tutta la vita" (Manzini *Ritratto* 29), "to everyone, what a unique way of giving attention and support, how generously he participated in the pain and problems of

⁵⁵ Although, as mentioned, there are numerous messianic tropes across the major religions, given Manzini's Catholic upbringing, the messianic depiction in *Ritratto* can be interpreted in line with the life of Jesus Christ presented in the New Testament.

⁵⁶ In *Ritratto* Manzini brushes aside this difference of opinion with a cursory apology: "Mio padre era cacciatore. Mi dispiace" (Manzini *Ritratto* 158), "My father was a hunter. I'm sorry" (Manzini *Full-Length* 118).

others and made them his own. In that way the heart adjusted the rhythms of his entire life” (Manzini *Full-Length* 16). In what is a reflection of Christ, Giuseppe’s mission is to bring “salvezza qui, fra gli uomini” (Manzini *Ritratto* 29), “salvation here on earth” (Manzini *Full-Length* 52).

Moreover, by accommodating Giuseppe’s life within a biblical framework, the circumstances leading to his death are endowed with the status of martyrdom: “né più né meno che il martirio” (Manzini *Ritratto* 29), “nothing less than martyrdom” (Manzini *Full-Length* 16) granting a degree of tolerability to Giuseppe’s tragic end. From these observations, the discussion proceeds by tracing Giuseppe’s life, as it unfolds in *Ritratto*, as an analogy of Christ’s life. In the course of her rendition, Manzini fulfilled the tenets of mythology: paradigm, perfection, and possibility (Coupe 9).

Before Manzini begins her account proper of Giuseppe’s life in “Ritratto in piedi”, she alludes to the mythic treatment of Giuseppe’s story to follow. His portrayal is introduced by way of the recollection of an encounter during which Manzini, a friend of hers, and Giuseppe, all engage in a conversation about Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Così parlò Zarathustra* (1883). Relative to that conversation, Manzini observes that “babbo ci ascoltava con una certa trepidazione. A quel tempo, io avevo l’idea del cenacolo; o estrema purezza, di un lavoro solitario, destinato a rimanere inedito” (Manzini *Ritratto* 35), “father listened to us with a kind of anxiety. At the time I had the idea of the artistic coterie, or the extreme purity of a solitary work destined to remain unpublished” (Manzini *Full-Length* 21). By drawing on Nietzsche’s opus, Manzini intimates a connection between Giuseppe and Nietzsche’s concept of the *Overman*.⁵⁷ Nietzsche adopted the term to describe his vision of a perfected being that transcended the “limits of human experience” to become the “master of his own fate” (Cybulska n.p.).⁵⁸ According to Carl Jung, the messianic archetype is the oldest and

⁵⁷ The original German *Übermensch* (often translated as Superman or Overman) first appeared as a concept in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The difficulties translators have struggled with “hinge on the prefix “über” (over, above, beyond) and ultimately the word proves untranslatable”. The present discussion adopts, as does Cybulska, “a masculine pronoun in its stead”.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche’s concept has been much maligned over the decades. The Nazi movement claimed it as a symbol of the master-race based on a partial definition of the term as a “source of inspiration and creativity” that could lead to new and “more powerful births” as a reference to the Aryan race. Nietzsche’s sister Elisabeth was anti-Semitic and, although Hitler never read the philosopher’s work, he

most heroic of all; in essence, “a revelation of religious nature; a revelation of God and also of man” (Cybulska). Central to the Overman’s journey is the preparedness to sublimate all “impulses and passions” and thereby owe “nothing to anyone”, a transformation that can only be truly attained through solitude because to become free ultimately means to be alone (Cybulska).⁵⁹ With her descriptors ‘purity’ and ‘solitary’, Manzini encapsulates the Overman qualities inherent in Giuseppe’s messianic status.

Although he was an atheist, Manzini’s portrayal of Giuseppe sits comfortably within a biblical framework. Even before the publication of *Ritratto*, Manzini recounted in her short story “Parole povere” that Giuseppe once “appeared” to her (Manzini *Album* 228). During that vision, Giuseppe seems intent on conveying a message to Manzini that she is unable to decipher:

[...] sento che deve dirmi qualcosa. Che io devo far presto a capire. Vedo tutto; perfino il tremito delle sue labbra. Mi si riverbera addosso l’urgenza di quelle parole da consegnare a me, a me sola. Quasi le vedo quelle parole. E non le afferro. Era il suo messaggio. La cosa mi turba ora, quasi come allora. (Manzini *Album* 228)

(I feel he has something to tell me. That I must hurry to understand. I see it all; even the tremor of his lips. The urgency of his words meant for me and me alone, reverberates over me. I can almost see them, those words. But I can’t grasp them. It was his message. It perturbs me today almost as it did then).

Manzini fails to understand what Giuseppe is trying to communicate and, despite the epiphanic nature of her vision, it only serves as the occasion for Manzini to reveal that, at times, writing is a means of distancing herself from the tremors and emotions that overwhelm her when she turns her

exploited various snippets that Elisabeth had provided him. However, had Hitler delved into Nietzsche’s writing he would have become aware of the philosopher’s “anti-nationalistic” stance and his statement that, were it up to him, he would have “shot all anti-Semites” (Cybulska). Indirectly relative to Giuseppe, some anarchists attempted to appropriate Nietzsche’s concept as a descriptor of “strength and individualism”, an erroneous interpretation because the philosopher, in fact, argued for “a well-ordered society” (Cybulska).

⁵⁹ Manzini is referring to Giuseppe’s “estrema solitudine” (Manzini *Ritratto* 35), “intense solitude” (Manzini *Full-Length* 25).

thoughts to her father's story (Manzini *Album* 228).⁶⁰

A few years later Manzini recounts in *Ritratto* a second vision of Giuseppe that occurs while she is visiting his grave in Cutigliano: “Sta in piedi e fissa davanti a sé, molto al di sopra della mia testa [...] Ha le spalle larghe, il babbo. È sempre stato diritto. Tiene al solito, la testa alta. Un atteggiamento non di alterigia; ma di sfida, sì. Lealtà e chiarezza” (Manzini *Ritratto* 63-64), “He stands and stares straight ahead, much above my head [...]. My father has broad shoulders. He has always stood straight. As always, he holds his head high. Certainly not in an attitude of pride, but of challenge. Loyalty and avowed clarity” (Manzini *Full-Length* 41-42). During this second vision Giuseppe also has a message for his daughter, but, unlike the first vision, Manzini understands this message loudly and clearly:

Vedi, nemmeno la morte mi ha scoraggiato. Nemmeno la morte può qualcosa, contro ciò che abbiamo in noi d'immortale, idea e sentimento. Non la senti, Giannina, la grandezza di essere obbligati a esistere, a essere se stessi eternamente, legati, legati da qualcosa che sfugge all'amore e all'odio... (Manzini *Ritratto* 64)

Look, even death hasn't discouraged me. Even death can't kill what is immortal in us: ideas and feeling. Don't you feel it, Giannina, the wonder of being obliged to exist, to be yourself eternally – bound, bound by something outside love and hate.... (Manzini *Full-Length* 42)

The theme of a resurrection persists but Manzini's second vision is distinguished by the complete clarity with which she is able to decipher Giuseppe's message. One way to understand this achievement is on the basis that at the time of writing “Parole povere” she was yet to be influenced by the saliencies illustrated in this chapter. In a different frame of mind five years later due to a renewed sense of purpose, Manzini reaches beyond the obstacles that impeded her previous efforts. Indeed, as though attuned to his daughter's readiness, Manzini states that in her vision, Giuseppe's demeanour exuded supreme calmness, inducing Manzini's heartbeat to slow down so that it fell into rhythm with her father's: “perfino i battiti del cuore

⁶⁰ As stated previously in this chapter, Manzini recounts turning her focus to other works, “al fine di vincere il tremore che ancora mi sconvolge se penso a mio padre” (Manzini *Album* 229), (in an effort to overcome the tremor that still torments me if I think about my father).

avrei voluto risparmiare, per intonarmi (Manzini *Ritratto* 64), “I even wanted to slow down my heartbeat, to be in tune” (Manzini *Full-Length* 42). Manzini’s change of heart is evident in the ease with which she understands her father’s message. Evoking that readiness, she states: “Ne sono persuasa, fino a un limite estremo, quasi totale, di consapevolezza” (Manzini *Ritratto* 65), “I’m convinced of it to an extreme, nearly total awareness” (Manzini *Full-Length* 43). Giuseppe’s message that immortality lies in one’s words and ideas is suggestive of Manzini’s capacity to overcome her obstacles by narrating her father’s story in *Ritratto*.⁶¹

Despite her renewed intention, Manzini alludes to Giuseppe’s vulnerability in having his story published because it would condemn him to “esporsi; e esporsi sempre; a pagare di persona” (Manzini *Ritratto* 65), “self-exposure, always to self-expose, to pay personally” (Manzini *Full-Length* 43). Defending the integrity of the father whose story she battled to reveal, Manzini’s attention turns to those who maligned Giuseppe: “gli vedessero il cuore, dovrebbero ammutolire di rispetto; il cuore vogliono ignorarlo. Invece, ogni suo gesto viene spogliato, fatto oggetto di discussione e di condanna [...] l’ultima parola; quella che rimarrebbe, e potrebbe far cadere in ginocchio” (Manzini *Ritratto* 70), “if they were to see his heart they would be speechless with respect. They would rather ignore it. Instead, every move he makes is exposed, made the object of discussion and condemnation [...] a final word: one that would last and make them fall on their knees” (Manzini *Full-Length* 46). Thus, Manzini’s responsibility rests on her ability to ensure that Giuseppe’s words in the guise of a biblical story are granted “una convalida indiscutibile” (Manzini *Ritratto* 65), “an undeniable validation” (Manzini *Full-Length* 43), and, accordingly, her father’s life is recorded as a messianic struggle through which his nobility is strengthened by his humility (Manzini *Ritratto* 65).

Manzini opens Giuseppe’s “gospel” by establishing his most pressing commandment. He instructs Manzini: “Mai umiliare” (Manzini *Ritratto* 70),

⁶¹ Recalling Damasio’s example of positive neural maps induced by the pleasing sight of a tropical beach, attention must be drawn to Manzini’s slowed heartbeat. Her statement may be understood in relation to Damasio’s explanation that positive feelings follow a positive physiological response. Manzini’s ability to finally attribute a positive purpose to her father’s life and death induced a sense of calm. This is another example of the interconnectedness of neuroscience and literary interpretation.

“Never humiliate” (Manzini *Full-Length* 46). Foregrounding his martyrdom, images of flagellation and crucifixion become superimposed on the image of her beloved father (Manzini *Ritratto* 30). Throughout, allusions to biblical scenes frame Giuseppe’s interaction with his disciples. Reminiscent of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Manzini describes Giuseppe sitting amongst his anarchist cohort speaking about human dignity and “unicità dell’individuo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 27), “individual uniqueness” (Manzini *Full-Length* 14). Giuseppe’s words radiate such warmth and beauty (Manzini *Ritratto* 27) that his very presence transforms even a squalid café into a great temple (Manzini *Ritratto* 27) wherein Giuseppe’s words are measured against Jesus Christ’s. Reaching the heights of religious stature Manzini asks: “Che il mio babbo parlasse in nome del Vangelo?” (Manzini *Ritratto* 27), “did my father speak in the name of the Gospel?” (Manzini *Full-Length* 14).

The Lord’s Prayer is also revised according to Giuseppe’s ideals. In a conversation with a friend, a priest who repeats the Lord’s Prayer, in reference to the line “dacci il pane quotidiano” (Manzini *Ritratto* 5), “Give us this day our daily bread” (Manzini *Full-Length* 30), Giuseppe rebukes him: “Eh, mi dispiace, non siamo proprio d’accordo: Ti preghiamo, daccene uno che non sia quotidiano. Vedrà che fervore!” (Manzini *Ritratto* 50), “Oh, I’m sorry, but I don’t agree. Please pray that we be given some non-daily bread. Then you’ll see some passion!” (Manzini *Full-Length* 30).

As the story of Giuseppe’s life unfolds, the camaraderie that accompanies him gradually gives way to a depiction of Giuseppe as an increasingly isolated figure. His banishment to Cutigliano echoes Jesus’ banishment to the desert. Evoking acceptance of his fate, Giuseppe states: “C’è più spazio. Anche la vista si allarga, ed è più bella” (Manzini *Ritratto* 187), “There is more space. Even the view gets wider and more beautiful” (Manzini *Full-Length* 141). Even Manzini, once the most ardent and loyal member of his flock, recounts how she abandoned Giuseppe in the final years of his life. Explaining her need to distance herself from her father she admits that “c’era posto e tempo per tutto [ma tu] non c’entravi. Non potevi entrarci” (Manzini *Ritratto* 207), “there was a time and place for everything [but you] didn’t matter. You couldn’t matter” (Manzini *Full-Length* 156).

Giuseppe is all-accepting: “Credette nel calore della mia promessa [...] felice di quel mio straccio di sorriso, di quella voce mascherata” (Manzini *Ritratto* 211), “He believed in the warmth of my promise [...] happy with a semblance of a smile, my false intonation” (Manzini *Full-Length* 159). Unfortunately, just as Manzini begins to undergo a change of attitude towards Giuseppe, thanks to an apotheosis that her father’s teachings educated her better than any library could, she learns of his death.

Manzini states that she was ill at the time of Giuseppe’s death, making it impossible for her to attend his funeral.⁶² For many years she believed that Giuseppe died of heart failure. The psychosomatic ailments that flared up with her attempts to write *Ritratto* seemed to worsen after she found out about the persecution leading to Giuseppe’s death: “questo mio fisico affanno che a volte diventa asma, è sì un effetto dei guai ai bronchi, e può implicare anche il cuore” (Manzini *Ritratto* 223), “this breathlessness of mine that at times becomes asthma is a result of defective lungs that can also affect the heart” (Manzini *Full-Length* 169). Chapter Eight, the last in *Ritratto*, is an account of Giuseppe’s death after his ambush by the black shirts.

Although Manzini was obviously not present, in *Ritratto* she narrates a re-imagined version of the events of Giuseppe’s ordeal, fashioned as a loving eulogy, thereby allowing her to grant her father, albeit only narratively, the support and company he was denied in his final hours of life. Her eulogy begins by re-tracing Giuseppe’s flight from his persecutors. The skies are described as darkening over Giuseppe: “Una torva follia di piccole strette nuvole nere divorava il residuo chiarore ambrato” (Manzini *Ritratto* 20), “A grim madness of little black clouds devoured the leftover amber gleam” (Manzini *Full-Length* 167), reminiscent of the skies darkening over Jesus’ crucifixion. And, just as Jesus demonstrates dignity and forgiveness in his final hours, so too Giuseppe meets his end with the “eleganza d’un

⁶² “La notizia della sua morte, giunse con un telegramma. Si seppe così che era mancato improvvisamente, di notte. Il telegramma lo ricevette la mamma, che era inferma da parecchio tempo. Non ricordo in che modo me lo dissero. Dev’essere stato un colpo tremendo. So che mi disperai. Avevo l’influenza e la febbre aumentò (Manzini *Ritratto* 214), “The news of his death came in a telegram. It said he had died suddenly in the night. Mama received the telegram; she had been ill for some time. I don’t remember how they told me about it. It must have been a terrible blow. I know I was desperate. I had the flu and my fever increased” (Manzini *Full-Length* 162).

patire sostenuto, alto” (Manzini *Ritratto* 225), “elegance of sustained, noble suffering” (Manzini *Full-Length* 171).

According to Valentini, the influence of paternal imperatives derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition of repentance, confession, and reconciliation is reflected in *Ritratto*’s tripartite configuration (Valentini 368).⁶³ Indeed, Manzini introduces herself as the sinner in need of confession and reparation (Valentini 368). While in general terms atonement refers to the reparation of a relationship, Christianity employs it as a specific doctrine illustrating God’s way of “providing a way of salvation of the sinful humanity” (Jackson n.p.). As Valentini suggests, Manzini’s sinfulness cannot be separated from the imperatives of her faith. Yet, in *Ritratto*, the links to atonement of the sinners are conveyed. To this end, Giuseppe’s moral rectitude serves as an inducement for God to look favourably upon him: “Mio padre è ateo, tu lo sai; ma a te vuol bene; e sul tuo conto mi ha insegnato cose [...] non ne sapranno mai nemmeno la metà (Manzini *Ritratto* 73), “My father is an atheist, you know, but he loves you; and he has taught me things that [...] people put together wouldn’t know the half of” (Manzini *Full-Length* 50).⁶⁴

Giuseppe’s fate, a consequence of his choices, necessarily intertwines with Manzini’s, who states that he “dovette prevedere che il martirio, né più né meno che il martirio si trovava in agguato lungo il suo cammino: e che mi avrebbe sfiorata” (Manzini *Ritratto* 29), “must have foreseen that his martyrdom – nothing less than martyrdom – was waiting in ambush, and that it would affect me” (Manzini *Full-Length* 16). Where Pistoia is concerned, Manzini states that “nessuno poi si levò in sua difesa, durante le lunghe persecuzioni fasciste, prima che lo mandassero al confino” (Manzini *Ritratto* 32), “no one came to his defence during the long fascist persecutions, before they sent him into confinement” (Manzini *Full-Length* 19). Only to follow

⁶³ In Valentini’s words, “the structure of *Ritratto* follows the Christian pattern of repentance-confession-reconciliation [reflected] in the novel’s [three] sections” (Valentini 368). Valentini’s observation corresponds to *Ritratto*’s division into the Premessa (Introduction), Atto di contrizione (Act of Contrition), and *Ritratto* in piedi (Full-Length Portrait).

⁶⁴ It is maintained here that on the basis of her Catholic upbringing, the doctrine of her faith framed Manzini’s notion of salvation.

with the admission, “eppure, non è che mettendo sotto accusa la mia città, io possa aiutarvi a giustificare” (Manzini *Ritratto* 32), “and yet, it’s not that by blaming my town I can help myself justify” (Manzini *Full-Length* 19). Thus, mirroring the triadic structure framing *Ritratto*, atonement is sought on behalf of Giuseppe, on behalf of Manzini and on behalf of Pistoia.

However, *in extremis*, it is Giuseppe who seeks reparation: “Cristo io l’ho sempre amato, Cristo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 221), “Christ. I have always loved Christ” (Manzini *Full-Length* 167), thus widening narratively the scope for his absolution. It seems that Manzini’s capacity to explore forgiveness, acceptance, and atonement is ultimately realised via her literary creation.

Mythopoeia

As already indicated, according to Laurence Coupe, three main features characterise the mythopoeic genre: paradigm, perfection, and possibility.⁶⁵ Mythological stories that are fashioned on these bases persist and are continually retold (Coupe 3). Crucially, for myths to succeed, they must exceed their origin by providing a “stimulus to speculation” and be understood as contributing to a “dimension of modern thought” (Coupe 9). This reconnects to Damasio’s description of humanity’s need to address *where from* and *where to* questions in the search for meaning. Giuseppe’s story, for example, reflected the concerns of Italy at the time of its publication, but was also a model for living that is to be replicated.⁶⁶

Paradigm is represented by Giuseppe’s exemplary life and character. Manzini speaks of her father’s moral stature that is embodied in his generosity and selflessness. In one instance, after the theft of his coat, Giuseppe’s appraisal of the occurrence was that whoever stole it must have needed it more than he (Manzini *Ritratto* 37). Worthiness comes from emulating his example.

⁶⁵ According to Coupe, there are four typologies of myth: fertility myth, deliverance myth, creation myth, and hero myth. Mythographers tend to privilege one particular example of paradigm over another. Typically, however, myths share a number of features (Coupe 3). The chapter adopts Cuppitt’s description quoted above and also used by Coupe, because it avoids the dogma that may arise from the preference for one myth over another.

⁶⁶ Seen for example, in the interest of movie producers to make a film of Giuseppe’s life.

Perfection is achieved through Giuseppe's death conceived as the perfect sacrifice for the greater good. In order to save his friends from harm, Giuseppe refuses their offer to accompany him home. Manzini explains that "parecchi insistettero per fargli compagnia; e lo misero sull'avviso: si sapeva che i più scalmanati fascisti aspettavano il momento adatto per finirlo. Proprio per questo il babbo non volle esporre chi gli voleva bene" (Manzini *Ritratto* 214), "Several men wanted to go with him, and they warned him that some hothead fascists were waiting for the right moment to finish him off. It was for that reason that my father refused to endanger anyone who cared for him" (Manzini *Full-Length* 162). Having succeeded in the grand test that is life, Giuseppe declares that he has "Nulla da cancellare, nulla da rinnegare. E le mie azioni, i miei convincimenti, dovevano portarmi qui, a un simile traguardo, ben venga questa prova. Servirà" (Manzini *Ritratto* 218), "Nothing to erase, nothing to deny. And if my actions, my convictions, have fatally brought me here to such a finish line, welcome to this trial. It will be useful" (Manzini *Full-Length* 165). Thus, with Paradigm and perfection aligned Giuseppe's embraces martyrdom as "La morte del giusto" (Manzini *Ritratto* 223), "A just death" (Manzini *Full-Length* 169).

The mythic treatment of Giuseppe's life also fulfils the notion of possibility. Giuseppe's ideals and beliefs endure through the efforts of others. The annual visits that his nephew, Tullio, made to Giuseppe's grave were, above all a pilgrimage (Manzini *Ritratto* 224). Tullio credited Giuseppe with his escape from Mauthausen, which the character portrays as follows: "mitragliatrici, spari distanziati... Non fui nemmeno sfiorato. Incredibile. Dopo fantasticavo che un'apparenza vana avesse fatto perdere di mira il bersaglio ai miei carnefici" (Manzini *Ritratto* 224), "Machine gun fire, shots from a distance. They didn't touch me. Incredible. Later I imagined that a ghost had made my executioners miss the target" (Manzini *Full-Length* 170). Tullio believed that the ghostly presence was Giuseppe: "mi parve che fosse proprio lui, il Manzini" (Manzini *Ritratto* 170), "I think it really was him, Manzini" (Manzini *Full-Length* 170).

Furthermore, testifying to Giuseppe's good character is Ciattini whose account of Giuseppe is presented verbatim in *Ritratto*, making it the definitive testimonial of Giuseppe's legacy. In what can be seen as a life of

rebellion, Giuseppe's ideals prefigure a narrative contradiction to both the establishment and the disruptors of peace. Faithful to the messianic tradition, *Ritratto* represents Giuseppe's "second coming" in the form of a literary rehearsal for a better outcome. Playing her part in ensuring the perpetuity of Giuseppe's message, Manzini declares: "finiamo sempre col parlare della stessa cosa; volevo dire: della nostra idea: e che è viva lo dimostra il fatto che continua a nutrirci" (Manzini *Ritratto* 226), "we always end up talking about the same thing; I mean, our idea: and the fact that it continues to nourish us shows it is alive" (Manzini *Full-Length* 171).

The ability to make sense of Giuseppe's life as a Christ-like figure incarnate among mortals seems to open Manzini up to new and optimistic horizons. She recalls her father's pocketknife. A souvenir from his trip to the Spanish Pyrenees, for Manzini the knife comes to represent an alternative world order in the form of rebellion (Manzini *Ritratto* 84). As though announcing a timely corrective in response to an era when society is forcibly re-calibrating its values, Manzini states that on the blade of her father's knife she would carve "Non occorrono armi" (Manzini *Ritratto* 305), "Weapons not needed" (Manzini *Full-Length* 172).

Damasio states that while standing on the edge of the Sea of Galilee a few steps from where Jesus spoke to his followers, his thoughts turned to the crises faced by the people of that era, but also the crises faced by people in recent history, such as the "horrors of World War II and the threats of the Cold War" (Damasio *Strange* 211). In Damasio's view, although the local conditions of crises are distinct, "they elicit similar responses featuring anger and confrontation as well as appeals to isolation and a slide toward autocracy" (Damasio *Strange* 211). Damasio asks whether humanity should have found by now "cooperative ways to overcome gradually and peacefully any and all problems that complex cultures face", especially as we enjoy "spectacular scientific discoveries, [...] all sorts of cooperation, in science, the arts, and trade; because the ability to diagnose, manage, and even cure diseases continues to expand" (Damasio *Strange* 211). Bearing in mind that Manzini lived through the greater part of the twentieth century, it is possible that, in light of the circumstances surrounding Giuseppe's life and death, she too experienced a sense of urgency similar to that expressed by Damasio.

That sense of urgency is arguably addressed by her account of her father's life, in a portrayal that conforms to the logic of her religious influence. Viewed through the lens of the lessons that mythopoeia has to offer, the messianic portrayal of Giuseppe allows Manzini to personify her father as no less than a messianic *Übermensch*.

This chapter has addressed the first of the four pathways that underpinned Manzini's trauma recovery and enabled the fulfilment of her wish to publish *Ritratto*. The chapter adopts Nalbantian's assertion that the interpretation of autobiographical writing benefits from insights derived from both neuroscientific and humanistic fields. In combination, these two fields allow for a multi-faceted exploration of the unconscious factors inducing Manzini's panic episodes. The chapter identifies a number of salencies that arguably influenced Manzini's determination to achieve her goal. Her project was aided by her accommodation of Giuseppe's legacy within a narrative framework that resonated with her sensibilities and culture. Damasio's theories that storytelling and the evolution of mythology play a role in the evolution of human consciousness are central to the chapter's interpretation of the reasons underlying Giuseppe's messianic portrayal. The chapter demonstrates that, ultimately, neuroscience and the humanities share an interconnection in service of humanity's endless struggle for survival. Indeed, as Manzini seemed to perceive, even in the harshest and most unforgiving environments, weeds find a way to thrive and overcome the adversity of their circumstance, bolstered by relentless "tenacia" and "forza" (Manzini *Ritratto* 59), "tenacity" and "strength" (Manzini *Full-Length* 59), giving the author reason to pause over her father's words: "È vita Gianna, è vita!" (Manzini *Ritratto* 59), "It's life, Gianna, it's life!" (Manzini *Full-Length* 38).

Chapter Two – Narrative tropes

In an interview with Joanne Feit Diehl, the poet Louise Glück stated:

It seems no one with a taste for privacy could possibly write: art is too revealing. I don't mean because it is necessarily literally autobiographical. I mean that, in its choice of metaphors, its recurring concerns, it makes a highly specific portrait of an individual mind. (Feit Diehl 177)

Throughout her career, Manzini produced a vast body of work that is striking for the frequency with which narrative tropes centred on animals, especially horses and dogs, appear. For the greater part, these animals share several features. The earliest horse and dog characters are typically forlorn creatures that are denied a realistic view of the world because they are too weak to move, or even look up. The horses, in particular, present a pitiable image. With their heads bowed, perception of their environment is confined to reflections in puddles on the ground, sometimes puddles of their own urine. It is not until much later in her career that Manzini begins to grant her animal characters a degree of vitality and self-awareness. Her 1947 novel *Forte come un leone* (*Strong as a Lion*) (hereafter *Forte*) presents a typical description of one of her early horses:

Una visione da tempo mi allettava. Dove il borgo cede alla campagna, e la terra diventa perplessa e come vacante, vedevo, in mezzo a prati timidamente collinosi, un cavallo bianco [...] che è sfiancato e magro [...] Decido finalmente di mettermi al lavoro [...] non bisogna perdere tempo; ma intanto indugio contro la spalletta d'un ponte. (Manzini *Forte* 12)

(For some time, a vision enticed me. Where the hamlet gives way to the countryside, and the land becomes hesitant and as though vacant, I saw, in the middle of timidly hilly meadows, a white horse [...] that is worn out and thin [...] I finally decide to start work [...] I mustn't waste time; and yet, leaning against the bridge parapet, I hesitate.)

Here she does not dwell on her description of the horse as she does in other instances. One simple reading of the passage would apprehend Manzini's depiction of the horse – “worn out and thin”, alongside her depiction of the surrounding “vacant” landscape – as metaphor: that is, as an evocation of the

author's state of mind.

Yet, if Glück is correct and all writing is autobiographical (even if inadvertently), this thesis is obliged to explore further the significance of the horse in this early narrative. Umberto Eco stated in *The Open Work* (1989) that the modern text presents the reader with a “field of possibilities” for interpretation and that it is up to the reader to decide which approach to take (Eco *Open* x). In Eco's view, a modern work presents a myriad of “potential meanings” co-existing within a work and no single version “can be said to be the main or dominant one” (Eco *Open* x). With these considerations in mind, several other interpretations surface. Manzini might be understood to be the protagonist engaging in the complexities of narrative development while the horse might be understood as a “prompt”, the instigator of that narrative development. However, in consideration of the scope of possible interpretations in relation to the text, it is important to also bear in mind Eco's stipulation in *The Limits of Interpretation*, published one year after *The Open Work*, that, ultimately, a work cannot be interpreted in an infinite number of ways because the interpretation must be able to stack up against the entire text in a manner consistent with the work as a “coherent whole” (Eco *Limits* 149).

In relation to *Forte*, for example, it is noteworthy that Manzini abandons any further reference to her debilitated horse in that essay, thus curtailing the possibility of an interpretation applicable to that text as a coherent whole.⁶⁷ Even so, horses continue to appear throughout her writing. All of those appearances suggest that it is important to consider her work in the light of Eco's notion of a coherent whole, based not simply on a single text, or even as a series of individual texts, but rather in relation to a number of works within which coherence emerges when they are viewed collectively as components of a single, evolving, and over-arching narrative. Therefore, Manzini's horse in *Forte* may be interpreted as a “node” in a thematic development that reveals, as Eco suggests, “more than [the author] intended to say” (Eco *Limits* 148). In light of Eco's contention, Manzini's admission in *Ritratto* that her horse in that account is the metaphorical

⁶⁷ *Forte* comprises eleven essays divided into three sections. The above passage appears in the first essay.

embodiment of the fear mobilised by her attempts to write Giuseppe's story can be interpreted as the end result, or as a final "node" in an unconscious narrative trajectory. On that basis, the chapter contends that an important narrative function of Manzini's horse and dog characters over a lifetime of writing is to reflect back to the author aspects of her own internal state that were initially unconscious. Resonating with both Eco's and Glück's assertions, this perspective underpins this chapter's argument that narrative tropes provided Manzini with a pathway to trauma recovery.

In an interview with Lia Fava Guzzetta, Manzini explained that she initially turned to writing about flora and fauna because it proved to be an effective distraction from a personal crisis afflicting her at the time (Fava Guzzetta 2).⁶⁸ As stated, Manzini's efforts to write *Ritratto* were repeatedly thwarted by the onset of symptoms creating an impasse, which she overcame by diverting her attention to fictional works such as those centred on her animal tropes (Manzini *Ritratto* 58). Indeed, from the very beginning of her career, Manzini gave considerable thought to her rapport with animals, surmising that they offered occasion for both her sorrow and enthusiasm (Manzini *Arca* 13). In light of her admission, it seems that Manzini and her animal characters engaged in an interactive process whereby the emotional state of the former was reflected and reciprocated by the latter. The author's own invention, then, is inscribed in her ongoing and evolving emotional life and may issue, at a later date, as a new or more "worked-through" representation. This notion is not foreign to interpretation of literary texts. For the critic Wolfgang Iser, for example, meaning is arrived at through multiple circular operations (recursions) between reader and text: that is, meaning emerges from relationships, "the fine-tuning of which is produced through a mutual inscription of circles into the multiple dualities of the register" (Iser 53).⁶⁹ This chapter proposes that Manzini engaged, over the course of her career, in just such recursive interchanges with her own texts, and, especially, with recurring narrative tropes.

Further explication of these arguments can be found by recourse to

⁶⁸ Manzini's comment is in reference to her 1930 novel, *Boscovivo* [Living Wood], a work that is centred entirely on plants and animals. Manzini married Bruno Fallaci in 1920 but by the end of that decade her marriage was failing. It seems likely that, given the timing, the crisis Manzini mentions relates to the breakdown of her marriage.

⁶⁹ Elaborating, Iser states that "understanding realizes itself through a continual circular movement [initiating] an ever-widening coupling between parts and whole" (Iser 53).

another interpretative mode. Psychoanalysis is a method of investigation consisting in bringing out the unconscious meaning of a patient's words, dreams, and fantasies with the aim of resolving a patient's emotional blockages and curing related symptoms (Laplanche and Pontalis 367). Psychoanalysis has long been applied to the interpretation of literature and Freud himself considered writers and poets to be the true discoverers of the unconscious (Di Benedetto 11). In the English-speaking world, psychoanalytic interpretations have often been underpinned by the theories of both Freud and Melanie Klein. However, over the decades, there has been a continual evolution of psychoanalytic theories and models, which have drawn from, and re-interpreted, those theorists' pioneering work. A more contemporary view of psychoanalysis is summarised by Claudio Neri who defines it as the specialised practice of transformation of sensorial and emotional experiences into thoughts and meanings (Neri 46).

One of the most recent developments in psychoanalytic thought derives from the work of the Italian psychoanalyst, Antonino Ferro,⁷⁰ who builds on Wilfred Bion's pioneering work when he introduces the concept of narrative derivatives (Ferro *Seeds* 2).⁷¹ Ferro's work blends literary theories, including Umberto Eco's semiotics and Vladimir Propp's study of folktales, with the Analytic Field Theory of the Franco-Argentinian couple Willy and Madeleine Baranger, as well as the contributions of Wilfred Bion.⁷² From that fertile ground springs a form of analysis that privileges narrative processes.⁷³ By applying Ferro's model of narrative derivatives, this chapter argues that the repetition of horse and dog characters heralded for Manzini a

⁷⁰ Antonino Ferro was born in Sicily and today lives and works between Milan and Pavia. He is a prolific author and has published numerous books and articles, many of which have been translated into English. He is a Training and Supervising Analyst in the Italian Psychoanalytic Society, the American Psychoanalytic Association and the International Psychoanalytic Association. He has been a visiting professor of psychoanalysis in many institutions in Europe, North America, South America, and Australia.

⁷¹ A feature of the spontaneous narration that arises during the psychoanalytic session, narrative derivatives may be thought of as waking dream thoughts that "act as 'carriers' towards the knowable" of a patient's unconscious emotional life (Ferro *Seeds* 2).

⁷² Wilfred Ruprecht Bion (1897-1979) is widely viewed as a revolutionary psychoanalyst whose concepts are vital to an understanding of psychoanalysis and the workings of the mind in general (Vermote).

⁷³ Narratology is an important aspect of psychoanalysis. In Ferro's view, the "interpretation of psychoanalysis is necessarily bound up with that of interpretation in narratology, of which it must indeed be seen as a sub-theme, albeit with characteristics all of its own" (Ferro *Psychoanalysis* 7).

method of working through the trauma incurred by her attempts to write *Ritratto*, which was, itself, based on her earlier developmental experiences. Within a fundamentally unconscious process and with each re-narration, the author and her animal characters recursively influenced each other and developed towards a point of clarity that culminated in Manzini's final horse and dog characterisations.

As this chapter makes an extensive use of psychoanalytical terminology applicable to the theories and models mentioned above, for ease of understanding they are presented in sequence. The chapter begins with a brief description of both the Freudian and Kleinian models, which are useful in creating a context for Ferro's thinking. This is followed by a summary of some of the published commentary on Manzini's animalia. That summary is then followed by a brief outline of the chapter's hypothesis concerning the significance of the recurrence of the horse and dog characters, itself followed by a brief description of Ferro's theory of narrative derivatives. From there the chapter proceeds to a summary of Gianna Manzini's life, which illustrates features of the author's literary career as well as her personal experience. Descriptions of trauma, containment, and the analytic field follow. The chapter also explores Wilfred Bion's descriptions of *alpha* and *beta elements*, and *alpha function*, as a means of understanding the *modus operandi* of narrative transformations (Vermote). Textual examples from Manzini's works applicable to the discussion underway appear throughout the chapter, which ends with a comparison between Manzini's narrative transformations and the works of Edvard Munch to highlight the process of narrative transformation across all artistic fields.

Freudian psychoanalysis

The Freudian model of psychoanalysis considers characters within a network of historical relations, and the patient's narrations are viewed as occasions to analyse conflicts, sentiments, and emotional strategies connected with such historical characters.⁷⁴ From that point of view, literary

⁷⁴ The term "characters" is used in reference to both narrative and the patient's discourse during the analytic session.

characters, whether biographical or fictional, are understood to have a historical status of their own (Ferro *Psychoanalysis* 84). According to Ferro, characters with a predominantly historical status can be found in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, in which the main characters possess clear-cut psychological features, and a "high co-efficiency of reality" so that "they appear as actual persons" (Ferro *Psychoanalysis* 84). The work is considered a true representation of life, and credibility is weighed in relation to coherence and mimesis of reality. Thus, the Freudian model devotes energy to explorations that bring historical conflicts to the forefront of awareness. A patient's dream, for example, could be understood to hark back to real events, even infantile memories, and transformation in the patient occurs when the characters in the dream are recognised and revealed for what they symbolise from the past. Manzini's work often lends itself to a Freudian model of interpretation. One example is Manzini's view that her father's political and social ideals provided a link in her family lineage. *Ritratto* opens with a discussion that briefly traces the author's family origins from Modena to Pistoia. Manzini identifies some of what she considered to be enduring family traits: "L'insistenza, di generazione in generazione, di certi tratti somatici, e insieme una linea spirituale e di coscienza mi turbò" (Manzini *Ritratto* 7), "The persistence from generation to generation of certain somatic traits, together with a line of spiritual and moral consciousness disturbed me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 1). Manzini's discomfort evokes the Freudian theory of family neurosis wherein a pathogenic influence exerts itself in the family structure, and the children's place in the family "constellation" or, rather, "fate", is determined from the outset (Laplanche and Pontalis 159).

Kleinian psychoanalysis

Kleinian thought veers away from the strictly historical status of characters and lays stress on the patient's unconscious phantasies about them, primarily concerning an array of internalised "object" relations.⁷⁵ In literature, therefore, the reader is invited to speculate on the literary character's inner

⁷⁵ As opposed to the more familiar term *fantasy*, which refers to a person's more conscious wishes especially pertaining to daydreams, *phantasy* is a psychoanalytic term describing the unconscious wishes of an individual.

functioning. In essence, the subject's intrapsychic reality is externalised through the character's patterns of relating in the world. In English, one example of a work susceptible to a Kleinian model of interpretation is James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which the internal life of the characters manifests in their way of functioning in the world (Ferro "Interpretazioni" 746).⁷⁶

The breadth of Manzini's work also presents many instances of characters that can be easily viewed through the lens of the Kleinian model. For example, "I passerotti" [The Sparrows] appearing in Manzini's 1960 book *Arca di Noè* (hereafter *Arca*), concerns a dancer who is forced to work as a waiter because of damage caused to his ankles while performing on stage. The dancer perceives his surroundings and responds to them according to his psychological distortions. Unaware of such internal psychological processes, he projects his rancour onto the sparrows that gather to eat the crumbs on the terrace tables of the Venetian restaurant where he works. Speaking to a restaurant patron, the waiter states in relation to the sparrows: "Quel saltellare, per amor di Dio, non ha nulla a che fare con la levità della danza [...]. Se uno ballasse come loro volano lo fischierebbero [...]. E inoltre sono tutti gobbi" (Manzini *Arca* 51), (All that hopping about, for goodness' sake, has nothing to do with the levity of dance [...]. If one danced the way they fly, one would be booed off the stage [...]. And besides they are all hunchbacked).

Instances of the psychoanalytic interpretation of literature have frequently been drawn from either or both of the above models, and they sometimes continue to be viable methods of interpretation. According to Ferro, however, by today's standards such conventional models can lend themselves to a high degree of generalisation because they seek something akin to the cracking of a code (Ferro "Interpretazioni" 745). Ferro's concept of narrative derivatives differs because it focuses not on the external or internal reality depicted in the narration but on the emotional environment surrounding the text's creation and on the field of the ongoing relationship

⁷⁶ Resonating with Eco's notion of literary "nodes", Ferro views James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses*, as particularly suited to the narrative derivatives model because both these works are characterised by a continuous series of self-representations continually coming into being (Ferro "Interpretazioni" 746).

between analyst and patient. From that perspective, autobiographical elements of Manzini's writing do more than represent past events. They represent her ongoing emotional response to her narrative as it gradually comes into being with each new work.

