

## The Order of Things: Games of Agency and Fate in Giancarlo De Cataldo's *I Traditori*

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*Per il Re, certo, ma per quale re? Se non ci siamo anche noi, quelli ti combinano la repubblica. Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi.*

Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*

*Un italiano. E come tale, lacerato fra abnegazione e opportunismo. Carlo Alberto, lui o un altro, chiunque avesse coronato il sogno di unire il paese, avrebbe avuto il suo daffare con un popolo così ambiguo, fundamentalmente ingovernabile.*

Giancarlo de Cataldo's *I Traditori*

For the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian *Risorgimento*, Giancarlo de Cataldo writes a popular historical novel entitled *I Traditori* in which he portrays the history of the *Risorgimento* through a contemporary lens, transgressing the genre of the historical novel, and retelling of history to reflect his understanding of the contemporary Italian socio-cultural mind. The invention of fictional characters with specific views on the organization of the cosmos, juxtaposed with historical figures in the landscape of the *Risorgimento*, reveals a double lens; De Cataldo revises history with an explicit agenda to include the perspectives of the victims of Italian history – namely the lower classes and women – while voicing through them the notably prevalent and long standing popular critique of the *Risorgimento* as “passive”, or failed - a popular notion after the publication of Antonio Gramsci's *The Prison Notebooks* in the late 1950's<sup>1</sup>. The literature of the *Risorgimento* frequently takes issue with what is deemed as an opportunism intrinsic to

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Italian nature referred to as *trasformismo*, defined by historian Walter Adamson as the “predominance of political society over civil society in such a way that the subaltern classes are held in a passive position because their potential leadership is coopted”

(Adamson 175). Gramsci writes in his *Prison Notebooks*,

A social group... must already exercise “leadership” before winning governmental power ...it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to “lead” as well. ...“transformism” was only the parliamentary expression of this action of intellectual, moral and political hegemony. Indeed one might say that the entire State life of Italy from 1848 onwards has been characterized by transformism – in other words by the formation of an ever more extensive ruling class... The formation of this class involved the gradual but continuous absorption... even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile. ...there can, and indeed must, be hegemonic activity even before the rise to power... It was precisely the brilliant solution to these problems which made the Risorgimento possible... as “revolution” without a “revolution”, or as a “passive” revolution... (Gramsci 59).

The understanding of the *Risorgimento* as “passive revolution” due to the opportunistic shifting of the bourgeoisie and “ruling classes” from one party to another to maintain power runs through the novels of Luigi Pirandello, Leonardo Sciascia, Anna Banti, and perhaps most famously Tomasi de Lampedusa – a tradition in which De Cataldo participates. He rejects the history of the *Risorgimento* as a celebration of the heroic triumph of Garibaldi, Cavour, and Mazzini, where the population is assumed to have risen and united by popular participation under empire. He is, however, concerned not only with representing the betrayal of the popular revolution by Italian *trasformismo*, but also exploring the ongoing question of the possibility of a unified Italian identity and politics in the twenty-first century.

As Lucy Riall and Silvana Patriarca explain in the introduction to *Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth Century Italy*, since the 1990s, the

history of the Risorgimento has been under continuous debate and revision to serve the political ends of contemporary parties. On one side are those who would like the autonomy of an unofficial area named 'Padania' that encompasses almost half of the Italian nation state in the north, while on the other are those who aim to celebrate and strengthen the memory of the Risorgimento to reinforce national pride. This struggle, together with increasing attention toward identity politics following public demonstrations and demands from feminists, gay rights activists, and immigration activists, led to developments in methodological approaches to historical representation and notably changed the range of ways the *Risorgimento* can be imagined (Patriarca 2-4). Giancarlo De Cataldo, in step with these shifts, spotlights voices long ignored or buried by traditional history.

