

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Body Politic on Stage:

Women Writers and Gender in Twentieth-Century Italian Theater

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

by

Monica Leigh Streifer

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Body Politic on Stage:  
Women Writers and Gender in Twentieth-Century Italian Theater

by

Monica Leigh Streifer

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Lucia Re, Chair

My comparative study of works for the stage by three twentieth-century women writers traces a distinct feminist genealogy in Italian theater. I focus on authors whose plays have been overlooked or merit new interpretation: Amelia Pincherle Rosselli (1870–1954) at the turn of the century, Anna Banti (1895–1985) at mid-century, and Franca Rame (1929–2013) in the 1970s–1990s. I treat the works of these authors in terms of gender, revealing a vibrant tradition of female playwriting and performance in Italy that foregrounds women’s bodies, lives, and engagement with politics and culture. In exploring the intersections of feminism and theater, I show how drama is a particularly apt medium for the dissemination of feminist themes in the Italian context.

Chapter 1 focuses on Rosselli’s emancipationist theater, and is the first study to treat her entire dramatic oeuvre in English. I argue that her plays should be read in light of her political

activism and commitment to progressive causes, beliefs fostered by her upbringing in a Venetian-Jewish household whose members were dedicated to egalitarian principles. Chapter 2 uses Anna Banti's *Corte Savella* as a case study for the modernist feminist practice of historical revisionism—the recasting of historical women as protagonists on the modern stage in order to provide new interpretations of their lives and legacies for contemporary audiences. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the reevaluation of Franca Rame's life-long theatrical career, showing how she developed as an author and co-author. For Rame, feminism and theater intersect through explicit monologues that harness the power of performance to condemn hypocrisy, sexism, exploitation and violence against women worldwide.

Theater has a deep cultural importance and historical legacy in Italy, but the existing canon tends to marginalize women's voices, experiences, and histories. My dissertation thus addresses a dual critical need: to expand our understanding of the modern Italian theater canon by researching feminist plays; and to offer an in-depth and comparative study that articulates a specific female subjectivity in the theater.

The dissertation of Monica Leigh Streifer is approved.

Thomas J. Harrison

Jon Snyder

Lucia Re, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

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Lastly, I owe my deepest gratitude to my family—my parents Richard Streifer and Maria Ciarallo Streifer, my sister Adriana Streifer, and my partner Aaron Thomas. Their ceaseless love and encouragement gives me strength on a daily basis, and has made it possible for me to successfully finish this project.

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**Managing Editor, *Carte Italiane*, 2011–13**

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### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

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- Monica Streifer, “Female Voice in Dacia Maraini’s *Norma* ‘44,” *California Italian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1–18.
- Lucia Re and Monica Streifer, “Dacia Maraini’s *Norma* ‘44: An English Language Translation,” *California Italian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1–41.
- Monica Streifer, “Affirming Life Through Death: Female Subjectivity in the Tragedies of Vittorio Alfieri and Gabriele D’Annunzio,” *La Fusta* XXI (2013): 1–26.
- Review of *Italian Women Writers: Gender and Everyday Life in Fiction and Journalism 1870–1910* by Katherine Mitchell, in *Modern Languages Review* 111, no. 4 (October 2016).
- Review of *Extravagance and Three Other Plays* by Dacia Maraini, Trans. James Schwarten, in *Annali d’Italianistica* 34 (2016).

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- “Women, Performance, and Politics on the Modern Italian Stage,” Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, Pasadena, CA. November 2016.
- “Franca Rame’s Feminist Performance Strategies,” American Association of Italian Studies, Baton Rouge, LA. April 2016.
- “Dante and Women,” panel co-chair and organizer, American Association of Italian Studies, Baton Rouge, LA. April 2016.
- “Franca Rame’s *Monologhi*: Breaking with the Italian Theatrical Canon through Performance,” Northeast Modern Language Association, Hartford, CT. March 2016.
- “Twentieth-Century *Drammaturghe* and their Early-Modern Women Protagonists,” Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, Portland, OR. November 2015.
- “Historical Revisionism on the Modern Italian Stage: Anna Banti’s *Corte Savella*,” Northeast Modern Language Association, Toronto, Canada. May 2015.
- “Women, Body, and the Soul on Stage: Amelia Pincherle Rosselli’s *Anima*,” American Association of Italian Studies, Boulder, CO. March 2015.
- “The Tragic Heroine at the Margins of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Female Subjectivity in the Tragedies of Vittorio Alfieri and Gabriele D’Annunzio,” American Association of Italian Studies, Eugene, OR. April 2013.
- “Dacia Maraini, Opera, and the Holocaust,” American Association of Italian Studies, Charleston, SC. April 2012.
- “A Translation of and Critical Introduction to Dacia Maraini’s *Norma ’44*,” American Association of Teachers of Italian, Erice, Sicily. May 2011.

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- “Italian Polarities,” January, 2013.
- “(Dis)Unity in Italy,” January, 2012.
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## **Introduction: Feminism and Theater in Italy**

This dissertation analyzes Italian women writers who recognize the feminist potentialities of the theater and thus choose to produce plays as a means by which to communicate their progressive views on women's changing role in modern Italian society. To examine this phenomenon, my dissertation is structured as a comparative study of theatrical works by three twentieth-century writers that establishes a feminist genealogy of modern Italian theater written by women. It focuses on writers who have been incompletely or inadequately addressed by extant scholarship and whose plays have been overlooked in the canon of Italian theater: Amelia Pincherle Rosselli (1870–1954), Anna Banti (1895–1985), and Franca Rame (1929–2013). I treat the works of these authors in terms of gender and genre, revealing a vibrant tradition of playwriting and performance in Italy that foregrounds women's bodies, lives, and engagement with politics and culture. In this introduction I will delineate the goals of the dissertation; give a synopsis of the current scholarship on twentieth-century Italian women playwrights and their relationship to the canon; outline the definition of feminist theater used as an interpretive lens in the following chapters; and provide an overview of relevant feminist theater theory, showing how each of the three playwrights addressed in the dissertation anticipate, exemplify, or diverge from the ideas put forth by the most prominent voices in the field. Lastly, I will outline my arguments developed in the subsequent three chapters.

The principal goals of my dissertation are twofold: (1) to provide in-depth analyses of feminist plays by three modern Italian women writers; and (2) to explore the multiple intersections of feminism and theater writing, showing why drama is a particularly propitious discourse for the dissemination of feminist themes in the Italian context. These objectives, however, are inherently interconnected: in accomplishing the first, the project aims for canon

revision, demonstrating that the exclusion of women from the panorama of modern Italian theater is not due to a lack of skilled writers or meaningful texts. On the contrary, this study reveals the existence of a purposeful and comprehensive tradition of playwriting by Italian women in the twentieth century that has gone undervalued, understudied, and at times ignored by modern critics and scholars. If the first goal addresses the “what” of the project—canon revision—the second addresses the “why.” The reason we need to reevaluate the Italian theatrical canon to include women’s voices and stories is innately connected to the question of genre—to what drama can do, and what it offers women writers in particular. My revisionary approach also seeks to rectify the historical record to show that there is, in fact, a tradition of modern Italian women writing for the stage, despite the fact that they are often left out of or only peripherally included in theater anthologies, critical studies, and histories. Ultimately, this project highlights women’s use of theater because it offers a literary and performative mode capable of articulating a specific female subjectivity and historiography.

Theater has a deep cultural importance and historical legacy in Italy, its canon spanning from medieval *sacre rappresentazioni* to the Renaissance “rediscovery” of Aristotle and production of the new Italian tragedy, to the improvisational *commedia dell’arte*, the neoclassical tragedies of Vittorio Alfieri, the romantic tragedies of Alessandro Manzoni, the bourgeois dramas of Giuseppe Giacosa, the lyrical and decadent *fin-de-siècle* tragedies of D’Annunzio, the gritty *verismo* of dramatists such as Giovanni Verga, to the existential tragi-comedies and problem plays of Nobel laureate Luigi Pirandello. It is clear, however, that even in the twentieth century, this well-studied theatrical canon presupposes or posits “Universal Man” or what Patrizia Violi calls *l’infinito singolare* as the ultimate if not only actor, maker, and subject of

history; thus de facto excluding or marginalizing women's voices, experiences, and histories.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation thus addresses a dual critical need: to expand the Italian theatrical canon by researching plays written by women; and to use this in-depth and comparative study of twentieth-century Italian women playwrights to show how theater acts as a discursive practice with didactic, political, and social implications, functioning in some instances as a form of feminist praxis. As the Italian theatrical canon continues to change slowly and to incorporate previously unrecognized authors and works, it is essential that criticism assessing the importance of these women playwrights in the Italian theatrical panorama be developed and disseminated.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly to "traditional," or male-authored theater, feminist theater is a diverse field that articulates many points of view, utilizes different forms and aesthetic codes, and adapts various themes to its cause. Its diverse chorus of voices cannot be distilled or reduced to one typology or literary-performative practice. The purpose of structuring this study around three distinctive

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<sup>1</sup> "Il maschio è il termine generico che sta per l'universalità del genere umano... Invece di presentarci due soggetti autonomi e differenziati, non riducibili uno alla negazione dell'altro, il linguaggio, come la cultura, danno voce ad un solo soggetto, apparentamene neutro e universale, in realtà maschile, e a questo riconducono, come sua simmetrica controparte, ogni differenza." Patrizia Violi, *L'infinito singolare: considerazioni sulla differenza sessuale nel linguaggio* (Verona: Essedue edizioni, 1986), 11–12.

<sup>2</sup> It is essential to note that the scholarly and performance canons of Italian theater are quite different. With notable exceptions such as Pirandello and De Filippo, the most frequently-performed Italian plays in Italy do not always come from country's most oft-studied playwrights. In many respects, this tendency is due to the importance of non text-based theater in Italy. In the context of European theater, Italy is unique for the historical and continued use of music and improvisation within its national theater tradition. In the twentieth century, the explosion of experimental groups modeled on the Living Theater furthered this tendency to eschew the play text. Italian theater historian Susan Bassnett discusses this phenomenon: "Traditionally, the greatest strength of the Italian theatre has never come from its playwrights.... There are a number of explanations as to why this should have been the case for so long, and why, in fact there is still so little playwriting in Italy today. Reducing those explanations to the lowest common denominator, what becomes apparent is that the history of the Italian theatre is both a history of improvisation, an anti-text theatre, and a history of music." Susan Bassnett, "Women's Theatre in Italy," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 2, no. 3 (March 1, 1995): 111.

playwrights who were active during different decades of the twentieth century and who each has a different relationship with feminism—both as a movement and a set of ideas—is to provide a detailed account of three distinctive modes of feminist theater-making while simultaneously conveying the breadth of the practice. In addition to Rosselli, Banti, and Rame, there are many names that would need to be added to a study whose goal were to be a more comprehensive treatment of modern Italian women playwrights. Some of these names include Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante, Maricla Boggio, Dacia Maraini, and Emma Dante, just to name a few.<sup>3</sup> Of all these writers, Dacia Maraini is today perhaps the most prolific and best-known both in Italy and internationally.<sup>4</sup> In linking such distinctive women as Rosselli, Banti, and Rame, however, and in analyzing the common themes that connect their works across the decades—such as women’s economic, political, and sexual self-determination—this study attempts to showcase the diversity, breadth, and depth of Italian feminist playwrights and theater practitioners, even if at the expense of an encyclopedic treatment. Their decision to use theater as the specific means by

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<sup>3</sup> On Ginzburg’s collection of plays *Ti ho sposato per allegria*, see Laura Peja, *Strategie del comico: Franca Valeri, Franca Rame, Natalia Ginzburg* (Firenze: Le lettere, 2009); Angela M. Jeannet and Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, eds., *Natalia Ginzburg: A Voice of the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). On Morante’s adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus* see Luca La Pietra, “*La serata a Colono* di Elsa Morante: Il dramma della conoscenza,” *Quaderni del ’900* 8 (2008): 89–102. On Boggio and Dante, see Daniela Cavallaro, “Giving Birth to a New Woman: Italian Women Playwrights’ Revisions of Medea,” in *Unbinding Medea: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Classical Myth from Antiquity to the 21st Century*, ed. Heike Bartel and Anne Simon (London: Legenda, 2010), 195–208.

<sup>4</sup> Maraini is the subject of numerous critical studies, and her works have been translated into many languages. Her pioneering experimental theater collective La Maddalena was a watershed moment in the development of a specifically feminist theater practice—one that influenced her contemporary and future playwrights, and will be discussed in the subsequent critical theory section of this chapter. For a decade-by-decade overview of Maraini’s career, including personal interviews with the playwright herself and many of her collaborators, see Dacia Maraini, *Il sogno del teatro: cronaca di una passione*, ed. Eugenio Murrari (Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2013). For a comprehensive bibliography of her works and criticism, see Federica Depaolis and Walter Scancarrello, eds., *Dacia Maraini: bibliografia delle opere e della critica (1953–2014): una prima ricognizione* (Pontedera: Bibliografia e informazione, 2015).

which to express their progressive positions on women's active engagement in society during their lifetimes demonstrates the distinctive feminist potential of practicing theater in twentieth-century Italy.

#### REVISING THE CANON

The customary scholarly neglect of Italian women writers is still (despite the wealth of feminist canon revision in literary studies in recent decades) particularly apparent in the field of theater studies, and especially with regard to modern and contemporary works. Most traditional histories of Italian theater—even ones that span from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era—either omit women playwrights entirely, dedicate minimal space to their study, or do not sufficiently address their accomplishments.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, these texts suggest that the Italian theater canon—that is, the texts worthy of continued study—does not include women authors.<sup>6</sup> Even critical

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<sup>5</sup> One example of a critical compilation that omits women is Pietro Carriglio and Giorgio Strehler, eds., *Teatro italiano* (Roma: Laterza, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> The canon of Italian theater has been established and reinforced by critical texts that consistently put forth and analyze the same artistic figures over time—dramatists who happen to be almost entirely male. Even in the context of the twentieth century, many histories of Italian theater make little attempt to include women playwrights. An example of this phenomenon is Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del teatro italiano contemporaneo* (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 2012). Antonucci's exclusion of women is particularly egregious from the vantage point of 2012. The description on the back cover suggests that he is unaware of this omission: "*Storia del teatro italiano contemporaneo* è un manuale completo e aggiornato... La nostra drammaturgia è ricca di autori di ieri e di oggi che ci hanno dato e ci danno un ritratto vivo e appassionato di un'intera epoca. Da D'Annunzio a Pirandello, dal futurismo al grottesco, da Petrolini a Campanile, da Betti a Eduardo De Filippo, da Flaiano a Testori e a Fo, essi hanno spesso superato i confini nazionali per proporsi, con le loro tematiche e con l'originalità del linguaggio drammaturgico, sui palcoscenici internazionali, accolti da significativi successi. Questa storia del teatro italiano... recupera inoltre autori ingiustamente dimenticati." He continues to list eight men who he feels have been "unjustly" left unstudied without naming a single woman in the same position. In the volume, prolific and internationally-recognized playwrights such as Dacia Marini, Franca Rame, and Emma Dante receive only a few sentences to a paragraph at most. The list of authors to whom he attributes original dramatic language and important themes is completely male. The book's presentation thus (erroneously) suggests that the history of

texts that claim to provide a comprehensive overview of modern and contemporary Italian theater—a time period during which many women were undeniably writing for the stage—continue to include women playwrights only peripherally, thus further codifying their exclusion and implicitly advancing the mistaken notion that no such tradition exists.<sup>7</sup> Rosselli's and Banti's plays, for example, are not included in any current encyclopedic treatments of Italian theater, while Rame's role as a writer and political performance artist is subsumed entirely under the rubric of the work by her husband, Dario Fo.<sup>8</sup> Instead, critical texts that focus specifically on Italian women playwrights tend to take the form of single essays or translations of selected works accompanied by a critical introduction.<sup>9</sup> While translations and articles are certainly necessary to disseminate primary texts to Anglophone audiences and serve as means by which to encourage the study of women authors in the academy, they lack the gravitas of in-depth critical studies and comprehensive accounts that have been conducted and continue to be produced on

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contemporary Italian theater does not include any women participants.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of a recent volume on modern Italian theater that only includes one in-depth study of a woman playwright (Dacia Maraini) see Michael Vena, ed., *Italian Playwrights from the Twentieth Century: A Companion Text*. (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2013). Maraini is the subject of the final chapter by Tony Mitchell, but it is only one out of fourteen chapters that address canonical male authors such as D'Annunzio, Pirandello, Bontempelli, De Filippo, Pasolini, and Fo. See also Ferdinando Taviani, *Uomini di scena, uomini di libro: la scena sulla coscienza* (Roma: Officina, 2010). It is interesting to note that while Taviani mentions playwrights such as Ginzburg and Maraini, he entitles his work *Uomini di scena*, thus perfectly exemplifying Violi's argument that literature and language presuppose a universal male subject.

<sup>8</sup> Neither Rosselli nor Banti are included in any gender-neutral anthologies of modern Italian theater. Franca Rame is in a unique situation among the playwrights treated here in that she is widely discussed in the scholarly community, but almost always in conjunction with Fo, and without sufficient attention to her work as an author and co-author.

<sup>9</sup> The English translation of Rosselli's *Anima*, for example, is included in a volume of translations dedicated to providing access to theatrical texts by women. See Katherine E. Kelly, *Modern Drama by Women, 1880s–1930s: An International Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

their canonical male counterparts.

While the inadequate presence, and at times outright omission, of Italian women playwrights in larger volumes or canonical histories of Italian theater is glaring, there are many scholars who have nonetheless published informative and essential works in the field. In doing so, they have contributed to the active tradition of feminist canon revision that has taken root in the field of Italian literary criticism beginning in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> To date, a leading voice in Italian women's theater criticism is Sharon Wood. Her essay "Women & Theater in Italy: Natalia Ginzburg, Franca Rame, and Dacia Maraini" is one of the only essays in English to comparatively treat multiple modern Italian women playwrights.<sup>11</sup> Wood is also the author of "Contemporary Women's Theatre," the only chapter out of thirty-four that focuses exclusively on women writers in *A History of Italian Theatre*—the most recent and authoritative English-language volume on the history of Italian theater.<sup>12</sup> Another prominent voice in Italian feminist

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of how Italian women writers have been included and excluded from the literary canon, and a genealogy of feminist literary criticism that addresses this polemic, see Laura Fortini, "Critica femminista e critica letteraria in Italia," *Italian Studies* 65, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 178–91. One of the primary goals of her work is to deconstruct the enduring stereotype that Italian women have not participated and do not participate in the production of literature. See also Anna Maria Crispino, ed., *Oltre canone: per una cartografia della scrittura femminile* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Wood, "Women & Theater in Italy: Natalia Ginzburg, Franca Rame & Dacia Maraini," in *Women in European Theatre*, ed. Elizabeth Woodrough (Oxford: Intellect Books, 1995). In addition to her expertise in theater, Sharon Wood is also a prominent critical voice in feminist canon revision with regard to Italian literature in general. See Sharon Wood, "L'altra biblioteca: la problematica della scrittura femminile," in *Il canone e la biblioteca: costruzioni e decostruzioni della tradizione letteraria italiana*, ed. Amedeo Quondam (Roma: Bulzoni, 2002), 143–56. Her work has been instrumental in bringing Italian women writers—from dramatists to poets to novelists—to the attention of an English-language audience. See Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing, 1860–1994* (London: Athlone, 1995); Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, eds., *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> See Sharon Wood, "Contemporary Women's Theatre," in *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 368–78. The volume is a valuable resource that begins with the Middle Ages and contains

theater scholarship is Maggie Günsburg, whose book *Gender and the Italian Stage* is doubly useful in that it addresses issues of gender and sexuality by male and female authors while also offering alternate interpretations of canonical Italian playwrights such as Goldoni, Pirandello, and D'Annunzio from a feminist perspective.<sup>13</sup> Daniela Cavallaro is another scholar whose works focus on adding to and revising the Italian theatrical canon to incorporate plays authored by women. Her recent series of essays on contemporary Italian women playwrights—including Franca Rame, Dacia Maraini, Maricla Boggio, and Emma Dante—highlights how theater is used as a tool to elucidate essential feminist themes such as mythic revisionism.<sup>14</sup> There are many feminist approaches to analyzing Italian theater, in addition to the study and translation of women playwrights and their works. One popular and effective approach of feminist critics in the Italian context has been to utilize the figure of the actress and/or diva from the turn-of-the-

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overviews of each historical period and its most renowned dramatic mode; chapters on individual playwrights; and essays on aesthetic moments and tendencies. It is the most recent, comprehensive overview of Italian theater in English and is a welcome improvement over its antecedent by Vincent Luciani, *A Concise History of the Italian Theatre* (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1961). Yet the fact that out of thirty-four chapters only one focuses specifically on women playwrights—and that no chapter is a monograph of a woman author—is to ignore the history of Italian women playwrights and thus reduce the status of their works. The prolific careers of Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg, for example, should entitle them to more than a cursory mention, if not their own chapters. Indeed, Maraini has written over sixty plays, founded multiple theatre companies, and her works have been performed on four continents, yet she is only addressed in Wood's general chapter on women's contributions to Italian theater.

<sup>13</sup> Maggie Günsberg, *Gender and the Italian Stage: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Her chapter "Center Stage: Franca Rame's Female Parts," is one of the first comprehensive treatments in English of Rame's feminist monologues.

<sup>14</sup> On myth and feminist theater see Cavallaro, "Giving Birth to a New Woman: Italian Women Playwrights' Revisions of Medea"; Daniela Cavallaro, "I sogni di Clitennestra: The Oresteia According to Dacia Maraini," *Italica* 72, no. 3 (1995): 340–55. On post-war women's theater see Daniela Cavallaro, "Drammaturghe italiane degli anni '50," *Italian Culture* 17, no. 1 (2013): 141–52. She is also the translator and editor of a collection of plays in English: Daniela Cavallaro, ed., *Italian Women's Theatre, 1930–1960: An Anthology of Plays*, trans. Daniela Cavallaro (Chicago: Intellect, 2011).

century through the early decades of the 1900s as a point of entry and inclusion.<sup>15</sup> The actress is a key interpretive figure, especially given the importance of performance, drama, and improvisation in the history of Italian theater. The work of these scholars and their diverse approaches to feminist canon revision is crucial in demonstrating the history of women's participation in Italian theater.

#### FEMINIST THEATER: FORGING A TRADITION, DEFINING A PRACTICE

This section provides a definition of feminist theater as both theory and practice by outlining how the field became codified in the latter decades of the twentieth century through the works of critics such as Sue Ellen Case, Jill Dolan, and Elaine Aston, among others.<sup>16</sup> In the Italian

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<sup>15</sup> Laura Mariani, for example, in *Il tempo delle attrici: emancipazionismo e teatro in Italia fra ottocento e novecento* (Bologna: Mongolfiera, 1991) discusses the symbolic and practical role of the actress in post-unification Italian feminist movements. In *Pirandello and His Muse: The Plays for Marta Abba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), Daniela Bini analyzes Pirandello's works through the lens of his most famous leading lady and their tumultuous relationship. In "Eleonora Duse and Women: Performing Desire, Power, and Knowledge," *IS Italian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2015): 347–63, Lucia Re focuses on the actress as an early feminist figure. Re's article is included in a special issue of *Italian Studies* that focuses entirely on the diva in Italian culture. See Katharine Mitchell and Clorinda Donato, eds., "The Diva in Modern Italian Culture [Special Issue]," *IS Italian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2015): 293–439. On the relationship between the theater and Italian women as audience members at the turn of the century, see Ann Hallamore Caesar, "Women and the Public/Private Divide: The Salotto, Home and Theatre in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy," in *Gender, Family, and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy 1860–1945*, ed. Perry Willson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 105–22.

<sup>16</sup> Their texts serve as foundational resources in the field of feminist theater theory. See Sue- Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1988); Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Other essential works in the field include Jane De Gay, *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2003); Maggie B. Gale and Vivien Gardner, *Women, Theatre, and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Karen Louise Laughlin and Catherine Schuler, eds., *Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics* (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995).

context, feminist historians and theater and visual culture critics such as Teresa de Lauretis, Maria Grazia Silvi, and Maricla Boggio both theorized and documented the diverse topography of theater-making in Italy from the late 1960s through the 1980s—a period dominated mostly by small, experimental collectives.<sup>17</sup> While the works of these theorists postdate the publication and performance of Rosselli’s and Banti’s plays, and largely coincide with Rame’s career, they nonetheless provide an invaluable framework for their analysis and discussion, and a much-needed vocabulary with which to evidence the many political and distinctly feminist elements at work in their plays. According to de Lauretis “theory is dialectically built on, checked against, modified by, transformed along with, practice—that is to say, with what women do, invent, perform, produce, concretely and not ‘for all time’ but within specific historical and cultural conditions.”<sup>18</sup> The idea that theory and practice grow symbiotically and are informed in part by the conditions of a given time period is a particularly important concept to bear in mind when linking these three playwrights across different decades of the twentieth century. They may not have the same aesthetic or formal antecedents but they nevertheless use the theater to publicly articulate a woman’s point of view. Exploring Rosselli’s, Banti’s, and Rame’s dramatic works through the critical lens of a feminist theater theory and practice—with its specific thematic and formal criteria—therefore helps to explicate the many ways in which they were significantly ahead of their time with regard to using theater for social and political critique, and for the

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<sup>17</sup> See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). On the history and practice of women’s theater in Italy, including excerpts from plays, essays on historical women playwrights, and personal accounts of performances and working groups, see Maricla Boggio, ed., *Le Isabelle: dal Teatro della Maddalena alla Isabella Andreini* (Nardò (LE): Besa, 2002). On women’s theater collectives in 1970s Italy and selected excerpts, see Maria Grazia Silvi, *Il Teatro delle donne* (Milano: La Salamandra, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 84.

dissemination of feminist themes.

### *Critical Voices*

One of the earliest critics to theorize a specifically feminist theater was Janet Brown, who in *Feminist Drama: Definition & Critical Analysis* identifies four essential elements of feminist plays: (1) sex-role reversals; (2) presentation of historical figures as role-models; (3) satire of traditional sex-roles; and (4) direct portrayal of women in oppressive situations. In assessing the feminist content of a play, Brown suggests that “if the agent is a woman, her purpose autonomy, and the scene an unjust socio-sexual hierarchy, the play is a feminist drama.”<sup>19</sup> With the exception of sex-role reversals, Rosselli, Banti, and Rame each meet Brown’s criteria for feminist theater. Indeed the reincarnation of historical and mythic women as role models—Artemisia Gentileschi by Banti, and Medea by Rame—is one of the key thematic operations examined in this study.<sup>20</sup> Rame in particular explicitly satirizes traditional sex roles in her feminist monologues through her comi-tragic depictions of the unfulfilling contemporary marriage and unsatisfactory sexual encounters. *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia*, for example, opens with an inadequate sexual encounter in which the female protagonist is treated like a Ping-Pong machine by her lover, while *Una donna sola* evidences the frustration of a woman who comes home from the factory only to work a second shift while her husband relaxes. While in a less categorical and sexual manner than Rame, Rosselli also critiques the institution of marriage, especially as practiced in bourgeois society. In *Anima* she shows how marriage can be damaging for both women and men, but argues that it impedes women’s chances for happiness and self-

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<sup>19</sup> Janet Brown, *Feminist Drama: Definition & Critical Analysis* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Rosselli also takes inspiration from historical women. Her last play, *Emma Liona*, is based on the life of Lady Hamilton, mistress of Lord Nelson and wife of Sir William Hamilton, British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples from 1764–1800.

fulfillment to a greater degree. Regarding point four, all three playwrights use theater to address rape, demonstrating through historical and contemporary characters alike that violence against women is one of the most enduring and intolerable manifestations of misogyny. The dramatic conceit of Rosselli's *Anima* is predicated on the protagonist's adolescent rape; Banti's *Corte Savella* takes its title and subject from Artemisia Gentileschi's rape trial at the Papal court in Rome; and Rame explicitly documents her personal experience of rape in the eponymously entitled monologue *Lo stupro*. Addressing society's "unjust socio-sexual hierarchy" is a parallel action to treating rape, as the social, material, and psychological conditions that support such a hierarchy are the same that facilitate sexual violence.