Overview of published commentary on Manzini's animalia

Numerous commentators have contemplated the significance of Manzini's animalia. The literary critic, Emilio Cecchi, states that Manzini's animal stories reflect the ongoing influence of traditional naturalistic trends that began in the French Enlightenment and Romantic Periods (Cecchi 926). Speaking more broadly, however, Cecchi also views Manzini's animal imagery as representative of humanity's innate connection to geological and cosmic history (Cecchi 927). Conversely, according to Maria Vitali-Volant, Manzini's animal stories are greatly influenced by the work of her contemporary, Federigo Tozzi, the author of *Bestie (Beasts)* (1917), a book praised by Italian literary circles for its innovative fragment literary style (Vitali-Volant 118).⁷⁷ Furthermore, Vitali-Volant notes that Manzini's animal imagery represents a universal view that draws from recognised iconographic themes and she cites as examples "Il sangue del leone" [The Lion's Blood], taken from the story of Saint Jerome, and "Il cavallo di San Paolo" [Saint Paul's Horse], inspired by Parmigianino's sixteenth-century painting *La conversione di San Paolo (Conversion of Saint Paul)*.⁷⁸ In relation to the novel *Boscovivo [Living Wood]*, Carlo Emilio Gadda stated that it is of spiritual significance, opening up "varchi inattesi ai pensieri di Dio e del diavolo" (unexpected gateways to the thoughts of God and the devil), and claimed that Manzini's coherence lies in her "cosmorama" depiction of reality (Gadda quoted in Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya 139).

⁷⁷ The fragment literary style describes a very short story that focuses on minute detail that, in turn, functions as the nucleus of an over-arching story. According to Vitali-Volant, Tozzi's narrative style derived from the author's intention to overhaul conventional literature (Vitali-Volant 118).

⁷⁸ Both these short stories appear in *Arca di Noè*. The painting that influenced Manzini's story, *La conversione di San Paolo (Conversion of Saint Paul)*, used to be attributed to Niccolò dell'Abbate (1510-1571); today it is attributed to dell'Abbate's contemporary Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola, more commonly known as Parmigianino (1503-1540). It is held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Pier Paolo Pasolini arrives at a similar view but from a more parochial perspective. He states that Manzini's animal stories are a testament to the influence on Manzini of her native region's hunting tradition, and that her animal characters bear an allusion to her ancestral Tuscan world (Vitali-Volant 118-22). Cecilia Bello Minciocchi also endows Manzini's animals with emblematic value invested with sociological and political significance, whereby the animals lose their "sacralità" (sacredness) due to their profane rapport with humans who inevitably manage to rob them of their innocence (Bello Minciocchi quoted in Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya100). In combination, these views reflect an overlap of allegorical and factual significance attributed to Manzini's animalia. Manzini's "Capponi diventati Don Giovanni" (Capons that become Don Juan) (1960) serves as a collective illustration of the aforementioned contentions. Unlike the relatively harmless traditional breeding process, the capons in this particular story have been subjected to a radical scientific procedure that results in aggressive and demonic birds. Manzini's story satirises the seeming end of a cooperative existence between humanity and animals:

Una decina di capponi dietro una rete, riparati da una tettoia.
Testa bassa, cresta e bargigli ridotti a nulla, coda miserabile,
obesi, ricchi soltanto d'una gorgiera spiovente, becchettano,
becchettano, e, malinconici convertiti, ripensano, non sai se
carichi di vergogna o di rimpianto, a una vita di gagliarde
sfrenatezze intravista come un miraggio all'alba del primo
chicchirichì. (Manzini *Arca* 143)

(Behind netting, ten capons, more or less, shelter beneath an awning. With heads bowed, crest and barbel reduced to nothing, wretched tails, obese, their only luxuriance, a drooping ruff, they peck, peck, and, sad converts, they think back, impossible to tell whether they are weighed down by shame or regret, to a life of vigorous lack of restraint that is glimpsed as though a mirage at the dawn of their first cock-a-doodle-doo.)

According to Magda Vigilante, Manzini's story is a warning to humanity to halt its scientifically driven degradation of nature. Transformed for the worse, the capons become in effect, a reflection of their abusive masters.

In summary, whether Manzini's animalia is interpreted according to well-established macroscopic codes such as those adopted by Cecchi; or by

insular and nostalgic codes such as Pasolini's; or as innovations such as the fragmentary style; or even as prefiguring environmental perils, the published commentary invests it with universal psychological significance. By way of exception and drawing attention to the personal qualities inherent in Manzini's animalia, Vitali-Volant states that Manzini's animal stories are the outcome of "immagini, ricordi e meditazioni personali" (images, memories and personal meditations) (Vitali-Volant 122). This view draws closer to this chapter's hypothesis that, overriding all emblematic and universal themes, it is Manzini's deeply personal and emotional communion with her animal characters that progressively and reciprocally engenders a capacity for psychic transformation. Taking a lead from Vitali-Volant's statement, the chapter contends that Manzini's sorrowful rapport with her animals and the pathos with which she depicts them links on a deeply personal and subjective level to the author's struggle to process her trauma.⁷⁹ To this end, Manzini's horse and dog tropes are understood to encapsulate a narrative *fabula* that recursively represents and influences her emotional state at the time of writing.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the continuity of her *fabula* accomplishes a gradual transformation of emotional blockages.

Throughout this chapter's exploration of these contentions, Ferro's theories prove illuminating as a means of deciphering the underlying function of narrative tropes. For example, a major difference between Ferro's view and traditional models is that narrative derivatives presuppose that everything that arises out of the psychoanalytic session can be understood as an emotional response related to the current experience of the session. On this basis, it is taken for granted that the analyst and the patient are engaged in constant and reciprocal emotional exchanges, and that these

⁷⁹ Manzini's writing is replete with diverse and far-flung animal characters ranging from larvae, ants and even oysters, many of which could arguably lend themselves to an interpretation based on narrative derivatives. The focus here is on the horse and dog characters because they appear from the start of her literary career through to the end, and, in particular, the horse character Lillo in *Ritratto* figures specifically as the embodiment of Manzini's fear of writing about Giuseppe.

⁸⁰ Storytelling features both a plot and a *fabula* and, while the former refers to the story as told, the latter refers to "the fundamental pattern of narration, the syntax of the characters, and the profound mental exchanges" between the patient and the analyst (Ferro *Psychoanalysis* 117). Manzini's horse and dog characters are thus understood as features of the plot but also as aspects of an unconscious *fabula* that gradually lead to understanding and therefore, trauma recovery.

exchanges are a primary influence on what subsequently comes to mind during the analytic session. Another of Ferro's theories relates to interpretations, which he names *saturated*, to reference explanations by the analyst that are overloaded with significance and inference in a manner that the patient finds intolerable. Saturated interpretations are definitive and tend to exclude other points of view, even though they are intended to be revelatory and to add to more conscious understandings. Especially at the beginning of psychoanalytic therapy, such interpretations can backfire by overwhelming the patient who may already be overloaded by a history of traumatic events as seen, for example, in Manzini whose flaring psychosomatic reactions impeded her task of writing *Ritratto*.⁸¹

An illustration of Ferro's concept of narrative derivatives may prove useful. If, during the analytic session, a patient suddenly recalls that as a child she was forced to finish all the food on her plate before she was allowed to leave the table causing her to feel anxious even before the meal commenced, because that particular memory arises at that specific time in the presence of her analyst, it may be understood as a way of informing that the analysis is too much for her to "swallow". The specificity of the analytic session is understood to have induced the patient to feel a certain amount of anxiety by having to talk about her most private sentiments and experiences.

Ferro explains that the analyst's role is to intuitively grasp the significance of the patient's narration and adjust his/her interpretative approach. So as not to add to the patient's distress, Ferro advises the analyst to sometimes offer what he refers to as *unsaturated* interpretations. A term coined by Ferro, unsaturated interpretations offer patients who would only be further debilitated by exhaustive interpretations, gentler possibilities of developing their narrative further in keeping with the patient's capacity to bear emotional arousal. In the case of the overwhelmed child at the dinner table, the analyst might observe, for instance, that "it's hard to eat and enjoy a meal when you feel watched and evaluated". That allows the patient to pick up the narrative and to develop it however she/he wishes. In contrast, a

⁸¹ As mentioned, "il tremore che mi sconvolge" (Manzini *Album* 228), (the tremor that overwhelms me), and alluded to again by Manzini in *Ritratto*: "M'impenna. Non vado avanti" (Manzini *Ritratto* 14), "I rear up. I do not go on" (Manzini *Full-Length* 4).

more saturated interpretation might concentrate on a historical reconstruction such as “Your father often overwhelmed you with his expectations”; or it might focus on the current relationship (a transference interpretation) as in “you apparently feel that I pressure you to take in ideas and to agree with me before you are ready to receive them”. By opting for an unsaturated interpretation, the analyst allows the patient to accommodate her emotions in her own time. It is here argued that Manzini’s horse and dog characters served a similar function.

According to Ferro, the analyst’s role fundamentally rests on his/her ability to intuit the patient’s capacity to tolerate interpretations at any given moment (Ferro *Avoiding* 53). He states that the patient is a mirror “reflecting the analyst’s distance, making it possible for him not only to remedy the relationship but also to observe which emotions the patient has not been able to tolerate” (Ferro *Avoiding* 53). It is, therefore, precisely because of the subtlety of the process that the patient is able to develop her emotional capacity and, in so doing, she will be able to transform or resolve traumatic experiences whose effects are ongoing in the present. Therefore, the patient is viewed as the analyst’s ideal collaborator, giving the analyst “the chance to understand how an interpretation has been experienced and how the whole of [...] interpretive activity should be modulated so that it can be a factor leading to growth and not persecution” (Ferro *Avoiding* 52).

Returning to the example above, the patient’s memory of her experience of mealtimes is understood as a symbolic representation of her immediate anxiety. By viewing her memory as a narrative derivative, the analyst intuitively feels that too much information, like too much food or too much scrutiny, is an intolerable experience. This approach invokes an empathetic process whereby the analyst receives and contains on behalf of the patient her unrecognised anxieties. Moreover, by being offered an unsaturated interpretation the patient is more likely to develop a further range of narrative derivatives. In Ferro’s experience, such moments “are enough to produce a series of cascading effects in the consulting room (and in the analytic technique)” (Ferro *Avoiding* 52). The patient becomes the ideal collaborator because she is the only person who can, after an interpretation, give the analyst “the chance to understand how an interpretation has been

experienced and how the whole of [...] interpretive activity should be modulated so that it can be a factor leading to growth and not persecution” (Ferro *Avoiding* 52). Therefore, the chapter argues that it is via the repetition of her tropes that Manzini ultimately accomplishes a narrative transformation of her trauma. By viewing the horse and dog characters as an “unsaturated” means of self-expression, it can be seen that they act as Manzini’s ideal collaborators in a process of emotional exchange, analogous to that between patient and analyst, wherein each is able to modulate anxiety by employing responses that lead to greater understanding over time.

Ferro’s theory of narrative derivatives initially emerged from his interest in narratology. It proved possible to trace a parallel evolution between the narratological conception of characters and the ways they are understood in various psychoanalytic models. Similar to a narrative, the analytic session is also populated by characters that are “assembled and constructed in expressible form” (Ferro *Psychoanalysis* 82). Furthermore, narratology seeks to identify a schema that is, more or less, a constant structure – fabula – beneath the changeable surface of the narrative plot of an individual story (Ferro *Psychoanalysis* 86). Manzini’s attempts to write about her father re-activate her childhood trauma, as it would in an analytic session. Over time, just as a patient would in therapy and, indeed, through a process that took her many years, Manzini articulates and confronts the reality of her trauma through her explorations of her animal characters. In other words, through her creative processes Manzini is able to render her experience “thinkable, narratable and shareable” (Ferro *Seeds* 51). Placing these considerations into context, a brief summary of Manzini’s life follows.

Gianna

Gianna Manzini was born in Pistoia, Tuscany in 1896 and she died in Rome in 1974. Even before her birth, her father was exiled and imprisoned for his anarchist activities. Giuseppe’s infamy introduced upheaval into all aspects of Manzini’s life. His attempts to carve out a means of supporting himself and his family by opening a shop selling Singer sewing machines, and a watch repair shop, for example, were repeatedly sabotaged by his opponents. Plunging the family into poverty, the situation was not improved by his

extended periods of exile. Facing potential destitution, Manzini's mother, Nilda, separated from Giuseppe. Separation, although not illegal, was a rarity in conservative, Catholic Italy in the early 1900s and also, very likely, a deeply unsettling experience for the young Manzini who often found herself caught in the middle of her parents' dissension. Manzini states that she was ostracised at school for being the daughter of an anarchist, and that both she and her mother were essentially disowned by extended family on both sides. This unhappy state of affairs came to an end in 1914 when Manzini and Nilda left Pistoia for Florence.

From very early childhood Manzini was frail and suffered from chronic, bronchial illness. Moving to Florence proved beneficial and her health markedly improved. It was in Florence that Manzini finally felt that she belonged and, although at times she and Nilda struggled to make ends meet, they enjoyed life. Manzini graduated from the Università di Firenze in 1920 with a thesis on Pietro Aretino titled "Le opere ascetiche di Pietro Aretino" (The Ascetic Works of Pietro Aretino), the Renaissance poet and political power broker famed for the licentious nature of his poetry. Given Giuseppe's time away from his family, one may infer that Manzini grew up with a sense of ambivalence regarding her father's private life. In 1905, Giuseppe published a work titled *Amore libero, studio di sociologia moderna* (*Free Love – A Study in Modern Sociology*), which he dedicated to his comrades (Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya 19). In 1915 Giuseppe published a further work titled *Tatà*, possibly the work that Manzini refers to in *Ritratto* as "un libretto, una favola allegorica" (Manzini *Ritratto* 207), "a small book, an allegorical fable" (Manzini *Full-Length* 156). Although Manzini makes no reference to the possibility in *Ritratto*, she alludes to the idea of Giuseppe's possible transgressions in "Sulla soglia" [On the Threshold]. Literature, it may be argued, provided an indirect means for Manzini to interrogate her father's private life.

In 1920 Manzini married the journalist, Bruno Fallaci, uncle of Oriana. In 1925 Giuseppe died. Not long after her father's death, Manzini left a brief career in teaching to become a full-time author, receiving high praise for her first novel *Tempo innamorato* [Time In Love], published in

1928.⁸² However, by then, Manzini's marriage was failing and she separated from Fallaci in the early 1930s (Bello Minciacchi et al. 53). This led to a personal crisis that she coped with by writing about flora and fauna rather than people. In the author's words: "C'è stato un periodo della mia vita in cui ho accantonato la narrativa: niente più racconti, niente più romanzi" (Bello Minciacchi et al. 17), (There was a time in my life when I shelved fiction: no more stories, no more novels). Despite these personal difficulties the break from her usual fiction proved to be a sort of literary awakening for the author: "Fu, devo confessare, un ripiego carico di sorprese, entusiasmante. E ritengo, proficuo" (Manzini quoted in Bello Minciacchi et al. 17), (It was, I must confess, a shift full of surprises, exciting. And I believe, advantageous). While living in Florence, Manzini met the literary critic, Enrico Falqui. With both parents now deceased and her marriage to Fallaci over, Manzini moved to Rome in the late 1930s. Manzini and Falqui remained sentimentally and professionally attached until Falqui's death in 1974, five months before Manzini's own passing.

It took time for Manzini to establish an affinity for Rome. She longed for her native Tuscany, her "paradiso perduto" (lost paradise) (Manzini quoted in Bello Minciacchi et al. 20). Yet after her struggle to adapt to her new city, Manzini stated in her diary that, in the end, it was Rome's "bellezza a conquidermi; e al solito, intendere ed amare divenne una cosa sola; e anche significò naturalmente, adattarmi, modificarmi, aderire: prima con uno struggimento di rimpianto e di nostalgia, poi con un vittorioso abbandono" (Manzini quoted in Bello Minciacchi et al. 20), (beauty conquered me; and as usual, understanding and loving become one; it also naturally meant adapting, changing, adhering: first with regret and nostalgia, and then with a victorious abandon). According to Bello Minciacchi, it was in Rome that Manzini enriched her narrative framework by entering "una nuova epoca, non soltanto biografico-sentimentale ma anche, e soprattutto, intellettuale", (a new era, not only biographical and sentimental, but also,

⁸² Eugenio Montale gave an emphatic review of Manzini's first novel, describing it as a work of "tormentosa, raffinata intelligenza", (tormenting refined intelligence), and defining its author as a "scrittrice di rarissima sensibilità [...]". Possa assisterla la fortuna!" (a writer of exceptionally rare sensitivity [...]. May she be assisted by good fortune) (Montale quoted in Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya 139).

and above all, intellectual), (Bello Minciocchi et al. 20). From her twenties onwards, Manzini wrote prolifically and, despite a limited readership, received numerous literary awards and high praise for her work.⁸³ While still a new arrival on the literary scene, she was invited to become a member of the Florentine literary group the *Giubbe rosse* (*Red Jackets*), named after the café where the group met. Testament to her artistic and philosophical stance, Manzini was also a contributing member of the avant-garde literary magazines *Solaria*, *Letteratura*, and *Campo di Marte*, which embraced an internationalist artistic aesthetic (Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya 32).⁸⁴

In 1947 Manzini published *Forte*, which includes an essay titled “La lezione della Woolf” [A Lesson by Woolf], dedicated to her literary idol, Virginia Woolf. In that essay Manzini declares her “debito” and “amore” for the English novelist, from whom Manzini acquired her “avventura di stile” (adventurous style) (Manzini *Forte* 14).⁸⁵

Authors often endured periods of financially straitened circumstances and Manzini was no different. In order to supplement her income, she contributed articles to fashion magazines under the pseudonyms Vanessa and Pamela, an activity that she carried out with considerable disdain (Bello Minciocchi et al. 16). She also translated works by the French writer and literary critic Jean Paulhan (1884-1968). Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Manzini also took part in various radio and television interviews based on fashion and literary criticism, a commitment she continued into the late 1960s.⁸⁶

Throughout her life, Manzini was an assiduous diarist. In the entry

⁸³ It was the publication of *La sparviera* in 1956 that brought the author, then aged 60, some commercial success, as may be construed by the fact that the novel was translated into French (Bello Minciocchi et al. 24).

⁸⁴ This is evidenced by Manzini’s tendency “agli esperimenti narrativi europei”, (for European narrative experiments) (Bernardini Napoletano and Yehya 32).

⁸⁵ Manzini considered Virginia Woolf’s narrative *Mrs Dalloway* crucial to her narrative development. Jamila Yehya asserts, however, that with *Tempo innamorato*, (1928), published a few years before Woolf’s novel appeared in Italy, Manzini had already demonstrated her own talent for technical composition and stylistic innovation, that she would later perfect in *Lettera all’editore* (Yehya quoted in Bello Minciocchi et al. 14).

⁸⁶ Such activity belies the fact that Manzini was reserved by nature, a trait that was likely compounded by the persistent ailments that forced her to live in relative isolation (Bello Minciocchi et al. 22).

dated August 8, 1953, she first writes about her wish to record her father's story: "Ho preso l'impegno di fare un racconto lungo [...]. Vorrei intitolarlo 'Ritratto di un uomo in piedi'. Un ritratto di mio padre" (Bello Minciacchi et al. 32), (I'm committed to writing a novel [...]. I would like to title it 'Standing Portrait of a man'. A portrait of my father). In reality the novel had occupied, as Bello Minciacchi states, "Tutto l'arco della vita come un pensiero costante mai abbandonato" (Bello Minciacchi et al. 33), (Manzini's entire life, like a constant thought that was never abandoned). In 1971 Manzini fulfilled her long-awaited ambition, with the publication of *Ritratto* for which she was awarded the coveted Campiello prize, and, for the only time in her life, she achieved bestseller status in Italy. During her lifetime Manzini amassed a vast collection of written and printed material relating to her personal and professional life. Having no heir, Manzini bequeathed that material to her long-time friend Mimma Mondadori. Today it is archived in three locations in Italy: at the Università La Sapienza in Rome; at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome; and at Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori in Milan.

The author's dedication to recording her thoughts in diaries proved a boon to the literary world by allowing scholars to track the evolution of her narrative creativity, to gain an insight into her cultural interests, and to glimpse the author's daily life and the friendships she kept. That is a remarkable outcome for a woman renowned for her reserve and modesty (Bello Minciacchi et al. 22).⁸⁷ The bequest included a large envelope, which Manzini labelled "Scritti del babbo" (Daddy's written works), containing a copy of Giuseppe's volumes, *Libero amore* [Free Love] and *Tatà*, as well as various other manuscripts he produced. The act of gathering and storing Giuseppe's writing in one envelope is an indication, despite the challenges she faced in her quest to write *Ritratto*, of the author's enduring admiration and affection for her father.

⁸⁷ Furthermore, Manzini was also an avid letter writer who maintained correspondence with many Italian women writers. Testament to her interest in and dedication to the status of women's literature, her archive includes numerous letters to friends such as Alba de Céspedes, Anna Banti, Paola Masino, Ada Negri, Ginevra Vivante and Maria Luisa Spaziani (Bello Minciacchi et al. 22).

Trauma: a psychoanalytic definition

Harold Blum states that psychoanalysis began with the study of psychic trauma, and a classical definition describes the sufferer as “overwhelmed and flooded by stimuli in a danger situation emanating from within or without – i.e., an internal or external danger” (Blum 415). In reference to traumatic memories, Blum explains that when a subject is totally overwhelmed by a traumatic experience there is “no possibility of adequately registering the trauma or responding to it” (Blum 415). Today, trauma is a term often used to describe the suffering of victims of war; of environmental disasters; of child abuse; and of domestic violence, generally referred to in adults as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Research has also necessarily expanded into the study of traumatic experiences in childhood because it is these extreme experiences beginning early in the life cycle that, in later life, “can have profound effects on memory, affect regulation, biological stress modulation and interpersonal relations” (Van der Kolk 189). Of course, it may be argued that having lived during an era characterised by two World Wars, illness, and high infant mortality, to a greater or lesser degree, most people were subjected to one form of trauma or another. It could also be objected that coming from a wealthy family and born to progressive parents who believed in the value of education, Manzini was spared many traumatic experiences. However, whether recognised or not, trauma is no respecter of social class and one person’s pain and its psychic consequences are not commensurate with and cannot be measured by comparison to another’s. In reality, Manzini’s infancy was spent in an environment that caused her to experience, inadvertently, profound trauma: abandonment caused by her father’s periods of exile, the failure to mourn the loss of family stability, and daily rejection at school. Living in a family that openly vilified the father she desperately needed to love and admire exacerbated this. Manzini never describes herself as traumatised and, indeed, the term was not in common parlance for much of her life. However, as stated by Van der Kolk, trauma is as much a physical process as it is psychic. On that basis, therefore, the chapter contends that despite her privileged upbringing, the recurrence of Manzini’s adverse reactions accompanying her intention to write *Ritratto* are typical of psychosomatic

reactions occasioned by childhood trauma.

Narrative conceptions of Manzini's trauma

In *Ritratto*, numerous allusions to physical discomfort represent a connection to trauma. One way to interpret these descriptions is as narrative derivatives evoking Manzini's uneasiness translated via a series of physical sensations. For example, fracture, "avevo l'impressione che il cuoio capelluto s'increspasse" (Manzini *Ritratto* 28), "I had the feeling that the top of my head was splitting" (Manzini *Full-Length* 16); fragility, "la pelle dietro gli orecchi diventava tenue, vulnerabile" (Manzini *Ritratto* 28), "The skin behind my ears was growing thin, vulnerable" (Manzini *Full-Length* 16); sensations of dryness, "avevo il palato arso" (Manzini *Ritratto* 25), "My throat was parched" (Manzini *Full-Length* 13); or prickliness, "sul ginocchio, nel passo, sentivo il ruvido della gonnellina di lana" (Manzini *Ritratto* 26), "I felt the rub of my wool skirt against my knees as I walked" (Manzini *Full-Length* 13). Each of these examples denotes the state of "hyper-arousal" and "vigilance" permeating Manzini's existence (Blum 416).

One particular anecdote sheds light on Manzini's sense of vulnerability, as well as the vivid but inarticulate nature of impressions inscribed as body memories, as described by Van der Kolk. Manzini recounts that one day while strolling through the streets of Pistoia with Giuseppe, the pair spotted a woman on a balcony tipping a vase of putrid water onto the street below (Manzini *Ritratto* 23). As Giuseppe pulled his daughter aside to prevent her from getting wet, the pre-adolescent Manzini was struck by the waft of body odour emanating from Giuseppe's armpit. Simultaneously, the pair looked up and glimpsed the narrow strip of sky visible between the tall medieval buildings. Manzini described the sight as "Un rivolo di cielo sopra le case" (Manzini *Ritratto* 24), "A rivulet of sky above the houses" (Manzini *Full-Length* 12). She goes on to state that from Giuseppe's point of view, the sight represented an "azzurra, alta fuga; forse liberazione, o riscatto, o giustizia, o libert , o avvenire" (Manzini *Ritratto* 24), "that high blue flight: perhaps liberation or redemption, justice, or liberty, or the future" (Manzini *Full-Length* 12). However, that same

“azzurra, alta fuga” gave rise to a markedly different reaction in Manzini. She states: “Io so che tremavo; e non avrei saputo come indicarla. Era qualcosa verso cui tendevo come a una sublime irresponsabilità della carne; qualcosa che mi aspettava; aspettava me” (Manzini *Ritratto* 24), “It made me shiver and couldn’t define its significance. It was something like a sublime capriciousness of the flesh, something that was waiting for me” (Manzini *Full-Length* 12).

This particular anecdote has attracted the attention of commentators. Daria Valentini construes Giuseppe’s perception of the sky as the epitome of male rationality, founded on logic and intellect, whereas Manzini’s description symbolises “a continuity with the maternal”, connecting the author to her future life in Florence (Valentini 370).⁸⁸ Georges Güntert construes the episode as a *rite de passage*, a reference to desire awakened in Manzini, “un desiderio impetuosamente erotico, provocato dall’odore del corpo maschile”, (an impetuously erotic desire, provoked by the odour of the male body) (Güntert 62).

To these views, however, this chapter adds a further interpretation relating to an alternative, less felicitous, form of awakening. Immediately following the woman’s gesture (of emptying the vase over the balcony), Manzini is suddenly and disconcertedly made aware of the mendacious reality of her existence, perceptible in the physical discomfort that ensues:

I muscoli si tendevano dolorosamente e il diaframma si rialzava impacciandomi, comprimendomi, mentre negli occhi impazziva una luce focante che doveva essere nascosta [...]. La mia mano, sempre arida, cominciò a sudare, stretta in quella del babbo. Me l’asciugai al vestito. Gliela restituii. Mi guardò. Certo, egli temette per me, ebbe paura per me [...] Io so che ne tremavo. (Manzini *Ritratto* 23)

My muscles strained painfully, and my breath caught in my throat, while a burning light raged in my eyes that I had to disguise [...]. My normally dry hand, held tightly in my father’s, began to sweat. I wiped it on my dress and gave it back to him. He looked at me. It was clear he was afraid for me; concerned for me [...] I only know I was shivering. (Manzini *Full-Length* 11-12)

⁸⁸ As stated by Valentini, Giuseppe’s response is “linear, rational, coherent within his system of values” whereas Manzini’s reflects the “image of birth [...] emphasizing the female body” (Valentini 370).

In his study on the physicality of trauma, Van der Kolk states that “ever since people’s responses to overwhelming experiences were first systematically explored, it has been noted that the psychological effects of trauma are expressed as changes in the biological stress response” (Van der Kolk 253).⁸⁹ In his pioneering work with trauma sufferers, Pierre Janet noted that it was not the traumatic events per se, but rather the memories of those events that become dissociated from consciousness and subsequently stored as “visceral sensations” (Janet quoted in Van der Kolk 253). With current understanding of trauma, Manzini’s portrayal of the event described above evokes the persistence of trauma inscribed in the body. In a further description Manzini conveys the distress occasioned by encounters with her parents:

Un turbine le loro parole. Mi attraversavano; moltiplicavano le mie possibilità; accrescevano in modo mostruoso quantunque effimero, la mia intelligenza; mi dotavano, nervi, cuore, d’un’immensa possibilità di soffrire; mi facevano raggiungere di colpo un’insostenibile età maggiore. (Manzini *Ritratto* 164)

Their words were like whirlwinds. They crossed over me; they multiplied my possibilities; they increased my understanding in a monstrous way however ephemeral; they provided my nerves and heart with immense possibilities for suffering; they aged me, suddenly, excruciatingly. (Manzini *Full-Length* 122)

As she matured, Manzini’s intractable distress described above transformed into a crippling sense of remorse.⁹⁰ In trauma studies, remorse seems to be a common affliction arising out of a sufferer’s sense of guilt. Paul Valent states that in trauma, a person’s morality may be “distorted towards survival” and a blameless person, as Manzini was, will assume guilt simply in order to survive (Valent 13). The description that follows illustrates the pervasiveness of her guilt:

⁸⁹ This is a notable similarity between Van der Kolk and Damasio’s explication of neural maps.

⁹⁰ Manzini uses the term *rimorso* (remorse), rather than *colpa* (guilt), and the two are very close in meaning. According to the *Dizionario Garzanti della lingua italiana* (1981 edition), *rimorso* means “sentimento di dolore che si prova per le colpe commesse”, (feeling of pain derived from faults committed). On this basis the chapter views remorse and guilt as quasi-synonymous.

Finii col percepire il suono del suo sordo rosichio. Finché un nome dovetti pur darglielo a questo segugio paziente: il suo vero nome. Rimorso, si chiama. Il rimorso è un poliziotto speciale. Ti dà tempo, perché sa che non gli sfuggirai... Sei sua. Sì che ti lascerà correre, svicolare, fermarti; però a poco a poco t'insinua il sospetto d'avere la palla al piede [...]. Altro che spalle al muro. Sei in croce; un grande riflettore di luce bianca, fermissima, ti è adosso e ti circonda. (*Manzini Ritratto* 189-90)

It came to the point where I could hear the dull sound of its gnawing. Until I had to give a name to this patient bloodhound: its real name. Its name is remorse. Remorse is a special kind of policeman. It gives you time because it knows you won't escape [...]. You belong to it. So it can afford to let you run, slip away, stop; however, little by little you begin to suspect you are dragging a ball and chain [...]. Your back is against the wall. You are desperate, and a great reflector of a very still white light white light that is on you and surrounds you. (*Manzini Full-Length* 142)

Psychoanalysts came to view trauma as an experience in which there is a disruption to a “protective shield”, a metaphoric but usually effective psychic barrier that could protect subjects from harmful and painful experiences (Freud "Beyond" 29).⁹¹ Not only was Manzini bereft of a protective barrier; it was replaced by the antithesis of protection in the form of an exposing light.⁹² For Manzini, remorse was “una zona d'ombra lavorato da un tarlo che, risalendo dal profondo, a lungo a lungo mi aveva incalzata, sgretolando” (*Manzini Ritratto* 189), “a shadowy area gnawed by a worm, which rising from the depths had harassed me for such a long time, devastating me” (*Manzini Full-Length* 142). Thus, although Manzini never referred to herself as traumatised, current understandings of the ways that trauma insinuates itself into a person's being support a reading of *Ritratto* that recognises her upbringing as traumatic, especially in its depiction of an

⁹¹ As stated by Freud, “We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (Freud "Beyond" 29).

⁹² As further example of the affinity between neuroscience and psychoanalysis, in Blum's opinion neurobiology supports the view that “organic changes occur within the central nervous system consequent to trauma” (Blum 417). Although psychoanalysis has always used the term “barrier” in a metaphorical sense, recent scientific findings demonstrate that in severe childhood trauma, the orbital frontal cortex does in fact undergo permanent developmental disruptions (Blum 417). Inadvertently, Manzini's description alludes to the breakdown of her protective shield.

existence devastated by loss, fear and guilt.⁹³

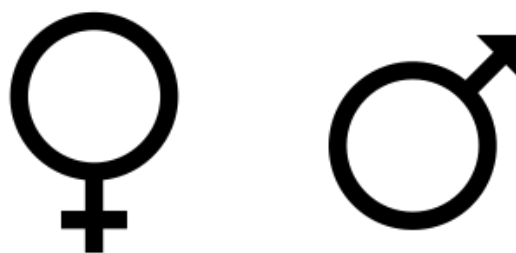
Containment: its role in trauma recovery

According to Rick Curnow, in psychological terms containment is the foundation of the relationship between the infant and the mother as the primary caregiver. The mother's role is to recognise and take in, as a container, the infant's anxieties (Curnow 5). Over and above the "logic" of responsibility, the mother's curiosity is an innate quality founded on a process of maternal attunement that arises out of her *reverie*, a term adopted by Bion and others, following the lead of Melanie Klein. From the French word for "dream", when used in psychoanalysis *reverie* refers to the relaxed state of attention given to inner emotional processes. Akin to daydreaming, *reverie* nonetheless accomplishes significant emotional work, probably because unconscious phantasies are at play behind the conscious imaginings of the person, however "dreamy" they are.

Closely resembling the mother-infant experience, during an analytic session it is often the role of the analyst to be attuned to the needs of the patient and to carry out a quasi-parental function by offering "an experience in which containment of distress" is possible (Curnow 8). Thereby patient and analyst become engaged in a spontaneous and reciprocal *reverie*, during which "internal experiences become represented externally first; they are observable and contribute to self-understanding" (Cooper 44). Thus, via the concept of containment, it is possible to apprehend another way of understanding Manzini's relationship with her animal tropes. They "contained" her emotional pain until she was able to approach it more directly and consciously.

Bion elevated the terminology "container and contained" to a utilitarian model depicting how both the conscious, verbal transactions and also the unconscious, extra-verbal transactions occurring within the analytic relationship are processed, drawing heavily on the analyst's capacity for *reverie*. He depicted the relationship thus:

⁹³ Every effort has been made to present an informed yet concise description of the psychoanalytic concepts presented in the chapter. While these are complex, even a cursory knowledge is valuable in order to grasp the chapter's contention that the evolution of Manzini's horse and dog characters functioned as pathways to her self-understanding.



The female symbol (left) is referred to as the container and the male symbol (right) represents a person's traumatic experiences and their accompanying emotions.⁹⁴

Thus, the male symbol is referred to as the contained, and it represents both conscious, articulated experience and also any, as yet, unmetabolised emotions. If the “female” capacity for containment is too small to hold the contained, then the “uncontained” emotions remain outside the relationship's capacity to recognise and “mentalise” them, resulting in emotions that can only be expelled by various destructive means (Fonagy).⁹⁵ In Manzini's case, unconscious trauma aroused a sequence of destructive emotions that were expelled through the flaring of psychosomatic symptoms and other avoidance tactics.⁹⁶ The chapter argues that they were also at least partially “held” and “digested”, in other words “mentalised”, within her relationship to her animal tropes. It is important to note that the container is not a static element and it can be “enlarged”. This occurs through the progressive processing, via the capacity for reverie, of unconscious “contents”, which then are transformed over time into conscious and symbolised experiences. In that respect, there is another model available to expand on the relevance of the processes described above. According to

⁹⁴ Although Bion referred to the symbols respectively as male (the contained) and female (the container), the symbols represent internal processes and are not intended to convey any gender connotations.

⁹⁵ Peter Fonagy and others have introduced the term “mentalisation” into the psychoanalytic lexicon. It constitutes a shorthand description of the processes described above, initially accomplished within the mother-baby dyad, and becomes, ultimately, descriptive of an individual's capacity to hold and process their own lived experiences.

⁹⁶ Such avoidance tactics include the writing of other works. In *Album*, Manzini states that several of her marginal works, for example *La civetta*, were a means of maintaining her distance (Manzini *Album* 228).

Ferro, narrative derivatives promote the development of alpha function and that, in turn, results in the “enlargement” of the container and, consequently, a greater number of contents that can be taken in and metabolised (Ferro *Avoiding* 61). The inference is that, as a person increases her capacity to process emotional experience, so she develops a greater capacity to transform trauma. Bion’s container-contained model is understood as shorthand for a dynamic process leading to new understanding.

In the light of Bion’s concept of the container-contained dynamic, the chapter conceives of Manzini’s relationship to her horse and dog characters as an ultimately successful example of a container-contained scenario, whereby her dread is reflected back to her in a tolerable form. The continuous interplay, over the decades, led to the expansion of her container until, finally, rather than turning away from the task of writing *Ritratto*, she was able to recognise her emotional obstacles as part of a broader avoidance tactic. By the time Manzini composed *Ritratto*, the horse and dog characters that accompanied her narrative trajectory were no longer viewed as external to her emotional reality but, rather, became the embodiment of it.

The analytic field

The analyst-patient relationship can be understood analogically as the equivalent of a mother-infant relationship, and, in turn, the psychoanalytic setting itself can represent the containing environment in which mother and infant interact. Yet another over-arching psychoanalytic concept proves useful at this point. Everything that transpires within that setting, including the self-experience of both participants, can be conceived of as the product of a dynamic, emotional and psychological “field”. The concept of the analytic field originated in the early 60s with Madeleine and Willy Baranger (Vermote 112). The Barangers conceptualised the psychoanalytic dyad of analyst and patient as a dynamic field in which the analytic pair remain “unavoidably connected and complementary”, thus forming “a single dynamic process”, recursively influencing each other’s discourse (Ferro and Basile 1). One view is that the analytic field represents the “theatre” created by the analyst and the patient engaged in a continuous and often unconscious communication, and the setting itself contains the evolving

environment that becomes populated by “characters” arising out of the emotional exchange between analyst and patient. Ferro and Foresti refer to processes within the dynamic field as proceeding “like an episode in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* [...] in which the reader and the author both become players [...]. Thus, the waiting, the questions, hopes, and uncertainties of the reading – and the writing – form the connective tissue of the narration” (Ferro and Foresti 76).

Similarly, the emotional exchange set up between Manzini and her unfolding texts functioned as a process analogous to that between a patient and analyst. The “field” created between Manzini and her texts enabled a recursive process that allowed for a series of interacting functions centred on, as Neri describes, “empathy, attention, attunement, reception, interpretation, etc.” that may interact either “positively, or else be blocked, inhibited or subverted” (Neri 49).⁹⁷ The field is comprised of three levels. The first level corresponds to the basic setting, usually the therapeutic space that initiates an emotional interaction between the parties present. The second level corresponds to the dynamic aspects of the “manifest content and verbal interaction”: that is, the stories and accounts the patient brings to the session. The third level corresponds to the “functional aspect of integration and insight” that evolves as a consequence of reverie (Neri 46). Relative to the processes of the analytic field, it should be noted that one of the fundamental changes that Bion makes to psychoanalytic theorising is to establish that dreaming is no longer be related solely to the sleeping state but occurs as a constant function, even during the waking state. And, just as it is impossible to consciously recall all the elements of dreams, subjects are usually unaware of their psychological metabolising function, which is active nonetheless (Ferro *Avoiding* 59). As Ferro explains, it is not the contents of the dream that matter, but the thought processes they are able to generate (Ferro *Avoiding* 61).

⁹⁷ Neri illustrates his point with the analogy of a hospital setting. He states: “When resolving clinical problems one needs to take account of the variables that don’t solely regard the patients but correspond to functions that are carried out by different members of staff, the relationship between themselves, the relationship between staff and patients. All of this summed up in the concise question that the doctor asks when starting the shift: ‘What is it like today?’” (Neri 49). Similar variables came into play with Manzini, whereby she and her “characters” would respond according to the experience unfolding in the course of narration.

Connections in *reverie*

The chapter proceeds with a description of narrative elements drawn from Chapter Five of *Ritratto* on the basis that numerous descriptions serve as narrative illustrations of processes of reverie signifying the containment of Manzini's emotional disturbance.⁹⁸ Chapter Five in *Ritratto* centres on Manzini's account of a day spent in the Pistoian countryside with her father for the purpose of a clandestine meeting between Giuseppe and his comrades. They have also brought their respective children who pass the time by playing, exploring the farm, and inventing games. Manzini recalls that the visit took place on a warm September day when the trees were laden with figs and pears. Despite the idyllic setting, however, Manzini, who is only eight years old at the time, finds herself unable to relax. She is constantly on the lookout because at any time authorities might get wind of the illegal gathering and storm in to arrest the anarchists.⁹⁹ In line with a more traditional evaluation, the critic Manfredo Anzini describes Manzini's writing as characterised by “debolezza della struttura narrativa”, (weak narrative structure); populated by an “ingordigia di immagini”, (excess of images), and weakened by an “evanescente linea narrativa”, (evanescent narrative line), all occurring as a result of “l'impossibilità congenitale nell'autrice di 'raccontare' nella sua semplice accezione” (Anzini 348-49), (the author's congenital inability to 'recount' in its simple meaning of the word).