De Cataldo is a judge, author, playwright and television writer who works in the popular genres of mystery, crime and noir. While writing this novel, he co-wrote the screenplay for Mario Martone's seminal *Noi Credevamo*, which also explores this history. Inside the jacket of *I Traditori*, De Cataldo lists his characters, "Eroi, Traditori e Banditi" in the front cover, and "I Personaggi Storici" in the back, recalling the structure of a play or a television where dramatis personae are listed. The novel is split up into a prologue, an epilogue, and thirteen "parts," most of which are only a few pages long and indicate the location and year of the events in question, in imitation of the structure of televised crime shows. Linking a literary endeavor to a comparatively "low" or popular form opens up a number of radical possibilities for the interpretation of history. In her introduction to *Plotting the Past*, Cristina Della Coletta writes,

Choosing to write within a genre is never a neutral and value-free choice. Writing historical fiction, in particular, implies applying specific interpretative codes to past reality, and these codes, which affect both the thematic and the formal levels of a text, are inevitably ideologically charged. Imposing specific criteria of selection and organization of the historical world, they establish their own rules on what can be selected from the realm of the real and what can be drawn instead from that of the merely verisimilar.

...In this perspective, genres, as well as their definitions, are not exclusively literary phenomena but also changing entities related and shaped by sociohistorical reality, entities that have a telling story to narrate, that of the history of mentality (Della Coletta 11).

De Cataldo's organization of the novel as serialized performance throws into relief the inextricable link between television and politics in Italy. Massive national viewership lends him greater creative freedom and links his novel to the televised events surrounding the celebration of the nation's "birthday" in the present day. The resulting incorporation of anachronistic characters and representations give voice to the victims of history, and put in their mouths the questions with which historical fiction of the *Risorgimento* has traditionally been concerned. Della Coletta writes,

By critically exploiting the genre of historical fiction and by highlighting the historical and cultural specificity of the narrative voice in their novels, authors ...implicitly claim that the only viable approach to genre theory is one that self-consciously places itself within the historical dynamics of a literary system that is in a state of constant change and development. By doing so, these authors do not reject all normative and typological definitions of genre, but rather act within these norms, manipulating them and revealing that both the normative and revisionary acts are historically determined and ideologically charged, and that they thus perform culturally significant hermeneutical functions (Della Coletta 3).

The play between the normative and the revisionary in *I Traditori* is complex and often a game of contradictions, perhaps most apparent in De Cataldo's writing of women - a category rarely addressed in traditional histories of the *Risorgimento*. The interplay between characters fictional and historical is a normative element of the genre, but the

revisionary is most striking in De Cataldo's two primary female characters, Striga, and Lady Cosgrave. The latter is an idealistic English aristocrat who joins the revolutionaries and displays the behavior of a suffragette far ahead of her time. Striga, a creature-like supernatural figure recalling ancient lore, is the novel's most fantastical invention, and is one of the most interesting to my argument and a focal point in this paper.

We encounter Striga for the first time when she is just moments from being burned at the stake as an accused witch by the same *canonico* who has kept her in his possession for sexual exploitation over an indeterminate period of time. This scene is a portrait of injustice associated with a time prior to that being represented. The last ritual burnings of witches in Europe took place in the eighteenth century, though individual cases continued to exist. The absurdity of the practice and its historical placement in the novel is particularly apparent in light of the emphasis on reason and the growing disbelief in the supernatural during the Enlightenment period. However, both nineteenth century imaginaries and those of the *Risorgimento* are Romantic narrative imaginaries that pose counter-narratives to eighteenth century insistence on the rational. By extension, De Cataldo's use of the supernatural draws a connection between the early nineteenth century and today, and implies a non-linear and non-rational undercurrent in the play of Italian history, most markedly expressed through Striga's philosophical struggles.

