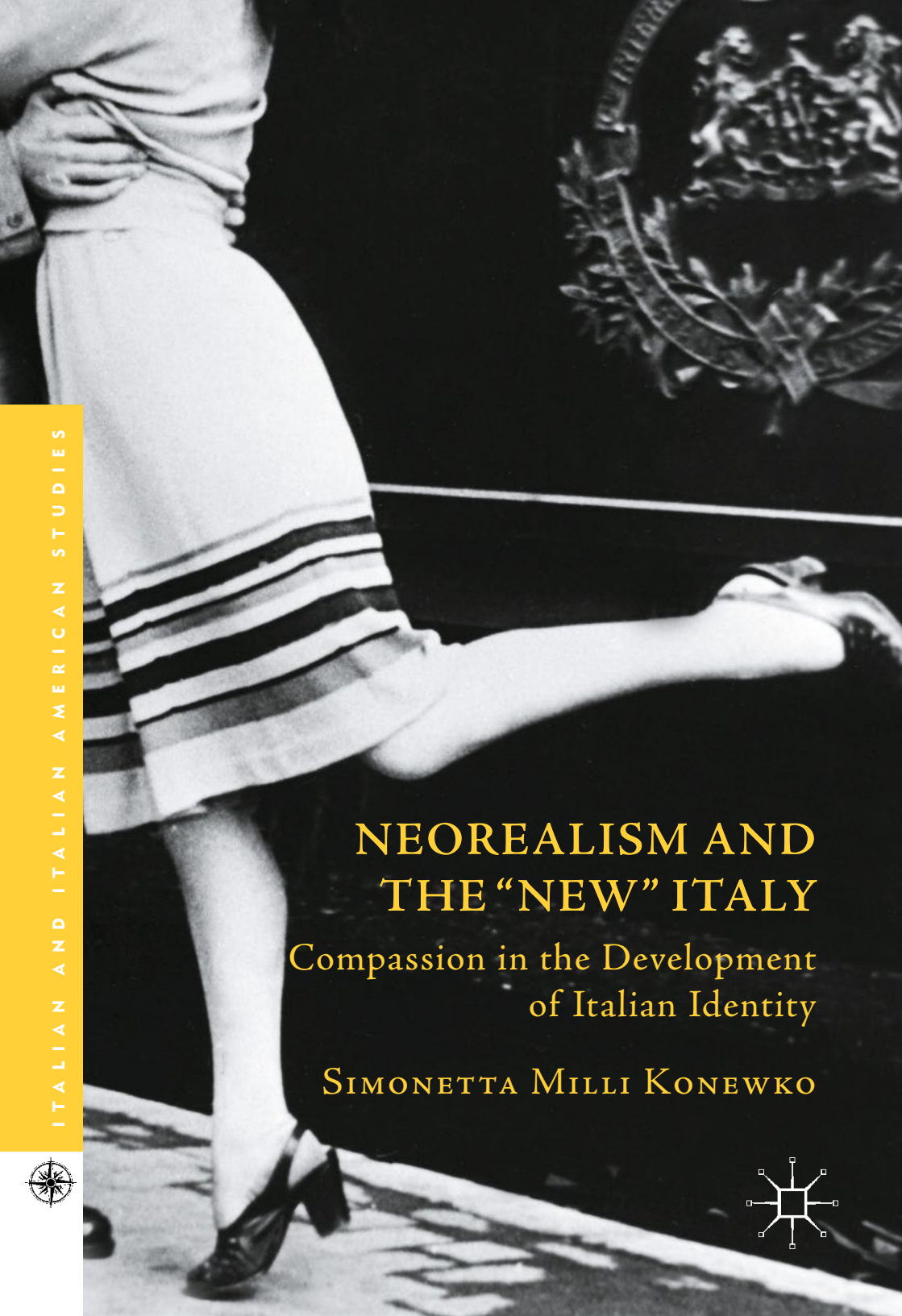

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NEOREALISM AND THE "NEW" ITALY

Compassion in the Development of Italian Identity

SIMONETTA MILLI KONEWKO

Italian and Italian American Studies

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Simonetta Milli Konewko

Neorealism and the "New" Italy

Compassion in the Development of Italian Identity

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Simonetta Milli Konewko
University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

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Ai miei genitori e modelli di vita, Omero Milli e Lilia Busti Milli

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Neorealism and the "New" Italy: Compassion in the Development of Italian Identity centers on the investigation of the emotion of compassion the neorealist artists express through their characters' interactions. It proposes compassion as an emotion that may be activated to unify certain individuals and communities and explores the meanings that compassion attains in promoting emotional intelligence, influencing the formation of Italian identity, and in redefining neorealism as a topic of investigation.

Specifically, the questions, textual examples, and theories of emotions that this analysis addresses are aimed to produce a deeper understanding of neorealist representations of the "anguish of a nation," and the forms of compassion through which Italy is re-encoded and reconstructed. By analyzing the overlooked roles that compassion plays in the development of Italian identity, and by redefining neorealism as a field of study highlighting representations of a particular period of Italian history, this work explores compassion as an emotion that is constructed to connect individuals at many levels.

The book is divided into four parts focusing on the mechanisms that allow compassion to operate during the postwar period. Part I presents the contextual material to understand neorealism. Part II provides the background to understand compassion and its functions during the Fascist time. Part III deals with representations of compassion and the connection with different examples of female characters' participation in the war. Part IV centers on the depiction of compassion in the most horrifying circumstances of the Holocaust.

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Neorealist authors and filmmakers fashioned their works out of the ruins of World War II and attracted global approval for their elaboration of an aesthetic defining post-Fascist Italy. Neorealism was not an official artistic school with rigid beliefs but it became noted for its literary and cinematic attention toward events that characterized the ordinary lives of common people during Fascism, the Nazi Occupation, World War II, and the postwar period in Italy. Usually perceived as thriving from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, the movement extended considerably during the 1960s and 1970s as many authors and directors resumed the original subjects of neorealism.

The neorealist movement has been connected mainly with leftist scholars who hoped that a more democratic form of government would ultimately succeed in Italy after the defeat of Fascism. Neorealist artists renounced the verbal embellishments generally associated with the Fascist regime (1922–1942) and shaped a documentary style, recounting the ruthless material situations of postwar Italy in unpretentious and colloquial language. They focused their consideration on social, economic, and political problems, and developed the concept of social commitment of artists in order to renovate Italy and Italians. Neorealism conveyed emotions, realities, and conflicts formerly masked by the Fascists. To understand the expansion of the neorealist attitude and methods, theorists agree that it is central to acknowledge the significance of the historic time in which these ideas started. Neorealist artists lived through an exclusive period of transformation that inspired their ways of perceiving and sharing present or past situations.

With the aim of offering the critical background for analyzing compassion in neorealist representations, Part I offers an overview of the literary and cinematographic origin of neorealism, the connection between the movement and its cinematographic and literary productions, its main subjects, and the methods used by neorealist artists to introduce emotional involvement.

Based on the models of Aristotle, M. Nussbaum, and Whitebrook, compassion is considered as the affective participation in another's experience, recorded through variations in affect or insight or through actions to better the condition of another individual. It can be displayed in a multiplicity of manners such as a reassuring word, a supportive action, or a helpful gesture recognizing that the other person is facing a difficult time. Compassion, which embraces sympathy in M. Nussbaum's terms and pity in Whitebrook's, specifies both the manifestation of an emotional condition and the immediate or evaluated involvement in another person's misfortune or anguish and the consequent expression of that realization.

Through the analysis of characters, circumstances, and plots, neorealist artists suggest a way to relate compassion with a rational progression and to propose a new evaluation of this emotion. The depictions of characters, which demonstrate comprehension of another individual's plight, present compassion as an emotion that can be generated by observing the difficulties experienced by others and through active participation in specific situations. These displays of compassion arise from reflective consideration of a specific circumstance or as instant reactions to devastating suffering.

Compassion can be distinguished by other similar emotions, such as pity, empathy, and sympathy. Examining the intensity of the pain or the point of view of the perception, specialists have struggled to underline these differences. For this examination, it is significant to keep in mind features of these similar emotions since here compassion could include characteristics traditionally attributed to other similar emotions. The focus of this work is not the examination of the degree of pain or the point of view of the observation but rather the political and social repercussions that emotional participation in others' suffering may generate. Specifically, this analysis focuses on the meaning and implications of different compassionate behaviors on postwar Italian society. In that context, compassion is activated in connection with the ability of mastering a new moral code resulting from the struggle of dangerous circumstances such as the war, the Fascist and Nazi occupation, and the Holocaust.

In order to provide a critical structure for analyzing compassion in neorealist representations, Part II briefly examines the functions that emotions and particularly compassion exercised in the cultural discourse during the Fascist time. It compares the usage of compassion in Mussolini's and Bernari's works, recognizing that compassion achieved libratory as well as punitive purposes. Mussolini, addressing women as objects of compassion because of their sacrifice to the nation, conceives this emotion as a means to impose disciplinary control. In his model, compassion is sacrificed for political achievements. Bernari, unlike the political dictator, utilizes compassion as a tool to better relationships and to offer individuals new models of behavior. Through compassion shown by his characters, Bernari proposes innovative manners to relating among individuals, highlighting also the misery of the political and social conditions of that time.

Part III centers on four different models of neorealist texts, which underline diverse representations of women's partaking in the fight against Fascists and Nazis. The following texts have been examined: Natalia Ginzburg's

autobiography *Family Sayings*, Alberto Moravia's *Two Women*, Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (*Agnese Goes to Die*), and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*.

The works by Natalia Ginzburg and Alberto Moravia propose compassion as an emotion often unused toward members of the same family or middle class. Proposing different methods for individuals to create their communities, the authors challenge previous standards proposed by the Fascist culture. By questioning the patriarchal power of her Jewish family, Ginzburg promotes an Italian identity respectful of gender differences and minorities, thus encouraging less rigid gender divisions.

Demonstrating the importance of understanding the suffering of others, Moravia employs compassion, triggered or denied among the characters or toward the environment, to instill awareness of crucial cultural elements, thus allowing Moravia to provide his own social statement. For instance, he rejects a blind nationalism, suggesting a more inclusive Italian identity, and enlarges the concept of neorealism through the promotion of a consideration for the plight of others.

By questioning the connection between women and obedience and passivity, Viganó challenges the supposition that during the war, women's involvement was merely at home. In contrast, she demonstrates that women's abilities moved beyond the domestic sphere. Through their dynamic contribution, they functioned efficiently in the more extended community, helping in achieving the partisans' political cause and demonstrating women's effort in exploring a new space for emancipation.

Rossellini, similarly to Viganó, uses compassion as a tool to propose conflict resolution and to endorse the political and social involvement of modern women. However, unlikely Viganó, the film also communicates that those features are appreciated when females display the patriarchal values worshiped by Fascism. This neorealist director denies any compassionate reply toward female figures exemplifying manners in opposition to the patriarchal description of women. Therefore, the commitment to the roles of wife and mother associated with the domestic sphere are still an important prerogative for Rossellini. The director suggests a less inventive way of problem-solving and proposes an innovative postwar female Italian identity but still connected to previous models.

The examination of compassion in the previous neorealist works displays different ways of promoting individuals' emotional ability perceived as a significant element for the new Italian identity. Emotional ability allows individuals to reach knowledge and consequently mental well-being, self- and

cultural awareness, and conflict resolution. Ginzburg's work confirms the psychological importance of mental well-being as a central element in human behavior. As affirmed by recent studies, this component is relevant to permit individuals to value their emotions and use them to influence their life and community positively.

Moravia uses self- and cultural awareness to reflect on the social condition, acknowledge the emotions of others, and connect with them. Self-awareness is the individuals' ability to consider both their individuality and others' standpoints. Cultural awareness is the skill of becoming receptive to our cultural values. The author employs these traits to promote awareness of individuals' cultural values and similarities with others, thus facilitating communication among them.

Through the construction of idealized female characters' representations of compassion, Viganó and Rossellini propose conflict resolution, which is a human process associated with individuals' emotional capability and aptitude to recognize the value of significant elements for others. This practice includes communication and motivation. Therefore, the neorealist authors teach that individuals' capability to generate a change in others is connected to the ability to understand their perspectives since this approach opens pathways to creative problem-solving. Rossellini, unlike Viganó, suggests that his emotional capability is anchored to previous ways of thinking, which affect his way of proposing solutions.

Part IV focuses on the depiction of compassion in the brutalizing surroundings created by the Italian anti-Semitic racial laws (1938) and concentration camps. It centers on two works: two testimonial narratives, *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi and *Smoke over Birkenau* by Liana Millu. This part explores the connections between compassion and identity, imagination, gender, national, and ethnic differences. Levi employs compassion in numerous manners. By denying it, he underlines isolation. By using it deceptively, he exemplifies the loss of trust consequential the gaining of personal benefit. When he depicts the prisoners reinstating recognition for others, he shows compassionate reactions as a tool for controlling ethical standards. These various manifestations of compassion offer ways to understand the dynamics of compassion and a manner to challenge the positivist view that emotions are distinct from other modes of learning.

The stories proposed by Millu and the compassionate reactions activated by her characters accentuate manners of contrasting dehumanization. The author proposes stories that center on the anguish of Millu's

female companions and their emotional sustenance of one another during their imprisonment at Birkenau. These stories underline the violence, the resistance, and the compassion of these women. Millu's work provides a perspective on compassion and shows that this emotion offers a system to refashion affectional bonds and impart support among the women. Contrasting the Nazi regime that inflicts division, Millu recommends coalition and family connections.

Levi and Millu, as Bernari during the Fascist time, encourage the practice of compassion to create relationships that prove to be crucial for individuals' salvation in the camps. Even if extremely difficult to be triggered, this ability allows individuals to influence others, communicate and build bonds, and therefore help people to progress and expand their perspective through a limited exercise of judgment. While Levi underlines the struggle in establishing relationships among men in the camps, Millu depicts these bonds as a common component of women's relationships. Contrasting the traditional male literature that has been gender neutral, she demonstrates that women can offer a different perspective on the Holocaust, and that their culture suggests diverse conditions through which to express their opportunities and act powerfully.

Through the analysis of compassion, neorealist artists encourage the employment of emotional capability, which, by encouraging social behavior, helps increase inclusion in the postwar Italian identity enlarged by recognizing others' perspectives and suffering and by cautiously practicing the ability of judging others. Additionally, it enhances individuals' ability to find positive solutions, reject a blind nationalism, promote women's relationships, and understand their different sensibilities and ways of coping with dramatic events. Hence, neorealism becomes a tool to encourage women's ability to be active participants in it. By recognizing the significance of others' emotions and standpoints, neorealist artists admit the relativity about their methodology. Since emotional ability is culturally constructed, these artists leave open the possibility for further explanations in the new Italy.

The compassionate reactions examined in this work highlight powerful ways to value individuals' perspectives and women's sensibilities in the postwar period. Although they recognize morals that neorealist artists propose to be part of the new Italian identity, these principles could be further explored. For instance, women's compassionate reactions prove to be a powerful tool to enhance their active inclusion in the postwar Italian identity; however, the subject is far from being exhausted. Further investigation could be practiced to underline women's situation and to examine,

for instance, if their compassionate effort was practiced to understand or reduce men's embarrassment as a consequence of their involvement changing.

Another potential area of enquiry is the examination of the limit of compassion. In fact, caring for people influences an individual emotionally and might cause exhaustion. It would be relevant to examine if postwar individuals had a limited capacity for compassion and if this emotion would exhaust itself under specific circumstances. The quality of a compassionate conduct orders that it should be done for its own sake and not with the purpose of being rewarded; however, it would be interesting to evaluate if people will set boundaries on compassion in order to avoid depletion of their resources and if they can find subtle methods of recognition that could potentially recharge their batteries.

A further topic of investigation would be to explore if compassion is an unchanging capability or if it underwent a specific evolution from the postwar period to now, as affirmed by the study by Goetz, Keltner, and Simon-Thomas. Moreover, of equal interest it would be to research if this emotion becomes easier with practice or if it would be beneficial in specific situations not to trigger it. For instance, during the dramatic events of a war, individuals might face the difficult position of sacrificing a few individuals for the benefit of the majority. In this context, compassion is sacrificed for the advantage of many. Further examination regarding these features of compassion could provide additional clarifications on the practices of this emotion, the degree people are willing to open themselves to others under dramatic conditions, and the social impacts that this procedure generates.

The examination through this book offered a new way to systematically examine how neorealism, praised for its compassionate characters, employs compassion to reach its own objectives. By promoting compassion and emotional intelligence, neorealist artists help us to realize how people act and adjust themselves to their social surroundings. Additionally, they highlight actions of bravery directed toward individuals and small communities and denounce the need of translating this quality into larger actions in the new Italy to promote social justice for many, diminish the anguish of the nation, and prevent tragedies originated by human desire for triumph.

PART I

Neorealism: What Is and Is Not

Creating their works out of the ruins of World War II, authors and filmmakers such as Primo Levi, Alberto Moravia, and Vittorio De Sica attracted international acclaim for their elaboration of neorealism as the aesthetic defining post-Fascist, or "new," Italy. Although not a formalized artistic school with prescriptive tenets, Italian neorealism became noted for its literary and cinematic focus on stories that arose from the everyday lives of common people during Fascism, the Nazi occupation, World War II, and the immediate postwar period. Generally viewed as flourishing from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, the movement broadened significantly during the 1960s and 1970s as several authors and directors returned to the original themes of neorealism.[1]

The neorealist movement has been associated primarily with leftist intellectuals who hoped that "communism or a more egalitarian form of government would eventually prevail" in Italy after the defeat of Fascism to "transform Italian society" (Pastina 86). Thus, these artists renounced the rhetorical flourishes generally associated with the Fascist regime (1922–1942) and fashioned a documentary style, describing the often brutal material conditions of postwar Italy in simple, colloquial language. They devoted substantial attention to social, economic, and political problems, giving rise to the concept of *impegno sociale*, or the "social commitment" of artists to renewing Italy and its citizens.[2]

Neorealism made it possible to express emotions, realities, and problems previously camouflaged by the Fascists (Leprohon). Theorists have attributed the international success of Italian neorealism to "the compassion of its products," as authors and filmmakers created "poignant syntheses

of the anguish experienced by a whole nation" (Pacifici 241). They also underscored the positive influence of this emotional component in the context of postwar Italy: "If it is possible to generalize about such matters, one might say that the 'new' Italy is at once more human and compassionate, less rhetorical and provincial, than the 'old' Italy of Mussolini" (Pacifici 16). However, these theorists have not elaborated on the nature of compassion as communicated by neorealist novels and films, leaving us with several questions to explore. What is the function of compassion in neorealist works? What features of compassion are represented in neorealist literary texts and films? This study analyzes the ways in which neorealist characters show or do not show compassion toward one another. It considers compassion as an emotion that may be triggered to unify individuals and communities in different ways, and it explores the function of these artistic works in promoting emotional intelligence, shaping Italian identity, and defining neorealism as a distinct field of study through their depictions of a specific time in Italian history.

My study centers on the thematic motifs that recur in six neorealist works: Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico famigliare* (*Family Sayings*), Alberto Moravia's *La ciociara* (*Two Women*), Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (*Agnese Goes to Die*), Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*), Liana Millu's *Il fumo di Birkenau* (*Smoke over Birkenau*), and Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*Survival in Auschwitz*). These works offer a rich array of characters whose identities are shaped by their exposure to suffering and compassion. Equally important is the representation of Fascist models of identity, consistently rejected by the suffering characters, in these literary works and films. As neorealist artists denounced the horrors of life during the Fascist regime and World War II, they created a binary opposition between Fascism as rhetorical, inauthentic, and false, on the one hand, and postwar Italian national identity as authentic and truly compassionate on the other hand. These artists' representations of compassion—or lack thereof—indicate how gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and geographic location determine inclusion in or exclusion from the new Italy, using paradigms that the claim to compassion may naturalize.

To investigate the significance of compassion in neorealist representations, it is important not only to explore the emotion of compassion (as I will do in Part II), but also to examine how neorealist artists perceived the circumstances that they experienced and how they subsequently narrated

those experiences. To understand the development of the neorealist approach and style, theorists agree that it is crucial to recognize the meaning of the historic moment in which these ideas arose. Neorealist artists lived through a unique period of change that influenced their ways of observing and communicating present or past circumstances. For instance, Millicent Marcus affirms that when neorealist artists explored historical subjects, they did so with the purpose of associating the past with the present ("Italian Film in the Shadow" 15). Mark Shiel, on the other hand, underscores the significance of the moment of change: "One of the most important ways of thinking about neorealism has been to see it as a moment of decisive transition in the tumultuous aftermath of world war which produced a stylistically a philosophically distinctive cinema…" (1). These theorists, treasuring the specific moment in history that they were experiencing, exhibit interest in the past in order to find a connection with their current circumstances.

Similarly, the postwar enthusiasm for a renewed freedom of expression was also highlighted by the intellectuals at *Il Politecnico*, a literary magazine created and directed by Elio Vittorini in 1945, in their plea for cultural rejuvenation. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile describe these intellectuals' intent to initiate a ground-breaking project of " …new thinking and writing, addressing both cultural and more strictly scientific, even technical, as well as sociological and other issues, and aimed at informing and educating the working class, as well as addressing a more intellectual readership…" (544). But although very innovative in impact, the neorealist artists' approach did not suggest a radical discontinuity with the past. On the contrary, the origins of their methodology dug deep into the works of writers and directors in Italy and elsewhere who could be seen as forebears of the themes and stylistic inventions that neorealist artists were embracing and disseminating.

To examine the neorealist works mentioned above and to convey their primary implications, particularly in connection to the emotion of compassion, we must examine a multiplicity of topics and related schools of thought. For instance, it will be important to consider the cinematographic and literary origins of the movement, the association between the movement and its cinematographic and literary productions, their main themes, and the ways in which neorealist works established emotional involvement.

Notes

1. Laura E. Ruberto, in *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*, affirms that European movies about immigration, such as Gianni Amelio's *Lamerica*, (1994) also adopted the style of postwar Italian neorealism (242).
2. In contrast, Giorgio Agamben underscores the reflective aspect of art: "Politics and art are neither tasks nor simply 'works': they name, rather, the dimension in which the linguistic and corporeal, material and immaterial, biological and social operations are made inoperative and contemplated as such" (72).

CHAPTER 2

The Italian Roots of Neorealism

Shortly after the war, Italian narrative literature attracted the attention of the reading public abroad, including the American public, in a way that, according to some critics, had been seen previously only during the time of Gabriele d'Annunzio. This phenomenon took the Italians completely by surprise, since they were unaware of the success that certain Italian authors had achieved abroad. Authors such as Silone (whose successful books were first published abroad), Moravia, Levi, and Vittorini won a new respect for Italian literature. At the same time, a significant number of motion pictures and a uniquely Italian style of movie-making based on attentiveness to the most unpretentious details of everyday life made Italian scenery familiar to movie viewers all over the world. The term *neorealism*, coined in Italy to indicate a new group of film directors, was utilized abroad to indicate a new school of narrators as well. As emphasized by such critics as Nicola Chiaromonte, this use of the term may produce misinterpretations. In fact, for Chiaromonte, it may indicate that "Italians had created a new kind of realism or that they had at last discovered the century-old tradition of narrative realism" (237). A clarification on the cinematographic and literary origins of the movement is needed.

Cinematographic Origins

Several theorists have investigated the origin of this new narrative form in Italy. Some of them trace its roots back to a naturalistic impulse characterizing the Neapolitan cinema before and during World War II, and to

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a realist or *verismo* style cultivated in Italian cinema between 1913 and 1916 (Perry 3). Others contend that the origin of neorealism is to be found in the literary movement called *Strapaese*, which developed during the Fascist period and generated rural and regional images offered in a naturalistic style. As Mark Antliff points out, this movement originated in the area of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, and it acknowledged the spirit of Fascism in the ingenuous, rural life of peasants. These artists wished to maintain regional variances against the standardizing effects of state domination and mass culture (141). The intellectuals of the *Strapaese* movement promoted the uniqueness of each region through depictions of unsophisticated, rustic life.

For James Hay, this myth is echoed in some neorealist films after the war, particularly those of Visconti and De Santis. He states that despite the similarities between prewar and postwar films, Italian film output after the war lacked the need to venerate or preserve cultural tradition, which was common during the 1920s and 1930s. The postwar films establish their dramatic struggle in Italian society itself, whereas their 1930s counterparts explore imaginary and mutual conflicts. Peter Bondanella, in his renowned work *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, points out the close relationship between early Italian neorealist cinema and literature, which was influenced by the prose style of American writers such as Hemingway and Steinbeck. For Bondanella, the creative encounter with a number of foreign cultures, including those of the USA, Russia, and France, together with the advent of talkies and a number of important cultural and artistic developments, set the stage for the appearance of neorealism (33). Although closely associated with Italian historic and social circumstances, neorealist films also appear to be linked to international perceptions.

Other critics share Bondanella's view. Mark Shiel notes the impact of the (not widely known) Soviet montage school of the 1920s on neorealism's documentary tendency in depicting daily life (17). For Brunetta (*Il cinema del regime* 167–174), this influence was especially facilitated through the translation of Russian film theory by Umberto Barbaro and the teaching of Russian filmmaking techniques at the national film school, the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* led by Luigi Chiarini. Film scholar Simona Monticelli also recognizes the impact of French and Hollywood cinemas (457). In fact, the poetic realism of Jean Renoir, which was extremely successful in Italy and provided some of the most important filmmakers with their first involvement in filmmaking, was exceptionally significant for the development of neorealism. Likewise, Hollywood cinema, which before its

rejection by the Fascist authorities in 1938 received extensive popular approval in the Italian market, exercised a significant influence.

Notwithstanding the strong influence accorded to French and American film and literature, theorists agree in affirming that the Fascist political regime and its cinematographic apparatus exercised a considerable influence on neorealist production. The Fascist authorities recognized the significance of film production in fashioning and preserving the political strength of the regime, enhancing the cult of its leader, legitimizing its power, and motivating its members (Bornigia 127). Although Mussolini, as Ruth Ben-Ghiat affirmed, never endorsed a precise aesthetic style and was more tolerant than other dictators toward artistic production (*Fascist* 9), he sought to control any kind of behavior that opposed his government and therefore prohibited any attempt by film directors or other artists to use their opinions to incite the public against his authority. As Steven Ricci put it, Fascist cinema was "…unworthy of enlightened critical scrutiny" (1). The Fascist government created political organizations and censorship boards in an attempt to organize the film industry.[1] For instance, the LUCE Institute (*L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa*, or Educational Cinematographic Institute) was established in 1924 to control all cinematic operations; it aimed to create educational films and documentaries to promote awareness of the link between film and politics. Mussolini also opened the first Italian studio, called *Cinecittà*, in 1937 to help filmmakers to produce films with Fascist messages and ideas. Most of these were war-based films with a story line and a substantial amount of propaganda, and they did not induce reflective introspection. As elucidated by Jacqueline Reich in "Mussolini at the Movies: Fascism, Film, and Culture," the film industry of the time generated "the basis for a cultural politics of evasion" (3); furthermore, "[t]he task of directors, scriptwriters, and performers involved was not to make the spectator think, but rather to induce him or her to forget" (3). The attempts by the government to create a powerful national cinema produced apparent results; as Shiel declares, "The effort of the fascist regime to influence the character of Italian film production, distribution and exhibition transformed the Italian film industry into the fifth largest in the world by 1942" (23). Even though critics underline the Fascist authority's system to avoid any kind of self-examination through film, they recognize the power that film production gained during the fascist time.

Despite the tight control exercised by the regime and its impact on the artists involved, it is significant to acknowledge the important accomplishments of Fascist cinema and, as I will investigate in later chapters, its

influence on neorealism. Notably, in order to deny any possible influence of Fascist cinema on later productions, critics, especially before the 1970s, often excluded it from intellectual discussions. As Steven Ricci explains, "…having articulated an evidently fundamental discontinuity between the cinema under fascism and contemporary Italian filmmaking, very few studies ever sought neorealism's cinematic antecedents" (23). In order to facilitate a separation between films produced during and after the Fascist time, scholars, especially before 1970s, rarely underlined the connections in the films between the two periods.

Fascist cinema production, though delimited within the ideological boundaries imposed by the regime, was extensive. Historical epics and war films reinforced the principle of national superiority. They expressed militarism, male heroism, and female subservience, as in *Scipio Africanus*, produced in 1937 by Carmine Gallone following Italy's invasion and subjugation of Ethiopia in 1935. This historical film was utilized as propaganda to justify the Fascist desire to occupy North Africa. Many critics highlight the association that Gallone proposed between the power of Fascist Italy and Imperial Rome. According to Federico Caprotti, "Gallone's focus on Roman events through the figure of Scipio at the height of the Second Punic War was a metaphorical reworking of historical colonial discourse into fascist imperial ambitions" (382). Other than a limited number of films produced by Alessandro Blasetti, such as *Sole* (*Sun*, 1929) or *Vecchia guardia* (*The Old Guard*, 1937), most of the productions belong to a more amusing genre; as Julie Gottlieb states, "Escapist films, melodramas, and sentimental and often frivolous comedies for the most part, which bore a striking similarity to Hollywood features of the same era, dominated Italian Fascist cinema" (43). These productions, which were complicit with Fascist politics, include the comedies of Mario Camerini, who, collaborating with Vittorio De Sica and often using him as the main protagonist in the films, exhibited what some critics consider a strong tendency toward cinematic realism. Camerini's comedies, such as *Gli uomini, che mascalzoni* (*What Rascals Men Are!* 1932), *Darò un milione* (*I'll Give a Million*, 1936), and *Il Signor Max* (*Mister Max*, 1937), focused on lower-middle-class individuals and their visions of self-improvement in the city environment. The thematic connection between his films starring Vittorio De Sica and De Sica's later neorealist production discloses, according to Carlo Celli, a continuity between prewar and postwar Italian cinema (4), underscoring a bond that has often been ignored.

Literary Origins

Although, in accord with specific developments in Italian culture and society, the new trend proposed a fresh approach to circumstances; it is generally recognized that realism was not a new phenomenon within the Italian cultural tradition. Scholars find a prominent realist component dating back to Italian literary folktales. According to several texts, realism in Europe started with Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which the description of fourteenth-century Tuscan life and customs is sufficiently harsh and pointed to fit within the category of realism as understood today. Francesco De Sanctis emphasizes the earthy components of Boccaccio's comedy in contrast with the seriousness of Dante and Petrarca's works.[2] Others note the daily occurrences that characterize *Decameron*'s narrative. For instance, folklorist Jack Zipes states that Boccaccio's tales, also called *novelle*, focus "on surprising events of everyday life and the tales (influenced by oral wonder tales, fairy tales, *fabliaux*, chivalric romances, epic poetry, and fables) were intended for the amusement and instruction of the readers" (12). Boccaccio's work greatly influenced later folktales in Italy and overturned modern stereotypes of the Middle Ages by conferring upon the characters in his stories a varied set of realistic incentives and purposes. For instance, while he reveres the cultural significance of ideas about chivalry, he also challenges these concepts by recognizing their falseness, thus undermining the application of chivalric ideas. Boccaccio described the full range of medieval culture, extracting the realities that people experienced beneath the affirmed appearances of gallantry and trust.[3]

Although this rich tradition of realistic narrative comprises old fairy tales recorded from oral tradition and medieval narratives, it is ordinarily considered that realism in Italian literary art did not reassert itself after Boccaccio until the Romantic Age. The father of this renewal of realism has been definitively identified as Alessandro Manzoni, author of *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*, 1827) among other works. Regarded as a masterpiece of world literature and a foundation for the modern Italian language, this novel provides a genuine depiction of the tyrannical Spanish rule in 1628. It is believed to have been written to condemn the Austrian empire, which controlled the area around Milan at the time when the book was written. In his introduction to the work, Manzoni affirms his belief that historical novels are the best aesthetic method of transmitting the truth and of teaching the educational significance of history. The story contains unaffected portrayals of events and explanations of characters

against the background of gang scenes and the eruption of the plague in Milan. The author provides a further clarification of the significance of his novel, which, in his opinion, "give[s] an adequate picture of a period in our country's history which, although famous enough in a general way, is very little known in detail" (564). As a result, Manzoni perceives his work as an unpretentious way to communicate authentic aspects of that historic time in Milan that would otherwise have remained unknown.

In contrast to Manzoni's historical attention, Giovanni Verga's work does not present the past as its framework but deals directly with the events and their characters. He is considered one of the initiators of the *verismo* school, or literary realism. Verga, like other nineteenth-century European novelists such as Luigi Capuana and Émile Zola, created his works deliberately following a number of precise rules, agreements, and practices—roughly called realism—the abundant subdivisions of which share in common the artist's purpose of exhibiting the representation of life as it is. Verga, born in Sicily in 1840, traveled to Florence and Milan, where the philosophy and thoughts of other writers greatly inspired his work. He wrote patriotic novels but later diverted his attention to the conditions of peasants in Sicily, developing the masterpieces for which he is recognized all over Europe: the short stories of *Vita dei campi* (*Life in the Fields*, 1880) and *Novelle rusticane* (*Little Novels of Sicily*, 1883), and his great novels, including *I malavoglia* (*The House of the Medlar Tree,* 1881), *Mastro don Gesualdo* (1889), and *Cavalleria rusticana* (*Rustic Chivalry*, 1884), which became very popular as an opera.

As underscored by many intellectuals over the years, such as Luigi Russo and Riccardo Bonavita, Verga's writing, designed to illustrate the simple human condition or a family of poor Sicilian fishermen, employed a unique style in which the story is told through direct and indirect dialogue among the characters. For Russo, Verga proposes the writer's impersonality (4), whereas Bonavita stresses Verga's ability to express the author's presence only through the plot and in the structure of the events (110). The document that best clarifies Verga's literary approach can be found in the introduction to the short story "*L'amante di gramigna*" ("Gramigna Mistress"), which appeared in 1880 in *Rivista Minima*. In a letter to Salvatore Farina, director of this journal, Verga specifies the principles of his approach, stating that a literary work should be expressed in the language commonly used by the protagonists and must faithfully represent the facts. In his opinion, this method allows the reader to gain a genuine impression of the circumstances (192).

The tradition of realistic narrative as a favorite genre employed in fairy tales continued with the works of Carlo Collodi and Italo Calvino. Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (*The Adventures of Pinocchio*) unmistakably displays realistic components. Though written for children, it has recently been amply examined as an important piece of Italian classic literature. Initially composed in the early 1880s, Collodi's work may have fairy tale–like features that tie it to children literature, but many of its elements are more akin to prose narratives aimed at adults, including his realistic attention to the conditions of the most vulnerable individuals in society, the descriptions of an underdeveloped nation, and the use of dialect. Collodi's writing presents an insightful documentary and social interest that associates it with the concreteness of the realist novels belonging to the *verismo* school. Strongly influenced, for different reasons, by both Italian masters of realism, Manzoni and Verga, Collodi was particularly sensitive to the plight of the poor, which was a widespread theme during his time and which, according to Dina Jovine, troubled the consciences of liberals (93). But a key element that distinguishes *The Adventures of Pinocchio* from earlier children's narratives is its genuine attention to present-day real life. Collodi's book "…depicts an encounter with contemporary reality that is dramatic and even traumatic…" (Perella 11). These components make Collodi's work similar in both subject and style to later neorealist narratives.

Among his numerous significant works, Italo Calvino is renowned for his *Fiabe italiane* (*Italian Folktales*), the first organized collection of Italian fairy tales. Like a modern-day Grimm, Calvino assembled, classified, and translated from numerous Italian dialects a massive treasury of folk narratives. In fact, as he states in his introduction, he chose "from mountains of narrative" (xix), which, in his opinion, contain a strong component of realism, especially the tales from Sicily. In fact, referring to Agatuzza Messia, the ideal narrator and typical Sicilian storyteller according to folklorist Giuseppe Pitré, he reports that her stories were frequently based "on realism, on a picture of the condition of the common people" (xxiii). Calvino offers a clear explanation of his effort when he indicates that the narrative possibilities offered by the folktales' "infinite variety and infinite repetition" make them appropriate for application to all stories. Calvino further clarifies this quality: "Folktales are real since they encompass all of human experience in the form of a catalog of potential destinies of men and women" (xviii). For Calvino, fairy tales are significant resources by which to examine and comprehend the intentions and purposes of individuals in society.

Moreover, according to some theorists, Calvino's transcription included variations aimed at highlighting the realistic qualities of the narratives. The author acknowledges this conscious effort to modify the tales in his introduction, where he admits that he made specific alterations in accordance with a Tuscan proverb, "The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it" (xix). Studying Calvino's alterations in comparison with other versions of the tales, Marc Beckwith demonstrates that his changes, such as "leaving off the endings and closing on a strong note or with a punch line," reflect an attempt to eliminate "the narrator's intrusion" and transform the tale "in the direction of the literary short story (one thinks of Maupassant or O. Henry)" (255). The realistic quality of the fairy tales that Calvino gathered is further enhanced by the author's expert ability to alter the writing in order to make the narrator seem disinterested and therefore attain a more impersonal narrative, typical of the realistic short stories authored by important European writers.

In contrast, during the Fascist period, many Italian artists found inspiration from the classics, and often their works expressed strong involvement and consideration of style. Although Fascism did not formally spur any specific form of literary production or any particular school, writers were encouraged to stay away from realistic simplicity and straightforward particulars. Fascism discouraged contemplation and introspection and promoted a positive, optimistic, and progressive approach to life, with support from its propaganda. Renzo De Felice, in *Mussolini il duce: gli anni del consenso, 1929–1936*, clearly conveys this aspect of the Fascist political leader when he suggests that Mussolini's involvement in cultural materials was not the consequence of any love of knowledge; on the contrary, it was designed to advance his political goals and, as such, was profoundly illiberal (107). It is well known that the Fascist regime practiced systematic censorship to ensure the success of its political aims. Guido Bonsaver notes the diverse range of this undertaking: "It was a tool that was taken up and used in many different ways, buy with different agents, and with different results" (216). According to former intellectuals, during the fascist time, censorship was present to facilitate Mussolini's political expansion but it was a very irregular system of operation.

The multiplicity of approaches used to bring the Italian people in line with Fascist philosophy created a variety of perceptions among the writers of the time. Authors responded in different ways to the restrictive intellectual situation and to the disdain for human autonomy that Fascist political philosophy embodied. Alberto Casadei, in his examination of the

twentieth-century literature, states that while some intellectuals followed the Fascist ideology, such as Gabriele d' Annunzio and Giuseppe Ungaretti, many covertly expressed their disapproval and did not abide by it. More frequently, authors expressed their opposition by choosing abstract and symbolic themes, such as those presented by the writers of more allegorical or realistic subjects, such as the ones proposed by Eugenio Montale (47). Many writers strongly perceived the responsibility to purify literature by all the forms of embellishment. As Nicola Chiaromonte affirms, "In terms of literature, they had to look for a way out of preciousness and purity of form which was too often synonymous with emptiness" (238). Even though the Italian literature of the Fascist period presents an assortment of narrative styles, as we will see in Part II, several scholars today view what we consider Italian neorealism as being strongly influenced by writers operating during the Fascist period as a response to the oppressive political ideology and aesthetic control that the regime exercised.

Notes

1. Gian Piero Brunetta's work provides rich and detailed information about cinematographic production during the Fascist period.
2. Robert S. Dombroski's edited work contains critical essays by Francesco De Sanctis describing his realistic perception of *Decameron*.
3. *Boccaccio. A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, edited by Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Lavarie Smarr, offers a description and critical inspection of Giovanni Boccaccio's writing.

CHAPTER 3

Neorealism and Films

After the fall of Fascism in 1943, works by Roberto Rossellini (1906–1977), Vittorio De Sica (1902–1974), and Luchino Visconti (1906–1976), among others, gained global appreciation. Freed from the censorship imposed by the regime, these directors were able to further develop a tendency toward cinematic realism already initiated as an instrument of propaganda during the years of Fascism.[1] Consequently, social, political, and economic subjects, forbidden by the Fascist ideology, were now combined to express a genuine cinematic communication. During the years of 1943 and 1944, the love for realistic representations of circumstances became a strong tendency, which, according to Casadei, started with cinematic production (48). Nevertheless, neorealism has been the subject of an active debate from its origin to the present and the object of various methods of examination.[2] For instance, recently, Catherine O'Rawe has affirmed the importance of developing a more sophisticated theoretical and historical approach in studying both neorealism and popular film ("Genre" 173). Also, a provocative article by O'Rawe and Alan O'Leary objects to the body of critical work that considers neorealism as the center of Italian cinema ("Against Realism" 103). These current studies demonstrate the impact that neorealist representations have on film production since scholars still express their interest to further examine their features and approaches. In different times, critics have disagreed over such issues as the origin of the movement's name, its initiator, or the time frame of its production. For instance, Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar confirm

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the notion that originally Umberto Barbaro acquired the term from literary study and utilized it to depict French realist cinema (3).

As discussed further below, although some critics limit neorealist cinematic production to a rather narrow time period, between 1944 and 1952, others enlarge the time frame to include works as late as the 1970s. Three works by the abovementioned directors, Rossellini, De Sica, and Visconti, could be considered crucial for the neorealist aesthetic: *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945), *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948), and *Ossessione* (1942). According to many critics, these works, among others, display features considered typically neorealist and greatly influenced cinematography in Italy and abroad. For instance, one shared element is a specific outlook toward life in general. Neorealist artists focused on the anguish generally felt by Italians after the war. Carlo Celli and Marga Cottino-Jones specify that this neorealist perception of life comprises "…a strong desire to uncover the truth about widespread suffering in Italy, and to identify with the plight of the victims" (44). Similarly, when Cesare Zavattini, screenwriter and one of the most important theorists of the neorealist approach, was faulted for concentrating so heavily on the representation of poverty, he responded, "We have started with misery simply because it is one of the most dominant aspects of our present society" (qtd. in Brunetta 431). In tune with Zavattini's perception, neorealist artists displayed a strong attention in depicting the suffering Italians experienced as a social consequence of the war.

Another component that distinguishes neorealist work is the artists' social commitment to generating cultural change. Neorealist advocates felt the need to reveal through both literature and film the social and economic situations of the most disadvantaged social classes. As Pickering-Iazzi points out, "The proponents of neorealism, as well as such magical realists as Massimo Bontempelli, reconceived the role of the artist as a 'committed' producer of art as sociopolitical practice, a notion not lacking precedents" (*Politics* 136). The social involvement of neorealism's artists was perceived as a way to suggest concrete reforms to better the contemporary political situation. In their examination of the current difficulties characterizing postwar Italy and with the intent to search for a renewal also in the means of expression, neorealist directors encountered technical limitations due to their lack of funds. As a result, they often made their motion pictures on a very restricted financial plan or even fashioned their own style as a consequence of their economic restrictions. As Bert Cardullo points out, "With minimal resources, the neorealist filmmakers worked in real locations using local people as well as professional actors; they

improvised the scripts, as need be, on site" (1). Hence, some neorealist practices, such as on-location shooting in genuine surroundings, nonprofessional actors, emphasis on the vernacular, and improvisation, were developed out of necessity.

Despite their similarities, neorealist artists also developed their individuality by devoting their attention to particular topics. For instance, as Cottino-Jones observes, Rossellini was concerned with the upheavals of the war, Luchino Visconti and Francesco De Santis with the problems of the peasantry, and De Sica and Zavattini with poverty in urban sites ("Women, Desire" 54). Moved by the desire to denounce social poverty and injustice and to create cultural changes, whether using low-budget procedures out of necessity or, in certain instances, more sophisticated methods, neorealist artists were able to represent the misery of postwar Italy and create films of provocative significance. Three of their significant features will be explored in the following sections.

Melodrama and Genuine Authenticity

Neorealist films often propose a contrast between melodramatic scenes and scenes of notable crudeness and unpretentious truthfulness. Critics have provided definitions of these two components. According to Louis Bayman, "…broadly speaking, melodrama in cinema is simply the pathos of the expressive elevation of fundamentally ordinary feelings, whereas realism is a recognizable attempt to bring representation closer to extra-filmic reality" (48). According to the *Oxford American Dictionary for Learners of English*, melodrama is "a story, play or novel that is full of exciting events and in which the characters and emotions seem too exaggerated to be real." As stressed by both definitions, melodrama tends to raise ordinary feelings to a higher level.

This intense way of representing individuals' emotional states seems to characterize Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione*. One of the earliest examples of neorealist movies, this film, based on the novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) by James M. Cain, is a melodrama of adultery in which Gino, an unemployed mechanic, arrives at a shabby inn owned by Giovanna and her older husband. The two of them fall in love and decide to murder the husband and live happily ever after, but a series of tragic events drastically changes their plan. The depiction of this couple's tough living conditions, their relationship, a subsequent death, and their consequent responsibility would anticipate fundamental components of neorealist works.

Visconti communicates these conflictual conditions through the choice of a melancholic and languid environment. As Shiel states, "*Ossessione* avoids conventional beauty and grandeur in its representation of the Po valley, presenting instead a haunting and windswept terrain whose unromanticized bleakness reinforces the sense of doom which pervades the narrative from the outset" (38). Although Visconti highlights the emotional appeal of those scenes, he is able to maintain their realism while supplementing them with a dose of exaggerated passion. Moreover, the unglamorous individuals and locations pointed toward a style of film clearly distinct from those made in Hollywood and from the so-called "white telephone" films made in Italy's Fascist period and characterized by intense melodramatic and comic scenes showing upper-class settings.[3]

As with Visconti's *Ossessione*, critics highlight the melodramatic components of Rossellini's films as well. Some of them observe that neorealist directors tend to organize their plots around main events that are very dramatic since they include life-or-death situations. For instance, the movie *Paisà* (1946), composed of six episodes showing different relationships between the American occupants and the liberated Italians, presents significant sequences that display these melodramatic components. In the Florence episode, a young Italian woman is searching the city for her lover but instead finds out about his tragic death. This discovery strikes her like a stray bullet. The scene accentuates melodramatic components without using the typical set of personalities that typically distinguish a melodrama. The two protagonists are not to be considered as hero and heroine, since they put their own lives and the lives of others in danger not to satisfy an ideal, but rather for the sake of personal affection.[4]

Nevertheless, specific features make this part of the cinematographic narrative extremely melodramatic. The sequence offers violent and disjointed images on which the viewer must attempt to impose coherence, since the director does not provide any explanation of past and present circumstances to clarify the protagonists' actions or justify the tragic events. Furthermore, the camera maintains a consistent third-person standpoint. The director does not include any cuts to close-ups but, through the camera movements, communicates the threat and vulnerability of the situation, allowing the viewers to feel as if they are part of the action. Similarly, when two Fascists are captured, they are hurried extremely close to the camera. This perception of proximity is maintained until the woman learns of the death of her lover as the scene concludes. The spectator's awareness of the woman and the meaning that her lover carried for her is constructed on

the basis of her actions during the powerfully represented episode. With this technique, the director suggests a close examination of the intense dramatic circumstances, inviting the viewer to a deeper participation.

Visconti's *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, 1948), based on the novel *I Malavoglia* by Verga, would become an exemplary display of the illusion of reality and of visual authenticity, which were fundamental elements of neorealist works. The cinematic realism characterizing these works is based on the starting point of the camera's mechanical reproduction of reality. The camera is seen as operating like a person, observing the events from outside. This neorealist approach often runs counter to the principle of verisimilitude that characterized Hollywood production and focuses on a narrative that André Bazin would define as "visible poetry" ("Umberto D: A Great Work" 81), that is to say, a description that underscores the lyricism of daily life. Likewise, for Bazin, realist cinema was "a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time" (*What Is Cinema*, vol. 2, 21). Zavattini suggests a cinema in which life itself becomes a spectacle. In "Some Ideas on the Cinema,"[5] he indicates, "An hour of the day, any place, any person, is a subject for narrative if the narrator is capable of observing and illuminating all these collective elements by exploring their interior value" (52). Hence, for Zavattini, the director's perception is able to transform a specific person or object into cinematic material.

The Earth Trembles is a pseudo-documentary set in the poor village of Aci Trezza, near Catania. It features individuals and situations previously left unnoticed as it investigates the mistreatment of Sicilian fishermen. The plot seems simple: in order to free himself and his loved ones from exploitation by the traders, the young protagonist organizes a small business of salted fish. Following the neorealist tendency to represent authenticity, the work aims to depict the highest degree of truth. This purpose is stressed in the film's opening frame as the director states plainly that the events really happened in a precise location in Italy: "The facts represented in this film occur in Italy, more specifically in Sicily, in the town of Aci Trezza, which is found on the Ionian Sea a short distance from Catania." The director's intent to indicate the accurate place of the events facilitates the conviction that the representation experienced is concretely true.

Moreover, in tune with the neorealist tradition, the opening frame also provides the key to understanding a further purpose of the film, namely a desire to transform the plight of the Sicilian fishermen into a representation of the universal sternness of class struggles. The second part of the opening

frame reads, "The story which this film relates is the same as that found for years in all those countries where men exploit other men." Visconti thus avers not only that the viewers will be exposed to an authentic representation of circumstances but also that this authenticity can be expanded much further than the borders of Sicily. The director stated later that he was simply interested in depicting the human condition: "In *La Terra trema* I was trying to express the whole dramatic theme as a direct outcome of an economic conflict" (*Film and Filming* 22). Furthermore, Visconti demonstrates his faithfulness to Antonio Gramsci's proposed solution to the southern problem, which foresaw an alliance between southern peasants and northern industrial workers.

Visconti uses several other practical expedients to facilitate the construction of an authentic reality. For instance, he decided to use the fishermen's dialect in order to reproduce genuine conversations among the indigenous people. In the original version, the fishermen portrayed themselves speaking in their native dialects and worrying about economic privation for over 160 minutes. Later, Visconti added narration in standard Italian. Other typical neorealist methods employed here are the shooting of scenes directly in the fishermen's rural community and the use of nonprofessional actors, which promote the avoidance of any film artifice, encouraging genuine representation of both the lives of impoverished Sicilians and their families and the story of human conflict. Realist films make visible individuals and situations previously left unseen.

On-Location Shooting: War-Damaged Urban Centers

The images of devastation left by the war greatly influenced neorealist production. In neorealist cinema, images of destruction underscore both the physical destruction and the mental and psychological devastation of its characters. Along with the Po delta scenes included in his *Paisà*, Rossellini paid attention to war-ravaged metropolitan centers and other sites emaciated by World War II. Several other neorealist films present the visually striking outcomes of the war, expressed through bombed-out edifices and roads. *Rome, Open City*, *Sciuscià* (*Shoeshine*, 1946), *Germania anno zero* (*Germany Year Zero*, 1948), *Il miracolo* (*The Miracle*, 1948), *Bicycle Thieves*, and *Umberto D* (1952) are some remarkable examples that highlight these zones of wreckage, waste, and destruction. All of them were filmed on site—which, as we have already seen, became a significant

component of neorealism. The authentic supremacy of this filming on location would encourage the creation of supplementary film movements such as the French Nouvelle Vague and, shortly thereafter, Cinema Novo in South America and the Independent Cinema in North America.[6]

The images of destruction in neorealist films evoke material devastation that implicitly reminds one of other destructive consequences. The physical annihilation of the Italian cities caused a shortage of infrastructure and the downfall of the economy, which subsequently triggered a lack of food and other supplies. This general crisis intensified the miserable conditions of the working-class citizens throughout the country, which ranged from subnormal to uninhabitable during the postwar period. Critics declare that the strength of these depictions can be found in the relationships that these devastated sites establish with their inhabitants. As Liz Bawden affirms in her examination of *Rome, Open City*, "The film's intensity and immediacy is derived principally from its depiction of war in terms of human values and relationship" (602). The devastated locations inform the viewer about the characters and their suffering, denouncing the deprivation that Italians were undergoing.

Several neorealist films exemplify these features. *Paisà*, Rossellini's follow-up to *Rome, Open City*, presents the ruins of the bombed cities of Naples and Florence, where the inhabitants have to face the material consequences of the devastation. The movie's six sections are set during Italy's liberation at the end of World War II, and they occur across the country. The depiction of the ruins underscores the struggle of people who must live each day in extreme circumstances. Other movies, such as *Shoeshine*, *Bicycle Thieves*, *Miracle in Milan*, and *Umberto D*, focused on the social destruction that follows physical demolition. For instance, in *Bicycle Thieves*, De Sica examines and denounces poverty in postwar Rome through the story of an unfortunate father looking among the shattered city for his stolen bicycle, without which he will lose the job that represented his family's redemption. Shooting in the devastated streets of postwar Rome, De Sica uses the genuine location of contemporary life to structure the drama of this distressed father whose new job delivering cinema posters is suddenly taken away. De Sica represents the relationships between father and son, canonically interpreted by nonprofessional actors, as they wander desperately through the wilderness of Rome, with no help from the police or from anyone else. The surroundings of a destroyed city symbolize the bleak social reality of postwar Rome, where "stolen items are resold to their victimized former owners" (Bondanella 60) or where, as happens in the final

sequence, the protagonist steals a bicycle himself, maintaining the cycle of theft and poverty. The protagonist becomes a representation of the suffering of humankind caught in an unreceptive and hostile space.