Bringing Anzini's view into a more modern conceptual “field”, the study contends that a close analysis of Chapter Five highlights an alternative interpretation: one that underscores Manzini's ability for narrative cohesion, and thereby her capacity to recount events from a fine-grained perception of reality as demonstrated by Chapter Five's opening paragraph:

Che cos'è questo ovattato rombo negli orecchi? Il sangue o
un'eco lontanissima di passi cadenzati [...] m'incanta un fruscio,

⁹⁸ One of the major dog tropes discussed here appears in *Ritratto*'s Chapter Five. This chapter as a whole would feasibly lend itself to interpretation from a narrative derivatives perspective.

⁹⁹ The gathering took place to organise the anarchists' participation at the Congress of Amsterdam (also referred to as The International Socialist Congress), to demonstrate in favour of the legalisation of the eight-hour working day.

quasi di pettine in un'immensa elettrica capigliatura: vi serpeggia un suono come di querula velina, su un fremito di foglie; chioccola, monotona, una goccia in una conca, accordandosi col tonfo di frutti maturi su morbide zolle; e quasi luccica un tintinnio di bicchieri alzati. Ma plana su tutto, rèmica, quel canto antico. Anelito, più che canto, o invocazione imperiosa, si mischia davvero al rombo del sangue e ad una cadenza di passi. (Manzini *Ritratto* 130)

What is this dull roar in my ears? Blood? Or the distant echo of rhythmic footsteps [...] a rustle enchants me, almost like combs in the electricity of a big hairdo. A sound winds around like a querulous tissue paper on quivering leaves; it gurgles monotonously, a drip in a shell, harmonizing with the thud of ripe fruit on soft ground, and the sparkling tinkle of raised glasses. But gliding over everything, rowing, that old song. Panting more than singing, or imperious invocation, it mixes well with the roar of blood and rhythmic footsteps. (Manzini *Full-Length* 96)

Superficially, Manzini's descriptive enthusiasm seems to accord with Anzini's criticism of "excess of images". However, there is an unmistakable narrative cohesion to be gleaned from the phonic elements characterising the description. Her choice of words such as "rombo", "fruscio", "querula", "fremito", "chioccola", "tintinnio", and "anelito", ("roar", "rustle", "querulous", "quivering", "gurgles", "tinkle", and "panting"), phonically capture the disquiet embedded in her recollection of the day. A series of visual elements follow that opening scene. The sunrays are perceived as "sciabolate di sole che fendono una pergola e frastagliano l'ombra sulla tovaglia" (Manzini *Ritratto* 131), "Sun stripes slash a pergola and outline the shadow on the tablecloth" (Manzini *Full-Length* 96).¹⁰⁰ Reverting to sounds, Manzini follows with a description of fruit falling from the tree: "Tonfi di frutti che cadono; sfatto anche il rumore, un che di troppo maturo: l'ascolti e sei già sazia" (Manzini *Ritratto* 132), "Thuds of falling fruit; a muffled sound because it is overripe: your appetite is sated just by listening to it" (Manzini *Full-Length* 97). Out of that narrative soundscape of

¹⁰⁰ Manzini's Italian illustrates the notions elaborated in the chapter much more dramatically than King's translation. For example, the chapter adopts Manzini's "machine-gun fire" rather than King's "bombarded" because the latter is too generic a translation and falls short of Manzini's original onomatopoeic description, "mitragliare", the timbre of which captures the menace inherent in the wasps buzzing. Similarly, Manzini's original Italian "frastagliare" denotes a jagged quality lacking in the English term "outline".

overwhelming profusion interjects, menacingly, a memory of swarming wasps that, “mitragliavano” (machine-gun fire) (Manzini *Ritratto* 140), a constant threat to survival: “potessero pungere, e magari far morire?” (Manzini *Ritratto* 140), “Could their sting kill you?” (Manzini *Full-Length* 104). In light of these examples, the chapter contends that Manzini’s narration is guided by the principle of cohesive whole, one that is it conveyed through a semiotic fabula of childhood anxiety. This is gleaned in the descriptions of physical discomfort and as well as those presented here.¹⁰¹

Chapter Five also serves as an illustration of Neri’s concept of the three layers comprising the analytic field. The first layer corresponds to the basic setting invoked by Manzini’s memory of overt elements such as the weather (warmth), the location (countryside), and those present (fathers and their children), characterising Manzini’s recollection of the day. The second layer corresponds to her underlying fears and anxieties manifest through the menacing nature of the imagery “vespe impazzivano intorno ai grappoli d’uva” (Manzini *Ritratto* 139), “wasps went crazy around the grapes” (Manzini *Full-Length* 103). The third layer is detectable via the author’s interaction with the text, that is, by verbalising her experience. This third layer allowed Manzini to work through, the disruptive emotions permeating what should otherwise have been a joyful adventure for a child. Manzini reveals, “io sto dunque male [...]. Può darsi che orgoglio e paura, mischiati, facciano quest’effetto. L’effetto di essere in cima a un albero che non ti reggerà; ma scendere non si può: bisogna proibirselo: sarebbe il disonore” (Manzini *Ritratto* 141), “I don’t feel well [...]. Perhaps this is how pride and fear mixed together makes you feel. As though you are at the top of a tree that won’t support you, but you can’t come down, you can’t give in. It would be a disgrace” (Manzini *Full-Length* 105).

Drawing attention one final time to another of Anzini’s comments, the discussion addresses his criticism that in *Ritratto* Manzini constantly reverses narrative perspectives, thereby obscuring reality and fantasy (Anzini 350). The discussion counters Anzini’s argument by recourse to one

¹⁰¹ Physical discomfort as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

of Ferro's observations regarding his own perplexity upon reading Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* (2001). According to Ferro, Fforde's novel has a realistic setting populated with realistic characters but the story also abounds in "temporal and logical breaks" in effect, proving a distraction to the reader (Ferro *Avoiding* 61). Ferro's approach to such narrative conundrums involves advocating for a reader who is willing to "play along with the author and to partake with him [...] a world where time has a habit of bending suddenly and the boundaries between reality and fantasies are blurred" (Ferro *Avoiding* 61). Ironically, in a spirit similar to Ferro's view, Anzini provides his own solution to the dilemma by echoing, unwittingly, the notion of the analytic field when he suggests that Manzini's "reazioni di tipo emotivo-fantastico" (349) (emotive-fantasy reactions) are, ultimately, the result of her capacity to abandon herself to the "spiriti che ha evocati e si abbandona ad essi" (349), (emotions she has evoked and she abandons herself to them); or as Bion might have put it, her capacity to abandon herself to her reverie. Accordingly, Ferro cogently states that the concept of the field allows for a grouping of emotions using the narrative elements and characters as "oven gloves" that make it possible to touch "the scalding contents" (Ferro "Transformations" 217). Ferro's theory of narrative derivatives also grew out of Bion's conceptualisations of reverie and it is useful to have a basic knowledge of the factors involved in the process. Bion coined the terms *beta elements*, *alpha elements* and *alpha function*. Their purpose is to represent abstract concepts that provide the analyst with a series of "working therapeutic tools" to assist in his/her thinking process relative to the patient.

Beta elements are the unconscious sensations and raw emotions that constantly influence our mental state. Bion postulated that because the mind needs symbols to represent emotions, beta elements are transformed into alpha elements via the process of alpha function. Alpha function produces a combination of "pictorial or poetic images that represent our emotions" (Ferro *Avoiding* 49). Beta elements are therefore transformed into alpha elements, which can then be stored in memory and are convertible to the "building blocks" of dreams (Ferro *Avoiding* 49). Alpha elements usually combine in a sequence of emotional transitions that can be detected in any

number of narrated “genres” such as a childhood memory, a story of external life, the story of a film, a diary-style report, a lie, an intimate revelation; or in any other of an infinite number of possible modes (Ferro “Narrative” 185).¹⁰² Each of these instances, as they arise out of the analytic session, is viewed as a product of reverie.

Therefore, driven by a person’s ongoing production of alpha elements, reverie is the fundamental *modus operandi* that generates new thoughts by constructing and assembling the meanings behind narrative development. Along a similar line of thought, the chapter maintains that much of the dialogue in *Ritratto* may be interpreted as part of an ongoing reverie prefiguring the development of Manzini’s thought. In one instance, for example, as if speaking to an interlocutor, Manzini exclaims: “Tento di spiegare. Voglio dire proprio tutto” (Manzini *Ritratto* 190), “I’m trying to explain, I want to tell everything” (Manzini *Full-Length* 141). In another instance she states: “Col fiato mozzo, provo, riprovo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 15), “Gasping, I try, I try again” (Manzini *Full-Length* 5). In yet another, “Prendo tempo. Non so da che parte incominciare” (Manzini *Ritratto* 207), “I’m taking my time. I don’t know where to begin” (Manzini *Full-Length* 156). Just like the unscripted dialogue engaged in by analyst and patient, *Ritratto* illustrates the spontaneity of Manzini’s thought that ultimately guides the development of the content in *Ritratto*.

Replete with narrative derivatives, Chapter Five of *Ritratto* proves useful because it includes a sequence of alpha elements, construed as pictorial renditions of emotion. Recalling Manzini’s description of the presence of wasps as threatening as machine-gun fire, the reader takes in the “strano e pur naturale concerto di suoni interrotti”, (Manzini *Ritratto* 130), “strange and yet natural concert of interrupted sounds” (Manzini *Full-Length* 96), as quoted: rustle, panting, quivering, roar, which to Manzini represented “una congiura” (Manzini *Ritratto* 130), “a siege” (Manzini *Full-Length* 96). As her description of the day unfolds, Manzini intimates the fear that engulfed not only her existence, but also that of her mother: “Certo,

¹⁰² Of note is the similarity between Damasio’s notion of a-film-in-the-brain and Ferro’s explanation of alpha function to depict the moving sequence of emotional elements.

ogni volta che si metteva in viaggio, si stava col cuor in gola [...]. Scontri a fuoco, feriti... Chi sa la mamma...” (Manzini *Ritratto* 132), “Surely every time he went on a trip our heart was in our throat [...]. Exchange of gunfire wounded.... Poor mama...” (Manzini *Full-Length* 98). Memories in *Ritratto* are thus apprehended as narrative derivatives arising out of Manzini’s reverie. And, crucially for Manzini, the articulation of her reverie becomes the apparatus instrumental in her developing a further capacity for thought and understanding.

From defeat and despair to depiction and confrontation

This discussion begins by reference to the short story “Un cane” [A Dog] which first appears in Manzini’s 1953 publication *Animali sacri e profani* [Animals Sacred and Profane]. Bambù, the dog of the title, is a weak and feeble character who ventures outside for the first time after spending several months recuperating indoors from a wound to his eye.¹⁰³ Once outside, he seeks somewhere to rest, all the while remembering the humiliation and brutality suffered in his youth at the hands of a cruel owner. Manzini articulates Bambù’s thoughts: “Altri tempi, quando, a rialzarsi d’un balzo dopo il rimprovero che è necessario ricevere acquattati” (Manzini *Arca* 108) (Different times, when bouncing back from a reproach that was necessarily received from a crouching position). In a description that recalls Van der Kolk’s account of trauma as a physical aftermath, Manzini elaborates:

[...] una suola di scarpa più grande di tutto lui; anzi crede di ricordarla quella enorme suola, e ne piange languido, e si sente dolore il fianco sinistro, un dolore che davvero è un modo acuto con cui la carne sa ricordare; e teme di essere picchiato proprio in quel punto...infatti a lui qualcosa s’allenta nel petto (Manzini *Arca* 109).

(The sole of a shoe that is bigger than he. Indeed, he thinks he remembers that enormous sole and he cries languidly, feeling the pain in his left side, a pain that in reality, is the acute way that the flesh remembers; and he fears that he will be struck in that very spot ... infact, something loosens in his chest).

¹⁰³ “Un cane” is reproduced in *Arca di Noè*, the edition employed in this discussion.

As Bambù tries to make his way around the courtyard, he collapses. Face down on the ground, he feels his heart press against his throat: “Così disteso, si trovò vicino alla gola un cuore ingombrante da non sapere se sarebbe stato meglio inghiottirlo o sputarlo” (Manzini *Arca* 107), (stretched out as he was, his cumbersome heart pressed against his throat, not knowing whether to swallow it or spit it out). One way to interpret Bambù’s indecision – that is, whether to swallow or not – is as a representation of alpha function working to transform whatever is urging or pressing on the author’s mind. That activity is succinctly conveyed by Neri as “the ability of operating transformations in sensorial experiences, in tension and in emotions” (Neri 59). In this instance, however, Bambù is unable to achieve either one or the other and thus dies in silence. Ferro’s comments below help to shed light on Manzini’s choice to “kill off” Bambù as a reflection of the author’s inability to adequately symbolise a reality she was not ready to face:

What is it that we do to our patients if we insist that it is the truth that is the important thing? Do we sometimes hand them something like a dish that is too scalding to hold in their hands, or something that may even endanger their lives? Of course, each day I hope that my patient can bear to hear just a little more of the truth. (Ferro quoted in Maxwell 4)

Ferro’s hope that the patient/character will gradually gain the ability to face her emotions is epitomised by the second dog character addressed in this discussion. While remaining nameless, the dog nonetheless features in Chapter Five of *Ritratto*. Manzini begins her account by explaining that while she is exploring the farmyard, she happens to look up to the second storey of a barn where her eyes meet those of a large guard dog looking out a small window: “Affacciato come un uomo, appoggia [...]. Guarda a orecchi ritti, zitto. Scende, sparisce per un momento, ricompare, sempre nella stessa posizione” (Manzini *Ritratto* 142), “He looks out like a human [...]. He looks with ears alert, silent. He gets down, disappears for a moment and reappears, always in the same position” (Manzini *Full-Length* 105). Manzini conveys a very different dog from her feeble Bambù who can only look downwards. Meeting Manzini’s gaze, this dog communicates his

thoughts to his author:

Non chiede pietà, nemmeno aiuto, nemmeno comprensione, né amore. Dice soltanto: sono qui. Non rinunci anche alla minaccia [...] Più grande della sua, d'incatenato, è la mia impotenza a capacitarli. Se resisto su un'idea di rinuncia totale o di perdono sublime, perdo quota, fluttuo, non so più chi sono, né dove sono. (Manzini *Ritratto* 143)

He doesn't ask for pity, or even help, understanding, or love. He only says: I am here. Don't give up even if threatened [...]. My powerlessness to understand is greater than his, chained. If I hold to a notion of total renunciation or sublime forgiveness, I lose ground, I flounder, I don't know who I am or where I am anymore. (Manzini *Full-Length* 106)

Manzini's communion with the dog fosters her awareness of her psychic state, but it is his demeanour that allows her to embrace it as a step towards healing: "Con dolcezza soprannaturale del suo sguardo mi ha sdradicata. Ed eccomi cosciente d'un vuoto, d'una insufficienza, tali da rendermi inaccessibile la grazia, anzi la santità cui allude quietamente il suo occhio. (Manzini *Ritratto* 143), "He has shattered me with the supernatural sweetness of his gaze. And now I am conscious of an emptiness, an insufficiency, which makes inaccessible the grace, or rather the sanctity, that his eye quietly alludes to" (Manzini *Full-Length* 106). As though offering an unsaturated interpretation responding to her distress, Manzini asserts "mi ha evitata, senza urto, senza stacco, anzi dolcemente, facendo scivolare appena di un millimetro la pupilla verso l'angolo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 142), "he has avoided me without a collision, without a break, even sweetly, shifting his eye a bare millimetre to the corner" (Manzini *Full-Length* 106).

Earlier in the afternoon, a boy at the farm explained to Manzini that the dog was chained in the barn because it was a danger to the hens and the turtles. Yet, as a result of her communion with the dog, Manzini realises that far from representing danger, the dog delivers her a reassuring message: "Ascoltava. Capiva più di me" (Manzini *Ritratto* 146), "He was listening. He understood more than I" (Manzini *Full-Length* 106). It seems the dog grants her the relief she had always denied herself: "Abbassò le palpebre. Avevo bisogno di tregua: me la dette. Le rialzò. Mi ritrovò", (Manzini *Ritratto* 144), "He lowered his eyes. I needed a truce: he gave it to me. He

raised his eyes again, and found me again” (Manzini *Full-Length* 107). And so, eighteen years after Manzini first wrote in her diary that she wished to write Giuseppe’s “portrait” and, coincidentally, also eighteen years after the first publication of “Un cane”, Manzini looked to her dog character in *Ritratto* for a reprieve from her crippling state of mind.¹⁰⁴ Through that interaction she finally processed, intersubjectively, what had hitherto proved a reality too unbearable to face. Transformation is evident in a telling *reverie*, whereby Manzini deduces on behalf of her dog: “ha fiducia, una incommensurabile voraginosà fiducia [...] Sarai felice, sarai felice, gli dico” (my italics, Manzini *Ritratto* 159), “He has faith – immeasurable, bottomless faith [...] You will be happy, you will be happy, I say to him” (Manzini *Full-Length* 119). Thus, arriving at the end of her dog account, Manzini adopts the adjective ‘voraginosà’, from the noun ‘voragine’ (chasm), in relation to her growing positivity. A description previously employed by the author to depict her sense of childhood bewilderment is redeployed in a positive interpretation. Released from the barn that imprisoned him, the dog makes himself comfortable between Manzini and her father: “Ormai il cane aveva preso posto fra noi: era una presenza” (Manzini *Ritratto* 159), “By now the dog had taken its place with us. He was a presence” (Manzini *Full-Length* 119). Ending her account, Manzini asks her father about the state of the dog’s paws that were worn from resting on the windowsill day after day: “come saranno nel punto in cui calano in quelle fosse? Con le piaghe?” (Manzini *Ritratto* 160), “What do his forepaws look like that fit into those groves. Will he have sores?” (Manzini *Full-Length* 120). Again, Manzini’s narration relies on a physical representation. On this occasion, perturbed by the pain the dog is experiencing, it is Giuseppe’s turn to articulate a statement of consolation “lo rimetteremo a nuovo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 160), “we will get him back in shape like new” (Manzini *Full-Length* 120).

This study now turns to an examination of Manzini’s horse characters, beginning with a short story titled “Un cavallo” [A Horse], which first appeared in her 1953 novel *Animali sacri e profani*, [Sacred and Profane

¹⁰⁴ She writes: “Un rimorso che ci coinvolge tutti, e c’imbratta di vergogna” (Manzini *Ritratto* 142), “A remorse that involves everyone, soiling us with shame” (Manzini *Full-Length* 106).

Animals].¹⁰⁵ The horse, Giangio, is a moribund creature on the brink of succumbing after years of toil. Swallows fly over him but he can only know this from the shadows they cast on the ground. Too weary to look up, Giangio is denied a direct association with his environment: “Rasente al triste sacco floscio, appeso agli orecchi, volavano rondini [...]. Movendo in breve giro, Giangio cercava in terra l’ombra di quel volo e di quella gioia [...] per un attimo specchiata, insieme a uno spicchio di cielo, in una pozza d’orina” (Manzini *Arca* 22), (Brushing against his sad, floppy sack that hangs from his ears, swallows flew [...] Moving around slowly, Giangio looked on the ground for the shadow of that flight and that joy [...] mirrored momentarily, together with a wedge of sky, in a puddle of urine).

Despite his age, Giangio is a work horse but he struggles to cross a bridge in order to reach the marketplace his driver is intent on reaching: “La fatica di salire oggi è tanta che, giunto in cima, assai svanito, si ferma e non vuol saperne di scendere” (Manzini *Arca* 23), (The effort to climb the bridge today is such that once he reaches the top, he is too exhausted to face the descent). In the moments before his driver began their journey over the bridge, Giangio was musing about his youth as a circus horse performing alongside another horse, Rho, that Manzini describes as a richly decorated, large and powerful animal. Commanding Giangio’s attention, Rho’s presence becomes “sempre più prossimo agli orecchi: vuole essere riconosciuto. E lo riconosce, infatti” (Manzini *Arca* 25), (Ever closer to his ears: he wants to be recognised. And indeed, he is). Absorbed by his *reverie*, Giangio is slow to realise the dull pain in his side and, in the moments that follow, a woman looking out her window notices that the horse is bleeding. Giangio is dying, his vital organs collapsing. In an effort to spare him further suffering, the horse is shot. Viewed as a narrative derivative of Manzini’s pain, Giangio is “killed off” because he symbolises Manzini’s sense of danger, the “scalding contents” of her memory, as it were, taking her too close to the painful emotions evoked by her father’s memory.

The second horse story, drawn from *Forte*, was published in 1947 as part of a collection of essays and relates to the same horse cited at the

¹⁰⁵ “Un cavallo” is reproduced in *Arca di Noè*, the edition employed in this discussion.

beginning of this chapter. Manzini's account is constructed around the hours following a deliberately lit fire that burned down a carousel. Looters have taken away most of the remnants but have left behind a beautiful wooden pony whose tiny decorative mirrors shine in the sunlight. As illustrated in the opening citation, Manzini's anecdote also features a real horse. Emaciated and nameless, this horse is worn out after years of work pulling the carousel around for people to ride. Both this and the 1929 story share several similarities. Like Giangio who thinks back to his circus partner, Rho, the second horse also thinks back to a distant, earlier life: "pensa qualcosa di struggente come l'inafferrabile ricordo della madre" (Manzini *Forte* 13), (he thinks of something as heart-wrenching as the elusive memory of his mother). And, just as Giangio's view of the world around him depends on the puddle of urine, the second horse is forced to view his environment through the fractured reflection in a trough of murky water. However, identifying with her 1947 horse, Manzini infuses her account with a reverie speculating on how fractured the carousel must appear to the horse: "Un giorno m'è tornata alla memoria l'immagine d'una cassetta d'acqua bruna vicino al palo al quale il cavallo girava, e ho capito come dovesse apparirgli, specchiata e frantumata lì dentro, tutta la giostra" (Manzini *Forte* 13), (One day, the memory came to mind of a trough full of murky water close to the pole around which the horse turned, and I understood how the carousel, mirrored and fragmented in it must have appeared to him).

The wooden pony bears similarities to Rho. Both characters are youthful, strong and ornately decorated, with a commanding demeanour: an unconscious indication, perhaps, that something needs to be addressed and expressed.¹⁰⁶ To be sure, Manzini opens *Forte* with the admission: "la mia maggior risorsa, l'immediatezza" (Manzini *Forte* 11), (my greatest resource, immediacy). Despite her intentions, as she comes to the end of her narration the immediacy required to write eludes her "intanto indugio contro la spalletta d'un ponte sul Tevere" (Manzini *Forte* 14), (meanwhile, I linger against the parapet of a bridge over the Tiber). Unable to process the significance of her hesitation hindering narrative immediacy, Manzini

¹⁰⁶ Such as the need to explore the reasons underlying the overwhelming emotions characterising Manzini's relationship with her father.

curtains her anecdote with the explanation: “Del cavallino di legno, avrei fatto un pezzo di oreficeria” (Manzini *Forte* 15), (Out of the wooden horse, I would have created a piece of jewellery). And as though needing to forestall her lack of progress, Manzini concludes: “il mio racconto da cominciare non m’è piaciuto più [...]. Era troppo stravagante” (Manzini *Forte* 15), (I no longer liked my story which I was yet to begin [...]. It was too extravagant).¹⁰⁷ In these passages, however, her descriptions do still speak to a subtle, tentative containment of her emotions. Manzini’s perception that her story was “too extravagant”, or, rather, too difficult to put into words, represents the author’s embryonic insight and thereby speaks to a growing capacity to process her experience. By leaving the stage, the horses engage the author in a dialogue that informs her that it is not, yet, the time to approach the “scalding” contents of her father’s memory.¹⁰⁸

In 1953, a significant transformation occurs with one of Manzini’s horse characters in another short story entitled, “Il cavallo di San Paolo” [Saint Paul’s Horse], inspired by Parmigianino’s *La conversione di San Paolo* (Saint Paul’s Conversion) (Manzini *Arca*).¹⁰⁹ The painting captures the moment that Saint Paul realises that the rays of light coming through the clouds are a message from God. Reminiscent of Rho and the wooden horse in the earlier stories, the horse in this story is also vigorous and proud, and, viewing the sky, exclaims, “quand’ecco che questa realtà, già irreale, diventa insieme cielo e miracolo, cielo e apparizione” (Manzini *Arca* 194), (behold this reality, already unreality, which becomes at once, sky and miracle, sky and apparition). Upon seeing the supernatural rays slicing through the clouds, the horse rears in wonderment and dismounts Saint Paul.

Manzini’s story unfolds as a re-imagining of the events that follow.

¹⁰⁷ Arguably an allusion to Manzini’s penchant for descriptive complexity, she opens her account by stating that even her handwriting “somiglia alla pressione varia ed eccessiva delle mie emozioni” (Manzini *Forte* 11), (resembles the varied and excessive pressure of my emotions). Interestingly, this revelation leads into Manzini’s account of her remorse at having ridiculed Giuseppe’s writing style (see footnote 43).

¹⁰⁸ This notion accords with Manzini’s admission in *Album*, which states that several of her works were a means of “acclimatising” to her father’s memory with the hope of overcoming her psychosomatic reactions (Manzini *Album* 229).

¹⁰⁹ “Il cavallo di San Paolo” is reproduced in *Arca di Noè*, the edition employed in this discussion.

Saint Paul's horse rouses his rider from his stupor and, with a movement of his head, points in the direction of the city. Saint Paul heads towards the city, galloping at lightening speed because the people must be told of the miracle. Manzini's admission that she wants to tell everything comes to mind. However, the people are sceptical of the Saint's story: too many charlatans roam the cities. At that point in the text, Manzini questions whether there is, indeed, a difference between the expression of one who has witnessed and one who pretends to have witnessed: "E, del resto, c'è poi una visibile differenza fra l'aspetto d'uno cha ha visto e quello di chi finge di aver visto?" (Manzini *Arca* 194), (And besides, is it possible to distinguish between one who has seen and one who pretends to have seen?). Despite his best efforts, Saint Paul fails to convince the onlookers and he is humiliated. With the capacity to understand this turn of events, Saint Paul's horse rears; a gesture so dramatic that the crowd is convinced that Saint Paul is telling the truth. Manzini seems to be implying that it is the animals, rather than the humans that possess a special capacity to disclose the truth.¹¹⁰ She ends her narration by stating that the story came to her while viewing Parmigianino's painting in the art gallery. She stood before it for ten minutes, and found that by the time she moved on to the next painting she was gasping for breath: "Quando mi allontanai dal dipinto [...] ero trafelata, tanto avevo corso in quei dieci minuti", (Manzini *Arca* 198), (Walking away from that painting [...] I was breathless, I had covered so much ground in those ten minutes).

Several elements distinguish this horse story from the previous ones. While the earlier stories include a meta-narrative concerning another horse, Saint Paul's horse features alone and is fully engaged in present events. Able to look up and around, this horse is granted a clear view of his environment. And, rather than succumbing to inevitable death, this horse is enlivened by the occurrences of the day, drawn out of his "silenzio poetico" (Manzini *Arca* 194), (poetic silence) by a miraculous experience. As a means of informing herself that she should be listening to what her horse is trying to communicate, the commandment, "Guardatemi" (Manzini *Arca* 198), (Look at me), becomes the imperative of the day. Perhaps Manzini must also learn to listen to her body.

¹¹⁰ Animals, like the body, have their own wisdom.

In 1971 Manzini's horse trope appears for the final time.¹¹¹ The scene unfolds in *Ritratto* with Lillo, a horse who has become alarmed and frightened, refusing to haul a cart across Florence's Santa Trinita Bridge:

A Firenze, a un cavallo da piazza, non potevano fare attraversare il ponte Santa Trinità. Giunto a metà, voleva saltare la spalletta e buttarsi di sotto, con la carrozza e tutto. Il vetturino diceva: 'Buono, Lillo, buono'; e tentava di trascinarlo per la cavezza. Macché. S'impuntava; schiumava; impazziva. E soltanto su quel ponte. Nessuno sapeva spiegarsi la cosa. Non c'era nulla da ricordare. Tutto accadde dall'oggi al domani. Ombroso, non era stato mai. (Manzini *Ritratto* 13)

They couldn't get a carriage horse to cross the Santa Trinita Bridge in Florence. When it got halfway across it tried to jump over the parapet with the carriage and everything in it. The driver said: "Good boy, Lillo, good boy," and tried to pull him by the reins. Useless. The horse stopped dead, foamed at the mouth, and went crazy. And only on that bridge. No one could explain it or think of any reason for it. It happened from one day to the next; the horse had never been skittish before. (Manzini *Full-Length* 3)

Lillo's alarm leads Manzini to enquire:

Che avrà visto, a metà dell'arcata del ponte? Quale ricordo, quale spettro sarà insorto a bloccarlo? Quale percezione d'un ostacolo imminente e terrificante? Che nessuno potesse capacitarsi, vedere, capire insieme con lui, e lo lasciasse lì, senza alcun possibile soccorso di fronte al proprio incommunicabile terrore, questo apriva una voragine di solitudine nella quale si dibatteva col peso de' suoi molti anni. (Manzini *Ritratto* 13)

What could he have seen halfway across the bridge? What memory, what ghost could have sprung up to block him? What perception of an impending and terrifying obstacle? No one could understand what was happening or see what he saw, and he was left helpless to face his incommunicable terror alone; an abyss of solitude opened in which he floundered with the weight of his many years. (Manzini *Full-Length* 3)

Lillo, Manzini's delegate, represents the terrifying impact of delving into the memory of her father. A high degree of narrative transformation takes place in the form of recognition of the fear that repeatedly hindered

¹¹¹ Although *Ritratto* contains several horse characters none are invested with the self-referential significance that Manzini gives Lillo.

her. Lillo's state of mind mirrors Manzini's:

Ebbene, in certi momenti, mentre mi provo a scrivere la vita del babbo, io sono quel cavallo, a metà del ponte. M'impenno. Non vado avanti. Addirittura torno indietro. Sconvolta? Tanto; ma non abbastanza. Infatti mi butto su un diverso lavoro; posso perfino attirare su di me un malanno o una malattia; prometto; riprometto; ma con un senso di colpa, di struggimento, di pace perduta. (Manzini *Ritratto* 14)

Well, at certain times when I try to write my father's life, I am that horse halfway across the bridge. I rear up. I do not go on. I turn back. Unnerved? Very, but not enough. In fact, I throw myself into other work; I can even attract misfortune or illness; I make promises; I make them again but with a sense of guilt, of torment, of lost peace. (Manzini *Full-Length* 4)

In his discussion of narrative derivatives, Ferro explains that the “driving force of the story is the need to find a space-time in which to develop the capacity to think and say that which cannot be said” (Ferro *Avoiding* 11). For most of her life, Manzini seemed unable to understand the significance of the fear and dread occasioned by her attempts to write *Ritratto*. The cause lay deep in her unconscious and proved just as crippling as the morbidity afflicting her early dog and horse tropes. Nonetheless, those early stories also functioned as reflections (in urine, in murky water, in tiny mirrors) of Manzini's need for distance from her trauma. The chapter argues that the gradual development of her horse characters provided her the space and time for her emotional container to build capacity. In retrospect, her initial recoil from her task was likely more than a simple avoidance tactic. It was, rather, an essential coping mechanism. Thus, two pathways to transformation become evident. On the one hand, the development inherent in her dog narratives encapsulates Manzini's sense of healing and consolation, finally attained by fulfilling her goal. On the other hand, her horse characters work in favour of establishing the distress occasioned by her memories of Giuseppe as the cause of her resistance, and of its physical manifestations. Together, the dog and horse tropes are characters in an ever-evolving interactive process realising Manzini's emotional status at the time of writing in more or less successful representations.

Reading Manzini's description of her anguished horse on the bridge,

one is reminded of Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893). Like Manzini's, Munch's childhood was also plagued by pain and longing (Watson n.p.). Many of the artist's early paintings depict motifs reminiscent of Manzini's early horse and dog stories: portrayals of sickness, death, and incommunicability. Munch's 1885 painting *The Sick Child*, for example, depicts a group of unresponsive, grieving characters seated around a bedridden child, each character withdrawn in pain. A few years after *The Sick Child*, in 1892, Munch produced *Melancholy*, a work depicting an isolated figure bent over, seemingly engrossed in a state of pensiveness. That painting possibly foreshadows the realisation of emotions discharged subsequently in *The Scream*. An image of anguish and despair, *The Scream* can also be understood as a narrative derivative functioning as the container for Munch's reverie: one that captures and reflects back to the artist the agony he had struggled to symbolise since childhood. Like Lillo, Manzini's final horse in *Ritratto*, *The Scream* functions as both the container and conveyor of emotions that pressed for expression. Indeed, it seemed to have heralded a narrative transformation exemplified by the painter's choice to give his later paintings specific emotions as titles: *Anxiety* (1894), and *Jealousy* (1895), for example.

Narrative transformation(s)

Narrative transformation is a means of trauma recovery.¹¹² The term was coined by Ferro to describe the process whereby beta elements are transformed into alpha elements, which are then, in turn, combined as narrative derivatives, rendering them containable and therefore thinkable. The result is that the traumatised person is able to represent intolerable emotions rather than evacuating them in destructive ways. Manzini's early horse and dog stories can be viewed as referring to two forms of encounter in the "field" constituted by her relationship with her writing. Initially, the need for avoidance was played out in the characterisation of her depleted horse and dog characters and her need to avert her gaze from their/her own

¹¹² Ferro acknowledges others who have contributed to the conceptualisation of transformation citing, for example, Francesco Corrao's theory of "narrative transformations". Ferro's own formulation is based on Bion's work, but ultimately, as Ferro states, they all refer to the patient's affective transformation (Ferro *Avoiding* 26).

suffering by curtailing their lives. Narrative transformation was nonetheless occurring because, by displacing her unacknowledged emotions into external characters, she achieved some partial representation of them *en route* to making them easier to accept. With time, Manzini's capacity for re-casting and re-narrating those same characters recursively created for the author "new openings for meaning" with each narrative (Ferro "Two Authors" 51). In the context of these considerations – the recurring image of the horse and the dog and Ferro's theory of narrative derivatives – it can be concluded that Manzini's trauma was virtually unable to be represented for the greater part of her life. And, although her early narratives did not fully resolve her trauma, they do display some of the elements contributing to a gradual and progressive recognition of her emotional blockages. Over time, the interplay between Manzini and her horse and dog tropes proceed as a co-construction, culminating with recognition and transformation of the dread that leads her to baulk at her task, just as her final horse baulks at his task of crossing the bridge.

However, Manzini's commerce with horse tropes had not quite come to an end. In her final book *Sulla soglia*, in the eponymous "Sulla soglia", the horse has been replaced by a horse trader, a wily character that Manzini finds unappealing and ignorant of the horse's true nature: "Eppure mi era sommamente antipatico. 'Ma i cavalli', gli dicevo zitta, con ben altro accento, 'gli hai mai guardati davvero, tu che ci vivevi in mezzo?'" (Manzini *Soglia* 80), (And yet, I found him completely disagreeable. But the horses, I stated quietly, in a different tone, have you ever truly looked at them, you who lived in their midst?) This study contends that in many ways like her horse trader, Manzini intuited that she also had been trading in the horse image, not understanding but biding her time until meaning was achieved.

Chapter Three – Nilda

Prologue: the seeds of sedition.

In 1895 Nilda entered into a marriage with Giuseppe that in many ways was doomed from the start.¹¹³ Despite the love shared by the couple, family unity was constantly disrupted due to Giuseppe's illegal anarchist activity. The Manzini extended family consisted of a hostile aunt on Giuseppe's side and Nilda's conservative siblings, a brother and two sisters, who opposed Nilda's marriage to Giuseppe. From a very young age Gianna suffered from severe and chronic asthma for which she needed frequent medical attention.¹¹⁴ The early years of the twentieth century saw Giuseppe repeatedly exiled. Succumbing to her family's wishes that she legally separate from Giuseppe, Nilda agreed to live in the family home. By acceding to her siblings' wishes it may be assumed that Nilda was motivated by the desire to provide an environment beneficial to her daughter's stability and well-being. In reality, however, that arrangement granted Nilda and Manzini very little solace. Caught as they were in the maelstrom of strife perpetuated by the family patriarchs – Giuseppe and Nilda's brother – stability was elusive. For Nilda, who found herself torn between love and admiration for Giuseppe and a sense of indebtedness to her siblings who did not hide their enmity for Giuseppe, there was little reprieve from a confrontational existence. At the completion of Manzini's secondary education in 1914, Manzini and Nilda were presented with the opportunity to leave Pistoia. Severing ties with her siblings and Pistoia, Nilda moved to Florence. Despite the conventions of the day that controlled and manipulated women's lives, she did not hesitate to prioritise her daughter's needs and future prospects, even if it meant giving up the (physically) comfortable lifestyle they knew in Pistoia.

¹¹³ Reflecting *Ritratto*'s tripartite structure centred squarely on Giuseppe, the present chapter is largely focussed on Nilda. It comprises a prologue, a main body, and an epilogue. Given Nilda's lack of verbal presence in *Ritratto*, the prologue provides insight into her unspoken reality as well as the underlying character strength that allowed her to overcome some of her difficulties. With the epilogue concluding the chapter, Manzini is restored as the central focus of discussion.

¹¹⁴ Asthma was a dangerous condition that was difficult to treat in Manzini's era, as can be understood by her description "la tosse l'avevo già a strascico di quella convulsa di anni prima: e, più o meno, mi rimane adosso" (Manzini *Ritratto* 75), "I already had a cough left over from that convulsive one of the year before, which had more or less stayed with me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 51).

Introduction

Nilda has hitherto received almost universally negative critical commentary. For the most part, commentators who draw their criticisms from content in *Ritratto* construe her as a weak and marginal entity in that work and also, by extension, in Manzini's life (Amoia).¹¹⁵ The present chapter contends that contrary to those views Manzini's characterisation of Nilda in *Ritratto* is far more nuanced, and that she and Manzini shared a much deeper connection than the common view allows for. Indeed, as exceptionally noted by Giovanna Miceli-Jeffries, Giuseppe's portrayal is monodimensional whereas Nilda's representation is far more "convincing and human" (Miceli-Jeffries 103).¹¹⁶ Rather than accepting the dominant view at face value, Manzini's portrayal of Nilda needs to be more closely analysed so as to arrive at a more subtle and realistic evaluation of Nilda's character. To this end, the chapter contends that, though at times misdirected and misunderstood, Nilda's efforts to ensure the best outcome for her daughter's future may be equated with Giuseppe's dedication to the principles of his ascetic lifestyle. For these reasons, Nilda is viewed as a pathway to Manzini's trauma recovery.

It is the chapter's contention that any evaluation of Nilda's character must be preceded by an appraisal of the oppression that governed the lives of women of Nilda's era and circumscribed their ability to think about, let alone behave outside expected norms of behaviour. Therefore, in large part, Nilda's submissiveness should be understood as the outcome of social conditioning determining her choices and behaviour. Counterbalancing this view, the chapter acknowledges Nilda's capacity to deploy a degree of

¹¹⁵ Critics have generally adopted the view that Giuseppe exercised the greater and more positive influence in Manzini's life, as can be understood by Alba Amoia's comment, for example, that although the author was "frail and ailing, she was remarkably tough-minded – a trait probably inherited from her father" (Amoia 28).

¹¹⁶ Giovanna Miceli-Jeffries says, "while the father's figure acquires solemnity and rigidity in his heroic portrayal, the mother's personality becomes more convincing and human" (Miceli-Jeffries 103). Miceli-Jeffries further states that Nilda's portrayal is, "of a sensitive, lacerated human being trapped in one of womankind's social and historical roles (Miceli-Jeffries 103). While this view is generally true, it does not account for Nilda's readiness to abandon her family home and the comfort of living with her siblings for an uncertain future in Florence with Manzini.

defiance and self-determination contrary to family expectations that, although subtle, is amply demonstrated in *Ritratto*. Such considerations and apparent contradictions allow the chapter to construct an alternative evaluation of Nilda's character and her relationship with Manzini.