Striga's rich internal life (and that of other female characters in the novel) is one of De Cataldo's primary subversions of genre and tradition. Through an omniscient narrator, only the reader has access to her internal monologue, because Striga is mute. She is a woman without name, nation, language or origin. She has an instinctive and

communicative connection with animals and, is often described as smelling like a goat or at any rate, “selvatica,” or of the wild. In the *dramatis personae* listed in the book jacket, her byline is simply “*creatura delle foreste*”, creature of the forests. She is frequently feared and ridiculed for being a witch - an assumption that provides her with her name, Striga. Though she is eventually literate, protected and respected, for much of the novel she is literally without a voice and outside of community or affiliation. Striga is both the subaltern and the element of pure invention through which De Cataldo expresses the otherwise historically inexpressible. Della Coletta makes reference to the use of invention in the subversion of genre:

Invention, therefore, becomes a way to fill in the gaps in the archives and tell the stories of those who did not have a voice in the historical world. In a curious sleight of hand, the realms of invention, creation, and poetry do not highlight art’s universality... they stress art’s foundations in the historical world and its ties to the sociopolitical reality (Della Coletta 15).

De Cataldo places Striga in the narrative as the symbol of innocence that refuses to be totally corrupted. She is the quintessential marginal character; She is trafficked among corrupt men as a sexual object, but rather than react with the characteristic rage and violence, or submissiveness, of the repeatedly traumatized, she is shown caring for children and animals despite violent consequences, and capable of love and compassion for her abusers. The depth of her peculiarity endows her with a strange power over all whom she meets. Though she is often dominated, within that domination there is always some recognition of something disturbing in her by those who abuse her, and a fear of the influence of her presence, body, and prescience. She functions simultaneously as a subversive thread and the voice of philosophical coherence.

The coherence posited by Striga's mathematical worldview, however, stands in opposition to the possibility of radical change and revolution. Striga has an inherent connection with numbers and stars (a standard Western symbol for fate), which she translates into flute music deemed terrifying, beautiful or diabolical. If Striga is thus endowed supernaturally with the universal secrets of fate, then the following passage strongly foreshadows the futility of the revolutionary endeavor.

La ragazza non ha nome e non ha voce. S'è svegliata un giorno sui colli, non c'era un prima, ma ci sarebbe stato sempre un dopo. Quattro zampe ha ogni capra. Il gregge ha trentasei capre. Ci sono, dunque, centoquarantaquattro zampe. I numeri non mentono, i numeri non tradiscono. Poi un giorno una Bianchina resta impigliata in una trappola per i lupi, e perde una zampa. Ci sono, dunque, centoquarantatre zampe nel gregge. Per un solo giorno, ventiquattro ore, perché poi Bianchina muore, e le zampe diventano centoquaranta. Non poteva andare diversamente. I numeri non amano le anomalie. Ti piacciono i numeri, dice il canonico... l'accarezza più giù, fra le gambe, e le regala un libro (De Cataldo 15).

She is sensitive to the mathematical structure of the universe and sees in its patterns not the radical potential for change, but an irremediable order intolerant of anomalies. Those on the bottom must there remain, at the mercy of by the powers that be – manifested in the above passage in the form of sexual abuse at the hands of the *canonico*. The leg-less had to die for the restoration of order. Striga is a similar anomaly. Just as the goat had to die, she has no choice but to become a site of abuse. She is passed back and forth between licentious men as entertainment of the flesh because of the vulnerability of her muteness and lack of connection to family, land or creed.

Math is a universal language that transcends the differences negotiated continuously by the novel's men – revolutionaries, Bourbons, and peasants alike – of regional loyalty through dialect. Frequently, differing dialects are shown to further the

suspicion and xenophobia of a fragmented and widely diverse populace. Striga's muteness and its consequence suggest the importance of a linguistic framework. In the passage below, we witness her acquisition of language and realization of the insurmountable differences built into language itself. Even the letters of the alphabet are for her imbued with contradictory connotations and the chaos of fate in its tensions with human agency.

La ragazza capisce che per le lettere funziona come per i numeri. Funziona attraverso i simboli. C come capretta ...Ma anche C come il cane che curò le ferite del santo, D come il Diavolo che fa urlare di notte il canonico e gli fa confessare il suo peccato, E come l'espiazione che la comunità si attende dal canonico, F come i forconi con cui le danno la caccia, il canonico in testa a tutti, per bruciarla contro la porta della chiesa, perché il rogo scacci, finalmente, dal paese Satanasso e la sua Striga. ...Guardava le stelle che non volevano mostrarsi e si domandava che cosa fosse quel peccato per il quale volevano bruciarla (De Cataldo 16-17).