In her seminal work *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Jill Dolan discusses feminist theater from the perspective of the audience, deconstructing the privileged position of the male spectator for whom theater is traditionally produced and through whose lens it is judged. She argues that feminist theater must confront conventional forms, as "the address of the traditional representational theatre apparatus constitutes the subjectivity of the male spectators and leaves women unarticulated within its discourse."<sup>21</sup> Her methodology differs from that of other critics in that she approaches drama from the point of view of reception theory, dissecting the relationship between representation, consumption, and ideology. She argues that for the purposes of a feminist analysis—the objective of which is to augment the traditional theater canon with plays authored by women and focused on their experiences—it is essential to evidence the effect of ideology on representation, and thus its presence in theater production and reception:

One of the basic assumptions of feminist criticism is that all representation is inherently ideological. Since dominant cultural meanings both constitute and are

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<sup>21</sup> Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 99. Dolan incorporates many additional critical voices in her work, including de Lauretis, who posits that "the construction of gender is both the product and the process of representation." de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 5.

reconstituted by representation, deconstructing performance from a feminist perspective entails uncovering the ideological determinants within which performance works... By canonizing certain texts and their meaning, and mystifying the origins of their authority, dominant cultural ideology appears in representation as naturalized and seemingly non-ideological. Feminist criticism aims to dismantle this pervasive myth in theatre practice.<sup>22</sup>

This statement recalls Patrizia Violi's linguistic theory of the universal male subject, whose existence is codified through grammar and appears neutral in spite of its gendered origins. In a similar fashion, the traditional male theater spectator—who brings with him a subject position that functions as a lens through which he will view the play—affects the production, reputation, and longevity of a new performance or text in many ways. The gender-biased politics of reception and critique, for example, can irrevocably mark both a play's commercial success and its status as art worthy of academic study. To illustrate this point, Dolan outlines how the opinions of dominant critical voices in newspapers and journals can influence the status of feminist works that challenge the canon. This is a phenomenon that affects Rosselli, Banti, and Rame: their plays and performances were judged and reviewed by the leading academic and cultural critical voices of the time—sometimes positively, other times negatively. Reviews in Italian newspapers, journals, and competitions contributed to their commercial success (or lack thereof), and framed their worthiness for inclusion in the “legitimate” Italian theatrical panorama. This is particularly true in the case of Franca Rame, who in both scholarship and cultural criticism has often been viewed as the second and lesser half of the Fo-Rame partnership. Rosselli's *Anima*, on the contrary, was initially legitimized by *fin de siècle* theater critics after her victory in the *Concorso Drammatico dell'Esposizione Nazionale* in Turin, though it was subsequently almost entirely forgotten.

Dolan's work on ideology and representation is especially valuable within the context of

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<sup>22</sup> Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 41.

realism, where she outlines the diverse feminist responses to the realist form and aesthetic. This is a particularly useful theoretical key through which to examine Rosselli's *Anima* and Banti's *Corte Savella*—two texts that utilize, engage with, and even question bourgeois realism's traditional three-act play that purports to provide coherent, reliable cause-and-effect accounts of social reality. Following the assumption that realism “reifies the dominant culture's inscription of traditional power relations between genders and classes,” and uses its own form to “mask the ideology of the author, whose position is mystified by the seemingly transparent text,” Dolan traces the responses of feminist schools of thought to this theatrical mode.<sup>23</sup> Liberal feminist theater, for example, uses the traditional dramatic form as a platform for strong and fully-developed women protagonists. This is true of Rosselli, who, in placing Olga and her unapologetically progressive views about women's intellectual worth center stage, uses the bourgeois theater to serve her own political purpose. While through this operation she does not suggest radical changes to the dominant theater apparatus, she nonetheless uses it to advocate on women's behalf.<sup>24</sup> Radical feminists, on the other hand, prefer to create their own experimental theater that fosters what Dolan terms a “feminine aesthetic,” completely avoiding the trap of male hegemonic dramatic models. A radical feminist would argue that “subverting male dominated theatre practice with a woman-identified model will allow women to look to theatre for accurate reflections of their experience.”<sup>25</sup> Materialist feminism, differently still, deals with

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that while formally, Rosselli's dramatic works exemplify a liberal-feminist approach to the theater, her personal brand of feminism espoused through her literary and political activism draws influence from diverse schools of thought including Mazzinian liberalism, socialism, and dedication to women's suffrage. Rosselli's relationship with feminism is discussed at greater length in Chapter 1.

<sup>25</sup> Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 83.

realism's problematic nature in a more Brechtian fashion, by analyzing the ways in which "power relations are structured in culture and replicated by representation."<sup>26</sup> In placing one woman center stage who consistently speaks about the intersections of economics and sexism, Rame's monologues exemplify a materialist approach. Rosselli's works instead reflect a more liberal feminist approach to realism by using traditional theatrical forms to hold realism's supposed mirror up to the face of the female subject, refracting her experiences, histories, and ideas. Consequently, in her works realism serves as a vehicle for the dissemination of women's stories and perspectives. Banti's perspective is different still in that her metatheatrical play *Corte Savella* engages with and challenges traditional dramatic realism by way of the modernist aesthetic that informs her entire literary oeuvre.<sup>27</sup> In a similar fashion to the novel upon which it was based, Banti's play lacks temporal unity or consistency, and adopts a self-reflexive focus on the production of women artists, drawing a fundamental connection between Artemisia Gentileschi and the writer's own career.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 97. Dolan adds that Brecht's theater theories—particularly that of alienation—serve as "a precedent for materialist feminist theatre practice and criticism." Ibid., 106. She concurs with Terry Eagleton's theory that Brecht's epic theater is "a model of how to change not merely the political content of art, but its very productive apparatus." Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976), 64. This fundamental-level change in the representational form itself is one of the defining elements of materialist feminist theater.

<sup>27</sup> Banti's relationship to modernism and Virginia Woolf is discussed further in Chapter 2. On the relationship among modernism, performance, and the development of feminist discourse in the early-twentieth century, see Penny Farfan, *Women, Modernism, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> While unlike Rosselli and Rame, Banti's understanding of feminism cannot be easily categorized, it is expressed most deeply through her literary commitment to fellow women writers and artists across historical eras. According to Wood, "Banti stands apart from any specifically feminist ideology, but her texts are paradigmatic, transhistorical metaphors for the women writer or painter, for the female artist." Sharon Wood, "Portraits of a Writer: Anna Banti (1895–1985)," in *Italian Women's Writing, 1860–1994*, ed. Sharon Wood (London: Athlone, 1995), 123.

While Dolan discusses the three predominant schools of feminist thought in relation to the ideology of representational forms, it is Sue Ellen Case who first methodically specifies the theory and practice of cultural/radical and materialist feminist theaters.<sup>29</sup> In *Feminism and Theater* (first published in 1988 and reissued in 2008) she traces the relationship between feminist movements and the theater on three levels: history, practice, and theory. She begins with a succinct deconstruction of theater history from a feminist point of view—beginning with the ancients and moving through the medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods—to show how women’s voices and bodies have been excluded from the stage and playwriting process since Greece’s Attic period through approximately the early eighteenth century. She cautions, however, that this type of historical deconstruction is only one of many ways for feminists to “think their way out of patriarchal prescriptions.”<sup>30</sup> Case frames her discussion of women’s exclusion from the theatrical panorama by detailing how woman-as-character has been constructed by the male dramatist for the male spectator, and how through consistent cultural and political reification this symbol of woman has come to stand in for the real thing. Since women were largely excluded from the public sphere and otherwise prohibited from taking part in cultural production—and thus relegated to private spaces—their image and character were created in their absence. Case summarizes the effects of this exclusion, both on society at large, and with regard to theater:

Culture invented its own representation of the gender, and it was this fictional ‘Woman’ who appeared on stage, in the myths and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences,

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<sup>29</sup> Case does not address the tradition of liberal feminist approaches to theater, as she believes that only radical and materialist approaches warrant substantial treatment.

<sup>30</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 1.

stories, feelings, and fantasies of actual women.<sup>31</sup>

In articulating the history of women's participation in and exclusion from theater-making—including the construction of women in the male-authored play—she provides a foundation upon which to base analyses of women playwrights from any time period in any cultural context.

Perhaps the most important element of Case's history is her treatment of Aristotle and his *Poetics*, a foundational text of theater theory and practice. By deconstructing his criteria on the formation of the dramatic character, Case evidences how the *Poetics* “expands the patriarchal prejudice against women to the nature of the dramatic experience and to the role of the audience.”<sup>32</sup> In Chapter 15, for example, Aristotle famously classifies good, clever, and brave as adjectives that are simultaneously essential to the composition of a tragic protagonist yet specifically male, thus rendering them unavailable to women as a class and signaling that women cannot be true tragic characters.<sup>33</sup> On character, Aristotle writes that “the character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever.”<sup>34</sup>

According to Case, in Aristotle's theory women have an inherently ancillary function, that is:

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>33</sup> See Aristotle, *The complete works of Aristotle: the revised Oxford translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2327–328. Similarly, in Chapter 4, Aristotle uses women's supposed lack of cleverness and intellectual aptitude to exclude them from the experience of mimesis, and thus from learning itself. From the *Poetics*: “he learns at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation... The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind.” Ibid., 2318. Case deconstructs this pleasurable learning process based on representation and imitation as one that inherently excludes women: “the pleasure of mimesis is didactic, and learning is linked to the enjoyment-reception of its product. Since cleverness is gender-specific to the male, the enjoyment of art may be restricted to his provenance.” Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *The complete works of Aristotle*, 2327.

to provide the limits of the male subject, which help to complete his outline, or they illustrate differences from him, which highlight his qualities. Once more, women are invisible—there are no qualities ascribed to them, their invisibility provides the empty space which organizes the focus on the male subject. In this way, they are subjects of tragic action only in so far as they might help to define the male character.<sup>35</sup>

Case argues that the misogyny of the *Poetics* is doubly problematic: it insults women and marginalizes them on stage, and as the first and most enduring (although virtually forgotten for over a thousand years) text to theorize theater, it has also influenced and educated both ancient and modern dramatists in its sexist ways, thus codifying drama as a practice by and for men. Its legacy as the seminal text of theater theory and status as a consistent point of reference thus has consequences for women's participation in and production of theater.<sup>36</sup> She rightly articulates that “the prominence of the *Poetics* within the history of the drama and the study of that history makes the exclusion of the feminist reader even more comprehensive.”<sup>37</sup>

What, then, can women theater practitioners do to free themselves of this history? Clearly, the Sisyphean task of undoing approximately 2,300 years of patriarchal ideology is a situation that no single playwright could rectify at once. Nevertheless, specific studies of women's participation in theater over time that acknowledge the gendered limitations of the *Poetics* is one means by which to rectify their historical and continued marginalization in the

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<sup>35</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Cynthia A. Freeland also challenges the *Poetics*' status as a foundational text in genre criticism by examining the problematic nature of how Aristotle's “analyses and criticism of tragedy hinge upon on his own moral views.” She traces a gendered critique of Aristotle's moralizing approach to aesthetic naturalism, demonstrating how it “confines artists to articulating or confirming moral truths we already know, rather than revealing difficult moral problems or raising moral issues in a significantly original and challenging way.” Indeed the evaluation of moral problems from new perspectives is often the focus of politically-engaged, feminist theater. See Cynthia A. Freeland, “Plot Imitates Action: Aesthetic Evaluation and Moral Realism in Aristotle's *Poetics*,” in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 128.

<sup>37</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 19.

canon.<sup>38</sup> To level the playing field, Case argues that “the feminist reader can discover the methodology and assumptions of patriarchal production. She can begin to comprehend the alliance of theatre with patriarchal prejudice. The study of its development may inform the feminist analysis of contemporary theater, assisting in the development of strategies to expose the fiction of Woman in classic texts.”<sup>39</sup> Exposing this fiction is one of the primary operations of most women playwrights, and it is certainly the case for Rosselli, Banti, and Rame. Through the theater they show how both contemporary and historical constructions of women characters are predicated on patriarchal values. They challenge these ideas by creating strong female protagonists who are the subjects of their own stories and use their ingenuity, wit, “goodness,” and other resources to effect change. They ascribe “male,” Aristotelian characteristics to women characters to repudiate historical dramatic precedents: Banti’s Gentileschi and Rame’s unnamed Palestinian refugee are brave, for example; while Rosselli’s Olga is righteous and good; and Rame’s Medea is powerful and independent. In rejecting theater’s patriarchal history through specific thematic, formal, and character-based choices, these playwrights use their work as a platform for the dissemination of progressive ideas on women’s participation in their own professional field—the arts—as well as in culture, politics, and society.

Case continues her brief but compelling history of women’s early involvement in theater with a chapter dedicated to women pioneers in the field. She begins with Hrotsvit von Gandersheim in the mid-tenth century, discusses Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz in the late 1600s, and finishes with Mercy Warren, who wrote plays during the American Revolution. Her goal is to

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<sup>38</sup> This type of study is essential in combating the canon’s tendency to replicate itself in its own image, or as Case says to “reproduce its history in its future.” Sue-Ellen Case, “Re-Viewing Hrotsvit,” *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 4 (1983): 535.

<sup>39</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 19.

show that there are indeed historical models of women's participation in the theater as authors and that this history must continue to be developed and divulged. In addition to tracing the artistic legacy of these women, who model a more traditional form of playwriting, Case also outlines the alternate methods women have used for centuries to participate in the playwriting and theater-making process, including as mimes, dancers, clowns, stock characters, and public performers (such as saltimbanques). Excluded from the dominant means of theater production and presentation, women's participation in the dramatic arts has often been dismissed as low-level and of little importance. Consequently, much of the work of these participants has been left unstudied and unrecorded, their careers debased through a purposeful association with prostitution: "their theatre tradition was a silent one, consisting of physical dramatic invention... They were denied the permanency of the written text, along with its privileged association with theatre buildings, state revenues, and pools of professional performers, all of which were available to men."<sup>40</sup> Specifically, Case advocates for the formation of a new definition of the word and practice "playwright" that acknowledges the exclusion of women from dominant means of cultural production such as writing and directing. To accurately study and critically assess women's historical contributions to theater-making, it is essential to investigate non-hegemonic modes of artistic production and participation:

Any history of women in performance must include achievements in performance areas which originated in the unique experiences of women. Alongside traditional categories of production such as playwrights, directing, and designing, consideration must be given to modes of performance located in domestic and personal spheres which were assigned to women by the patriarchy. With this in mind, the history of women playwrights should take into account evidence from outside the history of the written text.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28–9.

This theory is fundamental to my critical reassessment in Chapter 3 of Franca Rame as a feminist playwright and virtuoso performer. Initially written off as a comic vamp by the press and theater establishment, Rame has in many ways never been treated with sufficient gravitas, nor adequately recognized for her work as a playwright within the Fo-Rame partnership. This phenomenon is encapsulated with the awarding of the 1997 Nobel Prize for literature to Fo alone.

### *Radical and Materialist Approaches*

While Case is one of the first theater critics to detail the divergent dramatic approaches to radical and materialist feminism, with few exceptions her book focuses on Anglo-American traditions and examples. She provides a general overview of both philosophies, and explains how they have been used and adapted by women playwrights during the twentieth century. Further investigation is therefore required to understand radical and materialist approaches to theater in the Italian context, where a unique tradition of militant and experimental collectives developed over the course of the 1970s in conjunction with the politically-oriented women's movements.

As stated earlier, radical feminism challenges the universal male subject of both politics and history, and consequently strives to create a distinct women's culture, separate from that of men. This focus on the individual needs and experiences of women paved the way for sexual difference theories, the appropriation of psychoanalytic theory to forge a female symbolic order, and the formation of Consciousness-Raising groups, which emphasized "the experiences, forms and practices of women," among other traditions.<sup>42</sup> In brief, in the Italian context, radical feminists fought against bourgeois emancipationist ideology, which they viewed as part and parcel of the insufficient institutional reforms proffered by the communist and radical Left after

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 65.

the Second World War. Instead of incremental change with the goal of women's equitable integration into a male-dominated socio-political system, they argued for their total liberation from said system in favor of a new political order predicated on women's experiences and issues.<sup>43</sup> Some of the most famous radical feminist collectives in Italy include *Rivolta Femminile*, founded in 1970 in Rome by the art historian Carla Lonzi; the Milanese *Anabasi*, founded in 1970 by Serena Castaldi, whose goal was to examine the work of American feminist groups in order to provide historical context for the practice of consciousness raising in Italy; *Lotta Femminista*, which began in Padua; and *Il Cerchio Spezzato*, formed by students from the University of Trento.<sup>44</sup> The majority of these groups operated extrinsically from the established political order: unlike their Marxist-oriented counterparts, they were not associated with nor had

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<sup>43</sup> Fiamma Lussana comments on the relationship between anti-emancipation ideology, sexual difference, and separatism in the development of Italian feminism over the course of the 1970s: "Carattere originario e distintivo del movimento femminista italiano, in controtendenza con la maggior parte dei movimenti femministi occidentali, è il suo porsi contro il modello politico emancipazionista e garantista.... Il neofemminismo parte da una semplice considerazione: la 'differenza' femminile non chiede tutela o protezione, ma diritto di esistenza. Bisogna rimuovere la cosiddetta 'amnesia' della differenza sessuale, ovvero scalfire il presupposto fondante della democrazia politica moderna che riconosce a un non meglio specificato 'uomo' asessuato i diritti irrinunciabili della cittadinanza, comprendendo le donne nella categoria dell'uomo universale... In questo senso non si può definire il femminismo contemporaneo come un movimento antiegalitario: non si tratta cioè di contrapporre uguaglianza e differenza, i cui termini peraltro non sono l'uno l'opposto dell'altro, ma di approfondire invece il rapporto più complesso fra sesso e genere partendo dal fatto che, solo riconoscendo la differenza sessuale fra donne e uomini e dunque facendo agire la categoria di genere nei partiti, nei sindacati, e più in generale nella politica e nelle istituzioni, donne e uomini saranno davvero alla pari." Fiamma Lussana, *Il movimento femminista in Italia: esperienze, storie, memorie, 1965–1980* (Roma: Carocci, 2012), 32–4.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed history of these groups, their founding ideals, practices, and members—in addition to their differences and similarities—see *Ibid.*, 151–97. Perry Willson describes Italian feminism as a "shifting panorama of hundreds (at times, thousands) of collectives of varying sizes, often locally oriented. These lacked presidents, constitutions, or any kind of unified national structure (although some, like *Rivolta Femminile*, had loosely connected member groups in difference cities). They varied in size and were often very informal with fluid, shifting memberships." Perry Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 152.

origins in conventional political parties.<sup>45</sup>

The practices of radical feminist collectives—which in Italy included *gruppi di autocoscienza*, the publication of feminist journals, magazines and books, and the creation of women’s cultural centers and spaces—were tied to the development of specifically radical-feminist theater. According to Case, “CR groups provided the beginning of feminist theatre, which celebrated the public performance of the voices of women, without questioning their condition or definition, class or colour.”<sup>46</sup> In Italy, radical feminism was expressed on stage by way of experimental, militant, and separatist theater groups that focused on plays by and about women. The first and most famous of these collectives was La Maddalena, founded in Rome in 1973 by Dacia Maraini, along with Lù Leone, Maricla Boggio, and Edith Bruck, among many others.<sup>47</sup> La Maddalena was a theater company organized and directed entirely by women and dedicated to the study and performance of women authors. It was born of the desire to create theater that was more representative of the experiences and interests of women, and that provided them with the opportunity to do so first-hand. According to Boggio, La Maddalena was a feminist response to a theater culture—and society at large—that did not view women as protagonists or subjects of either history or current affairs:

La necessità agisce in maniera diretta e imprevedibile. Inventammo una drammaturgia d’assalto contratta, tesa, nella successione di singole protagoniste, a rappresentare tutte le donne, di varie estrazione sociale, che ci avevano parlato del loro vissuto nelle caotiche riunioni femministe, nei cortei, nelle discussioni politiche, ma anche quelle che non avevano possibilità di parole pur avendo voce

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<sup>45</sup> The differences between Marxist and radical feminisms in the Italian context is discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.

<sup>46</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 65. Case cites examples of radical feminist theater collectives mostly from the United States, including the It’s All Right to be Woman Theatre, founded in 1970, and the New York Feminist Theater Group.

<sup>47</sup> For a full list of participants, see Boggio, *Le Isabelle*, 17.

e pensiero; soprattutto di esse dovevamo suscitare una presenza diretta anziché narrata da altri, come era sempre avvenuto fino ad allora.<sup>48</sup>

Telling women's stories and giving voice to those who have gone without is the common theme that connects their dramatic works. The company debuted on December 6, 1973 with *Mara, Maria, Marianna*, a play written by Maraini and directed by Boggio. Divided into separate vignettes, the play recounts the diverse experiences of Roman women from multiple social classes: from the *sottoproletariato* to the *alta borghesia*.<sup>49</sup> The collective's final performance was Maraini's *Norma '44* in 1986.<sup>50</sup> Other noteworthy productions include *Eguaglianza e Libertà*, *La donna perfetta*, and *Lasciami sola*.

The establishment of La Maddalena in Rome can be seen a decisive moment in the history of twentieth-century Italian feminist theater in terms of both theory and practice. It was a theater company predicated on the radical feminist principles of anti-hierarchical organization and collective work—in this case, writing, creating, and producing plays—that was similarly dedicated to the explication of feminist themes such as abortion, divorce, and political, economic, and sexual parity. Everything from the costumes, to the lighting, to the choice of plays, directors, and actors was decided collectively: “non c'erano capocomici, direttori e

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>49</sup> On the play's protagonists, Boggio comments: “Erano donne che si presentavano al pubblico raccontandosi, rivivendo le loro storie con la forza dell'evocazione teatrale... Dalle storie di queste donne i problemi più urgenti di una società in veloce mutamento uscivano fuori di getto—casa, lavoro, famiglia, figli, compagni, dignità—reclamando un modo diverso di stare al mondo. Il teatro si adeguò a quei problemi e tentò nuove strade espressive sopra a quella, immediata, della denuncia.” Ibid., 22–3.

<sup>50</sup> A first-hand account of Maraini's experience at La Maddalena, including information on performances, is included in Maraini, *Il sogno del teatro*, 36–51. See Lucia Re and Monica Streifer, “Dacia Maraini's *Norma '44*: An English Language Translation,” *California Italian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1–41; Monica Streifer, “Female Voice in Dacia Maraini's *Norma '44*,” *California Italian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1–18.

sottodirettori, ma c'era una assemblea permanente che decideva tutto insieme, a maggioranza. Le discussioni non finivano mai... Si discuteva di tutto, delle questioni economiche come della produzione, delle regie e delle interpretazioni.”<sup>51</sup> La Maddalena is thus an example of how Italian feminist theater evolved as an increasingly explicit, political art—one that in the 1970s was often realized through engagement with radical feminist principles and practices. Reflecting on those years in a recent interview, Maraini was unequivocal about the group's feminist foundation and purpose:

È nato da un gruppo di femministe che avevano la passione del teatro. Non era un teatro “solo per donne,” come commentavano con ironia. Noi volevamo dare spazio alle donne perché si esprimessero in prima persona. Ma era rivolta a tutti. Bisogna pensare che allora non c'erano registe in teatro, non c'erano musiciste, non c'erano drammaturghe. Erano ammesse solo le attrici, perché non potevano farne a meno. E bisogna anche ricordare che tutta la storia del teatro si basa sulla esclusione delle donne della scena. Quindi la nostra scelta era anche simbolicamente importante... Siccome non riuscivamo a trovare donne che facessero le tecniche delle luci e del suono, abbiamo creato una scuola, in cui alcuni tecnici venivano a insegnare e le ragazze imparavano. Possiamo dire con orgoglio che alcune di queste sono poi andate a lavorare nei grandi teatri.<sup>52</sup>

Here Maraini explains the contemporary motivations—first and foremost women's historical exclusion from the theater world—that led her and her partners to create a unique space for women to make theater. The founders of La Maddalena—and Maraini in particular, who in 1973 already had years of practical experience running and directing theater companies—not only produced feminist plays, but also trained women in the technical skills necessary to work backstage, thus ensuring that women could be active participants in all aspects of theater production. The theater and theater arts, however, were only one facet of the collective: it also functioned as a cultural center that housed a library of feminist literature, published a feminist

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<sup>51</sup> Maraini, *Il sogno del teatro*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

magazine, and served as a meeting space for debates, conferences, and consciousness-raising groups.<sup>53</sup> Despite a very successful decade and a half, La Maddalena closed its doors in the mid-1980s—a fact that Maraini blames on a lack of public funding for the performing arts in sites other than mainstream, male-dominated venues.<sup>54</sup> The playwrights and performances of La Maddalena (Maraini's in particular) are well-known, discussed, and documented. Although they are not the focus of this study, the feminist critical insights generated by collective's experience constitute an essential part of my theoretical approach to tracing the development of a feminist theater practice in Italy. The foundation of La Maddalena constitutes a breakthrough moment in Italian feminism by way of the theater. Not only was it the first organization to explicitly use drama and performance as a form of political activism, it also highlighted radical dramatic concepts such as performances that engage with issues of sexuality, violence, and the body; the theater as feminist space; and the distinct needs and wishes of women spectators. Indeed, the experience of the women of la Maddalena makes it possible to analyze the activities of other Italian women playwrights in a new light.

Materialist feminism, on the other hand, should be seen as a term that comprises ideas

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<sup>53</sup> On the activities and logistics of La Maddalena, see Grazia Sumeli Weinberg, "Women's Theatre: Teatro La Maddalena and the Work of Dacia Maraini," *Western European Stages* 1, no. 1 (1989): 27–9. On the diverse facets of the collective, see Lussana: "È un luogo pensato per dare espressione a un'autonoma creatività femminile... e si propone di diventare anche un centro di documentazione e di ricerca sulla condizione della donna." Lussana, *Il movimento femminista in Italia*, 88.

<sup>54</sup> Despite its popularity, La Maddalena ran on a shoestring budget and everyone involved helped with the daily management and upkeep: "Devo dire che il teatro La Maddalena era sempre pieno. Non abbiamo mai avuto un fiasco con gli spettacoli che mettevamo in scena. Forse la curiosità, la novità della proposta, insomma era sempre zeppo e a volte la gente rimaneva fuori... Ricordo che per fare vedere quelli che sedevano nelle file posteriori, abbiamo segato le gambe alle sedie delle prime file. L'ho fatto io personalmente... Non avevamo una lira. Facevamo tutto da noi, anche i costumi, cuciti dalle attrici e le maschere costruite in cantina con la colla e il gesso. Ci siamo anche molto divertite." Maraini, *Il sogno del teatro*, 43.

held by both Socialist and Marxist feminists. It differentiates itself from the radical/cultural model through its focus on the material conditions of women, and pays close attention to the fundamental role of class and economics in the oppression of women. According to Case, materialist feminism's focus on collective organizing distinguishes it from the individual and at times essentializing focus of the radical point of view: "the perspective of historical materialism directly contradicts the essentialism and universalism of radical feminism."<sup>55</sup> While Italy has a strong tradition of radical feminism that developed in the post-war era, it also has a rich history of Marxist or class-conscious feminism dating back to Anna Kuliscioff at the turn of the century. Franca Rame, who identified as a Marxist and was for a long period of time an official member of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), could be considered an exponent of this orientation, as her works focus specifically on issues of class consciousness and exploitation. She was uninterested in the separatist feminist collectives popular during the 1970s—artistic, political, or otherwise—and this aversion permeated her theater practice as well. She firmly believed in working actively with political parties, in incorporating men into the discussion on women's exploitation, and did not share the need of radical feminists to forge a new and uniquely female symbolic order. Women, she maintained, would thrive in contemporary society once adequate legal, economic, and social measures were taken to prohibit their exploitation. Consequently, her dramatic monologues tend to take as their subject archetypical working-class women who confront issues of economic and sexual exploitation at work and at home. While Case rightly cites Rame's monologues as an example of materialist feminist theater, she inaccurately evaluates Rame's understanding of the role of patriarchy in codifying economic exploitation: "there is no notion of patriarchy as such in Rame's Marxist-feminist texts: instead, the privileges

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<sup>55</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 82.

accorded to the male gender are seen as an extension of capitalist production modes and class privilege into the personal, domestic sphere.”<sup>56</sup> I argue in Chapter 3 that Rame’s class-conscious theater practice is instead intimately connected to and draws inspiration from her intellectual understanding of and personal experience living in a patriarchal society.