Similarly, in *Umberto D*, De Sica (who directed the film) and Cesare Zavattini (who wrote the story and screenplay) focus on an elderly man living during Italy's postwar recovery. The protagonist's fixed income is insufficient to sustain himself and his modestly furnished room, even if he skips meals. The opening shots show him joining a street protest in Rome as old men seek an increase in their inadequate state pensions, thereby accentuating his struggle to preserve his self-respect in a city where human benevolence seems to have vanished. The city depicts here, as in many other neorealist works, the conflicts associated with the postwar social reconstruction. Marcia Landy clearly identifies this aspect when she states that "…the city is the quintessential milieu to portray the dislocations of postwar life and the uncertainty of identity with everyday sights and sound" (137). The social suffering that De Sica depicts in this film is associated with the difficulties of life individuals experienced in Italian cities, where they had to undergo a multitude of problems connected to restoration and renewal after the war.

De Sica represents this anguish through the simple plot of the movie. Along with his little dog, his only companion, Umberto faces a forthcoming eviction, and his inadequate pension and unsuccessful efforts to raise more money cause him to consider suicide. In this film, De Sica proposes again an aesthetic of metropolitan desolation that is also present in other films such as *Bicycle Thieves* and *I bambini ci guardano* (*The Children Are Watching Us*, 1944), where the sterile background of the urban landscape appropriately frames the characters' grief, lack of possibility of recovery, and loss of any hope for a better future. As Laura Ruberto affirms, "*Umberto D* depicts an Italy whose Fascist past has not been entirely eliminated in the wake of postwar democracy and capitalist economic restructuring, a situation that has resulted in a large class of working poor without opportunities of hope for survival" (146). The devastation of the war transforms a character study into a hurting, moving drama that expresses no confidence in the future.

The representation of the desolation and wreckage of the war as a source of psychological trauma is a common element in other works by famous neorealist artists. One film that unmistakably explores the combination of material hardship and mental suffering is *Germany Year Zero*, part of Rossellini's war film trilogy along with *Rome, Open City* and *Paisà*.

The director empathizes here with the plight of the German people following the fall of the Third Reich. The film represents the devastated remains of postwar Germany, where a 12-year-old protagonist must engage in all kinds of activities to help his family obtain food and barely survive. Although the physical destruction is powerfully represented in the film, the loss of hope characterizing the young protagonist is more problematic. As he grows up in Berlin in 1947, the familiar rites of passage from childhood to adulthood have become rushed and distorted. The protagonist is too young physically or psychologically to take on adult burdens. Besides bearing the everyday demands of feeding his family, the young protagonist is unprotected from several forms of corruption that Rossellini portrays as upsetting. In this context, the representations of the ruins of the buildings recall the mental damage that the war has inflicted on the young boy, not just the material destruction of the edifices.

The representations of the damaged cities are noteworthy not only as a means of denouncing the social and political vulnerability that Italians were undergoing but also as an iconic reminder that similar misery is experienced around the world. As Shiel observes, "Neorealist images of postwar urban crisis are an especially important legacy because Italy was the only one of the defeated Axis powers whose cinematic representations of the city achieved iconic status internationally soon after its military defeat" (68). For Shiel, the images of postwar cities are remarkable since they generated attention toward a beaten country directly after its downfall.

Although neorealist works contributed to modify art practice, with the exception of *Rome, Open City*, they were quite ignored in Italy. As noted by many critics, such as Roy Armes and Millicent Marcus, these movies were much more favorably received among critics and filmmakers abroad. Additionally, it became increasingly difficult to produce neorealist films since the Christian Democratic Party, which preferred to promote a rosy view of Italy, was providing limited funding for them. As neorealism was becoming prominent internationally, these bleak representations of Italy were perceived as threats by Italian politicians involved in rebuilding the country. In fact, laws were promulgated to stop these representations: "The Andreotti Law attempted to halt the production of films, specifically those of the neorealist school, that did not serve 'the best interest of Italy,' and to remove state subsidies from films that failed to depict a thriving postwar state" (Dixon 171). Although censorship was not practiced in the postwar period, political authorities attempted to control the film production in order to disseminate an optimistic image of the country.

Through the representations of these devastated urban landscapes filmed on location, neorealist artists communicated the economic, social, and psychological difficulties that individuals living through the postwar period confronted. Except for a few movies such as *Germany Year Zero*, these films are usually set in the streets of Italian cities and feature deprived, lower-class characters subsisting in war-devastated situations. Giovanna Grignaffini explains the function of the urban landscape when she affirms that the rebirth of Italian cinema depended on the discovery of two corresponding significances: the environment and the human presence in it. As the landscape shows the signs of human movement touching its forms, people accept the presence of the landscape in which they live (121). According to Grignaffini, the urban landscape and the characters function in close relationship to one another. Neorealist artists use the damaged cities to uncover a series of conflicts distinguishing postwar Italians. By doing so, they underscore the uniqueness of each situation, in contrast to the uniform national culture imposed by the Fascist authorities, and they call for a political and cultural renewal aimed at solving such difficulties.

Nonprofessional Actors and Intergenerational Sets of Characters

The presence of intergenerational sets of characters has been a regular element of Italian neorealist cinema. Children as characters are prominently introduced in *Shoeshine*, *The Children Are Watching Us*, and *Germany Year Zero*; middle-aged people eking out daily life are portrayed in *Paisà* and *Bicycle Thieves*; and people of advanced years appear in such films as *Rome, Open City* and *Umberto D.* In contrast with Hollywood actors, often represented as living in luxury and extravagance and being consumed with inconsequential affairs, neorealist actors, such as Anna Magnani, Silvana Mangano, Vittorio Gassman, and Aldo Fabrizi, were selected based on the authenticity and credibility of their actions, their physical makeup, and how they dealt with the direction that positioned them in these real-world surroundings, which were difficult and challenging. Moreover, not all the actors in Italian neorealist films were even professionals. As Christopher Wagstaff points out, some professional actors were essential for practical reasons: "In order to have some financial backing for the film, it was necessary to have some actors whose popularity could be used as guarantee

of future success at the box office" (119). Neorealist directors employed specific actors, chosen according to precise features, in order to assure the success of their productions and facilitate the film's economic achievement.

For the purveyors of neorealism, the nonprofessional actor, not having internalized the cinematographic conventions, was suitable for communicating a better sense of real life. According to De Sica, for instance, the nonprofessional actor is "raw material that can be molded at will," and "much easier to achieve a sense of authenticity and spontaneity with a nonprofessional than with a fully trained actor who must 'forget his profession' when working on a neorealist film" ("How I Direct" 5). The choice to create films with everyday people as actors allowed neorealist artists both to cope with financial restrictions and to fulfill their aesthetic vision.

Critics have often found similarities among the representations of characters featured in different neorealist directors' works. For instance, Bazin compares the characters in De Sica's and Rossellini's films and states, "Rossellini's love for his characters envelops them in a desperate awareness of man's inability to communicate; De Sica's love, on the contrary, radiates from the people themselves" (62). In both situations, the directors' passion for their characters is demonstrated through the sense of connection that they establish with those characters, as opposed to a feeling of detachment or superiority. For instance, in *Rome, Open City*, it might be difficult to understand the dilemma of Marina that causes her to establish a sexual relationship with a female Nazi official and betray her fiancé. However, the director still offers possible justification for her actions, such as that she may be acting under the effect of drugs.

In addition to nonprofessional actors, neorealist artists very often include children's narrative standpoint, which they use as a means to challenge certain aspects of social reality. In *The Children Are Watching Us*, which is a humane representation of a family's destruction, De Sica examines an idealized bourgeois society and the devastating outcomes of adult irrationality for an innocent child. The film portrays a young mother who, unable to bear the pressures of her family responsibilities, deserts her husband and family, permanently ruining the life of Prico, her four-year-old son. The boy places all his confidence in his indifferent father, only to be left by him as well. The story is almost completely recounted through Prico's perspective as he absorbs the events around him without expressing any judgment. In many sequences the boy, as the representative figure,

is pulled out of the crowd and then incorporated again at the conclusion of the film; Bondanella notes that this is a typical technique used by De Sica in other neorealist classics, including *Ladri di Biciclette* and *Umberto D* ("Hollywood" 63). De Sica's technique of highlighting the significance of a precise character proposes emotional involvement toward the plight of the protagonist.

Other sequences call attention to the central character's suffering. Several scenes depict the boy outdoors, either playing in the park while his mother meets her lover or walking outside accompanied by his father. These sequences promote the visual and emotional effect of Prico's small body dimensions and tender age in relation to the large, open background, as the boy appears consumed and hurt by the circumstances yet it is more difficult to locate and challenge responsible individuals. In this context, the child functions not only as the vulnerable victim of the tragedy unfolding around him, but also as an observer of social reality. Confirming Bert Cardullo's opinion that De Sica's work expresses feelings that could not have been communicated during the Fascist period ("Neorealism" 15), the movie suggests an emotional attachment to the boy and an approval of his perspective and moral standpoint. "De Sica's universe of solitude, loneliness, and alienation" (Ezra 123) is expressed through Prico's pain, which also provides a critique of middle-class society that De Sica associates with the privileged Fascist status. The perfect conventional society—which is completely disconnected from the contemporary social and historical reality—is confronted and disapproved.

Notes

1. For Giorgio Bertellini, these directors "…collectively contributed to a complex and consistent film universe of arresting illustrations, visual metaphors and narrative synthesis that addressed the cultural challenges and political transformations of modern post war life" (2).
2. Danielle Hipkins in "Why Italian Film Studies Needs a Second Take on Gender" underscores the importance of applying gender studies to the examination of Italian films.
3. Ronald Bergan's *The Film Book* provides information about the "white telephone" genre.
4. For a detailed examination of the melodrama genre, see *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* by John Mercer and Shingler Martin.

5. "Some Ideas on the Cinema" by Cesare Zavattini is included in *Sight and Sound* (October–December 1953) as edited material from a recorded interview published in December 1952 in *La rivista di cinema italiano 2* and translated by Pier Luigi Lanza.
6. For more information on these cinematic movements, see *Nouvelle Vague* by Jean Douchet and Anger Ce, *Cinema Novo X 5: Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film* by Johnson Randal, and *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* by Yannis Tzioumakis.

CHAPTER 4

Neorealism and Literature

In the period after World War II, Italian narrative was strongly motivated by the authors' desire to recount the extraordinary events of the war and the struggle against Fascism and the Nazi occupation. Many Italian realist writers of the time, inspired by the neorealist cinematographic models and by the sense of needed cultural renewal, wanted to express their social commitment toward the cultural reconstruction of the country. As affirmed by Alberto Casadei, this obligation entailed either a complete acceptance of more progressive ideologies or a new political stance in opposition to the bourgeois scheme (78). In Italy, this situation generated an openness toward new ideas and a constructive social debate, reflected in the creation and promotion of many literary journals that aimed to create a new cultural awareness free from the former imposition of Fascist beliefs.

The journal *Il Politecnico* (1945–1947), founded by Elio Vittorini, represented the main point of intersection among these new approaches and sensibilities. The writer aspired to produce a democratic forum. As explained in the *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, the journal's title refers to the periodical of the same title founded by Carlo Cattaneo in 1939 (985). Like his predecessor, Vittorini wanted to launch a direct interaction with social reality through a sequence of examinations. Other important literary journals examined in *Le riviste del Novecento* by Renato Bertacchini and Luisa Mangoni included *Mercurio* (1944–1949), founded by Alba de Cespedes; *Rinascita* (1944–1990), founded by Palmiro Togliatti; *Botteghe Oscure* (1948–1960), created by Marguerite Caetani

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and edited by Giorgio Bassani; and *Cronache sociali* (1947), directed by Giuseppe Glisenti. Another important literary magazine of the post-war period was *Officina* (1955–1959), which was founded by Francesco Leonetti, Piero Loverso, and Pier Paolo Pasolini to promote experimental forms of literature that introduced stylistic innovations without breaking with the previous literary tradition.

Other technological means of communication such as radio and (from 1954 on) television contributed to the spread of new ideas by promoting high-level cultural programs. In a similar way, publishing houses started to promote new Italian writers and to translate significant works by contemporary foreign authors. For instance, in 1943, Einaudi published Fernanda Pivano's translation of Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology* (qtd. in Smith Lawrence 231). Ordinarily, intellectuals in this period were oriented toward leftist ideals and, aiming to create new literary forms, proposed works characterized by a shorter narrative and an array of scenes combined together in a much rapid way than in the works of the 1800s.[1] Furthermore, some literary works were produced to offer a testimony to circumstances more than to express an artistic purpose. Among the several areas that neorealist artists probed, two subjects are particularly significant because of their implications for other works to be examined later: the representation of local identities and the condition of women.

Local Identities

Whereas Fascist authorities aimed to create an image of national unity by maintaining a stable and orderly society (Horne 238), neorealist artists focused on regional and local identities and gained great popularity in doing so. In the same way, these new intellectuals intended to propose a different way to reach a cultural unity, which would be constructed on the basis of an interdependence between the different regional areas. Antonio Gramsci explained this condition with the term *blocco storico*, or a pact between the industrialists in the north and the landowners in the south. For Gramsci, the hegemony of a social class could be obtained only through consensus and by using the apparatus of the state, such as school, political parties, and the church.[2] These significant themes appeared in the narrative of an important Sicilian writer writing more than a decade after World War II.

Leonardo Sciascia's *Gli zii di Sicilia* (*Sicilian Uncles*, 1958) proposes an association between local and global aspects of cultural identity. The four tales that make up the work follow a historical sequence of military

engagements, seen through the inflexible point of view of peasants. These stories depict Sicily with its particular features but also as a symbol for the world. For Sergio Pacifici, *Sicilian Uncles* "succeeds in presenting believable stories that unmask the tragedy as well as the farce of local traditions" (124). For instance, "The American Aunt" proposes a kind of international comedy set against the background of the Allied invasion of Sicily.

Specifically, this story describes the prosperity of an unfortunate Sicilian family during the American and English occupation. The USA is depicted as a charming and peculiar land through the perspective of an aunt who owns a store in New York and is sending financial support to her Sicilian relatives. At the same time, she also urges them to adopt her political vision, with the intent of influencing their participation in the 1948 election. When she later comes to visit the unfortunate family in Sicily, Sciascia mixes social comedy and historical drama. He portrays the aunt as disappointed by the fact that her Sicilian relatives are not actually starving, while they are represented as hurt by her limited point of view. The story ends with the narrator's uncle, a former Fascist, going to America with the woman and marrying her young daughter. This event is to be perceived as the celebration of the postwar union between capitalism and traditionalism.

Likewise, the subsequent stories in the book underscore the connection between indigenous and international experiences. For instance, "The Death of Stalin" portrays the Soviet Union's shifting strategies during and after World War II. In "1848," Sciascia recounts the story of a Sicilian baron's efforts to placate the Church, the military, and revolutionary forces led by Giuseppe Garibaldi. Finally, "Antimony" describes the adventure of an Italian soldier who joins Benito Mussolini's military intervention in the Spanish Civil War. These stories are told by poor Sicilian men, who are to be considered more as victims of their historical time than as agents of their own actions. Their extended reflections help to illuminate and to justify distrust of the different ideological positions.

A groundbreaking text on the complaint of the southern peasantry is *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 1945)[3] by Carlo Levi. This autobiographical novel was written between December 1943 and July 1944 in Florence and published in 1945. Because of his anti-Fascist activity, the writer was condemned to *confino* (confinement) in Lucania under the Fascist regime.[4] In 1935, when Mussolini was preparing to attack Ethiopia, Levi was transferred under guard to live as a deportee in the village of Aliano in the Basilicata region, an area whose various economic and social difficulties had facilitated its isolation. As Roland Sarti explains

in his description of the region, "The rugged interior, difficult communications, arid soil, and malaria in the lowlands have discouraged settlement" (142). Nevertheless, during his residency in this isolated area, Levi had the opportunity to learn the local peasants' traditions and customs and to acquire authentic knowledge of their way of life, which was later represented faithfully in his writing.

The novel describes a cut-off and abandoned culture and a community of secluded individuals. The title refers to a proverb that the local residents use to express that Christianity is practiced in this malaria-ridden province but that no real communication of salvation has ever reached its people. In the peasants' opinion, no one comes to the area except for adversaries, subjugators, and visitors who do not understand the region's problems. Carlo, a well-educated northerner, belongs to this last group, but during his enforced stay, he develops instead a profound understanding of and respect for the villagers.

The novel presents a rare encounter between the cultures of Italy's north and south, a clash of modernity with old fatalism. Levi describes the peasants as living in a world of pre-Christian pagan, stoic fatalism and portrays the despair, degradation, and isolation that they experience. Furthermore, he is particularly interested in representing the political seclusion that distinguishes the lives of the villagers, who had no notion of political ideas nor a clear concept of the State and its institutions but who nonetheless were able to establish a solid connection with the writer. Levi's lucid, sympathetic, and nonjudgmental account of the everyday adversities faced by the native villagers helped to propel the problem of the South into the national debate after the end of World War II.

Another neorealist author who pursued the vision of a peasant community was Ignazio Silone. A founding member of the Italian Communist Party and organizer of workers' groups in Spain, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, Silone became a leading leftist figure while in exile, and in 1927, he was sent back to Italy as chief of the party's secretive system. Later, however, he opposed Moscow's politics and was excluded from party leadership, as John Foot explains: "When Moscow imposed the sectarian policies of the Third Period on the Communist International at the end of the decade, a line which threatened to tear the Italian party apart, Silone was eventually expelled" (146). Although, as affirmed by Casadei, some doubts have been recently raised about Silone's attitude toward the Fascist party (67), from 1933 to 1945, when he was displaced in Switzerland (Stille vii), Silone wrote numerous novels that remained unknown for several years in Italy. Judged by many critics as one of Silone's most important

work, *Fontamara*, written in 1933, gained considerable popularity among the anti-Fascist groups. The novel appeared on the eve of the Spanish Civil War and shortly after Hitler came to power. As Stille points out (ix), during this time, people were faced with the choice of either promoting or rejecting Fascism, and consequently, the novel "became the very symbol of resistance" (Beechman 155). Other critics, such as Hanne Michael, accentuate the crucial role that the novel played as an example of anti-Fascist propaganda outside Italy (132). According to these critics, the novel exercised a strong influence inside and outside of Italy.

Fontamara[5] is the imaginary name of a small village in the southern Italian region of Abruzzo whose peasants called themselves *cafoni*. Originally, the term was used neutrally to signify a poor southern Italian peasant, but later, as affirmed by the Italian dictionary of Sabatini and Coletti, it acquired a pejorative connotation, coming to mean an uncouth, boorish, and ill-mannered person. Silone's peasants are the miserable victims of centuries-old subjugation and mistreatment. Their misery is described as strictly connected to their ignorance, and for this reason, they are represented as vulnerable. Specifically, they are susceptible to abuse because they need to rely on others for assistance in interacting with the complex and bureaucratic world of the city. In other circumstances, their defenselessness is associated with the direct exploitation by "…wealthy landowners, who refuse to pay them for labour" (Leake, 93).

Furthermore, the author depicts the exhaustion and desolation of the peasants and pastoral workers, which had been relatively undocumented until then. For the first time in Italian literature, peasants became central characters and their farming activities were illustrated with meticulously detailed description. Similarly to Levi, Silone offers a sympathetic portrait of the pre-Fascist conditions of the peasants of southern Italy. He denounces their condition of ignorance, misery, and isolation, but he also depicts a community of individuals who begin slowly to recognize the Fascists as astute oppressors and gradually attain an awareness of their right to be independent individuals. At the same time, these neorealist writers underline the significance of local identities in contrast with the Fascists' promotion of national blending.

Female Voices in the Postwar Period

In the postwar years, female writers were very active but, as in previous periods, their effort has been generally overlooked, even though many of them produced excellent works. During the 1980s, novelist Lalla Romano

(1906–2011) clarified this point: "Being a woman still weighs heavily in the literary milieu of our country. The critics treat you with a sort of condescension and concession" (qtd. in Petrignani 17). Similarly, Laura Salsini specifies that even though women authors "were and (in some cases continue to be) successful, productive writers, because of their sex, their works were often relegated to a secondary status among their contemporaries" (10). Critics describe this condition as related to the question of gender considered as a social configuration fashioned by historical circumstances. However, according to some scholars, an examination of gender is significant to expand individuals' awareness of their surrounding, "Gender is put to use in various historical situations in order to define and promote the public sphere, the principle of universality, or reason, or the body, or citizenship and enfranchisement" (Butler and Weed 4). Therefore, gender helps define and support significant values in society.

It is widely accepted that women's unfavorable living conditions did not facilitate their access to knowledge in general. As Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood[6] point out, "In the Western world, and in Italy in particular, women have led very different lives, have taken on very different roles and have not enjoyed the same levels of literacy and access to cultural and intellectual circles that men have" (2). Critics are clear in depicting the burden Italian women had to bear to access intellectual activities or groups.

Nevertheless, their situation slowly changed after World War II. During this time, women writers acquired a new awareness of their involvement in society. "Women had been active in the Italian Resistance, a movement celebrated in the immediate post-war period in literature and cinema alike, earning themselves the vote and, for many of them, a first taste of political and militant activity" (Panizza 8). In the postwar period, women writers were progressively involved in diverse literary activities, focusing their attention on the social and cultural changes that were taking place and looking for personal achievement. "Even as they battled openly for equal representation in Italy's society, they were expanding their personal visions and dreams and searching for fulfillment" (Amoia vii). Women's fiction enjoyed a rush of productivity with writers such as Anna Banti, Alba de Céspedes, Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante, Gianna Manzini, Maria Occhipinti, and Gina Lagorio uncovering and depicting women's emotional participation in their circumstances and representing the alienation of everyday living in a sober and moderate way. Although theorists emphasize the significance of women's writing representing the personal

dominion, Carol Lazzaro-Weis accentuates the risk that this approach may generate. In her opinion, these theories, "risk entrapping contemporary and future women writers and their works in the private sphere to which they have been condemned in the past" (2). In certain instances, women writers were very well educated, having committed themselves to specific intellectual undertakings. As Panizza and Wood indicate, in many cases, their activity grew out of their previous experience as readers or translators of European literature (205). One element that seems to unify these women's writing is their attempt to reconstruct their surroundings meticulously. Moreover, they were interested in representing both the anxieties of their time and the social issues directly associated with their region of origin. For instance, Gina Lagorio often chose the Ligurian shoreline as a background for her stories, whereas Maria Occhipinti repeatedly expressed a tendency to depict Sicilian life and traditions.

Female writers used different approaches in their narrative, reflecting the variegated circumstances characterizing their experiences. Stefania Lucamante's seminal work, *A Multitude of Women*, clearly demonstrates this diversity. For instance, Anna Banti and Elsa Morante proposed creative constructions to reflect and communicate their own existence. Anna Banti, the pen name of Lucia Lopresti (1895–1985), was born in Florence and became an historian but later turned to writing novels, stories, and autobiographical prose in which she represented female repression and a motivation for autonomy, not with passive humility and dull realism but with an opulent and elaborate style. She wrote several stories but became best known for her historical novel *Artemisia* (1947), in which she depicts the seventeenth-century female artist Artemisia Gentileschi. Significantly, Artemisia, a Baroque painter, did not know how to read or write, yet she was regarded as one of the first women in modern times to successfully maintain a career consistent with her passion and ability.[7] Susanna Scarparo provides a further clarification of this role: "Because of the relative absence of documentary material about her life and because a detailed account of her rape survived in court records, Artemisia has become both a mystery to be unraveled and a figure for identification" (363). Feminist scholars, such as Scarparo, regard her as an intellectual and physical icon since she suffered the violence of patriarchal persecution.

Following other female writers, Banti's novel elevates the figure of Artemisia Gentileschi by proposing a conversation between this Baroque painter and Banti herself during the events associated with the German retreat from Florence. The writer uses this imaginative device to

communicate about herself and her life. Chiara De Santi explains: "Banti chose to merge multiple genre—autobiography, biography and novel—in order to speak about herself through the figure of the artist Artemisia Gentileschi" (32). While the neorealist writer highlights the significance of a female painter from the past, she employs this artist to also represent her own life.

A central episode in the story is the loss of Artemisia's original manuscript, which was burned in the battle for Florence in 1944 but is described by the narrator/author. According to Craig Siobhan, "The destruction of the manuscript as material object stands in for the larger destruction of epistemological certainty" (602). Through the loss of the document, Banti suggests symbolically the devastating consequences that a loss can cause with regard to knowledge and awareness. Furthermore, this event suggests a double level of narration. *Artemisia* becomes the story of a woman writer who wants to recreate the life of a woman painter and, at the same time, the story of another woman writer who aims to reconstruct her original, now-destroyed manuscript. With the reconstruction of Artemisia's life, Banti offers the author/narrator of the story the possibility of recovering the past. As Lucia Aiello suggests, "By confronting the traditionally male-dominated history and historiography, she hopes to establish a different historic sensibility…" (34). Thus, Banti's different levels of narration can be seen as a means not only to review her own personal past, but also to reconsider the circumstances that characterized the life of the woman painter and to propose an alternative way of looking at events.

Another postwar female novelist who narrated her stories in complex fashion is Elsa Morante (1912–1985), who was born and lived almost all her life in Rome. Her mother was a Jewish schoolteacher from Modena; her legal father was an educator in a boys' reform school. Her biological father was from Sicily, but little is known about him. She attended the University of Rome but, for economic reasons, was unable to complete her studies in literature and started to work as an editor of doctoral theses. In 1936, she met alberto Moravia, whom she married in 1941. Toward the end of World War II, they fled to the Ciociaria mountains, fearful for their lives because both were of Jewish descent.[8] Significantly, this experience was reproduced by both authors in two important works that we will examine later: *La storia* (*History*, 1974) by Morante and *La ciociara* (*Two Women*, 1958) by Moravia.

Morante's first novel, *Menzogna e sortilegio* (*House of Liars*, 1948), was abundantly successful among critics and the public. It depicts a city in southern Italy and the events connected to a family there during a time span

of 20 years. Morante introduces the character of Elisa, who narrates the story and, according to many critics, becomes the central character in all of Morante's narratives. For instance, Franco Ferrucci affirms that Morante's characters "represent the major and minor gods of a universe which concern the childhood of a single character among all that is Elisa" (32). After her adoptive mother passes away, Elisa describes the events connected to her parents' and grandparents' lives. In doing so, she recalls remote places and people belonging to a distant past but not clearly specified.

The plot of *House of Liars* is simple. Elisa's mother loves her cousin Edorado, who, like almost all the characters in the story, is a ruthless liar and charlatan. In an exaggerated and inflated way, Morante depicts the passions and falsifications that characterize these southern Italian characters. She obsessively describes their multiple offenses until all the characters are dead and Elisa remains with her cat, attempting to find meaning in these past events. Casini affirms that during this process of understanding, the protagonist perceives that often facts appear different from what actually happened and that sometimes deceit is a necessary behavior (104). Morante attempts here to offer an explanation of situations and events that may appear very complicated and obscure, as if wanting to facilitate mutual understanding.

Another component of Morante's writing that has been the object of much investigation is her use of alternative realities or dreamscapes. Casini notes the presence in her works of realistic visions combined with fantastic and dreamlike components (104). This desire to express events and situations using unreal descriptions can be linked to the writer's desire to conceal her difficult childhood. Being the daughter of a Jewish woman during the Fascist regime and having an adoptive father who was not her biological parent created difficulties that might have impelled Morante to describe her family relationship in a fairy tale style.[9]

Produced during the distinctive period of neorealism, this novel presents both original features characteristic of that movement and other innovative elements. For instance, like many neorealist works, Morante's narrative contains melodramatic features that recall the narrative style of the previous century such as *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*, 1827) with its interest in emotional conflicts, family struggles, and the connection between characters rather than in the accomplishment of explicit objectives. But Morante also introduces a variety of original components that will characterize the literary production of a much later period. Stefania Lucamante highlights these innovative elements that " …foreshadowed and advanced tenets and structures later affirmed by postmodernism,

namely, the fragmentation of narrative cells, rhizomatic narrative, lack of a linear temporal consistency, and meta- and self-reflective processes" (*Elsa Morante's Politics*, 2). Employing both recognized models and new approaches, Morante discovers innovative ways of escaping the pain of reality and suggests original methods to cope with past events.

Banti, Morante, and other postwar female writers show that as women's prospects broadened, the subjects that they treated also expanded. Furthermore, they demonstrate the possibilities of using different approaches in depicting the changes that were taking place in their lives, families, and communities. Their works embody a high level of achievement and value the feminine while also functioning as a counter-discourse and proposing a space of confrontation with the prevailing ideologies. These women's creative writing offers a new standpoint on their circumstances, reflecting an insightful contemplation of their active role within a specific historical context.

Notes

1. The chapter titled "Twentieth-Century Culture" in David Forgacs's *The Oxford History of Italy* provides a helpful overview of the century.
2. For an overview of Gramsci's approach to the situation in southern Italy, see "Alcuni temi della questione meridionale," published in *La costruzione del partito comunista 1923–1926*.
3. Francesco Rosi adapted Sciascia's work into a film with the same title, released in 1979.
4. The *confino* was a preventive procedure similar to an internal exile. For an examination of this Fascist measure of control, see *The Fascist Confino. The Regime's Silent Weapon* by Camilla Poesio.
5. The novel was also revised for cinematic purposes under the direction of director Carlo Lizzani. The film, with the same title, was released in 1980.
6. In their introduction to *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood offer a vibrant account of the adverse conditions of life that women experienced from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.
7. For an examination of the artist's work, see Jesse M. Locke's *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting*.
8. The article "Elsa Morante" by Patrizia Acobas provides information about the writer's life.
9. Morante's early novel *Il gioco segreto* (*The Secret Game*, 1941) presents many examples expressing the writer's desire to escape authentic circumstances and therefore confirms this theory.

CHAPTER 5

Emotions in Neorealism

It has been often suggested that a study of emotional components can help us to understand a specific time in history. Although emotions are often considered universal aspects of human experience that unite human beings in different times and places, there has been substantial variation in how emotions have been articulated, structured, and encouraged across different periods and cultures. Here, emotions are considered as vibrant elements that contain remarkable and complex information about our life experiences and therefore make an ample contribution to human understanding. As stressed by theorists of emotion such as Alison M. Jaggar and Catherine A. Lutz, in contrast to earlier views that viewed emotions as irrational impulses, emotions should not be regarded as separated from reason. On the contrary, it is necessary to treasure the mutual dependency of those capabilities that our culture has often disconnected. Therefore, competencies such as "emotion and reason, evaluation and perception, observation and action" (Jaggar 165) are to be observed in their connection and dependence. In recent times, historians have often used particular emotions to typify a particular era, recognizing that human beings are, at their core, emotional creatures. For instance, historians may refer to an age of anger or fear[1] to emphasize that a given emotional state characterized a specific group of people during a specific moment or in connection to particular circumstances.

Recent studies of emotions validate this approach and offer constructive appraisals of disparate times in history. In *Understanding Emotions in Early Europe*, Michael Champion and Andrew Lynch investigate how

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medieval and early modern Europeans comprehended, created, and communicated emotions. In this way, they not only offer an examination of the complex relationships between individuals and emotions during that time but also elucidate concepts of individual and communal identity, social practices, and concerns of daily life. Similarly, the period after World War II in Europe has often been described using emotional elements. In "Feelings in the Aftermath: Toward a History of Postwar Emotions," Frank Biess examines the emotions of fear, hope, and resentment that characterized postwar West Germany since, according to him, these emotions "were closely linked to the experience and memory of violence" (30) and were therefore significant in challenging the inheritance of World War II. Similarly, several critics, both during the postwar years and in recent times, effectively highlight the close association between neorealist cinematographic and literary works and emotions, suggesting the meaning that emotions play in making sense of specific contexts. Nevertheless, although they recognize the significance of this approach, they only briefly refer to the importance of emotions and how they were understood as shaping life experience, moral codes, and pre- and post-Fascist society in general. Until now, a systematic examination of this relationship has not been provided. Accordingly, I will provide a concise overview of some of these accounts of Italian cinema and literature that are significant in helping us understand the neorealist productions examined in this study.

Cinema and Emotions

In opposition to the Fascist cinematography that developed between 1922 and 1943 which aimed to be an instrument of propaganda, critics note the significant function of neorealist films in expressing individuals' emotional components that dictatorial regimes, such as the German and Fascist ones, usually seek to deny. As a reaction to the dictators' controlled and univocal way of conceiving film production, in the postwar period, artists adopted their own cinematographic language to capture the suffering of everyday life and therefore promote reflection, commitment, and emotional involvement. For Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, neorealist films gave public voice to feelings of anxiety, loss, and sadness that Fascism "had publicly discouraged in favor of a culture of aggression and revenge, or filtered, in the Italian case, through a consolatory Catholic ideology" (159). Likewise, Zavattini, in his introduction to *Italian Cinema 1945–1951*, communicates the significance of promoting participation and an

emotional relationship between authenticity and artistic production. He indicates that the strength of Italian neorealist intellectuals is represented by their attempt to bring reality closer to dramatic art and by their hope that reality will absorb art (3). For him, only this documentation of reality will be able to promote the innovative style of a new era.

Analysts of neorealist films also focus on the emotional component expressed through the landscape. It has been often demonstrated that in encountering artworks, emotions achieve an important position and are also present in our aesthetic reactions to the natural surroundings. The space represented in neorealist films predicts the characters' emotional responses or is closely connected to them. Critics have found this link between the depictions of landscape and emotions in productions beyond the standard time frame of neorealism. Ted Perry, in investigating the beginning of neorealist films and their relationship to naturalist films such as Gustavo Serena's *Assunta Spina* (1915)—a heartbreaking story about love, jealousy, and guilt—notices that these movies are characterized by great attention to the environment as a significant factor influencing people's emotions and actions. In the same way, in a more recent study, critic Pierre Sorlin focuses on the fears and expectations of the Roman middle class in 1960 through Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Eclipse* (1962), a romantic drama of contemporary discontent. In this concluding chapter of Antonioni's informal trilogy, following *L'Avventura* and *La notte*, Sorlin is captivated by the portrayal of Rome's architecture as the backdrop against which the drama communicates individuals' existing unhappiness. He also underscores the close association between environment and emotions when he points out the contrast between the representations of different spaces proposed by the neorealist director, such as the lively, animated center of Rome and the residential and business area of EUR (*Esposizione Universale Roma* or Rome Universal Exhibition), the district established by Mussolini (121).

Correspondingly, many theorists underline the emotional participation triggered by the devastated environment in the postwar period. The presence and the perception of the ruins of war across the whole country would generate feelings of despair and horror, which were considered as preparatory points for the artistic productions. Investigating exemplary cinematographic works from the 1940s to the 1960s, Noa Steimatsky observes contemporary anxiety and emotional displacement in the works of many neorealist artists. In the introduction to her book *Italian Locations*, she writes, "A displacement of the postwar predicament—from Italy to Germany, from the aftermath of Fascism to that of

Nazism—must have been a necessary condition for Rossellini's realization of the pervasiveness of the ruin, the horror, the guilt manifest everywhere as a physical, moral, psychic condition, and infecting any articulation, any image" (xxix). According to Steimatsky, the neorealist director must have experienced a sense of emotional disruption in facing the omnipresent devastation, along with the feelings of fear and guilt, expressed in various forms that characterized the time. According to this approach, emotional arousals are distinct mechanisms that alert people of special encounters and play a central role in shaping their consequent response.[2]

Emotional stimulation can be also produced by relationships with vulnerable creatures or by remembering events, situations, or people of the past. Fellini's *La strada* (1954), a dramatic story of a traveling strongman and the unsophisticated and ingenuous girl who serves him as cook, clown, and concubine, portrays emotional participation initiated by the advantageous relationship that a man establishes with her defenseless female servant. Mark Shiel describes the variety of negative and positive emotions that this kind of relationship generates: "What he sees as her ugliness and stupidity prompt his macho contempt, her misery and their eventual separation, only to be followed by news of her unexplained death which leads him to an epiphany of grief and remorse and a recognition of the love for her which he suppressed" (114). Considered by some theorists a bridge between Fellini's early neorealist films and his later autobiographical ones, *La strada* highlights a ruthless condition of exploitation and demonstrates that emotions may undergo great development when associated with memories of past situations or individuals and the examination of personal mental processes.

Similarly, examining *The Children Are Watching Us* (1944) by Vittorio De Sica and *I Vitelloni* (1953) by Fellini, Arthur Knight points out the tendency of neorealist artists to represent emotions in connection to the portrayal of vulnerable children or autobiographical content. De Sica's film, as noted above, centers on the anguish of a four-year-old boy after his mother leaves the family for her lover. The mother, unable to stand the pressures of family responsibilities, ruins her son's life forever. For Knight, De Sica specializes in sentimental works that he handles proficiently with appealing shallowness and occasional pointed insights into the behavior of children (221). Meanwhile, Knight highlights Fellini's capability to express autobiographical material combined with the emotions of discouragement and hopelessness. In *I Vitelloni*, a description of the despair of a young generation growing up in a small Italian town, Knight notices the fondness

of people and an extraordinary ability to investigate surface appearances in order to convey inner feelings. He emphasizes Fellini's ability to find the exact image to convey a mood or an atmosphere, such as the desolation of an abandoned square or the decadent style of a third-rate Vaudeville house (225). Peter Bondanella shares Knight's view that in De Sica's films, such as *Shoeshine* (1946), children seem predominantly suitable to express inner struggles and are employed to provoke the viewer's emotions (57), whereas in Visconti's *The Earth Trembles* (1948), emotions are considered in connection with the language of the characters. Bondanella declares that Visconti abandons the standard Italian language in the belief that the original expression of the people's emotions could be achieved only by using their authentic dialect (68). Visconti's use of emotions undoubtedly reveals their cultural specificity, since in his representation they are triggered by culturally specific expressions that define groups of individuals.

Vincent Rocchio uses a Lacanian approach to underscore the significance of emotional components of neorealist films. Through this method, he demonstrates that the uncertainty of culture, due to various factors such as a disordered society, a disintegrated economic system, and a destroyed national cinema, is considered the site of anxiety for the individual (5). The spectator can escape displeasure through identification with the place of the leading individuals, that is to say, the place of authority and knowledge. For Rocchio, angst is eliminated only by seeing through the myths of dominant culture. The anxiety produced by the films analyzed is therefore controlled through an association with the authority and its place as a source of knowledge and truth (28).

Literature and Emotions

Some theorists have commented briefly on the bond between emotions and neorealist literary productions. Scrutinizing the original models of prewar realist literature from which neorealist production originated, they observe interesting differences in how emotions are employed. In her account of writers during the Fascist period, Robin Pickering-Iazzi refers to several emotional traits to describe intellectuals and their works. She describes Giovanni Boine, celebrated intellectual and regular contributor to the influential literary magazine *La Voce*, as an example of male anxiety since he considers the novel and poetry as delineated by gender (*Politics* 138). In Pickering-Iazzi's opinion, Paola Drigo's *Maria Zef* (1936), a novel that describes the struggle to come of age and survive in harsh situations,

portrays an arousal of affections. Her ability to produce strong, moral emotions in opposition to weak, immoral ones is a powerful feature of the novel. Mariutine, one of the protagonists, is depicted as aware of her family's material and emotional privations and subjected to despair, shame, humiliation, fear, and confusion due to the betrayal of her trust. Furthermore, she turns to anger when she learns that her mother experienced the same fate (160).

Pickering-Iazzi also examines Alba De Céspedes's *Nessuno Torna Indietro* (1938) (*There's No Turning Back*), which represents the lives of eight young women from diverse backgrounds and social groups living at Pensione Grimaldi, a small hotel run by Catholic nuns in Rome. Pickering-Iazzi describes the emotions of one of the women: "Silvia experiences the city streets of Rome with a paralyzing sense of fear and anxiety provoked by a historically and culturally constructed perception conditioned by centuries of domination" (*Politics* 176). Silvia experiences shame when, unseen, she moves into the city (*Politics* 176). In both her case and Mariutine's, emotions are employed to express conflicts, personal involvement in specific situations, or culturally created impositions. They are human practices that allow the characters to adjust to, respond to, and manage difficulties in social life.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat observes the presence of emotional components as distinguishing divergent historical periods. She notes that as a reaction against the egocentric literature of the past, the tendency to depict the real was used in 1930 to designate a new type of novel that depicts unsentimentally the daily life shared by all men. After 1940, Ben-Ghiat continues, the realist movement acquired a double-edged position in the eyes of the regime. In fact, the antielitist and collectivist sentiments that characterized the Fascist ideology become new elements of interpretation in a left-wing light ("The Politics" 140). Hence, in contrast with the previous time period, the literary production from 1940 onward generates an antielitist emotional involvement that is reexamined from a more progressive standpoint. This new approach would facilitate the growth of the /'literary production of the postwar period, which continued to express values and perspectives opposed to Fascism.

Post-Fascist authors articulate attention to emotional participation and promote the inclusion of sentiments in individuals' political lives. Lucia Re analyzes Italo Calvino's opinion about sentiments and political affairs and notes that, according to Calvino, a correct outlook on the relation between literature and politics assigns to literature the function of containing

and expressing eternal human sentiments. In contrast, those values and truths are glossed over by politics. Re also indicates that Calvino's ideas about the politics of literature create a model of values, at the same time aesthetic and ethical, that is essential to any meaningful action, especially in political life (*Calvino* 12). According to Re, in order to recommend a genuine active participation, Calvino proposes a new politics respectful and inclusive of those human sentiments that have amply characterized literature. In so proposing, Calvino not only underscores the significant role that emotions can play in political life but also the potential constructive relationship between literature and politics.

Vasco Pratolini's neorealist novel of postwar Italy, *Cronache di poveri amanti* (*A Tale of Poor Lovers*, 1974), employs emotions to describe the effects of Fascism and Communism on working people's lives. The author depicts Via del Corno, a street in Florence, by describing its individuals and their emotions such as love, desires, and fears. The novel recounts the actions of a Communist who encourages others to fight the temptations of Fascism. As Peter Brand and Lino Pertile observe, the novel has been analyzed as centering on the emotional participation generated by its protagonists: "Affective involvement with characters and subject-matter is prominent" (537). Following the neorealist literary and cinematographic tradition that promotes social participation, Pratolini presents his characters through the description of their emotional states in order to communicate their experiences and cause readers to become emotionally involved with their plights.

Cesare Pavese's *La casa in collina* (1948) (*The House on the Hill*) is a novel of war in which a teacher escapes through a countryside that is both stunning and shaken with horror. The work is clearly autobiographical, since during the last months of the war, Pavese, like his protagonist Corrado, left Turin to go to the countryside and live with his sister. Critics have often emphasized the emotional component characterizing Pavese's writing. Thomas Bergan writes, "The allegory of the story is clear enough: the inevitability of commitment, the hopelessness of the rational in combat with passion, the hopelessness of the individual in the face of social catastrophe" (30). In his analysis of the novel, Lawrence G. Smith underscores the significance of the "affective" (8) element, used to provoke the reader's sympathy. He also comments that the narrator, Corrado, treats the character of Cate with emotional indifference, which suggests the reader's own negligence and detachment toward the narrator himself.

Likewise, Smith employs the language of emotions to describe Pavese's *La luna e i falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfire*, 1949), the story of an unnamed narrator who, after making his fortune in the USA, goes back to Italy to reexperience the Langhe hills of his adolescence. Smith accentuates the caring way in which Pavese describes his native region and its characters: "Because the lovingly described physical countryside plays such an important role in the book and because Pavese presented several of the characters so sympathetically, one can easily mistake the book for a paean to the life and rituals of rural Piedmont" (8). In these examples, emotions are utilized to generate attention to and sympathy toward certain characters or to the narrator's native land, demonstrating the profound rational and social quality that the people retain.

Notes

1. See, for instance, *National Insecurity: American Insecurity in an Age of Fear* by David Rothkopf.
2. Two works by the internationally renowned neuroscientist Antonio Damasio amply show how emotional stimulations activate individuals' attention system: *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*.

PART II

Compassion: What Is and Is Not

The reference to compassionate involvement in Italian literature has a long tradition. This emotion has been present in Italian literary works well before the neorealist period. Giovanni Boccaccio, in the preface of *Decameron*, which he completed in 1353, defines compassion as the only virtue (xxvi), and Saint Catherine of Siena, in her letters written around 1374, uses the term to express an excessive attention toward the physical body ("Tommaseo" 81). More recently, Ugo Foscolo, in his epistolary novel titled *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (*The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis,* 1929), mentions compassion (81) numerous times and considers it as the most significant and perhaps a unique law of life. As such, compassion and certain other emotions are "at the very heart of morality" (Bagnoli 1) and "they can play a crucial role in the motivation of our actions" (Roberts 26). Although scholars recognize that certain "emotions are taken to represent a pervasive and persistent obstacle to morality, as in the case of self-love" (Bagnoli 1), they also accentuate the significance of others, such as compassion as a fundamental component regulating and directing individuals' life choices.

As developed in later chapters, critics stress the significance of compassion viewed as an internal guidance directing individuals to make the right decisions or setting important limits for their physical and mental strength. Therefore, emotions are perceived as a source of knowledge offering an enriched view of individuals' identity and the world. As Peter Goldie states, "Now, the epistemology of emotions looks in two directions: introspectively, towards our own mental and physical condition; and extraspectively, towards the world beyond the bounds of our mind and bodies" (1).

It is essential to underline their rational component that highlights the capability of people to understand and evaluate circumstances. Rather than propose a distinct division between reason and emotions, several contemporary theorists, such as Alison M. Jaggar and Catherine A. Lutz, tend to accentuate their correlation. While it is possible to perceive degrees of rationality in individuals' emotional responses, it is also possible to observe emotional features in their rational selections.

To clarify the meaning and implications of compassionate responses and to convey their main connotations, it is paramount to reflect on a variety of issues related to compassion. Among these are different theories of compassion and the relationships of compassion with similar emotions. In doing so, this work will examine the obstacles or limits in achieving compassion, the position of the onlooker, and the relationship between depictions of compassion and tragic representations. First, however, it is crucial to understand what compassion is.

CHAPTER 6

The Nature of Compassion

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines compassion as a painful emotion in response to another person's ill fortune or distress. It is characterized by three elements (1385b):

1. The suffering must be serious rather than frivolous.
2. The suffering must not be caused primarily by the person's own accountable behavior.
3. The pitier's own probability of suffering must be similar to that of the sufferer.

Thus, compassion is generated when onlookers recognize their possible involvement in the same kind of situation and realize that the sufferers are not responsible for their condition. Similarly, Adam Smith defines compassion or pity as "the emotion which we feel for the misery of the other" (3). Thus, we may consider compassion to be dependent on the witness's comprehension of the circumstances, which highlights a connection between compassion and reflection. Just observing another person's difficulty seems sufficient to elicit our compassion, our focus being concern for the person, not for the situation. This attention toward another individual's pain gives compassion ethical value.

In other instances, Aristotle clearly expresses an association between emotions and judgment. At the beginning of Book II of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes emotions as "states which are attended by pain and pleasure, and

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which, as they change, make a difference in our judgment [of the same thing]" (qtd. in Cooper 92). Changes in feelings generate alterations in the perception of specific events, consequently producing different judgments of those experiences. This insight is significant because one's analysis of the end of an emotion may reflect a change in judgment toward a specific event. In neorealist texts, authors often depict their characters' transformed emotions toward circumstances as turning points for different perceptions of events.

We may further clarify the association between compassion and judgment by comparing compassion with contrasting emotions. Aristotle's analysis of indignation indicates it is a contrary emotion to compassion: "The nearest antithesis to pity is the feeling they call indignation; for pain at the sight of undeserved good fortune corresponds in a way to pain at the sight of undeserved ill fortune, and proceeds from the same sort of character" (qtd. in Cooper 123). In other words, we generate compassion and indignation from feelings of unfairness toward unmerited suffering or unmerited good luck. Therefore, both emotions may attempt to allay a sense of injustice, which is related to a judgment toward a specific situation.

The neorealist characters examined here experience diverse kinds of anguish that often connect them and reveal different aspects of their conditions. Being sensitive to the suffering of others implies an understanding of the implications associated with that anguish. According to Giorgio Cosmacini, compassion is triggered through an "active participation to the suffering of another person" (7). Likewise, for Jeanine Young-Mason, compassion "is born of wisdom and courage and can only be realized through devoted attention to its many facets and origins…To understand compassion means to study the nature of suffering—the intertwining of moral, spiritual, psychological, and physical suffering" (347). Thus, to recognize the numerous facets of suffering, we must exercise our rational skills to bring to light the cognitive component of emotion.

Martha Nussbaum also accentuates the cognitive features of compassion:

> Because compassion frequently has deep roots in early moral development, it can be legitimate to contrast it with more fully theorized forms of reasoning; for this same reason, it can be appropriate at times to trust its guidance when it conflicts with theory. None of this, however, shows that it is not suffused with thought, and thought that should be held to high standards of truth and appropriateness. ("Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion" 31)

M. Nussbaum bases her model of compassion on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, identifying three judgments, or cognitive elements: "[a]size (a serious bad event has befallen someone)…[b] nondesert (this person did not bring the suffering on himself or herself), and the eudaimonistic judgment (this person, or creature, is a significant element in my scheme of goals and projects, an end whose good is to be promoted)" (*Upheavals of Thought* 321). In her *Upheavals of Thought*, the Aristotelian principle that the pitier's own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer remains an important element but is not necessary to trigger compassion. She also confirms the significance of this traditional component of compassion and expresses its value, clarifying the term "empathetic imagining," by which "we put ourselves in the suffering person's place, imagin[ing] their predicament as our own" ("Compassion and Terror" 15).

M. Nussbaum, arguing that an individual's potential susceptibility toward a specific misfortune does not automatically trigger compassion, replaces the third Aristotelian principle with eudemonistic judgment, that is, the onlooker's positive consideration of the importance a particular person or creature may have. However, is it possible for a person to instigate compassion toward a person who has no significance to that individual? Can someone offer compassion to persons who do not mean anything to that individual or to persons whose behavior creates separation from the observer? Can someone experience embarrassment regarding certain actions or statements but still feel compassionate toward the perpetrator?

M. Nussbaum only analyzes situations in which suffering happens to good persons, indicating that when people produce their own suffering, they activate a sense of guilt instead of compassion. However, she also recognizes that in specific situations, we can feel compassion for people who are responsible for their own suffering when that suffering is the result of excusable situations. In short, she admits that a misfortune caused by the sufferer's actions can instigate compassion when the sufferer's behavior is justifiable.

Her example of feeling compassion for "a teenager who has been arrested for drunk driving, but not for one who has tortured and killed a dog" further elucidates this point about responsibility (*Upheavals* 314). Here, adolescence is the external and excusing reason to justify the teenager's act. However, recognizing the reasons for an individual's actions may not always be so simple. Different events may require a specialized knowledge of certain circumstances. Thus, specific judgments toward diverse

situations may reflect ignorance of the conditions that prompted certain actions, complicating the easy classification of individuals and their actions.

In contrast to M. Nussbaum's defined configuration of compassion, Maureen Whitebrook avoids depicting certain groups of people with generalized behavior, instead calling attention to "particulars and the particularities of persons as such" (538). In her analysis of Toni Morrison's novels, Whitebrook shows that both serious suffering and individual responsibility activate compassion and that situations are not as straightforward as they may seem. In using M. Nussbaum's first criterion to activate compassion, the judgment of size, Whitebrook states,

> The suffering felt by the characters of these novels are shown to have "size" because they are happening to them as human beings not because they are representative of larger socio-economical forces. Their suffering is serious, but it is not only the consequence of indisputably serious conditions such as slavery or poverty, but is also a matter of their own responsibility. (533)

Whitebrook's humanistic view illustrates a concern toward individuals as such rather than as instruments of a specific power. Her emphasis on the possibility that people's misfortune can be associated with their responsibility opens up the chance to feel compassion for those who, in M. Nussbaum's view, do not deserve it.[1] Therefore, Whitebrook challenges M. Nussbaum's precise structure in analyzing compassion, suggesting that this emotion "is just a messier, untidier practice than such stipulation of rules allows" (532). By doing this, Whitebrook accentuates the difficulty of establishing rigid boundaries for analyzing compassion, which requires a deeper knowledge of each particular human condition.[2]

The significance of an additional evaluation seems essential in situations in which individuals are responsible for their own affliction. Whitebrook believes one must be aware of detailed information to activate compassion: "If recognizing that one is vulnerable in similar ways to those deemed to be objects of compassion is necessary for feeling compassion, facing one's own vulnerability is helped by that 'knowledge of particulars' available from fictions such as Morrison's" (534). Thus, her analysis prompts new investigations of the bonds between compassion and observation and of the term *vulnerability*.

For instance, when sufferers are unable to express their anguish, they must connect with their emotions or find other ways to understand their state. Conditions of pain may not be readily apparent to onlookers, as in

the case of persons who can hide their suffering in various ways or who are unconsciously influenced by negative experiences. In such situations, the sufferers' reactions may be unclear, entailing additional involvement on the part of the viewers, who may need to consider the previous conditions experienced by sufferers to activate compassionate responses.

Whitebrook emphasizes the importance of vulnerability as the primary reason triggering emotional participation. Neither the suffering nor the judgment of its cause produces compassion; rather, it is the person that is the proper object of compassion: "The vulnerable are those who can be taken advantage of, against whom power is exercised to their disadvantage" (537). Accordingly, vulnerability is a condition that exposes individuals to emotional trauma or to situations in which their feelings or rights are ignored, thereby allowing other individuals or institutions to take advantage of them.