Through numbers, Striga understands the Darwinian hierarchy of the world – the weak must suffer, and then perish. However, through the acquisition of language, she strings together words burdened with the violent metaphors of Catholic guilt, the concepts of sin and damnation. Her associations with each letter suggest darkly the weight of human action and the capacity of human agency to alter the causal equations of the structure of the universe, for good or for evil. She looks to the stars for an answer when almost burned at the stake, unsure whether she must perish as a free radical who threatens cosmic symmetry, or whether it is sin that earns her to such a fate. The world is for Striga, and for the novel, hinged on a hybrid paradigm where the lines between an inflexible fate based on a necessary and unforgiving hierarchy and a fate harnessed through human will and action are constantly in question.

La ragazza conta trecentoventicinque stelle attraverso la striscia opaca della via lattea. Vaga a lungo con lo sguardo cercando l'ultima stella,

perché quel numero asimmetrico la offende. ...ogni lettera ha un suono diverso, la somma delle lettere fa una parola ma i suoni non si sommano semplicemente, il risultato finale è un suono diverso, un numero diverso, ...Quando decide d'immaginare l'ultima stella, e lo decide perché lei sa che quella stella, da qualche parte, esiste, e lo sa perché i numeri non hanno una fine e un principio, allora, proprio allora, il volto della notte si confonde con quello del soldato biondo, e la ragazza capisce che c'è una cosa sola da fare: tornare da lui (De Cataldo 17).

Striga is intensely affected by disharmony. Tied to a church door and looking for the restoration of symmetry, the appearance of Lorenzo is the completion of this series of stars, the pivot that gives narrative coherence to an otherwise polyvocal and polyphonous historical novel. This history's definitive betrayal, namely that of the romantic promise of unification as modeled by Mazzini, is represented through the multiple betrayals of Lorenzo, the prince who saves her from being burned and the spy whose idealism is slowly drained through the course of the novel. That he is the final unit in the series of inevitable numbers intimates the delusions to come.

Not all of De Cataldo's outsiders have the same relationship to fate. Calabrotto is a the lower class Calabrian mercenary who betrays Lorenzo and his comrades at the opening of the novel. Though like Striga he has no ties, his choices as a mercenary allow him to make his own fate in the landscape of war. However, unlike Striga, he is no way a benevolent force. He repeatedly rapes Striga before he sells her to Lussardi for profit. The same aristocracy for whom he sabotaged Lorenzo, betray him and send him into exile. When he receives this news, a subtle contradiction is revealed. Despite his mercenary status, which indicates that he does not feel confined to place, loyalty, or honor, he is resigned to a sense of the world so divided by class that social hierarchies are tantamount to an immutable cosmic order.

Se volessi, pensa il Calabrotto, con due colpi ti caverei gli occhi dalle orbite, ti farei ingoiare il vetro delle lenti, ti aprirei il petto e strapperei il tuo cuore marcio di eccellenza e me lo mangerei davanti a tutti, crudo e pieno di sangue. ... Il bandito abbassa piano lo sguardo. C'è chi nasce in un posto, e lo chiamano eccellenza e signore, e chi nasce in un altro posto, e lo chiamano brigante: è sempre stato così, e sempre così sarà (De Cataldo 29).

Calabrotto's thoughts reveal explicitly that he not only desires but is capable of exercising his violent sadism on the judge who comes to send him into exile. Yet even the mercenary that makes his own fate is aware that no system could possibly save his skin before that of an aristocrat. He is beholden to what he knows is an arbitrary form of authority, but the unshakable nature of its truth gives it the weight of cosmic order against which he has no agency. He is not only the victim of the "order of things", as it were, but he re-enforces this monstrous order in his treatment of others. He thinks back to the rape of his sister, after which he brutally murders the man responsible, *and* his sister, as there is no other remedy for such dishonor. With this episode, birthright forces him to accept his fate. He joins a gang of bandits "by the natural way of things". He muses, "distinu, figghiju meu" (De Cataldo 27). Striga cannot escape being his victim any more than he can escape his fate as exile and violent tool. Both Striga and Calabrotto assume that their fates are in tune with a cosmic order indifferent to justice.