Attempting to clearly demarcate or separate radical and materialist feminisms is indeed a tenuous and ultimately questionable exercise. In Italy in particular, feminist organizations and philosophies were so variegated and diverse that the boundary between radical and materialist was at times unconvincing.<sup>57</sup> Each school of thought has its own idiosyncrasies and sources of strength, both as a philosophy in general and as applied to the theater. While radical feminism can at times fall into the trap of essentialism, materialist feminism—in a similar fashion to Marxist movements and doctrine—at times ignores the sex and gender-specific issues faced by women, even when understood as a economically disenfranchised class. Most importantly, however, these two philosophies are connected by more similarities than they are separated by differences. In the context of Italian theater, they coincide in their dedication to bettering women’s position in contemporary society, articulating their history, and making space in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>57</sup> According to Perry Willson, class-conscious vocabulary and Marxist ideas permeated the language and practice of what would normally be considered radical feminist groups: “Like other Western feminists, Italian feminists believed that ‘the personal is political’ and focused on ‘private sphere’ issues like sexuality, health, gender roles in the family and the transformation of everyday social relations. They wanted greater control of their own bodies, challenging the power of the medical profession and the Church. They advocated contraception and new attitudes to sexuality and opposed violence against women. All these were issues that the traditional Left had sorely neglected. Nonetheless, most, influenced by the strength of class politics in Italy, were anti-capitalist. Some wrote in language with more of a Marxist tinge than in many Western countries, whilst at the same time adopting a denunciatory tone toward the organized Left. Feminist groups varied regionally in this respect: in cities like Turin where the Left was strong, there was most attention to class issues.” Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy*, 152.

cultural production for the expression of their multifaceted experiences. The unique combination of class-conscious and radical ideas is, in fact, a defining characteristic of Italian feminist theater in the later decades of the twentieth century. Consequently, many women playwrights borrow ideas from each school to meet their own artistic and political needs. Considering the era in which she was writing, her use of traditional theatrical form, and her treatment of common themes such as marriage, Rosselli, for example, may initially appear as simply an exponent of liberal feminism. This is an inaccurate assessment, however, as it does not take into account her socialist predisposition, focus on women's meaningful employment and political engagement, nor activism with regard to women's suffrage and the right to vote. Similarly, while Rame is motivated by Marxist causes and considers economic exploitation to be the greatest barrier to gender parity, she specifically tackles issues that affect women—such as the second shift, sexual and familial relationships, and political activism—and creates space within a Marxist framework to explicitly address them. While Banti chooses not to identify with a specific feminist group, her consistent use of literature and drama to tell women's stories past and present demonstrates her dedication to evidencing women's contributions to cultural production.

### *A Working Definition*

What, then, is feminist theater and how should it be approached in scholarship? More specifically, how do twentieth-century Italian women playwrights engage with or forge a specifically feminist theater practice? In this dissertation I have borrowed ideas from many feminist theater critics to inform my analyses of Rosselli's, Banti's, and Rame's plays and professional careers. Elaine Aston, for example, highlights performance, suggesting that one of the principal goals of feminist theater scholarship should be to close the gap between studying

the performance and the dramatic text.<sup>58</sup> Theorizing both text and practice highlights the inherent physicality of drama, and thus provides the critical instrumentation necessary to explore such an element. Given that women have historically been associated with the merely physical, while men have been elevated as rational and moral beings, this is an important key for a feminist reevaluation of drama. Focusing on performance and the body is especially useful for the critical reassessment of Franca Rame, whose talent and experience as an actress are fundamental to her feminist theater practice and writing. It is also key in examining Banti's decision to rewrite her successful novel in the form of a play—a topic she discusses explicitly in her introduction to *Corte Savella*.

In *Unmaking Mimesis*, Elin Diamond theorizes feminist theater by putting into dialogue “the most pressing questions in feminist theory with the oldest questions of theatrical representation: Who is speaking and who is listening? Whose body is in view and whose is not? What is being represented, how and with what effects? Who or what is in control?”<sup>59</sup> These questions lie at the foundation of the dramatic conceit of Banti's *Corte Savella*. Through the dramatic depiction of Gentileschi's rape trial and the intricate interweaving of her artistic corpus with both the play's plot and themes, Banti provides the Baroque artist with the opportunity to speak for herself, as it were, and the audience with a long-overdue, pioneering critical reexamination of her paintings from a feminist perspective. Domnica Radulescu has contended

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<sup>58</sup> Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*, 57. According to Farfan, any definition of performance—especially within the context of feminist analysis—should look more broadly than the traditional performing arts to include events such as “suffrage demonstrations and pageants, lectures, a courtroom trial, a practical joke, the performance of gender in the practice of everyday life, and the performative act of producing feminist art and literature, theory and criticism.” Farfan, *Women, Modernism, and Performance*, 3. This definition is particularly useful when considering Banti's *Corte Savella*, the dramatic crux of which is the reenactment of Artemisia Gentileschi's rape trial.

<sup>59</sup> Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, ii.

that feminist theater must also challenge traditional dramatic modes in addition to positioning women center-stage as the subject of dramatic action. Her definition encapsulates many of her predecessors' main ideas:

By feminist performance I mean performance which pays attention to women, which addresses numerous issues regarding women's status in society, from sexuality, to motherhood, to relations with men, to violence against women, by means of performative and discursive techniques which differ radically from conventional mimetic realist theater, and which subvert conventional drama by means as varied as breaking in and out of character, speaking directly to the audience, and especially by always placing the woman's voice and presence center stage, as subject and not as object of the male gaze.<sup>60</sup>

Rame unequivocally questions traditional dramatic forms through female monologues and one-act plays in which she incorporates innovative performance elements such as didactic and interactive prologues. While Rosselli does not break from what Radulescu terms "conventional mimetic realist theater," she nonetheless challenges its male perspective, aesthetic, and construction of women characters. Banti, writing in the context of literary modernism, infuses the traditional realist stage with a metatheatrical, didactic apparatus in order to reevaluate canonical art historical narrative from the first-person perspective of a woman artist.

In addition to the more specific ideas heretofore detailed, feminist theater can also be articulated through a series of informal yet unifying factors, including dramatic elements that are commonplace among liberal, radical, and materialist approaches alike. One example is consistently creating women protagonists who are the subjects of dramatic action, who drive the plot, and who do not fall prey to the voyeuristic and misogynist tropes of self-sacrifice or suicide, among other classic endings. Olga, for example, is not consumed by Silvio's rejection—she instead builds a new life with a partner who values her intellectual faculties and focuses on her

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<sup>60</sup> Domnica Radulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution: Five Performers and the Lessons of Their Subversive Humor* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2012), 120. See chapter on Rame: "Franca Rame: Militant Isabella, Feminist Colombina in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Italy."

painting. Similarly, Rame overcomes trauma to tell the story of her own rape on stage, thus fighting the stigma that survivors often face and refusing to remain silent about an issue that affects countless women in Italy and the world over. She used her monologue, in fact, to aid in the fight for new legislation that would change Italian law to classify rape as a criminal act under the penal code rather than a “crime against morality.” Another way feminist playwrights defy traditional endings is by recasting historical women characters on the modern stage, thus providing them with the opportunity to present their experiences from their own points of view—perspectives which have often been marginalized by canonical historical narratives. In feminist plays women characters are also able to forge meaningful relationships with one another, connections that are often ignored or prohibited in male-authored works. Banti, for example, dedicates the entire third act of *Corte Savella* to Gentileschi’s relationship with a fellow artist, Arcangela. Together they discuss their lives as professional artists and find solace in one another’s company. Similarly, Rosselli’s Olga supports her model Marietta, and defends her from slander. Another common facet of feminist plays is that they address—in a historically consistent manner—themes essential to women’s self-determination and prosperity. Rame, for example, explicitly enters the debates of the 1970s feminist movements while Rosselli discusses women’s fight for the right to vote. Each thematic focus is congruent with the time period in which they were writing and performing.

The three chapters that follow are included in chronological order, beginning with Amelia Pincherle Rosselli at the *fin de siècle*, continuing with Anna Banti’s mid-century career, and concluding with Franca Rame’s post-war productions. Each chapter includes relevant biographical information on the playwright and an explanation of the historical context in which she was writing and producing theater. More specifically, each chapter addresses its subject’s

relationship to feminist ideas and to the specific feminist movement(s) or activities of the time. This structure is designed to highlight each playwright's relationship to the literary, cultural, and political environment in which she was working, and to showcase how an explicitly feminist theater practice developed over the course of twentieth-century Italy.

#### AMELIA PINCHERLE ROSSELLI

Chapter 1 establishes Amelia Pincherle Rosselli as a professional playwright heretofore neglected by the Italian theatrical canon whose works evidence a commitment to early feminist principles. The chapter includes an overview of Italian feminist and emancipationist movements at the turn of the century, thus providing a foundation not only for Rosselli's works, but also for the critical review of Banti and Rame's relationships with feminism in the subsequent chapters. While on the surface Rosselli's plays treat mostly bourgeois themes such as marriage, family, and the home, she uses them to comment incisively on the political, social, and juridical status of women in Liberal Italy. In doing so, she defies the prevailing theatrical conventions of the bourgeois drama and uses theater specifically as a means by which to observe and critique her contemporary political and cultural environs. I argue that her plays should be read in light of her political engagement, activism, and commitment to progressive causes, all of which were fostered by her upbringing in an intellectual Venetian-Jewish household whose members were dedicated to Mazzinian democratic principles. There are very few critical resources on Rosselli's literary works, life, and career in either Italian or English, and those that do exist provide only cursory information on her plays, do not investigate the full spectrum of her political activism, nor locate it correctly in the broader panorama of Italian emancipationist movements. My study focuses on her first and most famous work *Anima* (1898), but also addresses *Illusione* (1906), *Emma Liona* (1924), and her trilogy of plays written in Venetian dialect (*El Réfalo*, 1909; *El*

*socio del papà*, 1912; *San Marco*, 1913). It is thus the first to analyze her entire oeuvre and situate it within the context of a burgeoning tradition of Italian feminist theater.

Rosselli is often remembered only as the mother of Carlo and Nello—the anti-fascist Resistance heroes—which diminishes her own intellectual, political, and literary accomplishments. Moreover, she is often incorrectly labeled as merely a liberal feminist, without regard for the ways in which her plays, journal articles, other publications, and public engagements showcase her progressive feminist philosophy. This chapter connects these two facets of Rosselli’s life, showing how her playwriting and political engagement are inseparable. To this end, the goals of Chapter 1 are (1) to critically engage with her theatrical oeuvre for the first time in English, and in doing so (2) to highlight the utility of identifying and examining early models of feminist theater, which in turn helps articulate the tradition upon which subsequent playwrights and performers build. Rosselli does not exemplify a radical or materialist feminist theater practice, but she nonetheless anticipates many of their main thematic concerns in the Italian context, including a woman’s right to participate in the intellectual and political life of the nation, to mutually fulfilling relationships with men, to be recognized above and beyond the constraints of the body, and to be the active subject of her own story. Producing scholarship on Rosselli’s life and works is essential because it shows that women during this time period were indeed participating in the cultural and political life of Italy also through the theater, even if their contributions are not adequately remembered or acknowledged by the current state of scholarship. As Case contends in *Feminism and Theatre*, explicitly acknowledging women pioneers is key to articulating a feminist historiography of theater, thus ensuring their voices are included in the canon. In the context of twentieth-century Italy, Rosselli paves the way for the many women and feminist playwrights and theater practitioners who will follow.

Chapter 2 analyzes Anna Banti's decision to recast Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656)—one of the first Italian women master painters—on the modern Italian stage. Anna Banti, while best known for her critically-acclaimed novels, was also a playwright. She adapted her most famous novel *Artemisia* (1947) into a three-act play entitled *Corte Savella* (1960), which remains neglected by the scholarly work on her corpus. The chapter is centered on a seemingly simple question: why does Banti choose to rewrite her celebrated novel in the form of a play? This is the first study to comprehensively investigate Banti's decision to recast Gentileschi's story on the stage. In comparing the two texts it becomes clear that the transposition from novel to play is a specific formal choice with aesthetic and ethical consequences. This chapter deepens the links between feminism and theater previously established in Chapter 1 by showing how theater is used as a tool by feminist playwrights to represent and connect the lives of women past and present. Indeed Banti and Gentileschi face a similar set of challenges as professional women artists, notwithstanding the three centuries that separate their lives. By choosing as her protagonist a previously misrepresented and undervalued woman painter (Gentileschi, in fact, was all but unknown until the early twentieth century) Banti helps forge an new historiography of women artists that specifically takes into account their participation and experiences. Chapter 2 therefore focuses on genre, questioning the relationship between revising history and the dramatic mode, asking why theater is such a promising discourse for creating a new, more inclusive historical narrative and why this is particularly true for women's history. To answer these questions—and to parse Banti's ethics and style of self-adaptation from novel to play—I analyze her use of techniques such as fragmentation, dialects, and linguistic plurality; and her own interviews, essays and other works of non-fiction. Ultimately, Banti makes a double contribution to the extant scholarship on female pioneers in the arts: she uses the stage to

celebrate a real, historical woman whose legacy as a painter merited reexamination, and through her own dramatic work adds to the tradition of women playwrights in Italy.

The second component of this chapter connects the theatrical text and Gentileschi's paintings, which are featured prominently in the play. I explore how Banti uses Gentileschi's paintings to drive *Corte Savella* not only thematically and aesthetically, but also as a plot device. I argue that in doing so, Banti's two main objectives are: (1) to harness the aesthetic power of Gentileschi's paintings to influence both the characters within the play and the audience; and (2) to provide a new interpretation of Gentileschi's artistic oeuvre, which prior to the early twentieth century had been either ignored or dismissed. For example, her now-iconic painting of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* was the subject of long-standing reductive and misogynist interpretation based on the notion that Gentileschi painted the work as revenge against her rapist. By bringing this image, among others, to life on stage, Banti shows how the dominant interpretation of Gentileschi's corpus did not paint a comprehensive picture of her aesthetic vision, artistic courage, or experience as a professional painter. Furthermore, the way in which Banti interweaves Gentileschi's paintings with the unfolding of her drama provides a unique platform for a pioneering reinterpretation of her artistic oeuvre from a feminist perspective, as well as new ways of understanding the intermedial intersections of visual and performing arts. It is essential to remember that Banti wrote *Artemisia* almost forty years before the emergence in the 1980s of scholarly, feminist, and popular interest in the Baroque painter's life. While from the perspective of the twenty-first century Gentileschi may seem like an established, canonical, early-modern artist, Banti is in many ways responsible for her status as such. Her novel, followed by the play, inspired a new generation of scholars to study Gentileschi's oeuvre and to research her life—and in doing so cemented her legacy as one of the most prodigious and unique Italian Baroque

painters.

#### FRANCA RAME

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the reinterpretation of Franca Rame's life-long theatrical career, with the goal of presenting her as a distinct artistic figure who merits individual study apart from her husband Dario Fo while acknowledging the fact that their theatrical careers are intertwined. This focus rectifies the scholarship that often considers him as an autonomous artist without affording her the same respect. Furthermore, extant criticism tends to treat Rame only as a performer and actress, without considering the ways in which she developed as a co-author and individual playwright over the course of the 1960s and 70s. I posit that these two facets of her career are inherently connected and both essential to her legacy as a feminist theater practitioner. Consequently, this chapter diverges from the previous two in that it examines more closely the essential performative element of drama—a study made possible by the availability of video recordings of several performances.<sup>61</sup> For Rame, the discourses of theater and feminism intersect through explicit monologues—both tragic and comic—that harness the power of performance to condemn hypocrisy, sexism, exploitation and violence against women. Rame's works and legacy are the focus of my dissertation's last chapter because she embodies a convergence of playwriting, acting, performing, politics, and activism—each of which play a role in the continued development of a feminist theater practice. Her *Monologhi* serve as an excellent point

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<sup>61</sup> This type of analysis, for example, would not be possible with regard to Rosselli's works. While there exist many reviews of her plays being performed, there are no visual artifacts of the events. With *Banti* I examine the physicality of the theater from a theoretical point of view—how it extenuates the voice, the body, and what the ramifications are for the presentation of a female subjectivity—but due to the lack of footage or photos, I am unable to conduct an analysis similar to that in Chapter 3. Videos of Rame's performances are included in the Supplementary Materials.

of conclusion in tracing a genealogy of twentieth-century Italian women playwrights in that they externalize and render more concrete and explicit the feminist themes addressed by Rosselli at the beginning of the century, and Banti at midcentury. Additionally, Rame's comprehensive career as writer, performer, director, editor, and archivist encapsulates and symbolizes how theater-making can function as form of feminist praxis.

This chapter is organized into three main sections. In the first I provide a detailed account of Rame and Fo's life-long partnership, outlining her countless creative and managerial responsibilities within their theater collectives. I demonstrate how Rame's role in their partnership evolved over time, charting her evolution from principal actress and creative partner of the 1950s and 60s to the active author and co-author of the 1970s—the period in which they decided as a couple to tackle “la questione della donna” on stage. Most importantly, this section provides a new framework through which to understand Rame as a feminist playwright. Second, I trace Rame's complex relationship with feminism both as a movement and set of socio-political ideas, showing how her identification as a Marxist acted as a lens through which she viewed the struggle for women's rights. Third, using the monologues *Medea* (1977), *Lo stupro* (1975), and *Monologo di una donna araba* (1972) as case studies, I show how Rame's distinctive performance techniques explicitly engage with themes of feminist importance, thus reinforcing her legacy as a seminal feminist playwright and theater-maker.

More specifically, through the analysis of Rame's politically charged monologues published in the collection *Venticinque monologhi per una donna* (1989), this chapter evidences the aesthetic and moral practice of using theater and performance to advance feminism in the public sphere toward the end of the twentieth century. I examine the unique theatrical techniques Rame's performances utilize in order to break from the Italian theatrical canon—including

interactive prologues, improvisation, autobiographical references, playing multiple roles, and direct discourse with the audience, among many others. These innovative, and in some respects, revolutionary, theatrical practices elucidate feminist themes such as economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, and sexual violence, while showing the ways in which traditional theater at times marginalizes or diminishes women's voices and experiences. Her manifold stage performances—which have been intermedially reproduced on television and in documentaries and film—also double as an inclusive call to political action. Thus at the foundation of Rame's aesthetic practice is a moral imperative: a commitment to rendering explicit a critique of patriarchal culture and the ways in which it adversely affects Italian society, families, and women in particular.

By linking comprehensive analyses of key works by Rosselli, Banti, and Rame—ones that engage with their lives and times, theatrical works and other literary works, and relationships to feminism—I hope to highlight the importance of theater-making by Italian women with diverse backgrounds and political formations across the twentieth century, beginning at the *fin-de-siècle* and ending in the 1990s. Not only do their dramatic careers show how theater-making in Italy has been used as a form of feminist praxis, but put together, my readings of these three playwrights also provide a significant cross-section of feminist theater in twentieth-century Italy. Most importantly, this dissertation shows how the strength of the practice analyzed here is rooted in its diversity of approaches to the dramatic text and to performance.

## 1. Women, Body and Soul: The Emancipationist Theater of Amelia Pincherle Rosselli

### INTRODUCTION

Amelia Rosselli, née Pincherle, is the inaugural post-Unification Italian woman playwright, as she is the first modern Italian woman to have her works published and also produced in Italy's most famous and prestigious theaters. The scholarly recognition of her work in both Italian and English, however, is not commensurate with her many literary, social, and political achievements. Her theatrical and narrative works are close to forgotten: only her most well-known play *Anima* (1898) has been republished in a modern critical edition, and only *El Réfolo* (1909) and *Anima* have been translated (into French and English, respectively).<sup>1</sup> Her theatrical oeuvre consequently provides a point of departure in the larger project of mapping for the first time a feminist genealogy of twentieth-century Italian theater. In many ways, Rosselli anticipates by almost a century the famous feminist rallying cry of the 1960s and 70s, “the personal is political,” as her opinions on women's issues extend to all aspects of society—including suffrage, issues of employment, home, family, and public engagement. Her opinions are also inextricable from the Mazzinian liberalism that informed her upper-bourgeois, secular, Jewish upbringing in nineteenth-century Venice. A friend, Gina Raccà, aptly characterizes Rosselli's tenacious personality in an article for the Italian periodical *Nuova Antologia*: “nemica per natura di ogni conformismo, coraggiosa fino al sacrificio nell'asserzione delle sue idee, non conosceva i mezzi termini dettati dell'opportunità; l'*appeasement* in tutte le sue forme le era estraneo; non

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<sup>1</sup> Amelia Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, ed. Natalia Costa-Zalessow (Roma: Salerno, 1997); Amelia Rosselli, “Her Soul,” in *Modern Drama by Women 1880s–1930s*, ed. Katherine E. Kelly, trans. Natalia Costa-Zalessow and Joan Borrelli (New York: Routledge, 1996). Costa-Zalessow's thorough introduction to the revised Italian edition of *Anima* is one of the first to provide a critical assessment of Rosselli's most famous play, as well as information on her subsequent works.

si lasciava mai imporre la tirannia di schemi prestabiliti.”<sup>2</sup> Rosselli asserts her progressive ideals in both her private and public life, through the dissemination of her writings, and through social action. While in her plays she does not articulate a systematic political agenda as such, she both explicitly and implicitly challenges *fin-de-siècle* patriarchal power structures, societal norms, and historical precedent, sowing the seeds of female-centric inquiry and dramatic action that would pave the way for future women playwrights in Italy and beyond; and providing for her contemporary readers inspiration and the vision of a possible progressive future.

#### A MAZZINIAN LEGACY

Amelia Pincherle was born in Venice on January 16, 1870 to Giacomo Pincherle and Emilia Capon, both members of prominent, wealthy, and patriotic Venetian-Jewish families.<sup>3</sup>

Coincidentally, her life began the same year as that of the fully unified Italy, which by 1870 finally included Rome and the Papal States in its territory.<sup>4</sup> Her paternal and maternal uncles

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<sup>2</sup> Gina Raccà, “Amelia Rosselli: Un tragico destino di donna,” *Nuova Antologia* 436, no. 1850 (1955): 234.

<sup>3</sup> Showing her penchant for the dramatic text, Rosselli opens her posthumously-published *Memorie* (2001) with a vivid and humorous account of “the scene” of her birth: “La sera del 16 gennaio 1870, in una vecchia casa sul Canal Grande, a Venezia, si aspettava qualcuno. Faceva freddo, era tardi... Allora gli occhi interroganti fissano un punto al di là della stanza, oltre il lungo corridoio, oltre la vasta sala dal balcone che dà sul Canal Grande: la soglia della camera lontana entro la quale sta compendosi il Mistero... Ad un tratto, un improvviso tramenstio: un correre su e giù di passi: un nuovo silenzio. Poi l’uscio si spalanca: il vano si riempie di una figura d’uomo, giovane ancora, con baffi e basette. I ragazzi si alzano impetuosamente, gli si fanno incontro. ‘*st’dé, st’dé pur: la xe una femina*’ (Spegnete, spegnete pure: è una femmina).” Amelia Rosselli, *Memorie*, ed. Marina Calloni (Bologna: Mulino, 2001), 35–6.

<sup>4</sup> In terms of context, Rosselli was born three years after Luigi Pirandello, one year before Marcel Proust and the same year as Albert Einstein. She was part of an important generation that made large advancements in science, psychology, and the arts. These sea changes are evidenced in her writings, both theatrical and journalistic. For more on the context of her generation, see Valentina Manuela Supino, “I tanti volti di Amelia Rosselli,” in *Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Vieri Dolara (Firenze: Alinea, 2006), 76.

were dedicated to the cause of Venetian-Italian nationalism, and fought for the independence of the Republic of Venice against Austrian Habsburg rule.<sup>5</sup> Despite the brief success of the revolution of 1848 the Venetian patriots were ultimately defeated by the Austrians, and Leone Pincherle, Amelia's great-uncle, and Jacopo Caponi fled to Paris along with Manin (who was also of Jewish origin).<sup>6</sup> Unlike the majority of the peninsula, Venice did not join the Kingdom of Italy until after the third war of independence, when it was finally liberated from the Austrian occupation in 1866. This was a major event for the citizens of Venice, who contributed significantly to the making of the new Liberal State. The idea, first of Venice, then of Italy, was also of great importance to the Jewish families of Venice, who were doubly stigmatized as "other" under Austrian occupation.<sup>7</sup> Productive, economically successful, and liberated from the ghettos for multiple generations, for the Jewish population of Venice, Austrian rule represented a regression away from assimilation—and from what they felt was their predominantly Italian

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<sup>5</sup> Rosselli corroborates her family's political activity and dedication to Italian identity in her *Memorie*: "La generazione dei miei genitori apparteneva a quel periodo che risentiva ancora le benefiche conseguenze della liberazione dal ghetto. Generazione profondamente liberale che aveva partecipato attivamente alla lotta contro la dominazione austriaca. I ricordi più vivi della mia infanzia si riallacciano infatti ai racconti di mio padre e di mia madre, i quali erano a Venezia durante il glorioso assedio del 1849... Mio padre aveva combattuto a Marghera e accanto al suo letto tenne poi sempre, sospesa alla parete, la sua sciabola di combattente. Mia madre, sfidando le bombe, si recava ogni giorno alla Giudecca, attraversava cioè pericolosamente il Canale, per andare a trovare la sua bimba nata da poco e che aveva sistemata laggiù, località relativamente sicura... Ricordi gloriosi, che ci parevano, ed erano, i segni nobiliari della nostra italianità. Italianità per diritto recentemente acquistato: quindi tanto più geloso e prezioso." Rosselli, *Memorie*, 127–8.

<sup>6</sup> Leone Pincherle also served as a Minister in the Manin government. See Tiziana Agostini, "Prima del dramma: il teatro di Amelia Rosselli," *Quaderni Veneti* 39 (June 2004): 66.

<sup>7</sup> The Italian Jews of Venice were liberated from the confines of the Ghetto in 1797 when Napoleon conquered the Republic. Subsequent to his defeat in 1814, the Austrians reinstated Jewish segregation. On the experience of the Italian Jewish population after Unification see Maurizio Molinari, *Ebrei in Italia: un problema di identità (1870–1938)* (Firenze: Giuntina, 1991).

identity. Thus for many Italian Jews, participating in the Risorgimento and in the subsequent formation of the Italian state were important historical moments that served as capstones in their journey to adopting an Italian identity:

La comunità ebraica, uscita dai ghetti con l'arrivo in Italia delle armate napoleoniche, aveva partecipato da protagonista ai movimenti risorgimentali, investendo nella costruzione dello stato italiano le proprie aspirazioni di una piena cittadinanza: processo questo che produsse nelle generazioni risorgimentali e postrisorgimentali sentimenti fortissimi di amore per la patria italiana, condivisi anche dalle donne. La coscienza nazionale degli ebrei si forma parallelamente a quella italiana, nel corso del Risorgimento, come lotta non solo antiaustriaca ma anche contro la parte più retriva e conservatrice della società; in questo processo la religione ebraica diventa un patrimonio morale a servizio della Patria.<sup>8</sup>

Amelia Rosselli clearly states her own and her social milieu's views regarding religious, ethnic, and national identity in her *Memorie*: "In una parola: si era in pieno periodo di assimilazione. Ebrei? Sì: ma *prima di tutto* italiani."<sup>9</sup> While Jewishness plays an important role in Rosselli's personal formation, it is overshadowed, both in her literary career and in life, by her identification with and passion for Italy and the building of the Italian national consciousness. It is this same commitment to patriotism, the pursuit of liberty, and the promulgation of democratic citizenship, that later form the foundation of her staunch anti-fascist stance, one which she passed down to her sons Carlo and Nello Rosselli.

Patriotism and political commitment were also of extreme importance in the family into which Amelia would marry—the Anglo-Italian Rosselli-Nathans.<sup>10</sup> Amelia married Giuseppe

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<sup>8</sup> Nadia Maria Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica: società e politica in Veneto tra Sette e Ottocento* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2006), 200.