Had Nilda accompanied her husband into exile like Natalia Ginzburg, she might possibly have been received in a better light.¹¹⁷ The fact that Nilda and Ginzburg lived in two different historical eras, each punctuated by the ravages of a World War, may account at least in part for their respective decision whether or not to accompany their husbands into exile.¹¹⁸ Two and a half decades transpired between World War One and World War Two, during which time society was conditioned by a different set of values and beliefs. What was unthinkable in one era became the acceptable norm in the following era. Speaking to the role of societal influence upon the development of a person's character, the philosopher Hannah Arendt asserts that in evaluating a person's character one must foremost bear in mind that the qualities and defects of that person's character are but a revelation of the wider social forces that have conditioned the individual's conduct (Arendt).¹¹⁹ Thus, while the feminist advocacy of Anna Maria Mozzoni, Nilda's contemporary, was in progress and Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1960) was penning her quest for freedom and equality in her autobiographical novel *Una donna* (1906) (*A Woman*), much of Nilda's behaviour was determined by the anonymous forces subjugating the majority of women for whom, unlike Mozzoni and Aleramo, escape from that subjugation was unimaginable (Aleramo).¹²⁰ Arendt's insight highlights the distinction

¹¹⁷ Ginzburg followed her husband Leone to a village in Abruzzo where he was exiled for his anti-fascist activities. During that period Natalia raised the couple's three young children. She recounts her life in exile in *Lessico familiare*.

¹¹⁸ The chapter does not compare Ginzburg's experience with Nilda's, the intent here being to demonstrate that by living in an earlier era, Nilda was influenced by a different conventional mindset. Indeed, as will be addressed in this chapter, according to Manzini, Nilda was not altogether unwilling to accompany Giuseppe into exile.

¹¹⁹ Arendt's philosophy centred on the principle that humanity is latently conditioned by the society that, in turn, is created by humanity, creating, thus, a continuously reciprocal influence (Arendt 9).

¹²⁰ Considered to be the founder of Italian feminism, Anna Maria Mozzoni (1837-1920) criticised Italy's Civil Code on the basis that it was "detrimental to women's rights and position in society" by placing "the family's destiny" in the hands of men who "were lacking the skills to guide their families" (Kimble 5). Mozzoni is also noted for her translation of the British philosopher and political economist, John Stuart Mill's book *The Subjection of Women* (1869). In line with Mozzoni's feminist ideals, Mill's essay

between human nature and the human condition, facilitating this chapter's interpretation of Nilda. The analysis borrows from philosophy and psychoanalysis to problematise the unseen forces underlying people's attitudes and behaviour. The first part of the chapter focuses on historical context by undertaking an interpretation of Nilda through the lens of the philosophy of Michel Foucault. The second part of the chapter turns to a psychoanalytically-based interpretation of Nilda's behaviour in accordance with Wilfred Bion's theories of group relations, deployed to illuminate unconscious family dynamics. An outline of the present chapter follows precedes a brief description of Foucault's theoretical framework.

Michel Foucault

The French historian/philosopher Michel Foucault maintained that because history is limited by what is “thinkable at a given epochal moment”, the lessons that may be derived from it “do not lie in an interpretation based on what people thought and did in the past” because all historical periods are ineluctably underpinned by an “an internal history”, a term coined by the philosopher to describe what it is that operates on people and coerces them to think in a particular way without their awareness of those forces or influences (Downing 10).¹²¹

As a historian, Foucault came to condemn the conventional view of history because it relied on the “goal directedness of consciousness”, sponsored by universal grand narratives that are adopted as comprehensive explanations of historical experience and knowledge (Prickett 18).¹²² This situation presents a paradox in that, by their nature, grand narratives encapsulate globalising and totalising views of universal truths that, in

argued for legal and social equality between men and women.

¹²¹ One of the most consistently quoted theorists in the humanities, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a historian and philosopher whose body of work centred on questioning the effect of modern human sciences on society.

¹²² In this discussion, the term grand narrative is a philosophical reference designating those ideologies that legitimise philosophies of history. Some of the more widely recognised philosophies of history are Christianity, Marxism, and Patriarchy. According to Stephen Prickett, Greek fatalism is also a grand narrative. In reference to the the Homeric epics, so crucial to Greek identity, Prickett notes that the root of the word identity signifies “sameness” rather than “individuality”, thus supporting a globalised notion of norms of behaviour (Prickett 18).

effect, signify something more akin to mythology than reality (Gutting).¹²³ Following his contemporary François Lyotard (1924-1998), Foucault postulated that an approximation of truth, which in any case is a protean entity, is attained through the lens of the “silenced voices” of the meta-narratives that have “gone unheard in the traditional ‘grand narrative’ of modern history” (Downing 31).¹²⁴

Looking within the meta-narratives of history, it is possible to expose the “concealed social and intellectual rules that permit [grand narratives] to be made in the first place” (Prickett 7). Foucault’s view of meta-narrative assists in understanding of the underlying factors that conditioned women in Nilda’s era to conform to expected standards of behaviour such as obedience and passivity.¹²⁵ Moreover, Foucault’s theories also stress that a generation cannot think ahead of its historical epoch and, accordingly, should not be evaluated against the standards of a future era. Language emerges from the capacity for self-perception, which is impossible to achieve while a society is in the throes of its specific epoch (Downing 10). In essence, a lack of language equates to a lack of power; a theme central to Foucault’s work. Turning the Baconian phrase “knowledge is power” on its head, he argues that “power is knowledge” because knowledge itself is the true instrument of power.

¹²³ An illustration of the distortion of conventional historical accounts is Baron Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *History of England* (1848), which, Gutting argues, represents not only a distorted narration of the “past time in terms of its own conceptions and concerns”, but also a gradual illusory progress towards the so-called “glorious present” of the modern era (Gutting 34).

¹²⁴ Meta-narratives represent the small stories within the larger story contributing to the grand narrative’s ability to sustain the status quo. An example of meta-narrative is perceptible in Giuseppe’s initiative to travel to remote areas to teach the children who lacked the means to reach school (Manzini *Ritratto* 32). It may be argued that the children’s inability to attend school contributed to the high level of illiteracy among people who lived in remote areas, thus perpetuating as a meta-narrative, the false notion of country people’s diminished intellectual capacity.

¹²⁵ In the stereotype of Nilda as weak and bourgeois, she is seen as part of a narrative that offers a fixed view that is familiar but ultimately teaches little that is new. According to Foucault, each historical era had “its way of producing people that conformed to its expectations and needs” (Foucault quoted in Downing 10). Literary characters such as Lampedusa’s Maria Stella in *The Leopard* (1958), for example, provide an insight into the underlying societal conventions and expectations that shaped people’s behaviour. In Maria Stella’s case, despite bearing seven children, she never fully attains adult status in her husband’s perception, understood by his use of the diminutive appellation “Stelluccia” (Tomas di Lampedusa). A more constructive evaluation of the character might be attained by analysing her infantilised character as the result, at least in part, of her unconscious adherence to the expectations of her social milieu.

Grand narratives exert their power over society by sponsoring the formulations of “categories, averages, and norms that are in turn the basis for knowledge” (Gutting and Oksala 3.4).¹²⁶ The danger of such processes is that they lead to normalisations that are unconsciously adopted as the only acceptable norms of behaviour. Based on these deliberations, the chapter examines some of the ways in which Nilda unconsciously colluded to perpetuate her status quo within her socio-cultural environment: a status quo that latently enforced an insidious oppression that demanded silence and obedience from women. For women of Nilda’s era and social class such oppression proved all the more difficult to identify because it was cossetted within the bourgeois normalisations of daily life.

Chapter outline

Expanding on the chapter’s prologue designed to illustrate the difficult circumstances encountered by Nilda, the chapter presents a further summary of her life and character.¹²⁷ This is followed by an overview of some of the published criticism regarding Nilda and also a summary referencing Manzini’s own view of her mother. A discussion based on Foucault’s theory pertaining to archaeology and genealogy follows.

Manzini’s narrative offers a myriad of textual examples illustrating the latent forms of power operating within Italian society. Two such power constructs explored by the chapter are *bella figura* and the Church. At the conclusion of the Foucault-based discussion, the chapter segues into a consideration of the symbolic communication inherent in style of dress. That discussion leads into another of *Ritratto*’s prominent tropes: sewing and embroidery. Taking its lead from Patrizia Sambuco’s analysis of Elena Ferrante’s novel *L’amore molesto*, the chapter explores that trope as an allusion to Manzini’s trusting relationship with her mother. Sambuco construes the prevalence of sewing and clothes in Ferrante’s novel as a form of tacit communication. Similarly, Manzini’s focus on her mother’s delicate,

¹²⁶ The result of such practices is that the individual is transformed into “a ‘case’ – in both senses of the term: a scientific example and an object of care. Caring is always an opportunity for control” (Gutting and Oksala 3.4). Detectable for example, in the Prince’s use of the diminutive appellation *Stelluccia*.

¹²⁷ The prologue on Nilda and the summary of her life, along with the summaries of Giuseppe and Manzini’s life, allow the reader to become acquainted with all three protagonists of *Ritratto*.

skilled work in creating her clothes speaks of a tacit, pre-cognitive communication existing between the pair, as beneficial to Manzini's emotional stability as her intellectual communication with Giuseppe. By various means, Nilda is understood to bring a sense of relief and solace to Manzini in contradistinction to the anguish precipitated by her father's *modus vivendi*. Giuseppe's voice features prominently in *Ritratto*. By comparison, Nilda hardly makes an appearance. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, Manzini tenderly weaves Nilda's presence into *Ritratto*'s narrative backcloth. As part of the study, the chapter further interprets Nilda's dedication to embroidery and sewing as resembling the practice of gardening in Alice Walker's work *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Manzini's writing style can be understood to have evolved in imitation or admiration for Nilda's example of intricate dressmaking. In the course of the discussion the chapter draws on textual examples drawn from *Lettera all'editore* (1945), (*Game Plan for a Novel*), (hereafter *Game Plan*), *Ritratto*, and *Sulla soglia* [On the Threshold] (hereafter *Soglia*).

Following these considerations, the chapter turns to Bion's theory of group mentality. For contextual clarity, it presents a summary of Chapter Four of *Ritratto* in which Manzini details the events that led to the family rift and Nilda and Giuseppe's separation. Bion's theory of group mentality provides a valuable insight into the behaviours and dynamics within Nilda's family, as well as those between Nilda and Giuseppe. Bion's theory sheds light on why, considering her love for and support of Giuseppe, Nilda seemed disinclined to contradict her family's condemnation of him. Nonetheless, amidst such turmoil, Nilda found a way to remove herself and Manzini from Pistoia's oppressive environment, albeit under the pretext of furthering Manzini's education. By today's standards moving to Florence might appear a minor act of rebellion. However, it suffices to illustrate the subtlety of Manzini and Nilda's relationship, appreciable through the nuances of their connection rather than in the upheaval of grand gestures such as the uprooting of Manzini's childhood to follow Giuseppe into exile, especially in light of Manzini's medical needs. An attentive reading of *Ritratto* suggests that, on balance, Manzini's relationship with her mother was founded on a sense of reciprocal confidence and trust, in

contradistinction to the disdain some commentators have inferred.

The discussion unfolds by drawing on a description of the three basic assumptions or states of mind underpinning Bion's theory of group mentality. These are the assumptions of *dependence*; the assumption of *fight-flight*; and the assumption of *pairing*. Each assumption is accompanied by textual examples as appropriate to the discussion. Bion's final book, *A Memoir of the Future* (1991) frames the chapter's epilogue.

Nilda

Leonilda (Nilda) Mazzoncini (1864-1931) was born into a wealthy Pistoian family. Little is known of her life before her marriage to Giuseppe, which presumably means that she experienced a traditional Italian upbringing characteristic of her era, that would entail for example, a Catholic upbringing and training in traditional skills such as sewing. When Nilda married Giuseppe in 1895, she was aware of his chequered political past. By all accounts, she supported his political allegiances and respected her husband's efforts to promote the anarchists' cause. A defender of Giuseppe's moral rectitude, Nilda asserts in *Ritratto* that the motivation for her husband's actions was always to benefit others: "Ma per sé, mai nulla, mai nulla" (Manzini *Ritratto* 153), "But nothing for himself, ever" (Manzini *Full-Length* 14).

When Manzini was a small child, Giuseppe was arrested on suspicion of associating with his contemporary, the outlawed anarchist Errico Malatesta.¹²⁸ Like Giuseppe, Malatesta was a prolific writer and contributor to radical newspapers. On one occasion seeking evidence of that association, authorities raided the Manzini home: "Anche le mattonelle fecero saltare: poteva esserci sotto qualcosa" (Manzini *Ritratto* 121) "They even tore up the floor tiles: something might be underneath" (Manzini *Full-Length* 88). Shortly afterwards, Giuseppe was exiled to Porto Ercole. These events triggered the family's insistence that Nilda was better off legally separated from such a hothead (Manzini *Ritratto* 150).

¹²⁸ In *Ritratto*, Manzini refers to Malatesta as Enrico (96).

Unlike Giuseppe, who died a few years before the publication of Manzini's first novel *Tempo innamorato* (1928) (*Time in Love*), Nilda was fortunate enough to witness Manzini's growing literary success. By all appearances, Nilda was a great supporter of Manzini's writing. In her short story "Sulla soglia" Manzini recounts how Nilda could be drawn out of her "silenzi" by the mere mention of Manzini's writing (Manzini *Soglia* 90).¹²⁹ Before Giuseppe's death, Manzini's parents experienced a brief reunion. Unfortunately for the couple, after years of separation that were "resi più lunghi dalla guerra, dal fascismo, dall'esilio di lui in quel paesino" (Manzini *Ritratto* 57), "made so much longer by the war, by fascism, by his exile in that little town" (Manzini *Full-Length* 36), their reconciliation was inhibited by "riserve, di cortesie, di cauti silenzi, di commoventi timidezze" (Manzini *Ritratto* 57), "reserve, courtesies, cautious silence, touching shyness" (Manzini *Full-Length* 36). Eleven years after Giuseppe's death, Nilda also died. That event preceded and may have precipitated the end of Manzini's own marriage to Bruno Fallaci.¹³⁰

As mentioned, Nilda was highly skilled in sewing and embroidery, spending much of her time creating beautiful clothes for Manzini. Furthermore, personal attire constituted a rare means of individual expression for Nilda. In *Ritratto*, Manzini recalls that Nilda often wore mauve - Giuseppe's favourite colour - suggesting Nilda's compliance with Giuseppe and possibly also an unconscious attempt to please him.

Manzini's final book, *Sulla soglia*, comprises four novellas of which the eponymous "Sulla soglia" centres on Manzini's relationship with her mother. With Manzini herself suspended between life and death, the novella is characterised by a dreamlike setting in which Manzini and Nilda engage in a flowing dialogue akin to the processes of reverie. Unlike *Ritratto*, Nilda is granted a voice in "Sulla soglia", fashioned by a mnemonic trajectory that revisits significant events in Nilda's life such as her marriage to Giuseppe,

¹²⁹ In Manzini's words "perpetua gravidanza di silenzi", (perpetual weight of silence), presumably in reference to the silence after death. Nevertheless, it is of note that Manzini conveys Nilda's enthusiasm regarding her daughter's writing (Manzini *Soglia* 90).

¹³⁰ Margherita Ghilardi states in the *Encyclopedia Treccani* that Nilda's death signaled for Manzini an existential crisis that led to the breakdown of her marriage to Fallaci (*Treccani*).

claims of his infidelity, and Nilda's devastation occasioned by Manzini's chronic illness.

Summary of published commentary

According to Clelia Martignoni, Nilda was “incapace di rinunciare ad agi e benessere” (unable to give up luxury and comfort).¹³¹ Martignoni's view is based on the implication that Nilda, who is “borghese e poco coraggiosa”, (bourgeois and weak), rejected Giuseppe in favour of the comfortable lifestyle offered by her brother (Manzini *Ritratto* 14). It is clear in *Ritratto* that Nilda's brother did little to conceal his resentment at having to take on Manzini and her mother. In an outburst he exclaims: “Voluta o no, la famiglia era tua, e [...] l'hai lasciata sulle mie braccia” (Manzini *Ritratto* 107), “Wanted or not, it was your family, and [...] you dumped it on me” (Manzini *Full-Length* 77). Margherita Ghilardi opines that another of Manzini's characters, Giuliana in *La sparviera*, was a means for Manzini to reflect disapprovingly on her mother who was “fragile e insicura” (fragile and insecure) (Manzini *Sparviera* 28).¹³² In a similar vein, Alba Amoia states that Nilda's “weak” character compelled her to place her siblings' wishes before those of her “freedom-loving” husband because she was “self-renouncing” and “thin skinned” (Amoia 29). In a recent contradiction to these views, Ursula Fanning is more kind to Nilda by describing her presence in Manzini's life as “salvificatory” (Fanning 16).

In *Ritratto* Manzini's own views regarding her mother are far more fluid. On one occasion Manzini rages against her mother's reluctance to defend Giuseppe: “[...] la mamma aveva sì abbassato la testa; ma non l'aveva difeso. Che pianto, io, sola in un'altra stanza. Avrebbe potuto insorgere, lei; e invece: zitta. La odiai” (Manzini *Ritratto* 37), “[...] mama bowed her head but didn't defend him. I wept alone in another room. She could have objected, but instead remained silent. I hated her (Manzini *Full-Length* 23).¹³³ Yet, other instances speak of complicity: “Il sorriso

¹³¹ As stated by Clelia Martignoni in her Introduction to the 2005 edition of *Ritratto* (Manzini *Ritratto* 16).

¹³² As stated by Margherita Ghilardi in her Introduction to the 2005 edition of *La sparviera*.

¹³³ Manzini was angered by Nilda's failure to defend Giuseppe's character following the theft of his coat.

impercettibile della mamma mi approvava” (Manzini *Ritratto* 17), “Mama’s imperceptible smile showed her approval” (Manzini *Full-Length* 6). In another instance, Manzini is almost derisive of Nilda and her cohort. In reference to the character of Luigia Pezzi, a seamstress whose clientele were all bourgeois and demanding women, Manzini states: “Signore incontentabili; fra esse avrebbe potuto esserci anche mia madre” (Manzini *Ritratto* 25), “Hard to please ladies. My mother might have been among them” (Manzini *Full-Length* 13).¹³⁴ However, conveying an alternative view, Manzini recalls Giuseppe’s initiative to open a shop selling Singer sewing machines, “Aprirò un negozio di macchine Singer. A Pistoia non ve ne sono. Sa quante donne si rovinano gli occhi a cacciare punti, uno dopo l’altro, e si fiaccano la schiena?” (Manzini *Ritratto* 116), “I will open a shop to sell Singer sewing machines. Something that Pistoia needs and doesn’t have. Do you know how many women ruin their eyesight by hand stitching, and how it weakens their backs?” (Manzini *Full-Length* 84) Manzini recalls that “[...] mamma era contenta” (Manzini *Ritratto* 116), “[...] mama was pleased” with his efforts (Manzini *Full-Length* 84).

Ritratto aside, the starkest contradistinction to the published views is Manzini’s description of Nilda published in *Lettera all’editore*¹³⁵, (*Game Plan for a Novel*). In an essay dedicated to her mother Manzini writes of the “occhi brillanti, invece di mia madre, quella sua intera presenza negli occhi. Coraggiosi, mai sconfitti, senza riserve, rapitori, capaci di rivelare, delle cose, un valore intimo e un linguaggio. Occhi che soccorrono” (Manzini

On that occasion, Giuseppe remarked that the thief must have needed something warm to wear. For his comments, Giuseppe is accused of false modesty, “tutte pose” (Manzini *Ritratto* 37), “All an act” (Manzini *Full-Length* 23).

¹³⁴ Luigia Pezzi’s was the only female name to appear on the membership list of the *Associazione internazionale dei lavoratori* [International Workers’ Association]. In *Ritratto*, Manzini re-imagines Luigia carrying out her métier by day but at night occupied with the task of distributing pamphlets that were perhaps written by Giuseppe (Manzini *Ritratto* 25).

¹³⁵ As referred to previously, Emilio Cecchi states that Manzini’s novel came as a breath of fresh air to Italian literary conventions that had hitherto proved to be “tremendamente sterili”, (tremendously sterile), (Cecchi quoted in Bello Minciocchi et al. 25). *Lettera* was Manzini’s first novel published after the end of the World War Two. Distinguished by its experimentalism, the novel contains intersecting levels of narration that follow a group of characters as they appear in the author’s imagination and serve as a platform for Manzini to express her personal reflections, including those pertaining to the creation of a novel (Bello Minciocchi et al. 14).

Lettera 234), “my mother’s bright eyes, her whole being in her eyes. Courageous, never defeated, unreserved, seducers, capable of revealing the intimate value and language of things. Eyes that comfort” (Manzini *Game Plan* 159). In the same novel Manzini refers to Nilda as her “blasone” (Manzini *Lettera* 241), “moral emblem” (Manzini *Game Plan* 164), an accolade she will also grant her father decades later in *Ritratto* (Manzini *Ritratto* 194).¹³⁶

It seems that, vacillating as it does between feelings of respect, adoration, love, pity, anger, complicity, and irony, Manzini’s own attitude towards her mother is not as consistently critical as the published views would have believe. Rather, it is variable and complex, ultimately portraying a far more realistic version of the mother-daughter relationship. In *Ritratto* Manzini makes a telling admission: “Come perdonare alla mamma d’aver dato retta ai fratelli che la vollero separata dal ‘sovversivo’, dal loro nemico?” (Manzini *Ritratto* 163), “How to forgive mama for listening to her siblings who wanted her to separate from the ‘subversive one’, from their enemy?” (Manzini *Full-Length* 121). With this comment Manzini appears not so much to be rebuking Nilda for separating from Giuseppe as she is articulating her indictment of family pressures coercing Nilda into obedience. Manzini’s rhetorical question goes to the core of this chapter’s hypothesis centred on the pressures, self-imposed or otherwise, controlling the lives of women in Nilda’s era, and it provides the departure point for the following analysis.

Archaeology and genealogy

Like all the major theorists referenced in this thesis, Foucault created an original lexicon to delineate his pioneering theories. Two of his key notions used in this chapter are *archaeology* and *genealogy*. Foucault first adopted the descriptor archaeology with its connotation of an excavation site, to reference “the stage” on which the past is enacted. Foucault’s archaeology does not describe the events of history per se, but rather, offers an analytic method for uncovering the “hidden, inaccessible rules, codes and beliefs”

¹³⁶ It is surprising, therefore, to read that despite Manzini’s exuberant description of her mother, Martha King describes Nilda as “passive” (Manzini *Game Plan* viii).

that have been allowed to appear as facts (Downing 10). Because of these tendencies, grand narratives formulated on teleological principles have come to represent conventional history as a true account of the past.

Mirroring Foucault's view, Lawrence L. Langer provides a case in point regarding Primo Levi's writing when he warns against the insistence of "publishers [who twist Levi's] intentions as a writer into an affirmative direction" (Langer 197).¹³⁷ Langer maintains that readers should not try to "mine gleaming nuggets of human fellowship from the barren landscape of Auschwitz" (Langer 197). Rather, they should understand Levi's work as "a portrait of diminished human beings who were compromised by their special knowledge" (Langer 199). In a similar spirit, Foucault rejects the notion of the subject as a free and rational entity, in favour of one determined by the prevailing systems of thought. In Foucault's view, a more realistic representation of historical events is acquired if the *subject* of a particular history is conceived of as *subject to* a broader power system (Downing 10).¹³⁸ Fittingly, Langer states that Levi's "hesitant enquiry" has been transformed into a "confident manifesto", even though for his entire life he continued an exploration into the "morally uncertain meaning of the experience we call 'survival'" (Langer 197).

Without suggesting that Nilda's experience was in any way comparable to Levi's, there is an argument that Levi's and Nilda's commentators represent two sides of the same coin: in Levi, commentators have looked for the heroic while in Nilda commentators have looked for the pusillanimous. In any case, both figures have seemingly attracted value-laden judgments based on *a posteriori* knowledge of human experience. Neither Levi nor Nilda were the *subjects* of their respective history but rather, *subject to* it and the lesson lies, philosophically speaking, in the ability to recognise the distinction between the two states of being.

¹³⁷ Langer's criticism is directed particularly at American publishers who have twisted Levi's intentions into an affirmative direction by translating the original title of Levi's book *Se questo è un uomo*, as *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*.

¹³⁸ In reference to Foucault's notion of the power systems controlling the subject, Downing articulates it as "the history of what operates on people to make them think in a certain way, without their being necessarily aware of these forces of influence" (Downing 10).

Fundamental to Foucault's archaeological method is the constructivist view that language is a source of thought in its own right (Gutting 32). Exemplary of this is the work with traumatised women in the late 1800s undertaken by the French neurologist, Pierre Janet, who coined a number of common descriptors such as hysteria, dissociation, and the subconscious (Laplanche and Pontalis 431). Prior to Janet's work, people afflicted with psychological illness were considered morally deficient, organically damaged, depraved, or perhaps even possessed by a devil. Janet's neologisms contributed to the construction of a language model that accommodates contemporary knowledge of trauma as well as ushering in new discursive approaches.

In a similar vein, the published criticisms levelled at Nilda smack of an evaluation created from standards and expectations concurrent with knowledge and values developed in more recent times. During her lifetime, Nilda could not have had any way in which to perceive her own conduct as passive or obedient, or her reality as oppressive. Conversely, nor could she have been aware of constructs such as "women's liberation" and "equal rights", characterising feminist consciousness some decades after her death.

The tragedy for Nilda lies in the fact that although she lacked the linguistic means to identify her passivity as a consequence of subjugation, she nonetheless displays the traumatic consequences of repression somatised in her "verbal paralysis". When Manzini recalls her mother's attempts to shield her daughter from family disputes, all Nilda is capable of enunciating is a meagre "non voglio, non voglio..." (Manzini *Ritratto* 134), "I don't want to, I don't want to...." (Manzini *Full-Length* 99). Even so, that attempt to stand up for her daughter is met with a sardonic retort that further obliterates her capacity to speak. Manzini depicts her uncle's reply: "Con ironia, labbra stese in un sorriso senza luce, sigillato, ghiaccio, mortuario: 'Non vuoi, che cosa? Di', si può sapere che cosa puoi non volere?'" (Manzini *Ritratto* 134), "Sarcastically, lips formed in a cheerless smile, sealed, ice-cold, funereal: What don't you want? Tell me, may I know what you don't want?" (Manzini *Full-Length* 99). Thus, tyrannised into compliance, Nilda responds by dissolving into "Uno scoppio di singhiozzi" (Manzini *Ritratto* 135), "A

burst of sobbing” (Manzini *Full-Length* 100). The episode exemplifies Nilda’s own trauma deflected inwards and destined, as noted in Irigaray, to remain repressed and “constrained to silence and mimicry”, like that of a helpless child (Irigaray 138).

Nilda’s lifetime spanned the mid-1800s to the early decades of the 1900s; a period that, viewed from a modern perspective, was defined by established norms of patriarchy.¹³⁹ In accordance with Foucault’s theory, a conventional historical interpretation would imply that Nilda, like Nora in Henrik Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House* (1879), was aware that she was living according to a system in which men are the power holders and women are excluded from it. From that point of view, it could be deduced that Nilda’s conduct was born of recognisable patriarchal norms. However, by adopting Foucault’s archaeological approach, the analysis is directed towards identifying some of the inadvertent influences conditioning and manipulating Nilda’s behaviour and attitudes.¹⁴⁰

Patriarchy may be conceptualised as a dual level construct. On one level it functions as an overt social system of male dominance, usually in the form of judicial-political norms.¹⁴¹ On another level, it functions covertly to condition both men and women by implicit rules that maintain an imbalance of power geared towards perpetuating female subjugation, resulting therefore in a state of trauma normalised as natural female reticence and passivity. Patriarchy constitutes one of history’s grand narratives whose continuity and influence are assured via societal meta-narrative constructs (King "Gender" 30).¹⁴²

Anecdotes demonstrating the acceptance of male authority as the natural state of things appear early in *Ritratto* through Bellinzoni, a

¹³⁹ Patriarchy is adopted here as an umbrella term to indicate the entirety of societal norms that tip the balance in favour of male dominance.

¹⁴⁰ It is understood that these considerations relate to women in general.

¹⁴¹ The right to vote as a male prerogative is an overt example of patriarchy. By contrast, however, in light of her conditioning, her right to vote might never have occurred to Nilda.

¹⁴² Apropos of these concerns, Angela King has criticised Foucault’s failure to address gender issues. Nonetheless, she elaborates, such lacunae have not detracted from Foucault’s relevance in gender discussions on the basis that women are rendered conspicuous precisely by their absence from his arguments (King "Gender" 30).

character introduced in an account of his reproach of a group of women who have been distracted from their sewing by the singing in the street of a group of anarchists. Opposing the anarchists' creed, Bellinzoni remarks: "[...] starli a guardare gli diamo importanza, non lo capite? Che c'è da vedere in quattro scalmanati? Via!" (Manzini *Ritratto* 17), "standing there to watch we make them important, don't you understand? What's there to see in those hotheads?" (Manzini *Full-Length* 7). Irritated by the women's interest, Bellinzoni further berates them: "Non avete proprio nulla da fare, voi donne?" (Manzini *Ritratto* 17), "Don't you women have anything else to do?" (Manzini *Full-Length* 7). Thus chided, the women are corralled back to their duties. The account illustrates the commonplace acceptance of the presumed male right to censure female behaviour. The women's compliance exemplifies the relationality of the power imbalance that is obscured in the routine of daily life. Manzini herself describes it as a "tran-tran" routine of daily life, which sees women's activity confined and organised in proportion to the obedience demanded of them (Manzini *Ritratto* 17).

Even Giuseppe, despite his progressive ideology, displays a conventional mindset towards women. Midway through explaining a philosophical concept to Manzini who, in any case, was too young to grasp it, he remarks: "Oh, le donne, naturalmente non possono rendersene conto" (Manzini *Ritratto* 85), "Oh, naturally, women can't appreciate it" (Manzini *Full-Length* 59). Giuseppe's utterance "naturally" is an example of knowledge creating power and power created from knowledge. His adverb consolidates his belief that female biology is the cause of, and responsible for, their moral and intellectual inferiority. In a rare outburst of resentment towards Giuseppe, Manzini vehemently objects: "Le donne! Ogni esclusione mi offende; e poi sebbene bambina, sono pur sempre donna" (Manzini *Ritratto* 140), "Women! Every exclusion offends me; and although I'm just a girl I am still female" (Manzini *Full-Length* 59). As Virginia Woolf argued in relation to women and literature, the "fact" of women's intellectual inferiority arose out of women's lack of means, specifically regarding the requirements for a life of contemplation (Woolf). Similarly, Giuseppe's attitude seems to judge women against the norm of man understood as the "essential human subject" that is representative of the intellectual, and moral

human “whole” (King “Gender” 31).

One of Foucault’s aims was to show “via an exploration of the past, the situation of the present” (Foucault quoted in Downing 10). Manzini’s perspective on the female condition reflects Foucault’s argument. Notable for the subservience characterising some of her most prominent female characters, in *Lettera* Manzini articulates her frustration with the perpetuation of her gender’s “enslavement”. Manzini’s account shifts from an initial description of habituated passivity and compliance to a stream of consciousness that meanders to the heart of the author’s dilemma, exposing its disconcerting reality:

Che bella cosa essere una donna. Come mi piace essere una donna. Perché, nel momento stesso in cui cedeva, il mio braccio trovava una particolare mollezza e tutto il corpo acquistava un peso differente; e anche soltanto abbassando gli occhi aggiungevo all’abbandono qualcosa di estremamente grave e dolce. Infine rinunciavo a me stessa in una maniera esteriore, oltre che intima: perdendo contorni e statura: mi scoraggiavo, mi smarrivo; ma proprio nell’ubbidienza che mi disanimava era il femminile trionfo del mio essere più riposto. Abbandonandomi, mi trovavo tutta fertile, attenta in ogni fibra ad un senso misterioso di promessa che mi rendeva simile al seme della pianta sepolta nel tepore della zolla. ‘Come vuoi, come vuoi’ aggiunsi. E il suono delle mie parole, nella via rumorosa, risultò estraneo a quella resa assaporata: mi tradii a me stessa.

Mi fu chiaro in quel punto di resuscitare un’ebbrezza di altri tempi. La voce però vi s’era sottratta. Piena, tersa, aveva sostenuto quel doppio ‘come vuoi’ con naturale assennata condiscendenza.

Volevo che mi piacesse esser donna; che mi piacesse come quando il lavoro palpitava nel progetto, e Laura, Amalia, Elide, in diverso modo erano inclinate a riflettere il presunto privilegio della femminile schiavitù che tanto mi colmava. Spingevo perciò l’adesione al romanzo ritrovato fino a fingermi quella ch’io fui allora, fino a ricalcare me stessa.

S’accendevano intanto i primi lumi. Le botteghe, per il ristoro di un po’ di brillante calore, s’affacciavano sulla via livida con un’aria d’invito e di piccola festa che inteneriva. Dolcezza d’affidare la mano fredda al potere consolante di un’altra mano. Ma adesso sapevo che nell’esclamazione ‘Mi piace tanto essere una donna’ s’era sempre nascosta una vaga curiosità, un illimitato credito della vita, e magari l’attirante sospetto che in ogni angelico femminile umiliarsi, in ogni inoltrarsi fra delizie

di consenso, si celasse un germe di perdizione. In realtà essere donna mi piaceva ormai assai meno. Tirannica sorte. E tuttavia volevo che fosse come prima: ancora mio il merito di riconoscere, appagandomene, la nascosta gloria di un destino di remissività. (Manzini *Lettera* 11-12)¹⁴³

How wonderful to be a woman. How I like being a woman. Because at the moment of my surrender my arm seemed unusually soft, and my whole body grew lighter; the mere lowering of my eyes added something extremely grave and sweet to that abandon. In short, I renounced myself in an outer as well as an inner way, losing shape and stature: I was discouraged, upset; but the triumphant female of my being was hidden precisely in that disheartening obedience. By abandoning myself, I became more fertile, every fiber alert to a mysterious sense of promise that made me like a seed buried in warm soil. 'As you wish, as you wish,' I added. And the sound of my words in the noisy street came out strangely irrelevant to that pleasant surrender: I betrayed myself.

It was clear then that I was resurrecting a feeling of elation from other times. However, my voice was different. Full, concise, it had buoyed up that double 'as you wish' with natural sensible amenability.

I wanted to like being a woman: to like it as I had when [my characters] Laura, Amalia, Elide, in different ways, were inclined to reflect the presumed privilege of female slavery that had so filled me. I identified so with the rediscovered novel that I was pretending to be what I had once been, until I was imitating myself.

In the meantime the first lights came on. The shops, relieved by a little warmth, looked out on the dark street with an inviting and festive air that touched the heart. Like the sweetness of entrusting your cold hand to the consoling strength of another hand. But I then realized that in the exclamation, 'I like being a woman so much,' was always hidden a faint curiosity, an unlimited credit of life, and perhaps even the enticing suspicion that in every female's angelic self-abnegation, in every dallying with the delights of compliance, a seed of perdition is hidden. Actually, to be a woman pleased me much less now. Tyrannical fate. Nevertheless I wanted it to be as it was before: still mine the satisfying ability to accept the hidden glory of submissiveness. (Manzini *Game Plan* 2-3)

In the wake of a turbulent period that saw the rise and fall of Italy's fascist

¹⁴³ By "il presunto privilegio della femminile schiavitù", it can be contended that Manzini is referring to the covert nature of female oppression.

regime, the devastation of another World War, and a generation removed from her mother's, Manzini turns the lens onto herself almost two decades after the publication of *Tempo innamorato* which features Clementina, arguably Manzini's most submissive female character.¹⁴⁴ In *Lettera* Manzini finds a narrative platform from which to diagnose her sense of personal self-diminishment. For Manzini it seems that power is connected to self-knowledge evolving throughout her narrative.

Some years after Foucault formulated his theory of archaeology, he expanded it to include the concept of genealogy to represent the examination of the underlying power structures of the archaeological site (Gutting and Oksala 3.3).¹⁴⁵ With genealogy Foucault encouraged an inquiry into how universals embedded in grand narratives have come to be embedded as reality in society when, in fact, they are nothing more than contingencies arising out of a given way of thinking of a particular era (Gutting and Oksala 3.3).

According to Foucault, the 1800s onwards signalled newer forms of power systems. Until then, power was exercised through traditional forms of sovereignty and similar forms of dominion. Power originated from a top-down structure that was overt in its effect and role. With the diminishment of those traditional power structures there arose new forms of power that are much more insidious because they are covertly dispersed and stratified throughout society. This power arises out of relationally based systems that draw their continuity from the unconscious reality of social interactions. Thus, in its modern guise, power has transformed into a fluid process out of which people are as much a *product of* as they are *participants in* it. According to the Foucault scholar, Hans Sluga, modern power has come to subsume an inherent "mobile inequality", be it personal, economic, political,

¹⁴⁴ Clementina is the estranged wife in *Tempo innamorato* who, despite the betrayal she endured, gifts her husband and his lover her family home.

¹⁴⁵ With genealogy, Foucault deliberately sought to bring to mind Nietzsche's genealogy of morals with the aim of demonstrating that "a given system of thought" is the result of incidental historical outcomes rather than rational "inevitable trends" (Gutting and Oksala 3.3).

academic, and so forth (Sluga quoted in *Entitled Opinions*).¹⁴⁶

The character Luigia Pezzi who sews garments for Pistoia's bourgeois clientele is an illustration of mobile inequality. As a member of the working class, it may be assumed that she is "dominated" by her clientele, made up of well-heeled women such as Nilda who have the means to pay for bespoke clothes. However, in reality Nilda is denied a voice in family discussions and is compromised by her financial dependence on her brother. The power balance in this instance is arguably tipped in favour of Luigia Pezzi because, on the one hand, she is free to chart her own ideological allegiance and, on the other, she possesses the skills that allow her to create a modicum of income for herself.

Alluding to the advantages of Luigia's situation, Manzini notes that the seamstress is "silenziosa, attenta, bravissima" (Manzini *Ritratto* 25), "silent, attentive, very clever" (Manzini *Full-Length* 13). Luigia's silence does not result from a traumatic paralysis like Nilda's but, rather, from the freedom to focus her mind. As Manzini sees it, Luigia's obedient attitude arises out of respect for "il proprio lavoro di artigiana ineccepibile" (Manzini *Ritratto* 25), "her own work as impeccable artisan" (Manzini *Full-Length* 13).

In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) Foucault coined the phrase "medical gaze" in reference to the scrutinising medical approach towards the patient who is compartmentalised as a collection of ailments and symptoms (Foucault). Foucault argues that inbuilt in that attitude is an inevitable power imbalance in favour of the doctor who is afforded a "supreme mastery" over the patient because the "gaze that sees is the gaze that dominates" (Foucault quoted in Downing 34). A similar situation is observable in Giuseppe's way of relating to Nilda. During a visit by Nilda and Manzini, rather than expressing affection for his wife and daughter, which he probably felt, Giuseppe's attention was nonetheless focused on admonishing Nilda: "Non si manda una bambina, in campagna, a coglier fiori, vestita a festa" (Manzini *Ritratto* 166). "You don't send a child in the country to pick flowers in a party dress" (Manzini *Full-Length* 124). Dressing Manzini in beautiful

¹⁴⁶ *Entitled Opinions* is a Podcast Radio Program hosted by Robert Harrison of Stanford University.

clothes was one of the ways Nilda demonstrated that their daughter was well cared for and loved. Yet she is left having to justify her efforts. Manzini notes her mother's submissive response: "Quale altro modo mi resta per farti vedere che tengo alla nostra figliola come una reliquia..." (Manzini *Ritratto* 166), "How else can I show you that I look after our daughter like a relic..." (Manzini *Full-Length* 124). The simile, "reliquia", while today an unlikely description, conveys the idea of Manzini as Nilda's highest priority, but also places her within specific linguistic confines and, therefore, a thought boundary specific to her era.

In any case, Nilda's explanation falls on deaf ears as Giuseppe offers another reproach: "Non hai esitato neppure a farle bucare il lobo degli orecchi per infilarci un pezzettino d'oro. Tutto ciò che brilla ti incanta" (Manzini *Ritratto* 166), "You didn't hesitate to pierce her ear lobes to put in little pieces of gold. Everything that glitters charms you" (Manzini *Full-Length* 124). In the face of such condemnation, Nilda attempts to defend herself resulting in the following outburst: "Mi volevi come ti ero apparsa, soltanto per trasformarmi" (Manzini *Ritratto* 166), "You wanted me as I appeared to you only to transform me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 124). There is no attempt by Giuseppe to understand Nilda's point of view. Embedded in the episode is a progression of his scrutiny, beginning with dresses, then on to Nilda's jewellery, and inexorably on to the supposition that only his opinion counts. Swept up in the environment of her father's disparagement, Manzini also unleashes her own dose of condemnation by inferring that Nilda was a "vigliacca" (Manzini *Ritratto* 166), "coward" (Manzini *Full-Length* 124).