A suggestion of the same fatalism can be seen also in Terra di Nessuno, another heavy-handed representative of the betrayed lower classes. Terra di Nessuno is an assassin with a name that translates, literally to "Land of No One." His father was a farmer who saw along with his community the sudden appropriation of communal agricultural land in Sardegna by aristocratic princes and nobles, and became a legendary revolutionary bandit against such abuses. "La terra è di tutti!" – "The land belongs to all

of us!” - he claims to his followers. Upon his brutal murder by the *sbirri*, he is named after his death “Terra di Nessuno”, a name that his seven-year-old son takes on as an identity, swearing to avenge his father. “Il destino, però, aveva deciso diversamente”, writes De Cataldo, threading again the concept of destiny or fatedness as general assumption back into the narrative of the oppressed (De Cataldo 91-94). Despite the casual turns of phrase that implicate him in the overarching cosmic order to which so many characters seem beholden, Terra di Nessuno’s experience as a *volontario* expresses the problem of consciousness and education highlighted by Gramsci in his critique of Mazzini’s approach. Gramsci accuses Mazzini as being more philosophical than realistic and flawed in his inability to create synthesis between the educated ruling classes and the lower classes, leaving both parties unable to see the practical imperatives of a populist revolution (Gramsci 110). Terra di Nessuno describes his fellow *volontari* as “...studenti toscani. Ragazzi pieni di ottime intenzioni, con gli occhi accesi dal sogno della causa, ma senza quella cattiveria che, nell’azione, ti salva la vita” (De Cataldo 78). It is useful to look specifically at Gramsci’s indictment of Mazzinian organization of the *Giovine Italia*’s project:

Nor can it be said that ... a popular armed insurrection was an imperative necessity – as Mazzini believed to the point of obsession (i.e. not realistically, but with the fervor of a missionary). ... concentrated and instantaneous form was not preceded by long ideological and political preparation, organically devised in advance to reawaken popular passions and enable them... the absence among the radical-popular forces of any awareness of the role of the other side prevented them from being fully aware of their own role either; hence from weighing in the final balance of forces in proportion to their effective power of intervention; and hence from determining a more advanced result, on more progressive and modern lines (Gramsci 110 -113).

Gramsci's analysis of the disparity of organization and preparation of the unwieldy and fragmented Italian populace points to the flaws that allowed for *trasformismo* to unravel the Mazzinian endeavor and absorb the bourgeoisie interested in a revolution back into the original structure of power. The peasant class often receives their potential liberators as bandits to be expelled from the land and sees Mazzini as a terrorist. The essential failure comes in the lack of effort to create opportunities for the peasant class to come to consciousness of forces of oppression *and* create changes that ameliorate their miserable material circumstances. The literary idealism around which the revolutionary project is imagined has no importance to those who struggle for daily bread.

Revolutionary success is posited as coming from an education to which the lower classes do not have access, while the educated classes do not conceive of the immediate material contingencies of life and death involved in the struggle toward freedom from monarchical rule for those without class privilege. This reality is revealed with both pain and comedy in a passage where Terra di Nessuno describes his interaction with his group of *volontari* while they debate what to do with Austrian soldiers they have overcome with a surprise attack.