<sup>9</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> The Rosselli family was originally from Livorno, a port city in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, which boasted a large Jewish population active in commercial pursuits. The Anglo-Italian Nathan family was of matrilineal and patrilineal Jewish origin. The father of Amelia's mother-in-law, Moses Meyer Nathan, was a German Jew who became a naturalized English citizen and married Sara Levi, an Italian Jew from Pesaro.

Emanuele (Joe) Rosselli (1867–1911) in Rome on April 3, 1892 and would be forever marked by the political engagement fostered in his family.<sup>11</sup> Joe’s father Sabatino Rosselli had moved to London with his brother Pellegrino, where he subsequently met and married Enrichetta Nathan, whose mother Sara Levi Nathan was a close personal friend of the exiled Giuseppe Mazzini.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Joe’s maternal Uncle was Ernesto Nathan—the staunch Mazzinian and secularist who would become mayor of Rome in 1907. Indeed the Rosselli and the Nathan families were connected through several marriages over several generations.<sup>13</sup> In London, Joe’s parents Sabatino and Enrichetta personally interacted with Mazzini, whose liberal, republican philosophy greatly shaped their families’ democratic political identity.<sup>14</sup> The Nathan family even founded a school in Mazzini’s honor—the *Scuola Mazzini*—which focused on the education of girls from the lower-class Roman neighborhood of Trastevere, and where the teaching of religion was substituted with lessons from Mazzini’s book *Dei doveri dell’uomo*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On the early years of their relationship, see “Una corrispondenza d’amore, (1890–92)” in Aldo Rosselli, *La famiglia Rosselli: una tragedia italiana* (Milano: Bompiani, 1983), 11–40.

<sup>12</sup> Sara Levi Nathan exemplifies the type of strong, politically-engaged, emancipationist woman who influenced Amelia Rosselli: “I parenti di mio marito erano stati legati da intima amicizia con Mazzini, e soprattutto lo era Sara Nathan. Donna di grande volontà, di grande intelligenza, la sua figura sempre grandeggiò nel ricordo dei figli, offuscando del tutto quella del padre, anche dopo la morte.” Rosselli, *Memorie*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> Two Rosselli brothers married two Nathan sisters: Sabatino and Enrichetta; Pellegrino and Giannetta.

<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini’s ties to the Rosselli family were so close that he spent the final days of his life at the home of Pellegrino and Giannetta Rosselli in Pisa, where he lived under the pseudonym Mr. Brown. See Rosselli, *La famiglia Rosselli*, 179. “Pellegrino sposò una delle ragazze Nathan, Giannetta... Più tardi la coppia si trasferì a Pisa, dove acquistò una casa. Fu in quella casa che Mazzini sotto il nome di Mr. Brown, visse nascostamente gli ultimi anni della sua vita, ospite degli amici fedeli, e vi morì.” Rosselli, *Memorie*, 109.

<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *Dei doveri dell’uomo*, ed. Federico Sanguineti (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1990).

Mazzini's influence on Amelia was not a casual one. In his book *The Duties of Man and Other Essays*, he dedicates an entire chapter to "Duties of the Family," and argues for the economic, political, and cultural emancipation of women from the unjust oppression ratified by patriarchal societal norms—Mazzini, in other words, foreshadowed ideas that would figure prominently in Rosselli's theatrical oeuvre and journal contributions. In a passage from that chapter, he denounces the commonly-held belief in women's moral and intellectual inferiority:

Love and respect Woman. Do not seek only consolation in her, but strength, inspiration, a redoubling of your intellectual and moral faculties. Blot out of your mind any idea of superiority to her; you have none whatever. The prejudice of ages has created through unequal education and the perennial oppression of the laws that *apparent* intellectual inferiority which you use to-day as an argument for maintaining the oppression. But does not the history of all oppression teach you that those who oppress rely always for their justification upon a fact created by themselves?... Hold Woman, then, as the companion and partaker not only of your joys and your sorrows, but of your aspirations, your thoughts, your studies, and your efforts for social amelioration. Hold her as your equal in civil and political life.<sup>16</sup>

As will become clear through a close analysis of her dramatic texts and pertinent biographical data, Rosselli was influenced by Mazzinian democratic values in diverse aspects of her life; from the morality and level of education with which she raised her three sons (all of whom went on to fight and die for Italy); to the thematic foundation of her theatrical and narrative texts; to the purpose for which she took an active role in public life—a life filled with social, cultural, and political engagements. Mazzinian principles also informed Amelia Rosselli's notion of citizenship, a notion essential to her form of political engagement, especially with regard to women in society.

For Amelia Rosselli, citizenship is less a noun than it is a verb—an active duty that can and should be incorporated into the many facets of quotidian life. She intends this definition of

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<sup>16</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man and Other Essays*, trans. Thomas Jones (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1907), 62–3.

citizenship not just for men, but especially for women, whom she rightly sees as having been historically disenfranchised from political life, excluded from the public sphere, and literally without the right to vote.<sup>17</sup> Invoking citizenship in connection with women, in her early writing Rosselli expresses a specific dedication to the causes of Italian feminism and suffragism, both of which she names unequivocally in many of her articles, pamphlets, and letters; and addresses implicitly in her dramatic works through allusions, characters, and themes.<sup>18</sup> She explicitly calls women to action in her many articles on feminism (among other subjects) for the Florentine periodical *Il Marzocco*, to which she contributed from 1901 to 1914. In one article, “Propaganda elettorale femminile,” even after the disappointing, repeated exclusion of women from the vote in Giolitti’s era, she implores her fellow women to engage in politics by any other means available, and to support candidates who are truly committed to the cause of women’s suffrage: “nego alla donna il diritto d’isolarsi e di disinteressarsi della vita della nazione, per occuparsi unicamente della questione che più la tocca da vicino... Nego che essa possa indifferentemente abdicare ogni sua fede, per far trionfare un candidato che alla sua fede ripugna, solo perché le fa balenare la speranza di sostenere alla Camera i suoi diritti, una volta eletto.”<sup>19</sup> As an analysis of her biographical record will make clear, Rosselli’s literary career, feminism, and political

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<sup>17</sup> Women in Italy did not win the right to vote until after the end of the Second World War, in 1946. Even Italian men did not gain universal suffrage until 1912.

<sup>18</sup> In her explicit dedication to both feminism and suffrage, Rosselli is significantly more progressive than many of her female literary counterparts. The famous realist writer Neera (pseudonym of Anna Zuccari Radius), for example, refused to identify as a feminist and did not support women’s right to vote. Rosselli, in fact, wrote an op-ed for *Il Marzocco* in response to an article penned by Neera in which she proudly declared herself anti-feminist. See Amelia Rosselli, “Discussioni sul femminismo. Risposta a Neera,” *Il Marzocco*, January 17, 1904.

<sup>19</sup> Amelia Rosselli, “Propaganda elettorale femminile,” *Il Marzocco*, November 16, 1913. This article was written for the occasion of the first *Congresso nazionale pro suffragio femminile*, held in Rome in 1913.

activity are inseparable, each imbued with the clear sense of purpose guided by the themes of progress and patriotism, and the thoughtful criticism of societal norms.

Rosselli's engagements included leadership and participation in political, cultural, and economic organizations that actively fought for and encouraged women's advancement, education, the promulgation of culture and the arts, and charity for those less fortunate. Perhaps the most well-known of these organizations is the *Lyceum di Firenze*, of which Rosselli was a founding member in 1908 and continued to support until she departed Italy in voluntary exile in 1937.<sup>20</sup> She began as a member and subsequently became the president of the Literature Section from 1913 to 1915, during which time she was honored by the group for the success of her Venetian historical drama *San Marco*, which was performed at the Teatro Apollo in Rome in February 1914. The aim of the Lyceum Clubs was to create a meeting place for women beyond the boundaries of the home and to promote their cultural, professional, and artistic skills. They also sought to promote peace through their international network and connections during an era that would twice witness the devastation of Europe. The advent of the First World War created a political shift in the activities of the Lyceum club members, with many new sections created to

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<sup>20</sup> The Lyceum clubs were founded by the British national Constance Smedley. Florence was the fourth Lyceum club, after London, Paris, and Berlin. Each Lyceum club was divided into sections (such as Art, Literature, Music, Teaching etc.) with their own autonomous events, publications, and elected cabinet. For more information on International Lyceum clubs, and Florence's in particular, see Mirka Sandiford, "Il Lyceum di Firenze ai tempi di Amelia," in *Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Vieri Dolara (Firenze: Alinea, 2006), 39–49; Patricia Bulletti, "Amelia nel Lyceum di Firenze (1908–1937)," in *Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Vieri Dolara (Firenze: Alinea, 2006), 29–39. Rosselli's exile lasted from 1937–1946, during which time she traveled from Switzerland to France to Great Britain, finally settling in Larchmont, New York along with her two daughters-in-law, Marion Cave and Maria Todesco, and her seven grandchildren. For more information on Rosselli's experience in exile and her extensive correspondence with the Italian Socialist politician Gaetano Salvemini—who while in exile served as professor of History at Harvard University and helped secure American visas for Rosselli and her grandchildren—see "L'esilio (1943)" in Rosselli, *La famiglia Rosselli*, 135–52.

help in the war effort. Even her two younger sons Carlo and Nello became involved in Lyceum activities while their older brother Aldo was at the front, volunteering for the *Sezione pacchi per i prigionieri*, the aim of which was to send needed supplies and correspondences to Italian soldiers engaged in combat.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to her participation in the *Lyceum di Firenze*, Rosselli was the founder of the labor organization *Industrie Femminili Italiane* “che ai primi del secolo crearono una vera rivoluzione nel campo del lavoro femminile e rivelarono tesori d’arte fino allora ignorati e depositati nelle mani del popolo.”<sup>22</sup> Rosselli herself wrote about this project—and the importance of economic autonomy, the dignity that comes with appropriately-compensated work, and the economic dimensions of female identity—in an article for *Nuova Antologia* in February of 1904:

Perché, invece di commettere alle nostre operaie un lavoro banale che le macchine compiono in un minuto, non affidare ad esse l’alto compito di perpetuare l’eredità di lor gente antica? Perché, invece di mandarle a intisichire fra la polvere degli orribili telai a macchina, non lasciarle a casa, dove possono alternare l’atto del cucire o del muover la spola con quello del cullare?<sup>23</sup>

In this article, Rosselli advocates for female-owned and operated artistic textile collectives—in which working-class women are paid fair wages, work in safe environments, and have control over the pricing of their goods—that use regional and traditional methods to create useful and aesthetically significant textiles. She uses specific examples of successful collectives in Friuli,

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<sup>21</sup> Rosselli’s oldest son Aldo volunteered for the service in 1914 and died in the battle of Pal Piccolo on March 27, 1916. She discusses Carlo’s involvement in the Lyceum in her *Memorie*: “Carlo aveva prestato aiuto al Lyceum, nella Sezione Pacchi per i Prigionieri. Aveva così la piccola soddisfazione di fare anch’egli qualche cosa per la guerra, un qualche cosa assai modesto che però lo occupava nelle ore libere: ed era già questa una piccola soluzione al problema della sua insaziabile volontà di fare.” Rosselli, *Memorie*, 146.

<sup>22</sup> Raccà, “Amelia Rosselli: Un tragico destino di donna,” 234.

<sup>23</sup> Amelia Rosselli, “Una buona iniziativa,” *Nuova Antologia* 187 (1903): 485.

Perugia, Abruzzo, and other parts of Italy, and rightly understands women's economic empowerment as a form of personal emancipation and as way of bringing towns, cities, and even regions out of poverty. It is this type of article that highlights Rosselli's particular brand of "social feminism" that utilizes progressive economic ideals and initiatives to better the material and political status of women in society. Additionally, she took on the cause of appropriate compensation and security for domestic workers—the majority of whom were women—who were not afforded the same types of protection as working men:

Avevo sempre trovato assai ingiusto che le persone di servizio non fossero, come tali, affatto protette dalla legge, perché non appartenenti alla categoria di operai veri e propri. La *padrona* aveva il diritto di licenziare una persona di servizio. Questo mi pareva supremamente ingiusto, anzi addirittura iniquo. Avevo perciò fondata un'Associazione fra le padrone di casa, per assicurare le proprie persone di servizio alla Cassa Nazionale Invalidità e Vecchiaia.<sup>24</sup>

During the same period, Rosselli also served as the Vice-President of the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*, an organization founded and run by women whose goal was to protect the rights of working women of all social classes and levels; and founded the *Associazione Divulgatrice Donne Italiane*, the goal of which was to encourage Italian women to participate in the social, political, economic, and philosophical development of the Italian nation.<sup>25</sup> Although it continued thereafter, and even into her exile, participation and leadership in these women's organizations coincided with the pre-World War I period in which Rosselli wrote her six theatrical works; and more importantly, fulfilled an integral part of her personal, political, and

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<sup>24</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> The *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne* is a branch of the International Council of Women, an organization founded in the United States in 1989. See "Sul movimento politico delle donne. Il Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane" in Claudia Gori, *Crisalidi: emancipazioniste liberali in età giolittiana* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2003), 14. On the *Associazione Divulgatrice Donne Italiane*, see Stanislao Pugliese, "Contesting Constraints: Amelia Pincherle Rosselli, Jewish Writer in Pre-Fascist Italy," *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 2 (1998): 3.

economic vision.<sup>26</sup> There are very few critical resources on Rosselli's life and career, and those that do exist provide only cursory information on her plays, do not investigate the full spectrum of her political activism, nor locate it correctly in the broader panorama of Italian emancipationist movements. She is often incorrectly labeled as "just" a bourgeois feminist, without regard for the ways in which her ideas, publications, and public engagements showcase her more radical personal philosophy. More importantly, however, she is often remembered only as the mother of Carlo and Nello, which diminishes her own intellectual, political, and literary accomplishments.<sup>27</sup>

#### ITALIAN FEMINISM AT THE *FIN DE SIÈCLE*

The uniqueness of Rosselli's feminist vision can be more clearly elucidated when situated within the greater context of the emancipationist, suffragist, and feminist movements taking place in the newly-unified, Liberal Italy.<sup>28</sup> While many studies have been conducted on post-Risorgimento Italian feminist movements through advent of the First World War, they do not properly contextualize Amelia Rosselli and her particular brand of pre-war, liberal-socialist feminism,

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<sup>26</sup> Only her last play, *Emma Liona* (1924), was finished after World War I, however it was started beforehand and its progress interrupted by Aldo's tragic death. The other five plays were completed before 1914. They include *Anima* (1901), *Illusione* (1906), *San Marco* (1910), *El réfolo* (1910), and *El socio del papà* (1912).

<sup>27</sup> From Marina Calloni's introduction to Rosselli's *Memorie*: "A tutt'oggi nessuna antologia della letteratura italiana o enciclopedia dello spettacolo ricorda Amelia, neppure in qualità di prima scrittrice di teatro in Italia. Vi sono inoltre alcune lacune storiografiche, dal momento che, a parte qualche eccezione, non esistono studi adeguati sull'influsso che donne intellettuali, liberali, cosmopolite, e di origine ebraica hanno avuto sulla storia culturale e politica italiana, soprattutto a cavallo fra le due guerre mondiali." Rosselli, *Memorie*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Liberal Italy is defined as the period in time spanning from Unification to when the Fascists seized power in 1922. See Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 143–205. See also Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870–1925* (London: Methuen, 1967).

which is distinctive in its combination of Venetian, Mazzinian, Anglo-American, and secular-Jewish influences.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Rosselli's notion of feminism differs substantially from the three principal strains of Italian feminism of the time—Catholic, bourgeois, and Socialist—and does not fit neatly into any of the categories, rather taking pieces from each in order to form a more nuanced, cosmopolitan vision. She was at once progressive in her deliberate use of the word “feminism” and her choice to identify as such; in her conviction that women cannot fully participate in society until they are recognized as citizens with the right to vote; and in her focus on the economic dimensions of parity; yet at times she differed from her more radical Socialist peers, specifically in her dedication to Italian patriotism, which she realized through nationalism and the support of Italy's participation in the First World War (where her Venetian anti-Austrian sentiment was most certainly a contributing factor): “In quel fatidico anno 1914, eravamo, noi e i nostri amici, tutti interventisti... La speranza di una guerra di liberazione di Trento e Trieste esercitava il suo terribile fascino su grandi e piccoli... Era difficile sottostare a quella cappa di piombo della neutralità che pesava allora sull'Italia: l'atmosfera era troppo carica di passione.”<sup>30</sup>

Of all the typologies of Italian feminist thought, it was Catholic feminism—with its singular focus on women's self-realization through life in the home and commitment to religious

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<sup>29</sup> Thorough studies of Italian feminist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1974); Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia, 1848-1892* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975); Annarita Buttafuoco, *Questioni di cittadinanza: donne e diritti sociali nell'Italia liberale* (Siena: Protagon, 1997); Gori, *Crisalidi*; Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*.

<sup>30</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 139. This is not to say that Rosselli was a proponent of war or violence, but rather that she was initially interested in reclaiming some of the nationalist spirit lost as the liberal years progressed: “Ero a quel tempo legata da viva amicizia con Scipio Sighele... In casa sua fu creato il primissimo movimento nazionalista al quale partecipai io pure. Molti sentivano il bisogno in quel periodo di liberalismo un po' decadente dalle sue prime origini, di una rivalutazione dei valori nazionali... Certo non immaginavamo neanche lontanamente a quali deformazioni il nascente movimento avrebbe prestato man forte.” *Ibid.*, 121.

dogma—that least inspired Rosselli.<sup>31</sup> While a logical explanation lies in her Jewish heritage, a more profound reason is its lack of progressive causes when compared to other movements of the time that explicitly fought for universal suffrage, civil and juridical equality, economic opportunity, increasing women’s literacy rates, and the ability of women to pursue meaningful activity and work outside the home.<sup>32</sup> Her inclination toward *socialismo umanitario*, however, combines the Catholic penchant for charity with the class-conscious social principles of the left. In one of her children’s books, *Topinino garzone di bottega* (1909), Rosselli highlights her inter-classist ideology through the educational journey of the protagonist Topinino:

Noi non possiamo giudicare quel che sia giusto e quel che sia ingiusto. Ma a me pare che se fossi ricca, non sentirei che la gioia di poter fare del bene intorno a me. Allora la ricchezza non sarebbe più un’ingiustizia: ma sarebbe... già, ecco: sarebbe come una medicina buona in mano di un buon medico.” “E vero,” mormorò Topinino. Un mondo nuovo si apriva dentro di lui: un mondo di bontà e di poesia nel quale ricchi e poveri erano avvinti da una catena di amore.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rosselli’s opposition to the conservatism of Catholic women’s movements, and her formation of a more progressive, quasi-socialist feminist philosophy are congruent with her identity as a secular and patriotic Italian-Jewish woman. The new Liberal State was legally secular, a fact that provided for the greater assimilation of the Jewish community: “Although anti-Semitic attitudes remained rooted in all Italian regions, assimilated Italian Jews supported republicanism, socialism, and democratic nationalism because of their sense of political belonging to a secular state. They felt integrated in a common political body, settled in the country of their birth where they were overcoming centuries of segregation and invisibility.” Marina Calloni, “Freedom and Resistance Against Oppression: The Legacy of Amelia Rosselli,” in *Jewish Intellectual Women in Central Europe, 1860–2000: Twelve Biographical Essays*, ed. Judith Sapor (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 141.

<sup>32</sup> Rosselli realized her commitment to fighting illiteracy by participating in organizations that sought make books and libraries publicly available. She was a participant and founding member of the *Società per le biblioteche gratuite per le scuole elementari*, which was founded in 1907 and run under the auspices of the *Federazione Femminile Toscana*. Gori, *Crisalidi*, 134.

<sup>33</sup> Amelia Rosselli, *Topinino: garzone di bottega* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1909), 190–1. In addition to her two children’s stories about Topinino—the first of which was published as *Topinino, storia di un bambino* (Torino: Casa Editrice Nazionale, 1905)—Rosselli was also an editor for Le Monnier’s series “Biblioteca delle Giovani Italiani.” See Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, 62.

In this paragraph, Rosselli's character conceives of an idealized solution to the class tensions prevalent in Giolittian Italy through a simple realization: material wealth may be unequally distributed but can be used to benefit all depending on the morality of the person in whose possession it lies. To some extent, Rosselli's feminism also touches on the boundary of the moderate: while she advocated for and wrote about improving the lives of the working poor and lower-class women, she stopped short of explicitly joining the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI). Her hesitation to identify as socialist is evident in her comments on a review of *Gente oscura* (1903)—her collection of stories whose protagonists are members of the working and service class—in the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*: “Il giornale socialista l'*Avanti*, facendone la recensione, mi proclamò senz'altro socialista e come appartenente ai loro. Non lo ero, se non per un sentimento di maggiore comprensione e simpatia per le classi più povere di quelle che avessero le donne della cosiddetta *buona società*.”<sup>34</sup> In her refusal to join the PSI, Rosselli diverged from some of her more progressive feminist peers, such as Anna Kuliscioff, for example, who was a Jewish-Russian expat, professionally-trained doctor, and one of the founding members of the PSI.<sup>35</sup> Rosselli's unique brand of feminism also permeates her dramatic works. While she treats mostly bourgeois themes in her plays—engagements, marriages, and family politics—she does so from the point of view of a dedicated, reformist feminist, and liberal, assimilated Jew, which in turn fosters a progressive dramatic experience built on a didactic, moral foundation.

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<sup>34</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 116–7.

<sup>35</sup> On Anna Kuliscioff, the most famous exponent of Italian Socialist feminism, see Beverly Tanner Springer, “Anna Kuliscioff: Russian Revolutionist, Italian Feminist,” in *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism, and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present*, ed. Robert Kern and Jane Slaughter (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 13–27; Marina Addis Saba, *Anna Kuliscioff: vita privata e passione politica* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1993).

One impetus for the feminist movements of the late nineteenth century was the creation of the Pisanelli Code, introduced in the new Liberal State in 1865. This set of laws strengthened the relationship between the State and the private lives of its citizens, fomenting the frustration of those farther to the left, and in particular those who were keen to have divorce legalized: “In many ways the civil code of 1865 exemplifies the cautious, moderate political tone that had come to dominate the Risorgimento, and the question of divorce was not mentioned in the new Parliament for twelve years after the code came into effect in January 1866.”<sup>36</sup> While under the Code sons and daughters could inherit equally and unmarried adult women could make their own wills, it was an overwhelming juridical and political defeat for Italian women. It stipulated that women were banned not only from voting, but also from holding public office or practicing law; that women must take their husband’s name and citizenship; that women would lose the right to manage their own property, as all transactions subsequent to marriage required a husband’s consent; and that divorce would remain illegal, in all likelihood to stave off another battle with the Vatican.<sup>37</sup> In the decade spanning from 1865 to 1875, the diverse opinions held by Italian feminists coalesced in their shared interest in changing the patriarchal legal framework set forth by the Pisanelli Code: “Since the Civil Code governed family relationships and touched on all women’s experiences, regardless of region or class, it became a target of feminist reformers concerned with women of all classes.”<sup>38</sup> Specifically, women’s groups were united in their

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Seymour, “Till Death Do Them Part? The Church–State Struggle over Marriage and Divorce, 1860–1914,” in *Gender, Family, and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy 1860–1945*, ed. Perry Willson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 39.

<sup>37</sup> Perry Willson, *Gender, Family and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 8.

<sup>38</sup> Judith Jeffrey Howard, “The Civil Code of 1865 and the Origins of the Feminist Movement in Italy,” in *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America*, ed. Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F.

frustration with the lack of equity afforded to women in the confines of marriage: there was, for example, a profound difference in the definition of adultery as applied to women and men; legal separation for a wife was contingent on proving a husband's transgression; and this type of transgression was the only way in which a wife could escape the domination of the "marital authorization."<sup>39</sup> While in the last decade of the nineteenth century many of the more radical feminists moved forward to adopt Socialist positions and to fight for universal suffrage, a common interest in the way in which family law was used to mitigate the supposed civil equality of the sexes under the Pisanelli Code provided a baseline historical and ideological connection among the various Italian women's movements.

The period from Unification to the First World War witnessed the development and expansion of progressive feminism in Italy. Anna Maria Mozzoni is the author of one of the first post-unification publications on the unequal treatment of women under the law. In her book *La donna e i suoi rapporti sociali* (1864), she discusses how family law, and specifically the institution of marriage, is oppressive, stating that "Legal paternity is the first reason for woman's slavery... Man's dominion, in short, is women's servitude."<sup>40</sup> Mozzoni is also famous for founding the *Lega promotrice degli interessi femminili* in Milan in 1880, considered one of the first women's political organizations in Italy.<sup>41</sup> Another prominent voice of radical Italian

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Harney, and Lydio F. Tomasi (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978), 16.

<sup>39</sup> The marital authorization refers to Articles 134–7 of the Civil Code, which, in effect "made married women minors under their husbands' guardianship in the exercise of basic property rights." Ibid., 15.

<sup>40</sup> Anna Maria Mozzoni, *La donna e i suoi rapporti sociali* (Milano: Tipografia sociale, 1864), 195. Her book, published before 1865, refers most directly to the similarly-written Civil Code of the Piedmont region (The Albertine Code), however she applies the same charges after 1865 and throughout the 1870s.

<sup>41</sup> Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, 142.

feminist thought was the periodical *La Donna*, published from 1868 to 1892 by Gualberta Beccari and whose contributors included women writers, poets, and journalists.<sup>42</sup> The journal hosted discussions on a range of issues, beginning with the reform of family and marriage law, to opposing state-licensed prostitution, to explicitly advocating for women's suffrage.<sup>43</sup> It also explored Anglo-American and broader European approaches to feminism, most notably including the translation of an article on John Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Women* in 1869, and after the philosopher's death in 1873, a special issue including articles on and translations of *The Enfranchisement of Women*, the celebrated work by his wife Harriet Taylor.<sup>44</sup> The last year of the century saw the formation of another progressive periodical, *L'Italia femminile: Corriere delle donne italiane*, whose contributors included famous feminists such as Paola Lombroso, Linda Malnati and Emilia Mariani (a dedicated socialist); the direction of which would ultimately pass to Sibilla Aleramo, whose semi-autobiographical novel *Una donna* (1906) is considered one of the first feminist works of fiction in Italy.<sup>45</sup> Another Venetian Jewish feminist

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<sup>42</sup> For further information on *La Donna*, see *Ibid.*, 142–51.

<sup>43</sup> While other periodicals addressed women's issues, many were less progressive than *La Donna*. *L'Aurora* and *La Missione della donna*, for example, represented the more conservative wing of the women's movement, their pages emphasizing the betterment of women's condition through improvements in traditional channels such as motherhood and education. The editor of *La Missione*, Olimpia Saccati Mencato, opposed divorce, seeing it as a threat to a woman's place in the home, while other Italian feminists considered it essential in the fight for emancipation.

<sup>44</sup> Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, 142–151. In 1879 Anna Maria Mozzoni published a complete translation from English into Italian of Mill's *The Subjugation of Women*.

<sup>45</sup> Paola is the daughter of Jewish-Italian Criminologist Cesare Lombroso and sister of Gina Lombroso, a close friend of Amelia Pincherle Rosselli. Both Paola and Gina were exposed to and became fascinated with Socialist ideals through the visits and friendship of Anna Kuliscioff and Guglielmo Ferrero. The latter would become Gina's husband and was a frequent contributor to *Avanti!*, the daily newspaper of the PSI. On the friendship between Rosselli and Gina Lombroso Ferrero, see Marina Calloni and Lorella Cedroni, eds., *Politica e affetti familiari: lettere di Amelia, Carlo e Nello Rosselli a Guglielmo, Leo e Nina Ferrero e Gina Lombroso Ferrero (1917–1943)* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997).

fifteen years Rosselli's senior, Virginia Opler Monis, was a writer and active participant in emancipationist causes from Unification until her death in 1917. Her last publication, *La donna nella realtà* (1908), was a synopsis of emancipationist efforts and gains made during her lifetime. Most importantly, however, it brought together and promulgated the essential feminist themes at the dawn of the twentieth century: legal equality of the sexes, the vote, the legality of divorce and paternity suits, the abolition of prostitution, and the parity of salary.