But vulnerability is not always a negative quality that triggers viewers' emotional understanding. It may also be a beneficial element, enabling individuals to explore other possibilities of human interaction or to gain assistance in coping with their conflicts. In manifesting their negative side, individuals may also help alleviate the tension of their responsibility and reduce their emotional burdens.

Although Whitebrook's argument on vulnerability is compelling, in life-threatening circumstances, such as war or imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust, the majority of people may be vulnerable at all times. Becoming accustomed to this condition may minimize compassion. Thus, the term *vulnerability* may be less appropriate in this context. Instead, the term *suffering* may be more accurate. Suffering implies a deeper pain or deprivation than does a general sense of vulnerability. In addition, although vulnerable people may not be aware of their conditions, suffering individuals are generally conscious of their plight. Consequently, they attempt to stop their anguish, which may prompt compassion. Indeed, people may be unconsciously more inclined to offer compassion to individuals who try to end their suffering than to those who are unaware of their vulnerability.[3]

In negotiating the appropriateness of these different terms, we must consider Elizabeth Porter's concept of "compassionate co-suffering." Compassionate co-suffering is based on a sense of common humanity: "Compassion feels pain and responds accordingly" (101). Like M. Nussbaum's concept of eudemonistic judgment, Porter's notion of compassionate co-suffering includes regard toward another person. This main

feature of compassion, a focus on the sufferer's need, is important because it eliminates associations with feelings of superiority or attempts to control.

To activate compassion, one must participate in the other's suffering but not necessarily experience the same sense of vulnerability. Neorealist works depict people who are vulnerable in various ways as they face the dramatic conditions of war and endure their particular forms of suffering in different ways. Their personal histories and/or their unawareness of the political situation make them more or less susceptible to affliction. In this context, the characters may share the same vulnerability but not feel the same pain. Cesira and Rosetta illustrate this in Moravia's *La ciociara* (*Two Women*): The mother's mature perception of the events makes her more receptive to the suffering, augmented by the daughter's inexperienced perspective on the situation.

A hypothetical example of two individuals fighting Nazi and Fascist oppression also illustrates this discrepancy. Both people may be vulnerable if they are not fully conscious of the events. However, their vulnerability may not equally trigger compassion if they do not participate in the other's suffering. Perhaps only one of the two acutely perceives the suffering and the danger the person faces. Consequently, the individual may compassionately understand the friend's unawareness. The other, oblivious to the real danger of the war, may not share the friend's anguish and, as a result, may not feel compassionate toward the friend. Hence, whereas vulnerability describes a shared condition of frailty, suffering implies a deeper involvement in another's perspective.

Thus, based on the models of Aristotle, M. Nussbaum, and Whitebrook, we define compassion here as the affective participation in another's experience, registered through changes in affect or perception or through acts to better the situation of the other, which may be manifested in many ways: an encouraging word, a supporting action, or a caring gesture acknowledging that the other person is experiencing difficulty.

Compassion may be elicited by both light degrees of misfortune and stronger, exceptional degrees of sufferance activated during extraordinary situations, such as World War II, the Nazi Occupation, and the Holocaust. In neorealist literature and film, the crucial element in activating compassion seems to be competence in a new moral code that extraordinary situations impose. As a result, even situations denied by M. Nussbaum, such as (a) the suffering caused by the person's own actions, (b) portrayal of the sufferer's own situation as dissimilar from that of the giver, and (c) the perception that the sufferer is an unimportant figure from the giver's point of view, can trigger compassion.

Compassion also encompasses both an immediate response to specific circumstances and a reflective reaction to another individual's misfortune. It is an emotion produced not only through observing the difficulties experienced by others but also through affective and rational engagement in certain situations. Thus, compassion can be established within the contexts both of the individual and of a group. In other words, compassion can be socially constructed.

Notes

1. Jeremiah P. Conway, in "Compassion and Moral Condemnation: An Analysis of the Reader," admits that compassion can also be triggered when the sufferer is responsible for his anguish. Examining the story of Hanna, who is responsible for Nazi crimes, he writes, "The story acknowledges Hanna's moral guilt and finds room for compassion nonetheless. It intimates that moral condemnation is possible without distancing criminals from us so greatly that we fail to recognize ourselves in their midst" (298).
2. The intricacy of compassion is also noted in Lawrence Blum's "Compassion," in which he defines this feeling as "a complex emotional attitude toward another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person" (509).
3. The importance of suffering is confirmed also in the Buddhist tradition, which considers it an essential element for the activation of compassion. Charles Hallisey, in *Evil and Suffering*, suggests that "a certain amount of suffering is necessary to make us aware that our fantasies are not actually the way we and the world are. In addition, witnessing the suffering of others can help to generate valuable virtues of empathy, pity, and compassion in us. Awareness and compassion are catalyst and pinnacles of the Buddhist religious life" (54).

CHAPTER 7

Compassion and Pity, Sympathy, and Empathy

To appreciate further the significance of compassion in this work, it is important to underline features of other similar emotions since they might be present as well. Some variability exists in the use of the terms *pity*, *sympathy*, *empathy*, and *compassion* in theoretical discourses. Even though Young-Mason, M. Nussbaum, Whitebrook, Porter, Irene Switankowsky,[1] and others have attempted to differentiate them, scholars have had great difficulty keeping the terms separate. According to Young-Mason, who claims compassion is frequently confused with pity, empathy, and sympathy,

> …the nature and work of compassion is more elusive and mysterious… Compassion, like freedom, is a word whose meaning becomes clearer and finally clarified in practice, when known through desire and need, in hands-on exchange. Like freedom, compassion is a mutual experience given two or more people to act together for its realization. (347)

For Young-Mason, what distinguishes compassion is an intangible feature that makes this emotion more indefinable than the other three terms. In her comparison of compassion to freedom, she emphasizes its ability to create a reciprocal association among individuals.[2] This distinction is important in examining neorealist texts because they often bring to light different forms of emotional understanding and emphasize the reciprocal quality of compassion in creating a bond among individuals miserably put to the test.

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In *Upheavals of Thought*, M. Nussbaum avoids the term *pity* because it is commonly associated with elements of superiority or arrogance in contemporary discussions of emotions, connotations absent in traditional theoretical accounts by Greek and French philosophers. She clearly associates empathy with limited involvement of the onlooker:

> Empathy is simply an imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience, whether that experience is happy or sad, pleasant or painful or neutral, and whether the imaginer thinks the other person's situation good, bad, or indifferent (separate issues, since a malevolent person will think the other's distress good and her happiness bad). (302)

The onlooker is detached from the situation, not needing to express judgment toward the event witnessed or otherwise try to understand it. Empathy is connected to an imaginative ability to reconstruct another's misfortune. Therefore, the difference between empathy and compassion consists in the gravity of the situation. Although it is possible to empathize in both enjoyable and bad occurrences, one can only experience compassion in difficult situations. M. Nussbaum views compassion as being similar to sympathy:

> If there is any difference between "sympathy" and "compassion" in contemporary usage, it is perhaps that "compassion" seems more intense and suggests a greater degree of suffering, both on the part of the afflicted person and on the part of the person having the emotion. People who are wary of acknowledging strong emotion are more likely to admit to "sympathy" than to admit they feel "compassion." (302)

Thus, the difference between sympathy and compassion lies in the amount of suffering experienced by both the sufferer and the viewer and, consequently, the degree of emotional involvement of the onlooker. Because sympathy generates a less intense emotional involvement, it can also be more easily disclosed.

However, both sympathy and compassion should be differentiated from empathy: "'Sympathy,' as standardly used today, is very different from 'empathy': a malevolent person who imagines the situation of another and takes pleasure in her distress may be empathetic, but will surely not be judged sympathetic. Sympathy, like compassion, includes a judgment that the other person's distress is bad" (302). Sympathy and compassion are generated from a sincere recognition of another's misfortune; empathy may not include that element. The motive (i.e., an act to solace or injure

the unfortunate person) may be the component that distinguishes the two, proving that the focus here is the viewer's intentional action. Empathy may also reflect disconnection among individuals if it represents divergent interests. Becky Lynn Omdahl affirms that empathy is activated "when individuals share the emotional state of a target," demonstrating that this emotion may not be as painful as compassion (15). Nevertheless, many scholars agree that sharing both sad and joyful experiences may generate empathy.

Whitebrook uses the viewer's involvement to distinguish compassion from pity. Viewers may trigger both emotions with their first reactions to suffering, as well as by reflecting additionally on the circumstances. Thus, initial responses, which are often emotional, may later be tempered by reason:

> Compassion still depends on the first reaction to suffering: in practice compassion not only follows but effectively depends on that initial feeling… It may be argued that the very perception of suffering should carry more weight than [knowledge of] its cause, and consequent attention to fault and blame—that the feeling of pity might be allowed to trump subsequent awareness of facts about other which indicate worthiness, guilt or deserving blame. What is fundamentally at stake is the suffering or vulnerability rather than judgment of its cause. (536)

Describing compassion as a spontaneous reaction to the sight of suffering, Whitebrook illustrates its focus on misfortune rather than on fault, whereas pity reflects an understanding of merit and responsibility. According to this model, the difference between the two emotions is the immediacy with which individuals perceive their involvement with the suffering of others.

Later, however, Whitebrook complicates this analysis with examples of viewers that activate pity with their first sight of pain and their compassion after further evaluation of the situations. She also bases the difference between the two emotions on the kind of reactions they activate:

> Suffering invokes feelings of pity: such suffering may or may not be accompanied or followed by the exercise of compassion. For example, the first sight of suffering invokes pity—the road-accident victim is injured. Additional knowledge may modify the first impression: they are drunk, injured in an accident they themselves have caused. Compassionate action may then still follow—the driver is given medical treatment, quite possibly accompanied by a feeling that "there, but for the grace of God. (530)

Thus, although pity can be triggered by the first sight of pain, it simply expresses a feeling; compassion includes the action or reaction to that feeling. Pity implies an initial painful involvement of viewers who express their first reaction to suffering with inactivity or a less moving emotion. Therefore, pity represents an intermediate emotional level that may develop toward the more involving emotion of compassion or may be completely withdrawn.

As mentioned previously, Whitebrook argues that knowledge is necessary to understand a person and an event fully enough to evoke a compassionate response. Different knowledge results in different interventions, which may cause compassion either to flourish or to decline. Merely observing suffering may instigate only pity; further awareness may or may not instigate a positive and active reaction toward a potential sufferer: "Suffering as such is liable *prima facie* to invoke a response; however, reflective judgment may quickly follow and then initial identification with suffering or vulnerability may be modified, even if not entirely negated" (530). Thus, one may need to investigate suffering further and reflect upon it to trigger compassionate involvement and, therefore, confirm or reject one's first identification with the sufferer.

Whitebrook's concept of identification helps clarify the distinction between pity and compassion. Identification, a significant component of M. Nussbaum's analysis, is a broader part of Whitebrook's evaluation. She notes that in Morrison's novels, identification can occur with the effects of slavery or racism as well as with an "understanding of the problems of right behavior in adverse circumstances, of family relationships, of conflicts of values and culture" (534). Thus, to activate compassion instead of pity, one may need a broader understanding of the circumstances and to acknowledge events such as particular interactions among family members or different cultural mores.

Other scholars distinguish compassion from other emotions by analyzing the perspective from which the pain is perceived instead of focusing on understanding the circumstances. Porter addresses the difference between empathy and compassion by emphasizing the sufferer's viewpoint: "With empathy someone tries to identify similar emotions to understand sympathetically how the person feels" (101). With compassion, one focuses on the sufferer's condition: "Often, in listening to others tell of their pain, we quickly respond by recalling an incident in our own lives when we experienced a similar pain. Our story might help us connect with another, but we need to concentrate our attention on the other's plight in order to demonstrate compassion" (102). Empathy

requires finding a connection with the viewer's experiences; in compassion, such a bond may only facilitate the response because the viewer's attention must address the sufferer.

Still other scholars accentuate this strong altruistic feature of compassion, as opposed to empathy, noting that compassion may transcend the disposition of the moment. According to Lawrence Blum, "One's compassionate acts often involve acting very much contrary to one's moods and inclinations. Compassion is fundamentally other-regarding rather than self-regarding; its affective nature in no way detracts from this" (514). Compassionate actions show their unselfishness because they enable people to modify their character to respect the interests of others.

John Staines also noted this honorable aspect of compassion that moves individuals to care about one another and that transcends other similar emotions: "The grief of compassion is good and holy because, as it touches each person—in the root sense of contagion, contact—it spreads virtuous behavior…Nonetheless, this 'contagion' remains problematic for the very reason that the spectacle touches the viewer in such an immediate and powerful way" (100). What makes compassion a righteous emotion is not only its altruistic component but also its infectious quality, which may simultaneously represent a problem when it abruptly acts on people. This consideration is important because it offers a different perspective on this emotion that is typically represented in positive terms.

M. Nussbaum, although recognizing various respectable and reflective components of compassion that separate it from other related emotional responses, scrutinizes situations in which the value of compassion may be reduced. She also identifies the dark side of compassion:

> Frequently, however, we get a compassion that is not only narrow, failing to include the distant, but also polarizing, dividing the world into an "us" and a "them." Compassion for our own children can so easily slip over into a desire to promote the well-being of our children at the expense of other people's children. ("Compassion and Terror" 13)

In this case, compassion for specific individuals limits the well-being of others. Thus, compassionate responses may fluctuate according to the recipients and may suggest different levels of concern and acceptance for some individuals and indifference and rejection for others. Consequently, the representations of compassion in neorealist works may function in relation to the perceived significance of the individuals toward whom it is directed, benefiting some and casting others aside.

However, our focus is more on the political and social repercussions that emotional participation in others' pain may imply rather than on underlining the intensity of the pain or the perspective of perception. This analysis centers on the significance and relative implications of a vast array of compassionate behaviors on postwar Italian society. Thus, it is beneficial to keep in mind features of emotions such as compassion, pity, empathy, and sympathy since in expressing emotional participation in others' suffering, neorealist characters produce varied responses and may also display attributes of these similar emotions.

To do so, we may consider compassion, pity, and sympathy to be various aspects of a single emotional condition. George Rey distinguishes between an emotional situation and a single emotion when he considers an isolated feeling of resentment in the context of a broader category of resentments: "Where the history of an emotional state is essential to its being an emotional state of a specific kind, we might then speak of the etiological component of that kind" (182). This approach is noteworthy because it allows a more inclusive examination of related emotions. This, in turn, offers a more comprehensive image of people's broad emotionality, which then illuminates new aspects of single emotions not previously discerned when considered in their isolation.

Thus, for our purposes, distinguishing between empathy and compassion is sufficient. Here, empathy refers to the understanding of the happy or sad feelings of the sufferer. Compassion, which encompasses sympathy in M. Nussbaum's terms and pity in Whitebrook's, indicates either (a) the expression of an emotional condition or (b) the immediate or evaluated participation in another individual's misfortune or suffering and the subsequent expression of that understanding.

Notes

1. In "Sympathy and Empathy," Switankowsky distinguishes between empathy and sympathy: "Sympathy occurs at the pre-reflexive level, while empathy requires understanding another person's situation more intensely and at the reflexive level. Empathy presupposes a method of understanding that cannot be captured by reflective or selective attention alone, while sympathy could be brought about by reflectivity alone" (92).
2. Suzanne Keen, in *Empathy and the Novel*, differentiates empathy from sympathy, distinguishing between "the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as empathy, and the more complex, differentiated feeling for another as sympathy (sometimes called emphatic concern in psychological literature)" (5).

CHAPTER 8

Occurrences of Compassion

We must also consider the circumstances that may inhibit emotional participation. According to Aristotle, people "who are utterly lost and ruined, since they think they can suffer nothing more—they have done their suffering; nor again will be felt by those who conceive themselves to be eminently prosperous—rather will these be given to insolence" will not experience compassion (qtd. in Cooper 142). Extremely sad or flourishing situations may not generate compassion because the intensity of those conditions makes it difficult for people to imagine alternatives. Because authors of neorealist works, such as Millu's *Il fumo di Birkenau* (*Smoke over Birkenau*) and Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*Survival in Auschwitz*), often propose situations in which the conditions of individuals' lives are made severely miserable, this clarification is significant. Thus, we must explore whether such extreme situations can generate compassion and whether those responses can alter relationships among individuals.

Various conditions may potentially limit one's compassion. M. Nussbaum claims that, generally speaking, compassion will not occur if sufferers are responsible for their own conditions that are not the effects of justifiable situations. The finitude of one's emotional capacity may also limit one's compassion. This raises two interesting questions: Is compassion always automatically offered? Can givers wear out their emotional resources? Jacqueline Wiseman observed that "charity and compassion are not available in unlimited supply, the Bible notwithstanding. Like so many other

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strong emotions, compassion cannot be called forth on every possible occasion without exhausting the giver" (242). Thus, compassion requires a certain involvement on the part of givers, who risk depleting their resources for the other person's sake.

But what kind of participation constitutes a compassionate experience? Is it an attempt to deny oneself to help the other person or an effort to impose one's personality to relieve a specific suffering? Steve Tudor presents compassion as an experience that witnesses may activate with commitment and effort:

> [T]here is much work to be done to get to the point where, compassionately, one sees directly the Other's suffering, moving logically from evidential premises to a conclusion of compassion, in the manner of a scientist developing an account of distant planets or microscopic organisms, neither of which she sees directly, from observation data. Rather, the work is largely a matter of working upon oneself, upon one's own tendency towards the avoidance of or blindness to the Other's suffering, so that one becomes open to the compassionate perception of the Other. (80)

Demonstrating compassion, then, implies recognition of oneself in order to offer one's qualities to the other, an attempt that may consume energy the giver is not always disposed to expend. Therefore, the position of the individual witnessing a state of anguish is crucial to a better understanding of compassion.

To explain what is important for the observer, consider M. Nussbaum's concept of emotions as eudemonistic judgments, which she explains by picturing "a self as constituted (in part at least) by its evaluative engagements with areas of the world outside itself" (*Upheavals* 300). With this evaluation, she clarifies that the onlooker must consider whether the potential objects of compassion are important elements in a system of purposes. Eudemonistic judgments help one differentiate between emotions that enlarge or reduce the limits of the self, which will

> expand the boundaries of the self, picturing the self as constituted in part by strong attachment to independent things and persons. Love and grief are paradigmatic of such emotions; and, as we shall see, compassion pushes the boundaries of the self further outward than many types of love. Some emotions draw sharp boundaries around the self, insulating it, from contamination by external objects. Disgust is paradigmatic of such an emotion. (*Upheavals* 300)

Here, M. Nussbaum perceives compassion as an emotion that expands the limits of each individual's personality to project one's attention on others. This reasoning helps to explain individuals' involvement in precise events and their consequent choices, suggesting explanations for behavior that may be incomprehensible otherwise.

M. Nussbaum confirms Aristotle's position and demonstrates that people's experiences influence their judgment: Suffering often diminishes people's ability to account for their own experiences. Unlike Whitebrook, who highlights the importance of suffering instead of the judgment of it, M. Nussbaum connects compassion to the onlookers' opinions, suggesting that through their best reasoning, they can decide what merits compassion:[1] "Compassion takes up the onlooker's point of view, making the best judgment the onlooker can make about what is really happening to the person, even when that may differ from the judgment of the person herself" (*Upheavals* 309). Individuals' misfortune is filtered through the sensibility of the onlookers, who do their best to understand the sufferers' condition. The ultimate authority of suffering and, hence, of the worthiness of compassion is not the sufferer but the observer, which allows for different observations on individuals' character. Thus, onlookers are empowered to experience the sufferers' circumstances.

This way of thinking reveals a positive view of human nature: "In short, implicit in the emotion itself is a conception of human flourishing and the major predicaments of human life, the best one the onlookers is able to form" (M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 310). She assumes that the onlooker can make the best decision, but she does not mention the possibility of one's misfortune distorting one's judgment of the sufferer's trouble. For example, during war, people may experience oppression and constant exposure to the same affliction. The first likely colors their responses to others' mistreatment; the second may decrease their compassion.

Sociologist Candace Clark offers an interesting insight into this problem of human behavior from her study of the inhabitants of the Alto do Cruzeiro region in northwest Brazil:

> The predisposition to sympathize with others is not a necessary part of social life. Some societies…are quite different from our own in this regard… Existing on the verge of starvation themselves, mothers often did not feel sympathy for their infants and children, especially the weakest and least likely to survive. Because tears were thought to slow a dead infant's journey to heaven, the community condemned grieving at burials. (129)

This example suggests that sympathy is dependent on specific social conditions and cultural beliefs and that the consistency of particular misfortunes in certain societies makes individuals less responsive to common plights. This notion is particularly important in this investigation of neorealist texts. In these works, general misfortunes are regular components of daily life, raising the question of whether compassion may work in the same way.

Several scholars have commented on the success of neorealist films in reproducing the tragic events of postwar Italy. Lawrence Baldassaro notes that "neorealist film, at its best, did achieve a rare affinity between the tragic experience of an entire nation, and the artistic expression of that experience" (207). To conduct a better analysis of the relationship between the circumstances that trigger suffering and the compassionate responses that many neorealist works propose, we may find it useful to investigate another kind of literary production in which affliction is a crucial component, the literary genre of tragedy. Tragedy depicts the anguish associated with distressing circumstances. According to Edward Quinn, tragedy is

> [a] form of literary genre that depicts the downfall of the leading character whose life, its disastrous end notwithstanding, represents something significant. In this sense, tragedy may be seen as rooted in the human need to extract a value from human mortality. Viewed from this perspective, tragedy has a positive side in its search for meaning in individual life. (327)

Here, tragedy is valuable because it looks for an explanation of human existence. In the depiction of tragic events for constructive ends, tragedy allows us a better comprehension of life's repercussions. Similarly, in her analysis of classical Greek tragedies, M. Nussbaum notes the importance of this genre in foregrounding sufferers and their misfortune: "Tragic fictions promote extension of concern by linking the imagination powerfully to the adventures of the distant life in question. Thus, while none is per se eudaimonistically reliable, tragedies are powerful devices promoting the extension of the eudaimonistic judgment" (*Upheavals* 352). Tragic narratives, through imagination, reveal the plight of others and enlarge the onlooker's consideration of other human beings. Thus, M. Nussbaum connects tragedy and the human capacity for dealing with suffering.

Tragedies also promote delight at the realization of people's susceptibility and bereavement. They offer a way to handle the humiliation that may follow the realization of being powerless. Thus, the tragic mode may be particularly beneficial in overcoming the suffering that neorealist

characters have to tolerate and the anxiety that modern societies often impose on their inhabitants.

But is this humanistic way of reading tragedies appropriate in contemporary contexts? According to Whitebrook, "Tragedy is not an applicable concept for democratic conditions, where inequalities—of class and condition, say—are pressing political issues" (358). A concern with overcoming disparities makes tragic plots—which emphasize suffering, loss, and failure—difficult to apply in democracies. To instigate compassionate responses, as already stated, Whitebrook avoids generalization and proposes consideration of details connected to each individual: "Most generally, awareness of others and their particular characteristics may enable the political actor to better apply generalized rules. Compassion may then be linked to discretion, or the imaginative adaptation of regularized institutions and conventional arrangements" (358). To develop compassion, then, one must not only be conscious of others' specific circumstances but also interpret and respond to them in light of commonly accepted mores.[2]

Both M. Nussbaum's and Whitebrook's views are significant in examining the use of tragic conventions in neorealist texts to direct compassion to particular ends. In such analyses, one attends to individual differences and emphasizes not the fate decreed by the gods of classical Greek tragedy but the will of institutions that shape people's fate through policies and practices. Neorealist texts often emphasize human vulnerability and suffering brought on by a combination of individual action and the power of institutions. In these texts, the authors often depict the actions of a central character that experiences serious suffering that is neither accidental nor insignificant. This suffering is valuable because it is rationally connected with the hero's actions.

Notes

1. In "Emotions and Choice," Robert C. Solomon highlights the rational components of emotions: "Emotions are defined primarily by their constitutive judgments, given structure by judgments, distinguished as particular emotions (anger, love, envy, etc.) as judgments, and related to other beliefs, judgments, and our knowledge of the world, in a 'formal' way through judgments" (274).
2. Porter analyzes the importance of compassionate behavior in politics, linking it to the condition of the weak people in society. "Compassionate politics is both possible and necessary to responding emotionally and practically to the need for human security, which for many women and other vulnerable groups means simply feeling 'safe'" (990).

CHAPTER 9

Rethinking Compassion in Light of Neorealism

Neorealist works offer an interesting range of situations that depict actions in service of others and complex representations of compassion. For example, in Moravia's *La ciociara* (*Two Women*) and in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*), the authors express compassion as both an immediate response to certain conditions and a reflective reaction to another's misfortune. In opposition to M. Nussbaum's view, although the cause of suffering in such neorealist works as Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (*Agnese Goes to Die*) and Millu's *Il fumo di Birkenau* (*Smoke over Birkenau*) may be a person's own actions, the characters may still be worthy of compassion. This is sometimes extended by a character whose own situation is altogether dissimilar from that of the sufferer. What appears to be crucial to experiencing and receiving compassion in such cases is proficiency in a new moral code derived from the difficulty of extreme circumstances, such as World War II, the Nazi Occupation, and the Holocaust. These complex representations of compassion prompt a reconsideration of the term.

The Three Beliefs of Aristotle and Nussbaum

Neorealist works invite discussions concerning the relationships among compassion (perceived as a social product), rational practices, evaluated inquiries, and the sufferers' responsibility in situations of terror. In the extreme life-threatening conditions that prevailed in Italy during World War II, the Resistance, and the Holocaust, apparently trivial aspects of life

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elicited compassion.[1] Therefore, we must reevaluate the significance of certain losses, the first requirement of compassion. The value or size of a loss is an essential element in M. Nussbaum's view because it establishes whether a situation is worthy of compassion: "We do not go around pitying someone who has lost a trivial item, such as a toothbrush or a paper clip, or even an important item that is readily replaceable. Internal to our emotional response itself is the judgment that what is at issue is indeed serious" (*Upheavals* 307). In concentration camps, however, trivial items became treasures because they were not replaceable; therefore, their loss could prompt compassion.

Alberto Moravia, in *Two Women*, illustrates the significance of ordinary objects in war. When the female protagonist searches for a hut to live in, she declares the difficulty of obtaining ordinary articles such as sheets or a copper pot from the owner: "Everything had to be forced out of him by fighting tooth and nail and was only obtained after I had promised to pay a certain sum for the hire of each object" (85). In the Nota del Curtore (Editor's Note) of the Italian version of this book, Tonino Tornitore affirms the historic accuracy of this recollection, stating that *Two Women* is a valuable work because it was written during the events it recounts, "a rough report not faked by the mythicizing effect of the memory" (v). In stressing the truth of the protagonist's declaration because it is not revised by remembrance, Tornitore confirms the value and importance of ordinary items.

The circumstances explored in neorealist texts draw attention to the inconsistency between the value of ordinary objects and the prices asked to obtain them and clarify the same. In such circumstances, common items became exceptional and rare because they could not be replaced if lost, stolen, or destroyed. Owners could only be compensated with money or convenient exchanges. Robert E. Goodin notes the significance of compensation: "From a moral point of view the function of compensation is straightforward. Compensation serves to right what otherwise count as wrongful injuries to the persons or their properties" (56). For Goodin, reimbursing a person who undergoes a loss perceived as unjust is ethically correct. In neorealist texts, the authors associated undeserved damages with the loss of normal things; hence, their compensation.

Primo Levi, in *Survival in Auschwitz*, is equally clear in expressing the value of common things: "Within the lager, there is no great difference between a shirt worthy of the name and a tattered thing full of patches" (81). Extraordinary occurrences, such as illness, starvation, savage beatings, and death, do not necessarily induce compassion. At the same time, routine

events in daily life assume a significantly different, often greater, significance and are likely to produce compassionate responses. Olga Lengyel, a Hungarian prisoner in Auschwitz, eloquently conveys their psychological significance in the camp: "I badly needed a waistband to hold up my drawers. At the garbage dump, by a wonderful stroke of luck, I found three fragments of twine which could be pieced together for the purpose" (47). Aristotle lists other occasions that can trigger this emotion, including "death, bodily assault or ill treatment, old age, illness, lack of food, lack of friends, separation from friends, physical weakness, disfigurement, immobility, reversal of expectations, or absence of good prospects" (1386a). Although these moments are usually unordinary occurrences that typically evoke compassion, in concentration camps, they became part of the daily routine. People might experience all of them throughout the normal course of a day. As a result, compassion was not always elicited.

In Aristotle's view, the onlooker judges an event as suitable or unsuitable for compassion. Thus, the amount of time one spends under oppression or in a concentration camp is important. The less time one spends, the more amenable the person is to experiencing compassion toward the events Aristotle lists. This changed perspective is clear in testimonies of individuals whose shock in the first moments later became apathy. The more time the onlooker spent in the concentration camp, the more likely the person was to experience compassion in connection with elements considered insignificant outside the camp, such as a spoon.

The second requirement of compassion concerns the responsibility of the sufferer. According to Aristotle, compassion arises in situations of "undeserving" injury to the sufferer (1386a). We experience compassion when we think the person we observe is not responsible for causing the negative circumstances. Clearly, the prisoners in Nazi concentration camps were not guilty of wrongdoing, except within the Germans' perverse racial and political ideology. Thus, as Levi and Millu do in their representations of attempts to survive inside Auschwitz and Birkenau, we must take into account the survivors' moral codes that characterize those systems rather than the moral code of the outside world.

Bernard Gert, in *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do*, analyzes the system that people use to construct moral behavior. This scheme is based on five impairments (death, pain, disability, loss of freedom, and loss of pleasure) from which people create ten moral regulations: prohibitions against killing, causing pain, disabling, depriving of freedom and pleasure, cheating, and deceiving and proscriptions for keeping promises, obeying

the law, and doing one's duty. These rules, which most attentive people implicitly use in arriving at moral judgments, regulate human behavior. However, Gert's model of conduct addresses ordinary events experienced by people in common circumstances. He does not consider the extraordinary events represented in neorealist works in which the dramatic circumstances generate new ways of interacting.

The system of principles and judgments shared among the people who evacuated their homes during World War II or adjusted their lives to the reality of concentration camps does not observe Gert's five basic impairments. Consequently, it does not generate the moral rules that individuals commonly observe. To experience compassion in the circumstances depicted in neorealist texts, one must have a new set of values that fits the realities of those circumstances. For instance, in the concentration camps, inmates were treated absurdly and undeservedly. Because of the everyday circumstances in these camps, theft was both expected and necessary. M. Nussbaum reminds us that "the onlooker accepts a certain picture of the world in which the most valuable things are not always safely under a person's own control, but can be damaged by outside forces" ("Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion" 33). Therefore, even though individuals may cause their own suffering, it may still be worthy of compassion. Thus, characters whose own culpabilities are altogether dissimilar may extend compassion to the sufferers.

The third Aristotelian element necessary for understanding compassion is a judgment of similar possibilities or empathic identification. Compassion originates from misfortunes "which the person himself might expect to suffer either himself or one of his loved ones" (Aristotle 1385b). According to Peter Weinreich, "Empathic identification with another refers to the degree of perceived similarity between the characteristics, whether good or bad, of that other and oneself" (52). This notion stresses the importance of recognizing positive or negative correspondences with other individuals to identify emotionally with them. Similarly, compassion "does indeed involve empathetic identification as one component" (M. Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion" 35). However, in the act of identification, individuals recognize a sort of boundary that separates them from the sufferer. M. Nussbaum also states that the pain of another person represents an object of apprehension only if the onlooker acknowledges the possibility of experiencing a certain unity with the sufferer. Without that sense of commonality, people react with either indifference or mere intellectual curiosity.

This approach helps explain the reason individuals who wish to suppress compassionate feelings portray sufferers as different in kind and in possibility. Several scholars have emphasized the way Nazis referred to Jews in attempting to justify their own actions. Raul Hilberg observes that the Jews were depicted as nonhuman, either as beings of a remote kind of animal (e.g., insects or vermin) or as inanimate objects, "cargo" to be transported (274). In "Racism and Sexism," Gisela Block confirms the nonhuman representation of people who threatened the German race. In *Smoke over Birkenau*, Millu distinctly expresses the dehumanization of the women, constantly referring to them as "merchandise" and "work units."

M. Nussbaum also calls attention to an onlooker's optimistic reflection toward a particular individual or creature. Neorealist texts provide numerous examples of compassionate subjects called upon to act in the service of others perceived to be different because of their age, behavior, or nationality. This separateness is superseded by other thoughts that generate compassion (e.g., the compassion an old widow and a young one experience, respectively, toward a group of young partisans and a German soldier). Thus, even situations depicting encounters among those who feel distant from each other can produce compassionate responses. Rather than disparities in age and nationality preventing compassion, the characters' ability to connect events with current or previous experiences allows them to trigger compassion.

According to M.L. Hoffman, the role of imagination is important in these situations:

> Imagining oneself in the other's place reflects processes generated from within the observer…in which connections are made between the stimuli impinging on the other person and similar stimulus events in the observer's own past. That is, imagining oneself in the other's place produces an empathic response because it has the power to evoke associations with real events in one's own past in which one actually experienced the affect in question. (180)

People can understand others' feelings better if they have directly experienced those emotions in the past. Hoffman also highlights the link between emotions and socialization: "Socialization that allows children to experience a variety of emotions rather than protecting them from these emotions will increase the likelihood of children's being able to empathize with different emotions: it will expand their empathy's range" (288).

Thus, exposing children to a variety of emotional states to provide different situations in which they can compassionately relate is quite important.

Compassionate responses are possible, however, only if one can relate in some way with the events one is experiencing (Hoffman 180). The previous example of the two widows suggests other ways to understand the relationship between compassion and observation. Their previous experiences may have influenced how they view the young partisans and the German soldier, prompting a compassionate connection with their conditions even though the women may not feel particularly close to them.

Through their characters, situations, and plots, neorealist works suggest a way to associate compassion with a rational process and, thus, with a way to rethink previous examinations of this emotion. The depictions of characters, which demonstrate comprehension of another's plight, present compassion as an emotion that can be generated not only by observing the difficulties experienced by others but also through active engagement in specific situations. Often, these manifestations of compassion occur through reflective judgment or awareness of particular conditions; at other times, they are immediate responses to traumatic suffering.

Knowledge and Emotion

In "Love and Knowledge: Emotions in Feminist Epistemology," Alison M. Jaggar argues that a reexamination of the association between knowledge and emotion as a reciprocal rather than as an oppositional relation is essential. Jaggar rejects the notion of dispassionate inquiry, a scientific exploration that excludes emotions as an element of investigation:

> Far from precluding the possibility of reliable knowledge, emotions as well as value must be shown as necessary to such knowledge. Despite its classical antecedents and like the ideal of disinterested enquiry, the ideal of dispassionate enquiry is an impossible dream but a dream nonetheless or perhaps a myth that has exerted enormous influence on western epistemology. Like all myths it is a form of ideology that fulfils certain social and political functions. (156)

Emotions should be included in the process of generating knowledge.

Although disinterested and dispassionate investigation represents an important way to influence knowledge, express beliefs, and satisfy political and social purposes, it is often impossible to achieve. According to Jaggar,

the profound separation of race, class, and gender molds every aspect of our lives, including our emotional formation. The myth of dispassionate investigation persists because "it functions, obviously, to bolster the epistemic authority of the currently dominant groups, composed largely of white men, and to discredit the observations and claims of the currently subordinate groups including, of course, the observations and claims of many people of color and women" (154).

Jaggar explains the myth as a process to reinforce the authority of the dominant group of White men and to discredit the requests of the minority groups of people of color and women. However, the standpoint of individuals belonging to subordinate groups is often the most valuable because it offers a more complete examination of circumstances. Therefore, she emphasizes the mutual relationship between emotions and knowledge: emotions may enhance the expansion of knowledge because the development of knowledge may improve the progress of emotions.

Evaluated interpretation is also important in shaping emotion. According to Jaggar, observation is an active, selective procedure of interpretation, not a passive way of recording stimuli. The relationship between emotion and observation is reciprocal: "Just as observation directs, shapes, and partially defines emotion, so too emotion directs, shapes, and even partially defines observation" (134). Thus, a perceptive understanding may generate compassion, just as compassion may generate a perceptive understanding. Neorealist films and novels often depict this mutual bond in characters who relate compassionately to suffering because they understand the conditions that produce that anguish. This reciprocal link then indicates that the generation of compassion can occur not only through immediate reactions to suffering but also through calculated examinations of certain historical and social situations. These films and novels confirm Jaggar's notion of observation as an active procedure and demonstrate that compassion is strongly connected to the social group rather than being simply an individual response.

Catherine Lutz also refuses to accept the generalized view of emotions developed in the Western tradition. This tradition states that even if they can be associated with historical or interpersonal practices, emotions are essentially "internal characteristics of persons…features of individuals rather than of situations, relationships or moral positions…[and] constructed as psychological rather than social phenomena" (56). Instead, Lutz argues that emotions are related to the social and cultural context in which people find themselves, "constructed primarily by people rather

than by nature" (54). Consequently, emotions produce a variety of cultural work. For Lutz, "this purported emotionality, given its association with weakness as well as irrationality, is used to justify the exclusion of these individuals from positions of power and responsibility and to legitimize their disadvantaged social and economic positions" (65). In this context, emotions, linked with limitation and illogicality may explain and justify the exclusion of parts of the population from socially and economically powerful positions of control in society.

Examples from neorealist works illustrate compassion as an emotion that one can learn and activate in the context of a particular community. Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*Survival in Auschwitz*) and De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*) demonstrate that compassion is associated not only with the simple exposure to the plight of another person but also to an attentive elaboration on the reasons causing that condition. In other instances, such as in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*) and Ginzburg's *Lessico Famigliare* (*Family Sayings*), compassion appears to be the result of an instant reaction to anguish. Regardless, compassionate responses still demonstrate their logical quality because they are strongly influenced by the protagonists' past experiences.

Neorealist works depict immediate compassionate reactions that highlight the horror, awfulness, and rarity of the circumstances. These works provide further illustrations of the relationship between compassion and liability. When individuals are responsible for their own affliction, as Whitebrook believes, they must consider specific facts to activate compassion. However, the dramatic conditions depicted in many neorealist texts are based on a different framework for triggering emotional participation because the sufferers' responsibility and the following examination of other factors may not be significant enough to arouse compassion.

Neorealist artists often present circumstances of individual culpability that nonetheless evoke compassion. In Viganò's *Agnese va a morire* (*Agnese Goes to Die*), a woman who escapes Fascist oppression tries to connect with the partisans, opening herself and her whole group to discovery by the Fascists and Nazis. In spite of the danger her action represents, the partisans' initial reaction is compassion for her anguish. This event demonstrates that extreme threat or trauma can trigger compassion even without a thorough analysis of the sufferer's responsibility. Thus, compassion highlights the gulf between the regularity of ordinary sufferings and the exceptionality of traumatic events.

Matthew J. Friedman underscores the distinction between traumatic circumstances and ordinary painful events:

> The framers of the original PTSD [posttraumatic stress disorder] diagnosis had in mind events such as war, torture, rape, the Nazi Holocaust, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, natural disasters and human-made disasters. They considered traumatic events as clearly different from the very painful stressors that constitute the normal fluctuations of life such as divorce, failure, rejection, serious illness, and the like. This division between traumatic and other stressors was based on the assumption that although most individuals have the ability to cope with ordinary stress, their adaptive capacities are likely to be overwhelmed when confronted by traumatic stressors. (4)

This distinction accounts for people's diminished abilities to deal with traumatic events. In Viganò's example, the woman's irresponsible behavior still triggers instant compassion, suggesting that when traumatic experiences affect people's state of mind, they may attempt to manage overwhelming situations collectively to alleviate the general anguish.[2]

Notes

1. For more information about the economic activities and exchanges of goods and services among prisoners in war camps, see "The Economic Organization of a P.O.W. Camp" by R.A. Radford.
2. In these circumstances the unconditioned compassionate offer could also be explained as an attempt to reestablish connections with others since, as Glenn R. Schiraldi states, "a trauma can lead one to feel disconnected from others" (11).

CHAPTER 10

The Discourse of Compassion During Fascism

To create a critical frame for examining how we may differentiate the attributes, functions, and aesthetics of neorealist representations of compassion from preceding notions and images of this emotion, we examine briefly the roles played by emotion in general and compassion in particular in political, cultural, and literary discourse during the Fascist regime.[1] Much has been written about the rationality or irrationality of Fascist discourse. Alice Y. Kaplan and Barbara Spackman, among others, demonstrate that emotions are a constant presence in Fascist rhetoric.

Kaplan attempts to explain various unreasonable components of Fascist discourse. To account for the symbiosis and oceanic feelings created by Fascist congregations, she emphasizes rereading and historicizing Freud's sexist definition of oceanic feelings as the infant's emotion of vulnerability and desire for a protective father. Noting that "mothering" has been missing in theoretical work in general, Kaplan calls for a change: "I believe the shift can allow us to understand certain unexplored aspects of Fascism, just as the new metaphor of mother as a cultural authority allows the exploration of certain heretofore baffling religious attachments and oceanic feelings" (13). She analyzes the expressions of Fascism through the lens of everyday life, namely those conditions that originate in "odd but obvious places like the authors' attitude to their perceptions of time and space, in their relationship to lived experience" (46).

Similarly, Spackman affirms the importance of charting the rational in the so-called irrational elements connected to Fascist culture as "oceanic

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feelings, emotions, the lure of the voice, and so on" (119) because they are synonymous. She also recognizes that a study of Mussolini's articulations of emotions will reveal meanings of Fascist discourse and vice versa.

Niccolo Gianni, director of the *Instituto di mistica fascista* (School of Fascist Mysticism), also explores the close relationship between Fascism and emotion (Bobbio). Founded in Milan 1931, the school attempted to disseminate Fascist principles among high school and university students. He emphasizes the new significant moral connotation that Fascism generated, stating that the spirit of Fascism changed during the 1930s to become not merely a doctrine but a spiritual movement generated by the contrast between reason and sentiment. He also believes emotions are valuable components because they produce faith (e.g., the apparition of the Demiurge, war, Fascism). Thus, Gianni rehabilitates the notion of emotion and proposes a distinction that has been studied extensively from different perspectives, including the feminist philosophy and the cultural anthropology of Jaggar and Lutz.

In Western philosophical tradition, emotions generally occupy an inferior position in relation to reason. Thus, emotions are connected to "the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private, and of course the female," whereas reason has been connected with "the mental, the cultural, the universal, the public, and the male" (Jaggar 145). According to Lutz, in everyday discourse, "emotions tend to lead either to erroneous judgments and hence senseless, irrational actions, or they remain internal feeling states which organize no action, initiate no problem solving, constitute no rationality" (60).

Thus, Gianni's deceptive reevaluation of emotions may be subject to various interpretations. He may be following Mussolini's lead by making an apparent contradiction a productive force. He may also be delivering a veiled criticism of Fascism. Because Gianni defines significant historic events as acts of faith, his view of emotions is consistent with the dichotomy illustrated by Lutz and Jaggar. If emotion means the irrational, physical, or natural, then historical events such as the war and Fascism must be associated with irrational faculties.

In examining the role of expressions of compassion on individuals and the repercussions that these manifestations may produce on society, we focus on the political and social repercussions following emotional participation in another individual's suffering instead of on the level of pain or the viewpoint of perception. Such emotional participation may take many forms: a cheering word, a sustaining action, or a thoughtful gesture. It is

admitting that another person is experiencing difficulty through an alteration in affect or awareness or through an act to enhance the condition of that person.

In terms of M. Nussbaum's previously discussed requisites for triggering compassion, we see that compassion is a practical instrument to prompt specific reactions on people, provoking their submission to the established authority or their resistance to imposed communal standards. Thus, the compassionate reactions that characters display or refuse to display induce fascinating explanations of the emotion of compassion itself, the concept of dictatorial power (Mussolini), and the mechanisms that free individuals from restraining models of action (Bernari).

Mussolini

Analysis of Mussolini's verbal communication reveals the importance of the relationship between language and emotions. Therefore, in examining Mussolini's use of compassion, we must consider the Italian dictator's speeches, which scholars such as Spackman regard as crucial to understanding Fascist culture. Erasmo Leso's analysis grounds the motivations of Fascist rhetoric (Spackman). According to Leso, the most salient purpose of language is not so much to communicate information but to connect with others. Thus, Mussolini's speeches were not constructed to communicate arguments and possible resolutions but to court public approval[2]: "The relation that is set up between Mussolini and his listeners is a relation of faith, or even better, it is a magical relation: I am in the presence not of a political leader and ordinary citizens, but of a charismatic head and his faithful followers" (qtd. in Spackman 116).

Fascist discourse of the 1920s and 1930s articulates a politics of emotions designed to transform the private into public action. In *La fabbrica del consenso* (1975), Philip Cannistraro declares that Mussolini was perfectly aware that maintaining his regime depended on encouragement and support from the people. In 1931, Mussolini said, "As far as concerned the internal politics, the key word is this: reaching out to the people" (qtd. in Cannistraro 70). This idea that the Fascist movement considered the significant role exercised by the people is reflected also in Emil Ludwig's *Colloqui con Mussolini* (*Talks with Mussolini*), in which he quotes Mussolini: "The mass for me is only a flock of sheep, as long as it is not organized. I am not at all against it. I only deny that it would lead on its own. But, if it is guided, it must be done with two reins: enthusiasm

and interest. Who uses just one of the two, is at a risk" (119). Mussolini believes the combination of passion and concern transforms the masses from a limited condition of exposure achieved when people are influenced by different mutable directions to a powerful force obtained when individuals are controlled by a single external force.

Mussolini clearly specifies how he envisions directing the people: "Yes, this is what Fascism wants to do with the masses: organize a collective life, a communal life, working and combating in a hierarchy without a flock" (qtd. in Ludwig 123). However, the goal of Fascism is to create a society in which the people, liberated from their individual weakness, can experience corporate strength. Luigi Villari elucidates the possible value of this affirmation: "This doctrine, that the individual exists for the nation, i.e. for the common interests of the nation throughout the ages, may not appeal to all, but it is a noble conception of life. It subjects the individual to the duty of self sacrifice and self-effacement for the sake of the whole community in time and space" (53). Although this principle may reflect a sensitive notion of human existence, it contrasts with Mussolini's conception of communal life. His view does not involve any active political participation from the people and does not advance individual interests.

To lead a country, Mussolini believes it essential to impart a common belief, understood as an act of faith. People have to express their faithfulness to a specific ideology, even if no solid evidence exists on which to base the ideology: "Only faith can move mountains, not reason. Reason is an instrument but it cannot be the motor of the masses. Today, this happens less than yesterday. Today people have less time to think. Modern man's aptitude to believe is incredible" (qtd. in Ludwig 125). Thus, Mussolini's idea of collective action was generated by a limited view of human capabilities. His success was dependent on people unquestioningly following precise regulations that limited individual freedom, a possible indication that he feared the potential power of the masses.

Mussolini's concept of compassion allows clarification of his political position, encouraging considerations of the importance of sensitivity toward others, his idea of nationhood, the use of disciplinary functions, and his concept of pity. However, before analyzing Mussolini's notions of compassion, we must consider his thoughts about suffering. If compassion allows people to connect by acknowledging the suffering of the unfortunate, then the Duce's personal experience with suffering should help explain his attitude toward others' anguish.

Ludwig recounts "terrible" humiliations Mussolini had to endure in school. When children were divided into groups to eat, he was always part of the poorest group: "My soul still burns thinking that we, as children, were divided in classes!" (qtd. in Ludwig 194). Later, Mussolini offers further explanations about that experience: "Those sufferings are very productive since such unbearable and unworthy humiliations make a revolutionary man" (qtd. in Ludwig 195).

Suffering, then, is more than deprivation; it is a source of strength. It is not lack of food that caused humiliation for Mussolini but the social implications connected to it: he had to join the less privileged in his community, the poor. Mussolini's psychological pain links undeserved humiliation with revolution, with action in search of concrete answers: "I developed all my activities with great style in these ten years. I am convinced that control is due to action, even when it is wrong. The negative, the eternal immobile, is damnation. I am for engagement. I am a marcher" (qtd. in Ludwig 202).

Because psychological pain is harder to comprehend than physical pain, compassion is more difficult to activate for victims of the former. Tudor defines the pain experienced by the young Mussolini as "psychological suffering" (23), which differs from physical pain in its expressibility:

> The raw physical pain is expressed, at the primitive level, through inarticulate sounds and cries, and other physical movements…Psychological suffering, on the other hand, whilst it can find expression in such ways also, is usually more adequately expressed through speech…Many cases of psychological suffering are more difficult to recognize because their signs in the language the Other uses to express them are not so brute or blunt but require careful interpretation. (26)

Mussolini's childhood pain may be difficult to understand because the words used to describe it may require subtle explanation. Nevertheless, the verb "to burn" in the line "my soul still burns" is consistent with the Duce's "grandiose phraseology and bombastic speeches" (Falasca-Zamponi 178) to communicate an evil condition. The same phrasing is evident in a speech Mussolini gave to students after the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in which he decried the lack of support from the European countries. He describes the European politicians as "bloodthirsty…insatiable imperialist and bloody propagandists with their diabolical intrigues" (qtd. in Falasca-Zamponi 174). Indeed, "to burn" may recall the psychological pain and consequent humiliation of his condition.

Although Mussolini's descriptions of his early experiences of suffering are a bit melodramatic, he does reveal a capacity for emotion. In *Colloqui con Mussolini*, the Duce proposed that compassion, more than contempt, is necessary to rule:

> I asked, "To truly rule, is it necessary to have more contempt or humanity for men?" "The contrary is true," he vivaciously said. "It is necessary to have 99% humanity and 1% contempt." I was surprised, and in order to leave no doubt, I asked again, "Then, do men merit more compassion or contempt?" He looked at me in his mysterious way and said quietly, "More compassion, much more compassion." (qtd. in Ludwig 218)

This statement is unexpected because it follows Mussolini's stated indifference toward people: "I bear them, because I see in them only what they say. I do not let them reach my spirit. They do not move me more than this table or this paper. I remain completely alone among them" (qtd. in Ludwig 216). Therefore, although Mussolini may acknowledge the importance of compassion, he seems ill-equipped to manifest that emotion himself.

Studies of compassion consistently affirm the importance of sensitivity to another's condition. For instance, M. Nussbaum, in *Upheavals of Thought*, defines compassion as "a certain sort of thought about the well-being of others" (28). Tudor states that "compassion is the experience of one who witnesses the other's suffering" (11). Both definitions imply involvement on the part of the viewer. While M. Nussbaum believes the viewer has to be intellectually engaged with the suffering of another, Tudor assumes that observation is sufficient to trigger compassion.

In light of these observations, Mussolini's declaration that a ruler needs more compassion than contempt seems more a theoretical statement than a concrete element of his politics. Indeed, scholars have consistently noted the lack of a genuine compassionate link between the Duce and his people. Alexander De Grand, for instance, states that "Mussolini rose as a brilliant journalist, a man who manipulated the masses but who did not belong to them either in intellectual outlook or in sympathy" (17). Speaking in more general terms, Norberto Bobbio and Maurizio Viroli claim that "the Fascist mentality is the opposite of the one who values the idea of caring for one's community and fellow citizens" (52). However, although these observers note the absence of a "sincere" use of compassion in Fascist rhetoric, they do not deny that the regime used this emotion.

Despite possibly not feeling compassion toward his people, Mussolini recognizes its political importance. He often includes metaphors in his speeches depicting the Fascist nation as a family, a community of mutual feelings. He uses compassion both to address specific sections of Italian society and to achieve his political goals of instigating love for the Fatherland and arousing indigenous peoples in the Italian colonies. Mussolini also addresses compassionate feelings to specific groups considered worthy objects of compassion, evidenced in two of his speeches. The first is his speech to students after the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–36) in which he describes the European countries' desertion. The second is the speech following the first one that he directs toward women in Turin. In such cases, Mussolini's use of compassion illustrates the complex functions this emotion serves in his politics.

In the speech given in Turin on May 24, 1916, Mussolini commemorates the first anniversary of Italy's declaration of war and its entry into World War I. One may consider this address, which preceded the establishment of the Fascist dictatorship, a prototype of his communication to women. He begins by praising women, "Compassionate and noble women, compassionate to the pain of the war and noble in vigorously sustaining the proof of the Fatherland" (qtd. in Corradini 309), which he later addresses as mothers and sisters. But this rhetorical ploy is self-serving, as the following passage illustrates:

> But you who are listening to me, who have lost some dear person in the war, who thought to be the most unhappy during certain moments, you should know that I came to make you realize that you are incomparably the least unhappy among all, that a great comforter angel exists only for you and not for others. The cause, the cause for which your relatives closed their eyes to the light of the day, here is the comforter angel that others do not know. (qtd. in Corradini 310)

This passage exemplifies the cathartic value of the moment and the power of the orator's purportedly good news. To comfort the women and recognize their sufferance, Mussolini proposes a sort of Annunciation Day, using biblical imagery. As Carole C. Gallucci and Ellen Nerenberg note, "The Fascist discourse glorified the 'exemplary wife and mother,' a traditional female image closely tied with Catholic thought on women" (72.) Thus, Mussolini invokes compassion to enlighten women about their exclusive and privileged condition in the service of national ideals.