Se il popolo italiano fosse fatto di studenti e professori, l'Italia sarebbe libera da un pezzo. Ma studenti e professori non sono che un'infame minoranza. E il popolo, quello vero, sta da un'altra parte. Sta alla finestra. Guarda, aspetta di vedere come si mettono le sorti della battaglia, si prepara ad accorrere in soccorso del vincitore. ... Si accese una disputa sulla sorte da riservare agli austriaci vinti. C'era chi propendeva per un'esecuzione sommaria e chi per legarli e riportarli al comando, come bottino di guerra. La questione andò avanti per alcuni minuti. Nessuno intendeva recedere dalla propria posizione. Quando cominciarono le citazioni dai filosofi classici, Terra di Nessuno perse la pazienza ed esplose un colpo di moschetto in aria. Tutti si azzittirono (De Cataldo 91-93).

Material circumstances always take precedence over the world of ideas. Even Mazzini, rather than remain in Rome and go down in history as a martyr after the fall to the French, uses a falsified passport and goes into exile, choosing ultimately to live, regardless of the cause, unlike those who died in its name. This suggests that those with greater education and aristocratic privilege have more agency both because of the belief in their mobility across spheres political and social, and their material wealth. It also reveals the blindness of the educated classes to the prior knowledges and skills of the lower classes the revolution intends to liberate, and the greater applicability of their experience than the philosophical ideas of revolutionary struggle. Their experience produces a more realistic understanding of the tendencies of history than their idealistic middle class counterparts.

However, idealism does not spare the novel's characters ripe for Mazzinianism from the forces of cosmic re-harmonization as theorized by Striga. Lorenzo, romantically invested in the cause, is forced to go against his values, move between parties, betraying and lying despite his personal belief in Mazzini. He is ultimately defeated both by the failure of the cause and by the compromises of character he has to make to live. He mistakenly believes that Mazzini would remain as a martyr along with other sacrificed believers, while the majority reverts back to an opportunistic race toward stability and material gain. Unable to feel human emotion and resigned to the inevitable fate of empire, he wills himself to die but is saved by Striga. At the end of the narrative, in a painful manifestation of the *trasformismo* De Cataldo impugns, Lorenzo, back home where he started and defeated, is asked to run for office in the new government.

Perhaps the most naïve and militantly idealistic of the lot is Lady Violet Cosgrave, the best example of the inescapable disillusionment of those with radical political beliefs. She is a Lady with great privilege, education and activist fervor. She frequently cross-dresses and takes advantage of masculine freedoms with a feminist courage perhaps more appropriate to a later time period, functioning as a comment on the freedoms and limitations of the contemporary woman inside and outside of Italian politics. Lady Violet leaves her father's estate to join the patriots and eventually falls in love with a man below her class. She marries him due to unexpected pregnancy, and refuses to live under her father's roof with protections and wealth she would have to exchange for her freedom and dedication to the cause.

Her first interaction with her father highlights her unshakable faith. Her father attempts to forbid her from going to Mazzini's school for children, arguing that she is trying to foil their "natural destiny." She is furious, and asks him, "Quale destino naturale? Quello di essere venduti come schiavi da famiglie in miseria a un mercante di carne umana, sbattuti sulla strada...? ...Tu mi stai dicendo che una grande nazione esige schiavi" (De Cataldo 61). Even after Garibaldi's excesses in Bronte horrify her, she is determined to follow Garibaldi but finds herself suddenly devoid of her previous freedom, bound to her responsibilities as wife and mother. Ultimately, she abandons her husband and loses her faith, while enjoying, like Lorenzo, the material comfort she has always had, and none of the fervor. In the letter that closes her narrative at the end of the novel, she writes, "L'ironia è diventata la lente con la quale giudico e condanno il mondo. Senza appello. La passione è solo un ricordo degli ingannevoli tempi che furono" (De Cataldo 563).

It is not, then, the difference of education and power, and therefore a conception of agency material and otherwise, that sentences some characters to fatalism and others to idealism (and ultimately disillusionment.) Rather, those resigned to the brutality of cosmic order are ultimately less broken by the failure of the revolution, though broken nonetheless. De Cataldo is clearly aligned with Gramsci in his understanding of the reasons for the failure of the *Risorgimento* and yet the movement is infused with a cosmic or supernatural current of fatedness that suggests something more than poor planning or poor philosophy on the part of Mazzini, or weakness on the part of Garibaldi as the cause of defeat. The barriers to success are also intrinsic to the nature of Man – and I mean *Man* specifically.