Unlike the progressive wing of Italian feminism, which insisted on the necessity of civic equality becoming enshrined in law, moderate Italian feminism was distinguished by a suspicion of emancipationism as a bearer of change that would bring with it the potential for social chaos. For moderate feminists of the late nineteenth century, the family unit was the essential building block of the new nation, and women's rights consisted not of suffrage, but rather of ensuring their safety and ability to prosper within the framework of the home and family: "La concezione della società che viene espressa nei loro scritti è centrata su un rapporto organicistico tra famiglia e nazione e sul ruolo femminile all'interno di essa, ma senza che sia avvertita la necessità di un ampliamento dei diritti civili e politici per questo stesso ruolo."<sup>46</sup> An exponent of this school of thought was Luigia Codemo, whose work "alterna costantemente intenti educativi e schemi tipici della narrativa di consumo, veicolando valori della propria classe sociale: religiosità e fiducia nella Provvidenza, stabilità della famiglia, ordine sociale."<sup>47</sup> Moderate feminists were still dedicated to the betterment of a woman's education, but only within the context of family duties and interests, with the end goal of eradicating the superficial woman. Their idealistic notion was that once frivolity had been banished, there would be no more need to reform the marriage laws,

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<sup>46</sup> Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

as harmony would increase between spouses. Thus for moderate feminists, social problems and family politics could be worked out on the level of female morality as opposed to through legislation. While Amelia Rosselli was an explicit proponent of women's education—moral and otherwise—she was not so naïve to think that education alone without juridical and legal reinforcement would succeed in changing a woman's status and privilege in the newly-created Italy.

#### RESISTING DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES ON THE EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY STAGE

For Amelia Rosselli, the discourses of feminism and theater intersect through the dramatic representation of themes, motifs, characters, symbols, and subjects that expose the social and economic positions of women and are critical of the status quo in turn-of-the-century Italian society. She utilizes three of the most popular theatrical genres of the time—the bourgeois play, the dialect play, and the historical drama—to parse issues such as family and marital politics; double standards for men and women; and changing economic and social values between the generations of parent and child. With her protagonists firmly rooted in the middle class, however, even in the dialect plays she avoids the turn-of-the-century inclination toward *verismo*, despite its immense popularity in both novels and theater at the time.<sup>48</sup> For Rosselli, the inherent fatalism of *verismo* relies too heavily on the tragic destiny of its female characters. She rejects its depiction of women as inferior, weak, or animalistic beings who, as slaves to their drives and passions, are brought down by their lack of rationality, thoughtfulness, or ability to engage appropriately with society. The most important element of Rosselli's feminist theatrical project is the development of female protagonists who are the purveyors of ideas and engines of change,

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<sup>48</sup> On *verismo* and *naturalismo psicologico*, see Franca Angelini and Carlo A. Madrignani, *Cultura, narrativa e teatro nell'età del positivismo* (Roma: Laterza, 1975).

even if “only” on a personal or familial level, for example, at the level of sexual politics. As we will see in many of her plays—specifically *Anima*, *Emma Liona*, *Illusione*, and *El Réfolo*, among others—creating female protagonists who are more than accessories to male leads, and who engage in the development of their own subjectivity, is an integral part of her dramatic project. Another essential facet of Rosselli’s feminist theatrical project is a subtle didacticism: her convincing and varied representations of womanhood provide both a textual and live model for women of the time.

Rosselli’s plays, I believe, should be read through the interpretive key of the political action and engagement that is so crucial to both her professional and personal life. Her articles, journal contributions, and letters to the editor do indeed make explicit political statements—about suffrage, economic emancipation, and social welfare—and her participation and leadership in women’s organizations make clear a public acknowledgement of and commitment to her progressive worldview. The values she cultivated through activism, literary and otherwise, are ultimately the same ones that she brought to theater writing, where they come alive on the stage through dramatic action. Thus for Rosselli, theater and feminism intersect naturally: playwriting is simply another form of public engagement, a parallel action to that of writing an op-ed on women’s suffrage or delivering a speech at the *Lyceum di Firenze*. The means of communication may be different, the endeavor more artistic in nature, but the objective remains the same: to make evident the ways in which early twentieth-century Italian society unfairly denied women political power through disenfranchisement and exclusion; inhibited their economic autonomy; and promoted traditional social values that are both hypocritical in their treatment of the sexes and that work to locate women’s value in their bodies instead of their intellectual faculties. Considering her goal, it would be reductive and inadequate to classify Rosselli as

simply a proto-feminist or author who does not fully address themes of feminist importance. She is instead a dedicated feminist whose writings unambiguously communicate this position and whose dramatic works appropriate the trappings of bourgeois, dialect, and historical theater in order to mount a critique from within the confines of established theatrical genres. Her theatrical virtuosity thus lies in the ability to take a seemingly innocuous drawing room and turn it into a locus of critique through the actions, words, and staging of both major and minor characters as they work their way through relatable, quotidian situations of the home and family.

The subversiveness—at times subtle, at others explicit—of Rosselli’s dramatic activity is particularly evident when compared to the canonical male playwrights of the same era. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing through the turn of the twentieth, the Italian theatrical panorama was largely dominated on one side by *verismo*, and on the other by the bourgeois drama, the principal themes of which are the home, the nuclear family unit, and the power of money.<sup>49</sup> These plays present a normative, patriarchal heterosexuality in which traditional gender roles and marital power dynamics are vindicated, and in which the family unit is endangered by those who do not adhere to society’s strict moral code:

La figura legale del *marito* e della *moglie* diventa figura teatrale privilegiata, insieme a quella, derivata, dell’amante e dei figli; dell’amante che minaccia e dei figli che salvano l’unità della famiglia. Questo totalitarismo dell’etica familiare funzionerà da centro tematico del teatro borghese, almeno fino a quando Pirandello non lo ridurrà a puro schema.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bourgeois drama is one of three principal strains of Italian naturalist theater. The other two most prominent typologies are 1) the southern *verista* drama, famous examples of which include Giovanni Verga’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1884), *La Lupa* (1896) and *Dal tuo al mio* (1910); and 2) the dialect plays of the north, Venice in particular, whose themes echo those of the bourgeois theater. On Naturalist drama, see Franca Angelini, *Teatro e spettacolo nel primo Novecento* (Roma: Laterza, 1988); Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa, eds., *A History of Italian Theatre* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 223–69.

<sup>50</sup> Angelini and Madrignani, *Cultura, narrativa e teatro nell’età del positivismo*, 141. See in particular sections 68–72.

Examples of nineteenth century playwrights and works that promote women's adherence to traditional, patriarchal values include Achille Torelli's two most popular works, *I mariti* (1867) and *Triste realtà* (1871); Paolo Ferrari's *Le due dame* (1881); and Marco Praga's *La moglie ideale* (1890). Praga, for example, utilizes the classic *ménage a trois*—a staple of the bourgeois plot—to critique a wife's dalliance. Giulia, the protagonist, is described as a “donna moderna che ragiona,” and thus Praga draws a connection between the wife's “modern sensibilities” and the threat they impose on the stability and sanctity of the family unit: “qui la situazione triangolare moglie-marito-amante è gestita dalla donna... ma Praga usa l'anomalia della situazione per confermare la priorità del rapporto familiare su ogni possibile variante.”<sup>51</sup>

The most famous and popular exponent of Italian bourgeois drama, however, is Giuseppe Giacosa of Torino (1847–1906), whose versatile playwriting resulted in diverse dramatic texts, from the historical drama *Il conte rosso* (1880), to the realist drama *Tristi amori* (1887), to the Ibsenian one-act *Diritti dell'anima* (1894). To a certain extent, Giacosa embraced a more modern aesthetic than his fellow dramatists, as he was more conscious of the public's evolving tastes. As Angelini observes:

Certo è che, nei drammi di ambiente borghese, Giacosa seppe, meglio di altri, evitare la fatuità della casistica triangolare e, come in *Tristi amori*, prospettare tutto lo squallore che la provoca e lo squallore che ne sancisce il rientro nella norma. E meglio di altri, da borghese, seppe rappresentare coi mezzi del teatro, cioè dell'arredamento, dell'uso del luogo scenico, degli oggetti, ecc. quell'aspetto della civiltà borghese che riguarda gli apparati, gli abiti, il valore della presenza fisica degli oggetti e degli uomini.<sup>52</sup>

Giacosa's more perceptive aesthetics, however, do not preclude his relying on traditional gender stereotypes as a mainstay of his dramatic oeuvre, which can generally be divided into two

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 143.

principal categories: historical plays, and dramas of contemporary Italian life. Rosselli in fact, as we shall see, draws the title of her first play *Anima* from *Diritti dell'anima*, and directly refers to it in Act II, in which her two male protagonists discuss the most complete way to possess a woman: through the soul or the body. She includes this metatheatrical allusion as a critique of marriage politics in the predecessor text, the plot of which follows a jealous husband, Paolo, who castigates his faithful wife, Anna, for having been courted by his own cousin Luciano, who ultimately commits suicide in lovesick desperation. After questioning her, Paolo is initially satisfied with Anna's fidelity, but little by little doubt creeps in: she may have been true, but did she secretly love Luciano? Was she unfaithful in thought? In attempting an Ibsenite study in female psychology, Giacosa instead ends up promoting patriarchal notions of womanhood, such as the trope of woman as inherently enigmatic or unknowable. While Rosselli does not include revolutionary ideology in her plays, she nevertheless presents a theatrical project that can clearly be termed feminist in nature by way of appropriating the bourgeois theatrical mode and inserting female characters that often challenge the social and political norms of Italy's *borghesia*.<sup>53</sup> She goes on to use the same *arredamento* and *luogo scenico* as Giacosa, but assumes them for her own purpose of showing how male-authored theater does not engage critically with the socio-political constraints placed upon women in the new and evolving Liberal Italy.

An exception to the typical male-authored bourgeois theater of the late nineteenth century performed in Italy is Henrik Ibsen's work, and especially his renowned feminist play *A Doll's House* (1879), which greatly influenced Rosselli and her dramatic works in its depiction of female subjectivity and agency. In brief, *A Doll's House* tells the story of Nora, who forges her father's signature on a loan so that her husband Torvald can afford to travel to Italy for his

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<sup>53</sup> On the formation of Italy's upper-middle class, see Alberto Mario Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana* (Roma: Donzelli, 1996).

convalescence. She is then blackmailed by an employee at her husband's bank who sends Torvald the promissory note. After finding the document and berating his wife, he forgives her, insisting that she stay home and fulfill her role as wife and mother. In that moment, however, Nora realizes that she has been treated like a doll her whole life—the essential leitmotif of the play—controlled first by her father, then by her husband, and decides that she must leave in order to better discover who she is and what she wants from life. The play ends with Torvald in tears, unable to understand his wife's point of view, and Nora shutting the door to their shared home behind her as she departs.<sup>54</sup> Nora's refusal to identify only as a wife and mother is a rejection of the traditional, patriarchal familial and societal structures that the play sets out to investigate. Toril Moi rightly observes that *A Doll's House* is a radical play for its staging of “women's historical transition from being generic family members (wife, sister, daughter, mother) to becoming individuals (Nora, Rebecca, Ellida, Hedda)... Nora's struggle for recognition as a human being is rightly considered an exemplary case of women's struggle for political and social rights.<sup>55</sup> Nowhere in the text is this more clearly exhibited than when Nora speaks her most consequential line about viewing herself for the first time as an autonomous individual:

TORVALD: I am deeply shocked. Is this how you neglect your most sacred duties?

NORA: What do you think are my most sacred duties?

TORVALD: Do I need to tell you? Your duty to your husband and your children!

NORA: I have another duty just as sacred.

TORVALD: No, you don't. What duty could that be?

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<sup>54</sup> On the intersection of *A Doll's House* and feminism, see Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 225–47; Gail Finney, “Ibsen and Feminism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. James Walter McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 89–105. For contextual and biographical details, see Michael Levenson Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1974).

<sup>55</sup> Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, 226.

NORA: My duty to myself.

TORVALD: Before everything else, you are a wife and a mother.

NORA: I don't believe that anymore. I believe that *before everything I am a thinking human being*, just as you are—or, at any rate, that I must try to become one.<sup>56</sup>

Thus it is only by abandoning her life as wife and mother—a life in which she is bound by the constraints of a domineering husband and societal expectations—that Nora is able to begin the process of seeing herself as an individual with discrete needs. Much ink has been spilled on the case of Ibsen as feminist, and while he declined to formally join movements, some of his most famous remarks on women in society bear repeating. In a letter entitled “Notes for a Modern Tragedy,” composed in Rome on October 19, 1878 Ibsen writes: “There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life, women are judged by masculine law... A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint.”<sup>57</sup>

The reverberations created by *A Doll's House's* notoriety were felt keenly in Italy as well as the continent over. The play's Italian premiere was on February 9, 1881 at the *Teatro dei Filodrammatici* in Milan, with the famous Eleonora Duse in the lead role of Nora, and in the translation by Luigi Capuana. It was Duse in fact who insisted on performing the play with its original ending in which Nora leaves her family, against the wishes of Capuana and her paramour of the time, Arrigo Boito, who preferred the alternate German ending in which the curtain falls as Nora is seen crying at the sight of her children: “La grande attrice aveva inteso

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<sup>56</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, trans. Nicholas Rudall (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1999), 113. Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> Meyer, *Ibsen*, 465.

meglio dei due scrittori che il pubblico era ormai abbastanza maturo per capire Ibsen.”<sup>58</sup> The play also inspired many Italian feminist and emancipationist writers of the time. Sibilla Aleramo, for example, cites Ibsen’s Nora in her novel *Una donna* as the reason for which she finds the courage to leave her abusive husband.

Ibsen’s work was so groundbreaking, in part, because it featured a woman protagonist making rational, complex, and non-self-sacrificial decisions. More importantly, however, Ibsen’s portrait of Nora greatly contrasted with the ideology of womanhood conceived of by Catholicism as well as Positivism. Criminal anthropology and other branches of social science sought to make biologically determined arguments for women’s inherent inferiority, corruptibility, weakness, and propensity for crime. The founder of criminal anthropology was Cesare Lombroso, a Jewish-Italian scientist and physician from Torino who was greatly influenced by Charles Darwin and Auguste Comte. His work *The Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (1893) was as popular and enduring as it was damaging to the legal and juridical status of women in European and North American society, and helped foster a dominant ideology of gender that was not fully deconstructed until the second half of the twentieth century. Lombroso claimed to have found a new human sub-species—the criminal—and in his explanation of the female-born criminal he exposed the deeply misogynistic foundation of Positivist thought. Four essential concepts of his theory are (1) that female crime is biological in origin and there is a strict relationship between female deviance and sexuality; (2) that female criminals are less evolved than both male criminals and law-abiding women, necessitating infantilizing modes of corrective behavior; (3) that both normal and criminal women are inherently deviant “walking bundles of pathology” who at any time can exhibit their criminal

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<sup>58</sup> Mariani, *Il tempo delle attrici*, 17.

nature; and (4) that establishes normality as a standard for measuring law-abiding and deviant behavior.<sup>59</sup> For Lombroso, women's intellectual and spiritual weakness made them incompatible with genius and with creating artwork that was more than merely second-rate.

Lombroso's theories permeated the boundaries of social science, creating ideological and aesthetic repercussions in the worlds of art and literature, as well as in science, criminology, and the law. The canonical Italian dramatist and novelist, Giovanni Verga, for example, echoes Lombroso's philosophy on female deviance and criminality in his realist play *La lupa* (1896), which tells the story of a peasant woman and town outcast, La gnà Pina (nicknamed La Lupa, or the she-wolf) who extorts her daughter's fiancé Nanni into an affair. Verga's female protagonist is a criminal who perfectly exemplifies Lombroso's typology: she is a hyper-sexualized woman, animalistic in appearance and behavior, whose instinctual needs and devious actions prevent her from thinking rationally or being an adequate mother. Gnà Pina thus defies her proper social role, rendering her a danger to society. In fact, she is described in the play as a woman who "devours Christians." While from a modern perspective, it is clear that Verga's association of criminality and sexuality is tautological—she is criminal because she is sexual, she is sexual because she is criminal—at the time of its composition, this association would have been considered a scientific fact. Even in the title, Verga pays homage to Lombrosian ideology: women belong to an intellectually inferior category of human beings whose lack of capacity for

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<sup>59</sup> According to Mary Gibson, who wrote the introduction to the English-language translation, the standard of "normality" vis-à-vis deviant or criminal behavior was particularly dangerous for women: "This standard was applied to male behavior as well, but there remained alternative ways of thinking about male deviance (heroic rebellion, for example, or the sowing of wild oats). Female deviance, on the other hand, almost always ran the risk of being labeled abnormal and hence pathological. This also put law-abiding women in peril, for any woman who challenged the status quo could be deemed abnormal." Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, ed. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 28–9.

logic, reason, and rationality and inability to control physical impulses renders them animal-like and potentially dangerous.

Lombroso's criminal anthropological work and his personal political opinions, however, were at times contradictory. Believing that the Liberal State did not do enough to help the working classes, he became a Socialist in 1892, having been influenced by his personal friend Anna Kuliscioff, who was a frequent visitor in the Lombroso home.<sup>60</sup> He also supported the adoption of legalized divorce, going so far as to write articles on the subject with his colleague Paolo Mantegazza.<sup>61</sup> These progressive opinions, however, do not provide cover for the sheer misogyny of his work, which "constitutes perhaps the most extended proof of women's inferiority ever attempted."<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, however, and apparently without irony, Lombroso writes in his author's preface to *The Criminal Woman* that "not one line of this works justifies the great tyranny that continues to victimize women, from the taboo... which impedes them from studying, and worse, from practicing a profession once they are educated. These ridiculous and cruel constraints, still widely accepted, are used to maintain or (sadder still) increase women's inferiority, exploiting them, to our advantage."<sup>63</sup> Despite this preamble, Lombroso's explicit statements on women's intellectual inferiority and moral weakness and his conviction that they are ruled by instinct, cannot respond to reason, and thus need to be controlled by men, had the

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<sup>60</sup> It was Kuliscioff who furnished copies of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Women* to Lombroso's daughters Paola and Gina, fostering Paola's dedication to feminism. *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Perry Willson, "Introduction: Gender and the Private Sphere in Liberal and Fascist Italy," in *Gender, Family, and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy 1860–1945*, ed. Perry Willson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 43.

<sup>62</sup> From Gibson's introduction to Lombroso and Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

effect of inciting the frustrations of feminists and emancipationists across Italy, who published: “articoli polemici con Lombroso e le sue teorizzazione sull’inferiorità biologica della donna, intendendo dimostrare l’origine economica dell’emancipazione e la necessità storica del femminismo.”<sup>64</sup> According to Filippini, these articles against Lombroso were highly influential in the inception of secular feminism: “Queste idee esercitano un’indubbia influenza sul movimento, in particolare, come vedremo, in quell’area definite femminismo scientifico e testimoniano la persistenza di un pensiero laico.”<sup>65</sup> Just as the Pisanelli Code had done thirty years prior, Lombroso’s largely negative view of women—very much representative of late nineteenth century thought—had the unintended effect of uniting diverse emancipationist groups and bolstering their grievances. It is these Positivist ideals so prevalent at the time—that women do not have the capability to think and act rationally, that they are spiritually and morally inferior—that Rosselli specifically opposes in her dramatic oeuvre, and most explicitly in *Anima*.

#### STAGING FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY: ON *ANIMA*

It is Rosselli’s theatrical debut and most popular play that most explicitly outlines her progressive ideals regarding women in early twentieth-century society. *Anima* premiered on October 29, 1898 at the Politeama Gerbino Theater by the *Compagnia del Teatro d’Arte*, with actress Clara della Guardia in the leading role of Olga de Velaris and Alfredo de Sanctis as Silvio Vettori.<sup>66</sup> The plot of *Anima* was audacious for the time, as her innovative portrayal of a

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<sup>64</sup> Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, 193–4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 193–4.

<sup>66</sup> Other actresses in the first production included Italia Vitaliani, Irma Grammatica, and Emma Maria Riccardini. See Ettore dalla Porta, “Una commedia: *Anima*,” *Roma Letteraria* VII, no. 3 (1899): 60. Subsequent productions included the actresses Emilia Varini, Teresa Mariani, and Irma Grammatica. The play’s premiere date is recorded in Giorgio Rampone, ed., *Musica e*

female protagonist greatly contrasted with the choices of canonical Italian playwrights such as Giacosa and Verga. The play was successful not only because it was well-constructed and effective on stage, but also because it touched on controversial yet timely issues of gender politics in Liberal Italy. On one hand, *Anima* was of interest to women, especially progressive women and feminists: the theater was in fact one of the few places in the public sphere where women could go with relative impunity, and a large portion of theater audiences was indeed female. The theater was even possibly more effective than books in reaching a female audience.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, the play was not as successful with men because it felt like a provocation that attacked some of the most widely-held masculine values at the time. Considering both its novelty and distinction in this regard, *Anima* may be seen as the foundational text in the genealogy of theater as a form of Italian feminist praxis. This is because *Anima* (1) introduces and addresses many of the themes that become central to feminism over the course of the twentieth century; and (2) simultaneously acknowledges its status as theater, making a statement about artistic production by and for women—a leitmotif of central importance, as we shall see, to subsequent Italian women playwrights throughout the century.

In *Anima*, Rosselli questions the division between the body and the mind—the two essential halves of each person, irrevocably separated by Descartes centuries prior—a heuristic proposition that leads her to mount a critique of gender roles and marital politics in Italian society at the turn of the century. The long-standing trope of body as pitted against the soul—the

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*spettacolo a Torino fra otto e novecento. L'esposizione del 1989. Teatro Regio e i teatri torinesi (1896–1905)* (Torino: Archivio storico della città di Torino, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> The theater was one of the few public spaces in which women could be seen without damaging their reputations, and where they could go without their husband as an escort. On social practices and norms regarding women's theater-going, see Caesar, "Women and the Public/Private Divide: The Salotto, Home and Theatre in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy."

rupture of the whole subject—is not an inherent fact, but rather a tool of Western metaphysics used since Plato to separate out and devalue the feminine. Contemporary feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero discusses how philosophical discourse has traditionally masculinized the origin of the subject, rendering masculinity an abstract, intellectual quality while reducing femininity to the physically bounded or corporeal aspects of being: an enduring distinction that has come under question only with the advent of feminism.<sup>68</sup> She notes that for Plato and the western metaphysical tradition, the soul is metaphysical—that is, both intellectual and spiritual—and constitutes the superior part of the human being that is developed only in man, while the body and the physical, which are for Plato merely material and thus inferior, are aligned with woman and the feminine, in light of her essentially reproductive function. Thus woman's value is inherently in and of the body. Although Lombroso and Positivism are not interested in metaphysics, this view of woman's value as essentially physical endures in their own thought and to a large extent through the fascist era. Woman is defined by her reproductive function and through her role in the patriarchal economy as the husband's exclusive property. It is this very view that explains why in Italian theater of the early twentieth century we find the theme of women who prostitute their soul and yet are still considered valuable and unspoiled commodities on the marriage market. What counts is the body, not the woman's mind, her emotions, or feelings (spiritual or otherwise)—which are instead presumed to be child-like, underdeveloped, and weak. It is assumed in fact that they can be molded and rectified by man, by the husband, who is the superior being and has the duty to guide her and protect her. Thus the theory Rosselli critiques in her play—that women are inferior, are defined only by the physical, lack the capacity

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<sup>68</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone: figure femminili nella filosofia antica* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1990). Published in English as Adriana Cavarero, *In spite of Plato: a feminist rewriting of ancient philosophy*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1995).

for rationality, and ethical as well as spiritual depth, not to mention the esthetic power to create art—not only foreshadows later feminist writers and philosophers, but also has wide implications for the history of women and the body beyond early twentieth-century Italy.

By *anima*, or soul, Rosselli refers to all that is non-physical in a person's subjectivity. She does not intend soul as a religious expression of immortality, as in the Catholic tradition, but rather as the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual faculties of a person. In *Anima*, Rosselli fights not just against the notion that a woman's value lies in her body, but also against the idea that women are essentially suited only for the roles of daughter, wife, and mother, and cannot take part in a plurality of economic, social, creative, and political experiences nor be influential in their own right. She achieves this by writing a female protagonist who not only is a professional artist, but who has also won accolades for her work. Rosselli stages the importance of her protagonist's artistic career by introducing Olga in her studio, a locus of professional development that contrasts with the traditional staging of women in drawing rooms, kitchens, or other spaces of domesticity. The opening stage directions emphasize the ambiance of her professional space:

Studio di Olga. In fondo, la comune. A sinistra, porta che conduce nelle stanze interne. Le pareti sono ingombre di schizzi e di disegni, parecchi dei quali sono studi di nudo. A sinistra, in evidenza, un cavalletto con sopra un quadro non finito, rappresentante una rovina dell'antica Roma. Qua e là tappeti, vasi, stoffe, ecc., il tutto in artistico disordine. Olga sta dipingendo: davanti a lei Marietta, immobile, posa in costume di antica romana.<sup>69</sup>

The play thus opens with a meaningful image: that of a woman engaged in professional and artistic work of her own choosing. The artistic clutter of Olga's studio creates a warm, inviting space that dispels the long-standing idea that women's artistic production is a cultural threat—an infringement on male territory. When women trespass their traditional designation as artistic

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<sup>69</sup> Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, 39.

object and instead become subjects or practitioners of art, male dominance is threatened. Rosselli uses the play to argue, however, that art does not in fact make a woman dangerous, but rather an asset to a learned, democratic society.

Later in the first act, Rosselli reinforces the spectator's sense of Olga's professional accomplishments by introducing the character of Giorgio—her future husband—who compliments her art that he has just seen on display at the exposition: “Tornavo dall'Esposizione... e passando di qua, non ho potuto resistere alla tentazione di salire un momento per dirvi che il vostro quadro è un capolavoro [...] Proprio. Ed è stato anche messo in buona luce, cosa che succede di rado. Ma vi dico: un successone!”<sup>70</sup> His admiration for her work and ability to remain confident in himself despite her success is one of the principal reasons for which Rosselli constructs their relationship as happy and mutually fulfilling. Considering its importance in shaping Olga's personal and professional identity, art transcends its use as a simple plot device, becoming instead a discourse that frames complex issues of female professional engagement, empowerment, and emancipation. Her paintings—nude figures, among others—are symbols that simultaneously showcase her desire to represent women as they really are (not just as they are supposed to be) and betray the greater social anxiety over a woman's changing role in society—an anxiety felt keenly by many characters in the play, most notably Giorgio's mother Teresa, who is bothered by many of Olga's paintings. Her engagement with art is a personal and political statement about women finding their own profession and passion; and about men supporting such interests and pursuits in their female partners.<sup>71</sup> In many ways,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>71</sup> To a certain extent, Olga represents the ideal rather than the reality of a woman painter in early twentieth-century Italy. Women would not generally have been admitted into art schools—especially with nude models—and instead were more often amateur artists who painted still lifes

Olga (as a painter) can be seen as a metonym of Rosselli herself (as a dramatist), whose goal it is to represent women on stage as they really are—naked, so to speak, in their authentic emotions and thoughts. To this end, Olga embodies the *donna nuova* of the twentieth century, a woman whose need for self-expression translates into social and political action.<sup>72</sup>

Rosselli renders even more explicit her interest in fighting traditional gender ideology in an essay for *Il Marzocco*, “Discussioni sul femminismo: Risposta a Neera” (1904), a reply to the famous realist writer who took pride in her overtly anti-feminist, anti-suffrage stance. Rosselli’s response is measured, and she attempts to understand Neera’s concerns while simultaneously articulating her progressive take on the problem. Rosselli astutely identifies the societal anxiety that comes to afflict Neera and that is perhaps responsible for her misunderstanding of feminism and its focus on parity: “Neera non vuole che si perda di vista lo scopo per cui la donna è nata donna.”<sup>73</sup> Rosselli and Neera, however, have very different notions of what the “goal” of womanhood should be, with the former advocating for a multiplicity of experiences and the latter insisting on reinforcing traditional gender roles. In the article, Rosselli also touches on the material conditions of motherhood, showing how economics and social conventions are related, and making the case that the expectation of women to nurture and take care of children comes at a personal and economic cost.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, she points out the hypocrisy of the notion that

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and natural landscapes.