By manipulating women for political ends, Mussolini diverts the masses from the actual circumstances of the war and secludes them both from any concrete knowledge of the political situation and from participation in it. One can see support for this in the historic evidence of his promise of a female suffrage bill, a promise in which he uses compassion as a political tool. As Peter Neville notes, "Mussolini had made sympathetic noises about bringing in a suffrage bill (women did ultimately get the vote after the Second World War), but he reneged on his promise" (110). Then, the critic highlights Mussolini's apparent scornful duplicity: "His cynicism on the issue was then further demonstrated when, at the point where he conceded the vote to women in 1926, local elections were abolished in favor of a system of Fascist patronage" (110). Thus, Mussolini projects an apparently sympathetic understanding of women's rights and struggles in a coolly rational attempt to control their personal lives. In this case, compassion does not center on others' viewpoints, as emphasized by M. Nussbaum and Tudor, but on the viewer's perspective.

Demonstrating emotional participation toward specific people or conditions may have a further function in fascist rhetoric. We may view the apparent showing of compassion to women as maternal figures as a way of reinforcing their traditional role. Robin Pickering-Iazzi underlines the influence of the regime's communication on gender construction: "This component of the regime's communication apparatus can be read as highly self-conscious 'technology of gender' whose business was to reconstitute gender roles along the patriarchal model, in order to strengthen a sex-gender system undermined by the sociocultural and economic changes of modernity" (*Politics* 26). Hence, we may link compassion, activated in the service of a particular model of femininity, with disciplinary purposes because it requires women to behave in specific, approved, and restrictive ways imposed by the regime.

The use of compassion for political purposes is not uncommon. According to Kathleen Woodward, "Compassion, like so many of our other complex emotions, has a heady political life. Invoking compassion is an important means of trying to direct social, political, and economic resources in one's direction (indeed, compassion is one of those resources)" ("Calculating Compassion" 223). Thus, Mussolini's ostensibly compassionate attitude toward women reveals the Duce's calculated use of emotion to achieve social, political, or economic success.

In the same speech given in Turin, Mussolini clarifies the significance of the word *cause*, introduced in the beginning of his discourse, and appeals to the audience's love for the Fatherland and their compassion for the individuals who die for it:

> For this Italy, many people died, how many died during the year that ends today, how many died from every region of the country, every class, every religion…along the holy river and on the holy sea, on top of the pure snowy mountain peaks and on the glaciers accessible only by the miracle of valor. For this Italy, they died, and this is the cause for which they can live again: this is the cause in which those who cry for them must see them living again and feel an ineffable consolation. (qtd. in Corradini 311)

Mussolini evokes compassion by acknowledging those who died for the noble cause of their country. Through religious metaphors, he links his compassion to a sentiment of hope, expressed through the possibility of seeing those who died alive again in a sort of religious resurrection.

Although the function of compassion here seems liberating, helping people accept particular events, further examination reveals that depicting the dead as resurrected for the cause betrays Mussolini's interest in constructing a secular religion. According to Emilio Gentile, this rhetorical ploy has several effects:

> First, elicit support among the masses, assumed to respond more passionately to appeals to faith than to reason; second, to legitimize itself through the illustrious precedent of the Catholic Church; third, to rival and replace traditional religion; and finally, to create a sense of community that would transcend divisions, principally those of class and generation, but also, and interestingly, those between the living and the dead. (qtd. in Spackman 127)

This example shows the use of compassion not only to distinguish specific individuals who merit attention but also to advance the idea of nationhood. Compassion, then, is a useful tool to generate more response among the masses and ultimately to increase their subjugation to disciplinary control.

Mussolini's speech on May 15, 1936, to indigenous peoples in the Italian colonies illustrates a similar approach. Given at the end of the war in Ethiopia, the Duce uses compassion again to advance the notion of statehood: "Ethiopia is Italian! Rightly Italian, because with the gladius of Rome it is civilization that triumphs over barbarism, justice that triumphs

over cruel will, poor people's redemption that triumphs over millenary slavery" (qtd. in Falasca-Zamponi 176). He depicts the conquest as an act of compassion because the deprived Ethiopians will finally experience civilization and salvation. Thus, Mussolini triggers emotional participation to validate a political attack and cultural predominance, showing that the leader's words can veil his political views.

Neville, among other scholars, comments on the duplicitous nature of Mussolini's political rhetoric:

> But despite this rhetoric of compassion, the Duce resorted to extreme cruelty. Mussolini authorized the use of mustard gas against the Ethiopians despite the fact that this was banned under international law…Vittorio Mussolini was disappointed that the bombs he dropped caused such small explosions amongst the rickety huts of the Ethiopian tribesmen, when he expected to see the dramatic ones he was used to in Hollywood movies. (133)

Thus, ostensibly activating it to liberate, Mussolini triggers compassion to justify violent invasions of other countries and the subjugation of people to a way of life that requires "uniformity of behavior and limited individual freedom" (Lanzardo 89). Here, compassion loses its primary attribute of acknowledging the suffering of the unfortunate. Instead, far from reflecting consideration for others, the activation of this compassion is not for their benefit but for the imposition of disciplinary functions on them.

However, despite its cynical misuse under Fascism, compassion does have a legitimate role in politics. According to M. Nussbaum, "We must, therefore, rely on compassionate individuals to keep essential political insights alive and before our eyes. Political systems are human, and they are only good if they are alive in a human way" (*Upheavals* 404). For her, the human condition requires compassion to leaven and redeem politics. Its use as a political tool is antithetical to its proper character:

> If we produce an excellent social welfare system and yet dead, obedient, authority-focused citizens, that would be a failure no matter how well the system worked. It would not prove stable; nor would it accomplish the goal of political society, which is to enable citizens to search for the good life (both in and outside of the political sphere) in their own way. (*Upheavals* 404)

In contrast to Mussolini, Nussbaum includes compassionate and independent citizens as essential components of enlightened polity.

To elucidate the fascist idea of compassion and its uses in the regime, we must also refer to Mussolini's concept of pity. Although he clearly distinguishes between the two emotions, compassion is too close to pity for the dictator, an emotion he repudiates. Recalling his stay in Switzerland, he describes the deprivation he experienced there: "I knew hunger—stark hunger—in those days. But I never bent myself to ask for loans and I never tried to inspire the pity of those around me, nor of my own political companions" (qtd. in Milza 56). This assertion reflects an attempt to deny dominance to the pitier and subservience to the pitied. To pity another person seems connected here with superiority or arrogance and may reflect a hierarchical view of this emotion.

Pity, examined in light of Fascist discourse, creates one-upmanship. The young Mussolini, though perhaps inclined to offer compassion, refuses to accept compassionate responses to avoid the appearance of weakness or vulnerability. Thus, for Mussolini, although one may legitimately address people with compassion, being the object of compassion is not acceptable. Mussolini's idea of the victorious militant may explain this refusal to accept compassion. According to Mussolini, the successful Fascist cannot afford to be a prisoner of emotions; he must be a man of action: "Live dangerously. Indeed, I say to you like an old soldier: 'If I go forward, follow me. If I retreat, kill me. If I die, avenge me…I am the newest sort of Italian, one who is never thrown by events, but rather proceeds always straight down the road assigned by destiny'" (qtd. in Bosworth 218). Thus, Mussolini's speech acquires the tone of a slogan calling for action rather than of emotional introspection or compassionate participation, behavior typically associated with females, behavior which authors such as Carlo Bernari attempt to deconstruct.

Carlo Bernari

Mussolini's cultural apparatus not only recognized but also promoted neorealism, commonly viewed as an anti-Fascist aesthetic. Several neorealist artists were already operating during the Fascist period. Significantly, Ruth Ben-Ghiat argues that their previous Fascist collaboration generated amnesia in authors, such as Roberto Rossellini and Alberto Moravia. Pickering-Iazzi states, "In the thirties, such writers as Carlo Bernari…rallied for a contemporary Italian realist aesthetic, designed specifically to serve populism, collectivism and social change—ideals constituting the radical face of Mussolini's Fascist revolution" (*Politics* 135).

Although he authored several works such as *Era l'anno del sole quieto*, *Le radiose giornate*, *Per cause imprecisate*, and *Speranzella*, Bernari's *Tre operai* (*Three Factory Workers*) is significant to our examination of the role of compassion in Fascist discourse for three reasons. First, within the heterogeneous artistic field of the interwar years, which boasted avant-garde futurism, hermeticism, regionalism, and magical realism, Bernari writes this novel in the emergent neorealist mode. It thus offers a valuable frame for examining the relationship between neorealist aesthetics produced during the regime and in its aftermath. Second, and more important, Bernari crafts significant representations of compassion, thereby enabling an examination of different purposes associated with its initiation as social respect or rejection. Third, in this novel, Bernari portrays the discouragements, disappointments, and hopes for the transformation of society. Through the depiction of specific characters, Bernari emphasizes the humiliations, sufferance, and despair of a particular time.[3] The sociohistorical background is, in fact, fundamental to understanding the story. In Eugenio Ragni's two criticisms of Bernari, he states that prewar disorder, World War I, the occupation of the factories, dissent inside the Socialist party, and the peculiar situation of the working class in Naples around 1920 shape the story and its characters.

Three Factory Workers is the tragic story of three young people (Teodoro, Anna, and Marco) who move to Naples and subsequently to Rome, Taranto, and Crotone to find work and to fulfill their dreams but who are continually disappointed and overcome by the system. In this work, Bernari denies the proclaimed values of honesty and social justice. He proposes instead that only through revolution is it possible to reach equilibrium in the individual and collective life.

In opposition to Mussolini's use of emotional participation, Bernari always invokes compassion in this work toward individuals who are very close to the protagonists. Bernari's images of compassion invite consideration of significant topics, including the protagonists' dissatisfaction and the construction of better connections among people. He also presents the possibility of the misfortune of workers, new models of behavior, and the influence of society on individuals' character formation.

Bernari offers an important example in the character of Teodoro, who leaves his parents to look for a better position in life. After several misadventures, he finds work in a factory producing preserved food. His initial experience at work proves difficult because he lies about his skills and knowledge in that field: "The first half day was long and painful. The

workmen were ironically looking at him and exchanged opinions with each other about the new arrival. Teodoro was blushing at any glance, and his need to confide in someone was rising each minute" (*Tre operai* 157). Embarrassed and discouraged by the impossibility of being what he desires to be, Teodoro needs understanding and compassion from someone. Thus, Teodoro illustrates what Tudor calls "frustrated desire," which he defines as "one form of subjective hurt [that] is the condition of being aware of having a desire not met, the condition of being frustrated or dissatisfied" (18). Teodoro illustrates this dynamic in a conversation with another worker during the pause for breakfast, in which he expresses his dissatisfaction and confesses he has never done that job:

> When he left for breakfast, Teodoro seized his companion by the arm and said to him, "I have to confess something to you: I know how to do nothing. I have never done this job."
>
> "I can see!" the other replied. "I immediately realized that."
>
> "From what?"
>
> "We can see! We can immediately understand when a person doesn't know how to do a job."
>
> "Do you think they will recognize that?"
>
> "Don't worry. In three days we can learn this stupid skill. Stay always close to me and don't think about it." (158)

Perfectly aware of Teodoro's struggle, the man demonstrates understanding of the situation and appeals to compassion when he suggests a concrete resolution. In this context, compassion becomes a sophisticated way of reasoning and a path to greater awareness.

Tudor's study is beneficial for elucidating the significance of different situations. He argues that "through such critical understanding of human desires we can come to recognize some desires as being so important or central to a human life that we might call them (or, rather their objects) needs, or, at least, things that it is in our interest to desire. Others we might regard as more 'arbitrary' or 'fancy' desires" (21). In light of this, Bernari proposes compassion as a response to dissatisfaction due to requests that need to be recognized. Thus, compassion becomes a way to distinguish between desires and needs and may, therefore, generate social recognition or rejection.

Teodoro's wish to construct a different future and his frustration over the limitations of his background illustrate further the connection between compassion and disappointment: "A family of workmen can only produce workmen" (Bernari, *Tre operai* 36). Bernari connects Teodoro's sadness with a general compassionate response toward the people close to him:

> His life seemed to be empty without any purpose…He would have been satisfied with a kind of "happiness" not only for "himself" as in the song "I would like to be happy," but a general "happiness" for everybody, for Anna, for Maria, for Marco, for his father. Also for his father who doesn't know he is unhappy. Then, it was better to be alone. This is what he felt. By himself he could do better and more. (27)

Teodoro's dissatisfaction allows reflection on the nature of his desires. He longs for better conditions not only for himself but also for his friends and his father, who cannot even fight for improvement because he does not recognize his desolation. Because of his emotional participation, Teodoro realizes that to improve their conditions, it is easier to operate by himself.

This example illustrates how compassion can function independently, without the sufferer's permission. Blum, after distinguishing between the circumstances that make an individual worthy of compassion and those conditions considered appropriate by the majority, clarifies this truth:

> It is therefore necessary to distinguish the conditions for someone being an appropriate object of compassion from the conditions for compassion being the appropriate dominant response to the person…It is not necessary that the object of compassion be aware of his condition; he might be deceiving himself with regard to it. Nor in the case of the happy blind man, need he think of it as a substantial affliction, even if he is aware of it as a deficiency. (508)

Thus, Blum makes clear that the sufferer's ability to receive compassion does not depend on self-awareness. In the example of Teodoro, his father's unconscious discontent does not prevent the son from helping him. On the contrary, Teodoro's compassionate response, which highlights his father's unawareness, may underscore the general sense of acceptance that the young man wants to challenge. Compassion then becomes an instrument that reflects not only an inner state but also the outside world.

This purpose is further illustrated when Teodoro, after a long time, meets Maria and Anna again. Maria, who lives with a lawyer, immediately welcomes Teodoro and invites him to join the others in the dining room. She then invites him to recount his adventures, which Teodoro has no desire to do. Coming closer to Anna, he expresses his embarrassment: "'I really don't want to talk. What do these people think?' How little is Anna's ear, it is veined like filigree, almost blue. That ear bends down, expressing approval, it says 'yes, yes, you are right' and every time it bends down it appears to break into pieces" (Bernari, *Tre operai* 161). Rather than sharing his experiences with strangers, Teodoro opens up with Anna, who in turn is willing to understand him emotionally. Bernari suggests all of this very subtly through the description of her little ear, which may metaphorically imply the difficulty of compassionate listening.

Anna's initially passive response develops into a more energetic reaction when, after describing her own misfortune, she reveals her reluctance to communicate with the other people, reflecting her frustration and disappointment with them:

> She expresses with a sigh all her anxiety and then as a bitter comment she says: "However, when I see people who waste money in silliness I become mad. How can it be possible that there are people who don't even have bread and others who became rich after the war can allow themselves any luxury?" And she glances at Maria's lover who is laughing at a young man's jokes. (Bernari, *Tre operai* 162)

Anna's preliminary bending over Teodoro becomes an engaged announcement that reveals the young woman's dissatisfaction and frustration toward the social conditions. Her response also discloses a double feature of compassion: its languid and dynamic components. Staines elaborates on this twofold element of emotions:

> Passions are both passive and active: they are caused by some stimulus, yet themselves cause bodily motions, thoughts, volitions, and even other passions…Deliberation is an act of will that is driven by both passion and reason, and persuasion thus involves both passion and reason; reason by itself, in the opinion of many writers, is unpersuasive. (98)

For Staines, emotions can be inert or energetic, produced by specific incentives, and capable of generating other emotions in turn. Emotions work with reason to convince. Clarifying this relationship, he states, "We

need to consider reason and passion not as antithetical but as part of a single practice" (93). In the previous example, Anna's moderate compassionate participation generates a more energetic involvement that reveals her frustration. With this increased compassionate involvement, Bernari draws increased attention to the protagonists' dissatisfaction and conveys the power of compassion to induce social change.

In other instances, Bernari offers examples to depict compassion as a means to interpersonal connection, diverging from the model proposed by Mussolini. Once such example follows the encounter between Elisa and Teodoro:

> They go into the other room while he keeps saying, " …At least, you could have let me know."
>
> "Instead I wanted to surprise you."
>
> "What kind of surprise! Now it's late, here there is nothing to eat and the restaurants are closed."
>
> "Don't worry. I'm fine. I have already eaten." She is taking out her coat and is sitting on the bed. Teodoro is sitting close to her regretting what he just said. Now he feels a great desire to tell his misfortune, then have her caress him; have her saying that after all…after all I am sorry, have her saying that I am not a loser and that I could have more luck. But indeed Teodoro has something in his heart that makes him sad and longing for a confession. (*Tre operai* 129)

After the first moment of discomfort due to Elisa's unexpected arrival, Teodoro, unhappy from his previous adversity, longs not for a reply but for compassionate understanding expressed with a physical gesture, a "caress." Compassion, then, need not be verbally expressed; a loving touch is enough to communicate it.

However, emotion is also not confined to the physical realm. Although many scholars underline the common, predominant dichotomy that distinguishes Western traditions of identifying emotions with the physical and thoughts with the mental, Lutz specifies another meaning attributed to the physicality of emotions:

> Emotions are associated, in their positive but secondary sense of the engaged, with the spiritual and the sublime. To have feelings is to be truly human, which is to say, transcendent of the purely physical. Whereas emotions stand in close relationship to the instinctual when contrasted with cognition,

> they emerge as opposed to the animalistic and physical connotations of the instinctual when contrasted with what can be called the spiritual death of the estrangement. (66)

Through physical gestures, then, people share their humanity. This contrasts with the separation or detachment imposed by a lack of motion and, therefore, a lack of emotion. Bernari's emphasis on the communicative gesture may thus be an implicit condemnation of the regime, which imposed on men a lack of emotional involvement. Against Mussolini's intention to free men from emotions—expressed in the slogan, "The successful Fascist cannot afford to be a prisoner of emotions"—Bernari proposes an innovative man who needs and longs for them.

In the story of Teodoro, Anna, and Marco, Bernari illustrates other manifestations of compassion that suggest new models of behavior. For instance, Anna, once in love with Teodoro, helps him several times with her affection and support. However, viewing her life with Marco as the only concrete way to cure her child, she decides to live with him. (Unfortunately, the child will soon die and Anna will become very sick.) When Teodoro learns of this, he is initially jealous but then decides to assist Anna without letting her know. The narrator asks, "The desire to help her, because once he was helped by her, is an imperative; but how could he find a way to offer some money?" (Bernari, *Tre operai* 171). Teodoro proposes this solution: "Let's rent a little house together on the beach close by. The three of us will live there so Anna, taking care of herself as much as possible, could have a healthy life, be in the sun, and on the beach" (171). Anna and Marco, surprised by their friends' proposition, are concerned about the economics of it, feeling that Marco cannot afford to pay; but Teodoro reassures them: "Don't worry about it: for now I can cover it with my savings. You will pay me back as soon as you can." (171)

Teodoro, grateful for the help he received previously, displays mature feelings of compassion toward his friends that are directly connected to his memory and demonstrated through his moral and economic support. According to Daniel Putnam, "When I empathize with someone else in pain, I am not drawing an inference from my isolated experience to the possible experience of the other person. I am remembering what 'pain' is like and performing the imaginative counterfactual" (37). The connection between compassionate feelings and the appeal to memory accentuates the complexity of this kind of reasoning. Putnam notes that it is possible through memory to store, retain, and subsequently recall an experience of

anguish. In contrast to Mussolini's model of compassion, here, the emotion produces a concrete connection with other people and is perceived as the result of a cognitive experience devoted to another's welfare.

The demonstration of compassion toward Anna implies an acceptance of a different model of femininity than the one proclaimed by the Fascist regime. Here, Bernari suggests the right of women to act independently against the scheme the regime has imposed on them. Annamaria Galoppini accentuates this position:

> Fascism did with women what it would then do with the Jews: it gave them a so specific social identity that diversified them, organized their consensus, and then enclosed them in the ghetto…Fascism revealed even in this case its sad originality: because of the old idea of women's weakness that was used for political power and organization of consensus, and because of the traditional antifeminism that none of its supporters had thought before to call it progressive, it claimed now, through the theoreticians and propagandists of the regime, to call itself "revolutionary" and almost "feminist." (129)

Here, Fascist political designs are presented as antifeminist, self-interested, power-oriented, and illogical because they segregate women from the rest of society in the name of their improvement. Anna's situation may be a reaction toward this manipulated way of interacting with women, thus evoking more respect and independence. It may also reflect the changes of modernity, highlighted by her sharing an apartment with her sister, moving autonomously to different places in search of a more independent and satisfying way of life, and living with two men and accepting affection from both. Showing compassion to Anna may be a way of liberating Teodoro from the old obligations that Fascism imposed on the relationship between men and women.

Bernari's model of compassion as a rational element that highlights human bonds and unconventional behaviors is further revealed in the relationship between Marco and Teodoro. When, after a long time, the two friends meet again, Marco tells Teodoro that, after three months of trouble, he will finally meet an important person in Taranto who will find him a job. Teodoro is visibly upset by the news. Marco perceives his discomfort and responds compassionately:

> "But if you didn't find anything good, why don't you come with me?"
>
> "Wouldn't that be great!" Teodoro answers, looking down.

> "Give me your hand!" Marco says energetically: "I swear to God, if it is good for me, it must be good for you too!"
>
> "What do you mean?" Teodoro timidly replies: "You act for yourself. It is a card that we will play, and we don't know if it is going to work. It can also be wrong, and it's more difficult with two of us. I worsen your situation."
>
> "Who cares if it doesn't work, we will come back!" (71)

Here, Marco perceives his friend's dismay over a lack of opportunity and immediately acts to help him. Teodoro, knowing the difficulties he has had finding a new job, recognizes the significance of Marco's compassionate and unconventional behavior and warns him that his departure may cause him trouble. Marco's intervention demonstrates his altruism, showing that he is acting according to a system regulated by emotions, as he expresses compassion instead of a self-centered attitude.

Several scholars have analyzed models of behavior regulated by emotionality in attempts to understand their associated implications. Keith Opdahl confirms the existence of an emotional scheme of conduct with intrinsic values: "I demonstrate that emotion is not only expressive, giving voice to our immediate feelings, but depictive and perhaps even symbolic, as it stands for something other than itself" (11). According to Opdahl, emotions may explicitly express our feelings as well as implicitly convey other intentions.

Raymond Williams also underscores the logical component of emotions:

> We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought. We are then defining these elements as "structure"; as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. (132)

Here, emotions, interrelated with reflection, are considered an array of connected and unconnected elements that express awareness and interaction. Staines affirms this connection between emotions and reason: "This concept and emotion as part of the full experience of thought and communication very much reflects early modern notions of how reason and passion work together in deliberations both private and public" (93). Eugenio Borgna convincingly confirms this unity (24).

Marco's emotional involvement originates in his cognitive evaluation of his friend's dissatisfaction. His behavior simplifies Opdahl's and Williams's concept of emotions because he is probably moved by a compassionate

understanding of his friend, who is unable to find an appropriate job. His compassionate attitude toward Teodoro permeates Marco's thoughts about his friend, a legitimate object of compassion because Teodoro's struggle to find the right employment is perceived as a legitimate and beneficial thing to achieve. Compassion here illustrates Marco's other-directedness, validates Teodoro's efforts, and dramatizes the social crisis.

Bernari's work often depicts scenes of compassion triggered by individual dramas that illustrate the misfortunes of larger groups. In the following passage, Bernari describes the strenuous conditions facing factory workers in the town of Crotone:

> The factory workers from Crotone are almost all sick with malaria. Their salary is constantly kept at a low level because of the great request for work on the part of those who, not finding sufficient means for their sustenance in the country, go down to the plain and knock on the factory door. The ones most sick with malaria or those who cannot pay for a house, adapted themselves to living with their families in certain huts made of wood and sheet metal built on the beach. (*Tre operai*, 99)

Here, Bernari not only enumerates a list of adversities confronting Crotone workers but also denounces the lack of any legal organization to help them. Through these descriptions of the workers' health conditions and the injustice of low salaries, he demonstrates his compassionate attempt to condemn their upsetting social situation.

According to Ragni, Bernari's work is an "examination of relationships between individual and society and individual and system, recognized and studied not as meta historic entity, but as fundamental elements, microcosm and macrocosm of a historic reality changeably and diversely articulated in time, but always perceived as a tension between opposite forces" ("Carlo" 654). The individuals in the story are seen not as standing outside time but as being squarely within the particular historical circumstances against which they struggle. Bernari's compassionate approach toward them dramatizes their isolation from the people in power who organize their factory. It also reveals the lack of respect with which the workers are treated, illustrated by their ignorance of what they were actually producing:

> The men, not yet prepared for their work, were wondering about that gray and brown substance that they were extracting from their land: they were not able to realize what the purpose of the substance was…They thought

> they were doing a useless job, and thought those factories would go bankrupt. But soon they realized that that gray and brown substance would transform itself into metals in one of the two factories. (*Tre operai* 100)

The author's depiction of the harsh circumstances workers experience also provides insight into their actions: The men are completely disregarded as people, considered only in light of their physical strength. They lack not only skills but also any awareness of the economic possibilities of the factories. They appear utterly unable to improve their circumstances.

Here, Bernari uses compassion as a political device to underscore the social circumstances the workers face. By creating an apparently hopeless situation, he invites his reader to understand the men's condition compassionately and to reflect politically on that historic moment. He also confirms Ragni's observations: "[In] Carlo Bernari, the novel becomes…the vehicle of a political discourse, of a precise, vaguely articulated renouncement in a fearful atmosphere of sadness for the defeat of antifascism and mass of workers" ("Carlo" 651).

Bernari also shows the significance of social circumstances in shaping the ways individuals express emotions. Anna's tragic death is an illustration of this dynamic. Marco and Teodoro go to the Chamber of Commerce to arrange an occupation of the firms near Naples. Amid the crowd and the workers, Teodoro becomes involved in a scuffle. Marco, however, decides to go home. Meanwhile, Anna, who suffers from a heart condition, dies alone in the house the three friends share. Upon his return, Marco finds Anna's body. The loneliness of Marco's terrible discovery is broken by the noise of the farm manager's shoes:

> He says something incomprehensible like: "Don't despair" or "don't cry." But it is not important since he doesn't cry, he doesn't despair. He waits for the farm manager to go away again in order to look better at the bed on which Anna appears with her legs dangling down and her closed fist against her lips. (*Tre operai* 205)

Although the farm manager expresses compassion, it is meaningless to Marco, who simply wishes to be alone to examine the circumstances of Anna's death. Thus, compassion, even when sincerely offered, does not always alleviate the pain of the sufferer.

Blum clarifies this contingency and expands the possibility of compassion, stating that although it "is not always linked so directly to the

prompting of beneficial actions…compassion is also appropriate in situations in which nothing whatever can be done to alleviate the affliction, as for instance when someone is suffering from incurable blindness or painful terminal cancer" (515). Thus, compassion is appropriate even when it is not efficacious, when afflictions cannot be overcome, or when, as in Marco's case, a person needs to suffer through something alone.

Marco's response to the farm manager may suggest that he does not want to be seen as an object of compassion. In this regard, Marco behaves as a typical unemotional male, his behavior a clear reflection of what society expects from him. In commenting on the interplay between the individual and the social, Williams argues, "Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent , connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies" (132). He underscores the social component of emotions, confirming the importance of these undervalued qualities in opposition to the common definition of them as private experiences. Thus, Marco's response to the farm manager illustrates the power of socially constructed expectations.

Conclusions

This brief investigation of Mussolini's and Bernari's models of compassion reveals the rhetoric of compassion as a significant discursive formation in Fascist cultural politics that performed complex libratory and disciplinary functions. In his speeches, Mussolini addresses specific sectors of the Italian populace, such as women, as being objects worthy of compassion because of their sacrifices for the nation. He also conceives compassion as an important instrument for inflicting punitive restrictions. In these examples, the significance of compassion, the emotional response to individuals' suffering, seems to be sacrificed for political ends, "to regenerate the power of the nation and lead it to greatness and power" (Gentile 13). In this context, compassion functions as a tool of a totalitarian state:

> Totalitarianism was implicit in the original nature of the Fascist party, as it was originated in the years of Fascist action squads. From that, Fascism obtained the original and definite character of a militia party. With this term I intend to define not only a party that possesses an armed force, but a party that bases its identity, mentality, ideology, and life style on the militarization of politics. (Gentile 13)

The main ideological principle of totalitarianism is the militarization of its politics. In this light, Mussolini bases his apparent compassion more on power and supremacy than on attention to the people's suffering. Thus, compassion "serves the interest of an unfree ideology: the bonds of compassion become the bond of slavery" (Staines 110).

In contrast, Bernari dramatizes compassion as a way to enhance relationships, a practice influenced by society that liberates individuals from restrictive modes of behavior. Through the compassion offered to Anna, Bernari suggests innovative ways of relating to one another, highlighting and denouncing the desolation of the political conditions in which his characters live. At the same time, Bernari's work reflects the spirit of neorealism by drawing attention to the despair and hopelessness that highlighted daily life during that period (Di Nolfo 87), situations that needed to be confronted and condemned (Re, "Neorealist Narrative" 106), and by proposing alternative models of behavior. Thus, we may view the compassionate responses offered to Anna as challenging reactions that threaten established female models, evoke reflection, and suggest future transformation.

Although such examples are hardly exhaustive, they pose significant issues for examining compassion, its functions in neorealist texts, and new perspectives on a precise historic moment in Italy. As subsequent chapters will show, neorealist authors and filmmakers often create a binary opposition between Fascism as rhetoric, inauthenticity, and falsehood and postwar Italian national identity as authentic and truly compassionate. In our subsequent examination of the significance of such declarations, we will attempt to answer questions such as, how do postwar neorealist authors and filmmakers rehabilitate compassion for their own purposes? How is compassion used to accentuate the new aesthetic and/or approach to life in general?

Notes

1. To clarify the historiographical debate on the consideration of Fascism as a regime or a movement, see Stanislao G. Pugliese, "Introduction: A Past That Will Not Pass: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and the Resistance in Italy" (6).
2. Moreover, if we consider, as Marcello Sensini suggests, that through communication people perform many of their most important functions, it follows that communication is at the heart of what it means to be human.

3. Lucia Re, in "Neorealist Narrative: Experience and Experiment," argues that even though *Three Factory Workers* can be considered one of the first examples of neorealist literature, it lacks some significant elements, specifically "the notion that human events and actions are consequential, and therefore can and do make a difference historically and politically. This constructive and positive political dimension of plot is precisely what is lacking in most Fascist-era novels such as Moravia's *Gli Indifferenti* and Bernari's *Tre operai*, whose plots configure patterns of meaninglessness, endless repetition, *impasse*, indifference, and angst" (107).

PART III

Charting Landscapes of Compassion During World War II

In the next few chapters, we focus on four different models of neorealist texts, Natalia Ginzburg's autobiography *Family Sayings*, Alberto Moravia's *Two Women*, Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (*Agnese Goes to Die*), and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*. These works focus on different writers' depictions of Italian women's participation in the war.

The works by Natalia Ginzburg and Alberto Moravia propose unexpected usage of compassion since this emotion is often denied to individuals belonging to the same family or middle class. Therefore, these works offer different possibilities for individuals to create a sense of community that might interfere with previous models proposed by the Fascist culture. Ginzburg and Moravia display paradigmatic features of the historical context neorealists thematize as they depict the socioeconomic and political conditions of the time, which create environments of vulnerability. Food shortages, bombardments, and acts of Fascist and Nazi brutality threaten everyday survival. These works also raise interesting questions concerning the representations of compassion in relation to gender, race, class, and geographic location. Because these features have prominent roles in the formation of social subjects and their associations with family and community, in this chapter, we will consider the images of compassion in both traditional and nontraditional family configurations, in relation to the urban landscapes of Torino and Rome, and in relation to the rural country side of Abruzzo and Ciociaria.

Ginzburg and Moravia both focus on urban and rural locations in their works. The industrialized northern city of Turin, Italy, was a hotbed of anti-Fascist activism in the twenties and thirties. Ginzburg's depictions of Turin and of the rural southern community in Abruzzo where she spent several months of her life enable us to see how compassion figures in both the city and the countryside, inviting or prohibiting its textual expression. For Ginzburg, urban and rural locations offer equal opportunities for the expression of compassion. In *Two Women*, Moravia focuses first on Rome, a powerful symbol of spiritual and civil power, as it is occupied by German Nazis and then on the surrounding rural hills of Ciociaria, a haven for those escaping the impossible conditions of the Eternal City. However, Moravia suggests an association of compassion with the countryside as she contrasts these two locations, thus idealizing rural life, which may reproduce images crafted and disseminated by Fascist ideology.

In terms of family, although one may assume that family members sharing other emotional ties will express compassion more easily, obstacles also exist that render this emotion difficult to achieve even in familial environments. The different depictions of family authored by Ginzburg and Moravia raise several important lines of inquiry. During the early years of Fascism in Italy, members of Ginzburg's family were objects of surveillance because of their Jewish origins and anti-Fascist activities. As Ginzburg recalls events from those early years in Turin to the final days of World War II, her remembrances of her middle-class childhood highlight the tribal sense of belonging, an insular fortress within the metropolis, created by the specific way in which her family used language (i.e., idiosyncrasies, word play, expressions).

In this work, we see Ginzburg's father attempting to protect the border between family and the threats posed by the city, with its large population and multiplicity of perspectives. Thus, her father views outsiders with fear and suspicion, emotions that appear to work against the possibility of compassion. In another episode, Ginzburg's discovery of her husband's death after being tortured by the Nazis in a Roman prison provides another important example of the effect of language. Ginzburg informs us in the spare, unsentimental prose typical of neorealism that once in Rome with her husband, she thinks she will be happy again. However, Leone, who is running a secret newspaper, is arrested 20 days after her arrival. She never sees him again.

Moravia focuses on a less traditional family, a lower-middle-class widow and her daughter, and their escape from Rome to the relative safety of

a rural community in the mountains by Ciociaria. The depiction of the physical and social space suggests permeable boundaries between family and the community, the latter of which is formed by peasants, homeless families from Rome, and anti-Fascist activists in hiding. Although the widow Cesira expresses sympathy toward others who face tragic losses, she appears unable to do so toward her own daughter, Rosetta.

Moravia's depictions of Cesira and Rosetta are significant, in part, for the challenges they pose to Nussbaum's model of compassion. According to Nussbaum, three cognitive elements are required for compassion: "the judgment of size (a serious bad event has befallen someone); the judgment of nondesert (this person did not bring the suffering on himself or herself); and the eudaimonistic judgment (this person, or creature, is a significant element in my scheme of goals and projects, an end whose good is to be promoted)."[1] These three components appear in Moravia's tragic scenario involving mother and daughter. However, Moravia's novel highlights factors that work against the possibility of compassionate responses. After both mother and daughter are raped by a group of Moroccan soldiers, Rosetta has sexual relations with all the men she meets. The young woman's promiscuous behavior breaks moral taboos and prevents Cesira from exhibiting compassion toward her daughter. His text demonstrates the intricacy of neorealist representations of compassion and shows the difficulties of finding a balance between emotion and ethical values once one experiences an act of violence and injustice. Indeed, Moravia suggests that conformity with middle-class values, a tendency neorealist artists associate with the building of Fascist consent, sacrifices compassion.

Authors' representations of Italian women's involvement in the fierce partisan struggle against German Nazis and Italian Fascists during World War II complicate the phenomenology of compassion. Two of the clearest examples of these representations are Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*. These works present compassion as a tool to create an idealized woman figure that shows unconventional ways to resist Fascist and Nazi occupation. Furthermore, they express appreciation for certain groups of people and disapproval for others according to their offer or denial of compassion. Although the protagonists in *Two Women* and *Family Sayings* bear the consequences of the oppressive occupation and try in different ways to protect themselves from its burdens, the protagonists in Viganó's novel and Rossellini's film participate in the Resistance as political agents resolutely involved in fighting the oppressors. Consequently, these politically engaged characters

negotiate gender roles and the attendant expectations for emotional expression in different ways, leading us to ponder several questions: In what ways do the female characters perpetuate the older patriarchal ideology of female nurturance? In what ways is this challenged or reformulated? How does compassion for these characters or their exhibition of compassion contribute to the idealization of the female characters?

We also attempt to distinguish situations in which compassion is appropriate and inappropriate and to suggest reasons authors represent some groups more compassionately than others. Because the works by both Viganò and Rossellini focus on the fight to liberate Italians from oppression and on the vulnerable conditions they experience, we draw upon Jaggar's concept of "outlaw emotions," emotional responses of oppressed people in opposition to those who dominate; Whitebrook's concept of personal suffering, which, she argues, facilitates compassionate responses when individuals are perceived as defenseless creatures; and the works of Miriam Mafai, Alan Perry, and JoAnn Cannon to understand the historical conditions and involvement of women during World War II.

Exemplifying the neorealist tendency to craft artistic works from actual historical events, Viganò based *L'Agnese va a morire* on the life of an Italian woman who, like thousands of other women in Italy, joined the partisan movement, assisting with reconnaissance, communications, and weapons transport. Agnese is a humble older woman living in the rural region of Emilia Romagna. Viganò first presents her as a potential object of compassion when the Germans capture and kill her husband, Palita, an anti-Fascist. Subsequently, she becomes a subject who expresses compassion for others. When the partisans ask her to join their struggle, Agnese develops both a personal and a political awareness of their sacrifices and of the things they are fighting for: freedom and justice. She gives them her life savings and joins their ranks, ultimately becoming a sacred symbol of the Resistance when she is shot four times in the face by a German soldier and left to die in a pool of blood.

Rossellini's film *Rome, Open City* represents the collaboration of Catholics and Communists fighting the Nazi and Fascist forces occupying Rome shortly before the American army liberates the city. Although this film is a canonical text of cinematic neorealism, many critics emphasize its melodramatic components, the most notable being the clear definition of the characters as either good or evil according to the strength of their commitment to freedom and justice. However, of greater interest are the way in which compassion figures in the social and political system of signification

and the ways in which Rossellini uses it to underline a specific image of woman as seen through his portrayals of Pina and Marina. Rossellini creates several scenes that highlight the compassion of Pina, an unwed, pregnant, working-class woman engaged in the partisan struggle. However, he represents Marina, who escapes existential anguish through drugs she receives in exchange for sexual favors given to a female Nazi official, as hedonistic and unworthy of compassion. In fact, some critics suggest that Rossellini deploys homosexuality to criminalize the German Nazi characters. In this light, neorealist discourse reproduces terms of Fascist debate and appears less inclusive and less compassionate than is generally assumed.

Note

1. Nussbaum, 2001, p. 321.

CHAPTER 11

Compassion in Ginzburg's Depictions of Family Relationships

Like several other Italian neorealist writers, Ginzburg devotes considerable attention to social, economic, and political problems and to their emotional components.[1] She also participates in the neorealist attempt to redefine a national and cultural identity in terms that Fascism cannot corrupt. The subject of her book *Family Sayings* is the distinctive situation of her own anti-Fascist family. In analyzing this work, several scholars have emphasized the relationships among the family members and between the family members and the outside community. However, although they refer to the importance of the emotional components within these situations, these scholars do not examine them critically and systematically.

Luciano Parisi, for instance, notes Ginzburg's use of family and community to explore interactions between individuals:

> The seven books written between 1942 and 1963 tell the stories of rich dense groups of people and recreate the complex atmosphere experienced by those who make them. The families in *La strada che va in città*, *Valentino*, *Tutti i nostri ieri*, *Le voci della sera*, are lacerated by animosity and or deep antipathy…Also in *Lessico Famigliare*, that has a more serene atmosphere, Natalia's family is divided by resentments between parents and children and brothers and sisters. (107)

Parisi notes the value of investigating Ginzburg's work through the feelings and conflicts that characterize the relationships among the individuals she portrays and of the community that supports them: "Everybody

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belongs to a community, and that belonging gives a sense of comfort: we can foresee a time where families and villages will disappear, replaced by anonymous cities" (114). The belief that all individuals belong to a bigger group offers confidence and contrasts with the pessimism that otherwise characterizes urban existence.

Corinna Del Greco Lobner's examination of *Family Sayings* offers an analysis of the family through their vocabulary. She argues that the family's specific lexicon functions in various ways, one of which is to separate the family from the rest of the community: "Ginzburg conveys voices from the family group through codes that isolate the family lexicon from conventional speech and evoke with delicious immediacy past memories awaiting rediscovery" (35). In perfect accord with the neorealist aesthetic that stresses the importance of dialects in opposition to conventional Italian language, Del Greco Lobner attributes a dual function to Ginzburg's lexicon: the family members' use of specific expressions enables them to recall past events and, therefore, to connect to each other. At the same time, this system of communication inhibits their interactions with individuals outside the family.

Unlike Del Greco Lobner, Elena Clementelli does not emphasize the isolation of the Ginzburg family. She argues that by constantly inserting new characters in the story, Ginzburg depicts a community rich in a variety of human relations. Clementelli also clearly specifies the role of linguistic elements in creating connections to others:

> The vast terminology, that the time and habit convey to form the "family sayings," at the beginning, is part of the paternal and maternal vocabulary which is constantly enriched by "neologisms" drawn from relationships with friends and acquaintances, and from the more and more massive contributions from all the other members of the family. (82)

Therefore, if the lexicon initially appears restrictive because it is filtered by the parents' points of view, it later reveals its openness to outside influences and shows the family's attention to external perspectives. Clementelli further claims that the autobiographical events narrated by Ginzburg are often strongly associated with feelings, such as humor, that show her desire for emotional connection with her family members (80).

Joseph Francese has recently emphasized Ginzburg's dispassionate portrayal of her characters and her nonsentimental way of writing about herself in the first part of *Family Sayings*. He posits that the writer's

detachment from her family is a consequence of "apparent anxiety" (66) motivated by shame and internal conflict, her desire to keep "secret what she prefers to keep hidden" (76). On the other hand, Mirna Cicioni sees this "absence for the narrated self" as "parallel to the absence of Christian traditions. The lack of *appartenenze* ['emotions and desires'] becomes a lack of identity" (366).

These critical analyses suggest that the family is a complex entity: sometimes an isolated clan; sometimes a more open association; sometimes characterized by disagreement, humor, or affection. As such, these responses to Ginzburg's text confirm the importance of analyzing compassion or the emotional involvement that develops within families or small groups living in urban and rural environments. They also suggest that a sense of integration within the small family unit or extended community significantly affects compassionate responses.

Ginzburg sometimes chooses to silence compassionate responses regarding both the minutiae of daily life and the overarching political circumstances, challenging the hierarchical value commonly placed in the political sphere on the practices of daily life. Therefore, the text suggests that all displays of compassion are significant, regardless of when or where they occur.

Thus, an exploration of the significant changes that can occur in communities as a result of dramatic circumstances, such as Fascist authority, the Nazi Occupation, and World War II, is warranted. To explore the transformations those events produce in human relationships, we must consider the emotional mutations that characterize individuals' perceptions of other people's suffering. Specifically, we must examine Ginzburg's use of compassion to resist Fascist culture and to criticize gendered emotional roles, which she rejects, to offer new possibilities of expression for both men and women.

Ginzburg's Compassion Within the Family

Ginzburg critiques gender roles through her representations of moments when compassion shown among her characters is either expressed or absent. She depicts her father as a traditional male who does not demonstrate compassion because he cannot imaginatively identify with others. On the other hand, she presents Uncle Cesare and Adriano as more innovative male figures, offering two other models of compassion for men who, like some women figures, express their emotional understanding of others' suffering.

Although we may suppose that compassionate responses prevail among members of the same family, Ginzburg describes situations that prevent the expression of this emotion. One of her early memories highlights her father's uncompassionate interventions:

> When I was a little girl at home, if one of us children upset a glass at table or dropped a knife, my father's voice bellowed: "Don't lick the plates, don't make messes and slops." Messes and slops were things my father could not stand, any more than he could stand modern pictures. "You people don't know how to sit at table. You are not people one could take out anywhere. You make such a mess." (9)

By beginning her book with her father's uncompassionate comments, Ginzburg implicitly acknowledges the severity with which adults often impose their rules on children without first setting an example. Such detached imposition of a specific behavior without first providing a demonstration of the desired behavior has been the subject of strong criticism by many educational theorists, including Maria Montessori.[2] In *The Montessori Method*, she argues that adults often reprimand children for their behaviors but seldom "teach them how" (159) to behave appropriately before requiring them to perform those behaviors. Thus, through this memory, Ginzburg may be contesting the hard methods used to impose control on children, sensitizing the reader to a different relationship with them and proposing more direct involvement on the part of adults.

The father's behavior may also recall the model of patriarchal authority praised by the Fascist government but questioned by Ginzburg. According to Melissa Coburn, the father's authoritative and occasionally racist behavior is used to express a self-criticism, "By highlighting her own Father's weaknesses, the author claims herself a certain proximity to such a conflicting ideology" (757). Although the author recounts the circumstances depicting her family and friends resisting the culture of the regime, her fathers' conduct recalls some manners glorified by Fascism calling attention to the depth of the Fascist ideology in society. By highlighting her father's inadequacy and the importance of men's involvement in the private sphere, Ginzburg may be condemning the Fascist belief that men act mostly in public spaces. Vittoria De Grazia traced this Fascist and gender-based division of roles to the Victorian era: "In the high Victorian model of late nineteenth-century Europe, the destiny of nations was considered to rest on mainly skills and the virtues of the soldier-citizen, where women nurtured the values of privacy. The male purview was the public, and the man's voice

articulated political sentiment" (*How Fascism* 6). Thus, the manner in which Ginzburg calls attention to her father's uncompassionate behavior challenges the patriarchal model of authority that implied the importance of men's emotional participation in private matters.[3]

Except for some rare public moments, Ginzburg's father is generally shy in his dealings with people he does not know, behavior which tends toward the uncompassionate. Ginzburg highlights his wariness and quick judgments about new individuals in the opening pages of the book: "He used to comment at dinner on the people he had met during the day. He was very severe in his judgments and called them all stupid. 'I thought he was a really silly man,' he would say by way of comment on some new acquaintance" (9). Here, Ginzburg clearly denounces her father's harshness toward new people. The fact that they are unnamed suggests that her father perceives them as a single entity unworthy of his interest, much less his emotional involvement.

His hesitancy may result from the Fascist regime's anti-Semitism, his need to look after his relatives, and his desire to protect his politics. Either in defense of his family or as a consequence of the threatening political situation for Jews, he relates to outsiders with worry and distrust, demonstrating that those emotions work against the possibility of compassion. In the case of Mrs. Ghiran, the family's neighbor during a summer vacation in the mountains, the father reveals his difficulty in accepting unfamiliar people: "My mother made friends with a lady in the house next door. They got talking while my father was not around. He said it was a *negrigura* to talk to one's neighbours" (15). As Ginzburg explains in the beginning of the book, a *negrigura* is

> …any act or gesture of ours which he thought out of place…The range of such behavior was wide: wearing town shoes on expeditions in the mountains; getting into conversation with strangers in a train, or in the street; talking out of the window to one's neighbours; taking off one's shoes in the sitting-room, or warming one's feet at the stove; complaining on our mountaineering expeditions of thirst, fatigue, or sore feet; taking rich food on these walks, and napkins for one's fingers. (9)

Besides exhibiting the racist qualities explained previously, the father associates his wife's encounter with actions he considers inappropriate. By doing so, he undervalues her significance, displaying his insensitivity to his wife's need or desire for communication. Furthermore, he appears averse to forming new friendships and fears negative repercussions.

This episode with Mrs. Ghiran is also significant because it shows the climate of terror that characterized the lives of these people. Cesare Moisè Finzi, a Jew from Ferrara, recalls this condition of suspicion in his childhood: "For sure there were strong tensions either in the family or in the community, but my parents were able not to communicate their reasonable worries to us. However the situation was changed: for instance, mom did not have confidence to let us go out with the maid" (61). Similarly, Ginzburg remembers, "The truth was that my father was diffident and suspicious to strangers, being afraid they might be 'questionable characters.' But as soon as he discovered some sort of acquaintance in common he was reassured" (15).

Ginzburg's father's anxiety is also triggered by an outsider's physical appearance that puzzles him, creating detachment and antagonism. For example, in remembering her father's reaction to her mother resuming her piano lessons, Ginzburg describes the piano teacher as "a man with a little black moustache, [who] was terrified of my father, and crept along the passage on tiptoe with his sheets of music" (89). Her father shouts, "'I cannot bear your piano teacher…he looks very dubious'" (89). Although the piano teacher openly shows his concern, the father does not attempt to understand the teacher's alarm, showing no emotional involvement. Instead, he expresses strong hostility toward him. Because the only attribute that Ginzburg uses to depict the teacher is his "little black moustache," a detail that suggests Adolf Hitler, the father's mistrust originates from a sense of suspicion engendered by that moustache.

In other passages, Ginzburg eloquently describes the effects of living in the climate of fear created by her father's and brothers' unpredictable moments of rage. Here, she recalls uncontrolled moments of men's anger and their physically aggressive ways of solving conflicts:

> At home we lived always with the nightmare of our father's outbursts of fury, which exploded unexpectedly and often for the pettiest reason: a pair of shoes that could not be found, a book out of its proper place, or if a light bulb had gone, dinner was slightly late, or some dish a little over-cooked. And then we also lived with the nightmare of quarrels between my brothers, Alberto and Mario, which broke out equally unexpectedly…Alberto and Mario were big now and very strong, and when they set to with their fists they really hurt each other, and emerged with bleeding noses, swollen lips, and torn clothes. (36)

She further defines her father's attempts to solve her brothers' fights as counterproductive: "My father's intervention was as violent as all his

actions. He flung himself between the two of them locked in violent combat and whacked them all over. I was a little girl then and can recall my terror at these three men fighting savagely" (36). The father's intervention does not offer his sons a different model of behavior. Indeed, he perpetrates his violent methods on his sons, who learn from his example. Ginzburg thus denounces "masculine" actions by calling attention to the damaging repercussions of her father's and brothers' way of handling conflict.

Because these intense reactions were often the result of insignificant causes and might reflect the family' s precarious sociopolitical situation, these references to sudden or violent reactions may be metaphors to express the emotional insecurity of Ginzburg's Jewish family during the regime. According to Alan Bullock, Ginzburg "came to regard herself and her family as political outcasts in constant danger" (ix). However, Ginzburg seems to be alone in bearing her pain. She never references any person or condition that mitigates her suffering. Thus, she illustrates the seclusion and isolation that people belonging to a family or a larger community undergo when feelings of rejection characterize most human interactions. Her experience also recalls the separation many Jews were forced to experience.

Although an emotional response to circumstances may sometimes appear unconnected to an intellectual appraisal, emotions are connected to values (Jaggar 153). Thus, Ginzburg's evaluations of her surroundings often generate unemotional reactions, which may evoke compassionate responses in readers. They may also engender sympathy toward the values that characterize Ginzburg's community.

The father's conduct seems even more complex when he reveals his detachment and lack of compassion for members of his own family, including his mother. Ginzburg remembers the walks she and her father used to take in the mountains with her grandmother. The father, with his hands behind his back, took long strides, forcing his mother to try to keep up with his pace. In addition, although his mother always wanted to travel a new road, never wanting to go the way she had been the day before, he just kept walking:

> "This is where we went yesterday," she would complain. Without turning around my father would reply absently, "No, it is another one." But she persisted: "It is yesterday's road, it is yesterday's road." But he pushed on ahead without turning around. "I have got a cough and I'm choking," she would repeat, putting her hand to her throat. (13)

Despite the rural setting and the vacation they are taking together, the father is uninterested in the old woman's desires, needs, or concerns. The only important component is the amount of time he is dedicating to her, which frees him from any other duty and legitimizes his lack of emotional participation. Thus, Ginzburg describes more than a stroll together. Instead, these walks in the mountains are solitary exercises, which she emphasizes through the contrasting actions of the two participants: He strides in front, while she trips along behind him.

The father's comportment also indicates his indifference to the old woman. He holds his hands behind his back while smoking a pipe, selfishly enjoying the moment by himself. His failure to hear the old woman's request to change paths or to notice her coughing attack confirms his attitude, further suggesting his insensitivity. His self-centeredness works against compassion because it prevents any possibility of imagining or understanding another individual's experience.

These slights may also be indicative of the generational difference, an element that, according to M. Nussbaum, may inhibit a compassionate response (*Upheavals* 342). The father, immersed in his own thoughts, is simply not open to recognizing the old woman's requests. M. Nussbaum argues that "the movement of imagination that might lead to compassion can be blocked in several ways. One impediment, Rousseau argues, is supplied by social distinctions of class and rank (and, we could easily add, distinctions of religion, race, ethnicity, and gender)" (*Upheavals* 342). Thus, Ginzburg demonstrates that factors other than those identified by M. Nussbaum and Rousseau may work against compassion, including selfishness, age difference, and gender.