Lady Violet Cosgrave, even when defeated, maintains some commitment to the original cause. Retaining her values if not her fate, she continues to save and educate street children to protect them from exploitation by human traffickers. Striga too, as anachronistic as Lady Violet and as benevolent, never betrays anyone despite the great suffering of her life. She is instead able to expand her worldview to understand that the numbers, despite her wavering faith, do in fact return to original order. However, this order is not necessarily characterized by the symmetry that she previously imagines. Anomalies are not tolerated, but they are not necessarily eliminated as much as reintegrated into the cosmic order, in line with the workings of *trasformismo*. Neither the order nor the anomalies are ever for us to fully understand. She expresses the revelation of the multifaceted and unequal nature of cosmic order to Terra di Nessuno when his faith flags and he suffers as a soldier, away from her,

...anche la violenza ha il suo numero. La violenza è parte dell'ordine generale perché è parte di noi stessi, della nostra esistenza, della vita di

ciascuno. Ora so, diceva la Striga, che la tua lotta non potrà mai farne a meno. E ora so che la tua lotta é anche la mia. E sar  violenta” (De Cataldo 370).

Striga takes some time before she is able to make peace with the disharmonious violence of the numbers and her implication within it, but the music into which she translates her visions long before these revelations betrays her inherent understanding of the universe of the novel.

Padroneggiava lo strumento con perfezione, le note, a considerarle isolatamente, erano ben prese, nette, non strascicate. Era l’insieme a turbare nel profondo. Conteneva in s  qualcosa di malsano, qualcosa di diabolico, e nello stesso tempo s’intuiva una struttura consapevole (De Cataldo 90).

Her music is an interpretation of the malevolent thread that runs through the history in which she finds herself mired, the history whose structure she is able to calculate through her relationship with the stars, nature, and her mathematical and musical consciousness; A *Risorgimento* whose story haunts and perturbs forever but whose story of fragmentation and dissonance is fully coherent with the essence of its people. Striga questions fate and the extent of reliance available in any paradigm:

Se a ogni essere umano   assegnata una sequenza numerica, e se gli essere umani si modificano, evolvono, progrediscono, o degradano, anche i numeri si modificano, evolvono, progrediscono, degradano. L’ordine celeste non pu  dunque riflettersi in un’immobilit  originariamente imposta, ma   divenire. Ma il divenire non   forse prossimo al caos? Quale la causa del cambiamento? Un moto incontrollabile del divenire, oppure una nuova sequenza, predeterminabile, ovvero ricostruibile a posteriori? ...Infine: il caos che imbriglia le nostre esistenze pu  forse essere imbrigliato? Possiamo ipotizzare che un giorno si possa “comandare” sui numeri, e non esserne comandati? (De Cataldo 157).

For Striga, the spokesperson for the novel’s understanding of history, the question of agency and fate looms large. The dilemma of fate, even with the clear analytical theories explaining the structural failures of the *Risorgimento*, is unanswerable within the study of

history. In the fictional universe of the novel, however, Giancarlo De Cataldo is the hand of fate. Just as choosing to write within a genre is never a neutral or value-free choice, the construction of fictional characters and their universe is also never neutral. The portrayal of Mazzini as a terrorist and of his followers as ambivalent turncoats is accurate to history. However, the major subversion of historical narrative on De Cataldo's part is the inclusion of the supernatural and non-rational through which the questions of fate express themselves, and the exploration of said questions through strong female characters and the lower class. The female connection to cosmic order in the novel must be noted, particularly in a cultural environment where the status of the woman is in constant debate.