<sup>72</sup> “La *donna nuova*, stanca di quella che essa chiama la sua schiavitù, ha compreso che per imporre la propria volontà, essa aveva bisogno di diventare una forza politica.” Scipio Sighele, a personal friend of Amelia Rosselli’s, on the *donna nuova* in Michela De Giorgio, *Le Italiane dall’Unità a oggi: modelli culturali e comportamenti sociali* (Roma: Laterza, 1992), 20–7.

<sup>73</sup> Rosselli, “Discussioni sul femminismo. Risposta a Neera.”

<sup>74</sup> “Quando Neera dice che le ragazze, anzi che aspirare a studi superiori, dovrebbero raccogliere i bambini abbandonati procacciandosi una maternità artificiale e restando perciò nell’ambito dell’occupazione femminile per eccellenza, dimentica anche una volta che la maternità costa cara

women are capable of hard labor in factories but are “too frail” for the intellectual labor of a university career or other cerebral or artistic pursuits, from which they are regularly excluded. She ends her article with an exhortation that will become uncannily familiar to future Italian women playwrights as well as contemporary women the world wide, feminist or otherwise: as long as economic and social conditions remain unequal, one-half of humankind’s potential will remain unharnessed: “parmi per lo meno strano che all’alba del secolo ventesimo, allora che il patriottismo del quarantotto sembra già vecchio perché il nuovo non ammette in astrazione barriere fra nazione e nazione; parmi strano, dico, che in quest’alba di libertà una barriera si voglia ancora che sussista, quella che imprigiona l’ingegno femminile.”<sup>75</sup>

*Anima* was in many respects written by accident. At the time Rosselli was living in Vienna with her husband Joe, who was studying music at the prestigious conservatories in the Austrian capital. As chance would have it, upon her return to Italy, she noticed an announcement in the Florentine periodical *La Nazione* for the *Concorso Drammatico dell’Esposizione Nazionale* in Turin, and subsequently submitted *Anima*, which was first composed as a short novel while in Vienna.<sup>76</sup> Much to her own surprise, she won the competition, and *Anima* became an instant success, lauded by critics and adored by audiences all over Italy.<sup>77</sup> In his review, theater critic Ettore dalla Porta commented on Rosselli’s innate skill as a playwright, which

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e che raccogliere un bambino non basta: bisogna nutrirlo e vestirlo. Quindi, anche in tal caso, una maternità senza mezzi pecuniari non sarebbe possibile.” Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Sandiford, “Il Lyceum di Firenze ai tempi di Amelia,” 41.

<sup>77</sup> “Avevo vinto un importante concorso per un dramma. Era la prima volta che, in Italia, una donna scriveva per il teatro. Questa circostanza e la tesi ardita del dramma mi crearono di colpo una celebrità inaspettata e piena di responsabilità... Il lavoro fu rappresentato centinaia di volte da tutte le compagnie e fece il giro d’Italia, destando echi del suo successo anche all’estero.” Rosselli, *Memorie*, 114.

helped to so convincingly portray the work's main social themes:

La signora Rosselli ha dimostrato di avere innata abilità per una cosa, ch'è la caratteristica del vero *commediografo: fare la scena*. Cioè, mettere in rapporto i personaggi fra loro, e farli parlare presto e bene. Codesta cosa la non s'impara: è questione di tatto e di gusto. La signora Rosselli ha dimostrato di aver serii intendimenti d'arte, e di voler tendere ad uno scopo umano e sociale molto alto. Ha messo nei suoi personaggi un cuore di donna gentile *che sente*.<sup>78</sup>

A scholarly critic of the time, Lander MacClintock, also wrote in praise of *Anima*, stating that it “might have been written by Bjørnsen or Ibsen, so logical and clear is its thinking, so opposed its ethical principles to the typical Latin prejudices.”<sup>79</sup> Retrospectively, however, Rosselli recognized this success as the end of happiness in her marriage, as her career accelerated and Joe's began to stall: “forse quel giorno, che segnò la mia consacrazione di scrittrice teatrale, segnò anche—inconsapevolmente per me—la fine della mia felicità di donna.”<sup>80</sup> They separated not long thereafter, in 1903, and Amelia and her three sons moved to Florence, where she raised and educated them as a single mother all while continuing her political activism and literary career.<sup>81</sup> As an artist herself, Rosselli was keenly aware of the pressures women faced in developing their careers while simultaneously raising a family and maintaining a marriage. There

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<sup>78</sup> dalla Porta, “Una commedia: *Anima*,” 61.

<sup>79</sup> Lander MacClintock, *The Contemporary Drama of Italy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1920), 83.

<sup>80</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 10. Rosselli's observation is prophetic in its incisive analysis of the conflict women face between their personal and professional lives—a theme upon which she touches in her plays. This also becomes an issue of great importance in the works of second and third-wave feminists.

<sup>81</sup> Joe and Amelia separated in 1903 after she discovered his extramarital affair. Their custodial arrangement, in which Amelia raised their three sons on her own, was in part due to Joe's medical condition: “Mi decisi—penosamente—a separarmi legalmente dall'uomo che amavo al di sopra di ogni cosa al mondo, e il quale—strane complicazioni del cuore umano!—mi amava anch'egli tuttavia, e sempre mi amò per il resto della sua vita, nonostante l'abisso da lui scavato fra noi con le sue proprie mani.” *Ibid.*, 113.

is a certain amount of autobiographical foresight in *Anima*—Olga ends up with the man who is supportive of her artistic work instead of threatened by it—a conscious choice by Rosselli that perhaps also reflects her own needs and desires as a woman with a profession. Rosselli continued to focus on relationship dynamics in her subsequent plays, most notably *Illusione* and *Emma Liona*, where they function as a part of her commentary on the interpersonal struggles that afflict women who step outside the bounds of traditional feminine conduct.

*Anima* addresses crucial feminist issues such as marriage, family, economic opportunity, sexuality, and violence by signaling their presence and importance in the daily lives of the female protagonists and demonstrating how specific social conventions and traditions prohibit a woman's ability to realize her own social and economic interests distinct from those of her husband or family—and in doing so exhibits an early form of feminist ideology. It does not, however, propose a radical political agenda of change, as will become common instead in the works of Italian woman playwrights toward the end of the twentieth century. Marriage, for example, functions as a central plot device in the play, yet her critique of this patriarchal institution is articulated in her lengthy treatment of the distinction between the body and the soul—the eponymous and driving force of the play—and the way in which this distinction is used socially to undermine women and reduce them to pawns traded by men. *Anima* thus eschews the standard bourgeois theatrical tropes of betrothals in drawing rooms, staging the politics of marriage instead through the philosophical discourse of the soul, and its perennial conflict with the body.

Rosselli's opening panorama establishes the social politics of marriage as the central theme of the play. It is in fact the first topic of conversation: we are introduced to the protagonist Olga de Velaris, a painter and orphan, as she consoles her model Marietta, who has just been left

by her lover Leonardi and fears she is now a “ruined” woman. Olga is presented as confident in her convictions from this first scene: she assures her friend of the innocence of her behavior and implores her to ignore the judgment of others. The warm exchange that develops between the two women demonstrates what Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero will later term a reciprocal narrative exchange:<sup>82</sup>

OLGA: Non devi vergognarti per aver voluto bene a un uomo che credevi degno.

Vergogna sarebbe che tu avessi finito di amarlo per un secondo fine...

MARIETTA: (*un poco sollevata*). Oh, benedetta! Come mi fa bene questo che mi dice! E io lo sentivo, dentro di me, ma non capivo... non mi riusciva di metterlo fuori...

OLGA: Povera Marietta! L’abbiamo tutti in noi, sai, questa voce che ci parla dentro al cuore... Ma il difficile è appunto far tacere le altre per ascoltare unicamente questa. Coraggio! E se hai bisogno d’un consiglio, d’un aiuto, ricordati che ci son qua io.<sup>83</sup>

Olga’s empathetic assertion that Marietta trust her inner voice and consciously learn both to ignore doubt and say aloud what she thinks inside indicates her progressive outlook and dedication to forming meaningful relationships with other women. In a society dominated by men, it is this type of relationship between women that may foster camaraderie and sisterhood, she implies. Olga demonstrates the strength of her beliefs for a second time in the same scene. When her housekeeper Virginia worries about the outside appearance of having a “fallen woman” like Marietta stay the night, Olga responds with frustration—“oh, senti! Ne sono annoiata, di questo mondo stupido che s’impiccia dei fatti miei! E me ne rido altamente”—unwilling to waste her time on the opinions of others or the superficial standards of Italy’s

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<sup>82</sup> On the philosophy of female narrative reciprocity see Adriana Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: filosofia della narrazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997). English translation published as Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>83</sup> Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, 40–1.

*borghesia*.<sup>84</sup>

Olga and Marietta's conversation on social double standards foreshadows the heated discussion on the body-soul dichotomy that will take place between Olga and her fiancé Silvio Vettori at the end of Act I. First, however, Rosselli exposes Silvio's character, showing the ways in which he is both interested in the avant-garde yet eschews some of its key values. While paying a visit to Olga's studio along with Teresa and Graziana, his friend Giorgio's mother and sister, respectively, he unequivocally expresses his desire and admiration for the new and pristine by comparing his recently purchased home in one of Rome's new neighborhoods, Macao, to the "old rocks" of the ancient capital city that form the subject of one of Olga's paintings.<sup>85</sup> In addition to foreshadowing his subsequent argument with Olga, this conversation highlights how their diverse aesthetic preferences betray a deeper ethical divide that will eventually separate the couple:

SILVIO: (*avvicinandosi al quadro rappresentante l'arco in rovina*) Ah, ci ha lavorato!  
OLGA: (*voltandosi*) Dove? Ah, tre orette stamattina, sì.  
TERESA: Splendido!  
GRAZIANA: Magnifico!  
OLGA: Oh! È appena abbozzato... (*A Silvio*) E lei non dice nulla?  
SILVIO: Ma... ecco; Io vorrei che qualcuno... mi spiegasse una buona volta che cosa trova da ammirare in quei quattro vecchi sassi.  
GRAZIANA: Che orrore! [...]  
OLGA: Zitto, zitto. Son bestemmie.  
SILVIO: E allora m'aiuti lei a capire?  
OLGA: Non è certo il mio lavoro che può aver questa pretesa... ma non vede, non vede balenare fra pietra e pietra l'anima delle cose morte?  
SILVIO: L'anima delle cose morte. E poi?  
OLGA: Mi pare che basti. È tanto bello il passato! [...]  
GRAZIANA: E per questo che abita a Macao?

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>85</sup> Macao is the nickname of a Roman neighborhood that was extensively developed in the late nineteenth century. It is better known as *Castro Pretorio*—the eighteenth *Rione* of the city of Rome. Nicoletta Cardano, *Guide rionali di Roma: Castro Pretorio* (Roma: Palombi, 1999).

SILVIO: (*ridendo*) Precisamente. Là, almeno, si respira.

TERESA: In questo ha ragione.

OLGA: Resta a vedersi se le case di Roma alta, che non hanno altro pregio che quello di essere nuove, mi compensano della mancanza di quell'estetica squisita che trovo nei miei quattro vecchi sassi, come li chiama lei.

SILVIO: E le pare piccolo pregio, per una casa, quello di essere nuova? Guardi: del mio appartamento al Macao sono il primo inquilino; il primo, capisce, da che quella casa è stata costruita. Sa che piacere è il mio pensare che quelle pareti sono vergini d'impronta altrui; che nessun piede, prima del mio, ha lasciato la sua orma sul pavimento levigato? La verginità di una casa! Ma la parola stessa non le dice trattarsi di una cosa preziosa?

OLGA: Preziosa! Secondo i casi.<sup>86</sup>

Olga is an artist who admires the classics and whose aesthetics do not revolve around the principle of novelty. She is drawn to spaces and images with a story to tell, whose past she can represent through art, a fact evidenced by the paintings that adorn her studio. Silvio, on the other hand, is infatuated with all things new, untouched, and concrete. The austerity of a new house is appealing in that it comes with no baggage and can be molded to his own preferences, in following with the old adage that *il buon marito fa la buona moglie*.<sup>87</sup> Just like a husband can only mold “the perfect wife” if she has not already been impressed upon, for Silvio the perfect house can have no history prior to his own. Silvio’s assertion thus betrays the fact that he will not be comfortable with or tolerate what Olga will soon reveal in her desire to be honest before their wedding. Silvio’s inability to deflect the judgment of others, to challenge society’s traditions, and to let go of his own antiquated prejudices will lead to their separation at the end of Act I. There is something almost paradoxical, however, in Olga and Silvio’s aesthetic preferences. She lauds the past, which she refers to as *tanto bello*, while he derides it (*quattro vecchi sassi*); yet Olga’s ideals are progressive and reflect the influence of the growing women’s movements of the

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<sup>86</sup> Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, 57–8.

<sup>87</sup> This axiom is also the thematic base of Torelli’s play *I mariti*, one of Rosselli’s primary intertextual references, and central point of critique.

era while Silvio's remain more old-fashioned than he would care to admit.<sup>88</sup>

Finally left alone, Olga expresses her frustration at Graziana's flirtatious behavior with Silvio in the previous scene, citing it as an example of "la prostituzione continua della propria anima."<sup>89</sup> While Olga is offended by what she sees as Graziana's coquettishness of the soul—a form of insincerity at best and purposeful deceit at worst—Silvio is both amused and shocked by her prioritizing of personal integrity over physical integrity. In their conversation, Graziana functions not only as a part of the plot, but also as a metonym for what Rosselli sees as the immoral education of young women in Italy's *borghesia*, the values of which seek to keep women in their subaltern social, political, and economic location. Graziana acts as such because that is all she knows and has learned. Silvio responds incredulously:

SILVIO: Dunque la purezza del corpo non ha nessun valore?

OLGA: Di fronte a quella dell'anima, no certo!

SILVIO: Anima, anima! È una parola!

OLGA: Ah, bene! Facciamone pure mercato, purché restiamo materialmente pure! Questa è la grande virtù, questa è la vera castità! E perché? Ve l'hanno forse detto, che sia questa e non l'altra?

SILVIO: (*serio*) Mia cara, quando un'idea si propaga di secolo in secolo; quando da generazione a generazione essa viene consegnata ed accolta come un'eredità sacrosanta; quando la maggioranza la considera un'idea di verità e di giustizia, ho diritto di credere in essa e di proclamare nel torto chi pensa altrimenti.

OLGA: Anche al tempo di Galileo si ragionava così.

SILVIO: Ma l'uomo non potrebbe vivere né anche un momento al di fuori di queste leggi! Esse sono la sua schiavitù e la sua libertà insieme; la sua debolezza e la sua forza. Bisogna accettarle senza discuterle. Come in religione la discussione crea l'ateo, anche in questo chi discute finisce col mettersi al di fuori dell'orbita comune, dove non c'è più né legge né diritto, né dovere, né verità, né menzogna.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Later in Act I, as their argument intensifies, Silvio claims that it is his father, not he, who has antiquated ideas about women and marriage. See dialogue on the next page.

<sup>89</sup> Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, 61.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 61–2.

Here Silvio uses historical precedent and eternal patriarchal wisdom to justify his traditional belief in the importance of female bodily purity over that of personal integrity. He even refers to the soul as “just a word,” his glib attitude demonstrating that he does not believe a woman has a moral, ethical, spiritual or indeed intellectual dimension that may not coincide entirely with her physical being, and with the value of her body for patriarchal society. He also shows his rigidity with regard to rules and customs and his innate confidence in the righteousness of traditional institutions such as the Catholic Church.

At this point in the scene their conversation is theoretical, but it soon becomes practical when Olga discloses having been raped as a fifteen year-old girl. She is loathe to admit the violence she experienced, cognizant of the fact that Silvio will not be pleased to learn she is no longer a virgin, even under the tragic circumstances. Unfortunately, he fulfills her expectations, and even though he is genuinely conflicted and moved by her story, he ultimately decides to break off their engagement, unable to overcome his prejudice against a “compromised woman”:

OLGA: È inutile, non sono la moglie che ci vuole per te. Oggi, poi, me ne sono proprio convinta.

SILVIO: Ma questo è affar mio. Tu non c’entri. Io ti voglio così come sei. Se non fossi così, non ti avrei voluto bene.

OLGA: (*dolorosamente*). Ma avrai la forza di sormontare tanti pregiudizi, tanti principi a cui tieni? [...] Quelli stessi per i quali tuo padre esitava a dare il suo consenso...

SILVIO: Un vecchio, si sa, ha certa preconetti...

OLGA: Anche tu.

Silvio: Io?

OLGA: Tu, sì, non hai detto anche poco fa, davanti a me?

SILVIO: Grazie! Una cosa è mettersi al disopra del pregiudizio che comanda, per esempio, di ricevere una sposa dalle mani della madre, un’altra è calpestare, per conquistarla, un sacro principio...

OLGA: (*cupamente*): E se tu dovessi farlo? – (*Silvio si scosta, la guarda*) Lo vedi! Ah lasciami! Lasciami, prima che sia troppo tardi! [...] (*con voce morente, volgendo lo sguardo verso il quadro non finito*). Silvio! Sono... sono... anch’io... una... rovina... (*Si copre il viso con le mani*).

SILVIO: (*stenta a capire, la guarda, poi, come in un lampo, comprende, respinge Olga lontano, con ribrezzo*). Ah! ... Infame! ...

OLGA: (*buttandoglisi davanti in ginocchio*). No! No, non ho fatto niente di male! Te lo giuro! [...] Non ho mai avuto un pensiero che non fosse per te! Sono stata più tua così che se fossi diventata la tua amante!... Mi credi?

SILVIO: (*ferocemente*). Credo... Oh! Che cosa ho fatto per meritare! (*Si getta, singhiozzando, sopra una sedia*).

OLGA: (*trascinandosi presso di lui*). Non piangere! Ti giuro che non devi piangere! Dovevo dirti prima...è vero, ma avevo sempre sperato che tu non fossi come gli altri [...] È stata una maledetta fatalità! (*con accento rotto e convulso*) Ero una povera bambina ignorante, capisci? Avevo appena quindici anni... Che cosa vuoi che sapessi? M'hanno presa, così, come si prende un fiore da un prato [...] Oh Silvio, l'orrore di quella colpa commessa nell'incoscienza, il ribrezzo di me stessa, il terrore degli altri, e quella voce assidua di rimpianto e di vergogna, e l'angoscia immensa per il male irreparabile... Ah, quante lacrime piene di umiliazione! – Ma poi, più tardi, lo sprazzo di luce improvviso nelle tenebre del mio cervello infantile, e dal fondo del mio cuore l'eco di quell'altra voce, confusa e terribile: “Perché ti umili, perché ti umili così? Non è in te qualche cosa ancora che nessuno ti può portar via, se tu non vuoi donare? Su, alza la testa! A te, povera bambina che piangi, resta ancora un'anima!” (*Con un grido, esaltandosi*) Un'anima!... Un bene tutto mio, che possedevo senza saperlo, una verginità sacra sulla quale dovevo vegliare; ah no, non piangere!<sup>91</sup>

Even in her state of emotional distress, Olga articulates a very progressive notion of identity based in reclaiming personal markers and eschewing socially-imposed shame and guilt. After living through the violation of rape, Olga reaffirms what she has not lost, what can never be taken from her—the integrity of her soul, or personhood, the power of her mind and her inner being, and the unassailability of her moral character. To a certain extent Silvio understands the logic and significance of her reasoning, yet his pride will not permit him to forgive the trespass of her body. Ultimately, despite his love for her and the strength of their mutual affection, Silvio is unable to set aside his need to uphold tradition, and decides they can no longer marry.<sup>92</sup> Act I ends with Silvio fleeing, Olga in tears, a broken engagement, and a condemnation from the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 64–6.

<sup>92</sup> “SILVIO: Lasciami andare tranquillamente. È meglio per te e per me. OLGA: (*con disperazione*). Silvio!! Ah! Ti sei pentito! Non me credi! [...] Ma come! ... Mi lasci? Mi lasci? Silvio!!! SILVIO: Non gridate così. Cosa volete? Siamo stati vittime di un'allucinazione... Abbiamo creduto possibile l'impossibile. Siate ragionevole...” Ibid., 68.

playwright. As the feminist critic Nadia Filippini observes in passing:

Attraverso la vicenda di Olga, Rosselli affronta pubblicamente il tema della violenza sessuale e condanna il matrimonio d'interesse, contrapponendovi l'intesa spirituale, il rispetto reciproco, la passione autentica. Il tema della superiorità dei sentimenti e della libera scelta è profondamente sentito e caro alle femministe [...] e spiega il successo di *Casa di Bambola* di Ibsen, considerato un autore-chiave dell'emancipazione femminile, alla stregua di Stuart Mill.<sup>93</sup>

In this episode Rosselli shows how theater can be used as an instrument to publicize feminist issues: in this case her play explicitly discusses rape, a crime traditionally kept in the shadows, and demonstrates how it affects the lives of women. She uses this dramatic action and the suspense fostered by Olga and Silvio's broken engagement to render publicly on stage aspects of women's private lives, where they can be better understood in their complexity.

It is only after Silvio enters into a frustrating and dissatisfying marriage with the young Graziana that he realizes the gravity of his mistake, which he admits to the newly married Olga during their dramatic rapprochement in Act III. Silvio, still in love with Olga and nostalgic for their profound, genuine connection, is distraught that Graziana is his in name and body alone, and that she has no interest in his professional pursuits nor their life together:

Ma pensate che non c'è stato un minuto della sua vita, da che l'ho sposata, non un minuto, in cui l'anima di quella fanciulla sia stata mia! Anche adesso, la vedete... Eppure avevo tanto lottato per conquistarla! [...] Cercavo d'interessarla al mio lavoro, domandando il suo consiglio, mettendola a parte dei miei progetti, ragionando del mio avvenire, cercando, infine, di stabilire fra essa e me quella corrente di sentimento e di pensiero, senza la quale, ah, ora lo so, non c'è vero possesso... Ma essa! Essa non mi capiva [...] Essa, anzi che vedere in me il compagno della sua vita, l'amico, lo sposo, non vedeva che lo strumento di quella libertà alla quale aveva tanto anelato... (*Pausa. Poi, a voce bassa, lentamente*) A poco a poco, si fece fra di noi due il silenzio: sapete, quel silenzio delle anime che persiste anche quando le labbra parlano [...] Il trionfo, per il mio orgoglio maschile, di dire a me stesso, guardando mia moglie: 'nessuna carezza è passata su quel corpo, fuor che la tua.' Che trionfo!... E, accanto, il dolore di pensare che l'anima che esso celava non era mia, ne mai lo era stata [...] Allora, allora compresi il significato profondo e santo della verginità vera; allora che, baciando

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<sup>93</sup> Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, 207.

quel corpo casto e unicamente mio, mi struggevo di rabbia all'idea che l'anima in quel momento stesso, forse, era lontana da me...<sup>94</sup>

It is in Silvio's frank realization of his mistake that Rosselli's commentary lies: a woman's worth is greater than her body, and soul is not "just a word," as he had so confidently declared in Act I.<sup>95</sup> In staging Olga's unwanted comeuppance, Rosselli highlights the consequences of excessive male pride that can lead to disastrous decisions for both women and men; and the injustices visited against women in the perpetuation of patriarchal institutions. The error of Silvio's choice of bride, and thus the error of his judgment, is a condemnation of the tradition in which women are treated as commodities, defined by their bodies and not by their faculties as whole persons—thus indicating that they have purely corporeal value as opposed to individuality, rationality, and a life of emotions and feelings, which are all instead facets of both mind and body, in their mutual and rich interconnectedness. Thus Rosselli directly links Silvio's predicament to women's subaltern location in the social hierarchy of Italy, showing how these types of prejudices work to harm both women and men. More specifically, Rosselli condemns chauvinism by lauding Olga's logic and intelligence—what Silvio cannot understand until he experiences it, Olga has already understood at the theoretical level and thus possesses a self-awareness that her male counterpart lacks. There is even a hint of Rosselli's dry humor in Silvio choosing to marry Graziana: the girl who he earlier declared to Olga "non merita poi tutta quest'ira" then becomes his wife, and source of his frustration and impotence.<sup>96</sup>

Rosselli's condemnation is most visible in Silvio's suicide, which is implied off-stage at

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<sup>94</sup> Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, 109–10.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

the end of Act III.<sup>97</sup> Hence, in a sort of feminist plot reversal, Silvio's belief in the supreme importance of a woman's pure body over that of her pure soul leads to *his* demise as opposed to hers. Olga, on the other hand, is at this point happily married to her former friend Giorgio, having therefore escaped both spinsterhood and disgrace—two common endings during that era for “compromised” women such as Olga. It is important to note that this ending contrasts greatly with many of the male-authored plays of the early twentieth century and the operatic tradition, in which the “undoing of women,” as Catherine Clément has termed it, dominates the theatrical action.<sup>98</sup> Instead of writing plays in which the slow demise of the female protagonist is the focal point, Rosselli reverses this voyeuristic trend, writing a strong female lead who with thoughtfulness and strength overcomes obstacles to her happiness.

To this end, the finale of *Anima* interrogates the very opposition of body and soul on which the entire gender system of the play and the society it portrays is predicated. Rosselli calls into question the notion that women (and men, for that matter) can be so easily divided, and that one facet of life or existence should be so valued over the other. In order to combat the notion that a woman's value lies in her body, Rosselli employs various theatrical techniques, the most important of which is to write a strong, outspoken, professional female protagonist who fights for her moral convictions and is unafraid to speak her mind. One of her less obvious methods of combating misogynist female stereotypes, however, is to create portraits of men who never quite

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<sup>97</sup> Silvio's suicide is understood in the final stage directions: “Torna verso la scrivania, riapre il cassetto, afferra il revolver, esce disperato dalla porta del giardino. Subito dopo, affievolita per la lontananza, giunge l'eco di un colpo di revolver.” Ibid., 113.

<sup>98</sup> D'Annunzio's *La Gioconda* (1898) and Pirandello's *Diana e la Tuda* (1926) are examples of plays in which the demise of the female protagonist functions as a necessary plot device and is correlated to the artistic production of her male counterpart. See also Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, The undoing of women*, trans. Betsy Wing and Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

measure up, often falling short of their prescribed moral standard. The portrayal of the sub-par man is in fact a theme in many of Rosselli's works, and perhaps forms a facet of her unique brand of progressive feminism. For example, Rosselli deconstructs the belief commonly held at the time that women lack intellectual gravitas and capitulate to shallow interests by critiquing men who engage in similar behavior yet do not face public consequence. *Anima* is full of male characters who lack awareness and indulge in superficiality, yet they face the consequences for this weakness privately, in their personal lives and their pursuit of happiness. Thus Rosselli exposes the double-standard of gendered behavioral expectations of the time.

Silvio, as we have seen, cannot bring himself to follow through with his engagement to Olga knowing that she has been raped and thus is no longer a virgin. He forgoes a relationship with Olga—who was greatly invested in his well-being and with whom he had a deep connection—for Graziana, who fits the superficial requirements of a proper society wife but lacks Olga's thoughtfulness and dedication. Rosselli clearly condemns the moral reasoning behind this choice, and her judgment is rendered explicit through vignettes of Silvio's unhappiness and ultimate realization that he made the wrong choice. While Olga and Silvio do engage in a heated discussion on the topic, their conversations thereafter are muted, framed by the acquaintances, family members, and friends that constantly surround them. Thus it is instead through a portrayal of Silvio's difficult and lonely marriage to Giorgio's sister Graziana that Rosselli stages her message:

SILVIO: Noi due siamo più estranei l'uno all'altra che se ci fossimo conosciuti ieri.  
(*Con impeto doloroso, avvicinandosele*).

GRAZIANA: Ci siamo!

SILVIO: (*con angoscia*) Non posso continuare così: te l'avverto. Te l'ho già detto altre volte. Non posso. Non sono natura da vivere come un automa. Ho bisogno di convincermi che vivo, che sento, che amo; ho bisogno di compagnia; e mi sento invece così solo.

GRAZIANA: (*ironica*) Solo? Siamo una brigata.