On the other hand, Ginzburg presents situations that allow compassion to flourish. For instance, in her remembrance of her grandmother's death, she shows that memory and death may elicit compassion:

> My grandmother died, and we all went to Florence for the funeral… Henceforth my father always referred to her in a particularly affectionate and commiserating tone as "my poor mother." When she was alive he had always tended to call her stupid, as he did with all of us. But now that she was dead her faults seemed to him innocent and childlike, deserving of pity and sympathy. (74)

Her father, unable to experience compassion toward his living mother, does so in his recollections of her after her death. Thus, Ginzburg shows that

memory is not a rigid component of human behavior. Rather, memory, influenced by present circumstances, modifies past events and attitudes, as Walter Mauro states about his memories: "I was sorry that people's lives were lost [.] I felt we had to keep everything in some books…We cannot store everything, but we process and hold only what is necessary" (61). Linda J. Levine also indicates that "memories for emotional responses are partially reconstructed or inferred on the basis of current appraisals of events" (165). In Ginzburg's episode, memory prevents her father from remembering the disrespect he had for his mother while she was alive. What he once perceived as her mistakes are now guiltless errors that deserve only compassionate responses. He feels compassion toward her more easily now that she is dead, perhaps because he does not have to justify his behavior or face her emotional condition.

For Aristotle, the belief that no evil can befall one prevents compassion. For example, readers may not feel compassion while the Ginzburg's family is on vacation in the mountains because of the detachment the self-absorbed father feels toward his mother. Her death, however, activates compassionate responses because of the son's identification with his vulnerability to death or affliction. Thus, Ginzburg utilizes compassion to emphasize the way in which suffering can unify individuals belonging to different generations.

Even though Ginzburg's father rarely displays compassion in familial or public situations, he sometimes behaves differently. For example, Ginzburg remembers him showing compassion toward a woman playing the guitar even though he does not like music. The episode occurs in a restaurant after the war where the woman is begging for money:

> The waiter went to send her away. My father was furious with the waiter and shouted, "I forbid you to throw that poor woman out. Leave her alone." He gave the woman something, and the waiter was offended and angry and retreated to a corner with his napkins on his arms.
>
> The woman then took a guitar from beneath her cloak and began to play. After a short while my father began to show signs of impatience, the ones he showed at meals. He moved his glass about, the bread, the knives, the forks, and flapped his napkins on his knees. (39)

Three of the M. Nussbaum's factors for activating compassion are present in this example: The (a) suffering person, seen as a significant creature in the father's eyes, is experiencing (b) an uncomfortable situation for which

she is (c) not responsible. Although this episode occurs in a metropolis where people may find it difficult to connect with one another, compassion arises in public situations when human respect is broken. Consequently, although the father does not show compassion for family members' misfortunes, he feels directly involved in this woman's suffering. Ginzburg also makes it clear that his behavior is motivated by respect for another individual's less privileged condition.

The perceptions of disadvantaged subjects offer more inclusive views of particular situations than the emotional responses of the dominant classes because "oppressed people have a kind of epistemological privilege insofar as they have easier access to this standpoint and therefore a better chance of ascertaining the possible beginnings of a society in which all could thrive" (Jaggar 162). Ginzburg's anecdote illustrates that, by acknowledging the suffering of the beggar, the father recognizes the condition of an oppressed group of people because he, as a middle-class Jewish male, has experienced similar prejudice and intolerance. In legitimizing the female beggar's emotions, he challenges the dominant group's hegemonic perspective. Thus, compassion becomes an instrument of political disassociation and refusal, reflecting the anti-Fascist climate in Turin at that time.

The father's compassion toward the beggar highlights an important precondition for this emotion: the realization that an individual's suffering may also become a reality for the observer (Aristotle 1385b). M. Nussbaum (*Upheavals*) replaces this with eudemonistic judgment, the onlooker's view that another person is significant for his or her own set of values. Therefore, the onlooker will always tend to reach a positive result that benefits the suffering person. Through compassion, Ginzburg shows the significance of emotional ability allowing individuals to reach a more positive condition, properly operate in society, and meet the necessities of everyday life.

In contrast to Ginzburg's father, Uncle Cesare is a paradigm of respect for others' points of view. In introducing him, Ginzburg states,

> My father's brother, my uncle Cesare, was a drama critic. This uncle was calm, plump, and always good-humoured—quite different from my father—and as a critic not at all severe. He would never attack a play but always found something good in it. If my mother said she thought a play seemed stupid, he got cross and said, "You just try to write a play like that yourself." (22)

Even though his professional vocation suggests the scrutiny and critique of others, Cesare tries to share others' views. Unlike Ginzburg's father,

he finds positive elements in other individuals. He not only refrains from minimizing a writer's efforts but also refuses to allow other people to do so. His awareness of the difficulties of writing allows him to realize that others deserve his respect and emotional support, illustrating that knowledge of specific conditions can activate compassion. In addition, because Cesare realizes that his own work is read and criticized by others, he identifies with authors and offers compassion, thereby illustrating eudemonistic judgment. His compassion is generated by his awareness of commonality, in contrast to Ginzburg's father.

Ginzburg's Compassion Outside the Family

Compassion can also be triggered by political differences characterizing the community in which the writer grew up. In *Family Sayings*, often described as an exemplary anti-Fascist treatise,[4] Ginzburg frequently calls attention to compassionate involvement with individuals who try to escape the Fascists. For example, in the following passage, she describes the escape of socialist Filippo Turati, who hid in Ginzburg's house for about ten days:

> Then three men in raincoats came. Adriano was the only one I knew. He was starting to lose his hair and had an almost bald, square head, surrounded by fair, curly locks. That evening his face and scanty hair looked wind-swept. His eyes seemed alarmed, but resolute and cheerful. Two or three times in my life I saw that look in his eyes. It was the look he had when he was helping someone to be taken to escape, when there was danger and someone to be taken to safety. (70)

On the night of the escape, Turati shows signs of anxiety. Adriano's compassionate response is physically reflected in his eyes, illustrating that Ginzburg recognizes the look of individuals who are helping others in critical situations. This look conveys both their worry and their confidence: worry because of the danger involved; confidence because of their sense of collaboration or their belief that they are doing the right thing.

Later in the book, Ginzburg recalls Adriano's compassion as he helps her escape her apartment in Rome after her husband Leone is arrested:

> And I shall always remember his back bending to gather up our belongings scattered about the rooms—the children's shoes, for instance—and his good, humble, and compassionate movements. As we left his face had the weary look it had had when he came to our house to take Turati away—that fearful, happy look he had when he was taking someone to safety. (143)

Here, Ginzburg presents Adriano as a contrasting male figure to her father and brothers. In this passage, she varies from the unemotional tone that distinguishes other moments, including her husband's death, to communicate her participation through the precise details of Adriano gathering the children's shoes. In doing so, she suggests approval for this man who shows compassion for other people's anguish.

The passage is also an iconographic inscription of compassion. Ginzburg links Adriano's compassionate behavior with his earlier help in Turati's escape, illustrating that assistance can be both physical and psychological. His response also demonstrates that compassion transcends gender differences, both unifying men's and women's perspectives and expressing male sensitivity.

Lutz's comparison of emotions in the Western worldview with those in Micronesia clarifies this aspect of emotional involvement. Traditionally, women are considered more capable of expressing emotionality than men. However, rather than deny men's emotionality, American culture "engender[s] expectations that men will experience only certain types of emotion, notably anger. Women are expected to experience the entire range of emotion, with the possible exception of hate and anger, more frequently and deeply" (73). By extension, then, women are associated with nature, while men are aligned with cognition. In describing Adriano's compassionate involvement with others in need, Ginzburg evokes a society in which men may acquire individualities that value emotional consideration and compassionate responses.

Ginzburg's text suggests not only that compassion can overcome gender differences but also that it can reinforce gender bonds. She recalls, for example, the consolation her mother's female friends provide when her father is arrested: "She wept in the sitting room with her friends round her—Paola Carrara, Frances, Signora Donati, and all the women younger than herself whom she used to protect and help and comfort when they had no money or their husbands yelled at them. Now it was their turn to help and comfort her" (86). The image of her mother surrounded by younger women effectively illustrates how compassion can connect women of different ages. In contrast to the father's lack of emotional concern for his mother, the age difference between the women does not prevent compassion. Here, the emotion connects these individuals of different social and economic backgrounds, empowering the younger women to repay those who experience more difficult conditions. Compassion spans the boundaries between the two groups, creating a mutual relationship between the

younger and older women, showing that, perhaps for Ginzburg, solidarity among women is easier than among men.

M. Nussbaum also addresses the idea that women are more emotional than men, connecting their emotionality to their social state and education, which cultivate personal relationships for women and stoic norms for men (*Upheavals*). In this view, women's compromised social conditions increase their vulnerability, triggering compassionate responses. In *Family Sayings*, the women in the community perceive Ginzburg's mother as deserving of compassion. However, their feelings of gratitude for her past support may also contribute to their emotional involvement. Thus, compassion becomes a tool to intensify friendships among women and overcome isolation, which is particularly significant in metropolitan environments.

Whereas compassion promotes connection in urban surroundings, it also assumes a political cast in rural communities. Illustrating this are Ginzburg's memories of her last days in a little village in Abruzzo where Fascist authorities sent her and her children under the provisions of *il confino*, a form of exile within Italy created by Mussolini.[5] In November 1943, Ginzburg receives a letter from her husband informing her of Germany's invasion of Italy, the racial laws, and their risk of relocation. He urges his wife to return to Rome because she can hide there more easily. Ginzburg remembers her departure in this way:

> The local people came to my aid. They all put their heads together and helped me. The proprietress of the inn now had Germans established in her few rooms or seated round the fire in her kitchen, and she told them that I had been evacuated from Naples, was a relative of hers, and had lost my papers in the air-raids and needed to go to Rome. (138)

By taking advantage of her familiarity with the enemy soldiers, the proprietress convincingly vouches for Ginzburg's innocence. As a result of the proprietress's compassion, Ginzburg and her children are able to leave the village, travelling on one of the "German lorries [that] went to Rome every day" (138).

Here, Ginzburg ennobles a strong woman who, by virtue of her social role, is not afraid to intercede with male enemies. The proprietress's compassionate response originates from her desire to help more than from an attempt to deal with the threat. According to Whitebrook, "Pity and compassion are largely non-judgmental, but are concerned for the person(s)

within the disordered situation (rather than how to deal with the disorder per se)" (530). She also specifies their qualities when used in power relationships: "pity and compassion include an element of equality, by way of the sense of fellow feeling involved, a sense of suffering with rather than having power over" (530). Thus, the compassionate involvement of the proprietress reveals not only her impartial desire to help but also her fear of what the German occupation may bring in its wake.

Furthermore, through this memory, Ginzburg suggests the inconsistency of Fascist politics. Although the Fascists proclaim the value of the family, the government only promotes the image of the family, not its real significance.[6] By presenting a compassionate female response to a family division, Ginzburg also calls attention to the absurdity of the racial laws that result in separation and to the political consistency needed to treat the genders equally. She illustrates the issue of gender equality in her contention that both men and women suffer the same consequences of the conflict: loneliness and isolation, the common denominators of people after the war:

> For many years, of course, no one practiced their own professions, but all thought that they could and should do a thousand things together, and it was some time before each man took up his own profession and accepted its burden and the daily fatigue and solitude, which is the sole means we have of contributing to the needs of others who are similarly lost and prisoners of solitude. (142)

Although the confusion and excitement experienced at the end of the conflict create a sense of temporary camaraderie, eventually, people return to their solitary pursuits. The compassionate response proposed here is acceptance of this general condition. By accepting one's own solitude, an individual can understand the needs of others who are similarly trapped in their loneliness. Thus, after the Nazi occupation and World War II, compassion becomes a vehicle to unify individuals in a shared reflection on their feelings of emptiness and separation.

Conclusions

In her depiction of compassion in *Family Sayings*, Ginzburg portrays her father's unemotional detachment and sometimes violent conduct, highlighting the negative consequences of such behavior toward others and suggesting both self-criticism and how profoundly the Fascist culture

influenced society. In contrast, her portrayal of the compassion offered by both Uncle Cesare and Adriano illustrates a model of male identity that values emotional consideration and compassionate responses, thus challenging gender stereotypes. By questioning the association of men with action or violence, Ginzburg resists one of the myths of Fascism about gender differences. According to Alberto Traldi, an important aspect of Fascist ideology is the creating of "the 'ideal' type of Italian with regard to sex and family: patriarchal and masculine men; submissive, monogamous, and prolific women; numerous and respectful children" (66). De Grazia suggests that gender separation is due to Fascist education:

> Activities for boys emphasized competitive sports, military-type excursions, and in the 1930s exercises with mock-weaponry in keeping with the motto of the *Balilla* periodical, "Libro e moschetto" (Book and Musket). By contrast, girls' activities emphasized first aid, rhythmic exercises and charity, and of course included child care, flower arranging, and handicrafts. (*How Fascism Ruled Women* 158)

By attributing to male protagonists emotional behavior not included in the Fascist model of virility, Ginzburg opposes sexual separation and encourages more permeable gender divisions. This innovative construction of masculinity suggests that many apparent distinctions between men and women are factitious. Ginzburg is questioning the patriarchal power of her Jewish family and promotes an Italian identity that is respectful of gender difference, minorities, and oppressed people. At the same time, she encourages the idea that a national identity, if not properly nurtured, can be lost and swallowed in the rigidity of dictatorial regimes' oppressive ideology. Furthermore, the examination of Ginzburg's work through compassion exhibits how neorealist artists promote individuals' emotional ability to reach understanding, control, and, thus, mental well-being: qualities necessary to promote a positive way of living for all individuals. As amply demonstrated by psychological studies of Zeidner, Moshe, Matthews, and Roberts, mental well-being is an important factor in human behavior permitting individuals to understand the value of their emotions, utilize them to move their life forward in a positive direction, and make a contribution to their own community. In Ginzburg's work, mental well-being does not indicate that individuals will not experience difficult situations. Rather, it signifies that individuals "have the resilience to cope when times are tougher than usual" (Stewart-Brown). Neorealism proposes the notion

that the better persons are able to master their emotions, the greater their capability to overcome difficulties and positively influence their life. By promoting emotional balance, neorealist artists invite people to take positive actions and make changes in their existence.

Notes

1. Some examples of Ginzburg's works reflecting such commitment are *Le voci della sera*, *Lessico famigliare*, *Mai devi domandarmi*, "È davvero una servitù? Essere donna," and "Ti ho sposato per allegria."
2. Maria Montessori, the first woman in Italy to qualify as a physician, developed a pedagogical theory based on methods drawn from medicine, education, and anthropology.
3. For an examination of Ginzburg's critique of patriarchal authority, see James M. Fortney.
4. See both Michele Rago and Giancarlo Vigorelli.
5. For a more complete explanation of *il confino*, see Sodi, Introduction xii.
6. For elucidation of this contradiction, see De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945*, 81.

CHAPTER 12

Moravia's Representation of Compassion

Moravia, unlike Ginzburg, focuses on a less traditional family model, one composed only of a widowed mother (Cesira) and her daughter (Rosetta).[1] Specifically, Moravia encourages examination of Cesira's suffering, inviting the reader to speculate on her involvement in the historic circumstances and allowing investigations of the protagonist's compassionate responses through one simple question: How does Cesira emotionally cope with the horror of the war? Indeed, this question implies a reflection on the repercussions that such tragic events may have on the protagonist's ability to maintain her emotional stability and to relate compassionately with other individuals. The function of compassion, triggered or denied among the characters or toward its environment, teaches awareness of crucial cultural elements, allowing Moravia to provide his own social statement, suggest his perspective on the construction of a new Italian identity, and enlarge the concept of neorealism, through the promotion of emotional ability.

In addition, in their escape from Rome to the mountains of Ciociaria, the two characters live in both urban and rural environments, where they face several consequences of the war that alter their capacities to deal with pain and, thus, to be compassionate. In contrast to Ginzburg, Moravia clearly raises the issue of location, urban versus rural, and focuses on the effects of severe trauma on individuals' abilities to feel or express emotional participation.[2]

La ciociara,[3] directly inspired by Moravia's personal experiences of the war, centers on Cesira and Rosetta, brutalized by the events of World

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War II. Abandoning the store that Cesira's husband left them, the two women leave Rome to seek peace in the mountains of Ciociaria, where Cesira was born. To protect Rosetta's innocence, the mother struggles to pay a considerable sum of money to stay in the little peasant community of Sant'Eufemia, where other evacuees have gathered. After nine rough months, Cesira and Rosetta decide to return home, hoping that the Americans will liberate the city. On their way back, they are assailed by Moroccan soldiers in Fondi, who repeatedly rape Rosetta in a church. This final tragedy leaves the two women emotionally separated and incapable of identifying with each other.

In accord with the neorealist tradition,[4] Moravia indicts the war as the cause of all the hardships the protagonist must bear.[5] This position appears to be different from previous declarations about other wars. For instance, commenting on Renato Serra's *Esame di coscenza di un letterato* (*A Man of Letters' Soul-Searching*), written in 1915 during World War I, Alberto Asor Rosa argues that "war does not change the artistic values and does not create them: it does not change anything in the moral universe" (*Storia* 618). Conversely, neorealist writers emphasize the trauma of the war as being totally responsible for transforming society and individuals, to which Rosa argues, "Now, on the contrary, the young writers, so called '*impegnati*,' imply that [war] has changed everything, but really everything: first of all themselves" (*Storia* 618). This observation illuminates the culmination of Cesira's story as the war, seen in all its dramatic force, deeply modifies the relationship between mother and daughter.

La ciociara has attracted widespread critical attention. Indeed, several studies have noted its emphasis on a new kind of realism that is strongly centered on an examination of the external world.[6] For instance, Giorgio Barberi Squarotti states, "Moravia brings off his texts best when he manages to make the plot coincide with a world that is deliberately willed, but not arbitrary and not exclusively a function of the supposed ideological revelation of foundation of the work" (63). Thus, the value of Moravia's best works is found in his effort to understand the world in its complexity, when the plot is "the authentic moral will to penetrate the world, with all its manifestations of horror, pain, struggle, conscience" (Barberi Squarotti 63). This analysis is important to our examination of compassion because individuals' emotional responses, offered or denied, are consequent reactions to the anguish produced by external circumstances.

Although other analyses address the meaning of suffering in the representation of daily life during the Fascist period, the Nazi occupation,

and World War II, they do not sufficiently take into consideration the emotional components connected to pain. For instance, some scholars have called attention to the importance of Cesira as the suffering witness character of the work, similar to the character of Adriana in Moravia's *La Romana* (*The Woman of Rome*). Sharon Wood and Fulvio Longobardo, among others, claim that Cesira's anguish is associated with her condition of powerlessness. Wood accentuates the contradictory component of Cesira's disposition: Although she is "reduced to powerlessness," she is also "empowered with a speaking voice which becomes emotional in the final outrage inflicted on her and Rosetta" (78). Furthermore, Cesira represents the isolated reality of a specific area of Italy, which, in accordance with the neorealist tradition, is confirmed by the use of its related dialect (Wood).

For Longobardo, Cesira represents an entire class that laments its lack of knowledge about events that happen without its control and may symbolize the voice of an entire class of bourgeois. She articulates powerlessness against the great events and difficulties of the time, even as she expresses a desire to acquire a better awareness to overcome them or to avoid them in the future. Her denunciation of this lack of awareness and her attempt to focus on people's isolation and misfortune may express her need to obtain improved respect and the necessity of being more politically involved. However, although Longobardo refers to the typical neorealist hero or antihero as being a boy or peasant, Moravia offers a gender revision in proposing a woman in this role.

More important for us, however, is Adrienne Ward's comparison of Moravia's literary text with De Sica's cinematographic one. Ward focuses on Cesira's trauma and her ironic acceptance of the events as a consequence of her suffering. First, Cesira imagines impossible situations, such as a happy marriage between Rosetta and Clorindo. Then, she fails to recognize her own innocence when she comprehends that Clorindo, already married, is not the only man with whom her daughter has had a relationship and that Rosetta, emotionally destroyed after the rape, is not suffering but instead is seemingly indifferent. Ward implies that the traumatic consequences the protagonist must bear have damaged her ability to judge external circumstances, provoking her desire for a different reality. Despite the severity of the experience, Ward underscores the final emotional salvation of Cesira and Rosetta, when the mother sees her daughter begin to shed her emotional reserve, singing and crying at the same time. Rosetta's ability to express herself emotionally demonstrates her renewed interest in life. Thus, Cesira's suffering implies considerations for others.

Several times, Cesira comments on her mental confusion and incompetence regarding the unfolding political situation and the war's participants. These comments serve to dramatize the miserable conditions of the less fortunate, as this example shows:

> I had never taken any interest in politics, and I knew nothing of the Fascists, the English, the Russians or the Americans. Nevertheless, from having heard people talking all around me, I had come to see that, as things now were, there was nothing good for poor people like ourselves. (Moravia, *Two Women* 19)

Thus, we may analyze Cesira's adventure in relation to her participation in others' misfortune and investigate the implications of that involvement, including new possibilities for understanding the protagonist's social involvement and her situation as a woman.

The representations of compassion in the story also enable us to examine several aspects of postwar Italian society. In terms of gender, Moravia uses compassion to highlight different predictable ways of expressing suffering based on gender. Whereas Ginzburg uses compassion to highlight new possibilities of expression for men and women, Moravia associates compassionate reactions with the experiences of the female protagonist to decry her vulnerability and to reflect on her experience. Of significance is Moravia's choice of a female protagonist to illustrate his views on specific issues and to construct a frame of reference within which to fit them and his examination of the historic daily existence. Consequently, Cesira's compassionate responses invite considerations of several cultural aspects, including the social and political conditions of the time, the concept of nationality, the opposition of city and country, reactions to atrocity, and gender differences regarding emotions. As we explore these issues, the protagonist's emotional reactions also enable us to examine specific important features of compassion, such as its relationship with reason. Moravia thus regenerates the female protagonist's condition, demonstrating that even out of powerlessness, one may legitimately seek an understanding of the circumstances.

Moravia's exploration of the conditions and limits of compassion is set against a background that initially creates the aforementioned dichotomies (e.g., unsafe urban and innocent rural) and then frustrates them, complicating the dualism by showing the inaccuracy of easy generalizations. In the beginning, the female protagonist seems to be immature

regarding the reality of the war. Subsequently, she becomes fully aware of its harshness. Similarly, her moments of compassion develop from an initial phase in which she can express compassion toward the foreign soldiers to the ending when, raped by them, she becomes numb and indifferent.

Compassion and Social Conditions

From the first chapter of *Two Women*, when mother and daughter decide to leave Nazi-occupied Rome, Cesira's expressions of compassion toward Rosetta emphasize the two characters' vulnerability toward their social and political occurrences:

> In order to comfort myself for leaving home, I described to Rosetta the great welcome my parents would give me in our village: "You'll see; they'll make us eat until we're fit to burst. We'll be comfortable and we'll sleep well and above all we'll have plenty to eat. You'll see: they've got pigs, they've got flour, they've got wine, we shall live like kings." But this prospect did not cheer Rosetta; she was thinking of her fiancé in Yugoslavia. It was a month since he had sent any news of himself, and I knew that every morning she got up early and went to church to pray for him, to pray that he should not be killed and that he should come home and that they should be able to get married. Then, so as to make her see that I understood her, I said, hugging and kissing her, "My darling child, don't worry, because the Madonna sees and hears you and she won't allow anything bad to happen to you." (20)

This passage illustrates M. Nussbaum's threefold concept of compassion (*Upheavals* 321). Cesira, caring for her daughter, experiences compassion because she realizes Rosetta is suffering from a serious but undeserved cause. Moravia uses Cesira's emotional involvement to focus on people's sense of powerlessness and obligatory acceptance of strong political powers. At the beginning, Cesira thinks Rosetta's anguish will be comforted with an abundance of food[7] and drink in a fairy tale setting. She idealizes the countryside of Ciociaria as a sort of serene island protected from the tribulations of the city. However, Cesira soon realizes that Rosetta's suffering is more complex. Her pain is not the result of physical discomfort; it is emotional. No food or drink can assuage her daughter's anxiety about her fiancé. Cesira also recognizes her own inability to offer any concrete help to her daughter. The only way to alleviate her daughter's pain is to offer the prospect of supernatural intervention, which is provided by the

Madonna. However, this only emphasizes the gravity of the conditions they are experiencing and their total helplessness.

Centering on her daughter's suffering, Cesira denounces the war, holding it responsible for their present situation, for people's physical and emotional unhappiness, and for social stagnation. She again employs elements of the fairy tale genre to imagine their rosy life at the end of the conflict:

> I felt sorry for Rosetta because I knew she was suffering, and I said: "My blessed child, once this bad moment is past, everything will be all right, you'll see it will. The war will come to an end, we shall have plenty of everything again, and you'll get married and be with your husband, and then you'll be happy." (21)

Moravia's representation of the daughter's suffering, produced by material conditions derived from the politics and existing social conditions, is an appropriate object of compassion, suggesting that the reader should not only consider the social consequences of the political activity of the time but also reject them.

Moravia further achieves his social examination of the historic conditions through the discouragement and general uncertainty the two women experience in a city occupied by the Nazis. Moravia conveys this through Cesira's suffering and self-pity. Her pessimism for the political situation in Rome and her lost hope for a possible recovery of independence are highlighted by her loss of self-respect when, as a widow, she is exposed to Giovanni's physical advances:

> And when I thought about that incident with Giovanni and how he had given me that slap on the bottom, I felt that I too, like life, had fallen to pieces, and that I was now capable of anything, even stealing, even killing, because I lost my self-respect and was no longer the woman I had once been. I comforted myself with thinking of Rosetta, who at least had her mother to protect her. She at least would be what I myself now no longer was. True it is that life is made up of habits; and even honesty is a habit; and once habits change, life becomes a kind of hell and we ourselves so many devils let loose, with no more respect either for ourselves or for anyone else. (20)

In this example, Cesira, as the authorized voice of the story, perceives herself to be different from what she was once when, presumably, she was honorable and not vulnerable to sexual insult. She dislikes her condition, comparing it to the general disorder and insecurity characterizing

Rome. Moravia thus illuminates the total disorientation that people living during that time had to bear. By blaming herself, Cesira seems to violate M. Nussbaum's second criterion for compassion because she feels responsible for her own suffering. However, M. Nussbaum believes it is still possible to experience compassion when a condition exists that explains or justifies suffering (*Upheavals* 314).

The situation created by Moravia is different, however, because Cesira's perceived responsibility for her behavior may be a product of a turbulent time and calls attention to the numerous consequences of the military hostilities. Cesira, like everyone else, is in a position of weakness because of the war and is expected to adjust. As a woman, though, she is especially vulnerable. Thus, Moravia's portrayal of the war and the attendant Nazi occupation evokes confusion, uncertainty, and defenselessness, illustrating the alterations in perception and sensibility that people, and women in particular, endure.

In light of this, Rosa's distinction between historical events and the ways people express themselves may be useful. He notes that during World War II, a general alteration of existence induced a renovation of consciousness and artistic products: "The trauma of the war and Resistance is perceived in a strong way, and the conviction (or the illusion) that things also in literature have to really change is great" (*Storia* 617). Similarly, Cesira's experience demonstrates that extraordinary situations such as war may require different ethical codes. Behavior that may have been blameworthy during peace requires a different judgment in extraordinary circumstances. Thus, Moravia underscores the necessity of linking compassion to a different moral code that acknowledges the physical and psychological changes that occur during extraordinary events.

Compassion and Concept of Nationality

Two Women does not create a binary opposition between the suffering of good people and bad people. Instead, it acknowledges the general conditions of anguish that differentiate oppressive political authority. Through the female protagonist's perception, Moravia also depicts compassion directed toward individuals of different nationalities, including German soldiers, who face tragic losses.

Complicating the study of compassion, Moravia presents sometimes emotional responses in conditions not foreseen by M. Nussbaum. He shows that in extraordinary situations such as war, people's compassion

follows different models. In these cases, Moravia is more in tune with Whitebrook's argument that compassionate responses do not always originate from conditions established methodologically. This dynamic is revealed in the following example of compassion between official enemies. Cesira's recollection of the encounter between a German soldier and the evacuees in the village of Sant'Eufemia suggests a sense of commonality and shared emotional participation, which often characterize evacuees' existence during the German occupation[8]:

> You could see that he had no evil intentions, in fact that he had a sort of sympathy for all these poor people. He said that in peacetime he was a blacksmith; and he also said he was a good accordion-player. So one of the evacuees went off to fetch his own accordion, and the German sat down on a stone and played to us, surrounded by children listening to him open-mouthed. He played well, and he played, among other things, a song which at that period, it seems, was sung by all the Germans soldiers—Lili Marlene. It was a very sad song, almost a lament; and as I listened I reflected that, after all, these Germans that Michele hated so much and considered to be not even human were Christians like us, with wives and children at home; and they too hated the war which kept them far away from their families. (216)

As anticipated, despite the absence of eudemonistic judgment, compassion is equally triggered.

In spite of the overt hostility between the Italians and the Germans, Moravia presents a humanizing image of the German soldier, who shows concern toward the evacuees. His emotional understanding prompts the people to express their generosity through offering him an instrument to play. The Italian origin of the musical instrument and the choice of the melody, particularly suitable to the evacuees' miserable existence, situate the German soldier in a favorable position. In this context, Cesira's recollection combines the enemies' positions. Proposing a friendly encounter between them, she triggers concern and emotional attention for their common difficulties. Thus, compassion becomes a way to overcome the opposition between two groups of people, oppressed and oppressor, demonstrating that social interactions that accentuate similarities among strangers and overcome individual differences can generate this emotion.

According to Lutz, "Emotion is the necessary result of relationship with others more than the unfortunate breakdown of individual cognitive functioning" (80). In the previous example, the evacuees' attempt

to interact with the German soldier through the offering of the musical instrument and Cesira's compassion toward him illustrate not only acknowledgment of the other individuals but also consideration for their specific circumstances. Cesira's individualized compassion transcends the nationalism valued by the regime, dramatically exemplified by the racial laws. Her compassionate response also discredits the assumption that emotions reflect irrationality and accidentality.

Cesira's actions prompt observations on the association between emotion and reason. Her emotional involvement is the product of her logic when she feels the suffering of all the individuals experiencing that time of horror. Her compassionate responses often grow out of a consciousness of a mystical dimension that touches everyone's life, regardless of nationality or political creed, seen in her compassionate prayer for everyone:

> Then, influenced, by the immensely vast, black night which embraced so many lives and so many things and in which there was nothing to be seen, I prayed for all living beings, for myself and for Rosetta and also for the Festa family and for Paride's family and then for the people who were scattered all over the mountains, for the English, who would be coming to set us free, and for us Italians who were suffering and also for the Germans and the Fascists who were making us suffer but who after all were human beings too. (94)

Thus, compassion transcends individual differences, an especially dramatic illustration in light of the racial laws promulgated during the Fascist regime.

Lutz also states that "emotions are also sometimes considered to be an expression of personal values. Emotion is, in this case, conceptualized as the means by which value is apprehended or perceived in the world" (76). Thus, Cesira's compassionate response toward specific conditions of several divergent groups also suggests a double resistance toward the impositions of the Fascist regime: opposition to personal detachment and a rejection of blind nationalism.

Compassion in the Countryside and City

Moravia also illustrates the tension between the countryside and the city, another important theme in neorealist literature, through Cesira's reminiscence. In Rome, now occupied by the Nazis, Cesira and Rosetta are

vulnerable to all sorts of physical and moral threats. In opposition to this idea of the city, Cesira's reverie presents an idealized vision of the countryside: an idyllic place where one can find welcoming people, food, and peaceful rest. However, the actuality of Fondi is quite different from the vision Cesira creates in her imagination:

> As we walked into Fondi we very soon realized that the town was deserted and abandoned. Not so much as a dog to be seen; and all the shops had their blinds lowered, with bits of white paper stuck on to them here and there explaining that the owners had been evacuated; all the doors to houses and courtyards were bolted and barred, the windows were shattered, even the cat holes were stopped up. It was like walking through a town in which all the inhabitants had died of the plague. (42)

Here, Moravia makes it clear that the idealized rural community of Cesira's imagination no longer exists. The shops with their closed doors evoke the gravity of funeral processions in many small communities during which the blinds in all the shops are lowered. The disparity is drastic because no one can explain what has happened and where everyone has gone. The only explanation is a note saying that the owners, like Cesira and Rosetta, have been evacuated. Thus, Fondi proves no safer than Rome: "So this was the country: worse than Rome. And when I reflected on how I had deceived myself into thinking that I should find in the country everything that was lacking in Rome, I turned to Rosetta and said: 'Do you know what I say? Let's rest now and then go back to the station and catch the train to Rome again'" (43).

Cesira's desire to return to Rome may be seen as an affirmation of the city as a civilizing place. As David Forgacs observes, "The differences between urban and rural society were indeed considerable, but these accounts tended to judge the latter from the standpoint of a metropolitan culture which their author considered more rational and advanced, or indeed as the only culture deserving of the name" ("Twentieth Century" 292). Moravia initially reinforces this binary opposition (i.e., rational city versus emotional countryside) through Cesira's fanciful vision of the countryside, which stresses emotional participation and human understanding. That simplistic dualism is then challenged by Cesira's actual experience of the rural community.

The first people Cesira and Rosetta encounter create a jarring image of the countryside. Concetta and Vincenzo are local salespeople who entertain

deceitful relationships with the Fascist authority and whose egotistic and dishonest behavior reflects a debased moral code. Moravia depicts them as brazen individuals who try to take advantage of people in perilous conditions:

> I was struck by the thought that one ought always to see people doing the things that interest them, peasants in the fields, workmen in their workshops, and indeed—let us be frank about it—thieves with the stuff they have stolen. For these bedsprings and mattresses and chairs and tables and bundles were all stolen goods; I at once suspected it but it was confirmed that same evening by Concetta. (46)

When asked to whom the household goods belong, Concetta replies cavalierly that they have taken them because the owners have run off to the mountains. Her lack of fear and remorse scandalizes Cesira.

The idealized rural life in the country is again called into question when Cesira sees the abandoned church. Her reaction emphasizes the emptiness and lack of emotional involvement that she experiences there:

> Perhaps I should not have been able to pray; I felt numbed and apathetic and bewildered. I had hoped to rediscover the village where I was born and the people among whom I had grown up, of course my parents as well, instead of which I found nothing but an empty shell: they had all gone away, perhaps even the Madonna too, disgusted at her picture being handled in this way and left so crooked. (287)

Cesira's native Ciociaria, which she looks back on so fondly, is nothing like what she remembers. She is disenchanted about the disappointing events that have led to such transformation and does not express any compassionate involvement or concern for the place and the people she loves. Instead, a sense of loneliness originating from this general abandonment replaces her hopes of finding them. Metaphorically, Moravia even suggests that she has lost the religious faith that sustained her in the past.

The physical isolation of the rural environment intensifies Cesira's emotional isolation, typifying the seclusion of people living in the country. In this context, Cesira's feelings of solitude may symbolize the isolation and lack of knowledge these people experienced. The idea that the countryside is a place where people are unable to expand their vision or to develop a political conscience reiterates the absurdity of the war and the ignorance with which governments and people make decisions that involve thousands of human lives.

Paul Corner's description of Mussolini's ill-founded decision to enter World War II illustrates the relevance of this critique for actual historical events. Although the country was still unprepared, Mussolini entered the war in June 1940[9]:

> The war at sea went equally badly, the navy finding itself without essential air-cover at vital moments. Mussolini's insistence to send Italian troops to the Russia front in 1941 was a desperate attempt to maintain some political control over the course of a conflict which was getting totally out of hand, but even this attempt failed miserably. (286)

Corner accentuates the lack of wisdom of political decisions that find their inspiration more in the ambition of the leader than in the concern for citizens.

The countryside, however, is not only the object of criticism for its isolation and uncompassionate responses. At times, the protagonists find themselves in situations that help them grow psychologically and overcome their limited view of things. For Cesira and Rosetta, this emotional enrichment occurs especially as a consequence of their strong friendship with Michele Festa. This young man, an anti-Fascist intellectual, is an evacuee in the community of Sant'Eufemia, where the women spend nine months.[10]

During one of their many encounters, Michele tries to enlighten them concerning the significance of present events and offers a reflection on the connection between compassion and ignorance. Moravia situates the event on Christmas Day, when two airmen from England appear in the village. Cesira and Michele invite them to share what little food they have. As they converse, Cesira is surprised that the two Englishmen know nothing about Italy: "Although Michele appeared to be extremely well-informed about their country—in fact almost better informed than they [Cesira and Rosetta] were themselves—they [the Englishmen] knew little or nothing about Italy even though they were there at the moment and engaged in fighting a war there" (185). To Cesira, the importance of the event the Englishmen are experiencing should create curiosity about the place. Cesira recounts Michele's reflection on the significance of this ignorance:

> And, still in a low voice, at a moment when they were not listening to us, [he] went on to say that it explains many things, as for instance the air raids which had destroyed so many Italian towns. The airmen who dropped the bombs knew nothing about us or about our monuments; ignorance made

> them calm and pitiless, and ignorance, added Michele, was perhaps the cause of all our woes and other people' s too, for wickedness is only a form of ignorance and he who knows cannot really do evil. (185)

By not knowing a people or their history or by objectifying the other, antagonists become less emotionally involved, making it easier to commit acts of aggression. For Cesira, ignorance threatens compassion, while knowledge about another country may promote understanding. Thus, Cesira's compassion toward the Englishmen undercuts the idea that civilization and knowledge are peculiar to urban environments. It further suggests concern for the conditions of all citizens, who, no matter where they live, can often be manipulated by more powerful political forces.

Cesira's story also shows how war generates conflicting responses, sometimes prompting generosity, sometimes constraining and inhibiting compassion by stifling emotional involvement and leaving only indifference. In this context, the countryside compensates the characters' lack of emotional involvement and functions almost like another character in the story. Giuliano Dego notes the compassionate function of the landscape in relation to the emotional richness of the characters:

> Cesira, Rosetta and Michele are seen against the background of wartime Italy—terrified, humiliated, instinctive, rapacious and sentimental: full-blooded and human. The book is written in a dense and smoothly blended language in which event and landscape are incorporated in the history of the characters and bear witness to their development from instinct and bloodshed to sorrow and compassion. (104)

For Dego, Moravia presents individuals whose emotional capabilities are directly connected to the geographical scenery and the social situation of the war. Amid horrifying acts of brutality, they find support only outside the human condition. The landscape, in fact, witnesses their individual growth from an instinctual stage to the more mature actions of emotional involvement.

Compassion and Atrocity

Through the compassionate presence of the natural environment, Moravia also highlights human brutality. Moravia's countryside is not a special location where people can find protection. On the contrary, it creates the same vulnerability the characters attempt to avoid when they leave Rome.

As Cesira and Rosetta return to Rome, they again experience the horror of bombing. The writer depicts the two women's escape at night when the risk of a new attack threatens their lives:

> However I [Cesira] ran on, across a cornfield, dragging Rosetta by the hand, and then I stumbled and found myself in water. It was a brook, full to the brim, and the coldness of the water calmed me a little, and I stood still in water up to my waist, hugging Rosetta to my breast, while all around us a red light danced and in this light could be seen the ruined houses of Fondi, with their varying colors and outlines, just as daylight, and all over the countryside the explosions continued. (267)

Within this landscape of terror, Cesira and Rosetta find temporary relief in the healing waters of a brook, which becomes an engaged presence in the story. From there, Cesira observes the events and the two women witness the brutality of the war through the destruction of Fondi, Cesira's native village. The compassionate presence of the brook offers the protagonists a sense of calm, turning them into astonished and inert spectators of their own affliction.

The man-made environment, on the other hand, can be dismal and forbidding. For example, the church where the two Moroccan soldiers rape the women is a place of desecration and hostility:

> The altar was now bare, without ornaments or anything else; the picture was still there, but it was crooked, as though there had been an earthquake. The benches, which had once stood in rows up each side of the church right to the altar, had all gone except two, which were placed lengthways, opposite each other, the wrong way round. Between these two benches was a quantity of grey ash and black cinders, showing that a fire had been lit there. (286)

T.P. Ellis elucidates the significance of the altar in a church in his explanation of the folkloric value associated with the two parishes of Dolgelly and Llanelltyd in Wales:

> In olden times, the altar in a church was a very holy place indeed…People believed that on the altars of the Church, Christ was, in the strictest literal sense of the word, actually present. That being so, anyone who claimed the protection of the altar, no matter what he had done, could not be touched. He was at once protected by the altar and by God from vengeance of man. (29)

The sanctified space exercises its power through the restricted area of the altar that hosts the presence of Christ and, therefore, protects individuals from human reprisal. One usually relates a church with prayer and spirituality, which suggests introspection and examination of one's own mental and emotional feelings. However, in Ellis's view, the church is a space not only for contemplation but also for protection and security.

Cesira's depiction of the church contradicts this common view. She describes it disapprovingly, with lack of participation, and includes none of the symbolic associations with a place of worship. This church does not fulfill the expectations of intimacy, religious comfort, and safety that one brings to a sacred site. On the contrary, the crooked picture, missing benches, and signs of a previous fire reveal an attempt to profane the place. The physical setting, then, foreshadows the atrocity that the two women will undergo that will leave them completely emotionless.

This emotional detachment is a common response to violence. As Cesira says, "Our misfortunes actually made us indifferent to the misfortunes of others. And I reflected afterward that this, undoubtedly, is one of the worst effects of the war: that it makes people unfeeling, that it hardens their hearts that it kills pity" (270). For Cesira, individuals lacking in compassionate involvement toward others miss one of the most important components of their personalities. By attributing this lack to the effects of the conflict, she simultaneously condemns the war and dramatizes the significance of emotional awareness.

Lutz provides a beneficial explanation of the positive effects of emotional involvement versus detachment or withdrawal:

> In the second major contrast set, emotion stands against estrangement or disengagement…While the emotional is generally treated as the inferior member of the set in the emotion/thought contrast, here the evaluation is reversed. It is better, most would agree, to be emotional than to be dead or alienated. (57)

Emotion, then, is an antidote to estrangement that precludes any possibility of human relationship. However, emotion is not the absence of knowledge: "To be emotional is to understand deeply (even if too deeply) rather than to fail to see and know. If emotion in this sense is not associated with the notion of 'rationality,' it is at least a cousin to 'wisdom'" (Lutz 57). Thus, if emotion enables one to distinguish between good and evil, Cesira's lack of this faculty predicts her inability to filter the occurrences of life maturely and interact with others.[11]

Michele's capture is another example of extreme situations of terror stifling compassion. Five escaping German soldiers induce Michele to lead them through the mountains, where he is captured. Although Michele's father, Filippo, attempts to go instead, the soldiers reject him because he is too old. Cesira realizes that words are ineffective against severe grief: "We did not know what to say, because when there is a real sorrow with real causes words cannot lessen it and the only thing to do is to put an end to the cause of the sorrow, and this we could not do" (245). Here, for Moravia as well as for Ginzburg, compassion is the silent awareness that unifies people who experience atrocity.

Paradoxically, although Cesira extends compassion in different situations to individuals of varying nationalities and political creeds, she appears unable to express the same emotion toward her own daughter. Near the end of the story, Moravia describes an act of aggression against mother and daughter that demonstrates how the events they are experiencing violate their subjective space and compromise their emotional stability. In contrast with the earlier consistency of the story, this part of the narrative is irregular and unpredictable, reflective of the protagonists' emotional confusion.[12] Moravia first describes the extreme suffering the two women bear. He then introduces the final physical attack on them, which produces the final decline in the two women's proven psychological stability. This attack not only causes extreme moral and physical pain but also communicates sentiments of despair and hopelessness and metaphorically signifies the protagonists' total annihilation.

After the rape, Rosetta breaks established moral taboos by giving herself to all the men she meets.[13] Her sexual behavior prevents Cesira from expressing compassion:

> I felt I was no longer capable of talking to her nor of being sincere with her, because she had changed and, in changing, had changed me too, and so everything was changed between us. Again and again I thought of getting up, lying down on her bed beside her and embracing her; but in the end I gave up the idea and finally fell asleep. (313)

Thus, Moravia denounces the severity of the situation through a sense of the impossibility of mother and daughter sharing feelings or ideas. The social changes implicit in the moment they experience generate personal changes: even though Cesira realizes the importance of comforting her daughter with a physical gesture because she is unable to speak openly to her, she renounces that possibility.

This scene is, therefore, significant because it challenges M. Nussbaum's paradigm of compassion: despite all three elements of her model being present, this experience does not trigger the emotion. With this representation of a mother's lack of compassion toward her daughter, Moravia dramatizes the changes the human spirit undergoes in conditions of extreme horror, conditions that severely damage our human faculties to relate with others and our compassionate understanding. Moravia demonstrates the complexity of neorealist representations of compassion, showing the difficulty of balancing emotion and ethical values once an individual suffers an act of aggression and injustice. Indeed, Moravia suggests that conformity with middle-class values, a tendency neorealist artists associate with developing Fascist consent, sacrifices compassion.

When Moravia has Cesira recognize the humanity of the enemy, he portrays her as being rather naïve in trying to understand the condition of the enemies compassionately. In having her raped by the soldiers, he exposes her personally to the brutality and tragic implications of the war. In doing so, Moravia may be conveying his opposition to the regime's politics, his resistance to the war, and the impossibility of people grasping its horror and irrationality unless they actually experience it. In the preface to Giacomo Debeneditti's *October 16, 1943,* Moravia offers a clear image of the senselessness of the dictatorship:

> In 1938, absurdity, always present under dictatorships, entered my life decisively with passage of the so-called laws for the defense of the race. My father was Jewish, but my mother, whose name was de Marsanich, was not, and we children had been baptized. Absurdity therefore took the name of "exclusion."…We were excluded, that is, absolved in a way, because of insufficient evidence, of the crime of injuring the race by our birth. (15)

For Moravia, laws that illogically establish the superiority of certain individuals over others by birth or, conversely, that rehabilitate them for inadequate proof of their guilt express the irrationality of the dictatorship.

Compassion and Gender Differences

Cesira and Rosetta are similarly condemned to the soldiers' assault because of their gender. Moravia denounces here the vulnerable position of women, who, like the Jewish people, must accept abuse of power. Power is abused whenever someone who has control over others by virtue of superior mental dexterity, social or political position, or physical force inexcusably uses

that power to exploit. In Moravia's work, this abuse results in the emotional numbness of the female victims, who, through either changed moral behavior or an inability to relate to one another compassionately, evidence their physical and emotional destruction.[14]

We can compare Cesira's physical and emotional devastation to the suffering and annihilation experienced by Agnese, the female protagonist in Renata Viganò's story *L'Agnese va a morire* (analyzed later in this work). Both protagonists offer a specific emotional reaction to the war. Giorgio Pullini, in investigating the correspondence between Agnese and Cesira, analyzes their opposing qualities: "The fighting and polemic energy of one woman committed to the partisan struggle contrasts with the energy of another who does not understand anything about the war, but opposes it with the power of her instinct of survival and touches an even larger community" (115). Whereas Agnese shows her political involvement through finding innovative ways for a woman to struggle to liberate Italy from the Fascist and Nazi occupation, as an active partisan, she stands for more than her individual character, inviting the reader to reflect on the situation of the partisan women and women in general. Cesira expresses her resistance through sheer endurance, demonstrating that her political unawareness does not generate resignation but denunciation of discrimination.

The emotional compassion evoked by Agnese's final destruction is comparable to the participation that Cesira's emotional deadness may suggest at the end of *Two Women*. In both stories, the female protagonists encourage compassionate involvement because they are unjustly exposed to annihilation. In both cases, the authors situate their female protagonists in circumstances that reveal their vulnerability and weakness. While Viganò offers a character that openly challenges that condition and questions the assumption that women are passive creatures, Moravia depicts his female protagonist as more a victim of the abuse of power, calling attention to the great significance of suffering and exploitation.

For Cesira, the affliction, abuse, and emotional indifference that war generates are overcome when she sees her daughter crying again:

> I looked at her and I saw that her eyes were full of tears. The tears were brimming over from her wide-open eyes and sliding down her cheeks, and all at once I felt completely sure: she was not changed, as I had feared; these tears she was shedding were partly for Rosario, who had been killed without pity, like a dog, and partly for herself and for me and all those who had been stricken and maimed and destroyed by the war. (337)

As she realizes that her daughter can respond emotionally to her suffering, Cesira also realizes that the end of the conflict may restore hope and faith in human involvement.

Originally, her despair is the consequence of the lack of emotional respect that death evokes in this context, dramatizing the anguish of all those who died or suffered in the war. Rosario, the driver that attempts to take the women back to Rome, is killed by three robbers. Despite his apparent courage in facing the thieves, his death does not trigger any emotional response in the women. On the contrary, Cesira takes his money before getting on another truck. Only then does she recognize their responsibility and lack of concern: "It occurred to me that for reasons of our own, the three of us had shown no pity at all for Rosario, who had been killed like a dog and abandoned on the highway" (336).

Cesira's realization prompts reflection on their moral behavior. Even though Rosario is not aware of their emotional involvement, their participation demonstrates their own ethical principles, as Blum comments: "Yet it is morally good to be compassionate even when—as often happens—the object of compassion is unaware of it. For any concern for the welfare of others, especially when it promotes the sense of equality, is (*ceteris paribus*) morally good" (515). Here, the offer of compassion is an honorable action, not because of the good the recipient receives but because of the satisfaction and heightened sense of respect the giver receives. In contrast, Cesira's and Rosetta's self-centered behavior shows their wickedness and moral deterioration. Thus, Cesira's realization of that behavior and her recognition of her daughter's return to emotionality emphasize the positive functioning of her own moral behavior, indicating a reconstruction of her own self-esteem.

With this example, Moravia highlights the human decline associated with war and the possibility, through compassion, of overcoming its deteriorating effects. Of import is having a female character that, through compassion, illustrates this awakening. Indeed, Cesira expresses the significance of both women's condition and compassionate responses. Through emotion, traditionally attributed to female perception, Cesira retrieves her interest in human beings, overcoming the damage of war and reaffirming the value of emotional involvement among individuals.

Through Cesira, Moravia instigates an examination of compassion and the social system by embodying in her character those emotional responses that illuminate the human condition. The female protagonists' emotional indifference to Rosario's death illustrates the true horror of war, showing that

circumstances affect behavior and that emotions are socially constructed. As James R. Averill notes, "Emotions are responses that have been institutionalized by society as a means of resolving conflicts which exist within the social system" (37). Therefore, we may understand the recovered compassionate participation of Rosetta as a female corrective to the violence that society considers a masculine prerogative. The fact that Cesira does not challenge this social construction, as Viganò's Agnese does, demonstrates her desire to affirm male and female individuality, perhaps to reiterate and oppose men's abuse of power and aggression.

As noted previously, responses to suffering often differ in predictable ways based on textual representations. However, extreme situations can sometimes blur those differences as, for example, in the reactions to Michele's capture. In this context, Moravia presents similar reactions from men and women but also keeps specific gender roles in mind:

> The procession of Michele and the Germans filed past us and slowly disappeared into the scrub. Filippo gave a kind of roar and made as if to rush after him. Peasants and evacuees immediately jumped on him and held him back, still roaring and repeating the name of his son and weeping big tears which made streaks down his face. Michele's mother and sister had now come running up and had difficulty in understanding what had happened; they kept asking for explanations and as soon they understood they started weeping and crying out Michele's name. (245)

Michele's father expresses his suffering through strong tears, roars, and the repetition of his son's name. This emotional shock induces the intervention of other people who try to calm him. The mother and sister, after realizing what is happening, behave in the same way, crying tears and repeating Michele's name, illustrating that expected gender differences often disappear in extreme circumstances.

However, traditional gender roles still surface. Whereas the onlookers are motivated to intervene and hold the father, no mention is made of similar attempts to lessen the women's pain, suggesting that women are subject to different expectations. In her investigation of feminine and masculine sympathy rules, Clark affirms the connection between this emotion and societal expectations in American culture: "Men especially tend to express sympathy at solo, rather than a joint, level. They do so because our masculine sympathy logic, pervading the workplace and spilling over to the neighborhood and the family, predicts negative consequences for both sympathizer and sympathizee if men express sympathy too openly"

(78). Her analysis also seems relevant for the Italian culture, in which gender distinctions visibly exist. Thus, the reaction of the friends witnessing Michele's death leads to compassion extended toward the father, a response that assumes his emotional instability is potentially dangerous.

Conclusions

Although this inquiry into Moravia's need to understand the suffering of others may appear to contradict the theme of his own novel *Gli indifferenti* (*The Time of Indifference*, 1929), the author himself offers a clarification by admitting that the novel represents the final evolution of a specific time of his life. "Con *La ciociara* si chiude idealmente la mia fase di apertura e di fede senza incrinature nei confronti del comunismo" (qtd. in Siciliano 80). [*La ciociara* ideally ends the period characterized by my openness and unquestionable faith toward Communism]. *The Time of Indifference*, published ten years after the end of World War I, is regarded as the first Italian existential novel (Peterson xii). It expresses the author's disorientation toward a seemingly pointless world. "The awareness of problems of apparently insurmountable magnitude have intensifies a latent disposition toward a reappraisal of life in the light of recent tragic experiences" (Pacifici 210). Through the representation of the protagonist's rebellion against the emptiness of a *bourgeois* life, the author displays the character's struggle and the significance of individual choice. According to several critics, *La ciociara* is the work that most expresses Moravia's adhesion to the communist ideology (Casini 88). The individual conflict of Michele in *The Time of Indifference* is transformed into a class struggle voiced by the protagonist with the same name in *La ciociara*. Attempting to resist the Fascist ideology, here Michele is perceptive not only to the political problems in Italy but also to Italians' difficult conditions of life, expressing his civic concerns and social commitment.