In an interview with Alessandro Brunelli and Stefano Chiodaroli of *Zelig*, De Cataldo says, "Il filo conduttore [nei miei romanzi] è un rapporto con il delitto, il crimine e il lato scuro...e nello stesso tempo, un rapporto con la realtà. ...Questi sono romanzi che cercano di dare una risposta alle grandi domande sul male, sulla presenza della malavita, la deriva italiana..." The author who became famous with *Romanzo Criminale*, a fictional retelling of the actions of the Banda della Magliana, shows compassion for turncoats, explaining how in the history of every nation and every war, there are both heroes and bandits. There are those who start out with idealistic ideas and fall to the temptations and problems of everyday life. "Chi è che non ha mai tradito in vita?" he asks. "Non avete mai fatto la spia al compagno al maestro alle elementari? ... Più invecchio, più mi resta difficile dividere il mondo in bianco e nero e in buono e cattivo, giusto ingiusto. [sic]" Though this shows a generous view of human nature in the course of Italian history, a startling contradiction is revealed when he is asked about the female

characters in the novel, phrased unfortunately by Chiodaroli as “le tue donne”. Why are they so often stronger, smarter, and bestowed with a longer view of history, asks the interviewer? De Cataldo’s responds,

Io sono un po’ con tutti, sia con i personaggi femminili che con i personaggi maschili. C’è una parte di traditore e una parte di eroe in ciascuno di noi. ...C’è una bellissima frase di Carmelo Bene... “mentre la storia va in una certa direzione, segue gli umori della storia e guerre della storia, le donne restano lì, e ci sono e sempre ci saranno” - Che poteva sembrare una cosa conservatrice - Ma invece era esattamente il contrario. C'era quell'intuizione di individuare nell'elemento femminile, la capacità anche di una contrapposizione alla storia quando la storia sta sbagliando... Le donne e le mie eroine nei romanzi non tradiscono. E se devono scegliere tra un momento di guerra e un momento di pace, scelgono sicuramente un momento di pace. Tra un momento di distruzione e un momento di costruzione, sicuramente un momento di costruzione. [sic]...Forse c'è anche un po' di stanchezza di uno che appartiene a un genere che ha dominato il mondo gli ultimi duemila e passa anni, e non si trova davanti a dei grandissimi risultati. Forse, passare la mano sarebbe anche opportuno (De Cataldo).

There is a turncoat and a hero in us all – all but in women. Women for De Cataldo are the seers of history, not the participants. Despite all the power with which he endows them in their superior faith and vision, none of “his women” have significant impact on the course of history, even when they watch it play out with greater clarity than their male counterparts. While De Cataldo is comfortable accepting the limitations and temptations to which man can fall while struggling to uphold his ideals, women do not fall into the same category in reality or in fiction. In what is perhaps a pointed response to infamous Italian sexism, De Cataldo marks women as superior in their ability to uphold their ideals by virtue of a natural, essentialized and biological “intuitive” sense. He suggests, radically, that it may be time to turn politics over to women, eliciting the snickering or his interviewers.

Betrayal is stated as universal; “Chi è che non ha mai tradito in vita? Non avete

mai fatto la spia al compagno al maestro alle elementari?” However De Cataldo’s view of women is too essentialist for him to imagine them able to commit such low crimes, separating women from his notion of the universal. His interviewers later ask him an even more unfortunate question; Which of his female characters would he take out to dinner, and if all of them, in what order of preference? While De Cataldo has no option but to answer, he begins with, "si sta bene in compagnia delle donne, questo è normale e anche logico” (De Cataldo). This framing of women both in their goddess-like ability to harness the laws of nature *and* in the supposed purity that exempts them from the “universal” human temptation to betray, falls in line with a notion of human history as perhaps also confined to an essential fate, a way of things, “normale, e anche logico.” Men, he implicitly argues, will always be more likely to give in to temptation, and the Italian nation state will always have to submit to long standing hierarchies of class and region, preventing a coherent national identity in the face of material struggle and cultural fragmentation. Creative license allows De Cataldo the radical inclusion of the voices of lower classes and women, but even in fiction, female agency and participation in revolutionary success cannot be fully imagined in the story of Italian history. The victims of history remain limited in their rise above historical fate, and Italians fall to their intrinsically ungovernable nature, which they cannot shake, simply by the order of things.

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