SILVIO: (*toccandosi il petto*) Solo qui dentro, Graziana... e ho paura! Se sapessi com'è triste questa continua solitudine morale! Se sapessi com'è amaro il dire a sé stesso:—sei chiamato marito, figlio, fratello, e pure sei più solo che se vivessi in mezzo a un deserto! Com'è dolorosa la certezza che, di tanti che ti stanno intorno, uno coltiva nell'anima un pensiero per te!

GRAZIANA: Io non capisco. Ti metti in mente certe idee.

SILVIO: È così; è così lo sento. E allora, vedi, si prova uno smarrimento, un'angoscia; par di morire; par di essere già morti. E si soffre della felicità degli altri. Sì, si diventa anche cattivi. (*Con un senso di gelosia*) Quando io vedo quei due così uniti, così felici, ah! Graziana, guariscimi tu. Tu potresti, se volessi. Potremmo anche noi, forse, essere felici, senza invidia e senza rimpianto. (*posa la testa sulla spalla di Graziana*).

GRAZIANA: (*fredda*) Guarire! Sei malato?

SILVIO: Sì, molto malato...

GRAZIANA: Chiama un dottore (*lo respinge*).<sup>99</sup>

Silvio's desperation coupled with Graziana's humorous literalness and complete lack of interest in his experience creates what could be a parody of a husband and wifely quarrel. What is ailing Silvio can not be fixed by a doctor, as Graziana so ingenuously assumes: he is living the reality that is a consequence of his superficiality or moral deficiency. In adhering to bourgeois values and notions of propriety and property, Silvio is supposed to be rewarded with a fulfilling and satisfactory life yet he finds himself frustrated and increasingly desperate when this does not lead to the outcome he had envisioned. Thus, it is the vanity of Silvio's ego, his sense of entitlement, but most importantly the toxicity of bourgeois values that brings him a marriage of loneliness and a lifetime of unhappiness—a prospect so unbearable that it leads to his eventual suicide. By portraying Silvio's unhappiness, Rosselli disproves the claim that Giorgio so confidently makes in Act II: "Sposando una ragazza sul tipo di Grazia, c'è il vantaggio di farne quel che si vuole. E poi, ... sai bene che la moglie è quale la fa il marito."<sup>100</sup> Through this example it is clear that Rosselli condemns a society, and those who adhere to its principles, that values superficial purity

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<sup>99</sup> Rosselli, *Anima: dramma in tre atti*, 100.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

in women over depth of personal integrity. Furthermore, the common notion that a woman—being mostly body with an underdeveloped, child-like soul—can be molded and morally formed by her husband, is exposed as a mere delusion.

Giorgio, on the other hand, is depicted in a considerably more sympathetic light than Silvio, yet he too engages in an instance of questionable behavior at the beginning of the play. Shortly after the opening of Act I, Giorgio calls on Olga in her studio, and makes clear that his feelings for her transcend the platonic. Having long pined for her, he is frustrated at her evasiveness when asked if she has other romantic interests. He tentatively makes the case that he alone could be a supportive partner and understand the needs of an artist, but not only does Olga remain unimpressed, she is troubled by his presumption:

GIORGIO: Perché non so immaginare con chi potrete trovare la vostra felicità. Se sposate un artista, finirete per diventare rivali, per distruggervi scambievolmente; o pure—siete capace di farlo—vi annullerete, per non intralciare con la vostra la sua gloria. Se invece sposate un borghese qualunque, soffrirete e lotterete molto; perché tutto, in voi, nella vostra esistenza, è diametralmente opposto a quello che si pensa, si fa e si vuole nella cosiddetta società per bene.

OLGA: (*con accento canzonatorio, ma tuttavia turbata*) Sì che voi sareste l'unico?

GIORGIO: È ridicolo, lo so. Ma siete una natura troppo complessa per essere capita; e quand'anche capita, apprezzata dal primo venuto. Ci sono in voi degli abissi di mistero che bisogna saper rispettare.<sup>101</sup>

In this scene Giorgio relies on the classic misogynistic tropes of woman-as-mysterious, and of the essentially unknowable and enigmatic nature of women's thoughts. The logic follows that if he cannot sufficiently reason his way to winning her feelings, then her feelings must be unreasonable. Giorgio, however, is able to redeem himself as the play progresses, serving as a devoted and loving husband to Olga after her engagement with Silvio is broken. While it is later implied that their love may not be as passionate as what Olga had felt for Silvio, they are lauded

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 49.

as an example of the fact that introspection, mutual interest, and dedication to the total person reaps greater and more lasting rewards than a fixation on the body. Silvio is particularly jealous of Olga and Giorgio's connection and shared professional pursuits, realizing retrospectively the gravity of his error. By explicitly portraying their happy marriage and Silvio's envy of it, Rosselli critiques a social system in which keeping up appearances is lauded over sincerity.

Conversely, with Graziana—whose ignorance and superficiality are condemned by way of juxtaposition with Olga's thoughtfulness and erudition—Rosselli makes clear that her faults are not necessarily an intrinsic personal defect, but rather the product of a bourgeois education, which is deficient in scope and promotes values antithetical to the development of women's autonomy and subjectivity. Women are not naturally naïve or shallow, but rather are rendered so by the lack of a real education and the means to develop fully as citizens. Rosselli places the blame for Graziana's inadequate and faulty education on her mother Teresa, who keeps her daughter on a tight rein with regard to both social and intellectual exposure. As the play progresses, a connection is drawn between this style of upbringing and Graziana's lack of interest and ability in being an engaged wife and productive individual with her own goals and passions. In an animated discussion in Act I, Teresa and Olga disagree on what constitutes a greater risk for a young woman on the verge of her *début* in society—acquired knowledge or purposeful ignorance:

TERESA: (*a Olga*) Vedi, a me, in questi tempi, fa l'effetto di camminare sul ghiaccio, col pericolo di scivolare a ogni passo. Quando poi dobbiamo sostenere una di queste innocenti... (*accennando a Graziana*) ah, la responsabilità è assai grave!

OLGA: Cara signora, tutti questi pericoli non esisterebbero, se le ragazze venissero educate in altro modo.

TERESA: Ah, già, le tue teorie!

OLGA: Quando voi dite ad esse: sapete, ci sono due specie di verità: queste, che potete conoscere, e quest'altre, che dovete ignorare; che cosa succede? Che delle verità concesse non occupano né punto né poco; mentre su quelle che devono

ignorare si gettano con la curiosità morbosa che desta il atto proibito.

TERESA: (*con furia*) Ma Olga, Olga! Hai una libertà di linguaggio! [...] Un po' riguardo, santo Cielo!... Una decina di ragazze come te, e il mondo sarebbe bell'e rivoluzionato!... Non vuoi ascoltare i consigli di chi ti vuol bene. Cosa direbbe a tua povera mamma, buon'anima!

OLGA: Ho sempre pensato ch'essa mi avrebbe educata così, come mi sono educata io.

TERESA: Ah, no! Era una santa donna. Una creatura dolce e sommessa.

OLGA: Era anche, e lei me l'ha detto tante volte, incapace di una menzogna o di una bassezza; che'essa adorava la verità e non credo condannerebbe la sua figliuola per aver fatto della verità la sua fede e la sua religione. Mi dica: sono poi tanto cattiva, così, come sono.

TERESA: Cattiva! Che discorsi!

OLGA: Ma le dispiacerebbe, è vero, che Graziana stesse molto con me?

TERESA: No! Ma hai certe idee...<sup>102</sup>

Olga's *certain ideas* are precisely what worries Teresa—that exposure to certain things will also lead to certain new ways of thinking, which could be socially subversive. It is in fact Olga who exemplifies the newly liberated, professional, and independent woman Teresa fears is the consequence of improper rearing. The dramatic action of the play, however, serves as the arbiter in this matter, and ultimately eschews Teresa's traditional, bourgeois manners in favor of Olga's more progressive approach. As will become explicit in the second and third acts, limiting Graziana's adolescent exposure serves only to encourage her frivolous pursuits, and inhibits her ability to empathize and communicate with her husband Silvio, consequently depriving her of a happy marriage and future. Rosselli drives this point home by contrasting the two major relationships in the play—the marriages of Graziana and Silvio, and Olga and Giorgio—showing how the depth of the latter couple's connection is in no small part based on Olga's education, sophistication, and self-awareness.

In another telling yet humorous episode, Teresa insists that Graziana avert her eyes in a desperate attempt to keep her from viewing the nude portraits on display in Olga's studio. This

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 53–4.

type of Victorian prudishness is ultimately a part of the same system that defends the notion that women's bodies are simultaneously shameful and yet have more value than their minds:

TERESA: Io, poi, non me n'intendo. Di questa vostr'arte moderna non ci capisco un'acca.

OLGA: Non è poi tanto oscura.

GRAZIANA: (*additando uno dei disegni*) È questo qui lo studio per il tuo quadro, è vero? [...] E questo, (*guardando un nudo*) cos'è?

TERESA: (*a Graziana, rabbiosamente*) Non guardare; non c'è bisogno. (*a Olga*) Già, dicevo: tutto questo verismo non mi va. Non sono più esposizioni; ma botteghe di carne umana... Nudi di qua, nudi di là... E di carne andata a male, anche.<sup>103</sup>

Here Olga's art becomes a metonym of social change, a profession that stands for a much larger and more potentially threatening societal phenomenon. Art becomes the expression of Olga's progressive social politics, and thus an extension of Rosselli's as well. It is a means of communication through representation, a way to render explicit what remains unsaid: that Olga is a woman with a profession, who lives alone, has friends that live on the margins of "good society," is secure in the righteousness of her moral convictions, and does not adhere to the traditions of Italy's *borghesia*. Just as aesthetics change (*tutto questo verismo non mi va*), so do ethics, and the extent to which Teresa feels this new social pull—realized in that moment of looking at Olga's nude portraits and attempting to "protect" her daughter from their immorality—is a principal cause of her increasing anxiety over Graziana's future in this new world. Art, then, is a meaningful practice that houses much of the play's feminist message.

We have already explored how Olga's painting is analogous to Rosselli's playwriting, and in many ways, Rosselli's symbolic use of a woman artist-as-protagonist is similar to her use of theater as a theme and plot device within her play. There are many instances in *Anima* in

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 50.

which Rosselli uses the theater as a topic of conversation or a point of referral for the characters—she even comes close to staging a play within her play—and in doing so shows the theater’s importance as an artistic practice, meeting place, and cultural discourse in Italian, and indeed European, society of the time. Her metatheatrical moments are both subtle and explicit, and can be found in each of the three acts. The most obvious of these moments is when Olga, Silvio, Giorgio, and others make references to famous plays of the time, to prestigious historical theaters in Rome, and to the practice of spending evenings at the theater. Giacosa’s one-act play *Diritti dell’anima*, for example, serves as the thematic antecedent for *Anima* as well a frame of reference for Rosselli’s critique of bourgeois values and its flawed understanding of woman’s depth and fortitude.<sup>104</sup> These theatrical references—Giacosa’s play and evenings at the theater, among others—coalesce in Act II, where Rosselli employs them in order to change direction after Olga and Silvio’s broken engagement, which frames the end of Act I.

Rosselli’s metatheater reaches its peak in scene 7 of Act II, almost exactly halfway through the play, which culminates in Olga selling her soul to the highest bidder after a highly-charged evening in Giorgio’s *salotto*. She stages this auction for Giorgio’s friends—including Silvio—who does not take well to the dramatic event nor the whirlwind conversation that precedes it. The scene begins with Olga unexpectedly dropping in on Giorgio, joining the group of friends already assembled at his home, and continues with Marquis Bei creating a suspenseful and playful atmosphere through his glove and palm-reading tricks. The evening devolves from there however, and when Silvio reveals he must take his leave from the revelry to meet a date at

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<sup>104</sup> Rosselli’s subtle references to historical documents within her play contextualize her critique of Italian laws and customs of the time. For example, while gathered in his *salotto*, Giorgio’s friends mention the Pisanelli Code while discussing a professor whose wife was caught having an affair. Graziana is caught reading Mantegazza’s most famous work, *Fisiologia dell’amore* (1896). See *Ibid.*, 81, 74.

the *Teatro Valle*, he and Olga begin to argue—with Silvio asserting that she does not belong at their gathering (implying a sort of gendered space upon which he believes Olga has trespassed) and attempting to escort her out against her protests. Olga interrupts their skirmish, however, by changing tack and catching Silvio off-guard with her question: “Cosa c’è al Valle, stasera?” to which he replies “La prima dei *Diritti dell’anima*.”<sup>105</sup> Instead of leaving as originally planned, which Lorenzi implores him to do, Silvio remains, and the group embarks on an animated discussion of the thematics of Giacosa’s play. The group’s playful discussion of *Diritti dell’anima* both mirrors and expands upon Olga and Silvio’s significantly more serious dispute on the value of the body versus that of the soul from Act I. To a certain extent, the rhetorical game that develops between Silvio and Olga in this scene functions as a means of female self-expression. Silvio broke off their engagement with such finality, that through auctioning off her own soul, Olga is able to perform for Silvio—literally to show him—what through conversation he was unable to understand before: how unreasonable was his idea that the soul, or a person’s intellectual and mental faculties, do not, in fact, have bearing on their subjectivity:

GIORGIO: Di Giacosa, è vero?

BEI: Che titolo curioso!

GIORGIO: È una tesi molto ardita. Ammetterete che una donna possa permettersi le infedeltà del pensiero, purché non si dia materialmente...

SALVELLI: Io la trovo bellissima.

BEI: Anch’io. Così si vengono a stabilire due stati civili: uno per il corpo e l’altro per l’anima. Si leggerà per esempio, nei giornali: Oggi è stato celebrato il matrimonio spirituale fra il signor X e la signora Y. Testimonio della sposa il signor Z, suo marito corporale; testimonio dello sposo ecc., ecc. Gli sposi sono partiti per un platonico viaggio di nozze negli spazi del pensiero” (*Tutti ridono*).

LORENZI: In quanto a me, preferirei essere il marito testimonio.

SALVELLI: Furbo, l’amico!

GIORGIO: E io, quasi quasi, starei per l’altro...

TUTTI: Eh, eh!

GIORGIO: Si signori. Data questa scissione, resta a stabilirsi in quali dei due modi si possegga più e meglio una donna.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 87.

BEI: (*indicando Olga*) Eccone una che sarà al caso di giudicare. [...]

OLGA: (*contenendosi a stento*) L'anima... Sentimentalismi d'altri tempi. Cosa ne dite, Vettori? – Voi ne sapete qualche cosa, credo.

SILVIO: (*fuori di sé*) Sì! Io sostengo che la purezza del corpo va innanzi tutto, e che l'anima è il vieto pretesto di chi non ha altro da offrire!

SALVELLI: Bravo!

BEI: Ha ragione!

GIORGIO: Ha torto!

OLGA: (*con esplosione a Silvio*) Ah, credete che io ci tenga, all'anima mia? Mi credete di quelle che la serbano per le grandi occasioni? [...] Volete vedere che conto ne faccio? Qua: la vendo! La vendo a chi mi dà di più!

TUTTI: Bellissima – Originale!

OLGA: Su, quanto offrite?

SILVIO: Io non ho mai comprato anime.

OLGA: Ma io vi dò anche il resto per giunta! Spero che varrà qualcosa ancora. Eh? (*Agli altri, che hanno seguito questo rapido dialogo senza comprenderne il significato occulto*) Anche voi! – Chi dà di più?

SALVELLI: Diecimila lire!

BEI: Ventimila!

GIORGIO: (*scherzoso, ma un poco turbato*) Cinquantamila!

OLGA: (*con esaltazione*) Cinquantamila! Vettori, fatevi in qua! Avete paura?

SILVIO: (*fuori di sé*) Vergognatevi! [...]

LORENZI: (*a Silvio*) Vieni via.

SILVIO: Lasciatemi stare. (*Ad Olga*) E se credete... (*Fa per scagliarsi su di lei*).

OLGA: Cosa? Cosa?

LORENZI: Ma Silvio! Sei matto? (*Riesce ad allontanarlo da Olga*).

BEI: Centomila!

SALVELLI: Duecentomila!

GIORGIO: Basta!

OLGA: (*sempre più esaltata, fuori di sé*) Avanti, duecento! Vettori! (*In questo momento Silvio viene trascinato fuori da Lorenzi*).

GIORGIO: (*con voce potente*) Tutto quello che possiedo!

OLGA: Ah! ... (*Cade affranta sopra una sedia. Silenzio. Poi, con voce morente*) Datemi da bere...<sup>106</sup>

Giacosa's play—and what an audience of the time would have surely known of such a famous work—frames their dialogue on the preposterous idea of there being distinctly spiritual and physical spouses. Rosselli plays on the themes of Giacosa's work; critiquing them, and showing how arbitrary the separation of the human experience into the realms of physical and spiritual truly is. While many of Giorgio's friends—Bei, Savelli, Lorenzi, etc.—do not understand the

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 87–9.

deeper significance of Olga's *scenata* (they are, rather, simply intrigued and amused by the novelty and excitement of a woman acting in such a manner), Silvio understands her gesture as a pointed criticism of his decision to break off their engagement based on her adolescent rape. By staging an auction with herself as the prize, Olga is able to show Silvio how his behavior in Act I had turned her into a commodity, their engagement into a transaction. Through the auction, she asks Silvio the uncomfortable question "how much am I actually worth?" which in turn forces him to acknowledge the traditional values and prejudices that led to his abandoning her.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, in picking up on Olga's frustration toward Silvio, Giorgio makes a dramatic gesture that functions as the beginning of their courtship: he declares that he would give everything in his possession to have Olga's soul. Indeed the next scene, which is also the finale of Act II, Giorgio proclaims his love for Olga and his respect for her as a whole person, including his indifference toward her "compromising" past.

In including Olga's auction of her soul, Rosselli stages a visual representation of her feminist political ideals: that women are not assets to be bought and sold, and that separating the human experience into the physical and the mental is a futile and unnatural exercise that ultimately aids in the oppression of women, both in confines of marriage and family life, and on the public stage, where it is used to deny women access to political and economic means. Rosselli, then, suggests that the human experience, in either its male or female form, is dependent on the interconnectedness of the mind and the body, and that one cannot be a good member of the Italian social fabric, nor a good democratic citizen, without utilizing diverse

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<sup>107</sup> Values that, in a ironic lack of self-awareness, Silvio claims not to hold. He instead declares his father the traditional member of the family and distances himself from what he sees as his father's "antiquated" ideas: "Un vecchio, si sa ha certi preconcetti..." Ibid., 65.

faculties of both sides. Of all the characters, it is Olga who embodies this connection: she has a generous heart, and empathy for others—evidenced by her relationship with the model Marietta, for example; yet she is also thoughtful, rational, and intelligent, as is evidenced by her sharp wit in defending her open-minded opinions against the judgment of Teresa, Silvio, and others. Furthermore, through this episode, Rosselli demonstrates her confidence in the discourse of theater as the means by which to deliver this progressive message to the Italian, and eventually European, public. Olga’s argument may be easy to overlook in discussion, as Silvio does in Act I, but when acted out on the stage (or, as is the case, in Giorgio’s *salotto*), it is hard to ignore. Even her stage directions bolster the idea that this scene is supposed to appear almost like a play within a play: “Tutto questo dialogo, come pure la scena dell’asta, devono essere recitati rapidissimamente.”<sup>108</sup>

After the chaos and confusion of Act II, Act III opens to a scene of domestic idyll, a tender moment between the newly-married Giorgio and Olga secretly overseen by an increasingly distressed Silvio, their brother-in-law and houseguest of the moment:

OLGA: (*a Giorgio*) Ma tornerai davvero domani sera?  
GIORGIO: Certamente.  
OLGA: Mi sembrerà triste la casa, senza di te.  
GIORGIO: E io, credi tu che sarò lieto, lontano da te? Ma come si fa? Non possiamo lasciare tutti e due i nostri ospiti...  
OLGA: Ma telegraferai appena arrivato?  
GIORGIO: Sì, e tu, mi scriverai?  
OLGA: Un letterone di dieci pagine.<sup>109</sup>

Some time has passed since the end of the second act, but the action is still set at the Mauri family home. While metatheater and theatricality were the essential interpretive keys to the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 94.

previous act, here Rosselli re-establishes the motif of the successful and productive woman artist and thinker, linking once again her own occupation with that of her protagonist. When Silvio expresses his disbelief that Giorgio has actually finished writing his art history book—a long-term and oft-abandoned project—Giorgio attributes his success to Olga’s positive encouragement and support:

GIORGIO: Non l’avrei creduto neanche io! Tutto merito di Olga [...] Un giorno, poco dopo sposati, essa, riordinando un mio cassetto, trovò, fra molte vecchie carte, un mio abbozzo su quell’argomento, appunto. Sai che ho sempre scribacchiato, a tempo perso buttavo giù le idee, così come mi venivano, per lasciarle poi marcire nel cassetto. Ebbene, Olga lesse quell’abbozzo, le piacque, e da allora incominciò a tormentarmi, a dirmi che l’idea era buona, che dovevo svilupparla; infine, tanto disse e tanto fece, che riuscì a scuotere la mia fenomenale pigrizia. E poi, Olga sempre al fianco per consigliarmi, aiutarmi... Ah, è piacevole il lavoro, così! M’aveva installato una scrivania nel suo atelier; essa dipingeva e io scrivevo... E adesso, dopo un anno e mezzo di lavoro indefesso, ho finito.<sup>110</sup>

Act III thus brings vindication of Olga’s intellectual and artistic pursuits. At the beginning of the play, she was viewed by Teresa, Silvio, and others as a threatening *donna nuova* whose progressive ideas and provocative behaviors would corrupt innocents such as Graziana. Her position as a professional woman who lived alone, befriended those on the margin of “good society,” painted nude portraits, and won awards for her art, was viewed by those in the play—with the exception of Giorgio—and by society at large, as transgressive, and, as such, she was branded as a woman who overreached her prescribed arena. Over the course of the play, however, and particularly after Rosselli’s critique of those traditional values continued to grow, ultimately reaching its climax in the dramatic auction scene, the view of Olga as a deviant artist

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 96.

began to diminish. From the perspective of Act III, it is now clear that her ideas and pursuits have become part of the dominant discourse, and seem normalized in the context of her marriage. This should not be interpreted as a coincidence: her passion for work, particularly of the creative variety, solidifies her marriage, and the intellectual curiosity and reciprocal interest brings her and Giorgio closer together instead of fostering resentment or jealousy, as Giorgio had erroneously hypothesized in Act I. It is ultimately their successful and mutually fulfilling partnership that Rosselli uses to prove that women's diverse artistic, professional, and creative pursuits create better partnerships, and does not result in the unraveling of Italy's social fabric. On the contrary, it helps to strengthen both.

THE EXCEPTIONAL WOMAN AND THE EVERY WOMAN: *ILLUSIONE* AND *EMMA LIONA*

The central question of Rosselli's second play, *Illusione* (1906), is similar to that of *Anima*: how does the traditional institution of marriage constrict the happiness, success, and individuality of Italian women?<sup>111</sup> Through the clichéd story of infidelity—Emma Gianforti is kicked out of the house by her jealous and increasingly paranoid husband Alberto, who wants her back but is unable to forgive her minor dalliance, and thus abuses her until she decides to leave on her own—Rosselli dismantles the notion that love, forgiveness, and bourgeois moralism can peacefully coexist within a marriage. The play's two principal intertextual references include *Madame Bovary*'s Emma and the novel *L'illusione* by Federico de Roberto (1891), both of which treat similar themes, and with Flaubert's heroine functioning as a namesake.<sup>112</sup> In an

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<sup>111</sup> *Illusione* premiered at the Carignano Theater in Torino on January 26, 1901 while the play text was published five years after the stage debut.

<sup>112</sup> Giovanna Amato, "Tragico il tempo, chiaro il dovere," in *Una donna nella storia: Vita e letteratura di Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Valdo Spini (Firenze: Alinea, 2012), 55–6.

ending that recalls *A Doll's House*, Emma's only option to reclaim dignity after suffering Alberto's maltreatment is to leave the family home and not look back. Rosselli's second play, however, did not receive the same positive critical reception of her first, and it is the only play that she does not discuss at length in her *Memorie*, writing just one comment: "Avevo già scritto, due anni dopo *Anima*—quando vivevo ancora insieme con mio marito—un secondo dramma, *Illusione*. Ma un po' per l'aspettativa enorme da parte del pubblico, un po' perché il dramma, di carattere forse eccessivamente interiore, risultava lievemente statico e nudo, non riportò il successo di *Anima*."<sup>113</sup> There is perhaps a small amount of autobiographical influence in *Illusione*—it was written during the last years of her increasingly troubled marriage to Joe, during which time she was faced with a decision similar to that of Emma's. Ultimately, both writer and protagonist made the choice to strike out alone.

In Rosselli's last play, *Emma Liona* (1924), she writes the story of a different Emma, an historical Emma whose legacy has been interpreted exclusively by men—including poets, librettists, novelists, and playwrights, from Goethe to Dumas—who portray her as a classic femme fatale who brings ruin not only to the men in her life but also the Republican patriots of Naples.<sup>114</sup> Rosselli instead tells the story of Emily Lyon (Lady Hamilton) from her own perspective, and shows the young woman's pain as she is traded like a commodity by the man she loves and to whom she was promised, Charles Greville, to his uncle Lord Hamilton, British ambassador to Bourbon-occupied Naples. Rosselli began to write the play in 1914, but it was

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<sup>113</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 114. Despite the play's mediocre reviews, the starring actress Teresa Mariani was lauded by critics for her excellent performance in the role of Emma. Maria Alberti, "La drammaturgia di Amelia Pincherle Rosselli," in *Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Vieri Dolara (Firenze: Alinea, 2006), 101.

<sup>114</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the many nineteenth century adaptations of Lady Hamilton's story, see Amato, "Tragico il tempo, chiaro il dovere," 72–4.

never performed during her lifetime, and its publication was delayed until 1924—after the First World War, and coinciding with the rise of Fascism. In this play, Rosselli’s progressive operation is to show how Lady Hamilton’s more questionable actions—including her role in cancelling the armistice between the Republicans and the Bourbons, leading to the death of her lover Admiral Nelson and many Neapolitan patriots—are not in fact intrinsic to her character as a “mercurial and difficult woman,” but rather stem from the objectification and cruelty she suffered at the hands of the men in her life. Like the male writers before her, Rosselli also adapts the story to her own ends, but chooses to focus on Emma’s childhood in order to engender sympathy for the oft-misunderstood character: “Anche Amelia forza la storia... vuole scrivere dell’infanzia di Emma Liona, dei soprusi che ha subito dai suoi padri-padroni, che hanno sporcato il carattere di una bambina spianando la strada alla spietata carnefice che la storia riporta. Non c’è spazio, nei lavori di Amelia Pincherle, per donne completamente colpevoli, e men che mai per uomini completamente innocenti.”<sup>115</sup> In a departure from her other theatrical works, which are all composed in three acts, *Emma Liona* is divided into four episodes, the last of which takes place many years after the mainstay of the dramatic action and portrays Lady Hamilton’s escape from Italian peninsula back to England. Rosselli’s last dramatic text is a significant departure from her Venetian trilogy in both genre and style, which preceded the publication *Emma Liona* by almost a decade.

#### THE VENETIAN TRILOGY

In her Venetian plays, Rosselli continues to parse many of the same feminist themes as in *Anima*

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<sup>115</sup> “Amelia, con piccolo accenni ed espedienti narrativi, ci mette davanti non una burattinaia sanguinaria, ma una personalità circondata da parassiti adoranti, abituata ad essere considerata un oggetto di ammirazione, ma comunque un oggetto.” Ibid., 74–5.

and *Illusione*, but with a different sense of theatrical aesthetics, most notably with regard to her linguistic choice and the social class of her characters, who are distinctly marked as members of the middle class as opposed to the *alta borghesia*. The Venetian trilogy, written between 1909 and 1914, constitutes Rosselli's foray into dialect theater, an established practice in the Italian theatrical panorama dating back to the sixteenth century, particularly in the regions of Veneto, Campania, and Sicily. While her three Venetian plays are not exclusively social dramas, and do not focus on the politics of marriage as pointedly as *Anima* does, they do give life to her progressive ideals on the stage, and reveal her dedication to "the imperative of moral freedom... and the emancipation of men and women from the hypocritical dictates of convention," particularly within the context of the family and the development of the individual.<sup>116</sup> In the Venetian trilogy, Rosselli proposes the theme of the condition of youth in a traditionalist society as a complementary discourse to the leitmotif of her previous two plays, that is, what a woman must do to make her way in a man's world.