Our investigation into Moravia's perception of suffering has revealed divergent possibilities for triggering or denying compassionate responses by stressing the values of Italian society that need to find permanence and stability. Cesira's compassionate reactions, or their absence, draw attention to creative ways for envisioning women's refusal of men's exploitation and propose innovative approaches to investigate *Two Women*. Indeed, in his representation of her suffering, Moravia casts Cesira as a tragic character. She puts herself in others' situations even though her vulnerability puts her in danger. The story depicts her downfall after the soldiers' assault

and her physical and moral destruction. However, this tragic experience enables Cesira to grow both psychologically and emotionally. Indeed, her development ultimately leads to her compassionate understanding of her daughter's moral conduct.[15] As Quinn states, "Tragedy may be seen rooted in the human need to extract a value from human mortality. Viewed from this perspective, tragedy has a positive side in its search for meaning in individual life" (327). Consequently, as Cesira suggests, her suffering illuminates new, constructive ways of understanding individuals' existence: "Thanks to sorrow, we had emerged from the war which had enclosed us in its tomb of indifference and wickedness, and had started to walk again along the path of our own life, which was, maybe, a poor thing full of obscurities and errors but nevertheless the only life that we ought to live" (Moravia, *Two Women* 339). Through grief, the women can overcome the lack of concern produced by the war. Thus, suffering is a constructive way to break down emotional unresponsiveness, showing that although we may not express human concern in moments of desolation, we can retrieve it through similar emotional states.

Moravia further illustrates the tragic aspect of Cesira's character in her social impotence. Cesira expresses her powerlessness with direct, bare language that mirrors her instinctive and popular character.[16] Her compassionate responses originate in her intuitive observations concerning the suffering of others. Her vocabulary is simple and repetitive, expressing a simple logic that does not include intermediate possibilities or intellectual speculation. She bases her assumptions on the evidence she witnesses and does not foresee any possibility for action or change. For example, her response to his father when Michele is captured illustrates Cesira's perceptiveness and compassion: "We did not know what to say, because when there is a real sorrow with real causes words cannot lessen it and the only thing to do is to put an end to the cause of the sorrow, and this we could not do" (245).

Through Cesira's emotional ability and specifically through her offer or denial of compassion, Moravia suggests values such as self- and cultural awareness to be part of the new Italian identity. In the course of the centuries, philosophers, for example, Descartes, Locke, and Sartre, have tried to explain self-awareness and its effects. Self-awareness could be simply defined as the capability of introspection, that is to say, individuals' ability to consider themselves separate from their community but at the same time realize and value the perspectives of others. In Kofman's words, "Self-awareness allows us to consider the deepest aspects of our existence" (3). Moravia characterizes the compassionate female protagonist with this

precise quality, allowing her to reflect on her own condition, acknowledge the emotions of others, and therefore communicate with them.

Cultural awareness is often defined as the foundation of communication and it involves the capability of standing back from ourselves and becoming responsive to our cultural principles, beliefs, and perceptions. Cesira acquires, in fact, a much deeper self-knowledge when she is able to reflect on the basis of her own beliefs, actions, and reactions toward others. Cultural awareness becomes central when Moravia comments on people of different cultures. As often demonstrated, individuals see, interpret, and evaluate things in different ways and according to their own fixed perspectives. The concept of multiculturalism is useful here since it helps to clarify Moravia's acceptance of other cultures. "It suggests a human being whose identifications and loyalties transcend the boundaries of nationalism and whose commitments are pinned to a larger vision of the global community" (Adler 1). For this reason, it is significant that Moravia promotes a more flexible approach that resists the nationalistic and limited view imposed by the regime.

Cesira's compassionate responses and awareness of the social and cultural situation of the time allow her to recognize similarities among individuals with different nationalities, thus promoting and facilitating communication among them. By encouraging emotional ability and the development of self- and cultural awareness, neorealist artists construct an Italian identity that recognizes the importance of others and additional approaches admitting implicitly both the limitations of the Fascist and nationalistic view and the potential relativeness of their principles. Since, it has been amply demonstrated that emotional ability is culturally constructed, neorealist artists leave open possibilities for additional interpretations suggesting the importance of a multinational point of view.

Notes

1. Moravia may be calling attention to the difficulties that modern families encounter in raising and educating children, highlighting the importance of the social participation of the public institutions. According to Antonio Gramsci, "The security for children becomes a privilege of few people, and the Socialists do not want that to happen. We desire that all those born are protected in their physiological and moral development, have the same possibilities toward danger and threats of natural environment, and find the same necessary means to educate their intelligence, to give to the whole

community the maximum fruits of knowledge, scientific research, and fantasy that creates the beauty in poetry, sculpture, and in all the arts" (170).

2. Some of the other works in which Moravia expresses individuals' capabilities of emotional participation are *Gli indifferenti, Il conformista*, and *La romana*.
3. Inspired by Moravia's work, De Sica directed a movie by the same title.
4. Stelio Cro in "Moravia, The Picaresque, and Neorealism" underscores the importance of the author in the growth of neorealist aesthetic: "Moravia's role in the development of the neorealist movement was decisive, having sponsored and perhaps initially even influenced authors as Pier Paolo Pasolini, among others" (186).
5. Some critics call attention to Moravia's ambiguous political position. In *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922–1945*, Ben-Ghiat writes, "In many ways, Moravia was an anomaly within the fascist literary world. First, an allowance provided by his wealthy architect father meant that, unlike most Italian intellectuals, he was under no duress to publish his work or accept the subsidies proffered by state patronage institutions. Second, family ties placed him in direct contact with both fascist and antifascist circles, although, by his own admission, he embraced neither creed with much conviction" (55).
6. Cro, examining Moravia's work, argues that neorealism is influenced by the picaresque genre: "In a sense we could view Italian neorealism as the latest European revival of the picaresque genre. The picaresque novel spread in the seventeenth century from Spain to France, England, Germany, and Holland, and it is believed to be at the core of the origin of the modern novel genre. But it did not spread to Italy" (185).
7. Janice M. Kozma, in "Say It with Flowers: Imagistic Representations of Women in Alberto Moravia's Prose," associates Moravia's representations of women with description of food and plants. Her analysis, which does not include *Two Women*, investigates situations in which the female figure is depicted using food imagery, suggesting that she "is trivialized, distanced, and if necessary consumed, but never, never taken seriously" (383).
8. For an example of this, see Paul Salsini, *The Cielo. A Novel of Wartime Tuscany.*
9. For a detailed analysis of Mussolini's decision to enter World War II, see Fascist Italy by *John Whittam.*
10. According to Tommaso Soldini, the two characters named Michele both in *Gli indifferenti* (*The Time of Indifference*) and *Two Women* represent the figures to whom one may compare any other intellectual in Moravia's novel: "They represent two extremities of a same thread; one represents the intellectual's failure and the second his highest accomplishment" (107).
11. This is an important consideration that helps to clarify the analyses by Wood and Longobardo previously mentioned. According to these critics,

Cesira is the observer of the events or the female agent representing the entire class of bourgeoisie.

12. For more details about the inconsistency of the second part of the narrative, see Dego 106.
13. Katja Liimata offers an interesting analysis of Rosetta's change: "In some sense Rosetta's case could be interpreted as a rebellion against her mother and as an exploration of her body and sexuality in order to find an identity different from the one imposed on her" (225).
14. Several scholars stress the importance of this issue in Moravia's writing. Referring to *Gli indifferenti* (*The Time of Indifference*), Bonaventura Tecchi comments that the value of that work "is that Moravia has presented moral indifference as a problem, described it, and in a certain sense judged it" (57).
15. Barberi Squarotti, analyzing Moravia's *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*), notes the writer's tendency to propose a "typical behavior or a significant point which is able to highlight the horror and the shame of bourgeois society and fascism" (67).
16. Paolo Pullega refers to neorealism's language question, noting that the new aesthetic "oriented itself toward a chronicle narrative as the narrative form that guarantees the clearest reproduction of reality and immunization from every lyric temptation. Regarding the language, the obligatory action was to promote the usage of dialect with the national language" (326).

CHAPTER 13

Women, Compassion, and the Resistance Movement in *L'Agnese va a morire*

Written in 1949, *L'Agnese va a morire* is an important text in neorealism because Viganó documents women's involvement in the political fight against the Fascist regime through the eyes of the protagonist involved in the partisan struggle.[1] Although mentioning the emotional component characterizing Viganó's work and neorealism, critics have yet to devote sustained critical attention to the complex relationship between emotions and the author's work or neorealism. For instance, Re, in "Neorealist Narrative: Experience and Experiment," concisely recognizes the importance of emotions in reporting that Calvino assigns to literature the function of containing and expressing eternal human sentiments. Peter Bondanella briefly notes that in neorealist films, the original expression of emotions can only be achieved by using authentic dialect. Vincent Rocchio appears to recognize the importance of emotions in neorealism but actually employs Lacanian psychoanalysis to determine the relations between neorealist texts and their audience.

Scholars have also given insufficient attention to the emotional component of Viganó's work. Although much of Italian scholarship dedicated to *L'Agnese va a morire* underlines the conventional features of the protagonist,[2] some recent studies call attention to alternative aspects of Agnese's character. For instance, Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum (qtd. in Ruberto) and Simona Wright emphasize the reaction that Viganó generated because the Resistance experience is usually represented by men as a product of men's heroism, struggle, and power. Similarly, Laura Ruberto notes that

S. Milli Konewko, *Neorealism and the "New" Italy*, Italian and Italian American Studies, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-52416-4_13

Agnese's adventures disturb the prevailing depictions of the Resistance, a central subject in neorealist literature and film, and offer innovative insights. Ruberto not only calls our attention to Viganó's different perspective on the Resistance period but also recognizes and values Viganó's personal commitment as a partisan, shown through Viganó's focus on Agnese's participation in the war.

This acknowledgment is particularly significant in view of the lack of recognition concerning women's activity as members of the Resistance. Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina, in *La Resistenza Taciuta. Dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi* (*The Unspoken Resistance. Twelve Lives of Female Partisans from Piemonte*), valorize the efforts of those women whose participation in the war has not been sufficiently recognized:

> Finally, we thought it was more significant to give words not to the few women who have important jobs today or who, however, are very famous, but above all to the others, to those women partisans that in a more or less important way have undergone kinds of rejection or social exclusion. Those women, even if they revealed their exceptional talents during the partisan war, were then driven back in their traditional subordinate condition. (4)

Bruzzone and Farina try to compensate for history's exclusion of women by citing declarations of the unrecognized to emphasize the contrast between the demonstrations of the women's extraordinary abilities during the war and the lack of acknowledgment and respect they experience after it. Thus, Bruzzone and Farina attempt to recuperate the perspectives of common women on the war and to denounce the subsequent postwar discrimination these women had to bear.

Other scholars present different explanations for the omission of women from descriptions of the Resistance. According to Wright, the situation is quite complex:

> For centuries we kept the argument that women could not sharply describe what they did not experience directly, that is to say the bloody battle. Even more questionable than the problem of the lack of direct involvement is the problem of the genre, whose function was completely opposed to that of the males that was directed to violence and armed collision. (64)

Thus, women are not entitled to recount events that they do not directly experience. Such examinations are also at odds with their gendered posi-

tion. Wright suggests that because women have been historically denied direct participation in the war and are not expected to speak about war, battles, and violence, their testimony is considered irrelevant.

Offering a differing perspective, Margaret R. Higonnet attributes the paucity of writing by and about women and war to a general lack of interest: "Texts by women about war have become a casualty of history. Printed on acid paper and never reprinted, many of their books…are falling now into dust and may permanently disappear from history" (140). Higonnet emphasizes the negative effect of this indifference toward women's literature about the war and laments the loss of their testimonials.

Given this critical context, Viganó's unique narrative on women's participation in the war and the Resistance seems particularly significant for these reasons. First, the novel is a valuable contribution to Italian neorealism. It not only provides a woman's perspective on the war but also redefines two main traits of the neorealist aesthetic, compassion and humanism, which are usually conceived by men for men. Second, the novel helps reshape the memory of this historic time. Indeed, the importance of World War II, the Nazi occupation, and the Resistance in Italian national memory cannot be underestimated.

We may best understand the ways in which Viganó's particular representation of Agnese's actions symbolize Italian women's active contribution to this form of remembrance through Joan W. Scott's explication of national memory:

> Women's experience, when contrasted with official pronouncements on the meaning of war, provides insight not only into the discrepancy between domestic, private history and official, national history, but also (and more important) a means of analyzing how and by whom national memory is constructed. The private-public distinction—families as compared to the nation, mothers' needs versus the needs of the state, individual death as opposed to national survival—is critical in the formulation of nationalistic or patriotic ideologies. (28)

Here, Scott underlines the dissimilar features of women's witnessing, emphasizing their importance in revising the divergence between private and national history and in investigating the production of national memory. Even though Agnese's interventions may reflect private needs, they also offer a view of women's participation in the war that deconstructs national memory about the era and creates a new national ideology.

Published just four years after the end of World War II, Viganó employs different narrative perspectives in *L'Agnese va a morire* to validate women's stories of the roles in which they served in the partisan movement and of their experiences of the war. Wright highlights the relationship between neorealism and women's narratives:

> Finally, in Italy, the timely coincidence between the end of the hostility and neorealist's phase of greater development must not be neglected. This concurrence encouraged the concomitance of different voices and ways of expression of the narrative event. Therefore, this situation caused a remarkable extension of the literary discourse, which presumed the inclusion of the female's point of view. (64)

The inclusion of female narrative perspectives highlights the different roles assumed by women during that time, many of whom openly participated in the brutal conflict. In fact, according to Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, "Over 35,000 female partisans helped in the violent national revolution against fascism and Nazism" (qtd. in Ruberto 328). Thus, the increased involvement of women in the political panorama may have generated more intense desire to narrate the circumstances they experienced, which, in turn, resulted in more interest from readers eager to learn about those events from first-hand descriptions. The success of *L'Agnese va a morire* may in part be attributed to this dynamic.

Italo Calvino, in the introduction to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path to the Nest Spider*), explains postwar literary production as the result of the exceptional richness of narrative material: "One could establish an immediacy of communication between the writer and the public: we were face to face, under the same conditions, full of stories to tell, everyone had had his own, everyone had experienced irregular, dramatic, adventurous lives" (16). Thus, everyday experiences of exceptional, severe events generate a connection among individuals who appear to share a need to immortalize those occurrences in written form and to recognize other individuals' experiences.

In a similar vein, Matteo Palumbo argues that passion toward past circumstances and a desire to articulate them to a restored community drive Viganó's writing. His clarification of the connection between past circumstances and the emotional components they generate suggests that those emotional elements may prompt reconsideration of historic moments.

The connections critics such as Palumbo and Calvino make between narratives of the war and emotions illustrate the need to devote close analysis to Viganó's portrayal of emotions in relation to Agnese and other characters. In Moravia's and Ginzburg's narratives, we examined compassion against a background of suffering and distress exemplified by the Fascist and Nazi occupation. In Viganó's account, the historical conditions are even more dangerous; thus, she crafts the character of Agnese, a woman decisively engaged in combating their domination, to represent the fierce partisan struggle against German Nazis and Italian Fascists.

Because Agnese represents not only the struggle of a simple peasant who challenges the political conditions of the time but also the struggle of a politically aware partisan, Viganó's inspirations for this character are noteworthy. In "*La storia di Agnese non è una fantasia*" ("The Story of Agnese Is Not a Fantasy"), Viganó states that she imbued her fictional character with the physical and psychological features of an actual woman she encountered during World War II. However, according to Andrea Battistini, Viganó fashioned Agnese as "the syntheses of all the women who fought Fascism with her" (15). Regardless of whether she was an actual woman or a composite of many, Agnese effectively illustrates women's efforts in the Resistance. She shows Viganó's desire to let women voice historical reality from their own perspectives, giving them the same power as men to record social, historical, and political events. Thus, given the predominant Fascist portrayal of women as mothers and caretakers (as defined by female gender difference), Agnese is innovative and provocative.[3] Yet, despite Agnese's innovative female narration of the war, she often relates to others in ways that are traditionally maternal and nurturing.

Viganó represents the protagonist of *L'Agnese va a morire* both as an agent capable of demonstrating compassion through her caring behavior and as an object of compassion because of her experiences. Because Viganó explores the often neglected role women played in the Resistance, we explore Agenese's compassionate responses toward other characters in order to highlight and acknowledge the ways in which women supported the partisans' fight, affirming their commitments outside the family and assuming responsibilities in the public sphere. At the same time, we must underscore the ways in which compassion contributes to the idealization of the female character demonstrating how emotional ability can generate conflict resolution.

Agnese as the Subject of Compassion

Agnese's compassionate interaction with people is often associated with her maternal and independent behavior. Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone observe this distinctive aspect of Agnese's ways of interacting with the partisans in *In guerra senza armi. Storie di donne 1943–1945*: "In her role of nurturing 'mother' Agnese becomes part of what has been defined as 'maternage' of mass; yet, what remains unique about her is that she acts autonomously, not according to roles ascribed to her" (qtd. in Palma 71). Bravo and Bruzzone highlight also the protagonist's dynamic role in the partisan group, drawing attention to the important function she exercises in her region: "The motherly Agnese, far from a pawn in a strategy, becomes very active in participating and shaping, every phase of the Partisan's war in her region. She obstinately fights not only for the social changes necessary to ensuring their survival but also to preserve their resources" (qtd. in Palma 71). Thus, Agnese's kind and specific interventions establish her vital role in the Resistance in promoting social renewal and defending the partisans' possessions.

Agnese reflects a maternal yet worldly wisdom about the realities of war as she contemplates the tangible consequences the war may generate: dead, wounded, or sick people. Thus, she becomes a figurative mother who offers exclusive and independent sustenance to others, "preparing food for them, checking that they did not lack anything, washing their clothes, and constantly moving so that they would be well" (Viganó, *L'Agnese va a morire* 92). Although her compassion is consistent with the Fascist model of the nurturing woman, she also represents a different model of female character, one that directs her efforts to nonfamily members and contributes to specific political objectives.

Mafai elucidates this new aspect of women's lives during World War II, affirming that the war and the severe situations associated with it (e.g., hunger) forced women to abandon their positions of "exemplary wives and mothers" (4), to find occupations, and "to help those who shoot or to learn how to shoot" (4). Thus, although we may view Agnese's compassionate, nurturing attitude as a reflection of a traditional image of women, her political commitment and emotional involvement outside the domestic sphere create new and gratifying opportunities for interaction.

Another episode between Agnese and a young partisan that occurs early in the book shows Agnese's nurturing response as a platform for political action:

> She got up, poured some wine in the glasses, set the table with a napkin and she said: "Now you have to eat." She was cutting the salami and the bread and was watching the companion that was biting big pieces of bread. He said, with his mouthful almost to excuse himself, "I have been poking along since this morning."
>
> Agnese, who in front of her comrades was shy and easily blushed, red in her face, advanced, "In these months with the laundry I earned a lot. I want to give you some money." She unbuttoned her blouse, took a small package, and opened it. There were three one thousand lire bills inside. Then she said: "I know there is a great need for all those hidden young people and for the rest." Staring at a white spot, which was reflecting from the light in one of the glasses that was half full, she concluded: "Without Palita, I do not need it. I give it without any desire to insult you." (Viganó, *L'Agnese va a morire* 27)

Here, Agnese offers both emotional and material support to the partisans. She realizes that to interact with her comrade, she needs to establish a relationship that emphasizes her supportive attitude, which she expresses by providing food and drink. Agnese shows no embarrassment here because her compassionate offer is in tune with what women are expected to do. At the same time, we may view the simple gesture of setting the table and offering wine, bread, and salami as a bridge to the more difficult task of offering money. Thus, her behavior reflects both the nurturing usually attributed to women and the earning and managing of money that were traditionally male prerogatives. Her realization of how transgressive her offer of money is may explain Agnese's subsequent embarrassment, indicated by her blush and her glancing at the light and confirmed by her declaration, "Without Palita, I do not need it. I give it without offense." In fact, if her last words express her generosity and desire to help the partisans concretely, they may also suggest her discomfort because they voice the uncommon condition for women of providing economic support to men.

Jaggar's concept of outlaw emotions is helpful here to explain discrepant attitudes and behavior like Agnese's:

> Outlaw emotions are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values, and some, though certainly not all, of these outlaw emotions are potentially or actually feminist emotions. Emotions become feminist when they incorporate feminist perceptions and values, just as emotions are sexist or racist when they incorporate sexist or racist perceptions and values. (160)

For Jaggar, outlaw emotions are incompatible with prevailing beliefs and challenge definitions of the subordinate group.[4] Agnese's compassionate responses and subsequent embarrassment reveal her complex social role. Her financial ability to help the partisans enables Agnese to concretize her compassionate response, which highlights a new awareness for both Agnese and, symbolically, other women. However, her discomfort demonstrates that one may communicate compassion more easily in familiar situations and that innovative ways of interacting with people, such as the ones proposed by a feminist approach, may be more difficult to achieve.

Agnese's compassion does not always result in material or external expressions, however. Viganó also represents compassion as an internal quality crucial in explaining overt behavior. The association between compassionate responses and the imagination appears in the following example in which atmospheric conditions symbolize the protagonist's precarious physical and emotional state:

> August brought the first storm. A line of black clouds came up from the sea; they were still on the horizon like they were made of stones. In the valley, under the hot and sad sun, the air became heavier. It was like a feeling of torture and the partisans, with their sweat burning in their eyes, breathed faster. A breath oppressed with sufferance kept them alert and upset in their wet shirts. Agnese did not feel well and was astonished because she did not know about diseases or medicines. While she was sitting on the broken bench inside the hut, she imagined she was dying and that her heart had stopped like a jammed machine. She was sorry for her big fat cumbersome body that would remain there and for the deep hole that her comrades would have to dig. It would be a hard labor with that heat and the very dry dirt. (*L'Agnese va a morire* 81)

At this point, Agnese projects her worries about her own physical discomfort onto her comrades, whom she imagines are struggling to bury her body. Although her discomfort with the money reflects material reality, her compassion results from imagined events, revealing that Agnese's emotional involvement results from a predisposition of mind that enables her to anticipate the possible circumstances the partisans may encounter. Thus, while the previous offer of money allows Agnese to connect materially to the partisans, the predisposition of her mind enables her to bond with them, showing that the effects of compassion may be tangible as well as intellectual.

In clarifying this model, we must consider Richard Wollheim's study on the relationship between emotions and imagination. According to

Wollheim, emotions first have internal expressions, followed by external ones. Fantasies, as examples of interior emotions, are originated and directed by the emotions. In Viganó's story, the protagonist's fantasy about her comrades' hard work may result from her emotional involvement with them, which becomes the object itself of her compassionate behavior. It is Agnese's compassionate involvement, generated through her imagining, that creates her specific attitude toward the partisans. As Wollheim notes, "The role of emotion is to be understood in terms of a certain end that emotion has: that end being, as we know, to supply the person with an attitude" (128). Thus, the purpose of the protagonist's compassionate involvement is crucial because it generates her future approach toward the partisans' struggle and, therefore, precedes any kind of material manifestation.[5] Agnese's imagined involvement reflects both the emotional and the rational components of compassion. Indeed, her emotional involvement is associated with her capacity to envision her future intervention.

In a different passage, Agnese's compassion toward another woman enriches the combination of traditional and innovative behavior that characterizes her. Rina, a *staffetta*[6] like Agnese, stops at their camp one rainy day, "trembling from the cold, the wind and the rain that soaked her dress" (Viganó *L'Agnese va a morire* 82). After giving her "a rag to dry herself off," Agnes offers "her a little glass of grappa," noticing that the girl is "pale and her eyes were veiled" (*L'Agnese va a morire* 82). Rina soon informs Agnese about the tragic events she witnessed during the previous night when the "black brigade" took, tortured, and shot her father and brother, along with other people (*L'Agnese va a morire* 82). Viganó describes Rina's physical reaction and Agnese's consequent emotional involvement:

> The warm tears, leaving shining stripes on her face, were falling down and she quickly dried them. She said: "My fiancée should be here; they call him Tom." Agnese said: "Yes, he is here." Then she put her arm around the girl's shoulders and added: "Now I am going to look for Tom. You wait for me here." (*L'Agnese va a morire* 82)

Here, Viganó represents compassion first through Agnese's caring manners. She then manifests her compassion physically through an embrace and commits to searching personally for the woman's fiancé. Thus, Agnese's compassionate response reveals an ability to behave actively and wisely, challenging the cultural idea that emotions are in opposition to reason.

According to Lutz, who has attempted to deconstruct cultural bias that opposes reason to emotions,

> One of the most pervasive cultural assumptions about emotion is that it is antithetical to reason or rationality…Emotions tend predominantly to lead either to erroneous judgments and hence senseless, irrational actions, or they remain internal feeling states which organize no action, initiate no problem solving, constitute no rationality…People tend to see emotion as disruption of, or barrier to, the rational understanding of events. (60)

Lutz notes that because the prevailing assumption is that emotions oppose reason, they cannot generate intelligent decisions. In opposition to Wollheim's positive concept of emotions as internal and external expressions, this negative concept considers emotions to be motionless feelings. Indeed, beyond being inconsequential, they are actual barriers to rational understanding. However, Agnese's compassionate behavior shows the productive, rational, and active side of emotions, a demonstration of both their rational value and their rational capability.

Agnese as the Object of Compassion

The representation of compassion as a logical reaction and as an instrument of political interaction appears in several situations in which Viganó depicts Agnese as the object of characters' emotional responses as a result of her husband's capture and death. In the following example, compassion is offered to the protagonist by a partisan who is also taken prisoner by the Germans but is able to come back to inform Agnese of Palita's death[7]:

> Cencio's son remained confused, without understanding anything. He said to his great regret: "Then you did not know. This is bad news to say. I came to tell you but I didn't have the courage." He was stretching out his hands automatically toward the fire. Then, realizing they were too hot, he withdrew them.
>
> He whispered: "Try to bear it." He was not able to add anything else. Agnese, still quietly crying, with her fat and calm tears, went to pour some wine into a glass and offered it to him, then she looked in her packet for a handkerchief. She did not have it and she dried her face with her apron. She said: "You must tell me everything: how he died and where he was buried, how things really went." (34)

The man, apparently upset by Agnese's unawareness of events, reveals compassion through his few whispered words of encouragement. His inability to articulate his emotional participation serves to accentuate the recognized gravity of the circumstances. Here, Agnese is the object of the politically shaded compassion of a man who, like Palita, directly experiences the brutality of the Fascist and Nazi occupation. Thus, the "everything" may include not only the circumstances of her husband's death but also the political and social events involved, underlining Agnese's moral growth as a partisan.

Antonina Campisciano draws attention to Agnese's developing consciousness of her role in the partisan fight by analyzing her thoughts concerning the brigade. Discussing Agnese's statement, "I don't understand anything but what needs to be done will be done," Campisciano comments, "In her reply what emerges is not her admission or declaration to understand the whys and wherefores of the war but, on the contrary, a complete divergent ascertainment emerges, a humble observation that examines her faith and trust in persisting, of staying to fight" (69). Agnese's attitude here represents another stage in evolving complexity, for it is informed not merely by emotion or rationality but also by faith and trust. Furthermore, the compassionate response that she receives highlights her request for knowledge and involvement in the Resistance.

In other examples, Viganó represents compassion toward the protagonist as a political tool to establish the ideology that must be followed. In the following example, her condition evokes compassion in the whole community as they offer her support after Palita's death, which comforts her through spiritual and concrete assistance:

> A strange piety spread toward the widow, strange because she did not look for it. In contrast, she appeared serene, without imploration or tears. She had always been solitary, rather peevish and rough and without friendships. There were people who organized a collection and went in each home with the paper for the offer. The amount was given to the sacristan, who took it to Agnese. She saw him arriving one day when it was snowing heavily. The entire valley was white and gray with a low sky touching the tree. She said: "Alfonso, with this weather? What do you need? "…He answered: "We collected this money to honor the memory of the late Palita. The whole town participated. It is not so much, but it is from our heart." (43)

The townspeople's emotional response[8] to Agnese is surprising because not only has she not done anything to deserve it but she also has been

reserved and unfriendly. Despite this, the people in the town, moved by Agnese's hard times, give her a tangible expression of their compassion. Thus, Viganó communicates that compassion overcomes temperamental features and can be activated even if the sufferer is unaware of its occurrence. In other words, compassion is independent from the sufferer's temperament, which does not influence the witness's view.

The sacristan's recognition of the emotional value of the donation, which comes from everybody's heart, also highlights the unifying emotional expression of compassion. In using this example, Viganó may also be accentuating the importance of the common people as a united force. Thus, we may view compassionate participation as a channel for collective compassion that, in turn, reveals the broad anti-Fascist sentiment of the era.

Giovanni Falaschi underlines the special power that Viganó attributes to common people: "Additionally, for Viganó common people cannot be substituted by other forces. On the contrary, they are unbeatable, but there is no doubt that the author winds up excessively simplifying her popular characters and depicts their antifascism as an instinctive, hidden, and mysterious influence" (79). Falaschi's depiction of the anti-Fascist disposition of the common people as "instinctive" may derive from the general tendency to associate emotions with instinct or nature. However, our analysis of the relationship between compassion and reason suggests that the people's compassionate responses are products of logical thought. Their compassion for Agnese's condition legitimizes the widow's suffering and implicitly challenges the political beliefs that gave rise to that suffering. Thus, compassion is a unifying element, alleviating the brutality of tragic events and offering hope for new political realities.

This collective compassion toward Agnese may also contribute to the idealization of the female protagonist. The compassionate responses that Agnese offers and receives identify her as a privileged character. However, clarification of Agnese's special condition is important to understanding the influence of compassionate reactions on her glorification in the conclusion. Her extraordinary value is apparent at the outset of the book when Viganó describes her physical strength during her regular activities as washerwoman, strength that may foreshadow her military capabilities:

> You couldn't see her head, buried as it was under the tottering linens. She seemed to be carrying in her arms a small mountain of snow. But for her it was not too much of a strain. You could only detect the strength required by the brutal flexing of her fat leg muscles. The boys who passed her on their way to fish in the valley, called out, "Goodnight, tank!" (23)

Agnese can easily bear the labor of carrying the dry linens; only her leg muscles show the tension of her physical effort. Thus, with this initial description of her physical strength, Viganó may anticipate her future involvement in the Resistance movement, not only with activities traditionally associated with women, such as feeding or caring for the partisans, but also with occupations that require more physical endurance, such as fighting or killing, that are conventionally related more to men. The children's collective comment is validation of Agnese's capabilities. Carolyn Daly confirms this assumption: "The comparison of Agnese to a tank also foretells that Agnese will become a 'fighting machine' in a more traditional, masculine sense. In fact, her physical strength as a washerwoman and her ability to kill are intricately connected—the former provides the skill for the latter" (253).

Viganó depicts Agnese's endurance in several circumstances as she works with the partisans, often comparing her ability to bear prolonged exertion during her regular work to her seemingly being facilitated by it. To fight against the Fascists and Nazis who killed her husband, she starts working as a courier for a Resistance fighter. Wet from her sweat, she untiringly rides her old bike in arid regions during the summer; in the winter, wet from the rain, she rides in damp areas. However, Viganó emphasizes her physical power, increased by the loss of her husband, the day she kills an enemy soldier who brutally occupies her home. When the soldier falls asleep, Agnese avenges her husband: "So Agnese grabbed the machine-gun by the barrel, raised it and brought it down with a jerk on Kurt's head, exactly like she did when she hit matrimonial sheets, heavy with water, on the washboard" (54). Here, Agnese directs her physical strength, usually employed in activities traditionally associated with women, to accomplish an act of physical power and violence typically connected to men. In doing so, Agnese demonstrates her ability to collaborate in the Resistance movement not only as a caretaker but also as a fierce participant in the battle.

This scene puts women's work in the war on par with men's. Viganó emphasizes that, in addition to performing their traditional roles, women can collaborate in war in a brutal, violent way, just as men do. Furthermore, she demonstrates that women may reject the image of nurturance traditionally associated with femininity and develop less conventional ways to behave. Thus, with this innovative portrayal of the female protagonist, Viganó may suggest instability in the social order. Jean Bethke Elshtain proposes that "'the image of woman as Other, as the Goddess of Peace,' retains its power in spite of women's active military involvement because

its symbolizes qualities that fend off the barbarism implicit in war" (1). Indeed, the depiction of Agnese discredits the mythic association between women and peace. Instead, Viganó invests Agnese with great courage and strength of character marshaled to attack the enemy.

This attention to Agnese's special qualities may explain the compassionate reaction her atrocious death in the final scene evokes. During a roundup, Agnese is arrested, along with other people. During a brief period when everyone shows fear and concern, she repeatedly reveals her courage and humanity by persuading the others to continue believing in the cause of the Resistance. When she is set free with other women and believes she has avoided death yet again, she sees two ferocious eyes staring at her. The soldier she thought she had killed is standing in front of her:

> The officer shouted again; he took his gun and shot close to her eyes, on her mouth, on her forehead, one, two, four rounds. She fell down with her face smashed into the ground. Screaming, everybody ran away. The officer put the gun back into his holster and trembled, for sure, out of anger. Then the lieutenant said something to him in German and he smiled. Agnese was left alone. He looked strangely small, a pile of black rags on the snow. (239)

Thus, Agnese is killed in a way that literally and metaphorically destroys her ability to participate actively in the Resistance. By having the officer shoot her in the forehead, eyes, and mouth, Viganó underscores the annihilation of Agnese's intellectual faculties and, by extension, her rational involvement in the battle.

This scene may evoke compassion for several reasons. First, Agnese dies a particularly ghastly death, characterized by a violence that exceeds the punishment for her offence had it occurred during reasonable times. Thus, her death may prompt compassion in all but the most hardened readers. Next, the German officer's self-satisfaction at the brutal slaying highlights this effect. More important, however, the knowledge that Agnese dies like a martyr, without denying her political beliefs, suggests emotional participation.

In *Il santo partigiano martire. La retorica del sacrificio nelle biografie commemorative* (*The Sainted Partisan Martyr. The Rhetoric of Sacrifice in the Commemorative Biographies*), Perry reads Agnese as a martyr and Christ-like figure, suggested by the etymology of her baptismal name Agnese. From *Agnus*, her name evokes *Agnus Dei*, implying that this character faces death as a sacrificial symbol of the Resistance. He underscores

Agnese's martyrological association by noting that in the lives of several saints, friends and family members who have died appear in the dreams of those who are about to join them. Viganó creates several visions in which Agnese dreams about her husband, Palita, and receives suggestions from him. These dreams may convey her desire for a more open participation in her husband's political life, confirmed by her numerous comments on her lack of knowledge of that matter. These visions may also suggest her aspiration to be more politically involved in the Resistance and its political organization. Thus, the compassionate responses to Agnese's defeat may produce an idealized figure of a woman who resists the values imposed on women for centuries and tries, with her sacrifice, to establish a different model of conduct.

Conclusions

Compassion in *L'Agnese va a morire* exemplifies the dual function of the protagonist, who is presented both as subject and object of compassion, thereby illustrating the various ways in which women participated in World War II. Seen as both an external and an internal ability to behave actively and wisely, in this process, compassion is the mechanism to idealize a specific kind of woman.

In offering and receiving compassionate responses, Agnese illustrates a range of possibilities for revising old perceptions. She embodies the innovations that neorealism aspired to reach. Many scholars have emphasized the neorealist tendency to denounce contemporary political events by way of suggesting a different ideology.[9] According to Mario Santoro, "The neorealist narrative assumes the form of a report and a transcription of things even if more or less explicitly behind the report it aspires to propose a denunciation, to suggest the necessity of modifying the reality (339). For Santoro, the main intention of neorealist narrative is accusatory in order to propose transformations. Similarly, the investigation of Viganó's models, addressing social, economic, and political problems, reveals the neorealist aim to propose an anti-Fascist ideology. Viganó's neorealism is subtle. She invites readers to consider the conditions of partisan women in connection with the plight of women more broadly and, thus, to a larger anti-Fascist ideology.

The representations of compassion offered by Agnese to Rina or by Cencio's son to Agnese dramatize the direct involvement of women in the Resistance. By questioning the association of women with obedience or

passivity, Viganó challenges the assumption that during the war, women waited safe and rooted at home. Elshtain in "Women and War" also confronts this assumption:

> Moreover, employed or not, all women have had to contend with food shortages, rationing, and evacuation. In all these ways, then, the realities of the two world wars contradicted the myth that war compels men to go forth and fight in order to protect their women, who remain passive and secure at home with children. (1)

Laura Antonelli makes a similar argument: "Indeed, women fight for everybody, for peace, justice, freedom, and show a courage superior to what one could have imagined, discrediting that myth on female frailty that obliged them to remain only in the private sphere, protected within the domestic walls" (16). These declarations emphasize the contradictions between the image of women at home and their actual involvement in the serious life-and-death responsibilities associated with their daily work. Thus, Viganó creates a complex picture of women who have to manage both domestic events, such as food shortages, and their participation in rebellious activities with partisans, showing not only their political awareness but also their ferocious capabilities of killing.

In doing so, Viganó gives credit to the unexpected sides of women's involvement in the Resistance.[10] From one point of view, Agnese's compassion toward members of the partisan group, illustrated by offering food and drink and caring attention, conforms to the traditional female gender role. However, her compassion toward nonfamily members may represent a changed view of woman's commitment, one that allows her to operate outside the domestic sphere. Thus, Viganó uses compassion to challenge the Fascist model of female education to which Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto refer: "These Institutions have to spiritually prepare girls for ruling (organizing) the house and teaching in kindergarten" (404).

According to this account, the focus of women's education, which needs a separate kind of institution, is exclusively organizing the house and educating children. However, Agnese's compassion toward the partisans and her interaction with Palita's partisan friend illustrate women's abilities to move beyond the domestic sphere and to function productively in a more extended community.

Despite being allowed to demonstrate their abilities to accomplish the same results as men during the war, women were not offered the same opportunities after the war. According to Elshtain,

> Most governments, stressing the need to reward and reintegrate veterans and restore family life, instituted pronatalist and redistributive polices, such as family allowances and subsidies for housing and education, while playing down women's demands for employment opportunities and equal pay, even though they had supported such principles during the war. (9)

Although postwar governments recognized reintegration problems and valued the restoration of families, they reinstituted laws, policies, and incentives based upon gender differences, penalizing women who faced inferior employment opportunities and remuneration. Viganó may have foreshadowed this situation by making her protagonist dependent on the compassion of others, expressed in the villagers' monetary gift, rather than being a true agent of her own destiny. At the same time, the compassionate monetary donations Agnese offers may evoke the difficulties women overcome when they attempt to explore new territory or to face old conflicts.

The emotional ability that Viganó proposes through the idealized female character of Agnese is generated from her compassionate involvement toward other individuals and it is an essential element to produce conflict resolution. Thus, the author confirms the approach by Lilius and all, who conceive compassion as a pervasive aspect of organizational life. As often underlined, conflict resolution is a human procedure strictly connected to an individual's emotional ability since it includes components such as communication, trust, and motivation. William Ury suggests to "[b]ecome aware of your emotions" (*The Power* 33) if we want to solve our conflicts. But conflict resolution is strictly connected to the capacity to recognize and respond to the things that matter to other individuals. In Ury's words, "The ability to see the situation as the other side sees it, as difficult as it maybe, is one of the most important skills a negotiator can possess" (*Getting* 16). Therefore, our capability to generate a change in other individuals is connected to our ability to understand their perspectives. "If you want to influence them, you also need to understand empathetically the power of their point of view and to feel the emotional force with which they believe in it" (*Getting* 16).

In Agnese's experience, conflicts arise, for instance, from differences in perceptions and because the fellow partisans might have disagreed over Agnese's values, motivations, and ideas. Although those differences might appear trivial, as in the case of Agnese's monetary donation, they trigger strong feelings and express a deep personal necessity. In Viganó's model, Agnese expresses a need to help the partisans, respect their sensibility, and voice her political involvement. Furthermore, Viganó's neorealist art helps

to highlight the existence of conflict among individuals and to promote a positive method toward their resolutions. While struggle is an inevitable component of human relationships, the author proposes precious and constructive strategies to cope, avoiding a possible deterioration of the human relationship. Even though individuals are aware of the significance of managing conflicts, the ability of conflict resolution is rarely communicated. "Coping with conflict is something that we are rarely taught in any formal sense, although this is beginning to change as the field of conflict management gains a bigger foothold in all tiers of our educational system" (Masters & Albright 2). Viganó's work is noteworthy not only because it suggests resolution to women's struggle but also because it highlights the struggle itself. Through Viganó's work, neorealism becomes a vehicle to suggest that the new Italian identity should value emotional ability and recognize the legitimacy of conflict resolution and a willingness to scrutinize in an environment of compassionate understanding since this approach opens pathways to creative problem-solving.

Notes

1. Viganó's novel has inspired a film with the same title by Giuliano Montaldo. Other works by the writer, such as, *Partisan Wedding*, show women's political struggle.
2. Rosa, in *Scrittori e popolo* (*Writers and People*), emphasizes, for instance, the importance of *L'Agnese va a morire* as a testimony of the peasant world, which is underlined by the peasant environment in which the story unfolds and by the protagonist herself, who is a peasant.
3. For an analysis of women's role under Fascism, see *Mothers of Invention*, edited by Robin Pickering-Iazzi, and *How Fascism Ruled Women* by Victoria De Grazia.
4. Lutz highlights the relationships between emotion and power: "Emotions become an important metaphor for perceived threats to established authority; the emotionality of repressed groups becomes a symbol of their antistructural tendencies. To the powerful, this is their chaos; to the groups themselves, it is their impulse toward freedom" (62).
5. Putnam highlights the importance of imagination related to the capability of remembering one's own experience: "When I empathize with someone else in pain, I am not drawing an inference from my isolated experience to the possible experience of the other person. I am remembering what 'pain' is like and performing the imaginative counterfactual discussed earlier" (37).

6. Suzanne Branciforte clarifies the importance of *staffette* during World War II. These women were "essential to the functioning of clandestine activity" (7). They "relied on their female identity…[to] convey arms, food, messages, and other things to their male colleagues. It is ironic but no accident that the invaluable service performed by thousands of women *staffette* depended on their femaleness, thus 'exploiting the male habit of ascribing specific roles to women'" (7).
7. For a discussion on the significance of the cult of fallen soldiers, see Perry's "Rita, Pina, and Agnese: Martyred Mothers and the Myth of the Resistance" and *Il santo partigiano martire—La retorica del sacrificio nelle biografie commemorative* (*The Sainted Partisan Martyr. The Rhetoric of Sacrifice in the Commemorative Biographies*).
8. The author uses the term "pity," which several scholars define with different features than compassion. As stated in the first chapter, this distinction is not particularly significant for this study, which takes into consideration the broad significance and the repercussions associated with the emotional involvement in understanding another individual's pain.
9. Ben-Ghiat, in "Neorealism in Italy, 1930–1950: From Fascism to Resistance," affirms that some early examples of neorealism approved of Mussolini and the Fascist movement. After the war, several artists and intellectuals tried to purify neorealism of its Fascist past and affirm it originated in an anti-Fascist revolution (158–159). Similarly, Marcia Landy, in *Fascism in Film: The Italian Commercial Cinema, 1931–1943*, underscores the same features in her analysis of Italian neorealist films.
10. See Antonelli for further clarification on women's involvement in the Resistance.

CHAPTER 14

Compassion and the Construction of Women's Identity in *Rome, Open City*

Historians and critics have long considered the 1945 film *Rome, Open City*[1] to be a masterpiece of Italian cinema for both its aesthetic and its historic importance. With its stripped-down production methods and aesthetic, Rossellini's film is one of the first to exhibit cinematic neorealism, as Bondanella notes: "The conditions of its production (relatively little shooting in the studio, film stock bought on the black market and developed without the normal viewing of daily rushes, postsyncronization of sound to avoid laboratory expenses, limited financial backing) did much to create many of the myths concerning neorealism" (37). Bondanella also affirms the historical value of the work since it "…captured forever the tension and the tragedy of Italian experiences during the German occupation and the Partisan struggle against the Nazi invaders" (37).

Thus, the film's neorealist features are consequences of the historic moment. Vernon Jarrat, also focusing on the aesthetic aspects of neorealism, emphasizes the documentary qualities of Rossellini's film. He especially stresses the confined dimensions of the studio, "a one-stage studio measuring about 60 feet by 20" (qtd. in Huaco 164), that may make the scenes shot on location even more dramatic.

Other scholars have focused on the historical and humanist aspects of the work, including its rejection of social Darwinism. Leprohon and Arthur Knight, among others, recognize the historical importance of the work as a valuable document of the Italian Resistance. Knight emphasizes the documentary qualities of nascent neorealism: its use of nonprofessional

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actors and hidden cameras. In his analysis of the films *Man of the Cross* and *Rome, Open City*, Carlo Celli notes that both feature a priest as protagonist and both reject Darwinian principles and affirm Catholic values. In contrast, Ben Lawton argues that the value of *Rome, Open City* lies in its standards of humanity and integrity that transcend any specific religion, thus denying any significant connection with Fascist or Catholic creeds. Instead, Lawton emphasizes the humanistic honesty with which Rossellini depicts the Italian postwar period. Mira Liehm expands on Lawton's humanist reading of the neorealist aesthetic underlining that this approach seems: "…more foresighted than those who tied it solely to its sociohistorical background" (133). Similarly, Noa Steimatsky affirms that the movie achieves an important conciliatory role in the national and international public "consciousness" (xiv).

However, few scholars have attended to the representations of women in this canonical neorealist film, particularly in relation to their social functions. In "Resistance Heroes and Resisting Spectators: Reflections on Rossellini's *Roma città aperta*," Cannon emphasizes the disparity between the heroic importance attributed to men and the secondary function of women: "Women are physically removed from the male sphere. The gender roles are unequivocally established in the two consecutive scenes. Men are heroes, women are either caregivers or 'trouble'" (155). Millicent Marcus offers a meticulous examination of Rossellini's representation of female gender roles in relation to morals and his humanist vision of Italy's reconstruction. She analyzes the contrasting characters of Pina and Marina to examine the repercussions of their choices, accentuating the association between the women's physical appearance and their ethical options: "The consequences of two sets of moral decisions are embodied in these two women who are compared to each other throughout the film in terms of physical appearance, amorous expectations, emotional style, and cinematic precedents" (*Italian Film* 38). More recently, Marcus has centered on the representation of Pina as the Resistance activist who symbolically redeems the Italian collective self, promising to restore the Italian identity ("Pina's Pregnancy" 427). Proposing a different focus, Perry investigates the meaning of Pina's individual anguish to facilitate an examination of the female characters in the movie.

Thus, the emphasis on the humanistic character of neorealism seems at odds with the lack of critical attention to women's conditions reflected in this film. To redress this shortcoming, we will examine the social and historical significance of the women in the story through Rossellini's use

of compassion. In particular, we will focus on the role of the female protagonist and the compassionate responses she offers or receives to elaborate her role in society. The other female characters' display or rejection of compassionate reactions also induce interesting observations on the neorealist concept of female identity in the postwar time and the mechanisms that create an image of idealized womanhood.

Here, compassion is emotional involvement in another individual's life, expressed through a change of awareness or an action directed to improve the other's condition. This emotional alteration may be communicated through words, actions, or gestures that recognize another person's difficulty. Through an examination of M. Nussbaum's three components required for compassion, we may understand the role that sufferers establish in a community. The compassionate responses they offer or accept are ways to value their social recognition or rejection, allowing us to speculate on the possible reasons for their social discriminations.

Although analyzing the representations of compassion and female protagonists runs the risk of reproducing stereotypical associations between emotions and female gender traits, scholars such as Lutz have amply demonstrated that emotions are socially and culturally constructed. Furthermore, as a source of knowledge, they not only differ from culture to culture but also develop within cultures.[2] In *Rome, Open City*, Rossellini presents the male figures as fighting the politics and oppression imposed by the foreign occupant and, therefore, being involved in Resistance actions. He presents the female characters as opposing the political situation through actions aimed at solving their daily problems.

Pina's Compassion

Rome, Open City offers several examples of despair during the German occupation and ways to act against it. The movie opens with a German patrol marching across Piazza di Spagna in Rome, indicating the occupation of the city. Then the film turns to considerations of the repercussions of that historic event. We see Gestapo headquarters, where Major Bergmann and the Italian police commissioner are planning to capture Manfredi, a political opponent. The scene highlights the German invader's intolerant attitude toward his enemies as he visually expresses disdain when hearing the sounds made by tortured prisoners. In contrast to the representation of men, the women are fighting for food. Thus, Rossellini distinguishes precise gender roles and appropriate ways to express them from the beginning of the film.

Pina first appears in a scene at a bakery where she is one of the women who organize the pillaging of the store. The viewer's gaze is directed first toward her half figure emerging from among the other individuals, then toward her whole image to emphasize her pregnancy, as noted in the script: "A pregnant young woman, Pina, makes her way out of the noisy crowd raiding the bakery" (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 16).[3] We then see her begin to pick up a small loaf of bread she has lost in the shuffle. A sergeant helps her, showing no disapproval of her actions. The subsequent scene focuses on Pina's attempt to protect her shopping bag full of bread from the prying hands of other women.

Here Rossellini presents the women's looting of the bakery as an inevitable consequence of material repression. Hence, the women may reasonably evoke compassion because they are stealing bread, a staple of survival, underscored further by the presence of children, which provides possible justification for their actions. However, whereas the image of the other women is one of an undifferentiated throng unable to understand fully the significance of the looting, Rossellini focuses on Pina's pregnancy, which garners her compassion, on her rebellious streak, and on her political awareness, marking her as a prominent protagonist in the story.

Pina's capability as an active participant in the political struggle appears also in her conversation with the Resistance fighter, Manfredi. When Pina explains that she and other women have raided a bakery, Manfredi asks if the women were conscious of their actions. Although Pina hints at political motivations ("some of them do know why they are doing it" [Rossellini, *The War Trilogy*, 23]), she acknowledges that most of them are simply taking advantage of the situation, noting that one woman even "fished a pair of shoes and a scale" (23). This scene complicates the meanings suggested by the women's behavior. Instead of confessing the women's responsibility for taking advantage of the situation, Pina first accentuates their accountability. Thus, Rossellini conveys not only Pina's feeling of disappointment toward the other women but also her desire to express her understanding and solidarity with them. Her emotional ability enables Pina to recognize the perspective of other women and demonstrates her capability of conflict resolution.

The scene triggers compassion because it contains M. Nussbaum's three prerequisites. Pina perceives that her collaborators' suffering is both serious and undeserved. She recognizes them as significant individuals in her scheme of goals. Their shared vulnerability provokes admiration for her personal standards and sets her apart from the other women. Rossellini employs precise shots of Pina's caring eyes and controlled gestures and

of Manfredi's inquisitive yet genuine manners to invoke the importance of the events the two characters are discussing. Moreover, Rossellini creates visual signs, such as the light on Pina's face, that appear to valorize her expression of understanding toward the women and to appeal to spectators.

Edith Stein offers helpful commentary on the importance of compassion and empathy in the formation of one's own persona,[4] enabling us to understand the repercussions and implications of Pina's statements about the other women:

> By empathy with differently composed personal structures we become clear on what we are not, what we are more or less than others. Thus, together with the self knowledge, we also have an important aid to self evaluation… We learn to see that we experience ourselves as having more or less value in comparison with others. (105)

According to Stein, emotional involvement with others' problems helps individuals understand their own personalities. By comparing others' values to their own, individuals learn to consider their principles and to assess their significance. In this context, Pina's compassionate responses toward her companions highlight her individual behavior, which we may view as a model for all women in the new Italy. Consequently, Rossellini's representation reveals a totalizing perspective that does not sufficiently recognize differences between people or groups.

The bakery scene is also important in clarifying the image created of Pina's social, economic, and political position, as well as her perspective. Even though the women engage in an illegal act, their circumstances suggest compassionate responses toward their plight. For example, when Pina tries to defend her hard-earned bread from another woman's grabbing hands, the camera focuses on the sergeant who witnesses the whole scene and responds in an unexpected fashion, considering his position. Rather than sternly rebuking Pina, he reproaches her in a compassionate way, apparently attempting to protect her instead of punishing her: "But, Miss Pina, this is a crazy thing to be doing in your condition!" (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 16). He then offers to see her home.

In response, Pina justifies her actions:

> Pina: I'm supposed to die of hunger!
> *Someone, probably the baker's wife, shouts for help through the noise of the crowd.*
> Baker's wife (off screen): Sergeant, help!