These anecdotes demonstrate Giuseppe's presumptions of authority over Nilda. In a final example to be found in "Sulla soglia", Manzini infers that in his own way Giuseppe willingly colluded with Nilda's siblings to ensure that his wife did not accompany him into exile. His rationale is that he knew Nilda to be "incapace di resistere a una vita di sacrificio" (Manzini *Soglia* 122), (incapable of facing a life of sacrifice). Stripped of her right to make her own decisions, Nilda's reaction illustrates the distress brought about by Giuseppe's postulation: "Mi tenga, mi incateni, mi faccia patire la fame" (Manzini *Soglia* 122), (Let him keep me, let him chain me, let him

starve me). This account when Nilda was forced to take a defensive stance signals Manzini's empathy with Nilda's conundrum. These examples not only contradict the perception of Nilda as a passive entity: rather, they also reveal a character raging at the pressures of enforced obedience. Thus, from an array of vertices, everyone is trapped in the male gaze: Nilda in seeking Giuseppe's approval; Giuseppe who is trapped in his "authoritative" stance as the one who knows best; and Manzini who, thrust into a triangle of discord, sides with the voice of authority.

The discussion now turns to an analysis of two prominent aspects of Italian society that the chapter argues function as latent systems of power, conditioning people's behaviour and beliefs. They are the Church and the Italian cultural construct commonly described as *bella figura*.¹⁴⁷ Both are considered here as meta-narratives of patriarchy on the basis that they unconsciously instill attitudes of submissiveness and compliance on the part of the subject. Foucault's study of institutions such as prisons and mental asylums offers insights into an exploration of these contentions although it is widely recognised that the structure and methods of these institutions have radically changed over time. Originating as systems of violent physical assault, prisons have transformed into systems of reformation through the use of modern methods that seek to engender an "inner transformation" by imposing on the detainee a constant state of vigilance (Foucault quoted in Gutting 80).

By way of illustration, the discussion employs Foucault's description of the Panopticon as an example of modern latent control.¹⁴⁸ The Panopticon was a revolutionary concept in prison structure designed to maximise control of prisoners with minimum participation by prison staff. Its design entailed a central tower that housed a monitor that could look into any cell at any given moment but not into all the cells all the time. The principle of control was based on the assumption that the prisoner had no way of

¹⁴⁷ A similar construct to the notion of *good form* in English, *bella figura* is here adopted as an umbrella term encompassing the Italian notions of *dovere* (duty) and *onore* (honour) closely bound to the norms and values of conservative Italian society.

¹⁴⁸ Designed by the English philosopher and social theorist, Jeremy Bentham (1747-1832), the name Panopticon, comes from the Greek meaning "all-seeing".

knowing when the monitor was looking into his/her cell. As a result, the prisoner was forced to assume that he/she was always being viewed and accordingly self-monitored his/her behaviour. Theoretically, the prisoner's self-monitoring behaviour would transform into an internalised form of self-policing, ultimately leading to the reformation of criminal behaviour. The Panopticon demonstrated the possibility for architecture to globally promote "behaviour regulating norms".¹⁴⁹

Although the construction of the Panopticon was ultimately rejected, some of its elements went on to be incorporated into modern prisons. However, the concept has been widely adopted as a model for institutions such as schools, factories, and hospitals. In other words, the prison context has been normalised as a representation of "modern life" (Downing 2).¹⁵⁰ Foucault argues that it is through such normalisation of behaviour that modern power wields its control over people.

Foucault surmised that the greatest threat to power is the "non-observance" of rules, the existence of which ultimately serves as a means of qualifying behaviour as either acceptable, (that is, normal) or deviant: "The main goal is not revenge (as in the case of premodern punishment) but reform, where reform means primarily coming to live by society's standards and norms" (Gutting and Oksala 3.4).

The rigid parameters of acceptability evident in *Ritratto* saw Nilda manipulated towards behaviours that her family members deemed acceptable. Most obvious is her agreement to separate legally from Giuseppe, the contract of which had the power to manipulate the couple's movement and choices in accordance with "un sacco di varie clausole" (Manzini *Ritratto* 116) "a number of other stipulations" (Manzini *Full-Length* 84).

¹⁴⁹ In his study, Saul Fisher nominates the Panopticon as exemplary of the power of architecture to exert social control over societies (Fisher 8.3).

¹⁵⁰ Downing clarifies that Foucault's involvement with prisoners' activism in the 1970s did not lead to Foucault's seeking a reformist or liberationist agenda in relation to prisons but, rather, led to his understanding of the techniques used in the prison system that extended to, as discussed in the chapter, all aspects of modern life (Downing 2).

To varying degrees, everyone is expected to behave according to societal norms. Yet, paradoxically, by electing to pierce Manzini's ear lobes, Nilda's non-observance of Giuseppe's "rules" arguably incurred his ire due to his loss of power over Nilda. Conversely, his refusal to acknowledge Serravalle as his inheritance only serves to underscore his aunt Isolina's loss of power over Giuseppe, as she is forced to witness the family home sacrificed bit by bit to Giuseppe's ideology "come un formaggio" (Manzini *Ritratto* 153), "In slices. Like a cheese" (Manzini *Full-Length* 114).

These concerns lead to the role of the Church in *Ritratto* as a latent model of a disciplinary system. Daria Valentini draws attention to the way that *Ritratto*'s tripartite configuration (Valentini 368): arguably, a figurative crucifix encapsulating Manzini's moral compass. Accordingly, for the suffering endured at school Manzini implores Christ's clemency saying "senti, l'altra guancia io l'ho porta e ho continuato a porgerla" (Manzini *Ritratto* 76), "you know I've turned the other cheek and go on doing so" (Manzini *Full-Length* 52).

Manzini recounts an episode in which Nilda instructs her to pay a flying visit to Giuseppe in via degli Orafi: "T'aspetto in chiesa. Tu va di volata a dare un bacio al babbo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 138), "I'll wait for you in church. Hurry and give your father a kiss" (Manzini *Full-Length* 102). In a description that recalls the self-policing goals of the Panopticon, Manzini recalls her church's dome: "[...] incombente sulla mia casa, mi persuadeva della sua magia" (Manzini *Ritratto* 22), "leaning over my house, it convinced me of its magic" (Manzini *Full-Length* 10). The church lends a sense of protection, but also inculcates a sense of indebtedness. Mores of the day demanded that as a separated couple, Nilda and Giuseppe could not be seen together. In "Sulla soglia" Nilda expresses the hope that she and Giuseppe will cross paths: she exiting the church and Giuseppe heading towards his workshop, a miracle in Nilda's eyes (Manzini *Soglia* 118). That sin executed outside the church, however, is expiated from within. Manzini returns to the church after that brief visit to Giuseppe to find her mother "inginocchiata, il viso fra le mani" (Manzini *Ritratto* 138), "on her knees, her

face in her hands” (Manzini *Full-Length* 102).

Another parishioner explains that by taking part in a church procession the faithful are able to display “l’ubbidienza che si rispecchia nella processione” (Manzini *Ritratto* 33), “the procession as a mirror of obedience” (Manzini *Full-Length* 19). From the celebratory to the sorrowful, life is circumscribed by church activity. Manzini recalls: “Che città, a quei tempi, Pistoia: viatici, funerali, campane a morto, campane a festa, fanfare, bisbigli, bisbigli, bisbigli” (Manzini *Ritratto* 16), “What a town, in those times. Pistoia: the last sacraments, funerals, bells tolling for the dead, festive bells, brass bands, whispers, whispers, whispers” (Manzini *Full-Length* 5).

Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary systems such as the Panopticon extends to an understanding of the minute regulations of physical movements, detailed time schedules, and surveillance techniques, that impose their influence over people, resulting in what Foucault refers to as “docile bodies” (Allen). While men also undergo such influences, according to the feminist philosopher, Sandra Bartky, it is by and large women’s bodies that are more widely subjected to docile body practices, as can be seen, for example, in female dietary practices, economy of gestures and mobility (Bartky quoted in Allen 3.5). The description calls to mind the compliant women instructed by Bellinzoni to return to their work. Manzini describes the women’s “docile” reality: “[...] riprendiamo alla svelta le nostre occupazioni. Ritiriamoci dalle finestre. Giù la testa” (*Ritratto* 20), “[...] we hurriedly return to our occupations. We withdraw from the windows. Heads down over work” (Manzini *Full-Length* 9).

Bella figura is an underlying power structure that establishes the parameters of conduct and appearance.¹⁵¹ *Bella figura* represents a philosophy that is hard-wired into the Italian psyche. Like the Church, the influence of *bella figura* hovers over the lives of people, guiding behaviour in a manner reminiscent of Foucault’s description of the Englishman Samuel

¹⁵¹ Although Manzini does not use the term *bella figura* per se, much of the characters’ conduct in *Ritratto* reflects adherence to this convention.

Tuke's mental asylum. Tuke (1784-1857) was a devout Quaker who believed that the mentally disturbed deserved treatment rather than punishment. Major shifts in the conceptualisation of madness date from the middle of the seventeenth century when the "mad" became patients contained in vast, designated houses, "not yet medical asylums but semi-juridical institutions" (Downing 25). Tuke's approach was revolutionary because he provided an environment in which the patients were treated kindly with therapeutic practices that were geared to making them feel "morally responsible" for their "deviations" (Gutting 69). However admirable his intentions, Tuke in effect created an asylum that replaced the "free terror of madness with the stifling anguish of responsibility" (Gutting 70). In an effort to achieve his goals, Tuke invited patients to partake in tea parties and similar social occasions where the patients vied in "politeness and propriety". Apparently, these occasions were highly successful and delightful events (Gutting 70). In reality, however, Tuke's methodology entailed little more than bourgeois society imposing its conventional social morality. In Foucault's view, these advances obliged the mentally ill to be objectified "in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger" in a manner that did not overstep the boundaries of the accepted norm (Gutting 70).¹⁵²

Grief as a construct of *bella figura*

While ostensibly little more than a construct concerning clothes, accessories and the like, in reality *bella figura* extends an insidious reach that influences numerous aspects of traditional Italian society whereby honour, duty, appearance, and conduct are all measured against a notional set of boundaries unconsciously operating on every level of people's thinking and behaviour. Even in traditional society's enactment of mourning, *bella figura*

¹⁵² Following the tradition of moral treatment, the Italian psychiatrist, Dr Carlo Livi (1823-1877), pioneered a model for psychiatric reforms based on compassion for the patient that is still in use today (Starnini). From 1848 to 1873 Livi was the director of the Ospedale psichiatrico di San Niccolò di Siena (Saint Nicholas of Siena Psychiatric Hospital), during which time he initiated numerous developments geared towards the universal well being of the patient. It was also under his directorship that the hospital saw the construction of the Conolly Pavilion, modeled on the Panopticon, but in this case as a means of offering services and spaces vital to patient care (Starnini "Ospedale" n.p.). It seems that the pressure to accommodate the patient to wider society's mores was not part of Livi's vision of mental health care. The pavilion was named after the British physician Dr John Conolly (1794-1860), who, like Livi, advocated for non-violent treatment methods for the mentally ill.

enforces compliance with normalised codes of grieving.

Robert Harrison refers to Sardinian (and, by extension, southern Italian) mourning practices in the early half of the twentieth century, as described by the anthropologist Ernesto de Martino. According to de Martino, the ceremonial gestures of the mourners – lamenting, wailing, singing, tearing of hair – were a way to confront and overcome loss “through a series of normative gestures” that date back to the Homeric tradition (Harrison 58). Mourning was processed by way of a series of acceptable ritualised practices, through which grief could be contained “through scripted gestures and precise codes of enactment” (de Martino quoted in Harrison 56).

Events surrounding Giuseppe’s arrest and exile were tantamount to a death for Nilda. The “death” of her marriage plunged her into a period of grief and mourning for the loss of her husband. Although Nilda’s mourning was enacted quietly without the dramatic gestures described by Harrison, Manzini’s description of her mother’s behaviour nonetheless illustrates that which de Martino refers to as a “rulebound” performative aspect of mourning rendered acceptable by a set of “traditionally transmitted codes” of behaviour (de Martino quoted in Harrison 56). Manzini recounts that her mother shut herself away for three months, refusing to see people. Her eventual outing is described as “un avvenimento” (Manzini *Soglia* 112), (an event), and appropriately, Nilda’s appearance suited the occasion. As Manzini states, Nilda’s face was like “un’ostia; [...] un profilo di madonnina” (Manzini *Soglia* 112), (a host; [...] the profile of a little Madonna).¹⁵³ Under the influence of *bella figura*, even grief becomes a standard against which one’s conduct and appearance are measured. As though to affirm that this is precisely the case, Manzini asserts: “Proprio così, mamma: nessuno che non ti ammirasse. Anche più bella, dicevano” (Manzini *Soglia* 112), (That’s right, mother: admired by everyone. Even more beautiful, they said). An unconscious participant, Nilda is cast into acceptable models of grief that ensured her status of suffering yet

¹⁵³ Here in Manzini’s description the influences of the Church and *bella figura* intersect.

The language of clothes

As noted, Manzini pursued a parallel career as a fashion writer under the pseudonyms Vanessa and Pamela. Her first article, “La moda è una cosa seria” (Fashion is a serious matter), was published in 1935 in the magazine *La donna*. In her study, “Italian fashion: yesterday, today and tomorrow”, Eugenia Paulicelli states that Manzini’s “rigorous approach to fashion” suggested that it needed to be elevated from its conventional standing “in the realm of the frivolous” and relocated to intellectual and scholarly contexts (Paulicelli 2). For Manzini clothes and accessories represented symbols of the “embodied experience that is culturally, socially and historically situated” (Paulicelli 2). Manzini’s article highlights three important perspectives of fashion writing: first, it asserts the “importance of a gendered history of fashion”; second, it demarcates not only historical epochs but also the “social and political domains”; and third, it elaborates the relationship between fashion and nation (Paulicelli 2). For Manzini, who states in *Ritratto* that she is “sprovvista di cultura e di mentalità storica” (Manzini *Ritratto* 8), “devoid of culture and a historical mentality” (Manzini *Full-Length* 2), her awareness of the correlation between fashion and history reveals a finely grained insight that encapsulates the quality of *bella figura*.

As explained by Paulicelli, the idea of Italy as a nation began to evolve with the printing revolution, and so, too, the debate about “codes of style, beauty and behaviour” that resulted in the creation of a sartorial language to underpin the notion of “fashion as a social institution” whereby power is exercised in the creation of taste, desire, and consumption choices (2). Pointedly, *Ritratto* opens with an account of the enforced exile of Giuseppe’s Modenese great-grandfather, occasioned by his participation in the conspiracy against Duke Francesco IV. As part of his punishment,

¹⁵⁴ Regarding the communal nature of bereavement practices in traditional society, Harrison says that “ritual lament submits the emotive spontaneity of grief to impersonal forms of externalization, it *creates a chorus* or community of voices sharing in the lament” (author’s italics, Harrison 59). It can be argued that by recounting her mother’s response to Giuseppe’s exile, Manzini is inadvertently partaking in the communal nature of the grieving process.

Manzini's ancestor was forbidden to wear his wig or to carry his sword. Such edicts were put in place to bring dishonour to high-ranked subversives whose diminished social standing was laid bare for all to see. Manzini's account serves as an illustration of Foucault's description of top-down dominion exercised by the ruling aristocracy that subsisted within static and narrow parameters of behaviour and appearance.

From the seventeenth-century systems of power began to change and by the early decades of the twentieth century, power had become an inconspicuous part of modern society. One covert display of power is a person's personal style of dress. Manzini describes her uncle's formal dress code, employed to convey his immense authority (Manzini *Ritratto* 100). By contrast, Giuseppe's appearance flies in the face of male dress conventions of the day. Manzini often refers to her father's casual style of dress: corduroy slacks and usually, an open-neck shirt. At opposite ends of the political spectrum, the uncle's and Giuseppe's attire serves as a metaphor for their respective political and social ideologies; but crucially, a degree of power that comes from the right and freedom to choose.

Lost in this scenario is Nilda who lacks any freedom or authority. Manzini recalls a visit to Giuseppe with her mother. She and her mother had no way of knowing that the occasion marked the last time they would see him alive. As Nilda and Manzini board the bus at the end of their visit, Giuseppe steps onto the running board to give his wife an unexpected good-bye kiss. Burdened by layers of clothes, Nilda fails to notice Giuseppe's affectionate gesture. Manzini bemoans: "maledetta preoccupazione, per le donne, la borsetta, i cappotti, gli scialli: non lo vede" (Manzini *Ritratto* 57), "women's cursed preoccupations: purses, coats, shawls! She didn't see him" (Manzini *Full-Length* 37).

Like the blinkers on a horse, Nilda's clothes represent a symbolic entrapment from which she refuses to escape for fear of confronting her reality. In a further comparable example, Nilda's attire resembles a suit of armour chosen to keep under control both her inner rage, and her lack of resources to change her situation. Manzini describes her mother's appearance and conduct:

La mamma mangia lentissimamente, a schiena rigida. Lo sguardo vacuo, perfette le scannellature dello jabot bianco, insaldato, con la spilla d'oro in mezzo. E la pettinatura non è stata mai tanto liscia. Già: 'non pende un pelo' si dice. Un'aggrovigliata immobilità la contiene dalla testa ai piedi. (Manzini *Ritratto* 101)

Mama is eating very slowly, stiff backed. Her gaze vacuous, the pleats of her starched white jabot perfect, a gold pin in the center. Her hair has never been so well combed. Yes: 'Not a hair out of place,' as the saying goes. She is held rigidly from head to foot. (Manzini *Full-Length* 72)

Nilda unquestionably adheres to the expectations of *bella figura*; the quality and choice of her attire form an image of a woman fitting in with her milieu. Yet her behaviour unwittingly displays the psyche of a woman overwhelmed by the reality confronting her. In the first anecdote, clothes are a means of diverting her sight from the husband she loves but who has consistently abandoned her. In the second, clothes are her means of guarding herself against the circumstances that led to that abandonment. In both cases, her attire lends her neither authority, as in her brother's case; nor freedom, as in Giuseppe's. For Nilda, choice of clothing would always constitute a symbolic link in the chain of her subjugation to the foibles of the men in her life, and the consequences that ensued.

Ritratto abounds in examples of *bella figura*'s manipulation across all aspects of daily life, often occasioning, in Manzini's case, devastating consequences, whether it is an ostentatious flower bouquet to gift Manzini's teacher, trips to school by carriage, the elaborate meals delivered to Manzini's school, or the serving of extra courses in honour of the uncle's visit to Pistoia from Grosseto. Each of these instances is underpinned by the influence of *bella figura* coercing participants to blend in by attempting to stand out. Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, by exceeding the boundaries of conventional etiquette, they only serve to contribute to Manzini's sense of shame and humiliation.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Manzini meets these actions with the following negative responses. She writes, respectively, (a) "quando vidi l'imbarazzo di lei"(Manzini *Ritratto* 74), "when I saw my teacher's embarrassment" (Manzini *Full-Length* 51), (b) "sono l'unica scolara [...] ostentamente privilegiata" (Manzini *Ritratto* 71), "I'm the only student who goes to school in a carriage [...] ostentatiously privileged" (Manzini *Full-*

The following extract from “Sulla soglia” is a description of Nilda during an instance that analogically encapsulates all that was required of her and, arguably, of women in general: the expectation that she blend in, almost to the point of invisibility. Manzini states:

Il volto della mamma sembrava un velo premuto sul merletto della spalliera. Il disegno lo assimilava; sì che i capelli bianchi si confondevano con quei ramaggi, quasi determinandoli; gli occhi vi affondavano, slargando gli intervalli fra i vuoti e i pieni e i lineamenti risultavano prima sfumati, quindi assorbiti. Il naso poi lo distinguevo appena appena. Anche il movimento del treno contribuiva a quell’amalgama fra il tremore di lei e gli arabeschi della bianca trina. (Manzini *Soglia* 102)

(My mother’s face looked like a veil pressed onto the lacework of the backrest. Its design absorbed it; so much so that her white hair blended with the tendrils, almost accentuating them; her eyes sank into them, widening the spaces between her features seemed initially blurred thereafter absorbed. Her nose I could barely make out. Even the movement of the train contributed to the amalgam between her tremor and the arabesques of the white lace.)

Foucault’s genealogy allows a closer examination of Nilda’s compliance as contingent upon the latent structures of domination and conditioning operating on all members of her socio-cultural milieu. This results in a rationale for believing in women’s inherent inferiority that from our current perspective decades after the founding of the feminist movement, we find confronting and intolerable. Conversely, although conventional history has often preferred to lionise many historical figures, the reality is that few matched the empowerment with which they have been imagined. As Sergio Lo Salvia notes of Anita Garibaldi, for example, her representation as “amazzone immaginaria” is indeed far from the demure and fragile character one gleans from her portrait (Lo Salvia 39).¹⁵⁶

Length 48), (c) “almeno le alunne dietro me non vedevano il portapranzi”(Manzini *Ritratto* 71), “at least the students behind me didn’t see the container of food” (Manzini *Full-Length* 48), (d) “Macché mangiare, il nostro lento assaporare per finta [...] una compostezza cerimoniosa, ridicola” (Manzini *Ritratto* 112), “What we were doing wasn’t eating, but a slow pretence of tasting [...] a ceremonious, ridiculous composure (Manzini *Full-Length* 81).

¹⁵⁶ A further example of the lionised image of historical women is Lucrezia Borgia’s reputation as a manipulator of men when, in light of current knowledge, she is acknowledged for the subjugation, incest, and exploitation she endured at the hands of the abusive males in her life.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that Nilda could have transcended the constraints of her reality because, on the one hand, she had no way of perceiving them as constraints and, on the other hand, her conduct conformed to her society's moral expectations. She blended in, as it were. The same may be said of Giuseppe, whose "weakness" lay in his inability to completely transcend his views regarding women. Like the proverbial goldfish, Giuseppe could not survive outside his bowl. To do so would mean that he lived in an existential vacuum, and to describe Nilda as weak would fail to take into account the historical context of women's status addressed by Manzini.

Sewing's hidden idiom

According to Patrizia Sambuco, the clothes that feature in Elena Ferrante's novel *L'amore molesto* represent a tacit linguistic system communicating through "alternative media" (Sambuco 149). In that novel, the protagonist Delia receives a number of garments hand-sewn by her seamstress mother, Amalia. As Delia acknowledges, for years she rejected her mother without knowing why. As a child, Delia suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of significant males involved in her upbringing. She recalls that when her mother left the house she would hide in the wardrobe among her mother's clothes as a way of feeling close to her mother's body.

As part of her analysis, Sambuco outlines the difference between metaphor and metonym. As distinct from metaphor, which refers to figurative speech that establishes associations using images that are not always "logically comparable", metonym establishes a material connection between objects.¹⁵⁷ A metonym will generally be "linked to the body, to corporeality, to objects", which, unlike metaphor, cannot be lost to "chaotic absence of meaning" (Sambuco 150).

Given its corporeality, metonym significantly represents "a privileged form of expression for women" (Sambuco 150). Accordingly, and put in the simplest possible terms, the dresses in Ferrante's novel function

¹⁵⁷ For example, as in the pen standing for thought, or the sword standing for warfare.

metonymically as a representation of Delia's absent mother's body, whose closeness the character sought in childhood to escape her abusive father.¹⁵⁸ As Delia advances in her quest to understand what happened to her mother in her final days of life, she begins to apprehend the story of violence and subjugation to the patriarchal structure framing the existence of both mother and daughter. For Delia, the key to understanding the story that Amalia could never communicate through words is contained in the clothes the mother created for Delia in the lead up to her suicide.

L'amore molesto and *Ritratto in piedi* are similar in that they both feature an absent mother and, while it is obvious that the absence of Delia's mother is due to her death, the meagre number of lines spoken by Nilda in *Ritratto* may be apprehended as tantamount to a similar state of affairs where Nilda's individuality is concerned.¹⁵⁹ Both Delia and Manzini respectively create their mother's story through the clothes they created for their daughters. The clothes described in both novels represent an alternative means through which the mothers communicated intuitively with their daughters.

In *Ritratto*, Manzini recounts taking part, as a child, in one of Pistoia's religious processions. For the occasion, she wore a dress made by Nilda that was so intricately embroidered that, as Manzini recalls, "smantellò l'ultima resistenza di mia madre. L'aveva ricamato a mano lei, e quale occasione migliore" (Manzini *Ritratto* 34), "[The dress that] in the end finally wore down my mother's resistance. She had embroidered it by hand, and what better occasion" (Manzini *Full-Length* 20).

In a similar spirit, Manzini describes another of her dresses: "il vestito nuovo, bianco, con un bordo di ricamo che girava intorno al collo, scendendo di lato, a sinistra, fino in fondo; alla russa, si diceva. Settimane intere ci aveva lavorato, la mamma" (Manzini *Ritratto* 201), "my new white dress, with a border of embroidery around the collar that ran down to the hem on the left side: Russian-style, it was called. My mama had worked on

¹⁵⁸ "In fact, her dresses were for the little Delia a substitute for her mother" (Sambuco 145).

¹⁵⁹ This is especially so if the views of most of the published commentary are taken into consideration.

it for weeks” (Manzini *Full-Length* 152). Standing out in each of these recollections is Manzini’s awareness of the amount of time Nilda dedicated to creating each dress, an acknowledgement that denotes Manzini’s empathy for and appreciation of her mother’s commitment to creating beautiful clothes for her. The intricacy of the work involved indeed illustrates Nilda’s skill and talent no less than her resilience and perseverance, qualities that have gone unnoticed by published commentaries. In Manzini’s specification of time is a hidden dialogue that goes beyond the need for words. The author is aware that in her mother’s eyes she was worth the time and effort involved. In other words, no matter the situation or the difficulty involved, Nilda is available for her daughter.

In her analysis of Ferrante’s novel, Sambuco states that “the past of the mother lives on with its bearing on the present of the daughter”; the past is never truly overcome but instead, it gathers more value because of “its history of suffering” (Sambuco 147). Following this line of thought, just as Ferrante’s character Delia discovers the “intuitive feeling of closeness with her mother [...] provoked by the dressing gown” (Sambuco 148), the same may be said of Manzini, whose memory of Nilda’s dedication to sewing her dresses reveals the author’s enduring appreciation of her mother’s efforts. Obviating the need for direct dialogue, Manzini draws Nilda in from the margins of the text, allowing the character to convey her own story by means of a wordless idiom as refined as the stitches of her embroidery.

Sambuco points out that growing interest in recent decades in the mother-daughter relationship has reached a turning point for the rediscovery of “a positive attitude to the relationship with the mother” (Sambuco 3).¹⁶⁰ This goal is shared by Alice Walker, whose book *In My Mother’s Garden* highlights the necessity for a genealogy passed from mother to daughter in the form of “the gift of creativity” traceable in the “mother’s daily but extraordinary activities” as seen, in Walker’s case, through her mother’s daily tending of her gardens (Sambuco 3).

¹⁶⁰ According to Sambuco, Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born* marks the turning point in feminist debate by exposing “motherhood as an oppressive institution” while also affirming, “its value as an experience arguing for the daughter’s need to reclaim a positive relationship with her mother” (Sambuco 3).

In the decade following the publication of Walker's work, feminists began to pay attention to the figure of the mother and, significantly, to maternal values as a "positive source of a change of perspective of ethical values" (Sambuco 3). To this end, a more contemporary view of maternal values can be described as "an undogmatic way of thinking, embedded in caring, flexibility, and attention to detail" (Ruddick quoted in Sambuco 3).¹⁶¹

The path to genealogy might not be as easy for some women as it first appears. Ground-breaking though it was, Walker's novel did not revolutionise the way in which women were portrayed. In her analysis of Walker's novel, Jelena Šesnić states that Walker employs the images of "innumerable anonymous women as artists, poets, writers, creating their artworks not in an institutionalized way", but in unconventional ways, forced by the circumstances of their bigoted society (Šesnić 95).¹⁶²

Šesnić's portrait of artistic yearning within the landscape of an overtly bigoted society, described by Walker, can be extended to the landscape of covert bigotry of Italian society. The dedication of women like Nilda and her contemporaries to the conventional occupations of sewing and embroidery may be construed as their escape from "the numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release" (Šesnić 95). In an image accommodating that reality, Manzini refers to the routine around which women's lives are framed. It is a pity that *Ritratto* fails to include an acknowledgement by Giuseppe of Nilda's sewing talent. Sadly, it seems to imply his blindness and indifference to the significance of that "female" realm; or, worse, contempt for it.

Through her sewing and embroidery, Nilda established, albeit indirectly, a genealogy to share with her daughter that would guide her in her narrative goals. Nilda's attention to detail and the intricacy of her embroidery, the dedication and patience with which she created Manzini's

¹⁶¹ Sara Ruddick (1935 – 2011) was a feminist philosopher and author.

¹⁶² According to Šesnić, Walker's novel was ground-breaking. Centred on Afro-American women's struggle for the right to self-expression, the work stands out as a "manifesto to the emerging black women's writing", and, "reclaiming of her cultural heritage" (Šesnić 94).

clothes, parallel Manzini's own attention to narrative intricacies, literary detail fulfilling the author's pursuit of "poetic style in the tradition of art for art's sake" (Amoia 36). Through her mother's example, Manzini's genealogy is established not via the same activity but, rather, via the character qualities required to refine and fine-tune their respective skills.

Family matters in *Ritratto* and Bion's group mentality

Considered by many to be the most influential psychoanalyst after Freud, Wilfred Ruprecht Bion (1897-1979) initially gained recognition for his seminal study of unconscious group processes.¹⁶³ Bion's theories allow this discussion to shed light on the internal power structures within Nilda's family. On the one hand, Bion's theories permit speculation on the underlying reasons for the reverence that the women in Nilda's family displayed towards their brother, ostensibly the family patriarch. On the other hand, they also permit speculation regarding the reasons why Nilda's brother invited Giuseppe to join the family business despite his well-known radical leanings and illegal alliances.¹⁶⁴

A plausible explanation for these puzzles is discernible after a close examination of *Ritratto*'s Chapter Four, which proves a wellspring of examples relating to unconscious family dynamics. The chapter contends that while family members believe that they are consciously participant in particular decisions and behaviours, they are, as Bion says, influenced by a myriad of unconscious processes marshalling allegiance, enmity, rebellion and compliance. A summary of Chapter Four, followed by a description of Bion's theory of group mentality, places these contentions into context.

¹⁶³ As well as being a pioneering psychoanalyst, Bion was also a decorated, if non-conformist, officer during World War One. During World War Two, he was called on to work with returned soldiers to rehabilitate them. Bion attempted to construct a milieu that would be "therapeutic", drawing on his, by then, evolving conclusions regarding the processes inherent in (unconscious) group life that undermined conscious, cooperative functioning within groups. For his trouble, he was relieved of his post some six weeks later by the army. His theory on group function and mentality was further developed post war at the Tavistock Institute.

¹⁶⁴ Although Bion's theory concerns individual-in-group relational realities, there are parallels to be drawn with Foucault's theory of genealogy on the basis that both theories direct attention, albeit from different perspectives, to understanding unconscious aspects of social relating.

Summary of Chapter four

Chapter Four opens with the statement: “Più tardi siamo a cena” (Manzini *Ritratto* 99), “Later. We are at the supper table” (Manzini *Full-Length* 71). The simplicity of Manzini’s opening lines lends a sense of immediacy to the emotions, events, and people involved in the author’s memory of the evening, which she proceeds to recount in exacting detail. With Giuseppe exiled to Porto Ercole, Nilda and Manzini have moved into the family home that they share with Nilda’s sister and her two daughters. The dinner was to be a celebration of sorts, complete with special dishes added to the menu, to welcome Nilda’s brother home from Grosseto where he runs their highly successful family business.¹⁶⁵ Seated amongst the adults, Manzini’s attention is drawn to an ant making its way up the uneven “topography” of the plastered wall: “aggirato un monte, si inoltra in un canalone fatto a esse” (Manzini *Ritratto* 103), “going around a mountain, it enters a winding canyon” (Manzini *Full-Length* 74). As the chapter unfolds, the reader is presented with a chequerboard of loyalties and hostilities, recalled by Manzini in the fullness of its stilted composure: “Intorno a me non si parla, si bisbiglia, con pause così lunghe e assolute che anche il traffico d’un tarlo ce la farebbe a imporsi” (Manzini *Ritratto* 99), “Around me no one talks, they whisper, with long pauses so long and absolute that even a termite’s gnawing would be noticeable” (Manzini *Full-Length* 71). As though gathering her thoughts as to where to begin, Manzini’s focus is on the elegance of the uncle’s attire. Immediately, the uncle is given free rein and he dominates the dialogue by airing his views and grievances while the women remain silent.

Rumours have spread that Giuseppe’s ally, Errico Malatesta, is back in Pistoia: a fact that only serves to heighten the tension in an already divisive atmosphere. In reality, the topic serves as an opportunity for the uncle to vent his rage against Giuseppe who, it is soon understood, is the *bête noire* of his existence. With little concern for Manzini and Nilda who are forced to listen to their father and husband being vilified, the uncle accuses Giuseppe: “Mi sono allevato il serpe in seno” (Manzini *Ritratto* 103), “I nursed a viper

¹⁶⁵ Manzini’s nameless uncle, although also Nilda’s brother and Giuseppe’s brother-in-law, in the interest of simplicity, will be referred to as the uncle.

in my bosom” (Manzini *Full-Length* 74). With others seemingly hypnotised by the phrase, which is repeated throughout the chapter, events leading to the brother’s rift with Giuseppe are remorselessly recounted.

The uncle explains that in response to the uncertain predicament in which Giuseppe’s allegiances placed Nilda and Manzini, he believed that by accepting Giuseppe into the family business he had found a way “di assicurare l’avvenire di mia sorella [...]. Io mi illusi di cementare la famiglia. Di salvare la nostra Nilda” (Manzini *Ritratto* 107), “I believed I was ensuring my sister’s future [...]. I was under the illusion that I was reinforcing the family. Saving our Nilda” (Manzini *Full-Length* 77). It soon comes to light, however, that Giuseppe was following his own concerns in agreeing to the uncle’s offer with the sole aim of improving the working conditions of their employees, specifically by establishing an eight-hour workday. Giuseppe’s goal quickly became that of the workers. However, with the uncle refusing to agree to the workers’ demands, their only option was to stage a strike supported by Giuseppe. Manzini allows Giuseppe to explain his side of the story:

Tentai con poca speranza, è vero, d’avviare e portare avanti pacifiche trattative, facendomi portavoce degli operai. Sarebbe bastato un filo d’arrendevolezza, anzi di comprensione, e lo sciopero sarebbe stato evitato. Purtroppo non restò che agire dimostrativamente. (Manzini *Ritratto* 115)

I tried with little hope, it’s true, to start and bring forward peaceful negotiations, making myself the workers’ spokesman. Just a thread of surrender, or rather understanding, and a strike would have been avoided. Unfortunately, there was nothing to do but strike. (Manzini *Full-Length* 83)

Manzini also allows the uncle to disclose his reasons for inviting Giuseppe into business.

[...] mi dicevo: ‘Questo è un uomo che ci sa fare, pieno di comunicativa. Gli operai lo ascoltano’. Altro che se lo ascoltarono! È leale. Leale al punto che, prima di cominciare aveva già ordito il tradimento. Tradito la mia fiducia, buttato allo sbaraglio i suoi. (Manzini *Ritratto* 107)

I had told myself: ‘This is a man who knows what to do; he’s a good communicator. The workers will listen to him’. Did they ever listen to him! He is loyal: loyal to the point that, before

starting to work for me, he had already planned his betrayal. He betrayed my faith, risked his family. (Manzini *Full-Length* 77)

Thus, both sides of the argument are voiced, by way of a narrative device that allows Manzini to step aside, as it were, from the reasoning motivating the uncle and Giuseppe. As noted, Giuseppe's aim was unsuccessful and, perhaps due to the strength of Giuseppe's convictions, it was the uncle who came away worse off. According to Manzini, a corrosive suffering resentment pervaded all aspects of life and, not least, the very family he was intent on protecting: "Non gli piaceva più [...] nulla. Nemmeno la famiglia, questa palla al piede, questa manica d'ingrati" (Manzini *Ritratto* 111), "He didn't like it anymore. Anything. Not even his family, this millstone around his neck, this band of ingrates" (Manzini *Full-Length* 80).

Heedless of his young niece's feelings, the uncle rants about Giuseppe: "volevi una compagna; e dato che si poteva ottenerla soltanto col matrimonio cadesti in trappola. Ma una figlia era di troppo, per un anarchico..." (Manzini *Ritratto* 106), "you wanted a companion; and given that you could only obtain one through marriage you fell into a trap. But a daughter was too much for an anarchist..." (Manzini *Full-Length* 76). Trying to keep pace, Manzini attempts to piece together the uncle's inference: "Una figlia: io? Non mi volevano? Il mio posto a tavola mi sembra rubato. Chi è una bambina non voluta? Chi sono? Mi sento staccata in una vuota immensità" (Manzini *Ritratto* 106), "A daughter? Me? Didn't they want me? I seem to have lost my entitled place at the table. Who is an unwanted child? Who am I? I feel drawn into an immense void" (Manzini *Full-Length* 76). Speaking up to reassure Manzini, Nilda overrides the comment by telling her: "In capo al mondo saremmo andati, per averti" (Manzini *Ritratto* 106), "We would have gone to the end of the world to have you" (Manzini *Full-Length* 77).¹⁶⁶

Increasingly incensed, the uncle proceeds to mimic Giuseppe by placing a metal toothpick holder to his eye in the manner of a clock maker

¹⁶⁶ This is the first of only two lines granted to Nilda in *Ritratto*. Nonetheless, it is of profound importance because it illustrates the thesis' contention that Nilda was a reassuring presence in Manzini's life, and that when a pressing need arose, Nilda did not hesitate to speak up for her daughter.

using an eyepiece. But the theatrics prove too much for Manzini, who reacts with a scream: “L’urlo sarà il mio. Mio, lo sconvolgo. Ma non ho finito di rendermi conto che eccomi imbavagliata. La camicia di forza addirittura, con due tovaglioli” (Manzini *Ritratto* 168), “The scream was mine. Mine the great outburst. But I hadn’t yet realized it when I found myself bound and gagged. Exactly like a straitjacket, with two napkins” (Manzini *Full-Length* 78). Manzini’s cousin leaps to muffle Manzini: “con i gomiti mi serra le braccia scatenate; e nello stesso tempo mi tempesta la fronte di baci. Soltanto le ginocchia possono urtare contro il tavolino” (Manzini *Ritratto* 108), “she held my flailing arms with her elbows; at the same time she smothered my forehead with kisses. Only my knees were free to kick against the table” (Manzini *Full-Length* 78). It seems that at all costs the women must avoid provoking the uncle, by showing their disapproval.

Yet, by Manzini’s evaluation, the uncle, in his way, was also a victim: “Eppure è stato tradito, ingannato, sorpreso nella buona fede” (Manzini *Ritratto* 104), “And yet he was betrayed, deceived, his good faith disappointed” (Manzini *Full-Length* 74). Manzini summarises his position:

Fino ad allora, tutto gli era andato liscio: una piccola conquista dopo l’altra, un gradino dopo l’altro. Tenacemente, onestamente, con oculatezza perfino geniale, con merito saliva. Che posizione! Solida si dice: una solida posizione, ammirata e invidiata. E l’ubbidienza [...] se è ottenuta in modo così definitivo [...] è un trono. (Manzini *Ritratto* 110)

Up to then everything had run smoothly. One small victory after another, one step after another. Tenaciously, honestly, even with cautious brilliance, meritoriously, he rose. What a position! Solid, it is called: a solid position to be envied and admired. And the obedience [...] if accorded so readily [...] is a throne. (Manzini *Full-Length* 80)

Manzini’s description of her uncle is an amalgam of admiration, fondness, fear and anger, and in Chapter Four she concedes to him the opportunity to voice his grievances. As the evening wears on, the uncle’s account of Giuseppe is intertwined with that of Malatesta, his anger oscillating from one character to the other. Towards the end of the dinner, Nilda seems to overcome the reserve that characterised her presence at the table. Rising to leave the table, she states that Malatesta (not Giuseppe, surprisingly) is “un

grand'uomo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 118), "a very great man" (Manzini *Full-Length* 86). Perhaps emboldened by her mother's remark, Manzini blurts out her relatives: "Siete tutti vigliacchi!" (Manzini *Ritratto* 127), "You are all cowards" (Manzini *Full-Length* 93). For that outburst Manzini receives "un manrovescio indimenticabile. Forse l'unico della mia vita" (Manzini *Ritratto* 127), "an unforgettable backhanded blow. Perhaps the only one of my life" (Manzini *Full-Length* 94). The act surprises even Manzini, who acknowledges her uncle's customary gentleness: "E dire che lo zio era noto per la sua mitezza. I cavalli, i focosi cavalli maremmani, li domava con la voce" (Manzini *Ritratto* 127), "And to think that my uncle was known for his mildness. His tamed his spirited Maremma horses with his voice" (Manzini *Full-Length* 94).