> Pina, to baker's wife: Go hang yourself!
> Sergeant: I'll see you home.
> *They go off screen to the right.*
> Voices shouting: Bread, bread, bread, we want bread! (16)

In this scene, Rossellini's portrayal of the female protagonist consolidates her status in relation to other female characters. The baker's wife, for instance, who belongs to a higher social class, receives no attention at all. The sergeant's compassionate acquiescence acknowledges Pina's extreme condition as she actively attempts to overcome a real need. Her actions, which may be prosecutable, are instead approved by the choir of voices shouting for bread.[5]

Although the sergeant's compassionate response recognizes Pina's suffering, Rossellini renders the protagonist's position more complex by depicting part of her suffering as self-imposed: she is pregnant outside of wedlock. This element complicates our understanding of compassion because it challenges M. Nussbaum's notion that when individuals generate their own affliction they typically do not generate compassionate reactions. However, Rossellini renders and affirms Pina's responsible behavior by emphasizing her personal awareness through her confession to the priest, Don Pietro. Pina regretfully admits that she has made many wrong decisions in the past; even though pregnant, she is not ashamed to get married in church. Then, she reveals her astonishment at her future husband's decision to marry her:

> Pina: I have thought so many times he could really have found somebody better'n me—yes, a younger girl, not a widow with a child, and without a cent. Because I've had to sell everything to keep going…and things keep getting worse. How'll we ever forget all this suffering, all these anxieties, all this fear?…Doesn't Christ see us? (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 53)

Here, Pina realizes that, through her pregnancy, she is making an already difficult existence even more so. However, her recognition of her responsibility and her individual limitations, together with her despair regarding the historical circumstances, instigate compassion for her condition. Thus, Rossellini presents through one character's anguish, the pain of many others. As a result, we realize that, although the war is national and international in scope, suffering always has individual dimensions.

Whitebrook highlights the importance of personal circumstances in relation to compassionate responses through her examination of compas-

sion as a response to personal suffering in Toni Morrison's novels. She emphasizes the importance of knowing the particular details of an individual's situation to appreciate the person's vulnerability:

> It is the vulnerable person per se who is the proper object of compassion, rather than the especially good or particularly deprived. The exercise of compassion implies concern for the other; it would follow that compassion would need to be exercised when that other is vulnerable. Politically speaking "suffering" maybe a misleading term, and "vulnerability" more appropriate. (537)

For Whitebrook, people generate compassionate responses when they experience concern for others who are suffering physical or emotional pain. In the example of Pina and the bakery, one may offer compassion to acknowledge the woman's new condition of susceptibility, thus emphasizing her traditional role of mother and future wife. Cannon confirms this examination in her analysis of the female protagonist viewed primarily as a mother:

> The fact that she is with child reinforces the idealization of Pina as mother. Not only she is the mother of Marcello, one of the leaders of the youth Resistance movement, but she is also the mother of the unborn offspring of the partisan hero, and one of the potential heirs of the new and better Italy which Francesco envisions on the eve of their wedding. ("Resistance Heroes and Resisting Spectators" 147)

Here, Cannon associates Pina's importance with her ability to generate potential leaders for the new nation. The bakery scene, on the other hand, depicts the women actively engaged in providing food for their families, emphasizing more dynamic qualities that project a more energetic female role in the public sphere of society. As Re points out, during the Fascist time, women were made to be mother and wife: "their only natural and politically desirable place was in the home" (*Futurism and Fascism* 190). Thus, Rossellini suggests a more emancipated image of a woman who simultaneously values her functions both as mother and wife and as advocate for social reform.

Another scene further underscores this complex female identity and its social and political significance. Pina and her future husband, Francesco, are talking in the stairwell the night before the wedding. Pina, upset because of the hard economic conditions, is discouraged about the seemingly never-ending war:

> Pina: But when'll it end? Sometimes I just can't go on. This winter it seems like it'll never end!
>
> Francesco: It'll end, Pina, it'll end, and spring will come back, and it'll be more beautiful than ever, because we'll be free. We have to believe it, we have to want it! See, I know these things, I feel them, but I can't explain it. Manfredi'd be able to, he's an educated man, he's been to college, he's traveled. He can talk so well. But I think that's the way it is, that we shouldn't be afraid now or in the future. Because we're in the right, the right's on our side. Understand, Pina? (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 70)

This scene depicts Francesco's compassionate response toward Pina's anxiety and may implicitly reinforce and approve her sociopolitical involvement. The verbs Francesco uses suggest that he takes her distress and anguish seriously. His calm, persuasive voice encourages Pina's confidence toward him. Francesco voices the ideas and decides who is included in the "we," presumably Pina, the only person listening to him, and himself. Thus, the scene proposes a compassionate response that distinguishes a new, anti-Fascist model of masculinity. This is emphasized through the space, a stairwell that Rossellini chooses for this scene.[6] A series of steps for passing from one level to another, here the stairwell may symbolize the protagonists' transitional condition toward future circumstances.

In addition, the way in which Francesco communicates his emotional understanding underscores his consideration for Pina. While admitting his inability to describe eloquently the events they experience, he articulates his hopes for a better future. Moreover, through his assertion that "we're in the right, the right's on our side" (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 70), Francesco embraces his female companion's desire to achieve social and political change. As a result, his response establishes Pina as a receptive interlocutor who is encouraged to cooperate fearlessly in constructing a better future for her children.

Marcus also identifies courage as a primary element of Pina's character, illustrated in Pina's refusal to comply with domineering Nazi power: "Pina, as one of the organizers of the neighborhood women, represents the spirit of popular insurrection against the occupying forces" (*Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* 37). In this light, Francesco's compassionate reassurance communicates not only approval for Pina's role in the struggle against the foreign occupation but also recognition of women's involvement in the conflict.

After constructing Pina as a positive female character whose actions, desires, and values may serve as models others may emulate in the recon-

struction of Italian society, Rossellini sends her to a heroic and premature death. In her final scene, he underscores her bravery and compassion, as she shows both her contempt toward a German soldier and her compassionate reaction toward another woman:

> *Pina, lined up with the other women against the wall, holds the woman whose son has been captured. The sound of German voices is heard off screen.*
>
> Pina: Don't worry.
>
> *The German corporal walks back and forth in front of them (camera shifts slightly with him). He stops to look at Pina and caresses her shoulder and arm.*
>
> Corporal: Hat Dir schone Augen gemacht, der Pfarrer? [Has the priest made eyes at you?]
>
> *Furious, Pina slaps his hand.* (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 92)

In depicting Pina lined up with fellow working-class women, Rossellini accentuates her social identity and her powerlessness in the face of the Nazi soldiers. However, her compassionate response toward another woman's anguish over the roundup reveals her individual personality. By holding the other woman and giving her verbal support, Pina demonstrates respect for the woman's anguish and her own strength and resistance against the arrogance of Nazi authority. Forgacs clarifies this aspect of Pina's personality: "Pina is meant to come across to the audience as a proletarian salt of the earth, struggling to feed her family in hard times, embodying both the collective suffering and the spirit of defiance of the Roman people." (*Rome, Open City* 50). Pina's compassion underscores women's shared pain and disobedience in the face of the Nazi occupation, showing that compassion may be used to enhance awareness of social and political messages.

While Pina's rebelliousness emphasizes her courage, it also precipitates her tragic end. Rossellini powerfully presents Francesco's capture and Pina's desperate reaction.[7] In this sequence, Pina's emotional reaction following Francesco's capture contrasts with the climate of terror portrayed in the previous scene, a more generalized depiction of the crowd. The focus here is on the female protagonist's individual suffering. Pina advances quickly through the gun barrier and, when she sees Francesco being pushed onto the truck, tries to break free from another soldier while screaming, "Let me go! Francesco!" (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 95). Pina, again demonstrating her rebellion against oppressive authority, frees herself from the soldier's restraint and rushes toward Francesco through the crowded street, one hand extended toward him. In the other hand, she holds a white scarf,

a symbol of purity and surrender and a call for peace, which is in sharp contrast to the Nazis' fierceness. Don Pietro draws her son, Marcello, toward him, covering his face. Francesco, watching from the truck, calls to Pina. The repetition of the two characters' names, unaccompanied by any music or sound, underscores the gravity of the circumstance and may be seen as a refrain foreshadowing their imminent separation. Finally, as Pina continues to run toward Francesco, gunfire mows her down. Marcello, frantically screaming, forces his way to his mother and throws himself on her. Don Pietro lifts Marcello from her body and hands him over to the sergeant, the boy screaming and struggling between the two men.

In line with the neorealist tradition, Marcello, Pina's young son, becomes the focus of the scene as he observes the dramatic event, sharpening Pina's anguish.[8] After presenting a detailed image of the heroine's pain, Rossellini shows Don Pietro's emotional response. He draws the boy near him, closes his eyes, and later lifts him from his mother's body. The priest's compassionate reaction initially reflects his attempts to protect the young child from the horrific sight and, later, to calm his despair. Rossellini intensifies the moment by depicting Don Pietro on his knees, holding Pina's dead body in his arms, while Marcello, off screen, keeps screaming, "Mama!" (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 95).

Marcus, considering this moment as the *scena madre* of neorealism, focuses on the notion of trauma and its multiple interpretative possibilities ("Pina's Pregnancy"). These tender gestures emphasize the implications of Pina's death and the brutality of the Nazis. Rossellini also presents Pina's death as starkly individual, in contrast with the many anonymous deaths caused by the war, yet suggestive of multiple meanings for the social collective. Corrado Augias, in reflecting on the criminal activity in Rome during the postwar period, analyzes the meaning of single murders during that time, allowing us to consider the significance of Pina's death (and death in general) during the war:

> During that time in Rome there was more than one murder which was to remain in people's memory for long time. The curiosity for those murders overcame the usual interest for detective stories; it was like if those assassins, to whom the news dedicated big space, were allowed to discover again the private dimension of a violent death, after all those anonymous mass murders that the war had provoked. (194)

In contrast to the mass murders generated by the war, the specific killings in Rome created a major impression on the people, causing them

to recognize once again the tragic meaning of violent individual deaths. Similarly, in his representation of Don Pietro's compassionate response, Rossellini accentuates the significance of Pina's violent and dramatic death and attempts to redefine the value of each individual life. Thus, Rossellini's representation of compassion offsets the numbing emotional consequences of the war in which death becomes an uneventful occurrence.

Of significance is Rossellini's presentation of two characters whose compassion figures in Pina's destiny: Don Pietro, the anti-Fascist priest, intervenes to assist Marcello during his mother's murder. Francesco, the communist hero, later takes care of the boy. Despite their opposite creeds, they are united against Nazi and Fascist domination. Several authors have commented on the collaboration among different factions of the Resistance. For instance, Forgacs analyzes the mythical purpose of the unity among different groups:

> The patriotic myth presented in the film was one example of a very widespread production of such myth, to which many other neo-realist films and texts, as well as memoirs and historical records of the resistance, contributed. They all responded to a strong collective need to erase parts of the past, commemorate other parts, and produce good memories of the war capable of expelling painful or traumatic memories. (69)

As in many other neorealist works, here Rossellini presents the myth of patriotism in *Rome, Open City* to highlight favorable aspects of the past and to eliminate painful ones. Even though Marcello will not forget what he has witnessed, Rossellini focuses his attention not on the boy's sense of revenge but on Don Pietro's and Francesco's compassion toward him. Thus, we may view this film as Rossellini's attempt to commemorate the circumstances of the past with the aim of creating a new national identity free of painful reminiscences of the war.

Furthermore, Rossellini's focus on Don Pietro and Francesco in this sequence suggests he valorizes the characters through their involvement, aimed at helping the oppressed victim. Tudor, in clarifying the connection between the offer of compassion and the personality of the person offering it, opens a new way to interpret the characters in the film. He maintains that compassion is activated only if the observer makes some attempt to give concrete help to the person in need and that demonstrating compassion entails acknowledgment of oneself in order to offer one's qualities to the other (122). This effort may consume energy that the observer is not always willing to spend. Applying Tudor's observation to Don Pietro

and Francesco, we can conclude that they are able to become emotionally involved because of their self-awareness and their recognition that participating in this tragic situation is worth the effort. Thus, through their actions, Rossellini implicitly affirms the value of the anti-Fascist witnesses' behavior and reinforces their belief. Moreover, their compassionate responses to Pina reveal Rossellini's significant attention toward her character and his presentation of her as a model for an idealized woman in the new postwar Italy.

Perry sees evidence for this strong characterization of Pina's grief in his analysis of three works of the Resistance in light of their female protagonists' deaths. He interprets Pina as a sacrificial martyr who rescues Italy from its Fascist history:

> Although assuredly Rossellini cast both Don Pietro and Manfredi as holy martyrs, the deepest christological significance communicated through personal sacrifice is found in Pina's death…An unarmed woman, victimized by a German bullet, is now the redeeming Christ: with this reverse *pietà,* Rossellini sums up the deepest meaning of the Italian Resistance. ("Rita, Pina, and Agnese" 328)

By comparing Pina's sacrifice to Christ's, visually signified by the way Rossellini positions the bodies as Don Pietro holds Pina after her death, Perry renders her battle against Fascism all the more heroic. This interpretation considers pain and personal sacrifice essential in overcoming miserable conditions and in creating hope for a different future. In addition, Rossellini's representation of Pina as sacrificial martyr recalls the common use of female characters to symbolize the fight for freedom and human rights that women have frequently been denied throughout history, whether overtly or covertly.

A comparison to Agnese's death may be beneficial in order to understand the process through which Pina becomes an idealized figure. Both stories represent courageous and rebellious women/mothers who are killed because of their public opposition to the Fascist and Nazi authorities. Both protagonists' destinies generate different compassionate responses, which may be viewed as means to highlight the protagonists' glorification. Alan Perry, in *Il santo partigiano martire. La retorica del sacrificio nelle biografie commemorative* (The Sainted Partisan Martyr. The Rhetoric of Sacrifice in Commemorative Biographies), clarifies this process:

> A figure of female hero/martyr may create surprise, but it is through her that the heroic death for the cause reaches its full meaning. It also eliminates the excessive virility that characterizes the fascist cult of the dead in battles. If dying for the cause redeems the sins of Fascism and renews the nation, which better incarnation of this concept in a woman who with her death generates the national rebirth? (43)

In contrast to the male heroes who die fighting and are recognized for their bravery, the female martyrs may be perceived as unconventional figures. However, Perry claims them as liberators and the embodiment of a general resurrection of the country. Agnese and Pina, witnessing the horror of Fascist and Nazi power, are elevated to the role of sacrificial victims whose lives are regarded, through the compassionate reactions that they trigger, as productive examples to follow, and their stories are remembered for the sake of inspiring other individuals.

Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the two idealized women. Viganó describes Agnese's killing at the end of the story after presenting several situations that depict the female protagonist actively engaged in a variety of activities associated with the partisan movement. Consequently, the compassionate reactions evoked by Agnese's death idealize an unusual kind of woman who, as a mother, nurtures and takes care of the partisan but, as a soldier, is able to transfer information and shoot people.[9]

In contrast, Rossellini depicts Pina's death in the first part of the movie, following her involvement in circumstances primarily connected to her life as a mother and future wife. The compassionate reactions inspired by Pina's death romanticize a woman who shows awareness for social concerns but is still strictly absorbed by the traditional role imposed on her. Indeed, Rossellini represents her as a conventional, vulnerable woman due to her pregnancy, and to the fact that she is denied the privilege to contribute to postwar Italy with another male hero.

Additionally, Pina's premature death might express the director's refusal to expose the character to situations that could directly reveal, as for Agnese, her revenge toward oppression and therefore suggests new models of female behavior considered too innovative to be accepted and idealized. But Pina's death could be also viewed as a demonstration of passive suffering, since she dies for the cause instead of actively resisting its obstacles.

Laura's and Marina's Compassion

Pina's significance becomes clearer still when contrasted with that of two other female characters, Pina's sister Laura and Marina. Rossellini presents neither of these women in a positive light; consequently, they do not typically generate compassion from the other characters on screen. Unlike Pina, Laura and Marina display concern for frivolous things, such as the latest fashions. They approve of sexual activity outside of marriage and live outside the traditional family structure, acting independently of men to survive.

We first see Laura in the scene in which Pina tells Manfredi about the bakery raid. In contrast to Pina and her political involvement, Laura is absorbed in trivial matters. She enters the room wearing a slip, exclaiming about her stockings. Her concern with her clothing, along with other comments, suggests her anxiety about social class and her distance from her sister's hard life. Pina clearly recognizes Laura's foolish ways as shown in this conversation with Manfredi:

> Pina: She's my sister.
>
> Manfredi: Oh, your sister?
>
> Pina, *picking up a jacket and a towel from a chair*: That surprises you, doesn't it? Who knows what kind of lies she's told you, that she lives goodness knows where, eh? She's ashamed of us because she says she's an artist while we're just poor working women. But I wouldn't change places with her!
>
> Manfredi: Ah, I understand you.
>
> Pina: Not because she's bad. She's stupid! (Rossellini *The War Trilogy* 25)

Critical of her sister, Pina displays no compassion to her or for her. Although she declares that her sister is ashamed of them, Pina herself seems embarrassed about her sister's different attitudes and behavior. Thus, the social and psychic distance between the two sisters becomes a barrier to compassion. M. Nussbaum clarifies this dynamic in *Upheavals of Thought*, stating that compassion is blocked by social distinctions of class, rank, religion, race, ethnicity, and gender, because they make it difficult for people to perceive their own possibilities in other individuals' anguish.

Pina fits this description perfectly. She clearly perceives her social condition to be different from her sister's and is incapable of imagining herself in that role. Manifredi's approval of Pina intensifies her awareness of the gulf between the two sisters. Furthermore, Rossellini presents Pina, who lives a simple, hard existence, as a so-called genuine and true example of

female virtue. Laura, captivated by concerns for luxury, pleasure, and a life of comfort is associated with that which is artificial and false.

In contrast, Laura and Marina, her friend and colleague, trigger compassion. The two perceive themselves as socially similar. In a conversation between the two women in Marina's small dressing room, the two women mutually express their understanding of each other's pain. Marina even offers Laura her apartment when Laura declares that she cannot live with her family anymore. Laura, on the other hand, demonstrates concern for her friend when she realizes that Marina is using drugs again. In this scene, the women's smoking habits, their similar stylish clothing, and their shared work as performers emphasize their emotions. In addition, the tiny dressing room suggests their isolation from the rest of the society, placing them in a separate group whose conversation and existence are segregated from others.

The scene also contains specific objects with metonymical functions[10] that may cause viewers to feel a sense of detachment toward the two women rather than compassion for their anguish. We may perceive these items—a small bottle of drugs that Marina tries to hide, other cosmetic containers scattered on the bureau, various pieces of elegant clothes hung on the wall—as negative elements that call attention to the women's attraction to the women's misguided priorities. Attracted to the world of performance instead of the domestic realm and the brutal realities of daily existence during the war, they are self-absorbed, concerned with their physical appearances and addictions. In contrast, Pina concentrates on important issues such as food shortages and the organizing of a social insurrection. The women's socially detached position, reinforced by their separation from family members and their substance abuse, militates against compassion because these difficulties, in the context of the war, appear less significant than the problems the female protagonist's experiences.

Thus, while the film exalts Pina as nurturing mother, wife, and emancipated woman, it denigrates Laura, whose independent, selfish lifestyle threatens the construction of the new female identity. Specifically, Laura does not embody the pathway that facilitates the creation of a new masculine nation. Instead, she struggles to affirm her own identity through fashion and the world of performance, suggesting implicitly that permitting more permeable gender boundaries in Italian postwar society may somehow jeopardize the nation's virility.

Marina, the second unsympathetic female character who threatens the construction of Italian female identity, betrays Manfredi, the anti-Fascist.

We first see Marina in her nightgown, resting on her bed cushion as she makes a telephone call. Later, wearing a low-cut gown in the Copacabana nightclub, she secretly searches her bag for drugs. She shows affection to Ingrid, a member of the Gestapo, who gives Marina warm embraces and loving words. According to Cannon, "The suggestion of a lesbian relationship between Marina and the sinister Ingrid seals Marina's fate as a negative model" ("Resistance Heroes and Resisting Spectators" 150). Therefore, in contrast to the emotional involvement that Pina's situation generates on screen, Rossellini's representation of Marina suggests disapproval and detachment, particularly given the perception of homosexual behavior at that time.

Given this situation, although the movie informs us of Marina and Manfredi's love, their relationship is an impossible one:

> Pina: So you fell in love with her!
>
> Manfredi: Happens all the time…But she's not the right kind of woman for me. Maybe if I'd known her before, when she lived in Via Tiburtina.
>
> Pina: Well, a woman can always change, especially…
>
> Pina *(off screen)*: when she's in love.
>
> Manfredi: But what makes you think she's in love? (Rossellini *The War Trilogy* 26)

Here, Manfredi conveys several emotions: love, mistrust, regret. His mention of Via Tiburtina, a popular anti-Fascist neighborhood,[11] suggests that their love is tied to their social status, indicating a more conservative political view than that typically suggested by neorealist artists. In addition, Manfredi doubts the likelihood of Marina changing. His disbelief is later clarified when he finds drugs in her bag. He expresses his mistrust and lack of emotional participation in Marina's life when he tells her, "You are your own boss. I haven't any right to tell you what to do" (110).

Furthermore, Manfredi expresses cynicism about Marina's love for him, stating, "Who am I, anyway? Just a guy who's passed through one moment of your life" (Rossellini, *The War Trilogy* 110). In response, Marina divulges the rationale for her behavior, confessing that her pay covers only her stockings and cigarettes. Her lovers allow her to have a better life. Manfredi's reply reveals his different view of life: "Poor Marina! And you think happiness means having a fancy apartment, fancy clothes, a maid…rich lovers" (110). Despite his love for her and his realization of the difficulties she has experienced in the past, he neither demonstrates any real compassion for her nor attempts to understand her suffering.

According to Lawton,

> As we have already seen, notwithstanding the advice of Pina, he is harshly judgmental in his relationship with Marina. Basically, he uses her and casts her aside in accordance with his almost monastic warrior code. And to make things worse, from Marina's perspective, he has the nerve, as Marina says in essence, to *farle la predica* [to lecture her] after having thrown her over. His sin, his inability to feel compassion, his inability to love (with Dantean ramification) thus condemns him to torture and death. (188)

Thus, Manfredi's fidelity to the war and his lack of compassion for Marina cause her to betray his location to the Nazis, bringing about his torture and death. However, given the Christ-like iconography employed in the torture scene, we may also view Manfredi as a heroic figure who sacrifices himself for the Resistance.[12] Through Marina and Manfredi's relationship, Rossellini may be either hinting that political issues should take precedence over personal ones or suggesting his persistent attachment to the patriarchal model of women's roles.

Another way of looking at Marina is to consider her loneliness, an important attribute in neorealist movies. For Brunello Rondi, one of Rossellini's screenwriters who cites the pain of human isolation as a main feature of neorealist cinema, this film expresses the human loneliness that the war produces, portraying the moral distortions that individuals experience and the pain they inflict on each other in such circumstances. If this is the case, is Marina a product of war or of her own character deficiencies? Although we may view the seclusion she experiences as the result of the historic moment, the negative connotations with which she is represented prevent any attempt to view her simply as a victim. Notwithstanding Rondi's generalizations about Italian neorealism, Marina's isolation seems clearly to be less a condemnation of war and more an expression of the filmmaker's disapproval of her materialism.

Conclusions

Rossellini's representations of compassion open new lines of inquiry to investigate *Rome, Open City* and highlight the potential similarities with the traditional patriarchal ideology, dominant during Italy's Fascist period, and deviations from it, which neorealist artists attempt to eradicate. In the film, Rossellini, similarly to Viganó, uses compassion as a way to resolve conflicts and to highlight and endorse modern women's political and

social involvement. However, unlike Viganó, the film also suggests that those qualities are valued only when women also demonstrate the patriarchal values particularly glorified by Fascism, such as commitment to the roles of wife and mother associated with the domestic sphere, thus proposing a less inventive way of problem-solving. This neorealist director denies any compassionate response from characters on screen toward female figures embodying behaviors in opposition with the patriarchal definition of woman. Thus, Rossellini's construction of female identity reveals an unwitting correlation with the one adapted by the Fascist creed. In her article titled, "Amore e ginnastica" ("Love and Gymnastics"), Daria Valentini clarifies, "Mussolini's demographic campaign insisted on maternity as the supreme and mandatory woman's mission, even though she was an athlete." (118). Similarly, Pickering-Iazzi explains:

> While promoting the model of woman-mother (*donna-madre*), a traditional figure that the Fascist discourse reinvented by casting the bearing of children and selfless devotion to family and home as the highest political service women could perform for the state, conservative commentators inveighed against the crisis-woman (*donna-crisi*). Invoked by such other signifiers as "intellectualoide," the "masculinized woman," "*garçonne*," and "*maschietta*," this figure represented the deviant "degeneration of the female type" associated with emancipated behaviors, ideas, and desires. (*Mothers* x–xi)

According to both scholars, Fascist discourse reinforced women's maternal role, and in Pickering-Iazzi's view, it recast this position as a political contribution to the state. In *Rome, Open City,* Rossellini's compassionate portrayal of Pina suggests approval of the women who combine concern for marriage and family with an active social conscience. His lack of compassion for Laura and Marina may imply rejection of the new manners many women were acquiring that had no social commitment to better the lives and conditions of others.

Rossellini's representations of compassion also bring to light features of woman's identity that recall those suggested in Fascist films. In both Fascist and anti-Fascist representations, the condition of females is often one of dependence. Pina, as the female protagonist anchored to her family values, may have been influenced by those representations, underscoring Rossellini's connection to that traditional figure of woman.[13] Landy, in her investigation of the roles of women and their subservient function,[14] affirms that such films as Camerini's *Come le foglie* (*Like the Leaves*, 1934) and Palermi's *La peccatrice* (*The Sinful Woman*, 1942) present similar approaches:

> These films featuring women, whether single, independent women or married women, share certain common strategies, motifs, and themes. In some, obedience and service to the father is central, with transference of allegiance to the husband…Everywhere is inscribed the subordination of the woman: to parental figures, to children, and, where overtly political, to the cause of fascism. (115)

Furthermore, she affirms that female dependence is a common element in Fascist films. Hence, even though considered one of the first neorealist works to celebrate the new anti-Fascist Italian identity, *Rome, Open City* still betrays the influence of earlier films[15] with regard to women's roles.

In the final analysis, neorealist films clearly say more about the images of women's roles the directors wish to project than they do about actual female involvement in the Resistance. Yet *Rome, Open City* has been consistently praised for its documentary and anti-Fascist merits. For example, although Maria Michi, the actress who plays the role of Marina, was actively involved in the liberation of Italy,[16] her experiences did not inform the image of womanhood she represents in Rossellini's film.

Rossellini's vision of female involvement in the Resistance is also in stark contrast to the actual letters that women, captured and condemned to die by the Fascists or Nazis, wrote to their families.[17] The following excerpt from a letter Irma Marchiani wrote to her brother highlights the protagonist's vibrant role as a female partisan:

> In my heart the idea (nevertheless not felt by many individuals) that all of the people, more or less, have to offer their support took shape. This call is so strong; I feel it so profoundly that after fixing all my things I leave happily. The command told me "In your glance there is something that tells me you know how to command, your mind gives extreme trust; I would have never dreamed of hiring women, but not in your case." And he just saw me once. (qtd. in Antonelli 182)

The strong, independent dedication to political activity that emerges in this letter contrasts with Rossellini's representation of female characters and disregard for current models of women who participated more directly in the fight. Marchiani's letter, along with other similar historic documents, offers ample evidence of women's participation in the battle against Fascism. For instance, journalist Rossana Rossanda asserts that "2,000,000 women were actively involved in one way or another in the Resistance and that official figures were hopelessly inadequate" (qtd. in Bassnett 104). These documents also reveal neorealism as a less inclu-

sive ideology with more parallels toward Fascist values than formerly anticipated. Although neorealist artists wanted to promote a culture free from the nationalistic and conservative view of the Fascist regime, some of them still displayed, through their production, the immense influence that Fascism exercised on their work. This connection between Fascism and neorealism is supported today by new historiography that no longer accepts the perceived interruption between Fascism and neorealism. Examining the postwar time in Italy, theorists highlight the presence of "several contradictory strands and several lines of continuity with postwar culture" (Hewitt 4). For instance, film critics such as Marcia Landy believe that Alessandro Blasetti's *Quattro passi fra le nuvole* (*Four Steps in the Clouds*, 1942), produced during the end of the Fascist period, presents clear elements of the neorealist aesthetic (*Fascism* x). Thus, Rossellini's characterization of the socially committed Pina as a compassionate protagonist whose emotional capability and caring responses highlight her social position opens new ways of reading this character. In addition, his depiction of Pina as a more modest rebel still yearning to fulfill a traditional domestic role prompts new questions about the construction of a postwar female Italian identity.

Notes

1. According to Forgacs, "The term 'open city' had the specific meaning during the war of a city which was to be excluded from military operations, could not be used as a transit zone for troops or materials and could not be the seat of a military government (Cairo and Athens were also designated open cities in this sense)" ("Twentieth-Century Culture" 31).
2. See Jaggar for a detailed examination of these aspects of emotions.
3. The script for *Rome, Open City*, as scripts for many other movies by Rossellini, was written by Sergio Amidei in collaboration with Federico Fellini. However, citations within this work are from Rossellini's *The War Trilogy,* translated by Judith Green.
4. As clarified earlier, in this study, features of similar emotions may be included in compassion. Stein's example on empathy is pertinent to our analysis of compassion.
5. In tune with Perry's reading, bread may also suggest Christian values. Jesus Christ called himself "the bread of life" (John 6.35); he also said, "If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6.51). Jesus also blessed bread and presented it as transformed into his body during the great Eucharistic mystery: "Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His

disciples, saying, 'Take and eat: this is my body'" (Matthew 26.26). In this context, bread may be a symbol for Pina's salvation because in taking bread she expresses her opposition to the Nazi regime.

6. For an explanation of denotative and connotative meaning in cinema, see James Monaco 161.
7. The inspiration for this scene was the actual shooting of Teresa Gullace. More information about her and Don Morosini, who inspired the character of Don Pietro, can be found in Celli's "Italian Neorealism's War Legacy: Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta/Rome, Open City* (1945) and *L'uomo dalla croce/Man of the Cross*" (1943) and Marcus's "Pina's Pregnancy, Traumatic Realism, and the After-Life of Open City."
8. The presence of children as testimonial witnesses to the events narrated is typical of neorealist cinematography. For more details about this topic, see Roy Armes 154 and Landy 33.
9. Gabriele Pedullà informs us that Viganò's narrative is characterized by feminist themes and stories of emancipation. In his opinion, the author's short stories' favorite subject is "women that stopped being afraid" (262).
10. According to Monaco, "A 'metonym' is a figure of speech in which an associated detail or notion is used to invoke an idea or represent an object. Etymologically, the word means 'substitute naming' (from the Greek *meta*, involving transfer, and *onoma*, name)" (167).
11. According to Forgacs, "The Via Tiburtina, where Pina tells Manfredi her father had a tinsmith's shop and Marina's mother was a custodian (*portiera*) of an apartment block, is another consular road, forming one of the boundaries of *San Lorenzo*, a working-class district erected in the 1880s which had become known for its anti-Fascism under Mussolini's regime and which had been badly damaged by Allied bombs on 19 July 1943" (*Rome, Open City* 43).
12. Bondanella underscores this analogy: "When Manfredi dies without betraying his cause, Rossellini frames his Communist Partisan leader as if he were photographing the crucified Christ, employing the traditional iconography familiar to us all from numerous works of religious art" (41). A similar argument can be found in Perry's *Il Santo Partigiano martire* 44.
13. Mark Shiel underlines precise traits that make Pina the symbol of Italian womanhood: her resistance identified in "her natural moral goodness, her passionate sense of self and her instinctive defiance of the occupying Germans" (49).
14. Ben-Ghiat ("Neorealism in Italy" 158) clarifies this similarity between Fascist and neorealist films in her explanation of the origin of neorealism. The new aesthetic developed during the dictatorship but it swelled, as a movement, only after the fall of Fascism, thus offering the intellectual community the freedom to investigate their social and political environment.
15. For more information about Rossellini's debt to Fascist films, see Celli 227.

16. See Armes and Cannon ("Resistance Heroes and Resisting Spectators" 155) for descriptions of Maria Michi's involvement in the Resistance.
17. Liliana Cavani's *La donna nella Resistenza* (*Women in the Resistance*) is another valuable work that underlines the historic evidence of women's dynamic involvement in the Resistance. Commissioned in memory of the twentieth anniversary of Italy's liberation, this documentary includes several interviews of women participating in the conflict. One of them, Marcella Monaco, organized the liberation of Sandro Pertini, President of the Italian Republic in 1978, from the Regina Coeli prison. Also, Martin Ritt's *Jovanka e le altre/Jovanka and the Others* is a remarkable confirmation from Yugoslavia of brave female-led resistance against the Germans.

PART IV

Compassion and the Holocaust

In the next chapters, we examine the possibilities for compassion in perhaps the most extreme circumstances, the dehumanizing environments created by Italian anti-Semitic racial laws (1938) and concentration camps. To do so, we will focus on two works: two testimonial narratives, *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi and *Smoke over Birkenau* by Liana Millu. Although scholarly studies generally approach these three works as Holocaust art, their texts clearly incorporate key components of neorealist aesthetics:[1] They denounce the horrors produced by Fascist ideology, they express a concern for the despair and squalor that the common people had to endure, they depict the social problems that certain sectors of the Italian populace had to bear, and they exhibit the historical verisimilitude and the political commitment of the artists. Thus, these texts enrich neorealism with important social perspectives and contribute to a reconsideration of their subject matter. As these works are situated within the context of Italian neorealism, the connections between compassion and identity, imagination, gender, national and ethnic differences, and construction of relationships will be examined.

Putnam and John Portmann, among others, have explored different components of compassionate involvement. Putnam argues that compassion is a process by which individuals can imaginatively participate in each other's specific situations. Portmann suggests that although people are usually inclined to express emotional understanding, compassionate responses can also be offered for personal advantage. The two neorealist works we consider here often represent compassion as an act of imagination in which individuals remember the causes of their previous personal pain.

Occasionally, however, compassion is depicted as an insincere act for the benefit of the individuals.

In the testimonial narratives by Levi and Millu, compassion appears to be elicited through privileged access to certain experiences. For instance, in Levi's testimony, reliance among the prisoners is exceptional. He presents a logic designed by the German Nazis to destroy the ethical, affective, and psychological features of being humans. Indeed, he represents a world in which the logic of living is reversed, thus challenging Portmann's statement: "We do well to appear sympathetic generally" (*Survival* xii). In the day-to-day struggle for survival to which Levi bears witness, each person's anguish is so unbearable that it generally provokes indifference or lack of engagement with others who suffer in any way. Thus, it becomes nearly impossible to be moved by other people's suffering. Levi raises a particularly complex issue with his portrayal of the manipulation of others' sympathies, exemplified by Henri. Although Henri appears to be a charming, civil, young Frenchman, Levi suggests he is the most despicable of characters because he calculatingly makes plays for compassion, thus securing protectors. The author connects this deceptive performance and the compassion it inspires to "the primitive minds of the brutes" (99).

In Millu's testimonial, compassion puts into relief the abuse that women had to endure, as suggested by Esther Fuchs in *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation. Studies in the Shoah 22,* and cuts across cultural barriers, as noted by Putnam. Putman argues that emotional participation in another person's misfortune is more evident in extraordinary situations, such as the war or the Holocaust. In those cases, responses to pain and suffering unify individuals of different cultures. Thus, it is significant that Millu describes forms of emotional participation among women belonging to different cultures and nationalities who share in each other's suffering as a consequence of the despicable conditions they must endure.

However, her eyewitness testimony also recalls tragic events that fail to generate compassion. Such is the case with Maria. With this figure, Millu introduces a pregnancy trope to represent the ultimate evil of Nazism, a woman's vulnerability, and the Jewish battle against genocide. Maria has been married a short time when the Germans take her. Adela, who has seen her own daughter die, is highly critical of Maria. Her resentment toward the young woman, who seems to be more fortunate than her own daughter, precludes compassion. The story of Adela illustrates that compassion is not impulsive; it is cautiously activated and includes consideration and thought. As Portmann suggests, how people think about suffering may offer insight into important cultural attitudes.

Millu's representations of compassion achieved and denied create a complex notion that this emotion is contingent upon shifting ethical codes, personal histories, and material conditions. However, compassion is also a key component that enables the formation of female sustaining groups that strive to mitigate the physical and emotional subjugation imposed by the Germans. Thus, an examination of the emotion of compassion in the context of the Holocaust allows researchers to expand the understanding of crucial issues such as the nature and totality of the Nazi anti-Semitic policy, the Jewish response to the persecution, the development of the ability to survive in unusual circumstances, and the reactions of both perpetrators and bystanders.

Note

1. Re ("Neorealist Narrative") includes Holocaust writings in neorealist production. For other features of neorealism, see Bondanella.

CHAPTER 15

Compassion in *Survival in Auschwitz*

Scholars have asserted the significance of continuing to investigate the Holocaust experience[1] but have struggled to describe the astonishing, unique genre of testimony or Holocaust literature. Rachel N. Baum declares that the distinctiveness of the material is related to individuals' perception of pain. Theodoro Adorno and his supporters argue that to explain the Holocaust rationally, one must recognize that although it operated with reason, it went far beyond logical understanding (Schiff). Adorno initially considers silence the only appropriate response to the tragedy of the Holocaust: "to seek to portray with inadequate words would betray that reality and the voiceless dead at its core" (qtd. in Schiff xxi). However, although finding a language to do justice to the victims is difficult, silence compounds the evil.

Many scholars have noted the necessity of using different fields of knowledge to understand the Jews' agony. In his analysis of *Survival in Auschwitz*, James T. Chiampi attempts to explain the offense to moral standards and the shock the Jews had to bear in Auschwitz through Croce's philosophical concept of the "atrocious sublime":

> *Se questo è un uomo*[2] satisfies Croce's blurred criteria for sublimity by describing the arrival of the *ultrapossente* [the very powerful] and the *improvviso* [the unexpected] in Levi's life. It renders, by means of what I shall call "concentrationary sublime," the shock evoked by an incomparable transgression of expectation and ethics, an experience of lethal otherness…*Se questo è un*

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> *uomo* describes as an *unicum* the totalizing enclosure that was Auschwitz. It is a world both framed and invaded by the constant threat of a horrifying and immeasurable sublimity—transformation from person into ashes—total victimization, utter erasure. (492)

Levi's work embodies a unique disobedience of moral values and the ongoing danger of conversion into a nonentity. Thus, we may ask how individuals in conditions of total mistrust can experience any kind of emotional involvement toward each other.

Survival in Auschwitz is an eyewitness account of experiences in Bruna-Monowitz, the men's concentration camp.[3] Although most research on Holocaust survivors follows an idiographic model, concerned with scrutinizing personalities and the effect of experiences on individuals, Levi's examination focuses also on the emotional components behind the circumstances. His writing reflects a desire to depict circumstances objectively and to analyze the emotional reasons behind them. The author's preface acknowledges that the book adds little to the already well-identified details of the atrocities carried out in the "extermination camps." Thus, his reason for writing is to make sense of his own experience and to provide a serious analysis of the human soul in the Holocaust.

The book begins with the author's paraphrased version of the Sheman or Shemà Israel (Deut. 6.4), a central prayer for the Jews. Finzi specifies that the prayer is usually said twice a day and is also said every time a person is in danger or at the point of death (34). The epigraphic poem, clarifying both the subject of the book and its original title, *If This Is a Man*, is an invitation to consider the tragedy of the Jews and to curse those who decline this opportunity. The poem also calls attention to the contrast between those who live in comfortable gratification and those who suffer beyond any imagination:

> You who live safe
> In your warm houses,
> You who find, returning in the evening,
> Hot food and friendly faces:
> Consider if this is a man
> Who works in the mud
> Who does not know peace
> Who fights for a scrap of bread
> Who dies because of a yes or a no. (ix)

Thus, Levi challenges the reader to think about the suffering of the dehumanized Holocaust victims and identifies compassion for others as an important element in his testimonial.[4]

Despite the horrors of the camps and their common condition of isolation, Levi presents specific circumstances in which emotional participation emerges, offering precious material to illustrate the theory of compassion as well as to revise some of its components. We have seen that compassion can be distinguished from pity, empathy, and sympathy by analyzing the kind of pain, the subsequent response of the viewer, and the perspective from which the pain is perceived. For this analysis, it is also important to keep in mind that the concept of compassion might include elements pertaining to other similar emotions. In fact, the focus of this study is on the political and social repercussions that emotional participation in others' pain may imply rather than on the intensity of the pain or the perspective of perception. As clarified by Rey, this analysis centers on the significance and relative implications that a vast array of compassionate behaviors may produce. This approach is noteworthy because it allows a more inclusive examination of related emotions and offers a more comprehensive image of people's broad emotionality, which illuminates new aspects of single emotions not previously discerned if considered in their isolation. Thus, here we continue to consider compassion as a behavioral partaking in individuals' pain, shaped by the three components of compassion identified by M. Nussbaum (*Upheavals*). An examination of these elements, or their lack thereof, allows us to understand the meaning of compassion in the camps and its social and ethical implications in building relationships and recognizing ways to resist Nazi ideology. To comprehend the significance of this emotion, we must also recognize those deceiving situations that prevent compassion from occurring.

Deceptive Compassion

Although other autobiographical works highlight the importance of introspection as a way of resisting the daily routine of the concentration camps,[5] Levi emphasizes the utter loneliness of the lager: "Here the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone" (*Survival in Auschwitz* 88). Levi is clear in describing the reason the activation of emotional participation is very difficult in the camp:

> If someone…vacillates, he will find no one to extend a helping hand; on the contrary, someone will knock him aside because it is in no one's interest that there will be one more "mussleman" dragging himself to work every day, and if someone, by a miracle of savage patience and cunning, finds a new method of avoiding the hardest work, a new art which yields him an ounce of bread, he will try to keep his method secret and he will be esteemed and respected for this, and will derive from it an exclusive, personal benefit; he will become stronger and so will be feared, and who is feared is, *ipso facto*, a candidate for survival. (88)

Here, Levi shows that the logic of the extermination camps is based on a solitary fight for survival. This logic takes no account of others' needs. Thus, in a world in which the logic of living is reversed, Portmann's statement, "We do well to appear sympathetic generally" (xii), seems inaccurate. Instead, "We do well to appear indifferent generally" seems more appropriate because each person's anguish is so unbearable that it generates nonengagement with the suffering of others. It becomes impossible for one to be disturbed by other people's pain; and any apparent identification with others is likely to be "deceptive compassion," emotional participation that originates not to help another individual but to fulfill one's personal needs.

In the chapter entitled "The Drowned and the Saved," Levi's descriptions become more detailed, offering a more vibrant view of camp life than in earlier chapters in which the narration is sparse and chronological. Here, the author highlights deceptive emotional participation by using the term *pity*. Although this term is often used interchangeably with compassion to demonstrate concern toward another's situation, here the unifying component is missing. Compassion bonds two or more individuals through recognition of the suffering of the unfortunate ones. In deceptive compassion, observers do not acknowledge the others' pain. Instead, they focus exclusively on their own improvement. As Blum notes, although a compassionate action may include acting in opposition to one's moods, a deceptive deed takes account of only the observer's frame of mind (514). Thus, whereas compassionate actions show their unselfishness because they enable people to modify their character to respect the interests of others, deceptive compassion reveals its self-centered nature, failing to address the sufferers' needs because it is moved only to reach the goals of the witness.

In this chapter, Levi introduces the character of Henri,[6] who offers a specific response to the conditions in the camps and is crucial to our

understanding of deceptive compassion: "Henri, on the other hand, is eminently civilized and sane, and possesses a complete and organic theory on the ways to survive in Lager. He is only twenty-two, he is extremely intelligent, speaks French, German, English and Russian, has an excellent scientific and classical culture" (*Survival in Auschwitz* 98). Levi views Henri as despicable because he is so calculating. At the same time, the author feels an affinity for Henri because of his "excellent scientific and classical culture."

Henri also has an engaging personality:

> It is very pleasant to talk to Henri in moment of rest. It is also useful: there is nothing in the camp that he does not know about which he has not reasoned in his close and coherent manner…To speak with Henri is useful and pleasant: one sometimes also feels him very warm and near; communication, even affection, seems possible. (Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* 100)

However, Henri's charm is deceptive. Once he cynically determines that someone is a "son type" (99), he nurtures the person for his own convenience: "He listens with increasing sympathy, he is moved by the fate of this unfortunate young man, and not much time is needed before he begins to yield returns" (99). Henri knows how to instigate pity in prisoners, civilian employees, and professionals. He also uses his abilities to offer sexual favors for profit and discovers an emotion to use for his own advantage:

> Henri has discovered that pity, being a primary and instinctive sentiment, grows quite well if ably cultivated, particularly in the primitive minds of the brutes who command us, those very brutes who have no scruples about beating us up without reason, or treading our faces into the ground; nor has the great practical importance of the discovery escaped him, and upon it he has built up his personal trade. (100)

Thus, Levi makes clear that true pity is a way of participating in the pain of others.

However, among "the primitive minds of the brutes," this emotional response is not directed at helping others. Rather than issuing from a perceived likeness, it comes from an assumption of superiority. As a result, Henri manifests a "deceptive compassion," revealed to shield himself from hard labor and, in the end, from the "selections." Levi sees him as a pro-

fessional seducer, comparing him to the serpent in Genesis for the cold way he sets upon his prey. Thus, Levi ends this chapter dedicated to him: "I know that Henri is living today. I would give much to know his life as a free man, but I do not want to see him again."[7]

According to M. Nussbaum, disgust prevents compassion. Individuals feel disgust toward people that exemplify the boundary between being "truly human" and "basely animals" (*Upheavals* 347):

> Throughout the history, certain disgusting properties—sliminess, bad smell, stickiness, decay, foulness—have repeatedly and monotonously been associated with, indeed projected onto, groups by reference to whom privileged groups seek to define their superior human status. Jews, women, homosexuals, untouchables, lower-class people, all of these are imagined as tainted by the tint of the body. (*Upheavals* 347)

Individuals who feel superior manifest their supremacy through a sense of disgust toward specific individuals they see as polluted. As we see in Levi's description of Henry, the young man understands the emotion that the brutal individuals feel; but instead of resisting it, he uses it for his own personal advantage. Reinforcing the prisoners' identities as perceived by their exploiters, he does not offer any hope for them. On the contrary, his deceptive compassion contributes to their exploitation.

Portmann notes that deceptive compassion does not have to be associated with extraordinary conditions: "Sometimes we pretend to sympathize with others when we don't because we are taking out a sort of insurance policy to cover our own needs when disaster strikes us" (xii). Thus, even in the ordinary conditions of life, people can feign emotional participation, as Henri does, to benefit themselves rather than the sufferers. However, Henri's situation appears to be different. In ordinary conditions, one does not necessarily obtain advantage at the sufferer's cost; but in the extraordinary conditions of the concentration camps, increasing compassionate responses toward sufferers may bring significant returns to the witnesses. Hence, the temptation to express deceptive compassion is constant. Although individuals like Henri cultivate benevolence for its instrumental value, faking their feelings puts such individuals in doubtful positions when they become the objects of compassion and comfort. Thus, Levi's denial of compassion toward Henri may have deeper significance. Being fooled and having one's life imperiled by a fellow prisoner may suggest a loss of hope among people in general.

Compassion

In spite of his paean to solitude, Levi is witness to two relationships that provide entirely different reaction to the camp and restore his trust in humanity. His friendships with Alberto and Lorenzo illustrate the use of compassion to oppose the principles of the camp. These models of compassion exemplify M. Nussbaum's three components of compassion. However, we must clarify the first two components (judgment of size and judgment of nondesert) to consider the circumstances proposed by Levi's work. In terms of the first component, in extreme, life-threatening conditions such as those that prevailed during the Holocaust, both serious circumstances and trivial elements of life can elicit compassion. In the camps, trivial elements become treasures because of their irreplaceability; therefore, their loss can prompt compassion. Conversely, extraordinary occurrences such as illness, starvation, savage beatings, and death do not necessarily induce compassion.

In terms of the second component, we experience compassion if we think the persons we observe are not at fault in causing their negative circumstances. However, in light of the Holocaust, we must consider the different moral code that characterized that system in comparison with that of the outside world. For instance, Levi clarifies that theft is expected and necessary in the lager. Therefore, in such circumstances, individuals may cause their own suffering and still be worthy of compassion.

Levi's relationship with Alberto illustrates the positive dimension of the human spirit. Alberto, Levi's best friend, is ultimately killed by the Germans when they evacuate the camp. In contrast to many other prisoners, he is a person with moral strength: "Alberto entered the lager with his head high, and lives in here unscathed and uncorrupted" (*Survival in Auschwitz* 57). Although he is able to adjust his existence to the circumstances, his honesty allows him to be unaffected by the prevailing moral decadence that characterizes camp life. At the same time, he is a strong man whose intelligence and intuition enable him to confront hardship and fight for his life: Alberto "understood before any of us that this life is war; he permitted himself no indulgences, he lost no time complaining and commiserating with himself and with others, but entered the battle from the beginning" (57).

Levi also suggests that Alberto's behavior encourages comprehension and compassion, connecting this sentiment less to the person's ability to disclose it and more to the sufferer's ability to elicit it. Alberto's behav-

ior—his bodily movements, his attempt to make connections with people—promotes emotional involvement:

> He has the advantage of intelligence and intuition: he reasons correctly; often he does not even reason but is equally right. He understands everything at once: he knows a little French but understands whatever the Germans and Poles tell him. He replies in Italian and with gestures; he makes himself understood and at once wins sympathy. He fights for his life but still remains everybody's friend. He knows whom to corrupt, whom to avoid, whose compassion to arouse, whom to resist. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 57)

However, his skill in knowing whom to corrupt and whose compassion to arouse differs from Henri's because he "remains everybody's friend." Thus, Alberto is genuine in Levi's eyes.

Here, Levi wants the reader to understand that the moral code of the lager is completely contrary to that of the outside world. Even when performing actions considered immoral or unethical outside the lager, Alberto does not betray the other prisoners. For instance, Alberto is willing "to steal the rolls of graph-paper from the thermographs of the Desiccation Department, and offer them to the Medical chief of Ka-Be with the suggestion that they be used as paper for pulse-temperature chart" (*Survival in Auschwitz* 86). Thus, Levi remembers his qualities as a virtue: "Yet (and it is for this virtue of his that his memory is still dear and close to me) he himself did not become corrupt. I always saw, and still see him, the rare figure of the strong yet peace-loving man against whom the weapons of night are blunted" (57).

In contrast, Henri's behavior evokes antipathy because it reveals a form of exploitation that associates him more with the Germans than with the prisoners. By disregarding the other inmates and establishing false communication with them, he virtually adopts the Germans' reasoning and, consequently, offers no hope for change. Thus, Alberto's approach triggers compassion and admiration because he sets up respectful communication and participation. His conduct reminds the prisoners of another logic of action, one that calls hope to mind and restores trust.[8]

In his examination of the importance of communication in the lager, Franca Molino Signorini argues, "When people are able to understand and be understood, they become less alien to each other. In a context where people are alienated from each other, and forced to revert to a purely biological survival, speech allows human contact" (178). He considers

the importance of communication associated with an individual's ability to understand another language. Although mastering a language makes people less isolated, using a language to trick individuals, as Henri does, may be more devastating than ignoring the idiom altogether. Indeed, it may result in stronger disillusionment because the offense comes not from the enemy but from a fellow inmate. We may extend Signorini's observation to a more far-reaching ability to comprehend and to be comprehended: not simply linguistic aptitude but a shared sense of communality, participation, and complicity among the prisoners that, in specific conditions, may allow some kind of cooperation. Levi does not witness these possibilities in Henri's code of behavior, which is the reason he does not offer compassion to him.

In emphasizing Alberto's compassion, both received and offered, Levi describes an atypical condition for the victims of the lager. James Hatley argues a different case in his description of later generations' failure to notice the prisoners' suffering:

> Whether this forgetfulness is brought about by callous indifference or by the more subtle means of a rationalized justification, by the sublimation of a particular victim's suffering into the so called "larger picture," makes no ultimate difference. In either instance the singularity of the particular victim's suffering is ignored—the outrage of an injustice and the compassion that is called by that outrage are lost either in a pose of feigned indifference or in a rush to explanation. (3)

Hatley repudiates any attempt that fails to acknowledge the victims' suffering. Similarly, we may view Levi's recognition and respect for Albert's behavior and the way in which he copes with his suffering as admiration for the singularity of his conduct and his ethical values. We may also view the compassion that Alberto induces among his inmates, in its exceptionality, as a way to measure the ethical standard of individuals in exceptional situations such as the Holocaust when a revision of moral behavior is necessary.

Whereas Alberto is important for understanding compassion inside the camp, the relationship that Levi establishes with Lorenzo clarifies and expands compassionate responses outside the camp. Introduced in the chapter entitled "The Events of the Summer," Lorenzo is an Italian civilian bricklayer who knows Levi's relatives.[9] Out of pure humanity, he brings Levi food rations every day. To shed light on the importance Levi attaches to Lorenzo, we must consider a popular saying in the camp with

which the author begins this chapter: "When things change, they change for the worse" (*Survival in Auschwitz* 116). According to Levi, "More generally, experience has shown us many times the vanity of conjecture: Why worry oneself trying to read into the future when no action, no word of ours, could have the minimum influence?" (116). Thus, Levi's eyewitness accounts bear out the constant lack of reason and certainty that preclude the possibility of making conjectures. The tenuousness of the prisoners' survival and their complete lack of power make it worthwhile not to worry because they have no power to interfere. Consequently, the prisoners perceive the future as a progressively negative time.