With that final act, the ordeal of the family dinner was over. The chapter ends with an account of Nilda climbing into Manzini's bed to comfort her daughter. Yet it is Nilda who is in tears. Manzini explains: "mentre lei fiottava adagio sulla mia nuca; e io avevo mezza bocca sul guanciale: 'Non mangiamolo più questo pane avvelenato. Pane avvelenato. Andiamo via, io e te sole'" (Manzini *Ritratto* 127), "while she cried quietly against my neck, and my mouth was half on the pillow: Let's not eat this poisoned bread any longer. Poisoned bread. Let's go away. Just you and me." (Manzini *Full-Length* 94).

Bion's concept of group mentality refers to the collective and unconscious mental activity that takes place when people assemble in groups. According to Bion, groups always function as a unit and manifest a unanimous and unconscious mindset to which individual members contribute anonymously (Grinberg et al. 13). However, the shared group mentality is often in conflict with the conscious opinions, aims, and thoughts of individual group members and this conflict results in reactions of, for example, uneasiness, anger, or silence on the part of some of the group members.¹⁶⁷ A prominent aspect of the dinner scene described above is the silence of the women. Manzini is profoundly disturbed by this silence and,

¹⁶⁷ By groups are meant any number of people who have come together with one or more specific purposes. In *Ritratto* the family gathered for the uncle's visit constitutes the group.

finding herself in a growing state of dread and unable to stop her uncle's rant, she observes of the women: "Ammutoliscono. Il loro silenzio è più minaccioso delle parole. Mi sento impotente. Sola. Del tutto sola: piccolissima. Il silenzio è una belva. Sta per divorarmi. Mi annienta" (Manzini *Ritratto* 127), "They were struck dumb. Their silence was more threatening than words. I feel powerless. Alone, utterly alone: very small. The silence was a beast about to devour me. Annihilate me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 93). As noted by Irigaray, the silence suffered by women comes across as a reaction to and identification with each other's hysteria, a "pathology" that is experienced within the "social and cultural structure" (Irigaray 38). Within the narrow confines of the family structure, such pathology is sure to be exacerbated.

Bion coined the term "basic assumptions" to refer to the several underlying somato-emotional phenomena that are expressed through a shared unconscious phantasy. He outlined three basic assumptions that can be at play within a group: the assumption of dependence, the assumption of fight-flight, and the assumption of pairing.

The basic assumption of dependence assumes that the group submits to some authority with a child-like dependence and belief that the authority will solve all the group's problems.¹⁶⁸ The uncle personifies an omnipotent entity that promotes belief in the notion that reverence for authority will provide solutions to life's problems. On the level of group behaviour, dependence is manifest in the women's deference to their brother: "intorno a lui non alita che approvazione e sollecitudine" (Manzini *Ritratto* 100), "Only approval and solicitude surround him" (Manzini *Full-Length* 71). This must be recognised as well as deserved. The uncle represents the orthodoxy that, it is assumed, will provide protection in an uncertain world of unlawfulness, epitomised in this case by Malatesta. In displaying the basic assumption of dependence, group members are compliant and passive, as understood by the women's silence and reluctance to interrupt the uncle. As group leader, the uncle faces the danger of his inability to solve the

¹⁶⁸ The basic assumption of dependence is employed to interpret the dynamics within Manzini's family. However, it is also applicable on a global scale where entire populations become dependent on a leader. In light of twentieth-century history, the basic assumption of dependence readily comes to mind apropos of Hitler and Mussolini, for example.

problems faced by his family. The threat is typified by underlying fear. Manzini's aunt, for example, articulates the fear circulating their existence. For her: "che ci fossero più carabinieri che liberi cittadini le parrebbe una cosa bellissima" (Manzini *Ritratto* 100), "it would be a wonderful thing if there were more policemen than free citizens" (Manzini *Full-Length* 72).

The basic assumption of pairing describes a tendency in a group in which a couple (of whatever constitution, not necessarily male and female) develop an intense interaction while the others appear to be mesmerised by them. The assumption is that the pair will create a perfect, messianic being. This does not necessarily mean the birth of a child: it may be an idea or any number of other "conceptions". The uncle was subject to Giuseppe's projection of "messianic hope" and accordingly hero-worshipped him (Grinberg et al 17). Enthralled by his potential, the uncle employs Giuseppe in blind faith, possibly as a means to fulfil his phantasy; that of being able to relieve himself of the burden of others' dependence, as demonstrated by his disdain for the burden of his siblings.

Giuseppe's activism brings him into contact with broader socio-political viewpoints and, through him, the workers come to comprehend the term "diritto" and, with an understanding of their rights, a new collective and individual identity. Manzini describes the excitement of the workers who until then had subsisted docilely, in Foucaultian terms, held to ransom by their lack of knowledge. Not unlike the uncle, the workers are similarly enthralled by the hope augured in Giuseppe's message: "Viva il Manzini" (Manzini *Ritratto* 109), "'Viva Manzini' they shouted" (Manzini *Full-Length* 79).

According to Manzini, the workers are eventually granted improved work conditions and once order was re-established in the factory the uncle's profits were not any lower: "il guadagno non sarebbe venuto meno né quel progressivo salire nella scala sociale" (Manzini *Ritratto* 111), "he would lose neither income nor his progression up the social ladder" (Manzini *Full-Length* 80).

Given this outcome and his business acumen, why, then, is the uncle so vehemently opposed to Giuseppe's proposition? Foucault provides a

plausible answer. On the one hand, Nilda's brother's capacity for thought is circumscribed by "archaeology" limited to his epoch, and, therefore, he is unable to conceive of the notion of workers' rights. It is easy to construe that the uncle's notion of workers' rights began and ended with giving people a job: "Ho dato lavoro a un mucchio di gente" (Manzini *Ritratto* 112), "I hired a lot of people" (King 81). Yet even that measure of power is perceived as a burden: "Li ho tutti sulle spalle" (Manzini *Ritratto* 112), "Everyone depends on me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 81). The uncle conveys his resentment: "E da tredici anni in su lavoro e sempre lavoro, senza orari di sorta [...] agiato, sissignori, non mi sogno di negarlo, agiato, e uomo maturo, mi diverto? Mi posso divertire?" (Manzini *Ritratto* 112), "By the time I was thirteen I was working without fixed hours of any kind [...] well off, yes sir, I wouldn't dream of denying it, a well off, mature man, do I enjoy myself? Can I enjoy myself?" (Manzini *Full-Length* 81). Giuseppe often engendered the expectation of great things in those he dealt with. The virulence of the uncle's response to Giuseppe's aspirations may be explained by the fact that the "Messiah" is, as always, a disappointment: a fact not lost on Bion who wryly observes, if there is any prospect of the Messiah actually manifesting as flesh and blood, it must never be realised. This will always be because:

For the feelings of hope to be sustained it is essential that the 'leader' of the group [...] should be unborn. It is a person or idea that will save the group – in fact from feelings of hatred, destructiveness, and despair, of its own or of another group – but in order to do this, obviously, the Messianic hope must never be fulfilled. Only by remaining hope does hope persist. (Bion *Experiences* 152)

Hence, while Giuseppe is charismatic, the underpinnings of the basic assumption pairing are always going to promote a rift in the family. Acting as the focus of the basic assumption of "messianic hope", Giuseppe's introduction into Nilda's family brings to bear unresolved emotional states within it. Given that all basic assumption groups undermine any potential for conscious and rational growth and development, the uncle's reaction is instinctively defensive and schismatic (Grinberg et al 19-20).¹⁶⁹ Through

¹⁶⁹ While all groups are influenced by the basic assumptions as outlined, not all are as dysfunctional and damaging as they are in Manzini's account: in reality, many develop positively and collaboratively from

Giuseppe, the uncle attempts to weed out the canker, “the enemy within”. Thus, as depicted in *Ritratto*, Giuseppe transforms into a snake that deserves to have his head smashed: “Schiacciargli la testa, bisognerebbe” (Manzini *Ritratto* 113), “He needs his head smashed” (Manzini *Full-Length* 82).

Nilda is the character that throughout Chapter Four, displays attitudes in line with each of the basic assumptions; and, ultimately, partially overcomes their hold. The basic assumption of dependence is evident in her body language, betraying the obedience to the pack leader. At the dinner table she sat “a schiena rigida. Lo sguardo vacuo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 101), “stiff backed. Her gaze is vacuous” (Manzini *Full-Length* 72). The basic assumption of pairing is seen, for example, in her and Giuseppe’s hopes of running the sewing machine store. From the outset, her union with Giuseppe seems doomed despite the couple’s best intentions. Manzini summarises the outcome of that venture: “poco dopo, mandarono il babbo a Porto Ercole, a domicilio coatto; la bottega venne chiusa; e lei tornò a vivere con i suoi, accettando poi di separarsi legalmente” (Manzini *Ritratto* 116), “not long afterwards they sent my father to Porto Ercole in exile; the store was closed, and mama went to live with her family, accepting legal separation (Manzini *Full-Length* 84). Nilda’s pairing with Giuseppe would always be based on an unattainable ideal and, again, as Bion states, the Messiah must always remain *in potentia* because the reality would destroy the phantasy of perfection.

Submerged by conflicting basic responses that seem to threaten her existence, Nilda rebels against the leader in a manner akin to the basic assumption of fight/flight. This basic assumption supports the idea that there is a palpable enemy either within or outside the group (Bion *Experiences* 152). As mentioned, towards the end of the evening Nilda declares that Malatesta is “un grande uomo” (Manzini *Ritratto* 118). Following her mother’s comment, Manzini provides a description of the outlaw as though to prove the character’s value as a symbol of all that is free and liberating: “l’emblema d’un rischio inebriante, fulgente; era il perseguitato vittorioso, quello che arriva all’improvviso” (Manzini *Ritratto* 118), “the symbol of

thrilling shining danger; he was the victorious persecuted, someone who suddenly appears” (Manzini *Full-Length* 86). Manzini’s words encapsulate the promise of the basic assumption of pairing that promises relief from the struggles involved in coping with life’s remorseless realities.

Bion’s theory concerning basic assumptions assists in explaining the illogical nature of familial relating in *Ritratto*. The theory highlights that, within groups, by means of an unconscious state of mind, often at odds with the desired outcome of a group gathering, the behaviour of the group members can tether them to either conventional or revolutionary authority. Within her family, Nilda was subject to the unconscious influences of basic assumptions that overwhelmed her capacity to defend Giuseppe’s beliefs, or to respond to the uncle’s accusations.

Bion explains that all groups ostensibly meet for the purpose of accomplishing rational, cooperative purposes (Grinberg et al 17). Manzini’s family members come together in Chapter Four in order to accomplish the very specific goal of exposing their vulnerabilities and fears, allowing Manzini to separate herself somewhat from the historical elements that engendered the family rift. Nilda’s very dependence, brought into question, unconsciously, by her support of Malatesta, substituted for an awareness of her own needs and desires. Malatesta represents Nilda’s rejection of both the uncle and Giuseppe, out of which Manzini was able to harness her own need to escape Pistoia. In this manner, Chapter Four draws on Nilda’s role as the narrative centrepiece at the heart of Manzini’s psychic transformation.

The psychoanalytic perspectives presented in this chapter assist in understanding the latent group processes that controlled the behaviour of Nilda’s siblings. Such understanding allows for the rejection of a simplistic criticism of Nilda as a passive and marginal entity. The unconscious forces within her family environment are as powerful as the broader forces beyond the threshold of the family home. It is misguided to expect that Nilda could have engaged in a mutiny with the conscious intentionality employed, for example, by literary heroines such as Dacia Maraini’s Marianna Ucría (Maraini).¹⁷⁰ Rather, through a demonstration of maternal empathy with her

¹⁷⁰ Maraini’s eighteenth-century, deaf-mute heroine, Marianna Ucría breaks with tradition by leaving

daughter's suffering, Nilda was able to be free herself from the misery of insignificance while at the same time preserving aspects of daily life vital to her sense of continuity and normality.¹⁷¹ While none of the characters could fully escape their conditioning, an understanding of the basic assumption of fight-flight explains how Nilda was able to generate a degree of self-assertion. Dependence led her to develop a new relationship with the forces that constrained her, partly expressed as flight, and partly expressed as a creative solution to the conundrum of how to attain a degree of self-determination in the interests of Manzini's future prospects.

Epilogue

Wilfred Bion's *A Memoir of a Future* is the last work in his corpus. The book comprises a trilogy of novels. However, it is a curious production and its genre cannot be easily classified. It is not unambiguously a drama or a novel and the original "cast" of characters begins to expand rapidly. Numerous new characters arrive on the scene, some of whom are literary individuals such as Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Watson, Mycroft, and so on. While some characters derive from imagination and fantasy, others are personifications of historical functions or "parts" of self, such as Mother, Memory, Nurse, All, and Myself. The characters end up in an endless dialogue with the result that the novel is perceived as an heir to Bion's *Experiences in Groups* that informs the psychoanalytic interpretation of this chapter. Bion's final publication is a literary portrayal of various aspects and forces operating within a personality, understood as a group, and engaged in its task of learning how to function more or less harmoniously.

Likewise, if the characters in *Ritratto* are observed at a meta-level, they can also be construed as embodying various forces that Manzini had to contend with as an individual. Chapter Four of *Ritratto* serves as an illustration of this. In the dinner scene, the individual protagonists can be read as indicative of the internal conflicts that Manzini faced. There is, for

Sicily and her grown children. According to Amoia, Ucria's choice was the result of "a more mature relationship with [herself] at last free to design her own destiny" (Amoia 98).

¹⁷¹ As is seen by the pair's move to Florence in order to further rather than disrupt, Manzini's future.

example, her own repressed criticism of her father who repeatedly abandoned his wife and daughter. This is conveyed through her uncle's disapproval of Giuseppe "Tu sei senza patria, né dimora. La patria comincia dalla famiglia, perdio!" (Manzini *Ritratto* 106), "You have no country or home. One's country begins with one's family!" (Manzini *Full-Length* 76).

The sexual overtones in the account of her cousin's "seduction" of an official "che le faceva la corte, [la cugina] tolse all'improvviso le forcine dal nodo dei capelli [...] un'audacia inaudita, in lei" (Manzini *Ritratto* 125), "who was courting her, she suddenly took the pins from her knot of hair [...] an unprecedented audacity on her part" (Manzini *Full-Length* 92), are a reflection of Manzini's assumption of a flight response that would expose her to the uncertainties of maturity. There is also Manzini's "religious" side that idolises Malatesta. Rebellion is accomplished through the choice of a different Messiah while the religious attitude is preserved. Eventually, however, Manzini's frustration overwhelms her and is expressed through the violence of her uncle's slap.

Last but not least, the significance of Giuseppe's subversive behaviour should not be overlooked as a means of illuminating the darker places; the gaps and fault lines, which were aspects of Manzini's own being. Giuseppe's statement "Quella parola 'progressivo' rivela il mio vantaggio" (Manzini *Ritratto* 115), "That word 'progressive' shows my advantage" (Manzini *Full-Length* 84), arguably functions as the symbolic portal to the indirect and unconscious path through which Manzini manages to find a creative solution to the competing forces that beset her. She, like her parents, does not so much transcend the wider forces of her culture and the culture of her family as, like the ant on the dining room wall, wriggle through the cracks formed by their faults and contradictions. Despite it all, with Nilda by her side, Manzini eventually fights fire with fire by bending the enslaving forces of basic assumptions back on themselves.

Chapter Four – Maternal influences

Chapter Four furthers the analysis of Nilda's contribution to Manzini's trauma recovery. The chapter is presented in two parts, with the first adopting a psychoanalytic viewpoint and the second a philosophically-based stance. As it is the contention of this thesis that Nilda played a profound role in Manzini's trauma recovery, a combination of these disciplines allows the chapter to construct an in-depth portrayal of her character, its positive presence in Manzini's life, and further brings to light Nilda's prominence in Manzini's writing.

For the psychoanalytic discussion, the study largely draws from Chapter Seven of *Ritratto* in which Manzini recounts her memories of living in Florence. The author's life took a decisive turn for the better after her move to that city, an experience that she narrates in exuberant terms. Significantly, Manzini's narration of Chapter Seven stands out for the abundant maternal references characterising her description. Because such maternal allusions are lacking in *Ritratto*'s other chapters, the discussion explores their significance and how they relate to Manzini's experience of Florence.

One way to comprehend Manzini's "maternal" description is by viewing Florence as a metonym of Nilda. This contention is aided by the work of the British psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas, whose theories draw attention to the influence of maternal care in the infant's pre-verbal life. According to Bollas, a positive pre-verbal life experience becomes embedded in the infant's psyche, sponsoring her capacity to embrace promising experience in adult life, as is evident in Manzini's account of life in Florence.

Following on from these explorations the chapter proceeds to a philosophical discussion that focuses on Nilda as a source of kindness, trust and reliability, especially where Manzini is concerned.¹⁷² Specifically, that discussion centres on the contention that Nilda always demonstrated a

¹⁷² While the psychoanalytic discussion centres on a hypothesis of Manzini's pre-verbal infant life in Nilda's care, the philosophical discussion centres on Manzini's later childhood.

spontaneous empathy towards those in need that in turn influenced the evolution of Manzini's own empathy for all living beings demonstrated in her narratives.¹⁷³ These contentions are further illustrated by recourse to the novels *Forte come un leone*, *Lettera all'editore*, *Ritratto in piedi* and *Sulla soglia*. Nilda's presence in each of these texts demonstrates that she was far from the marginal entity some commentators have claimed. Moreover, these texts convey the nature of Manzini's relationship with Nilda from the standpoint of Manzini's narration of their interaction, which is often depicted through the subtleties of a private communication carried out by facial expression, physical gesture and sensitised choice of words. By approaching Nilda from such varied interpretive vertices it becomes evident that her character unquestionably played a positive role in Manzini's life.

Maternal influences: part one.

In Chapter Seven of *Ritratto* Manzini states that in Pistoia there were “alcune strade strette come corridoi, misteriose come bisbigli” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “some streets as narrow as corridors, mysterious as whispers” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). Conversely, Manzini states that Florence “mi abbracciava, mentre io l’abbracciavo. Godetti la felicità d’essere viva su quel lastricato” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “embraced me as I embraced it. I savoured the happiness of being alive on that pavement (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). From these passages it is possible to glean a sense of the contrasting ways in which Manzini was affected by the two cities involved in her upbringing. In the first citation, Manzini's depiction of Pistoia alludes to the sense of confinement and uncertainty colouring her mood, whereas the second depicts Florence as a welcoming and carefree environment. Such a contrast is surprising because as Tuscan cities Pistoia and Florence share many similarities. The origins of both reside in antiquity and both share a common history of political and cultural influence in Tuscany's broader historical landscape. Furthermore, they are topographically similar in that both feature narrow thoroughfares, cobbled streets, fountains, piazzas and statues, all of which were constructed in antiquity. Nonetheless, these cities

¹⁷³ Especially in terms of the sensibility with which Manzini depicts her animal characters.

seem to have signified, for Manzini, very disparate experiences. In light of these considerations, the chapter seeks to understand the underlying reasons leading to that divergence in Manzini's views.¹⁷⁴

One hypothesis is that *Ritratto* echoes the author's psychic reality at the time of living in each city.¹⁷⁵ To this end, the chapter contends that the trauma arising out of Manzini's conflicted relationship with Giuseppe is narratively displaced, albeit unconsciously, onto Pistoia as the locus of the occurrence of her trauma. Conversely, Florence represents a period of growth and flourishing that could only have been realised after she distanced herself, literally and figuratively, from Giuseppe. It could be said that leaving Pistoia for Florence heralded the end of Giuseppe's prominence in shaping Manzini's outlook on life, to be replaced by Nilda's rather more reassuring influence. On this basis the chapter contends that Nilda was the facilitator of Manzini's encounter with her Florentine *joie de vivre*.

Christopher Bollas¹⁷⁶ is the acclaimed author of an extensive body of writing but it is his theories relative to the importance of maternal function that are adopted in this discussion to explore Manzini's positive reaction to Florence. According to Bollas, as the primary caregiver, it is usually the mother who, as a result of consistent and reliable care, instils her infant a sense of creativity and optimism (Bollas *Reader* 37). Therefore, it is argued here that as Manzini's primary care giver, Nilda also fostered such qualities in Manzini, and they are perceptible in Manzini's embrace of the opportunities for psychic growth offered by Florence.

The chapter's exploration of these contentions begins with a description of Bollas' concept of the *transformational object*, which frames

¹⁷⁴ This view is supported by Leonard Lutwack who states that in the final analysis, "all places in literature are used for symbolical purposes even though their descriptiveness may be rooted in fact" (Lutwack 31). This assertion allows for the speculation that Manzini's recollection of Pistoia and Florence mirrors a topography of her being that cannot be divorced from the internalised dialogue with her parents.

¹⁷⁵ Manzini was eighteen years old when she moved with Nilda to Florence.

¹⁷⁶ Christopher Bollas lives in the United States. He earned his PhD in English at the University of Buffalo where he studied with Michel Foucault, among others. He became a Professor of English literature in the mid-1980s and worked concurrently as a psychoanalyst. He was a visiting Professor at the Institute of Infant Neuropsychiatry at the University of Rome (1978-1998). Like Ferro, Bollas also draws on narratology as a means of demonstrating psychic evolution.

the notion of Florence as a reflection of Manzini's experience of Nilda's care. This is then followed by a summary of *Ritratto*'s Chapter Seven with the aim of achieving an understanding of the ways in which Manzini benefitted by living in Florence. It is also in Chapter Seven, however, that Manzini recounts her rejection of Giuseppe and the subsequent remorse that plagues her existence thereafter. In order to extrapolate a sense of Giuseppe's influence on Manzini's emotional conflicts, the discussion visits several anecdotal accounts in *Ritratto* in the lead-up to Chapter Seven. The discussion of these contentions unfolds by resort to Bollas' theories of the *unthought known*, *mood*, and *fate*, which allow a view into the value of narration as a means of working through unresolved family conflicts. From there the discussion refocuses on Manzini's experience of Florence via the application of Bollas' concept of *destiny drive*, *idiom*, and *aesthetic experience*. This discussion traces the evolution of Manzini's destiny drive which the chapter argues began in Pistoia where, albeit unconsciously, her awareness of a better future was initially foreshadowed.

The chapter proceeds to a discussion of Nilda's idiom of care as a spontaneous and fluid activity and how it may be detected in Manzini's narrative pertaining to Florence. Two anecdotes from Chapter Seven are analysed: specifically, Manzini's reaction to the music during a concert and her response to viewing Titian's painting, *The concert*, as instances of Manzini's aesthetic experience. The discussion concludes with a brief examination of the infant's acquisition of language and how it relates to maternal function. Bollas' analysis of Kenneth Grahame's story *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) is employed to complete the analysis of Manzini's aesthetic experience. Therefore, as usual, *Ritratto* is a rich source of textual examples appropriate to the discussion. Indeed, Manzini's description of her life in Florence can be understood as a veritable mosaic of narrative illustrations consistent with Bollas's theories.

Manzini's original transformational object.

Christopher Bollas states that in pre-verbal life an infant cannot recognise her mother as a separate person. Rather, the mother is identified as a process

that alters her state of being. This is achieved through the daily rituals of the mother's care revolving around the infant's physical needs such as feeding, changing, bathing, soothing, playing and sleeping (Bollas *Shadow* 14).¹⁷⁷ Because of her foundational role, Bollas describes the mother as the original transformational object on the basis that she is literally the original transformer of her infant's existence from an experience of misery and discomfort, to one of comfort and contentment. These cumulative transformations establish the mother's primacy, as the "enviro-somatic transformer": that is, the facilitator of her infant's capacity to integrate all encountered experiences instinctually, cognitively, affectively, and environmentally. In other words, she is responsible for the entirety of internal and external transformations (Bollas *Shadow* 14).¹⁷⁸

Following the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, Bollas contends that the mother provides her infant with a "continuity of being" that is drawn from the "stillness" arising from the mother's holding, both literally and figuratively. These early experiences are processed through the privacy of a communication based on an idiom of intersubjective gestures, gazes and utterance (Bollas *Shadow* 13).¹⁷⁹ It is within the stillness of this "holding" environment that her infant receives the mother as the "enviro-somatic transformer". From the infant's point of view, in moments of distress, the mother magically appears, and the repetition and consistency of that event instils in the infant the belief that the mother's appearance arises out of the infant's innate creative impulses.¹⁸⁰ Such consistency and reliability of care are the crucial factors in enabling the infant's development of a "perceptual identification" with the opportunities for transformations (Bollas *Reader* 2).

According to Bollas, a person's early experience of the original

¹⁷⁷ As stated by Bollas: "It is an identification that emerges from symbiotic relating" (Bollas *Shadow* 14).

¹⁷⁸ That includes the distress of hunger, thirst, fear and cold, for example.

¹⁷⁹ The notion of stillness is owed to Donald Winnicott. It is a term he coined to describe the infant's experience as she is held, literally and figuratively, in a state of all-encompassing bliss (Winnicott 594).

¹⁸⁰ This is so on the basis that the transitional object allows the infant to play with the "illusion" of her own omnipotence (Bollas *Reader* 2).

transformational object lives on into our adulthood, informing and influencing our choices and decisions. Bollas describes it as a “phenomenon” of being that manifests in humanity’s “wide-ranging collective search” for transformational life experiences (Bollas *Shadow* 15). Indeed, as Bollas asserts, “the advertising world makes its living on the trace of the [transformational] object: the advertised product usually promises to alter the subject’s external environment and hence change internal mood” (Bollas *Shadow* 16).

Of course, seeking fulfilment is a normal part of life that should be pursued. However, the significance of Bollas’ concept lies in understanding the adult investment in transformational experiences, whether it be a new job, a new relationship, a trip, or any other object. The underlying quest, Bollas argues, is founded upon the desire to re-experience the process of transformation experienced as a result of maternal care (Bollas *Reader* 3).¹⁸¹

Furthermore, Bollas explains, the intensity of a person’s relation to an object as a symbol of transformation is the result of an identification with the deeply affective experience generated in the mother’s original holding environment and its promise of a transformational experience (Bollas *Shadow* 16). Therefore, the more attuned and responsive to the infant’s needs the mother was, the greater a person’s capacity to welcome positive transformative experiences in later life.¹⁸²

Bollas’ description of the transformational object as a symbol of ingrained affective infant experience informs the chapter’s analysis of Manzini’s affective response to Florence. To this end, the chapter contends that Manzini’s exuberant reaction to Florence resonates with her pre-verbal experience of Nilda’s responsive interaction with her infant. Through her care Nilda fostered Manzini’s capacity to welcome transformations as ultimately positive experiences. Manzini’s openness to the embrace of

¹⁸¹ In relation to the seeking of a transformational experience, Bollas states: “although it seems grounded in the future tense [...] it is an object seeking that recurrently enacts a pre-verbal [...] memory” (Bollas *Reader* 3).

¹⁸² Winnicott speaks of the “good enough mother” in reference to the capacity “of assuming maternal care that is adequate in the important respects” (Winnicott 588). By this, the analyst purports that it is the *consistency* of availability that ensures that mothering is of a good standard.

Florence is thus understood as a reflection of the transformations Nilda offered Manzini in her early infancy.¹⁸³

Indeed, from the onset of her new life in Florence, Manzini's response to the city echoes the mother's appearance before her expectant infant. Referring to Florence Manzini states: "Mi si parò davanti ad un tratto, come un viso. Ne realizzai di colpo il colore: ne ho il nome sulla punta della lingua, di quel colore, ma devo proibirmi di dirlo, dato che lo riconobbi come il mio" (Manzini *Ritratto* 190), "It appeared before my eyes suddenly like a face. I realized what colour it was at once: the name of that colour is on the tip of my tongue, but I must not say it since I recognized it as my colour" (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). Manzini's initial perception of Florence reflects the infant's knowing of the mother only after she comes into her infant's view. And, as though intuiting the reasons underlying her rapture as the result of a symbiotic attachment, Manzini concedes that her reaction to Florence was based on "un'assurda immedesimazione: un appropriarsi più per capire" (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), "an absurd identification: appropriated so as to understand" (Manzini *Full-Length* 143).

That Manzini's reaction to Florence resonated with the infant's pre-verbal stage of life is evidenced by her inability to ascribe logic to the unexpected joy elicited by her encounter with the city. She concludes that was impossible to explain because it was "una cosa che accade" (Manzini *Ritratto* 192), "something that just happens" (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). Despite this, and arguably due to Manzini's finely attuned sensibilities intertwined with creative ability, the author describes her experience by resorting, fittingly under the circumstances, to the re-evocation of an undoubtedly lived experience: that of an infant gently rocked in her mother's arms, "raccolta e sostenuta nel suo multiplo movimento" (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), "cozied, sustained in its multiple movement" (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). As a major transformational object, Florence introduced Manzini to a second childhood mirrored by her willingness to regress to a state of surrender and trust originally experienced in maternal care and re-evoked as

¹⁸³ That was a positive experience that extended to Manzini's adult life.

a joyful encounter with Florence.¹⁸⁴

Summary of Chapter Seven

In 1914 Manzini and her mother cut ties with Pistoia by moving to Florence where she completed her tertiary studies. This was facilitated by the fact that Giuseppe was by then exiled to Cutigliano, a municipality approximately midway between Pistoia and Florence. Chapter Seven in *Ritratto* recounts Manzini's experience of life in Florence. The sense of stifling monotony that had characterised her daily life in Pistoia is replaced by a boundless positivity, manifest primarily through her improved health. Used to the ravages of illness, once in Florence Manzini quickly finds herself brimming with a never-before experienced "scoppiante energia" (Manzini *Ritratto* 193), "bursting with energy" (Manzini *Full-Length* 145).

Even her physical appearance seems to undergo a transformation. In a description reminiscent of the flowing locks of Botticelli's Venus, Manzini states that her long hair took on "un che d'elettrico, fruscivano, cantavano [...] gaia follia. Un daffare poi a tenerli a bada in un nodo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 193), "something electric and swishing about it sang [...] gay insanity. It was real work to keep it in a knot" (Manzini *Full-Length* 145). Moreover, for one acquainted with the frailty brought about by lengthy convalescences, Manzini rejoices in the strength of her legs, "uno scatto felice: mi comandavano" (Manzini *Ritratto* 193) "a happy strength, they took charge" (Manzini *Full-Length* 145).¹⁸⁵ In a further description, she states that from a thin and sickly girl she transformed into a healthy young woman whose appreciation for such unexpected well-being can only be gauged by direct experience: "La salute, per chi l'incontra a un tratto, è un vino che può

¹⁸⁴ Relevant to the chapter's considerations is Manzini's entry in her diary dated 30 August 1947: "Un giorno bisognerà che scriva del mio rapporto con Firenze. Quella città mi autorizza ad essere me stessa. Lì mi riconosco. Un tempo fu penoso riconoscermi. Ora non più. Perdo ogni incertezza, sono spedita in ogni pensiero, so muovermi, so risolvermi. Capisco che cosa fu la mia giovinezza e, ad onta di tutto, ne sono fiera" (Manzini quoted in Bello Minciacci et al. 11), (One day I must write about my relationship with Florence. That city gives me permission to be myself. There, I know myself. Knowing who I am used to cause me pain, but not anymore. I lose all uncertainty, my thoughts are uninhibited, I know where to go, I find solutions. I understand my youth and, despite it all, I feel proud).

¹⁸⁵ As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, Manzini's statement about the strength of her legs is in regard to her flight from Piazzale Michelangelo after unexpectedly seeing Giuseppe. Her comment alludes to the speed that served her well as she ran home as quickly as possible (Manzini *Full-Length* 145).

ubriacare. Altro ad esserci assuefatti. Come la ricchezza” (Manzini *Ritratto* 193), “Health, to whoever comes to it suddenly, is a wine that intoxicates. Something out of the ordinary. Like wealth” (Manzini *Full-Length* 145).

As a consequence of her improved health, Manzini’s senses seem to sharpen in response to her new vitality. Her previous abhorrence of food is happily usurped: “ingordigia di tutto, mi agguantò lo stomaco; e fu meraviglioso scoprire il pane” (Manzini *Ritratto* 193), “sudden greed for everything grabbed my stomach, and it was wonderful to discover bread” (Manzini *Full-Length* 145). In a reaction far removed from the embarrassment caused by the elaborate lunches delivered to her school in Pistoia, Manzini recounts how she openly devoured slices of bread and butter on her way to her classes, for all to see. Smells enticed; signs of life palpitated at every corner: “Odori di pioggia sulla pietra. Odori di campagna portati a folate. Odori di libri invecchiati nelle sale della biblioteca. Odori delle sigarette sui vestiti e nei capelli dei compagni. Odori di cavalli che sudano. Odori di donna; di bucato; di lini e di cotone nelle mercerie” (Manzini *Ritratto* 193), “The smell of rain on the stones. Country smells riding on the breeze. The smell of old books in the library. The smell of cigarettes on my companions’ clothes and hair. The smell of sweating horses. Woman smells, laundry smells, linen and cotton smells in clothing stores” (Manzini *Full-Length* 146). Moreover, in a description reminiscent of Escher’s Italian townscapes, Florence is perceived as a sequence of architectural relationships shifting and bending perspective: a piazza, “come per magia” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “as if by magic” appears to exceed its “reali misure” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191) “actual measurements” (Manzini *Full-Length* 143), in a progression of shapes and forms that sees her attention drawn from the stairway to paradise that is the Biblioteca Nazionale, to encounters with such heady discoveries as the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace (204). Manzini’s architectural descriptions recall the Chilean psychoanalyst Matte-Blanco’s theory of the symmetrical relations governing the unconscious mind wherein, as with poetic tropes, a part comes to stand for whole.¹⁸⁶ An infant, for example, recognises her mother from her comforting

¹⁸⁶ Ignacio Matte-Blanco (1908-1995) was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who formulated a mathematical based explanation of mental operations. Briefly, Matte-Blanco argued that asymmetrical

grasp as she is lifted towards the “oceanic” bliss of her chest.¹⁸⁷

In equal measure, Manzini’s intellectual life flourished, rewarding her with one scholarship after another (192). Manzini’s unquenchable thirst for knowledge was sated somewhat by her friendship with a bookstore owner who was happy to lend her books on the proviso that she returned them the following day. Manzini explains that she would angle her neck sideways to read the pages because she was only allowed to separate the side of the pages while leaving the top intact, as instructed by the bookstore owner. School no longer represented the domain of rejection, but rather, “l’ebbrezza delle lezioni”, (Manzini *Ritratto* 192), “the excitement of the classes” (Manzini *Full-Length* 145) rounded off with an abundance of extracurricular diversions: theatre, concerts, art exhibitions (Manzini *Full-Length* 192). A sense of destiny unfolds, promising new vistas. Manzini feels herself traversing the threshold of “una seconda innocenza. Fino a quel momento ci affannavamo a imparare, capacitarci, affinarci: non serve più. Fra ombra e silenzio, bruciato ogni bagaglio di cultura” (Manzini *Ritratto* 204), “a second innocence. Up to that moment we have struggled to learn, to understand, to become refined: it is no longer useful. Among shadows and silence, with all cultural baggage burned” (Manzini *Full-Length* 154).

Approaching womanhood, Manzini recounts that in Florence she received her first silk stockings, her first bra, a buckle for her belt, and her first pair of sunglasses: objects marking phases of progression in her young life. However, punctuating these joyous initiations, Chapter Seven also recalls the advent of Manzini’s shame of Giuseppe and her need to keep him at arm’s length, detailing descriptors of his poverty: “Le scarpe vecchissime, troppo lustre, facevano piangere. Il vestito, pulito, sì, ma ormai senza forma; come un pigiama” (Manzini *Ritratto* 207), “His very old, too shiny shoes were enough to make you cry. His suit, certainly clean, but shapeless – like pyjamas” (Manzini *Full-Length* 156). In the course of her joyful existence, Manzini, for the first time in her life, is ashamed to be seen with Giuseppe.

logic prevails in conscious rational thought while symmetrical logic prevails in the unconscious, in dreams, and in highly emotional aspects of life. These states occupy a “domain of similarity” where, metonymically, a part “mirrors” the whole (Charles 792).

¹⁸⁷ Freud described as oceanic the subject’s “feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole” (Freud “Civilization” 65).

Plunged into the moral conflict that would plague her existence after Giuseppe's death, Manzini questions the source of her sense of guilt: "rimorso di che cosa? Per carità" (Manzini *Ritratto* 190), "remorse for what? For heaven's sake" (Manzini *Full-Length* 143). In an attempt to attenuate her remorse, Manzini singles out an improbable rationale: that at least she did her best to uphold Giuseppe's ideals by refusing the party card that would have offered certain advantages during the Fascist regime.¹⁸⁸ An outburst of frustration towards Giuseppe, it seems that in any case, the presence of her beloved father proved the single factor marring Manzini's experience of Florence and, as she states, her freedom to "calarmi tutta nella mia repentina, rapinosa gioventù" (Manzini *Ritratto* 194), "sink myself completely into my sudden, rapacious youth" (Manzini *Full-Length* 146).

Hovering in the background of these occurrences is Nilda, consistently ready to provide any support required to help Manzini get through her day, whether in the form of practical assistance by writing out Manzini's hurriedly scribbled lecture notes (Manzini *Ritratto* 197), or by marking her eighteenth birthday with a special gift: "Una grande croce di topazi da portare al collo con una catinella" (Manzini *Ritratto* 197), "A large topaz cross with a chain" (Manzini *Full-Length* 149). Nilda is identified as Manzini's dependable companion. When, after visits to the theatre the pair stroll along the Arno, a topography of reassuring images frame Manzini's recollection, to provide a distraction during the exam period: "balconi, finestre, cielo, stelle, luna, selciati di strade deserte, chioccolii d'una fontana, qualche canto; silenzio" (Manzini *Ritratto* 197), "balconies, windows, sky, stars, moon, paving stones of deserted streets, a gurgling fountain, a song, silence" (Manzini *Full-Length* 149). Nilda's presence seems to procure for Manzini a necessary sense of stillness so that she can

¹⁸⁸ The matter of the party card highlights the complicated and conflicting environment pressing on Italian female writers under the Fascist regime. Guido Bonsaver analyses the unofficial censorship imposed on women authors. He states that according to archival records, "Gianna Manzini was excluded from public recognition for her writing, but at the same time was receiving funds" from both the Ministry for Popular Culture (MCP) and Mussolini's ministerial office (253). However, Bonsaver also notes that in the hostile environment generally faced by female authors during the regime, authors such as Manzini and Alba De Céspedes were uniquely positioned to question, albeit indirectly, "some of the basic values of Fascism's domestic life" (260). Nonetheless, Manzini's claim in *Ritratto* that she refused a party card constitutes a further discrepancy. By way of explanation, it is possible that her claim obfuscates yet another trick of memory, as previously noted for example, in regard to Giuseppe's date of birth (see Chapter One). Be that as it may, the matter sheds further light on the author's conflicted emotions vis-à-vis the remorse that characterised her paternal relationship.

negotiate the transitions encountered in Florence. One pointed example, following Manzini's flight from Piazzale Michelangelo after sighting her father, is that it is Nilda who Manzini calls for to help her overcome her anguish: "Mamma salvami" (Manzini *Ritratto* 196), "Mama save me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 148).

From here the analysis proceeds to an examination of textual anecdotes that speak to Manzini's need to escape her father's influence. For this exploration the discussion turns to Bollas' concepts of the unthought known, mood, and fate.