Against the bitterness and hopelessness of existence in the camps, Lorenzo represents an astonishing exception to the rules of the prisoners. He is the most vital force in Levi's survival because he operates both on material and spiritual levels. On the material level, because of his civilian status, Lorenzo has an easier time collecting leftover food, which he then gives to Levi and to others. He does this fully aware that he may incur grave physical harm, even death. On the spiritual level, Lorenzo is remarkable for his optimism, expectations, and ability to resist the logic of the lager. Arriving when Levi believes they have no future, Lorenzo embodies kindness because his attention to others is triggered only by his desire to give them aid.

Portmann offers an insight into Lorenzo's emotional attitude: "Compassion thus discloses the other as being in a certain state, situation or condition…Compassion calls upon me to relieve the other's suffering…Compassion involves the other as in need, and myself as called upon to alleviate or end the other's state of need" (121). Lorenzo, desiring to participate in and alleviate others' suffering, personifies a distant sense of good and infuses Levi with the belief that it is worthwhile to survive. Recalling Lorenzo's crucial role in his survival, Levi states,

> However little sense there may be in trying to specify why I, rather than thousands of others, managed to survive the test, I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror, something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth to survive. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 121)

Lorenzo breaks one of the lager's basic codes by showing the potential of the human spirit. He shows Levi that a just world can still exist on the outside and that something wholesome and uncorrupted still exists. More than anyone else, Lorenzo prevents Levi from forgetting that he too is a man:

> The personages in these pages are not men. Their humility is buried, or they themselves have buried it, under an offense received or inflicted on someone else…But Lorenzo was a man; his humanity was pure and uncontaminated; he was outside this world of negation. Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 122)

Notwithstanding the humiliation inflicted on the prisoners, Lorenzo detaches himself from that condition and maintains his humanity and respect. Although Lorenzo is a civilian worker, the quality he exhibits is especially admirable in light of the many testimonies asserting that humiliation is a regular method used to reduce inmates to a nonhuman condition.

In his denunciation of humiliation, a defining component of Nazi methods, Debenedetti observes a quality that the Nazis immediately demonstrated during the first days of the Jews' deportation from Rome:

> It did not take long, as in all places so jam-packed with people, for the place to become contaminated with stagnant air, like the miasma which affects all prisons and places of deportation. Guards and overseers almost always impeded the way to the latrines. The goal of humiliating, demoralizing, reducing these people to human rags, without will, almost without self-respect, was quickly evident. (60)

In this context, emotional participation becomes an invaluable tool to connect people. Thus, Levi experiences common humanity through Lorenzo's compassionate attitude, a theme that characterizes the third and final chapter of Levi's work, "The Story of Ten Days." Here, Levi describes the German withdrawal from Auschwitz, the arrival of the Russians, and the achievement of human relationships.[10]

In this chapter, Levi changes generic conventions and adopts elements of the diary genre to record the last ten days in Auschwitz, possibly to underline the miraculous change.[11] According to Stuart Hughes, Levi's stylistic choice highlights the severity of the Nazi's offense:

> The final ten-day phase of survival, unguarded and abandoned to the bitter January cold, was the only one that Levi narrated in fully grisly detail. And

> for a reason both moral and aesthetic: this was when the Nazis triumphed in defeat, when they broke the spirit even of those who had held out until then, when their former captives sank to less than men. As prisoner after prisoner froze or starved, the remaining human norms collapsed. (78)

To understand Levi's stylistic choices better, we must briefly consider the conventions of the diary genre. According to Felicity Nussbaum,

> the diary and journal…are representations of reality rather than failed version of something more coherent and unified. In spite of the fact that the diary and other serial narratives imitate traditional and emergent generic codes (romance, epic, drama, comedy, tragedy), by being written in "private" they affect to escape preexisting categories, to tell the "truth" of experience. The diarist pretends simply to transcribe the details of the experience. (165)

The diary entry, then, offers a depiction of the event and focuses on the facts of the narrated occurrence. Thus, the aims and conventions of the diary serve Levi's endeavors to provide a precise, detailed representation of the liberation to highlight its significance and magnitude.

The diary genre also affords a narrative that evolves in time, allowing the author to present realities in constant flux. According to Margo Culley, "While the novel and autobiography may be thought of as artistic wholes, the diary is always in process, always in some sense a fragment. That is not to say that diaries do not have distinct shapes, but that their shapes derive from their existence in time passing" (220). Thus, the diary is more as a work in process than as a finished effort, which seems appropriate for describing the evolving emotions of a condition that passes through different stages of development.

Moreover, the author can organize and control time in the diary form. This feature seems particularly significant in the context of the camps, where the prisoners have no time of their own. Thus, Levi's stylistic choice of the diary may symbolize a regained sense of autonomy and independence and seems appropriate for conveying Levi's memories.

Shoshana Felman, on the other hand, observes that although testimony has become the most significant way to recount traumatic circumstances such as World War II and the Holocaust, it does not offer a complete understanding of the events:

> As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not set-

> tled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of references. (5)

However, Levi's use of the diary genre reveals the depth and breadth of his memory, his moral understanding, and his reacquired interest for others.[12] By employing this form of testimonial, which immortalizes events for others, Levi suggests his newly obtained concern for future generations. Indeed, Levi affirms that his writing is inspired by a strong desire to communicate his experiences:

> I wrote because I felt the need to write…I've had the feeling that for me the act of writing was equivalent to lying down on Freud's couch. I felt such an overpowering need to talk out loud. Back then, in the concentration camp, I often had a dream: I dreamed that I'd returned, come home to my family, told them about it, and nobody listened. The person standing in front of me doesn't stay to hear; he turns around and goes away. I told this dream to my friends in the concentration camp, and they said, 'It happens to us too.' And later I found it mentioned, in the very same way, by other survivors who've written about their experiences. (qtd. in Camon 42)

Thus, the conventions of the diary serve both the writer who needs to tell what happened and the reader who needs to know.

In "The Story of Ten Days," Levi describes the first tentative acts of cooperation and understanding against a threatening background. In the following example, he describes a regained concern toward other individuals that indicates a different code of behavior is still possible:

> And then Towarowski…proposed to the other sick men that each give a slice of bread to the three of us who had been working, and the others agreed. Only one day before, such an event would not have been conceivable. The law of the camp was: "eat your own bread, and, if you can, your neighbour's," and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the lager was dead. It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from Häftlinge [prisoners] to men again. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 160)

By sharing food, a basic necessity, the prisoners reaffirm their common humanity and become men again. They realize the significance of sacrificing for other individuals because they see their own good in the collective

good. Levi reveals that his hope has been reborn, which gives him the ability to control the situation.

Although he is sick, Levi becomes active again and, with his friend's help and through his compassionate involvement, finds that it is also necessary to help those who are more seriously ill:

> Charles and I shared the various tasks outside. There was still an hour of light: an expedition yielded us a pint of spirits and a tin of yeast, thrown in the snow by someone; we made a distribution of potatoes and one spoonful of yeast per person. I thought vaguely that it might help against lack of vitamins. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 160)

Here, Levi evinces a spirit of compassionate collaboration as he recalls the chemical properties of yeast and uses the information to improve their condition. This concern toward others allows Levi to employ his education for the benefit of his fellow prisoners, thereby overcoming the inhuman and absurd logic of the lager.

Cannon underlines the grotesque logic of the concentration camps, identifying the irrational rules the prisoners must endure:

> Levi notes the absurd precision of the daily roll call, the senseless and innumerable prohibitions. The prisoners are ordered to remove their shoes, which are then mixed up and swept away, to be replaced by wooden clogs. Prisoners quickly learn that everything is forbidden and forbidden for no reason: "*Hier ist kein warum* [There is no why here]. ("Memory and Testimony" 130)

The rules defy any kind of intellectual or critical consideration, imposing an existence without reason.

Levi's compassionate recollection of his chemistry information highlights his refusal to accept that logic. As the prisoners quickly realize that no logical understanding of the lager structure is possible, they also quickly realize that reasoning is still possible outside of it. Indeed, Levi's compassionate involvement in the final part of the book underlines not only the severity of the offenses the Jews had to bear but also their strength and endurance in not losing their faith and concern for others.

Levi's emotional involvement toward others is also evident in the concluding pages when he encourages prisoners with the most difficult and challenging conditions:

> I was thinking life outside was beautiful and would be beautiful again, and that it would really be a pity to let ourselves be overcome now. I woke up the patients who were dozing and when I was sure that they were all listening I told them, first in French and then in my best German, that they must all begin to think of returning home now, and that as far as depended on us, certain things were to be done and others to be avoided. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 164)

The memory of his past life outside the camp triggers Levi's compassion, exciting him to wake the other prisoners and encourage them to think about returning to their homes. His support becomes concrete when he suggests precise rules of behavior to avoid spreading disease.

In her discussion of the adverse effects of memories on the prisoners trying to survive the lager conditions, Cannon states,

> While the prisoner Levi is committed to preserving the memory of the offense, he cannot allow himself to court memories of home. The author contends that memory of home rarely surfaces in the prisoners' waking hours. When it does, it is an unwelcome intrusion, making the present more difficult to bear. The Italian prisoners quickly give up the practice of meeting every Sunday evening to reminisce. Like his fellow prisoners, Levi had to let go of his memories of his family and his former life in Turin. Forgetfulness is a means of survival. ("Memory and Testimony" 132)

Existence in the camp is so harsh that the memory of what they have lost is intolerable for the prisoners. Disregarding these recollections is a way to stay alive. In "The Story of Ten Days," however, memory has a positive function, becoming a tool to overcome health and moral afflictions and, therefore, to promote survival. Thus, while Ginzburg uses memory to emphasize the reliability of the past in contrast to the uncertainty of the future, Levi employs it to reestablish a sense of stability, to overcome devastation, and to underline that memory, like reasoning, is a casualty of life in the lager.

One sign of hope in the lager is a renewed sense of collaboration among the prisoners:

> The news that a soup was being cooled spread rapidly through the crowd of the semi-living, a throng of starved faces gathered at the door…The majority dispersed but one came forward. He was a Parisian, a high-class tailor (he said), suffering from tuberculosis. In exchange for two pints of soup

> he offered to make us clothes from the many blankets still to be found in the camp…The following day Charles and I were in possession of a jacket, trousers and gloves of a rough fabric and striking colours. (Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* 164)

Here, the prisoners learn to organize themselves. Considering that only one of them offers his work, we may assume that collaboration was limited to a strict number. The majority just gather to obtain something to eat, demonstrating that receiving is possible without offering anything in return. The prisoners rediscover that a simple exchange of goods for services can promote trust and compassion. In turn, trust and compassion produce commitments to help other individuals and arouse gratification and connection. Lynne Henderson describes this dynamic as "the foundational phenomenon for intersubjectivity, which is not absorption by the other, but rather simply the relationship of self to other, individual to community" (24). Even though the exceptional circumstances of the Holocaust created new codes of behavior, Levi shows here that, through compassionate behavior, people can again rise above circumstances, reaffirm basic human values, and respect the dignity of human life.

Conclusions

In *Survival in Auschwitz*, we see Levi use compassion in several ways. Through its denial, he dramatizes isolation. Through its deceptive use, he illustrates the loss of trust resulting from the gaining of personal advantage. He illustrates compassionate responses as measurements of ethical standards and gauges of shared humanity in his portrayal of the prisoners reestablishing their respect and consideration of others. These diverse expressions of compassion not only provide new ways for us to understand the dynamics and dimensions of compassion but also, and more significantly, challenge the positivist view that emotions are separate from other modes of apprehension, such as reason, as Jaggar explains:

> Early positivist approaches to understanding emotion assumed that an adequate account required analytically separating emotion from other human faculties. Just as positivist accounts of sense perception attempted to distinguish the supposedly raw data of sensation from their cognitive interpretations, so positive accounts of emotion tried to separate emotion conceptually from both reason and sense perception. (148)

Indeed, the proposition that emotions are distinct from reasoning or other modes of human perception contrasts with Levi's account, which illustrates the rational components of emotional involvement. Levi clearly articulates his feelings of compassion and eloquently explains their motivations. For instance, although Henri's deceptive behavior does not trigger Levi's compassion, Alberto's respectful manners toward the prisoners do.

Levi also demonstrates that one may analyze that emotion, clearly shown in the example of the sick Hungarian prisoner who offers his bread:

> It was Somogi's turn. He was a Hungarian chemist, about fifty years old, thin, tall and taciturn. Like the Dutchman he suffered from typhus and scarlet fever. He had not spoken for perhaps five days; that day he opened his mouth and said: "I have a ration of bread under the sack. Divide it among you three. I shall not be eating any more." We could not find anything to say, but for the time being we did not touch the bread. Half his face had swollen. As long as he retained consciousness he remained closed in his harsh silence. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 170)

The compassion displayed here is complex. The man offers bread as a sign of gratitude, and the prisoners show respect for his affliction with silence and deferred action. Their response renders simplistic the positivist distinction between reason and compassion, for the men's behavior reveals a sophisticated ability to think, act, and evaluate. Moreover, Somogi's compassionate offer reveals his concern toward the other prisoners' situation, disclosing an evident bond with them.

Elizabeth Spelman confirms this enlightening quality of emotions: "So, then, our emotions, or at least some of them, can be highly revelatory of who and what we care or don't care about. They provide powerful clues to the ways in which we take ourselves to be implicated in the lives of others and they in ours. And their absence provides such clues as much as their presence does" (109). Thus, because emotions offer an image of people's involvement with others and caring about others, we may consider emotions to be vehicles to express other human faculties. In the example of Somogi, his compassionate involvement expresses appreciation and apprehension for the prisoners and his knowledge of their conditions.

At the beginning of this narrative, Levi explains the mentality of the extermination camps as defining the prisoners' situation as a solitary battle against survival, a logic that does not consider other people's needs. Thus, compassion is rare and indifference is common. However, just as we must

not separate true compassion from thinking and judging, we may conclude from Levi's testimony that an environment devoid of compassion is marked by an inability to think. In fact, his recollection of his arrival in Auschwitz is characterized by this inability as he depicts his first impressions of the camp in hellish terms, showing this logic at work: Prisoners perform as "we" yet quickly become "one," solitary despite the group, and unable to think:

> This is hell. Today in our times, hell must be like this. A huge, empty room: we are tired, standing on our feet, with a tap which drips while we cannot drink the water, and wait for something which will certainly be terrible, and nothing happens and nothing continues to happen. What can one think about? One cannot think any more; it is like being already dead. (*Survival in Auschwitz* 22)

Significantly, an absence of compassionate participation leads to an inability to think. In this environment, even imagining horrible circumstances generates more apathy than fear. Levi associates the impossibility of thinking with death. He not only shows the debilitating effects of a compassionless wasteland but also reveals the ability to end such alienation by restoring human participation and compassion. Through the representation of compassionate responses in inhumane conditions, he highlights the power of compassion to resist the horror of the camps and to avoid forgetfulness. Thus, compassionate involvement overcomes Levi's fear of not being heard, the theme that often dominates his dreams and that he defines as "pain in its pure state" (*Survival in Auschwitz* 60). Compassion, as he states in the initial epigraphic poem, is what Levi requests from his reader in contemplating the condition of another individual "who dies for a yes or a no" (9). Through compassion, we can recognize those who, unlike him, did not survive, because it calls upon us to bear witness, in Levi's terms, to bear responsibility for any act or attempt aimed at annihilating racial, ethnic, national, or religious groups.

The representations of compassion that the characters show to one another in *Survival in Auschwitz* highlight the implications that Levi attributes to relationships as a significant component that played a huge role in his own survival and that of others. Many scholars have emphasized the effect of emotional capability to enrich social functioning. For instance, the study by Lopes, Salovey, and Straus fully demonstrates the strong link between emotional ability and the quality of individuals' personal relationships.

Levi encourages the ability to effectively express and validate compassion in order to create and maintain relationships since it allows individuals to inspire and influence others, to communicate and build bonds, and therefore to help others change, grow, and develop. Levi sees relationships as a sort of investment. The more individuals value and invest in them, the more they can obtain from them.

Levi suggests that, even under challenging situations, once compassion is well sharpened, it generates a specific social knowingness and a spontaneous, unprompted obligation that facilitates a positive outcome and develops connections. Levi shows that even in dramatic circumstances, one can consider consequentially the possible responses to one's verbal or nonverbal communication and adjust accordingly. It may be either what we do or say that determines the result we struggle to attain.

For Levi, compassion capability involves the ability to consider consequentially the impact of one's words or actions. He advises, however, that under horrible circumstances, compassion is difficult to achieve and it is enormously difficult to judge anyone who is not able to express it. It is extremely probable that when faced with almost certain death, even individuals with strong emotional intelligence could send out unintended cues, no matter how subtle. Thus, Levi alerts us about the difficulties that individuals may encounter in developing and practicing compassion and suggests expanding individuals' perspective through a limited exercise of judgment.

Neorealism, through Levi's analysis of individuals' compassion, promotes a competency in developing emotional capability, conceived as a "form of intelligence" (*Emotional Intelligence* 3) and a way to build relationships with others. Emotional intelligence has been regarded as a significant factor of individuals' character since it controls how people relate and connect with others. This ability allows individuals to construct better relationships with one another as it implies a deeper knowledge of other people's personalities. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves assert, "Emotional intelligence is your ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationship" (17). Furthermore, emotional intelligence allows individuals to "process emotional information accurately and efficiently; and have the insight to skillfully use one's emotions to solve problems, make plans and achieve in one's life" (Salovey & Mayer 319). By promoting this ability, Levi's neorealist work encourages positive social behavior and facilitates increased inclusion in the postwar Italian identity that is enlarged by cautiously judging others.

Notes

1. See Pugliese's "Prologue, Answering Auschwitz" 1.
2. *Se questo è un uomo* is the original Italian title of *Survival in Auschwitz*.
3. See Branciforte for a discussion on the differences among prison camps, working camps, and concentration camps.
4. Amy Simon underlines the shame of the world produced by deteriorating human cohesion presumed by Levi.
5. For further insight on this topic, see Brenner 5.
6. Henri is the sixteen-year-old Paul Steinberg, deported to Auschwitz and assigned to work in the camp's laboratory with Levi. After 50 years, he clarifies Levi's opinion of him in *Speak You Also: A Survival Reckoning*.
7. According to Gabriel Motola, the author does not want to meet Henry again "because he had betrayed the scruples Levi saw necessary to maintain oneself as a man" (2).
8. In *La Tregua* (*The Reawakening* or *The Truce*), Levi states that although he will not forgive the Germans, he does not hate them because to hate another ethnic group is to imitate the Nazis.
9. Levi provides further information about Lorenzo in an interview with Nicola Caracciolo. When asked how Lorenzo Perroni ended up at Auschwitz, Levi states, "In a manner of speaking he ended up there because he volunteered. He was a bricklayer for an Italian firm that did work in France, and when France was occupied, the Germans took over the entire firm en masse. They transferred the operations to Germany, to Auschwitz, in order to build this immense factory about which I spoke to you and where I worked. At that time it was still under construction. There were twenty, thirty construction enterprises there, many of them German, naturally" (82). Levi also expands on Lorenzo's life in *Moments of Reprieve. A Memoir of Auschwitz*, in which he describes Lorenzo as someone who, though not a survivor, "had died of the survivor's disease" (118). Meeting him again in Fossano, Levi finds "a tired man; not tired from the walk, mortally tired, a weariness without remedy" (117).
10. Levi narrates the events that accompanied his escape from Auschwitz in his second book, *La Tregua* (*The Reawakening*), which Francesco Rosi made into a film, *The Truce*, in 1996.
11. According to GianBiasin, to address the consequences of the Holocaust, Levi uses a distinct narrative technique that combines the different genres of autobiography, historical memoir, travelogue, picaresque story, and moral reflection (7).
12. For more information about the function of memory in the autobiographical narrative, see James Olney 19.

CHAPTER 16

Compassion in *Smoke over Birkenau*

With *Smoke over Birkenau*, perhaps her most well-known book, Liana Millu became an important voice in Italian narrative, offering a female perspective on the events of World War II and the Holocaust.[1] Her participation in clandestine activities and her Jewish origin led to her arrest in the spring of 1944. She was subsequently deported to Fossoli[2] and then sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She survived the extermination camp and returned to Genoa. Just two years later, she published *Smoke over Birkenau* (Branciforte 289), which, according to Paola Guazzo (17), represents the first Italian female narrative of the Shoah[3] not strictly confined to diary form, that is, the daily accounts of events.

Instead, the book includes six stories that focus on the suffering of Millu's female companions (Gustine, Lili, Maria, Adela, Bruna, and Zina) and their emotional support of one another during their internment at Birkenau. These accounts reflect the violence, the tragedy, the resistance, the endurance, and the compassion of these women. Here, we examine Millu's work from the perspective of compassion to show that this emotion offers a way to recreate affectional bonds and, therefore, instill a sense of cooperation among the women that may have helped them to survive. Although compassionate participation is rare in concentration camps,[4] Millu draws attention to numerous instances in which this emotion, seen not as heroic but as an ordinary human reaction, becomes commonplace among the female prisoners.[5]

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Scholars and witnesses have often brought to light the fact that the conditions, treatment, work, and labor in the women's camps were even worse than in the men's. Millu is no exception: "Even in Auschwitz it was clear the men were treated better than the women" (*Smoke over Birkenau* 165). In his foreword to *Smoke over Birkenau*, fellow survivor Primo Levi elucidates this difference between the two camps:

> For a variety of reasons, the women's situation was a good deal worse than that of the men: first, less physical endurance, coupled with work more arduous and degrading than the labors imposed on the men, the agonies of disrupted families; and above all the haunting presence of the crematoria, located right in the middle of the women's camp, inescapable, undeniable, their ungodly smoke rising from the chimneys to contaminate every day and every night, every moment of respite or illusion, every dream and timorous hope. (Preface 7)

However, our objective is not to measure the intensity of suffering either the men or the women underwent but rather to reconstruct an accurate portrait of their tribulations.

In an analysis of those circumstances, questions of gender may appear superficial, secondary, or inappropriate. The Nazis' infamous "final solution," after all, was a systematic campaign of genocide aimed at a race, not a gender.[6] Nevertheless, several scholars emphasize the importance of gender in the physical and psychological tools of oppression employed by the Nazis. According to Esther Fuchs,

> By ignoring gender we stand to miss one of the most lethal weapons of Nazi propaganda and persecution. The Nazis produced an ideology of both racist and sexist supremacy. Anti-Semitism and misogyny were interconnected in the Nazi apparatus, and to ignore their misogyny is to remain oblivious to the profundity of their anti-Semitism and anti-humanism. (ix)

Women under the Nazi regime experienced double discrimination, that of their nationality and that of their gender. Thus, because it was recorded mostly by men, our current understanding of the Holocaust experience may involve inaccuracies. According to Marlene E. Heinemann, "[T]o assume that Holocaust literature by men represents the writing of women is to remain blind to the findings of scholarship about the significance of gender in history and literature" (2).

Although several other scholars emphasize the importance of a female perspective on Nazi oppression, none of them have conducted a systematic reading of the emotional or compassionate component. Anna Reading, for instance, clarifies the intricate manner in which the social inheritance of the Holocaust is gendered. Pascal Rachel Bos affirms that men and women sometimes experienced, retained, and recorded these events differently (32). Sara R. Horowitz also underscores women's unique vantage point, indicating that female circumstances such as "menarche, menstruation, and pregnancy in the concentration camps" appear to be left out in the male narratives (366). In addition, she states, "In many Holocaust narratives by men, women are portrayed as peripheral, helpless, and fragile" (367). Agreeing with Horowitz's approach, Lillian S. Kremer asserts that in women's narratives, "female characters are fully defined protagonists, experiencing the Shoah in all its evil manifestations" (5).

Thus, following Stefania Lucamante's approach in "Non soltanto memoria. La scrittura delle donne della Shoah dal dopoguerra ai giorni nostri" (80) in this analysis, we intend to enhance the knowledge of the Holocaust by offering a woman's view of the circumstances. We will discuss Millu's text not as one that aims to valorize differences or divert attention from the main concern of anti-Semitism but as one that gives voice to women's perceptions of their deprivation in the Shoah and their exercise of compassion. De Grazia's analysis of Millu's work confirms that her stories are "parables about human endurance" ("In Short" 16). At the center of that endurance is an emotional involvement with the condition of others. According to philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen, empathy, "being humanity's basic emotional faculty, contains a cognitive dimension by virtue of which it, and it alone, discloses to us something about another person, namely, his or her emotional experience in a given situation" (204). Vetlesen's observation refutes the positivist claim that emotions are separate from intellect. This "cognitive dimension," he asserts, enables one to participate in the suffering of others. In the same way, Millu recounts how her friends' travail triggers her emotional and empathetic identification with them.

As a result, compassion is evident in Millu's friendship with the five women: Gustine, Lili, Maria, Adela, and Bruna. Their pain and subsequent compassionate responses are central features of their identities. Apart from Gustine and Lili, Millu depicts the women's suffering in the context of motherhood. The author's articulation of compassion serves several functions. It enables them to resist the logic of the lager, to reveal personal situations, and to overcome individual and physical differences.

The compassionate responses that they both offer and accept allow the women to bond and establish coalition, uniting different cultures and nationalities; to value their individuality; and to refute Nazi ideology.

Although Millu presents these compassionate responses matter of factly, they often have a spiritual dimension or mystical component: "Love must truly be a gift of the gods," Millu asserts, "if it could grant these brief spells of respite to miserable human 'merchandise' like us" (*Smoke over Birkenau* 50). Scholars of the Holocaust have observed that often religious ideals inspire other forms of love, as Brenner states in his comments on women's autobiographical texts: "It was the struggle to preserve faith in the reality of a faithless world, to continue to love the world despite its lovelessness that infused meaning into the lives of these women" (10). Thus, their religious faith serves as a reason to endure the abuses of the camps.

Gustine, Lili, Maria, and Bruna's Compassion

Millu presents Gustine, Lili, Maria, and Bruna in Chapters 6, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Except for Gustine's anguish, which is introduced toward the end of the memoir, these women's experiences are represented in chronological order. Their stories portray an escalating level of suffering, as well as compassionate involvement, and are significant because they describe the affliction of women. Their pain is linked to their roles as sisters, lovers, and mothers.

We begin with Gustine because her suffering seems more manageable than that of the other women and, therefore, suitable for initiating a discussion of compassion. Through the representation of Gustine's anguish, we can also analyze compassion as an important unifying component among women belonging to different cultures and nationalities. We first meet Gustine, who is from Holland, as the woman who sleeps next to Millu in the quarantine barrack. After several months, when Millu meets her again, she is unable to recognize the "waxen-faced girl" at first (*Smoke over Birkenau* 147). Once Gustine reminds her of the quarantine barrack, Millu overcomes her astonishment. To survive, her sister has become a prostitute for the Germans, a choice which has caused Gustine much pain, pain she has not been able to overcome.

Here, Gustine's situation contains M. Nussbaum's required three elements for triggering compassion (*Upheavals*): Gustine's anguish is very serious, she did not bring her suffering on herself, and her plight is significant to Millu. Thus, when she asks Millu if she thinks the war will end soon, Millu is overcome with compassion and tries to give her hope:

> In truth, I needed to believe it too, maybe a good deal more than my pride would let me acknowledge. And so I asserted confidently that not only would the war be over, but by Christmas we'd be sleeping and eating in the comfort of home, enjoying ourselves around a warm stove. I even repeated the report from the camp radio, which had been circulating for some time. "The Russians are a hundred twenty kilometers away. Don't you hear the cannon fire at night?" (*Smoke over Birkenau* 148)

Despite their different nationalities, Millu encourages the girl and herself by asserting that soon they will be enjoying the comfort of their homes. The depiction of the Russians as saviors enhances the idea that participation in others' pain overcomes national boundaries.

Several scholars have commented on this aspect of compassionate involvement. According to Putnam, "Certain forms of empathy seem to cut across most cultural barriers, e.g., the sense of suffering triggered by the experience of the Jews in Nazi death camps. … some facets of learning how to be human, such as responses to pain and suffering, cut across cultural barriers" (40). Thus, emotional participation in the Nazi camps is often more powerful because, regardless of ethnic and social backgrounds, upbringing, and education, people have sincere similar reactions to affliction. By overcoming the potential barriers of personal circumstances and experiences that influence an individual's life, compassion is a universal value in promoting human partnerships.

Lili's story further demonstrates the selfless quality of compassion, the total separation between prisoners and perpetrators, and the consequent vulnerable and dangerous condition of Lili's existence. This young 17-year-old Hungarian woman from Budapest is involved in a hazardous relationship with a German commander. Millu shows her compassionate involvement with Lili through a conversation with another woman from Budapest:

> "Do you think Lili's really in love with him?" I asked Aërgi. The mere notion stirred me with pity. If it was true, then my young friend was burdened not only by the lager itself, but by the searing vulnerability of passion as well. "Poor Lili," I sighed, and sensible Aërgi nodded in sympathy. (*Smoke over Birkenau* 28)

Millu's feelings toward this girl allow her to understand and share her pain, with Aërgi confirming that participation in suffering produces human bonds. This unifying component of compassion is doubly emphasized

here, first, through their different nationalities (Aërgi is Hungarian; Millu is Italian) and, second, through their friendship. Both women are emotionally moved by Lili's circumstances and, therefore, identify with one another. Thus, even though M. Nussbaum's third element (significance of the sufferer to the observer) is missing here because Millu has just met Lili, we see that in exceptional situations such as the Holocaust, compassion may function in different and less definite ways.

In the previously cited passage, the author's compassion is moved by her imagining the consequences of Lili's attraction to a German officer. The statement "The mere notion stirred me with pity" does not connect Millu's emotional participation to an actual state of suffering but to the possibility that it may occur. The imagined suffering is also connected to Lili's vulnerability. The tragedy is that romantic love, ordinarily a cause for celebration, now arouses pity and fear in Lili's friends, who realize that indifference is easier to bear in Birkenau.

In his interview with Millu, David Dambitsch confirms the women's emotional oppression. When asked to clarify her reference to love, which is very rare in other testimonies, Millu emphasizes the women's forced repression of their emotional lives:

> In the lager there was what can be called minimal life. We were young and had a regular inner life, even if we could not express it. Only a simple glance or a word was sufficient to think it was love. But this happened very, very, seldom. I do not remember any love story in the lager, except for the one that I described in *Smoke over Birkenau*. It was just because of a glance or a word that you were recognized as a person. Immediately, we were more than a thing, but a person, and then it could happen that somebody fell wonderfully in love. (8)

Because camp conditions force the women to restrain their emotional involvement with others, they can misunderstand even the most negligible gesture of attention for love, an affirmation of their human condition. The compassionate involvement that Millu and Aërgi feel for Lili reflects recognition of Lili's human qualities and restores ethical relationships in the camp.

We should note here how acknowledgment of other individuals can signal moral concern for them, whereas indifference communicates division, detachment, and lack of interest. A passage from Rudolf Höss's autobiography, *Kommandant in Auschwitz*, is illustrative here because it illuminates the association between compassionate involvement and moral attitudes:

> Time and again I was asked how I, how my men, over and over again could cope with witnessing this process, how we could endure it. I always replied that all human inclinations and feelings had to be kept silent in the face of the ice-cold consequence with which we had to carry out the order of the Fürher. Thus, I had to appear cold and heartless in front of proceedings that would cause the heart of any still humanly feeling person to turn around in his body. (132)

Here, indifference is the prime threat to compassion. The danger is that those whose capacity for compassion is suppressed can cause damage to others because their moral judgment has been compromised. This suggests that to be morally responsible, people need to be emotionally involved with others. In Lili's case, Millu's and Aërgi's compassionate responses are necessary ways of accessing their friend's experience. Without that faculty, they are unable to evaluate the danger Lili faces.

Defining compassion as a virtue, psychologist Nadia Neri confirms the value of compassion. In her analysis of the narrative of Etty Hillesum, a Dutch prisoner, she emphasizes the importance of combining the emotional and rational spheres in compassion. Her concept of compassion as a "thinking heart" fuses emotion and thought, because "only through the awareness of pain that goes through the heart can one hope that destructive forces will not overcome the world" (24). Thus, she endorses the significance of compassion as emotional and rational involvement in not only acting morally but also avoiding further deterioration of human relationships.

In several examples, Millu stresses that the logic of the lager in promoting inhuman conditions of life is based on avoiding emotional bonds with other individuals. Therefore, any attempt to establish those ties may be perceived as resistance to that logic. In describing one extraordinary night when Maria gives birth in the horrible conditions of the camp, Millu writes, "It was still night, but for us day was dawning, with its unvarying acts and imperatives, the harsh Birkenau day that acknowledged neither birth nor death, only silence and obedience to its pitiless laws" (88). However, the merciless rules of Birkenau oblige the women not to speak of this exceptional event. Thus, they follow the camp's daily regimen mutely.

Here, Millu introduces the pregnancy trope and the corrupted moral meaning that this condition generates in the context of the concentration camp. The decision to give birth in the lager has grave consequences,

immediate death for both the mother and the child. Thus, Millu accentuates both the harshness of the rules in the camp and the exclusion of the concept of birth in the ideology of the lager. Although Millu celebrates the courageous birth of a newborn life, she does not allow the reader to forget the more commonplace outcome of camp births, recounting the fatal consequences of such an event.[7]

According to Gerald E. Markle, if birth in the lager is ignored, so should be death:

> Auschwitz was first and foremost a place of death. You knew that you had adjusted, explained memoirist Sara Nomberg-Pryztyk, when you routinely and mindlessly stepped over dead bodies. "I got used to it.…I could look at the dead with indifference. When a corpse was lying across my path, I did not go around it anymore[.] I simply stepped over it." (9)

The death of an individual in Auschwitz, a common and frequent event there, produces impassiveness and insensitivity.

In contrast, birth, because it opposes the camp's operative logic, is an amazing and humanizing but unachievable event[8]: "Imagine a birth at Auschwitz: improbable, impossible, surely remarkable, in this place of death" (Markle 9). Sodi underscores this point: "A child born in the Lager is the antidote to the Lager. It represents the non-perversion of the human body and the forces of nature. …A child born in the Lager is anti-Lager" (*Narrative* 172). In recording the extraordinary event of birth at Birkenau, Millu suggests that the women, creating personal bonds among themselves, opposed this truth of the lager, showing that they had not yet absorbed the brutal logic of the camp. Therefore, hope is still possible.

In terms of M. Nussbaum's three requirements, Maria's story does not engender compassion initially because the second element is missing, lack of responsibility of the sufferer. Arrested by the Germans just after she had married, Maria works very hard to hide her pregnant condition. In this case, Maria's pregnancy indicates her involvement in the situation. At the camp, her willingness to work, originating in her desire to give birth, alienates some of the other women. Adela, who had seen her own daughter die, resents Maria. Millu herself initially asks Maria, "Why are you working so hard? Are you trying for a blue ribbon or something?" (*Smoke over Birkenau* 57). Later, she regrets her insensitivity:

> I felt bitter remorse for tormenting someone weaker than I, yet in some ways so much stronger. I could have wept at my own brutality. Soon I would be a true daughter of the lager: my mouth would mold itself into a thin, cruel line, the lips twisted in a scornful grimace. I would be no different from the old-timers. And I admonished myself, softened my heart. I got closer to Maria again and tried to show her kindness. (58)

Realizing that the lager molds individuals allows Millu to reprimand herself. Through self-examination and an acknowledgment of her complicity in Birkenau's logic, Millu experiences compassion, which changes everything: "Thus Maria stopped being an abstract figure to be judged by abstract reasoning. She was no longer a selfish monster but a warm, good, trusting human being, and I had all the sympathy in the world for her" (59). Compassion, then, yields a more complete and nuanced assessment of another person than does a strictly rational examination of that person's actions. Furthermore, Maria's story demonstrates again that this emotion works differently in extraordinary situations because in those cases, it is more complicated to define it.

Millu's revelation about Maria also illustrates the Aristotelian tenet that empathy depends on the similarity between the pitier's and the sufferer's misfortune, which is underlined in this passage:

> For all I knew, if I were pregnant I might have felt the same, might have trusted that the war would be over before the nine months were up and that my baby would lie in a white cradle, in a white room. … Of course, I would have felt exactly the same!…And then, by imagining myself in her predicament, I couldn't help but feel for her. (*Smoke over Birkenau* 59)

Thus, identification with another, even if imagined, can prompt behavior-changing compassion, which can change behavior. After her epiphany, Millu says, "I would stay close by as we worked on the grounds behind the barracks" (59), revealing that through shared emotional states, the woman can establish interpersonal connections and oppose the code of behavior enforced in the lager.

That compassion evokes unselfish motivation and, consequently, more concerned behavior toward other people is a notion stressed by psychologists Robert Hansson, W.H. Jones, and Bruce Carpenter, who write that the act of comforting is dependent on the ability to decode certain emotions (266). This dynamic is apparent when Liana Millu tries to comfort a friend:

> One day I took a good look at her face: how sad and worn, with grayish blotches and deep circles under the eyes. I asked her age and was shocked: just twenty-three. "Twenty-three!" I must have looked so incredulous that Maria couldn't help noticing. "Back home I didn't look like this," she said, shaking her head in her usual way, with such a profound resigned melancholy that my heart went out to her. … I tried to distract her with frivolous chatter: she had beautiful hair, such lovely dark eyes and thick arched eyebrows. (*Smoke over Birkenau* 59)

Here Millu not only communicates the suffering she witnesses in another but also tries to alleviate it, in part because she identifies with Maria.

Later in the book, Millu reveals that she also has despaired over her premature aging. In this scene, Millu is dumbfounded by her appearance: "I looked in the mirror and did a double take. Could the face belong to me? It must, though I neither recognized nor liked it. Still, I couldn't resist studying it. It was impossible to accept that that image was what I had become, that the face in the mirror was what people in the lager recognized as me. (*Smoke over Birkenau* 169). The mirror can be a cruel witness, with some people, in cases of long-term anguish, not even recognizing their reflections. The condition of physical pain causing bodily awareness and the realization of such via the mirror are central *topoi* in discussions of both women's and men's Holocaust experiences.[9] Woodward notes the importance of this association: "One is never so aware of one's body as when one suffers from it" ("Mirror Stage" 105).

Like Levi, Millu draws attention to differences in appearance due to health or illness, beauty, and clothing. Such observations often underline the gradual decay of the body and the subsequent moral desolation. However, in situations of common suffering, individual differences—even physical appearance—seem unimportant, which can also prompt compassion: This revelation can prompt compassion, as Arthur Schopenhauer illustrates:

> Therefore, whatever goodness, affection, and magnanimity do for others is always only an alleviation of their sufferings; and consequently what can move them to good deeds and to words of affection is always only knowledge of the suffering of others, directly intelligible from one's own suffering and put on a level therewith. (375)

Thus, awareness of other people's anguish is comprehensible in the face of one's own suffering. Millu's compassion toward Maria derives from the

author's personal discouragement regarding the physical deterioration that Birkenau produces, which may symbolize both spiritual and moral dissolution.

This concern for bodily appearance is a recurrent theme in women's writing. Linda A. Jackson acknowledges that the reason for this gender construction is found not only in the importance of appearance in relation to women's reproductive potential but also in widespread cultural values (9). Analyzing the sexual dimension of Millu's testimonial, Sodi confirms this tendency:

> Nonetheless, in women's Holocaust writing, largely contrary to that produced by men, bodily concerns regularly occupy a central narrative role. This was in part a consequence of the cultural construct of femininity and womanhood in the '30s and '40s; in part, it was due to the Nazis' deliberate targeting of the female body in death camps as a locus of experimentation and humiliation. ("Many Bridges" 157)

Millu's compassion for Maria's physical deterioration highlights both the cultural model of femininity and the Nazis' degradation of women.

In the chapter "High Tension," Millu conveys the mental agony that women underwent during the Holocaust. We see this last model of compassion in Bruna, a woman denied her role of motherhood. Of note is Millu's placement of Bruna's story in the center of her memoir, which reinforces the routine despair the prisoners in the lager experience.

After being interred at Auschwitz, Bruna is separated from her 13-year-old son Pinin, a prisoner who labors in the men's section unloading garbage. Bruna can see her son only once each day on the way back from work. Again, we can see evidence of M. Nussbaum's three principles for triggering compassion: First, all of her companions in the barrack consider this woman's undeserved plight a serious one. Her story elicits their sincere expressions of compassion:

> "It was right there that I saw him two months ago. … I remember it as if it were yesterday. I had just started in the factory, and I saw a cart coming by with a group of boys pulling it. My heart gave a leap. … My baby! Right over there! My baby. … Finally he saw me. He leaped from the cart and threw himself on my neck, so tight that wild horses couldn't have pulled him off. …" She stopped to wipe her eyes and so did Costanza, walking on her other side. I squeezed Bruna's arm affectionately. (99)

In her account of Bruna's maternal experience, Millu introduces an important element of female Holocaust writings that highlights the effect of the camps on gender roles. Recreating the psychological complexity of her own universe, Millu depicts here a counterpart who experiences the Shoah in all its evil: Nazi sexism removes this Jewish woman from her traditional role of a nurturing mother.

Nazi policies unavoidably cast mothers of so-called inferior races as threats to Aryan purity and, therefore, destined them for extermination (Heinemann 17). However, according to Kremer, "Pregnancy and motherhood, prevalent in women's Holocaust writing as tropes for female vulnerability or as reminders of the dominance of the life force, are virtually absent from male Holocaust writing and from much critical Holocaust discourse" (11). Thus, Millu depicts the misfortunes and dreadful treatment the mothers have to bear. She shows the Jewish women's discovery that bearing children is a crime against the Reich and that their children are to be denied life, condemned to starvation, disease, medical experimentation, or doomed to be gassed or tossed alive into the crematoria.

Departing from much late-twentieth-century feminist writing, which displaces the maternal voice by privileging women as sisters and friends, Millu emphasizes both sisterly and maternal bonds. In Kremer's opinion, "The authority of the maternal voice in Holocaust writing links it to traditional Jewish writing, which routinely rendered maternal figures and influence affirmatively" (11). Thus, Millu portrays Bruna compassionately and heroically as a strong woman who shows great bravery and courage in overcoming difficult situations to communicate with her son. For example, because Bruna is obsessed by her desire to celebrate her sick son's birthday, she asks Millu, who knows a little German, to go to the market with her to buy something for the boy, although its offerings—carrots, onion, a piece of bread—are typically slim.[10] In this context, Bruna and Millu experience an unimaginable and unexpected act of generosity from Katia, the Russian woman who sells the carrots. Bruna begs Millu to accompany her to the camp market because she knows Katia and can help her receive a better bargain. While Millu and Katia are negotiating the price, Bruna urges Millu, "'Tell her it's for my son'" (*Smoke over Birkenau* 104), which Millu says "struck me as futile to introduce that sort of issue. … what earthly difference could it make to Katia if Bruna's son needed carrots?" (104). Considering that Katia is also starving, her compassion is remarkable when she sees that Bruna will renounce all her ration of bread to buy carrots for her son:

> We were about to leave when Katia called us back. I was afraid she had changed her mind and would demand to have her carrots, but to our great astonishment she handed me a minuscule slice of onion, saying we should give it to the boy. Then she dashed off, leaving us gazing dumbfounded at this incredible gift. (104)

This incident illustrates that even in conditions of abysmal suffering, human compassion is achievable among women not related by established bonds of friendship.

Thus, Millu underscores a strong difference between the women's frequent emotional participation in the camp and the men's rare emotional involvement described by Levi. According to Germaine Tillion, a former French political prisoner at Ravensbrück, "In the women's camps only the most selfish in character became hardened, while for many the incredible personal suffering only increased their concern for the needs of others" (230). Millu illustrates this observation when all her barrack companions, under Millu's direction, agree to help Bruna:

> I asked the others if they would put aside a morsel of bread each day. That way within a week we could have enough saved up to buy something for Pinin. They agreed readily. We'd be just as hungry either way—and by the end of the week we triumphantly purchased half a clove of garlic and handed it solemnly to Bruna. …She was very moved. (107)

Then Millu describes Bruna's reaction: "Her sallow face colored with surprise as she thanked us, and with her black eyes glistening under the thick brows she even seemed beautiful. … And that, amidst the hard, brutal faces of Birkenau, was a wonder to behold" (107). Hence, the positive effect that compassion has on Bruna reflects back on the others in the form of appreciative gratitude.

Many Jewish women who endured the Holocaust have attributed their survival to the generosity of friends who shared their bread, helped them withstand roll call, or nursed them through chronic illness.[11] Based on her study of Jewish female societies in the camps, Sybil Milton concludes that an effective survival strategy was women's creation of surrogate families in the same barracks or work groups (62). These small families, usually not biologically related, increased protection and created networks to help members cope with the privations and primitive camp conditions. This mutual involvement is pertinent to

Millu's experience, its implications revealed through the compassionate responses offered to Bruna.

Millu manifests the courage and dignity of Jewish women in the face of atrocity primarily through spiritual and psychological opposition. These women reveal their spiritual strength through their religious expression, another important *topos* for compassion. Despite the danger, the women observe Jewish ritual and law whenever they can. Thus, when Bruna and her companions find out that Pinin has been chosen for a future selection, the women adapt religious ritual to express their compassion. They all go to see him

> behind the mesh of high tension wires that surrounded the camp. Those wires unmarked by any warning skull and crossbones. …Her fair-haired son stood there desolate, watching us leave. …None of us could bear to look at Bruna. …We all felt the awkward strain of needing to speak, to say something to this grief-stricken mother…Poor Bruna, we murmured like a litany, poor Bruna, poor Pinin. (*Smoke over Birkenau* 110)

The atrocity of the situation generates collective compassion among the women. Unable to formulate words to comfort their friend, they whisper the rosary. The recourse to prayer transcending theological differences projects the women's sense of helplessness in the face of monumental injustice.

Brenner casts light on religious expressions of hope under the threat of internment in the concentration camps. Analyzing the lives of Etty Hillesum and Anne Frank, she emphasizes their tendency to discover in disparate belief heritages a way to posit future salvation. In extreme situations, however, even that defense mechanism fails: "[I]n view of the intensifying terror of the apocalyptic destruction, these ways of resistance were not sufficient…Compassionate rationality and a sense of responsibility toward the world could hardly protect the victims from mental and emotional collapse" (107).

Similarly, Millu ends *Smoke over Birkenau* with a litany and muted funeral knell: "*Mater inviolata*! *Mater consacrata*!…*Rosa mistica*! *Stella matutina*!" (196). These invocations implore special consideration for the lives of these specific individuals versus the Holocaust's millions of anonymous deaths. Through this Latin–Catholic liturgical address, Millu emphasizes the enormity of the Holocaust nightmare, particularly as concerns its female victims.

Conclusions

Smoke over Birkenau dramatizes female models of compassion during the Holocaust that open new methods of analysis of Millu's work. These models also suggest ways of creating affectional bonds and, therefore, resisting and countermanding the horror of Nazi totalitarianism. Her memoir, a unique form of testimonial, may prompt questions on the significance of this kind of personal narrative. Some theorists criticize the historical value of such writing. Felman, for example, observes that, although testimony is the most significant way to recount traumatic circumstances such as World War II and the Holocaust, it does not offer a complete comprehension of the times: "As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge or assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of references" (5). Millu's first-hand account, however, may resurrect an overlooked historical record that may be significant in connection with other testimonies and in light of additional examinations of such events.

A feminist perspective on the Holocaust, for example, isolates the Nazis' assault on Jewish women's reproductive capabilities. According to Katharina von Kellenbach,

> The Holocaust targeted women in their capacity of mother because the Nazis intended to destroy the possibility of a Jewish future. Jewish women who gave life physically during the Holocaust embodied hope for the future in a most powerful way. They often had to pay the ultimate price for their decision: martyrdom…There is an element of resilience and resistance in some of these women's decisions to risk the dangers of pregnancy in order to deny the Nazis' attempts at total control and to assert their desire and determination to hope for and work for a different future. (30)

Thus, Bruna's anguish illuminates the Nazi exploitation of female vulnerability and Jewish identity.

Also of significance is that Millu's narrative, unlike other accounts, does not include negative images of mothers during the Holocaust. For example, Bendremer writes, "Mothers left children on the steps of the house and… ran away. They were trying to survive without their children" (8). Although these stories showing the depth of extreme fear may still be interpreted as depicting resistance to Nazi genocide, Millu's narrative presents no such

shocking examples, perhaps because she wants to evoke immediate identification in her readers. The conditions her friends experience are severe but recognizable, whereas the violence of other accounts is likely to cause disorientation and detachment rather than compassion.

The stories of Gustine, Lili, Maria, and Bruna, in light of their compassionate responses to each other, underline a way of opposing dehumanization. While the Nazi regime imposes division and separation, Millu proposes alliance, unification, and family connections. Referring to French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, Brenner explores the significance of women's bonds:

> [A]s Levinas argues, "no one can save himself without the others." From this point of view, therefore, the resistance that focused on the other defied the Nazi politics of dehumanization through horror. "In horror," Levinas tells us, "a subject is depersonalized." The emphatic stance that each woman strove to maintain until the last possible moment counteracted the horror and therefore resisted depersonalization. (176)

People's humanity is saved by their relations with others. As Peter Kuon puts it, "Maintaining humanity or recovering humanity in the extreme conditions of a concentration camp means refusing a purely physical survival through concrete acts of attention and care for other" (108). Thus, the compassion of the women whose stories Millu recounts allows them to create affectional bonds and to resist the horrific ideology of the Nazi concentration camps. A shared recognition of their suffering helps to establish the individuality of each woman and to combat their anonymous eradication.

While Levi underlines the struggle in establishing relationships among men in the camps, Millu depicts these bonds as a common component of women's relationships. Traditional literature on the Holocaust has been gender-neutral and until very recently women's testimony has been unnoticed. Male Holocaust scholars tended to underline the similarity between the experiences of men and women in the camps by emphasizing the fact that the Holocaust obliterates any difference between sexes. However, the study by Hedgepeth and Saidel and Millu's testimony, among others, demonstrate that it is possible to obtain a different perspective on the Holocaust by examining women's lives and by understanding their experiences. Millu's representation of compassion highlights the significance of bond construction among women in the camp and confirms

other women's work. For instance, Charlotte Delbo's understanding of survival in terms of humble acts of relationships (27) offers an additional valuable context. Women's different material conditions and social connections throughout life provide them with the ability to produce types of families offering networks of survival. Delbo, Millu, and other women show that their culture offers women definite and diverse conditions in which to express their options and to act eloquently. They prove that the supposition that human responses are undifferentiable is inappropriate.

Through Millu's representations of compassion, neorealism becomes a channel to promote women's relationships and understand their different sensibilities and ways of coping with dramatic events. Moreover, neorealism clearly conveys that while it would be wrong to state that women's experiences in the Holocaust were entirely different from those of men, it would be incorrect and confusing to affirm that they were equal. In many instances, individuals' suffering were shaped by their gender, and Millu communicates that only by understanding what was unique to women and men is it possible to offer a comprehensive description of what happened. Through Millu's analysis, neorealism offers a more attentive portrayal of life in the camps and possible consequences associated with it. As society creates different roles and expectations for diverse groups of people in relation, among others, to their age, class, race, and religion, so communities inside the camps propose the same procedures. Similarly, just as society constructs different behaviors between children and adults, poor and rich, and members of different racial or religious groups, so it produces dissimilar functions for men and women. Neorealism becomes a tool not only to explore cultural definitions and expectations of women and represent how they experience their lives in the camps, but also to encourage women's ability to be active participants in the new postwar Italy.

Notes

1. Besides *Smoke over Birkenau*, see Millu's *I ponti di Schwerin*, *Tagebuch-il diario del ritorno dal Lager* and *Campo di Betulle. Shoa: l'ultima testimonianza di Liana Millu*.
2. Fossoli, known as War Prison Camp 73, was near Carpi in the region of Emilia Romagna. It was earmarked to receive prisoners of war, soldiers, and Allied noncommissioned officers. During the first few days of September 1943, the camp was abandoned. All remaining military detainees were shipped to the prison camps in Germany. De Felice reports that Fossoli was not considered a bad place until the Fascists took over.

3. For an understanding of the term *Shoah*, see Anna-Vera Sullam Calimani's "Name for Extermination."
4. Levi's testimony, for instance, mentions few cases of compassionate interaction among men in the camp.
5. In *Questo povero corpo* and later in *C'è un posto della terra…Una donna nel Lager di Birkenau*, Tedeschi, who also was deported to Birkenau, writes about women's solidarity in the camp: "The life of female prisoners is like a piece of knitting whose stitches are joined together because they are knitted into each other; but if the yarn is broken, that invisible point that unravels loses itself among the others and gets lost" (*C'è un posto* 98).
6. It is amply documented that the aim of Nazi policy was the extermination of not only Jews but also other groups of people. See, for instance, Gotz Aly and Susanne Heim's *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction* or Christopher R. Browning's *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy*.
7. For other details on how Nazis treated newborns, see Gerald E. Markle 9.
8. According Jutta T. Bendremer, the Nazis gave women something to produce amenorrhea (68).
9. See Robert Antelme 51.
10. For more information about the black market inside the camp, see Millu's *Campo di Betulle – Shoa: l'ultima testimonianza di Liana Millu* 70.
11. Other women, describing their attempts to escape, underline the importance of villagers' compassion for their survival. For more details on this topic, see Bendremer 7.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by "n"refers to endnotes.

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