The unthought known

Echoing Freud's foundational account of the workings of the human unconscious, Bollas states that "in each of us [there is] a fundamental split between what we think we know and what we know but may never be able to think" (Bollas *Shadow* 282). Bollas refers to this state of unthinkable knowing as the unthought known, specifically used in reference to a person's inability to consciously perceive the negative aspects of childhood experience.¹⁸⁹

In *Ritratto*, the overall tone of the author's description of Pistoia portends, through the ponderous nature of the narrative, a vestige of Manzini's unthought known: "Che città a quei tempi, Pistoia: viatici, funerali, campane a morto" (Manzini *Ritratto* 16), "What a town in those times. Pistoia: the Last Sacraments, funerals, bells tolling for the dead" (Manzini *Full-Length* 5). A sense of the inevitable predominates, a fatefulness that marries with a lack of agency. Recalling one of Pistoia's familiar beggars known as Cianino, Manzini states: "passava il lunedì; era piccolo come un vecchio bimbo ridente" (Manzini *Ritratto* 16), "he passed by every Monday. He was as small as a little old smiling baby" (Manzini *Full-Length* 5). Unwittingly, Giuseppe's ensuing comment: "nessuno avrà il diritto di essere felice" (Manzini *Ritratto* 16), "no one will have the right to

¹⁸⁹ Bollas' concept of the unthought known differs from his concept of the transformational object in that the unthought known becomes instilled in a person's psyche during childhood rather than early infancy. By the time an infant reaches childhood she will have experienced her sense of self in relation to the world (Bollas *Shadow* 4). On this basis, it is argued here that Manzini's boundlessly fruitful experience of Florence owed it genesis to a gratified pre-verbal life.

be happy” (Manzini *Full-Length* 5), only serves to reinforce Manzini's unthought known of childhood sadness. Akin in some ways to the neuroscientific concept of non-declarative memory,¹⁹⁰ Bollas' theory of the unthought known represents an aspect of an individual's existential memory that could, theoretically, be consciously articulated by the subject under questioning. But, until then, it is never consciously scrutinised. Once again, the goldfish comes to mind. Presumably, the goldfish never questions the concept of water.

Moods

As an avenue into a person's unthought known, Bollas' hypothesis assumes that the unconscious may be “tapped into” via particular moods that seem to impose themselves on a person, apparently unbidden (Bollas *Shadow* 5).¹⁹¹ In Bollas' lexicon, moods are understood to represent “psychic phenomena” serving “important unconscious functions” (Bollas *Shadow* 115). To summarise, Bollas states that like dreams, moods possess an aspect of incommunicability. However, when a person enters a mood, like a person who is asleep, they enter into “a special state where a temporal element is at play. They will emerge, like the dreamer, after the spell is over” (Bollas *Shadow* 115). For this reason, one of the benefits of moods is that they allow a part of the person's self-awareness to shift into a positive state so that “a complex internal task is allowed time and space to work itself through” (Bollas *Shadow* 100). To this end, several anecdotes in *Ritratto* may be taken as narrative depictions of Manzini's unthought known that ultimately led to psychic resolution. Linked by the seemingly incoherent emotional responses that they elicit in Manzini, these anecdotes draw attention to the incommunicability characterising her relationship with Giuseppe, in itself a surprising turn of events considering the author's commitment to tell

¹⁹⁰ As described in Chapter One of this thesis, memory is both explicit (declarative) and implicit (non-declarative). While the declarative memory refers to conscious memories, non-declarative memory refers to unconscious memories that cannot be consciously recalled but nonetheless influence a person's emotions. Childhood trauma is understood to be stored in the non-declarative memory.

¹⁹¹ Bollas explains that when “certain analysands establish crucial states of being [...] they often do this by living through a mood” (Bollas *Shadow* 100). Bollas elaborates that on such occasions analysands “can articulate their internal states of mind and ordinarily provide [the therapist] with a narrative of their life, but important elements of experience are only expressed through moods” (Bollas *Shadow* 100).

everything (Manzini *Ritratto* 190).

Beginning with an account of a particular day when she was walking with her father in Pistoia, Manzini recounts Giuseppe's observation of a woman pushing a pram. In relation to the baby nestled in the carriage, Giuseppe remarks to his daughter:

Non credi che, contro il petto della sua mamma, tenuto in braccio, sarebbe più felice? Senza dubbio, i piccini sarebbero consolati dal puro contatto fisico con la mamma; la pelle, dico; un odore, un tepore, un tessuto che loro riconoscono per proprio [...] poi, il tic-tic del cuore: anche attutito dai vestiti, che conforto percepirlo. Ascoltandolo imparerebbero adagio a mettersi in moto, a vivere rassicurati. (Manzini *Ritratto* 38)

Don't you think he would be happier held in his mother's arms against her breast? Without a doubt, the little ones would be consoled by the pure physical contact with their mamas: I mean the skin, smell, warmth, even a fabric they would recognize as belonging to their mother [...] And then, the tick-tock of her heart, muffled by the clothes, what a comfort to perceive it. Listening to it, they would slowly learn to move, be reassured. (Manzini *Full-Length* 23)

Far from finding reassurance in Giuseppe's rather sophisticated understanding of the infant's need for physical contact, Manzini's whole psyche is jolted by the sudden awareness of the anguish underpinning her existence. Her response is as follows:

Non fiatai. Fui a un tratto sconosciuta a me stessa. Ascoltandolo, divenni via via come un seme perduto fra le pieghe della terra. Adagio la mia fisica ottusità parve sfogliarsi; ma erano fogli pesanti, compatti, quasi marmorei. Tuttavia, qualcosa che dormiva in me, baluginò: e riuscii a presentire quanto può pesare un dolce bambino in collo; sì che mi dolevano vagamente non solo le braccia, ma le reni e l'inguine. (Manzini *Ritratto* 38)

I couldn't breathe. Suddenly I was a stranger to myself. Listening to him I gradually became like a seed lost in the folds of the earth. Slowly my physical torpor seemed to strip away, but in heavy, compact, almost in marmoreal leaves. Nevertheless, something asleep in me blinked, and I could imagine the weight of a sweet baby in my arms; a vague ache was not only in my arms but also in my back and groin. (Manzini *Full-Length* 24)

It seems likely that Manzini's response encapsulates the mood into which the author unwittingly entered. Manzini's mood may be viewed as a reflection, as Bollas states, of a "disowned internal experience" that is preserved "intact during childhood" (Bollas *Shadow* 113). A textual example offered by Bollas that closely resembles Manzini's real life experience provides an insight into her reaction to Giuseppe's observation.

Bollas writes that if a child's father, for example, "departs for a year, and if this separation is inadequately worked through with the mother and father, then a child may assume this loss (of the father and of the child self lost with the absent father) is a self-defining event" (Bollas *Shadow* 111). Bollas elaborates that in such situations, a child can be left to work on a problem that is beyond her capability, leaving her to assume that the issue is unresolvable. In turn, that unresolved state of affairs becomes part of that child's sense of identity. Manzini's recollection regarding the "weight" of a baby seems connected to her own childhood wherein the experience of trauma is expressed via physical discomfort. According to Bollas, when a person is subject to a mood, "he becomes the child self who was refused expression in relation to his parents for one reason or another. Consequently, moods are often the existential registers of the moment of a breakdown between a child and his parents" (Bollas *Shadow* 115). Manzini's description of disappearing into the earth invokes a sense of how she felt as a child caught in the midst of parental conflict.

Yet, as Bollas elaborates, moods also serve a vital and ultimately positive function because they help a subject "work through" her experience (Bollas *Shadow* 102). Therefore, by narrating her recollection of the child in the pram, Manzini is granted the opportunity to work through her own internal experience, the narration of which proves a means to get in touch with "her former infant-child" and thereby contact the generative potentialities of moods (Bollas *Shadow* 102). As though emerging from a dream with a new clarity, Manzini achieves a productive conclusion that counteracts the image of disappearing into the earth: "L'aria fa tanto bene, vero, ai bambini? Ero felice di essere d'accordo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 39), "Fresh air is good for babies, isn't it? I was happy to be in agreement"

(Manzini *Full-Length* 24).

Another episode evokes a similar result. In a further allusion to unresolved parental conflict, Giuseppe states apropos of the influence of Nilda's siblings on Manzini: "Me la cambiano, me la sciupano, me la trasformano, questa bambina" (Manzini *Ritratto* 40), "They are changing, ruining, transforming this child" (Manzini *Full-Length* 24). In response to Giuseppe's concerns, Manzini states that, "come in sogno, con quella frase dinamitarda, gli corsi avanti (Manzini *Ritratto* 40), "as in a dream at that explosive phrase, I ran ahead (Manzini *Full-Length* 24). The mood allowed her to overstep the friction surrounding her childhood. From it, she emerged with the following understanding: "Ero uscita da una voragine soave e dolorosa" (Manzini *Ritratto* 40), "I had come out of a sweet and painful chasm" (Manzini *Full-Length* 25).¹⁹²

Perhaps surprisingly, the unthought known can also be traced as a mood that is carried generationally through one's ancestral legacy (Bollas *Shadow* 283). As though to prove Bollas' postulation, Manzini begins *Ritratto* with a declaration of her disquiet arising from the persistence of family resemblance: "L'insistenza di generazione a generazione, di certi tratti somatici, e insieme di una linea spirituale e di coscienza, mi turbò" (Manzini *Ritratto* 7). "The persistence from generation to generation of certain somatic traits, together with a line of spiritual and of moral consciousness disturbed me" (Manzini *Full-Length* 1).¹⁹³

Thus, despite the championing of her family history, Manzini's discomfort alludes to the presence of her unthought known. Surprisingly, after seeing the image of her ancestor, the first Manzini to be born in Pistoia, Manzini describes: "un viso ovale, lungo come il mio o, meglio, come quello del babbo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 7), "an oval face long as mine, or rather, as long as father's" (Manzini *Full-Length* 1). It seems that just by being

¹⁹² The similarity of psychoanalytic theories discussed in this thesis is evident; Bollas' notion of moods, for example, overlaps to some extent with Bion's reverie, and, by extension, with Ferro's theory of narrative derivatives.

¹⁹³ This anecdote was also cited in Chapter Two of this thesis in relation to Freud's theory of historical family conflicts. But, as is argued here, the anecdote also serves as an illustration of Bollas' theory of moods.

Giuseppe's daughter Manzini automatically entered a politically compromising situation, the understanding of which would obviously elude a child's comprehension.

However, as in the previous anecdotes, in this instance Manzini also seems to arrive at a workable conclusion that offers relief and understanding: "tutto sommato, quantunque mi faccia impressione la costanza di certi lineamenti fisionomici e spirituali, devo convenire che a mio avviso qualsiasi blasone non aggiunge nulla alla figura di mio padre" (Manzini *Ritratto* 8), "all said and done, even though the similarity of certain facial features and spiritual characteristics disturbs me, I must admit that nothing can add to my father's stature" (Manzini *Full-Length* 2).

This study contends that there is value in recognising the above anecdotes as narrative representations of moods. As such they are interpreted as aspects of Manzini's unthought known allowing an insight into the unconscious nature of her unresolved childhood experience. Moreover, by recourse to Bollas' notion of unthought known, the analysis goes some way to explaining the reasons underpinning Manzini's need to avoid her father in her young adult life. Bollas' description of fate further contributes to the exploration of the stasis pervading Manzini's characterisation of Pistoia.

Fate

Although historically viewed as synonymous and interchangeable, in modern times the notions of fate and destiny have come to represent divergent realities. Destiny represents the freedom to chart life towards a sense of fulfilment, whereas fate represents a sense of life pre-ordained by external events (Bollas *Reader* 43). It was not until the eighteenth-century that a differentiation between fate and destiny began to occur, coinciding with the rise of the middle class, out of which emerged the notion of the individual who, through "vision and labour", was able to determine his own destiny (Bollas *Reader* 43). Conversely, deriving from the Latin *fatum*, meaning "a prophetic declaration" fate continued to be associated with the idea of all that is unalterable in life (Bollas *Reader* 43). Bollas surmises that possibly because the idea of fate has origins in agrarian culture which

rendered people dependent on the seasons and weather for successful crops, it perpetuated the belief that life was at the mercy of the elements. The idea of unalterable fate has a bearing on a person's outlook on life similar to Bollas' notion of unthought known as the harbinger of unthinkable and unchangeable phenomena.

To this end, metaphors of ruination abound in the use made in *Ritratto* of Italian symbolism for death and mourning. Manzini is sent to pick chrysanthemums¹⁹⁴ while visiting her aunt Isolina who asserts that Giuseppe's politics brought devastation to the family: "Per sempre [...]. Un 'sempre' più pesante di una pietra tombale" (Manzini *Ritratto* 154), "Always [...]. An 'always' heavier than a tombstone" (Manzini *Full-Length* 115). It can be seen also in Manzini's presentiment of eternal agony marking her father's life, and, by extension, her own (Manzini *Ritratto* 29). Even Pistoia's topography of dark, narrow streets alludes to a sense of confinement anticipated by generational fate that determined the outcome of life as predictably as "l'ora rituale del passeggio, al tramonto, con le ragazze da marito, due passi avanti alle mamme e alle zie" (Manzini *Ritratto* 16), "the ritual *passeggiata* at sunset with other unmarried girls, two steps ahead of our mothers and aunts" (Manzini *Full-Length* 6). Presumably, Manzini expected to follow suit. (Bollas *Reader* 21).

Manzini's family history and her unhappy childhood imbued her with a sense of the unalterability of life represented by her native Pistoia, a city depicted anecdotally as Manzini's oracle of annihilation bearing down on her existence: "L'abitudine trionfa e con l'abitudine una compostezza lietamente sepolcrale" (Manzini *Ritratto* 20), "Habit triumphs, and with habit a cheerfully sepulchral composure" (Manzini *Full-Length* 9).

The question arises as to whether Manzini would have engaged similarly with Pistoia as the agent of her destiny had she been brought up there in a welcoming, nourishing, optimistic environment? The present analysis agrees only to a point because, long before her encounter with Florence, Manzini had interacted with her original transformational object in

¹⁹⁴Chrysanthemums symbolise the dead in Italian tradition. On All Souls Day Italians take chrysanthemums to the cemetery.

the guise of Nilda, a mother whose felicitous intervention facilitated the evolution of her daughter's sense of destiny.¹⁹⁵ On this note, the discussion turns to a description of destiny drive.

Destiny drive

According to Bollas, the concept of destiny depicts “that course that is the potential in one's life”, the root of which is linked to the word destination (Bollas *Reader* 43). As if to highlight the ease with which Manzini departs from the “determinati andirivieni” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “well-defined activity” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144) that framed her Pistoian existence, Manzini entered her destination of Florence with the ease of stepping through a gate, and immediately she was “ricreata da una forza che mischiava all'orgoglio genuflessa gratitudine” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “recreated by a power combining pride with genuflecting gratitude” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144).¹⁹⁶ Propitiously, it is the intervention of Florence – Manzini's “epic heroine” – that thwarted the threat of existential stasis she faced in Pistoia.

Bollas' concept of destiny drive refers to a series of unconscious experiences driving an individual: the “urge”, in other words, that pulls a person towards the evolution of their “true self” (Bollas *Reader* 44).¹⁹⁷ *Ritratto* hints at such a series of experiences relative to the evolution of Manzini's destiny drive. Indeed, much earlier than her arrival in Florence, Manzini's destiny drive made its presence known. It was perceptible, for example, in her rejection of the values that her conservative relatives stood for and, not least, in her insistence that she and Nilda leave the poisoned

¹⁹⁵ Bollas states that he was unable to find an instance in the classics where “destiny” intervened capriciously or, for that matter, destructively, “on the part of the gods”, leading him to deduce that destiny could be altered due to the “epic hero's” subjective interpretation of his destiny (Bollas *Reader* 43). On this note, it may be hypothesised that Italy's historically agrarian culture seems to have had no influence in delineating a distinction between the terms because *destino* corresponds to both fate and destiny.

¹⁹⁶ In Manzini's words, “fu come varcare un cancello” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “it was like passing through a gate” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144).

¹⁹⁷ The scope of this chapter does not allow for an in-depth foray into a psychoanalytic application of Bollas' theories in the clinical context. However, the summaries offered in this chapter, together with the textual examples given, illustrate the usefulness of Bollas' concepts for an insight into Manzini's positive experience of Florence.

atmosphere of Pistoia. As explained by Bollas, in the formation of a subject's destiny drive the "mother can either be fundamentally a fateful presence or an object through whom the infant establishes and articulates aspects of [her] destiny" (Bollas *Reader* 45).¹⁹⁸ It is argued here that Nilda is the latter where Manzini was concerned.

The following anecdote drawn from Chapter Four and, therefore, prior to Manzini's experience of Florence, serves as a striking example of the role of maternal influence in determining Manzini's destiny drive. The passage is quoted in full so as to give a sense of the enveloping sensations experienced by Manzini as she drifts off to sleep in her mother's embrace:¹⁹⁹

Il niente si allarga. Diventa limpido come una palla di vetro. Sto per entrare in un'altra sfera, dove tutto sarà risolto; quando'ecco, trasalendo, rigettata indietro: 'Ma i vestiti...'. Nell'armadio c'è quello nuovo, color bronzo, di moiré. Una bellezza. Calata per metà nel sogno, lo tocco. Com'è frusciante. Così le foglie delle canne sull'argine: o il mare, quando le onde sono piccine. Questa seta mi parla alle dita. Me le lusinga. I polpastrelli sono già vinti. Adesso anche il palmo della mano. Lo liscio quel moiré, l'accarezzo, avendone una felicità, una felicità un poco infetta, ma irresistibile. Sono in un involucro, in un bozzolo di soavità, dolcissimo; e che canta; perché questa seta ha una voce risalita dal fondo del mare. Ha stregato lei, la mamma; e ora strega me. (Manzini *Ritratto* 128)

The nothing expands. It becomes clear as a glass ball. I am about to enter into another sphere where everything will be resolved; when wining, flung backward: 'But the dresses...'. In the wardrobe there is the new one, bronze color, of moiré. Beautiful. Half falling into a dream I touch it. How it rustles. Like reeds on the riverbank; or the sea, when the waves are small. The silk speaks to my fingers. It charms them. The flesh of my fingertips is already conquered. Then also the palm of my hand. I stroke that moiré, caress it, getting happiness from it – a slightly corrupted, but irresistible happiness. I am wrapped in a very sweet, soft cocoon; which sings; because this silk has a voice rising from the depths of the sea. It has bewitched my mama, and now it bewitches me. (Manzini *Full-Length* 95)

¹⁹⁸ At least to a degree, Bollas maintains that heredity, biology and the environment are influential factors of destiny. However, to this end, "environment" is understood to derive from the mother's handling of her infant in early life (Bollas *Reader* 44).

¹⁹⁹ The passage forms the end of Chapter Four in *Ritratto*, in which Manzini recounts her family rift, as explored in Chapter Three of this thesis.

While some commentators have focused on the moiré dress as a symbol of Nilda's materialism, the thesis proposes an alternative interpretation that has little to do with that conjecture.²⁰⁰ Viewed in its entirety, Manzini's description points to her destiny drive triggered by her instinctual desire for fulfilling psychic experience that evolves, in turn, from responsive early infant care. This contention is based on three arguments. First, Manzini's memory of the feel of the moiré, evoked as a soothing sensation that, much like the soothing effect that stroking a security blanket has on a child, may be interpreted as a way of containing the trauma encountered in her earlier experience of the family argument. In her choice of the moiré as the object of her narrative Manzini recognises, by unconscious means, a way of, as Bollas puts it, "desensitizing" herself "to further toxic events" (Bollas *Being* 71). Second, the moiré links both mother and daughter to a reciprocal transformation based on a quasi-incantatory (or in other words, bewitching) aesthetic experience of the senses, whereby the joy of the dress lies in its textural appeal, unrelated to a representation of bourgeois luxury. Last, Manzini's descriptors "involucro" (wrapping), and "bozzolo" (cocoon), allude to the generative nature of her dreamy state whereby the former evokes the sense of protection induced by the maternal presence, and the latter alludes to the promise of birth and all the future prospects it entails.

Thus, the decision to leave Pistoia for Florence resonates with the author's destiny drive, fulfilling the promise of a city which, by all accounts, Manzini had only glimpsed in passing but which had nonetheless succeeded in alerting the young student to the promise of happiness and reward. Indeed, Florence's proximity to Pistoia makes it the logical location for Manzini to carry out her tertiary studies. However, more substantially, the chapter's argument is based, as Bollas writes, on the notion of a life "punctuated by inspired moments of self realization, deriving from the instinct to elaborate" one's destiny drive (Bollas *Being* 70). Leaving Pistoia means that Manzini was freed from the intimidations of a reality teetering on the edge of an existential "chasm" while Florence accorded her the security of firmer ground where she could finally experience "la felicità d'essere viva

²⁰⁰ For Martignoni, the moiré dress constitutes another symbol of the "lussi" (luxuries) Nilda had grown accustomed to by living with her siblings (Martignoni quoted in 2005 edition of Manzini *Ritratto* 16).

su quel lastricato” (Manzini *Ritratto* 191), “the happiness of being alive on that pavement” (Manzini *Full-Length* 144). In summary, Manzini’s capacity to experience the transformations offered by Florence is the result of Nilda’s influence that began during Manzini’s early life and persisted thereafter.

Accordingly, on the occasion of her eighteenth birthday, Manzini states that Nilda gave her a long necklace with a topaz cross (Manzini *Ritratto* 197). As the account unfolds, it turns out that the necklace was eventually pawned to help the pair make ends meet but, in any case, Manzini’s reaction is utterly affirmative: “Non importa. Ero felice” (Manzini *Ritratto* 197), “Never mind. I was happy” (Manzini *Full-Length* 149) Manzini’s sense of loss is mitigated by the existential fulfilment Florence offered.²⁰¹

In a similar spirit, the following anecdote illustrates Nilda’s attunement as Manzini’s pathway to the assuagement of distress. The author’s description bears all the indicators of the mother’s apparition before her infant that initiates the transformation from pain to peacefulness: “Lo specchio mi placò [...]. Uno specchio può inghiottire; può portare via; magari addormentare. Finché riaffioro. Mi riconosco. Tutto è intatto: l’attimo e anche il domani. Infatti la mamma alle spalle, dice: ‘Vuoi che andiamo al pattinaggio?’” (Manzini *Ritratto* 197), “The mirror calmed me [...]. A mirror can swallow you; it can carry you away, even sleeping. Until I resurface. I recognize myself. Everything is unchanged – the moment and also tomorrow. In fact, mama behind me, says: ‘Do you want to go skating?’” (Manzini *Full-Length* 149). Drawn by intuitive understanding of her daughter’s emotional disintegration – induced by sighting Giuseppe in Florence – Nilda comes to the rescue by spontaneously suggesting a distraction.

Once they are at the skating rink, they are joined by a friend of Manzini’s who, by the author’s account, “mi voleva bene. Era bella, elegantissima, incantevolmente incolta, e stupefatta che si potesse provare

²⁰¹ That is, in all senses – cognitively, instinctually and affectively – Nilda is understood as facilitator of these integrations (Bollas *Shadow* 14).

piacere a studiare” (Manzini *Ritratto* 197), “[she] loved me. She was beautiful, very elegant and charmingly uncultured, and amazed that anyone could enjoy studying” (Manzini *Full-Length* 149). The statement is in stark contrast to the account of Manzini’s school experience in Pistoia where she felt constantly judged and rejected, describing her fellow students as a bunch of “scimuniti” (Manzini *Ritratto* 73), “blockheads” (Manzini *Full-Length* 50). Florence fostered in Manzini a more detached, ironic, and constructive stance, wherein she was the one who was forgiven by her friend for being so studious (Manzini *Ritratto* 197).

In terms of the fulfilment of her destiny drive, Florence presented Manzini with all manner of potentialities related to transformative experience. Bollas’ destiny drive may be likened to Abraham Maslow’s “instinct of actualization” (McLeod),²⁰² the subjects of which are propelled by a psychic roadmap that, in this case, was generated by the idiom of early maternal care.

Idiom

Bollas states that each of us possesses an “idiom” for life, a phenomenon that is understood as the capacity for psychic organisation, which results from the infant’s experience of maternal handling in pre-verbal life. Such handling, although it cannot be remembered consciously, is reflected existentially in one’s manner of relating to the object world. Idiom has its genesis in the mother’s manner of interacting with her pre-verbal infant. A means of remembering, early infant experience is detectable through the “idiom” of one’s private thinking and self-talk. Bollas theorises it as a reflection of the foundational maternal care system instantiated as a self-care system in adult life when one may conceive of idiom as an inner presence represented, for example, by daydreaming. In daydreams a person is both subject and object, and the manner of self-relating therein expresses significant features of the mother’s caretaking (Bollas *Reader* 45).

The discussion proceeds with two anecdotes that serve as illustrations

²⁰² Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was an American psychologist and philosopher who argued that the capabilities of self-actualising people sprang from their emotional fulfilment (McLeod).

of Manzini's idiom fashioned on a paradigm of Nilda's handling. On the occasion of an outing with a fellow student, Manzini is captivated by Florence's Arno River. In relation to the river's flow she muses: "che una linea potesse essere così espressiva, così umana. Non ridere. Mi sembra proprio la parola giusta. Umana. Una morbidezza ... Una linea come di una donna. Una donna pensata. E un occhio pacato lontanissimo la proietta qui" (Manzini *Ritratto* 195), "that a shape could be so expressive, so human. Don't laugh. That seems the right word. Human. A softness A woman's shape. An imaginary woman. And a distant placid eye projects her here" (Manzini *Full-Length* 146). Manzini's description may be perceived as the verbal articulation of her idiom vis-à-vis the gentle, fluid, and unified system of care experienced by Manzini in early infancy.

In the second example, Manzini describes her response to a musical performance. She states that, abandoning herself, she entered into "un incantesimo nel quale si iscrivevano, progredivano, si scioglievano, con ritmi via via diversi, stati d'animo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 195), "an enchantment in which the moods according to their own rhythms, were inscribed, advanced and melted away" (Manzini *Full-Length* 149). Reminiscent of the incantatory experience of maternal stillness, Manzini's abandon is perceivable as an expression of idiom.

Bollas states that a person's sense of destiny is founded on the feeling that she is fulfilling the terms of her "inner idiom through familial, social, cultural, and intellectual objects" (Bollas *Reader* 45). Objects, Bollas continues, are not selected but, rather, present by chance and the pleasure yielded by the surprise of such unexpected objects proves as liberating a purpose as the discovery of a lost key to fit a lock, a fitting analogy for the element of surprise experienced by Manzini. Thus, while Florence was the broader setting for the enactment of Manzini's destiny drive, her characterisation of the Arno, the concert, and the moiré dress, reveal an idiom traceable back to the experience of maternal care.

Proceeding to a description of Manzini's aesthetic experience, one significant scene conveys the intensity of that experience. On the occasion of a concert held at Florence's French Institute, she describes her response to

the music as follows:

Il mio ascoltare si risolse in una stupefacente proiezione di linee. Un accordo; e un fisico sobbalzo; ma al tempo stesso, radiosamente, quell'accordo sfuggiva lungo una tangente, raggiungeva un punto lontano che apparteneva ad un'altra sfera: prenatale? oltre la barriera del tempo? non so; ma fulgente, netta, decisa. Subito incalzante, un nuovo raggio, quasi radente: una falciagione morbida e inesorabile: conduceva, raccoglieva, gremiva, portava via, in fondo al nulla d'una pausa che rubava il respiro [...]. Un disegno che raffigurava su un invisibile, ma tenace, ma sicuro schermo (uno schermo esistente quantunque attraversabile dalla nostra brutale esistenza) qualcosa simile ad una proiezione dell'umana essenza. Voglio dire che lungo quelle rette correva elettricamente il segreto del nostro labirinto, inferno paradiso; del tutto espressivo e rivelatore. Rivelatore di che? (Manzini *Ritratto* 199)

My listening evolved into an amazing projection of lines. A chord: and a physical jolt: but at the same time, radiantly, that harmony escaped along a tangent, it reached a point far away that belonged to another sphere. Prenatal? Outside the limits of time? I don't know, but brilliant, sharp, decisive. At once a new, urgent, almost oblique ray – a soft and inexorable slicing – led, gathered, filled, carried away, behind a small pause that robbed the breath [...]. A pattern that was projected on an invisible but tenacious and secure screen (an existent screen albeit traversable by our brutal substance), something similar to a projection of the human essence. I mean that along those lines the secret of our labyrinth, heaven and hell, ran electrically; completely expressive and revealing. Revealing what? (Manzini *Full-Length* 150)

Fittingly, to account for Manzini's experience, Bollas writes that there are occasions in life when a person is so enthralled by an experience that they experience the certainty of having been “cradled by and dwelled with, the spirit of the object, a rendezvous of mute recognition that defies representation” (Bollas *Shadow* 30). Bollas defines the aesthetic experience as a “caesura in time when the subject feels held in symmetry and solitude by the spirit of an object” (Bollas *Shadow* 31).

An aesthetic experience (as opposed to a “cognitive or moral” one) is recognised on the basis of its capacity to captivate a person's attention, halting all logical processing of the event. In effect, an aesthetic experience is characterised by its own self-sufficiency (Bollas *Shadow* 31).

Elaborating, Bollas states that whether an aesthetic experience occurs as a result of religious conversion, of the listener's rapture (as in Manzini's case) while listening to a symphony, viewing a painting or landscape or reading a poem, the aesthetic experience crystallises "time into a space" where both subject and object appear to engage in an exclusive encounter (Bollas *Shadow* 31). Time thus seems suspended with the deep rapport generated by the experience granting an "illusion" of being one with the object (Bollas *Shadow* 31). Impossible to plan, the beauty of such surprises is defined by a person's sense of being both fused with and held by the object.

Unexpected and sudden as it may seem, Bollas describes the aesthetic experience as a form of *déjà vu*, which accounts for the sense of familiarity such experiences evoke (Bollas *Shadow* 32). This is because aesthetic experiences rest primarily on an existential recollection of a time in our existence when communication was founded on the illusion of a deep rapport with the mother and communication was based on physical interaction (Bollas *Shadow* 32).²⁰³ Significantly, Manzini's description of being led, gathered, filled, and carried away, evokes the mother's cradling of her infant.

The expectancy of transformation in early infancy aligns with the surprise element of the aesthetic experience. Manzini concludes her concert account by describing how, despite the inability to logically process her experience, it was uncannily familiar: "Mi fu chiaro in quel momento. Lo sapevano le punte dei miei capelli, le mie unghie, il mio alluce [...] ma il mio cervello non avrebbe potuto riassumerlo né spiegarlo e tanto meno descriverlo" (Manzini *Ritratto* 199), "It was clear to me at that moment. The ends of my hair, my fingernails, my big toe knew it [...] but my brain could never sum it up or explain it, or much less describe it" (Manzini *Full-Length* 150). Viewed in light of uncanny knowing, Manzini's description subsumes an internal logic relatable to pre-verbal infancy whereby perceptions are translated through sensorial and corporeal means.

As Bollas understands it, the mother's idiom of care combined with the infant's experience of her handling, provide the infant with her first

²⁰³ As mentioned, the communication is grounded in gazes, caresses and utterances.

aesthetic experience (Bollas *Shadow* 32). Thus, the sense of being “held” by the music, may be understood as originating from those moments in her early infancy when transformations were achieved according to Nilda’s idiom, thus providing the template for Manzini’s aesthetic experience to come. On this note, the discussion turns to a further anecdote representative of Manzini’s aesthetic experience. Inspired by the general delight that characterised her life in Florence, she introduces her discovery as follows:

Avvenne in maniera del tutto casuale, durante una di quelle domeniche mattina che ho detto. Lunghi corridoi, immensi saloni. Davanti a ogni quadro mi fermavo, consultavo una guida, magari prendevo appunti. Bello, bello, bellissimo. Ero un punto esclamativo che cammina. (Manzini *Ritratto* 205)

It happened completely by chance during one of those Sunday mornings I mentioned. Long corridors, vast rooms. I stopped before every painting. I consulted my guidebook, even taking notes. Beautiful! Beautiful! Very beautiful! I was a walking exclamation mark. (Manzini *Full-Length* 155)

In this state of excitement, Manzini’s attention is held by one particular painting:

Perché fosse il *Concerto* di Tiziano a girare dentro di me la chiavetta d’un interruttore non so spiegarmelo. Nulla in quell’opera, né in quell’autore conteneva, almeno che io potessi rendermene conto, appigli che agganciassero le mie future predilezioni o sommovessero qualcosa dormiente. Forse è il minuto che conta. In quell’istante dovette compiersi un avvenimento, un compleanno segreto, se non proprio una nascita. So che rimasi folgorata da un’emozione che neppure apparteneva a quelle figure, quantunque una di esse, quella dell’uomo alla spinetta voltato di tre quarti, anche adesso mi càpiti d’incontrarla inaspettatamente. Si trattava di un’altra ineffabile vita che palpitava di là dal quadro, dietro, oltre la cornice, quantunque emanata da quei colori e da quelle forme: il respiro dell’opera d’arte. (Manzini *Ritratto* 205)

I cannot explain why it was Titian’s *The Concert* that flicked the switch in me. Nothing in that work or in that artist (at least as far as I could say), contained hooks that would snare future delights or awaken something sleeping. Perhaps it is the moment that counts. In that instant an event must have occurred, a secret birthday, if not really a birth. I know that I was startled by an emotion that did not belong to those images, even though one of them, that of the spinet player turned three quarters, to this day I happen to encounter unexpectedly. It concerned

another ineffable life palpitating outside the painting, behind, beyond the frame, although emanating from those colours and shapes, the breath of the work of art (Manzini *Full-Length* 155)

In a response that is characteristic of an encounter with an aesthetic experience, Manzini reacts with both a sense of surprise and, a sense of enigmatic connection with the painting. While at first the reader may be tempted to apprehend the spinet player as an allusion to Giuseppe, in light of Bollas' concepts of the aesthetic experience the sense of familiarity drawing Manzini to the figure may otherwise be interpreted as an unconscious reconnection with the maternal idiom.

Each of the above anecdotes exemplifies the effect of the aesthetic experience and, appropriately as Bollas' explains, although Manzini was able to describe how the music and the painting affected her, she was at a loss to ascribe a logical explanation to why her experience was so intense. In pursuing this question, a brief account is in order of the developments that ensue with the infant's acquisition of speech and its relation to maternal capability. This is followed by an examination of Bollas's analysis of the children's story *The Wind in the Willows* (1908).

As the infant matures, she transitions from pre-verbal to verbal capabilities. Under ordinary circumstances, Bollas explains, "the maternal aesthetic yields to the structure of language", at which point the mother's facilitation of language, coupled with the infant's grasp of grammatical structure, represents the most consequential transformation of the infant's "encoded utterance" (Bollas *Shadow* 35).²⁰⁴ In normal circumstances therefore, a harmonious transition to language will take place and, if "at the point of acquiring language" the infant is accepted and facilitated, all will tend toward a facilitative expression of self (Bollas *Shadow* 35). And there is no clearer illustration of the facilitative aspect of Nilda's handling than its reflection in Manzini's extraordinary relationship with the written word.

In Kenneth Grahame's much-loved story, *The Wind in the Willows*,

²⁰⁴ This happens in the phase when the mother's aesthetic of care passes from her tongue in the form of cooing, singing, and mirror-uttering to storytelling and language proper. In other words, the aesthetics of handling passes into the "idiom of formal aesthetics" (Bollas *Shadow* 35)

the character Rat undergoes an aesthetic experience. Bearing a close resemblance to Manzini's own experience with the concert and the painting, Grahame describes Rat's reaction as follows: "Rapt, transported, trembling, he was possessed by all his senses by this new divine thing that caught up his helpless soul and swung and dandled it, a powerless but happy infant in a strong sustaining grasp" (Bollas *Shadow* 38).²⁰⁵

From his position on the river, Rat was unable to see that the rays illuminating the environment originated from the sunrise. Unable to link the experience to any discrete object, Rat situated his experience in the realm of mystic phenonema (Bollas *Shadow* 39). In reality, Rat's experience bears the hallmarks of a re-evocation of the mother's presence in pre-verbal life. Bollas' illustrates Rat's uncanny familiarity with his experience: "This experience – an aesthetic moment – feels new and strange, yet it arouses a 'longing'; its immediate impact is not cognitively linked to any previous mental experience, yet affectively it evokes the past" (Bollas *Shadow* 38). The same could be said of Manzini's experience. An alternative summation may be as follows: The *experience* of the mother in pre-verbal life precedes the *knowing* of the mother. Pointedly, as both experiencer and author, Manzini and Grahame are uniquely positioned as the "omniscient identifier", to convey, through the logic of language, their respective aesthetic experiences (Bollas *Shadow* 38).²⁰⁶ Interestingly, both Manzini and Grahame employ symmetrical imagery to foreshadow the promise of transformation. That promise is presaged by an oblique projection of lines, colours and shapes in Manzini's case while in Grahame's it is the geometric depiction of sunrays expanding over the river just before the break of dawn (Bollas *Shadow* 38).²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Mole and Rat are the main characters in Grahame's story.

²⁰⁶ Bollas states in regard to Grahame that as a writer, he knew how to identify such experience on behalf of the child reader, invoking the imagery of the infant held by the mother, and thus placed "the aesthetic moment in the space between the infant and the caretaker" (Bollas *Shadow* 38-39).

²⁰⁷ Where the concert is concerned, Manzini describes her aesthetic experience in terms of "una stupefacente proiezione di linee [...] un nuovo raggio quasi radente: una falciagione morbida e inesorabile" (Manzini *Ritratto* 199), an "amazing projection of lines [...] an oblique ray – a soft inexorable slicing" (Manzini *Full-Length* 155). Where the painting is concerned, Manzini describes her experience as "emanata da quei colori e da quelle forme" (Manzini *Ritratto* 205), "radiating from those colors and shapes" (Manzini *Full-Length* 155).

Bollas' conceptualisations make for an exciting interpretation of Manzini's descriptions of her felicitous experiences in Florence. To this end, they have enabled the hypothesis of Manzini's positive response to Florence as a reflection of the care received from Nilda in the author's early infancy. Bollas' theories demonstrate how foundational psychic development is kindled by maternal attunement and availability in the earliest stages of life. Such attunement and availability from Nilda anticipate Manzini's Florentine experience. Equally, Bollas' description of the unthought known also sheds light on some of Manzini's more puzzling reactions to Giuseppe's interactions with his daughter.

Advancing from a psychoanalytic discussion pertaining to life in early infancy to life in broader terms from a philosophical viewpoint, the discussion that follows nonetheless continues to be framed by notions of maternal influence as a facilitator of transformation.

Maternal influence, part two

The publication of *Ritratto in piedi* brought Manzini a level of critical attention previously unknown to her and this resulted in a body of published commentary focussed largely on that single work.²⁰⁸ As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis in relation to Nilda, critical focus has largely rested on Nilda's representation in *Ritratto* with various commentators deducing that she was a passive and weak entity whose influence on Manzini fell short of Giuseppe's. However, while it is true that Nilda has a limited presence in *Ritratto*, attested to, for example, by the limited dialogue attributed to her by Manzini, it would be ill-founded to assume that this is a reflection of the author's personal view of her mother. In reality, Nilda's presence in many other works portrays her as a source of enrichment in Manzini's life. While this view in no way discounts Giuseppe's influence, it allows the discussion to pursue a more balanced representation of parental influence by drawing attention to something that has hitherto largely gone unacknowledged: a recognition of Nilda's strengths and qualities. To this end, it can be said that by widening the lens on Manzini's narrative it

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Valentini, Martignoni and Anzini.

becomes clear that Nilda not only features across Manzini's literary production, but also that Manzini's portrayal of her reflects a character of determination, wisdom and generosity. It is on this basis, that the thesis construes Nilda as the enabler of Manzini's self-relating and, ultimately, of her trauma recovery.

Contrary to Giuseppe, whose presence apart from *Ritratto* is largely referred to anecdotally and incidentally in Manzini's writing, Nilda features throughout Manzini's literary output. One way to account for her presence is by noting that based on evidence from Manzini's writing Nilda's memory did not induce in Manzini the psychosomatic responses induced by Giuseppe's. Therefore, the apparent ease with which Manzini was able to approach her mother may be understood as a testament to the positive nature of the pair's relationship. Indeed, a reading of Manzini's work centred on Nilda underscores the perceptions of a daughter who both admired and appreciated her mother. To this end, the discussion below references anecdotes from *Forte come un leone*, (hereafter *Forte*) *Ritratto*, *Lettera all'editore*, (hereafter *Lettera*) and *Sulla soglia* (hereafter *Soglia*).

Recourse to these novels portrays Nilda as a source of solace and dependability in Manzini's life. In particular, these accounts illustrate Nilda's spontaneous receptivity to Manzini's needs as they arose in the moment, an innate hospitality that is all the more outstanding for its lack of criticism and judgement. Nilda is a parent instinctually motivated by the desire to reassure and protect Manzini. In that motivation, the chapter re-interprets Nilda's oft-cited passivity as a positive quality that facilitated her openness to the unexpected events unfolding in the course of her daughter's life. Nilda's passivity is understood, therefore, not as denoting inactivity, but rather as a hospitable capacity for empathetic receptivity that nurtured Manzini's empathy that is detectable, for example, in her characterisation of the numerous animal characters that populate her narrative. Such qualities represent an essential humanity in Nilda that is deserving of critical appreciation. This chapter's interpretation of Nilda's character begins by considering Manzini's essay titled "Mia mamma mi giustifica" (My Mother Justifies Me) from *Lettera*. In that essay, Manzini extols Nilda's qualities and the benefit they bring into her life. Published fifteen years after Nilda's

passing, Manzini's enthusiastic homage encapsulates Nilda's legacy as a source of pride and happiness for the author. Manzini articulates Nilda's importance in her life as follows:

alla mia vita, la mamma appartiene, non alle mie invenzioni; è il mio blasone; ed è anche il mio alibi: non debba la sua immagine vincolarsi ad alcuna vicenda fantastica, né il suo passato mischiarsi nella favola. Tengo tanto a quella sua sorgiva perenne di spirito, me ne nutro, la saccheggio a tal punto, continuo a spremere da lei, con sì infrenabile audacia, saggezza, verità e gioia, che ad ogni costo devo difendere in me il suo solitario splendore. (Manzini *Lettera* 241)

my mother belongs to my life, not to my inventions. She is my moral emblem, and also my shield. Her image must not be connected to any imaginary event, nor her past mixed with fable. I depend so much on that perennially new spiritual fountain of hers. It nourishes me. I raid it so much; I continue to squeeze the wisdom, truth and joy from it with such irrepressible audacity that I protect her solitary splendour in me at any cost. (Manzini *Game Plan* 164)

Thus, several decades before publishing *Ritratto* Manzini had already published an account exalting Nilda as a positive force in her life. Notably, Manzini opens her account in *Lettera* with the assertion that Nilda's character should never be confused with that of her traditional female protagonists who are often distinguished by their subservient nature. To clarify the distinction, Manzini announces for example that, "Amalia, la mamma che si muove fra i miei personaggi, doveva essere quanto possibile diversa dalla mia" (Manzini *Lettera* 233), "Amalia, the mother who moves among my characters, had to be as different from my own as possible" (Manzini *Game Plan* 158). Moreover, and as if to consolidate her assertion, Manzini further remarks that her mother was to stand independent of the author's own proclivity towards fictional females characterised by a "passato lungo, pieno ma smorto", (Manzini *Lettera* 233), "a long, full but dull past" (Manzini *Game Plan* 158), and whose existence proved as stagnant as "un profumo di vecchie carte" (Manzini *Lettera* 233), "the smell of old paper" (Manzini *Game Plan* 158).²⁰⁹ In light of her tribute, published

²⁰⁹ As stated in Chapter Three of this thesis, with *Lettera* Manzini seemed intent on presenting the Italian literary world a narrative that was not only stylistically innovative but also created renewed consideration of the role of the female in her writing. To this end, Manzini's account of Nilda, a real person exerting

evaluations of Nilda as passive and weak are disproved by the author's own evaluation of her mother's character long before *Ritratto* was penned.

Hospitality

The interpretation presented here of Nilda's hospitable nature as an innate quality is partially derived from the theories of Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1999) whose work informs the discussion to follow. While hospitality is a common term in modern parlance, Levinas formalised it as a philosophical concept in his seminal work *Totality and Infinity* (1961). As such, hospitality is understood as humanity's innate capacity to welcome the stranger in need (Gauthier 159). Manzini's accounts of Nilda's way of interacting with the world illustrate her character as the embodiment of hospitality in such a manner that it can be convincingly argued this was her unique legacy to her daughter.²¹⁰

In order to place these contentions into context, the discussion begins with a brief summary of Levinas' life, which offers an insight into his dedication to the formulation of hospitality as a philosophical ontology. From there, some of the Levinas' key concepts are briefly described: *face-to-face encounter*, *other*, and *transcendence*, all of which are applied here to textual content featuring Nilda. These considerations lead into the chapter's conclusion, which hypothesises a notional view of *Ritratto* as the narrative domain in which Manzini could accommodate, further to her father's legacy, the full reality of her filial experience. The topic of Nilda's narrative marginality is therefore addressed as an extension of her influence perceived as a hospitable gesture of "stepping aside". These themes are developed by reference to the key elements of Levinas' hospitality, lending support to Manzini's goal of constructing her "storia-ritratto" (Manzini *Ritratto* 51), "prose-portrait" (Manzini *Full-Length* 34). Manzini was able to realise that achievement as a consequence of Nilda's influence that, by example, showed her the value of reaching out to those in need: a value that the author was finally able to enact in regard to her own experience.

real influence, as distinct from the plethora of fictitious characters, fittingly serves that goal.

²¹⁰ This manner of interaction may logically, be considered an extension of her interaction with Manzini in early infancy.

Emmanuel Levinas – a brief introduction

Levinas was born into a Jewish Lithuanian family that moved to the Ukraine in order to flee both the disruptions of World War One and the Russian Revolution of 1917. With the attainment of Lithuania's independence from Russia in 1918, the family returned to its native country where Levinas first attended university. By the early 1930s Levinas and his family had moved to Paris where the young philosopher continued his university studies. In 1934 he published a thesis that was in many ways prescient, entitled *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*: a dissertation that in common with that of his colleague Foucault a few decades later, would prove germane to the philosopher's distrust of "grand abstract systems of explanation" (Steinfels). During the Second World War, Levinas lost several family members to the Holocaust and became a prisoner of war himself. He came to view Western philosophy's focus on ontological reasoning as ineluctably biased toward a cognition of "others", based on the need for "sameness", as the primary aspect of identity (Wolin).

Levinas contended that ontology bore the potential to construe the most efficient means to a given end and that this could be catastrophically manipulated for the pursuit of evil and destruction, as evidenced by the Shoah (Wolin). On this basis Levinas' view echoes Foucault's archaeology/genealogy of Western history apprehended as a grand narrative that tends towards the desire to subsume or even eliminate those who deviate from the norm, as Levinas' family experienced first hand.

In response to these events, Levinas focussed on elaborating non-conventional definitions of humanity's "natural state", arriving at the notion that what connects all people is our fundamental vulnerability. That understanding culminated in a creed of ethics founded on a philosophy of hospitality that is instinctually attuned to another's plea for help (Levinas quoted in Aristarkhova 164).

The face-to-face encounter and the notion of the other

Levinas proposed intuitive consciousness, a phenomenon underscored by the

vulnerability of the other, as the basis of human interaction. His concept of the face-to-face encounter exemplifies such intuitive consciousness. As people go about their life, it is in the very repetition of the face-to-face encounter that a person's sense of responsibility toward a person; that is, the other, is kindled. These circumstances manifest at an unconscious level, pre-ordained by the "continuum of sensibility and affectivity" on which humanity instinctually functions (Bergo 1.1). In the course of these initial unconscious moments others are perceived, according to Levinas, as "pure expression" that invokes affection before reflection (Bergo 4.2). During these instances of unconscious interaction, awareness is shifted away from one's sense of self and this triggers the responsibility to act ethically towards others. This response is the self's instinctual "right" to take on the suffering of others that occurs prior to feelings of moral obligation. From the experience of the face-to-face encounter emerges a here-and-now dialogic process expressed via words, gazes, or body language (Bergo 4.2).

It is Levinas' understanding that people live according to various modalities. They consume the fruits of the world, are affected by natural elements, construct houses and shelters, and carry out social and financial transactions. Levinas stipulates, however, that there is no event that is as "affectively disruptive" for people "holding sway in its world than the encounter with another person" (Levinas quoted in Bergo 4.2).

Levinas' observation brings to mind Primo Levi's poem at the beginning of his work *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) (*Survival in Auschwitz*), in which the author invites the reader to "encounter" the victims of the Holocaust whose call for help was ignored. Levi's opening poem serves to draw attention both to the experience of a people, but also to our innate ethical obligation to respond to human suffering in its raw vulnerability. Levinas might have argued that it was the failure to engage in dialogue initiated by the face-to-face encounter as alluded to by Levi that ultimately gave rise to the Holocaust and because of it, a political dialectic perpetually bearing the threat of its repetition.

As Nilda died in 1931, it must be noted that she could not have had any awareness of the horrors of the nazi-fascist regime that would eventuate

during the next decade. Despite the fact that, or rather precisely because she lived in an era prior to the totalising regimes to come, her character serves as an example of the theory of the face-to-face encounter in the lived experience of the moment. Manzini's accounts of Nilda lend themselves to a view of her character as the embodiment of an intuitive, ethical response untainted by the façade of utilitarianism promulgated by the belief systems to which Levi was subjected.

Knowledge of Levinas' description of the face-to-face encounter advances an interpretation of Nilda's concerns for her ailing daughter. Manzini recalls that during a bout of severe illness, it was through Nilda's expression that Manzini registered her mother's concern: "colma d'ansia, a parlar subito non ce la facevi. Mi guardavi [...] e il volto vero, quello privatissimo, quasi proibito, che io sola potei conoscere" (Manzini *Soglia* 117), (filled with anxiety, you were unable to speak right away [...] You looked at me, and your real face, that extremely private one, almost prohibited, that only I was allowed to know). The episode may be perceived as a face-to-face encounter inscribed in Manzini's memory, intimating the empathy on which Manzini's rapport with Nilda was founded, exemplified, not in the least, by the (mutual) awareness of the other's suffering in that difficult period.

On a happier occasion, a further anecdote underscores the face-to-face encounter as an instinctual expression of mutual affection and receptivity. Stealing away to secretly read articles reporting Giuseppe's anarchist activity, Manzini describes the following scene: "seduta sul letto, un fianco contro la spalliera; la mamma sulla poltrona, rasente, attaccata a me. Con un braccio mi serrava le gambe. Con l'altra mano reggeva il foglio" (Manzini *Ritratto* 133), "I would sit on the bed, hip against the bed head; mama in the armchair, touching me. With one arm around my legs, holding the paper in her other hand" (Manzini *Full-Length* 98). Sitting so close to her daughter, the mother's embrace alludes to a protective shell underscoring Manzini's perception of Nilda as both protector and guide.

As noted by Alba Amoia, Giuseppe used to compare Nilda to an

alabaster lamp (Amoia 36).²¹¹ From the ancient Greek meaning vase, alabaster is a translucent yet yielding material. Unwittingly, Giuseppe's observation adds to the chapter's evaluation of Nilda as both the dispenser of light and also the facilitator of transformation. Daria Valentini extends this chapter's interpretation when she states that Giuseppe's comparison consolidates the traditional categorisation of female nature as passive, receptive, bodily, and dense: all attributes that since antiquity have been attached to the feminine (Valentini 370). Thus, while aligning with the maternal themes that characterise the present chapter, Valentini's description also underscores the tenets of hospitality.

A further case in point is Manzini's account of the family dinner, during which she received a slap from her uncle.²¹² Manzini's description that followed emphasises Nilda's perception of, and capacity to alleviate Manzini's distress. As is often the case in *Ritratto*, it is Manzini's description of her mother's actions, rather than dialogue, that illustrates Nilda's attunement to Manzini, who states that her mother had gently "infilata nel mio lettino; mi teneva stretta" (Manzini *Ritratto* 127), "slipped into my bed and held me tight" (Manzini *Full-Length* 94). Manzini's account leads one to believe that, having left the table earlier, Nilda had no knowledge of the slap. Regardless of that circumstance, it is Manzini's account of Nilda's behaviour after the event that highlights Nilda's perception of her daughter's needs. Just as alabaster has the capacity to allow light to shine through, Nilda is repeatedly remembered as embracing the array of emotions experienced by Manzini.

Transcendence

Manzini's account of her wish to escape the "poisoned" atmosphere of Pistoia exemplifies Levinas' notion of transcendence. In his lexicon transcendence is understood as the ultimate surrender to one's need to escape status quo; in effect, a figurative "stepping over" the limits of one's

²¹¹ In Amoia's words "an alabaster lamp with a light inside", a description used by Giuseppe in reference to the whiteness of Nilda's skin (Amoia 36).

²¹² As described in Chapter Three of this thesis.

physical and social situations (Bergo 2). A notion of transcendence perfected is echoed in the relational fluidity characterising Nilda and Manzini's life in Florence. In their effort to make ends meet, Manzini and Nilda act in collaboration. Manzini recalls that they often lacked money: "Un giorno sì e uno no, riunivo a casa quattro o cinque scolare per insegnare un poco di quel pochissimo che già sapevo. Ci aiutavamo anche così, la mamma ed io, a tirar avanti" (Manzini *Ritratto* 202), "Every other day I would meet with four or five students to teach them something of the very little I knew. In this way, mama and I also helped each other to make ends meet" (Manzini *Full-Length* 152). Again, the description concerns Manzini's actions, while it is assumed that Nilda was also contributing her part.²¹³

With little published commentary dedicated to Nilda's characterisation in other works, perhaps the value of *Ritratto* lies in its capacity to convey the nuance of hospitable gestures to accentuate the mode of Manzini and Nilda's relating. A case in point appears in *Forte* in which Manzini recounts a childhood event that took place in the course of an evening while she and her mother were staying in the countryside. Manzini begins her account by stating that the pair was in the house alone. A sense of warmth and comfort is conveyed by that most maternal of images, with Manzini charged (for the first time in her life), with the task of watching the milk in a pot to make sure it does not boil over. Absorbed by her task, Manzini hears her mother state from an adjacent room: "Qui non c'è che la bambina ed io, nessuno può farvi del male" (Manzini *Forte* 18), (there is no one here but the child and me, no one can harm you). Nilda has met two would-be thieves at the cottage door. It should be noted, contrary to scholars' descriptions of Nilda as "weak and defenceless" (Amoia 46), her character manages to display remarkable composure in a potentially dangerous situation. Nilda's words serve at once to reassure her daughter that neither of them is in any danger and, at the same time, respond to the presence of the other: not as a threat but as an acknowledgment of the other in a summoning of help. Indeed, would the men be drawn to thieving were it not a matter of survival? The account is reminiscent of Giuseppe's response to having his coat stolen, an

²¹³ As understood, for example, by Manzini's stating that Nilda would stay up late at night to re-write Manzini's university notes.

occurrence that prompts empathy in him rather than vexation.²¹⁴

Levinas states that in the face-to-face encounter, the expression of the other carries a duality of both command and summons, as clarified by his enunciation: “the face, in its nudity and defencelessness, signifies: ‘Do not kill me’” (Levinas quoted in Bergo 4.2). Relative to the thieves in Manzini’s account, Levinas’ plea “do not kill me” could be replaced with a more optimistic, “help me survive”.

Nilda invites the thieves to sit at the table and share their food. She passes no judgement, but rather, conveys acknowledgment of the immediate need of the moment. Eating in silence, the group seems to suddenly become aware of its mutual predicament. Exemplifying the tenet of the face-to-face encounter as the essence of intuitive consciousness, Manzini recounts: “In quell’istante, noi quattro, guardandoci, ci scambiammo in uguale misura di commozione, di stupore, forse di carità e di invidia: un dono di cui nessuno di noi si è certo dimenticato” (Manzini *Forte* 19), (In that moment, we four looked at each other and exchanged in equal measure, emotion and surprise, perhaps charity and envy: a gift that none of us certainly has forgotten).

When Levinas draws attention to the face of the other, his wish is to invoke the instinct that intuits the “widow, orphan, or stranger” before us (Levinas quoted in Bergo 4.2). It is in such instances that people become alert to the reality that the widow, orphan, and stranger, are lacking an “essentiality” in their existence: namely, as stated by Levinas, “spouse, parents, home”. For Manzini and Nilda the missing essentiality is the presence of Giuseppe as father and husband, the experience of which, at least in part, might have influenced Nilda and Manzini’s empathy with the would-be thieves.

Appreciated as an expression of hospitality as pure generosity, the episode captures Nilda’s intuitive consciousness awakened by the essential vulnerability at the core of the other’s (and her own) existence. Indeed, once the meal is finished, Nilda gave a figurative nod to the defencelessness of

²¹⁴ As stated previously, Giuseppe’s response to the episode was to suggest that whoever stole his coat must have been in need of one: “Chi l’ha preso ne aveva certamente più bisogno di me”(Manzini *Ritratto* 37), “Whoever took it certainly needed it more than I did” (Manzini *Full-Length* 23).

the men by inviting them to spend the night in the wheat barn, which they accepted. She handed them blankets for warmth and they exited the house.²¹⁵ Manzini's account exemplifies Nilda's innate generosity that is not focussed on who the other is, but rather on what the other lacks, and she responds accordingly. Moreover, it evidences the strength and resourcefulness of a woman who is not, after all, so passive but, rather, alert to mutual vulnerability.

"Sulla soglia" similarly depicts Nilda's capacity for spontaneous and non-judgemental response in moments of need. Manzini recounts an episode during which she tried to bathe, with devastating consequences, her little pet bird, Rosolino. In the following passage Manzini's despair is apparent: "già una rigidezza mortale allungava quel collicino da nulla. Sull'occhio spento, uno straccio di palpebra grigia. Io gridavo: 'Aiuto mamma aiuto...' 'Quieta!' imponesti: 'Te lo salvo'" (Manzini *Soglia* 96), (already a mortal stiffness lengthened his insignificant tiny neck. Over his spent eye, a strip of grey eyelid. I shouted: 'Help mama help...' 'Quiet!' you commanded: 'I'll save him'). Immediately Nilda's efforts were directed at helping Rosolino. Using a soft woollen cloth, she carefully dried the bird. Next, she placed the tiny creature between her breasts so as to keep him warm; as Manzini recalls: "apristi la camicetta e lo mettesti fra i seni [...]. Mai dimenticherò quel gesto" (Manzini *Soglia* 96), (you opened your blouse and placed him between your breasts [...]. I will never forget that gesture). Similar to the previous anecdote, Manzini's recollection is framed by maternal images that fittingly, contextualise her own experience.

In the days that follow, Nilda carefully fed the bird tiny flies and specks of moistened bread. After a few days the bird recovered and flew around the room for a few moments. Ever attuned to the other's needs, in this case, Rosolino, Nilda reminded an exhilarated Manzini: "Ora avrà bisogno di dormire: lascialo in pace. È stata la sua prima uscita dopo la

²¹⁵ Manzini would recount the story again in "Sulla soglia", changing several, albeit marginal details. For example, she names the location as Nespolo, mentions a storm raging outside, and that Nilda gave the thieves what little money she had. However, a more notable alteration comes by way of Manzini's claim that Nilda found her bravery due to Giuseppe's influence. Manzini states in reference to Nilda: "Eri tanto ardita, perché ti sognavi vista dal babbo; perché recitavi per lui" (Manzini *Soglia* 123), (you were so courageous because you imagined yourself seen by Father, because you were acting for his benefit). Remaining unaltered in both accounts however, is Manzini's depiction of Nilda's spontaneous assistance and her lack of criticism of the thieves' intentions.

malattia” (Manzini *Soglia* 98), (He needs to sleep now: leave him in peace. It’s been his first outing since his illness). Of interest to the discussion is Manzini’s account of her mother’s actions to save Rosolino. Nilda’s gestures are presented sequentially: from drying him, to placing the bird between her breasts, to feeding him, to watching him fly, to allowing him to rest. Befitting Bollas’ notion of maternal idiom, Manzini’s description highlights the fluidity of Nilda’s care.

The centrality of Nilda is illustrated by these anecdotes. Manzini’s portrayal conveys Nilda as an exemplar of care and attentiveness, as seen by her approach to Rosolino, but equally as one of empathy and generosity, as seen by her approach to the would-be thieves. Either way, Nilda is notable as the provider of a solution. Ironically, one of her strengths lies in her attunement to the helplessness of the other. It might be said that the very unexpectedness of each situation seemed to galvanise Nilda’s intuition of the other’s vulnerability, a quality that was able to transmute any benefit to be obtained by judgement or criticism. Nilda’s example abounds in positive lessons for Manzini. Her acceptance of and response to the situation at hand demonstrates how the act of addressing the needs of the moment proved a means of transcending fear and despair.

Ultimately, it may also be argued that Manzini is the embodiment of Nilda’s other. In her repetitive face-to-face encounters with her daughter, Nilda’s maternal responsiveness is recursively evoked by her daughter’s vulnerability. By recounting Nilda’s gestures of feeding and warming – the thieves and Rosolino – Manzini illustrates her own experience of being fed and warmed, symbolically as well as literally, by Nilda. It seems that Nilda is the one character in Manzini’s writing recalled as being capable of blotting out the numerous existential crises faced by Manzini throughout her childhood.

Thus far, the chapter has adopted an interpretation of hospitality in accordance with Nilda’s role understood in a literal sense on the basis that, indeed, her behaviour provides a cogent illustration of maternal hospitality in action. However, hospitality may also be understood figuratively, and this supports the chapter’s hypothesis that, ultimately, *Ritratto* may be perceived

as Manzini's symbolic refuge. Although any reference to Manzini's trajectory to the completion of *Ritratto* is underpinned by the trauma incurred along with her efforts to write it, it may also be argued that prior to *Ritratto*'s conception Manzini was at pains to source a narrative domain where her story could reside within the context of her father's. One view is that Manzini's psychosomatic ailments were perpetuated by the lack, figuratively speaking, of a welcoming domain as stipulated by the requirements of hospitality that could "contain" both Nilda and Manzini: potentially the "containment" that Giuseppe could have provided.

Irina Aristarkhova summarises the six key elements of Levinas' concept of hospitality as the following: *Welcome* which is understood as an "unconditional acceptance of the other"; *Receptivity* which is understood as "an ability of reason to receive"; *Discretion* which is understood as "emphasising You and not Me"; *Intimacy* which is understood as "a conscious and enjoyable vulnerability of feeling in total refuge at home with oneself"; *Recollection* which is understood as "relation to the language of the host, as a recollection of that first hospitality"; and *Habitation* which is understood as "a retreat home with oneself as in a land of asylum or refuge" (Aristarkhova 165).²¹⁶ From this brief description it may be deduced that in order for hospitality to be satisfactorily enacted, both host and guest must play a mutual role in the creation of the freedom to be, while at the same time granting a sense of protection.

Manzini's face-to-face encounter with Giuseppe's memory rested on her capacity to feel unconditionally welcome. *Ritratto* allowed her to finally transcend the fear that had repeatedly stalled her attempts. It may be argued that, after decades of wandering in the wilderness, Manzini found refuge by way of *Ritratto*'s interiority. And, just as Nilda demonstrated in the instances of Rosolino and the hungry thieves wherein she addressed the needs of the moment, Manzini's transcendence of her obstacles came by way of her role as both guest and host of her father's and mother's stories.

²¹⁶Aristarkhova states that the premise of hospitality is founded on the maternal relation (163). Social relations, she explains, are served by models grounded in the maternal relation as demonstrated by many traditions and "primary texts" (Aristarkhova 163). French culture, for example, has adopted, figuratively speaking, a model of femininity that according to Kant was naturally inclined to "rendering services, helpful benevolence, and the gradual development of human kindness according to principle" (Kant quoted in Aristarkhova 168)

The question arises as to what role in *Ritratto* is served by Nilda in the context of hospitality. One response is to suggest that just as Nilda's rapport with Manzini was characterised by unconditional welcome and receptivity of Manzini's needs, so, too, Nilda's hospitality hovered over *Ritratto*. By virtue of her mother's example, Manzini was able to unconditionally welcome the fulfilment of her goal within the context of narrative freedom, whereby her needs, fears, grievances, omissions, appropriations, inaccuracies, accusations and admissions were not judged or criticised.

To this end, the discussion reconnects to the topic of Nilda's marginality in *Ritratto*. Bearing in mind that Manzini often grants Nilda a voice only in her other works, it may be that Nilda's marginality in *Ritratto* is best perceived as an extension of her hospitality that allowed Manzini to explore, unhindered, her relationship with Giuseppe via the intimacy of a dialogue of reparation. In such an instance, therefore, the act of marginalising Nilda's voice, though not her presence, only serves to punctuate the trust and receptivity inherent in Manzini's relationship with Nilda, the status of which the author happily established in *Lettera*.²¹⁷ If, as Levinas surmises, hospitality is also characterised by the quality of discretion, then Nilda's silence may be viewed as an act of discretion by "withdrawal" for the purposes of "letting the other be" (Aristarkhova 175). Perhaps, therefore, as the foundational exemplar of hospitality, Nilda's influence ultimately served Manzini best in sponsoring the author's own hospitality as a means of fulfilling her own needs.²¹⁸

Exploring Levinas' concept of hospitality sheds light on Nilda's instinctual propensity to meet her daughter's needs unconditionally. Manzini's rapport with Nilda is contextualised by, for example, the qualities of empathy, trust, and, dependability, which are perceptible in an array of Manzini's works placing Nilda front and centre of Manzini's narrative. The philosophy of hospitality also allows *Ritratto* to be interpreted as the figurative domain in which Manzini could accommodate the narrative she struggled for years to articulate. Overall, the theme of maternal influence

²¹⁷ As stated in Chapter Three of this thesis, in *Ritratto*, Manzini conveys Nilda's "speech" via a "dialogue" of smiles, gaze, body language, and gestures of care.

²¹⁸ The term "foundational" subsumes recognition of Nilda as Manzini's transformational object.

underscores the chapter by acknowledging Nilda as the backdrop of unconditional welcoming that framed Manzini's capacity to transcend her emotional obstacles.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate how Gianna Manzini's *Ritratto in piedi* functioned as a creative means for the author to resolve trauma. While some earlier commentators have noted the traumatic circumstances of the author's childhood, until now none has devoted attention to the fact that the text of *Ritratto*, as the fulfilment of Manzini's lifelong goal, proves to be an example of trauma recovery achieved by narrative means.

Underpinning this interpretation is Manzini's admission of the difficulties she encountered during her numerous attempts to write her father's story, a preoccupation that plagued her almost to the end of her life. While it has been widely recognised that *Ritratto* lauds Manzini's father, critics have failed to acknowledge that Manzini's psychosomatic symptoms, which forced her to turn to other works as a means of coping, were indicators of trauma suffered earlier in life. The fact that these symptoms arose in relation to her attempts to write Giuseppe's story, connects Manzini's trauma to her unresolved paternal and familial relationships. Given that these consequences were unintentional and inadvertent, *Ritratto* draws attention to the notion of unconscious trauma and the insidious way it pervaded Manzini's existence. This thesis has shown how a close reading of her work extends contemporary literary understandings of trauma – especially childhood trauma – by focussing on the ways that one creative individual experienced traumatic circumstance and managed to overcome its most pernicious effects.

Crucially, it became evident that the fulfilment of Manzini's goal was only possible once the author was able to accommodate Giuseppe's story within the context of her own devastating experiences, which she so cogently recounts in *Ritratto*. Given that the avowed purpose of *Ritratto* was to construct a narrative account of her father's life while also serving as a vehicle that allowed Manzini to articulate her own experiences, in this study *Ritratto* is treated as an autobiographical account as much as a biography. In many ways, the work is the culmination of an extended autobiographical project that evolved over many years and leaves us with the portrait of an author constantly coming into being, reinventing herself with each of her

literary productions.

Given the emphasis on Manzini's experience as Giuseppe's daughter, central to the analysis was an exploration of the means that enabled her to overcome the trauma occasioned by the impact of his choices on her life. That broadening of focus necessitated as close a reading of Manzini's opus as of *Ritratto*. The analysis identified three pathways to the fulfilment of her goal, and these were presented over four chapters dealing, respectively, with Saliencies, Narrative tropes, Nilda, and Maternal influences. In exploring these pathways, concepts derived from a number of different fields – neuroscience, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literary theory – all assisted in formulating an account of how Manzini worked through her trauma. In particular, it proved useful to turn to pioneering theories of prominent practitioners currently working in the fields of psychoanalysis and neuroscience. The application of their innovative insights allowed Manzini's narrative, so often interpreted according to codified conventional theories, to regain pertinence and a refreshed importance.

In light of Manzini's admission that she attempted to write Giuseppe's story countless times, the analysis began with an examination of *Ritratto*, searching for evidence of the ways that the author achieved her goal. Several factors, termed saliencies, emerged as pressing circumstances that occurred in the lead-up to the book's publication and seemed to play a crucial role in motivating Manzini to break through her inhibitions. Manzini's fortuitous encounter with Giuseppe's young comrade, Alighiero Ciattini, ensured that Giuseppe's legacy and, no less, his style of anarchism were presented in a positive light. Manzini's wish to see her father in this light, and her status as the last of her family line, both surfaced as likely contributors to the author's sense of purpose. As Antonio Damasio has made clear, in the quest for survival the role of saliencies as determinants of motivation should not be underestimated.

By turning to neuroscience, it has been possible to establish, with examples taken from her writing, how Manzini's experience confirms the insight that a person's conscious intentions may clash with their unconscious motivations. Damasio's formulation of mind and body operating as

intertwined entities, each constantly engaged in mutually influencing the state of the other, advanced the exploration of Manzini's portrayal of Giuseppe's life, viewed through the lens of her own descriptions of her conflicted childhood. Manzini's avoidance of the psychological and emotional consequences of childhood abandonment is proposed as the major determinant that gave rise to a panoply of psychosomatic ailments that beset her frequently. Damasio demonstrates how decision-making is linked to appropriate saliences influencing a person's sense of purpose; and how this, in turn, influences the person's feelings and emotions. The vector created by the interaction of competing forces motivates a person to follow a particular direction. The interplay of defences and saliences proved crucial to Manzini's conviction that Giuseppe's story needed to be told, despite her resistance, and in a manner that made sense to the author; indeed, in a fashion that gradually promoted the working through of her trauma.

In approaching these concerns, the study drew on Suzanne Nalbantian's assertion that it is incumbent on literary criticism to consider the contributions of neuroscience concerning the question of how autobiography is interpreted. Entering the more familiar territory of literary interpretation, the analysis then revealed that the two fields share many perspectives. The perpetual quest for survival is a recurring tenet of neuroscience, and the study asserts that narration also functions as a means of survival. Indeed, to this end, Damasio's concept of the evolution of human consciousness as a biological phenomenon in which an implicit aspect is storytelling provided a gateway to understanding Manzini's idealised characterisation of Giuseppe in *Ritratto*. While some scholars have already commented on Manzini's mythic treatment of her father, none has questioned the motivations behind the characterisation beyond simple hero worship, so anomalous in Manzini's fine-grained observations of human behaviour in her other narratives. Responding to this conundrum, the thesis established that Manzini's re-tracing of Giuseppe's life as a messianic martyr not only resonated with her cultural sensibilities but also, crucially, fulfilled her own quest for survival as the documenter of Giuseppe's legacy. With so much of twentieth-century autobiography – in Italy and beyond – centred on experiences of trauma, neuroscience offers an interpretive

framework for analysing both how trauma is experienced, and also how it is resolved by narrative means.

Two animal “characters” present in *Ritratto* carry particular significance, both in their own right and especially as they are re-incarnated in various guises as recurrent figures in other narratives. The horse that refuses to cross the Trinita Bridge and the barn dog released after years of captivity both constitute keys to appreciating Manzini’s trajectory towards self-understanding, despite her multiple capitulations of avoidance and hesitation. Manzini’s writing is populated by numerous animal tropes but the dog and, in particular, the horse recur as regular features. While Manzini’s animalia has attracted abundant critical attention, interpretation has largely been limited to codified and emblematic interpretations that view the horse and dog stories as stand-alone accounts. Yet, given Manzini’s admission in *Ritratto* that she *was* the alarmed horse, coupled with the dog’s avowed capacity to understand the author’s feelings, the significance of these characters must not be neglected.

A retrospective reading of Manzini’s animalia narratives therefore allowed the formulation of a novel interpretation, recognising that the horse and dog characters were connected and that with each of their reincarnations they constituted a process of gradual transformation, retrospectively perceptible with each re-narration. Incrementally, they advanced from subdued and alienated figures to become fully present and self-aware participants. Antonino Ferro’s theory of narrative derivatives allowed the study to pursue a fresh line of interpretation wherein Manzini’s horse and dog characters are regarded as features of an underlying fabula in her opus: one that traces the author’s emotional trajectory. They function as signposts of the author’s psychic transformations.

Aligning with current sensibilities that recognise the role of containment and emotional metabolisation in trauma recovery, Ferro’s theories also shed light on the horse and dog characters as links or “nodes” – to borrow Eco’s terminology – *en route* to Manzini’s startling admission in *Ritratto* that she *was* the horse on the bridge, the horse functioning as much more than a metaphor of her emotional state. The distinction is a subtle one

but here is an author fused with her creation, not simply speaking metaphorically. This highlights a sense of narrative cohesion in Manzini's narratives that signifies the author's own growing recognition and acceptance of the narrative means of "working through" her traumatic history. That process resulted in a catharsis that took years to develop. In a similar vein to Damasio's focus on the role of emotions, Ferro's narrative formulations advance a view of Manzini's horse and dog characters as keys to understanding her narratives as over-arching, autobiographical gambits emerging out of the "field" of empathetic interaction with her own creations.

When applying a new lens to an author's production, a question immediately arises: would it be possible to utilise a similar approach to examine other writers' works? Along with the autobiographical work of Primo Levi, Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare* and Alba de Cespedes' *Quaderno proibito* come to mind. Moreover, with certain modifications and caveats in place, a neuroscientific lens could also be useful in examining the realm of fiction. For example, Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto*, or perhaps even Alberto Moravia's writing, might be approached with the intention of tracing out recurrent themes and tropes, observing the development of certain characters, or postulating hypotheses about how an author may have worked through certain preoccupations. Both neuroscience and analytic field theory offer valid means to speculate on the concerns of greatest interest to the author in question. Of course, a purely fictional work does not allow for the analysis to refer back to the author's stated concerns and aims, as it did for Manzini. But, as Glück observes, one does, potentially, gain access to the lineaments of a particular mind. One would be focussing on the writer's relationship to their body of work and treating that ongoing relationship as a field within which transformations or fixations occur. The focus would also be on the centrality and efficacy of narration as a mode of consolidation of a sense of self, and as a mode of resolving emotional blockages, in line with Damasio's neuroscientific propositions.

A major aim of this thesis was to counterbalance the somewhat caricatured critical perceptions of the influence of Manzini's parents on her development. In this study, an argument is advanced whereby Giuseppe, who has been viewed consistently favourably by critics, is by no means seen

as an unambiguously inspirational and positive influence on Manzini. Moreover, Nilda, who has generally been viewed in a negative light by critics, is in this account by no means as ineffectual as she has often been considered to be. In approaching these considerations, the thesis acknowledges references in Manzini's work to the plight of women's subjugation, and the author's intuition that, in effect, women are unconsciously conditioned to accept the cultural status quo. Setting out to explore an appreciation of these issues, the study posed two questions: first, what factors coerced women of Nilda's era into submission; and, second, what can we learn about Nilda's true character from the fact that she was able to rebel against her family's norms?

To answer the first question the study turned to Michel Foucault's historical/philosophical theories to expose some of the manipulations enshrined in Italian society. Overall, a major misgiving was that much of the criticism directed at Nilda's character stemmed from expectations of behaviour within the context of current standards rather than those realistically to be expected during Nilda's lifetime. Repeatedly prevented from making her own choices by her cultural milieu and consistently berated for her decisions by the critics, Nilda seems to have been subjected to a none-too-subtle form of victim blaming in critical commentary.

En route to answering the second question, the study found that *Ritratto* is structured on a binary linguistic system that Manzini employs for each of her parents: overt and verbalised forms of argument in Giuseppe's case, and tacit and implied attitudes in Nilda's case. Thereafter, the study redressed the balance by giving recognition to Nilda's importance in Manzini's trauma resolution by drawing from examples of positive inferences from Manzini's description of her mother's actions. It was asserted that in order to fully appreciate the conditions implicitly coercing Nilda's behaviour, it is necessary to enter into a consideration of the fulcrum of her life – her family with all its dysfunctional ties. The insights of Wilfred Bion, a pioneer of group therapy, shed light on the pervasiveness of unconscious or unexamined group modes of functioning, and he also fosters an acknowledgement of the courage required to question the power of such modes and to assert self-determination. In the instance of her rebellion,

Nilda's capabilities as the instigator of transformation are revealed.

A recognition of the limitations faced by the numerous female characters populating Italian literature emphasises the value of a constructivist analysis whereby an evaluation of their actions proceeds from a perspective that remains cognisant of the characters' lived milieu and reality. Such an interpretation allows a shift away from the conventions of grand narratives, whose influence plays into the perpetuation of patriarchal oppression. With familial relating comprising a prominent trope in twentieth-century Italian literature, female characters can only benefit from an interpretation constructed on the (almost) imperceptible social manipulations conditioning them, rather than focussing on their alleged failings. Twentieth-century Italian writing is replete with female characters struggling for a voice within the family. Utilising Foucault and Bion's theories of the hidden power structures influencing female (indeed, all) behaviour, these struggles can be apprehended in a new light.

Given the recognition of the manifest importance to her life of Manzini's relationship with Nilda, the exploration of pathways to trauma resolution repeatedly demonstrated Nilda to be a major factor. Nilda's appearances in Manzini's narratives – not only in *Ritratto*, but also in other works beyond that text – highlighted the need to adequately address her importance, both in Manzini's early infancy and well beyond. Nilda's influence, then, emerged as a third pathway to trauma recovery. One of the major aims of this thesis was to resolve the discrepancy between its reading of the importance of Nilda's influence on Manzini's career and the published critical commentary. In an effort to compensate for these discrepancies, the thesis deals with Nilda's maternal provision in more ways than one. From very early in Manzini's life, Nilda was the parent who ensured the author's psychic development and laid the groundwork for her further progress.

This is further emphasised within the analysis of *Ritratto*'s chapter on Florence, seen as a metonym of maternal provision. With the aid of Christopher Bollas' thought, it becomes obvious that Florence constituted much more than a setting for historical events or a phase in the author's life.

With *Ritratto*'s description balanced equally between Manzini's positive experience of Florence and her need to distance herself from Giuseppe, what emerges is a powerfully condensed depiction of Manzini's contrasting parental experiences, with her choice of descriptions that echo the infant's experience in early maternal care. It becomes apparent that the depictions of Florence and Pistoia characterise a further trope, evoking the states of mind that Manzini (and Nilda) evolved from, and towards. From a further, equally pioneering psychoanalytic perspective, Christopher Bollas' explication of both destiny and fate added to the thesis' assertion that Pistoia and Florence function as tropes employed to represent states of mind.

Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy also proved consistently useful in establishing the subtleties of Nilda's influence. In exploring Nilda's capacity to sponsor Manzini's liberation, along with her empathy and trustworthiness, Levinas' theory of hospitality aided in understanding Nilda and Manzini's relationship, which was characterised by an accommodating *hic et nunc* reciprocity.

A major finding of this thesis is the need to adequately recognise the importance of maternal provision in trauma recovery. Among the key elements of trauma resolution, the notions of containment, metabolisation of emotional experience, and empathy emerge as essential. It has been shown that an important source of each is to be found in Nilda. The analysis demonstrates that Nilda's maternal care functioned as a generative, progressive, and transformative process, mediated largely through innate attunement. The point is underscored in Manzini's accounts of her mother's role in her life, even if her importance is established by allusive means rather than directly described as in Giuseppe's case. It is also inscribed metonymically in descriptions of two cities, while her painful, incremental process of recovery and emotional resolution is embedded in various narrative devices and tropes.

The paternal influence on Manzini's work, epitomised by Giuseppe and his story, is outward looking, socially progressive, and idealistic; it constitutes a cohort of laudable, aspirational principles. Yet it also induces anxiety about ever being able to live up to those ideals. By contrast, Nilda's

influence is presented as subdued, practical and understated, but inherently supportive and enabling. It constitutes a lived experience of Giuseppe's ideals instantiated in everyday practice, silently and almost invisibly. As critics, we forget the necessity of considering both of these counterbalancing influences on Manzini at the peril of producing a one-sided, unconvincing account of her motivations in producing *Ritratto* and, arguably, her whole opus.

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