In the first of her dialect plays, *El Réfolo*, which premiered on January 26, 1909 at the Teatro Quirino in Rome in a production by the famous Venetian *capocomico* Ferruccio Benini, Rosselli dramatizes how new generations reevaluate and often protest against social traditions and constraints: "Nel *Réfolo* l'autrice mette a fuoco, in una lieve vicenda, l'eterno contrasto tra le generazioni, ma lo fa con quella grazia sorridente, con quella intima comprensione che le permettevano di avvicinarsi senza preconcetti e con assoluta obbiettività a tutti gli aspetti della vita."<sup>117</sup> The *réfolo*, which translates from the Venetian to "gust of wind," arrives in the form of

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<sup>116</sup> Pugliese, "Contesting Constraints," 3.

<sup>117</sup> Raccà, "Amelia Rosselli: Un tragico destino di donna," 233. At the time that Rosselli wrote *El Réfolo*, the theme of generational conflict was prominent on the Italian literary scene. See, for example, Pirandello's *I vecchi e i giovani* (1908).

Marinella, a young woman who has decided to run off to Bologna and marry her sweetheart against the wishes of her family. She stops at her aunt Caterina's home on her way to the station, where she brings with her a defiant attitude and air of change. Every evening at 8pm, Caterina is joined by Momolo, her former love interest, for a game of cards. Marinella's presence in the house encourages the old paramours rethink their decision to obey their parents' orders not to marry. The play thus presents their individual meditations on the merits of social convention versus that of forging a new, non-traditional path in defiance of parental authority and familial duty. Sadness pervades the end of the play when Momolo finally admits to himself that he sacrificed a lifetime of happiness for fear of confronting authority: “(*con profonda amarezza*) Gavevimo la felicità ne le man e se la semo lassada scampar!”<sup>118</sup> Through Momolo's regret, Rosselli's stages her belief in engaging critically with authority—and in particular with dominant social customs that often create disparity between the sexes. The moral of the story, which is articulated in the final conversation between Momolo and Caterina, who feel ill at ease in a world that no longer resembles the one in which they grew up, is shaded with optimism, however, and is oriented toward the future:

CATERINA: Non ghe pareva de viver in un mondo novo? Mi me vien fredo solo a pensarghe.

MOMOLO: (*più calmo, risollevando il capo*) Questa la xe vera! Gerimo fati de un'altra pasta. Infatti nualtri no sentivimo parlar che de dover; questi d'ancuo no i parla e no i sente parlar d'altro che de diritti. In nualtri l'obediencia gera cosa natural e spontanea; in lori xe spontanea la rebelion. Insoma se somegemo co fa el zorno e la note!

CATERINA: (*con filosofia*) Ciò; semo ognuno da la nostra parte fioi dei nostri tempi.

MOMOLO: Sta a vedar chi ga rason e chi torto!

CATERINA: No sta a nualtri de giudicar. Bisognaria tornar a nasser de qua a cent'ani, e vedar che fruti ga portà sto modo de far d'ancuo.

MOMOLO: Parole d'oro.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Amelia Rosselli, *San Marco; El Réfolo* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1910), 93.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

In this passage, Rosselli reminds us that we do not need to fear change or “a new world,” as Caterina does when viewing Marinella’s behavior, but rather should engage with it in order to shape it according to values that will enlighten society and render it more equitable.

The critical reception of *El réfolo* was complimentary, however it did not achieve the same acclaim that *Anima* had ten years prior. Despite this fact, almost all the reviews appreciated the play’s principal dramatic conceit—that of the difficulty of navigating the social and political changes that take place between generations:

È infatti una piacevole e delicata commedia, dialogata con garbo, e ricca di osservazione psicologica... Non dunque per l’originalità dell’argomento si raccomanda *El réfolo* all’attenzione della critica, ma per la sua forma comica quasi perfetta, per l’equilibrio fra le sue parti, per la misura, per una visione di vita intima, piena di soavità e di delicatezza. Anche in questa sua nuova commedia la R. riafferma quelle eccellenti qualità sceniche, che già erano apparse nel suo primo lavoro: *Anima*, e che fanno di lei la migliore, per non dire la sola, fra quante scrittrici italiane osarono affrontare il Teatro.<sup>120</sup>

In this 1911 review from the *Revista teatrale italiana*, Rosselli is lauded not only for the psychological introspection and formal properties of her play, but is also acknowledged as an accomplished woman playwright. In following *Anima*, these plays helped to cement her reputation as a woman who was able to penetrate a male-dominated field, a fact corroborated by Domenico Oliva in the *Giornale d’Italia*, who referred to Rosselli as “una delle poche scrittrici che posseggono il senso del teatro.”<sup>121</sup> It is unfortunate, however, that even considering positive

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<sup>120</sup> “Amelia Rosselli: *El Refolo*, commedia veneziana in 2 atti,” *Rivista teatrale italiana* 15 (May 11, 1911). See also: “Réfolo, cioè ventata, è quella che sconvolge la tranquilla esistenza di una famiglia: ed è qui un’altra volta rappresentato il contrasto fra i giovani e i vecchi, fra il modo di pensare della nuova generazione, più audace e libera, e quello dell’antica, troppo schiava delle convenzioni sociali.” *Annali del teatro italiano*, vol. 1 (Milano: L’Eclittica, 1921). “È una commedia leggera e delicate, a cui la forma dialettale veneziana viva, colorita, spontanea, si addice molto bene. Non nuova nella sua sostanza, ha tuttavia particolari di una leggiadria ben femminile, che interessano piacevolmente.” Ettore Albini, *Cronache Teatrali, 1891–1925* (Genova: Edizioni del Teatro Stabile, 1972).

<sup>121</sup> In his praise of Rosselli, however, Oliva betrays the broader dismissive attitude toward

critical reception of her plays at the time, a lack of scholarly attention after her death has prevented her works from being more widely studied and appreciated.

*El socio del papà*, written over the course of two years (1910–11) and published in 1912, is the second of Rosselli's dialect plays. The three-act comedy debuted on February 7, 1911 at the Goldoni theater in Venice in a production by the Ferruccio Benini Company, to public adoration and lukewarm critical reception.<sup>122</sup> Her second Venetian comedy continues the theme of generational conflict started in *El réfolo*, but the emphasis changes from courtship and social customs in order to focus more specifically on the themes of politics, religion, and familial duty: “In quest'ultima commedia, come già ne *El réfolo* descrivevo il contrasto, sotto un diverso aspetto, fra la generazione dei genitori e quella dei figli: una famiglia che si disfa, nonostante tutto l'amore con il quale i genitori se l'erano raccolta intoro, nonostante la speranza, nel padre, che almeno uno dei figli rimanesse in casa e diventasse suo socio nell'azienda ch'egli dirigeva.”<sup>123</sup> In brief, the play tells the story of Gigi Benetti, a father who hopes that his youngest son Carleto will take over the family business after his two older sons have married, moved to other cities, chosen other professional pursuits, and expressed a lack of interest in running the family store. Carleto defies convention by declaring to his parents his right to choose his own path without regard to the expectations of the family, an opinion which his older brother Bepi shares: “Papà, papa, Dio sa se ve volemo ben, se no faressimo de tuto per vederve contenti; ma no domandene el sacrificio de tuta la nostra vita per el fato che vualtri ne gave sacrifice la vostra!

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woman authors at the time. Tiziana Agostini, “Amelia Pincherle Rosselli e Venezia,” in *Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Vieri Dolara (Firenze: Alinea, 2006), 89.

<sup>122</sup> A 1911 review negatively compared *El socio del papà* to its predecessor, *El Réfolo*: “Piace senza raggiungere la perfezione artistica della precedente commedia della stessa autrice.” *Annali del teatro italiano*.

<sup>123</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*, 115.

... Son convinto che el sentiment vero no vogia dir sacrificio de un per l'altro; ma che ognun gabia da rispetar la libertà de l'altro."<sup>124</sup> In his impassioned conversation with his father, Bepi touches on the key Rossellian theme of individual liberty. Whereas Gigi represents the conformity of the older generation, his sons are interested in exploring life beyond the duties of the family. Their non-conformity extends as far as religion, with Bepi declaring himself secular and refusing to baptize his son, a symbolic decision that incites great frustration and hurt in his parents. In this sense, Gigi recalls Caterina of *El réfolo*: a member of the previous generation who is uncomfortable with and perhaps even fearful of the significant changes taking place at the turn of the century. Rosselli's message, then, is similar to that of her previous play: adaptation, progress, and liberty are values to be pursued, not shunned, in modern society.

A small but essential role is given to the one daughter of the family, Aneta, who is tellingly described as a *dona emacipada* by Bortolo, the family acquaintance. While she is not central to the plot, Rosselli uses her character both to comic ends, and as an example of how young women of the time could be politically engaged even while unable to vote. Some of her explicit feminist moments include asking her father to sign a petition against prostitution, educating the housemaid Zanze in Socialist dogma—transforming her into a party-line toeing member of the proletariat—and proclaiming her right as a woman to have an opinion:

ANETA: (*ironica*) Ah za, perche per vualtri, le donne no le ga da aver opinion.

BEPI: Una, si: quella del Mario.

ANETA: Anticaie! Vergognite de parlar cussì!

CARLETO: (*ironico a Bepi*) Ti te desmenteghi che la xe una feminista.

ANETA: Sicuro: gavaressistu qualcosa in contrario?

GIGI: (*dimenandosi sulla sedia*) Anca el feminismo adesso ghe mancava!<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Amelia Rosselli, *El socio del papà: commedia in tre atti* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1912), 88–9.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Rosselli uses the discourse of feminism to further develop the theme of generational conflict: she stages it as one more obstacle that old Gigi must overcome in a changing, modern world.

Ultimately, Rosselli's characters are not able to resolve their deep-seated conflict—not even after the arrival of an innocent baby boy—and the play ends with Gigi's resignation to a new family dynamic that he feels does not do justice to his personal, life-long sacrifice: “(con scherno) La famegia! I fioi! Bele parole! Se strussia tuta la vita per farsela su, sta famegia; per arlevarli, sti fioi; e po, cossa ne resta? Un bel gnente! No, pezo: ne resta... eco qua: un bastardeto... per tuta consolazion!”<sup>126</sup>

In the last of the Venetian plays, *San Marco* (1913), Rosselli recounts the 1848 uprising of the Venetian public against the Austrian occupation, which resulted in the one-year restitution of the Republic, governed by Manin.<sup>127</sup> As we know from her *Memorie*, this was an episode of great personal and familial importance: her family directly participated in the revolution and she grew up inculcated that the notions of patriotism and liberty were paramount.<sup>128</sup> Rosselli cared deeply about this play, going so far as to write an article about in the periodical *Marzocco*.<sup>129</sup> This last play also chronicles the changes between generations, but does so within the context of political and governmental unrest, showing how macro societal movements effect change on the micro, or personal, level. In brief, the plot centers on Zuane Barbarigo, an elderly Venetian who

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>127</sup> *San Marco* premiered at Milan's *Manzoni* Theater on May 19, 1913.

<sup>128</sup> “Dopo il successo delle due precedenti, ero stata presa dal desiderio d'immergermi più completamente nel passato della mia Venezia. I ricordi della sua gloriosa epopea del '49, che avevano tanto colpito la mia mente infantile per i racconti dei miei genitori che l'avevano vissuta, affluirono di nuovo in me improvvisamente—strano alquanto, in quell'ambiente toscano!” Rosselli, *Memorie*, 134.

<sup>129</sup> Amelia Rosselli, “L'assedio di Venezia sulla scena dialettale,” *Il Marzocco*, April 20, 1913.

is willing to compromise his political integrity for comfort, and his son Alvisè, a dedicated revolutionary who seeks to reclaim the honor of his city from the Austrians. Father and son are surrounded, however, by a large cast of colorful characters whose presence creates echoes of Goldonian comedy within the historical drama.

In *San Marco*, Rosselli's use of dialect has both aesthetic and ethical justifications: "Perché, pensai, il teatro dialettale non dovrebbe anch'esso riflettere i fatti eroici nazionali, quei fatti dei quali fu appunto protagonista il popolo? Si dice un po' troppo che il dialetto si presta soltanto a esprimere piccoli pensieri e piccole passioni."<sup>130</sup> Here Rosselli argues that dialect theater can treat heroic themes as well as quotidian life, and that perhaps some of history's greatest heroes are actually the anonymous citizens who participated in important political events, helping to bring them to a successful conclusion. In many respects, that is the play's central conceit: merging history's grand narratives with the stories of the average families who participated in them, fostering humor and commentary along the way. In her focus on the diverse members of a Venetian family, Rosselli also continues to address the social and familial issues faced by women of the time, and deals with them in a progressive manner. For example, when Alvisè's daughter Lisa is raped by her cousin Ernesto, instead of blaming her or worrying about the family's reputation, Alvisè is horrified and banishes the young man. In doing so, he demonstrates a more enlightened attitude than the stereotypical familial patriarch of the time.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Rosselli, *Memorie*.

<sup>131</sup> "Pochi drammi hanno rappresentato con tanta consapevole tranquillità una dinamica che per quei tempi era fin troppo scabrosa. Amelia aveva già trattato il tema dello stupro in *Anima*, ma per questioni di intreccio non si era mai posto il problema di un eventuale matrimonio riparatore." Amato, "Tragico il tempo, chiaro il dovere," 70.

## CONCLUSION

In many ways, Rosselli's three Venetian plays tie together the most important themes of her literary oeuvre, dramatic and otherwise: feminism, social politics, nationalism, and the dangers of conformism and consumerism in bourgeois society. In treating these themes within the context of her home city of Venice—configured in her work as a symbol of resistance to oppression—she is able to combine her interest in progressive social ideology with her familial passion for, and background in, Italian patriotism. Of her many contributions to Italian culture and politics, her distinct brand of feminism—highly influenced by Anglo-American feminist philosophy as well as European Socialism and secular Judaism—helped to define Italian women's political and cultural organizations and provide a clear voice for liberty and republicanism, both before and after the advent of fascism. She expressed her patriotism through participation in political and social organizations, and through her literary pursuits, one of the few avenues of intellectual expression available to women who were legally disenfranchised from the political life of the country. Even though Italy had suffered greatly, and all three of her sons were killed over the course of the two world wars, Rosselli wrote about the joy of coming back to her home country from her exile in New York: “Nonostante le emozioni, le preoccupazioni, la tristezza per il nostro povero Paese, il ritrovarci tra la *nostra* gente è dolcezza tale che soverchia tutto il resto. E mi pare che lo spirito dei miei Carlo e Nello, e anche del mio Aldo ... sia ora placato nel vederci tornate coi loro figliuoli al *nostro* posto.”<sup>132</sup>

Rosselli's literary and journalistic contributions should not be undervalued. She was an important intellectual, political, and cultural figure of early twentieth-century Italy whose progressive ideals and Mazzinian philosophy not only directly influenced two of the country's

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<sup>132</sup> Letter from Amelia to Gina Raccà (1946), see: Raccà, “Amelia Rosselli: Un tragico destino di donna,” 236.

most famous anti-fascist activists—her sons Carlo and Nello Rosselli—but also lay at the foundation of the many organizations she helped to create. She used this public platform to discuss how women are an integral part of modern society, and in doing so paved the way for woman activists, writers, artisans, and workers to come to the fore. The production of her theatrical works was indeed intertwined with her extensive engagement in political, social, and economic organizations, and it is for this reason—in addition to their artistic merit—that her plays are foundational in understanding theater as a form of feminist praxis. Her works serve as a basis for those women playwrights who, as literary and artistic aesthetics began to change, approached modernism and the post-Pirandellian theatrical landscape with a renewed focus on themes of feminist importance.

## **2. Women, Body and History: Anna Banti's Baroque Heroine of the Mid-Century Italian Stage**

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I consider the theatrical practice of recasting a Baroque-era woman as the protagonist of a modern Italian play, effectively bringing her back to life for a contemporary audience. The chapter is a study of Anna Banti (1895–1985) and her most famous female protagonist, the painter Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656)—a woman who in many ways confronts some of the same challenges as the author herself, despite vast temporal differences. This theatrical process allows Banti to help forge a more inclusive canon that showcases from a feminist perspective the experiences of a previously marginalized and misunderstood artist. Among other topics, Banti addresses the social and societal barriers to women's participation in public and professional life; Gentileschi's familial and sexual relationships, and their connection to her work; and in a self-reflexive sort of way, the struggle of women artists to gain recognition. An analysis of Banti's only play deepens the connections between the discourses of theater and feminism established in Chapter 1. Her emphasis on historical revisionism through theater—while similarly based on progressive ideas of women's participation in society—differs substantially from the focus of Amelia Pincherle Rosselli's *Anima*. Instead of using theater as a lens through which to observe and critique its contemporary political and cultural environs, Banti uses the theater to look backward to what a male-authored history has omitted from its narrative. In looking retrospectively, however, she also projects forward, as the experiences of Artemisia Gentileschi uncannily parallel many of the issues twentieth-century women also faced, and still face today. This phenomenon is particularly striking with regard to women in the public sphere—artists, writers, poets, and activists, in particular—who comprise the principal examples used by Banti in her literary oeuvre.

Banti is one of the most important exponents of Italian modernism, and wrote many novels, short stories, and works of literary criticism. She published actively from 1937 to 1982, and gave interviews until her death in 1985. While *Corte Savella* (1960) is the only play of her long and prolific literary career, it serves as an excellent example of historical revisionism on the modern Italian stage because of the thematic and symbolic resonance of the text, which reprises the story of Artemisia Gentileschi and her trial at the Papal court in Rome. The play is adapted from Banti's own novel *Artemisia* published thirteen years prior and first composed in 1944.<sup>1</sup> In her play, Banti gives voice to one of the first women recognized in her own time as a master painter, a woman whose story, however, was and often still is obfuscated by, and art often judged solely in the light of, the rape she suffered at the hands of her tutor. This choice of subject is not a coincidence, but rather a specific choice on the part of Banti, who comments on the general absence of women's histories in an interview with former student Grazia Livi: "Pensa solo ad Artemisia, o a Lavinia [the painter, Lavinia Fontana]; sono donne che vengono fuori da una storia che per loro non c'è, non è mai stata scritta, anzi le cancella. Tant'è vero che quasi ne muoiono, sí ne muoiono di disperazione."<sup>2</sup>

Banti had a complex relationship with feminist causes, eschewing the label while espousing many of feminism's main themes and concerns in her texts. It should be noted, however, that she resisted labels of all types, not just with regard to feminism. In fact, one of the central themes of her corpus is inherently progressive—the dignity and courage of women—a theme that she explores to its fullest potential in both her novel and play on Artemisia Gentileschi and that dovetails with many of the socio-political goals of feminist movements in

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Banti, *Corte Savella* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> Grazia Livi, *Le lettere del mio nome* (Milano: La Tartaruga, 1991), 139.

the twentieth century. The focus of this chapter, then, is on theater as a tool used by women writers to represent and connect the lives of women past and present. The act of putting center-stage previously disregarded, misrepresented, or undervalued women—and thus contributing to alternate historiographies that specifically take into account the female subject and her experiences—is inherently progressive. An analysis of *Corte Savella*—and in particular its adaptation from novel to play—thus serves as an excellent example for why theater is a uniquely successful vehicle for the reinterpretation of history and the dissemination of feminist themes, independent of the feminist identification of the playwright.

#### LUCIA LOPRESTI

Anna Banti is the penname of Lucia Lopresti, one of the most important exponents of Italian Modernism. She was a writer of novels, short stories, articles, and biographies, as well as an art historian, literary critic, and prodigious translator of Anglophone writers such as Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Jack London, and William Thackeray. Banti was born in Florence but moved to Rome for university where she completed a degree in Art History. There she met and married the influential art critic and professor Roberto Longhi in 1924, and together they founded and co-edited the cultural journal *Paragone*, which published alternating volumes on art and literature, with Longhi editing the former and Banti the latter. After her husband's death in 1970, Banti continued as the editor of the journal, which is still produced to this day. After many years as a published art critic, she began her prolific literary career at age 42 with the semiautobiographical novel *Itinerario di Paolina* (1937).<sup>3</sup> Showing her penchant for self-reflexive narrative, Banti also

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<sup>3</sup> For more biographical information and a brief overview of her works, see Carol M. Lazzaro-Weis, "Anna Banti (Lucia Lopresti)," ed. Gaetana Marrone, *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2007). The only monograph on Banti is the eponymously entitled work by Enza Biagini: Enza Biagini, *Anna Banti* (Milano: Mursia, 1978).

ended her career with an implicitly autobiographical novel, *Un grido lacerante* (1981), which tells the story of a young Roman woman and art historian tasked with carving her own personal and professional identity while living in the shadow of her brilliant professor and husband. Later in her life, Banti stated that she chose to take on a penname because she did not like her given name, and to prove that her success was hers alone, and did not stem from the name-recognition of her husband:

Mi sarebbe piaciuto usare il cognome di mio marito. Ma lui l'aveva già reso grande e non mi sembrava giusto fregiarmene. Il mio vero nome, Lucia Lopresti, non mi piaceva. Non è abbastanza musicale. Anna Banti era una parente della famiglia di mia madre. Una nobildonna molto elegante, molto misteriosa. Da bambina mi aveva incuriosita parecchio. Così divenni Anna Banti. Del resto il nome ce lo facciamo noi.<sup>4</sup>

In a certain sense, Anna Banti the pseudonym can be viewed as a sort of stage name or character that enables the author to approach different modes of narration, such as the self-referential, personal, and historical, without violating her own privacy or explicitly stating her point of view, which is instead left to the interpretation of the reader. This type of masking can also be seen as a theatrical device, one that indeed frames the majority of her writings, in which the non-linear interactions between protagonist, narrator, and temporality function as interpretive keys.

Although Banti is the recipient of many literary awards—including the 1952 Premio Viareggio for the novel *Le donne muoiono*; the 1955 Marzotto for *Allarme sul lago*; the 1957 Veillon for *La monaca di Sciangai*; the 1974 Premio Ceppo for the short story “Tela e cenere”; and the 1982 Premio Antonio Feltrinelli for *Un grido lacerante*—her accomplishments are often reduced by her second-class status as a “woman writer” and the comparative lack of scholarly materials on her works when compared to male authors of the time. She acknowledges this point of frustration in an interview with Petrigani: “Sono citata nelle enciclopedie, sono presente nelle

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<sup>4</sup> Sandra Petrigani, *Le signore della scrittura: interviste* (Milano: Tartaruga, 1984), 101.

antologie. Ma una scrittrice, anche se di successo, è comunque emarginata. La diranno grande fra le altre scrittrici, ma non la equipareranno agli scrittori. È un'usanza diffusa.”<sup>5</sup> Banti's frustration with the inequitable treatment of women in society, and in particular with the predicament of women who seek careers as professional writers and artists, is a prominent theme that runs the course of her entire literary oeuvre.

#### BANTI AND FEMINISM

Banti's relationship to feminism then, both as a political movement and as a set of socio-political themes, is fraught with complexities and contradictions. While she promoted many of its main tenets in her texts—including the dignity and courage of women, and their right to a fulfilling and economically productive career, among others—and crafted her narratives around independent female protagonists who must overcome the barriers to success and happiness perpetuated by a patriarchal society, she avoided the feminist label, explicitly stating her disinterest in being marked as such: “il mio è più una forma di umanesimo che vero e proprio femminismo.”<sup>6</sup> Her identification as humanist, however, did not prevent her from acknowledging and criticizing—in fiction, interviews, and essays—the unequal treatment of women in society.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, she occupied a space familiar to women of the time, who faced professional and personal ostracization for publicly declaring themselves feminists. As Susan Sontag aptly notes

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> In an interview Petriagnani asks Banti: “Ma non Le sembra che le donne abbiano, in una società fatta su misura dell'uomo, tanti problemi in più dei maschi?” Banti replies: “Sì, questo lo credo. E penso anche che questi uomini ne fanno veramente di tutti i colori e che, politicamente, ci stanno portando alla rovina. Forse se ci fossero le donne al potere, le cose andrebbero meglio.” Ibid.

in her essay on Banti's most famous novel *Artemisia* (1947):

Feminism has meant many things; many unnecessary things. It can be defined as a position—about justice and dignity and liberty—to which almost all independent women would adhere if they did not fear the retaliation that accompanies a word with such a sulphurous reputation. Or it can be defined as a position easier to disavow or quarrel with, as it was by Banti (and Arendt and Colette). That version of feminism suggests that there is a war against men, which was anathema to such women; that feminism suggests an avowal of strength, and a denial of the difficulty and the cost for women in being strong (above all, the cost in masculine support and affection); more, it proclaims pride in being a woman, it even affirms the superiority of women—all attitudes that felt alien to the many independent women who were proud of their accomplishments and who knew the sacrifices and the compromises they entailed.<sup>8</sup>

Thus for Banti, to identify as feminist was to some extent foreign, and came with a political and social cost—especially given her place among the Italian literary and cultural elite, a sphere dominated by men. She instead settled on the label of humanist, and felt that her ideals were progressive in regard to women's participation in the social, economic, and political fabric of society, even if she would choose not to describe them feminist as such.

Banti may not have considered herself a feminist, but that does not negate the critic's capacity to read her works in the light of such a theoretical context. As the foundational themes of her corpus show, a preoccupation with women's subjectivity, autonomy, happiness, and memory is a fundamental component of many of her texts.<sup>9</sup> In an essay dedicated to Banti's unique brand of feminism, Elena Belotti comments on the consistent pattern of strong women

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, "A Double Destiny: Susan Sontag Writes about Anna Banti's *Artemisia*," *London Review of Books* 25, no. 18 (2003): 6–9.

<sup>9</sup> Banti's progressive focus is most often realized through the creation of women protagonists who are artists and writers. As Daria Valentini notes: "what constitutes a line of continuity between *Artemisia* and the other female characters in Banti's fiction is indeed their struggle to be acknowledged as subjects capable of artistic creation within specific social parameters, a challenging issue for Banti personally. She explores the image of the woman artist by portraying women musicians, writers and painters." Daria Valentini and Paola Carù, eds., *Beyond Artemisia: Female Subjectivity, History, and Culture in Anna Banti* (Chapel Hill, NC: Annali d'Italianistica, 2003), 4.

protagonists that anchor Banti's novels and stories: "Si possono definire femministi perché narrano la rivolta delle donne contro un destino già preconstituito e segnato fin dalla nascita per l'unica ragione dell'appartenenza di sesso, descrivono esistenze chiuse, limitate, di secondo ordine, oppure la tragedia del talento femminile negato o la differenza del sentire e del vivere femminile."<sup>10</sup> A sample of the works that Belotti considers to have a feminist foundation include selections from *Il coraggio delle donne: Vocazioni indistinte* and *Felicina* (1940), *Artemisia* (1947), *Le donne muoiono* (1948), *Lavinia fuggita* (1950), *Il bastardo* (1953), and *La camicia bruciata* (1973), among others. Moreover, in addition to highlighting the subjectivity of their female characters, these texts do another important job—that of recording women's stories and providing them with institutional memory, something previously missing from the literary and cultural status quo.<sup>11</sup>

One specific way Banti addresses her interest in women's issues is through the historical female character and her fight for recognition, whether as an artist, musician, scholar, or simply as an autonomous person distinct from her male family members. This is precisely the operation at play in both *Artemisia* and *Corte Savella*.<sup>12</sup> By displacing the protagonists from her own time

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<sup>10</sup> Elena Gianni Belotti, "Anna Banti e il femminismo," in *L'opera di Anna Banti: atti del convegno di studi: Firenze, 8-9 maggio 1992*, ed. Enza Biagini (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1997), 111.

<sup>11</sup> Belotti adds: "Le eroine di Banti sono contro la mancanza della memoria del proprio passato, che invece è concessa ai maschi e li consacra all'immoralità, come nel racconto *Le donne muoiono*." Ibid., 112.

<sup>12</sup> Banti has written many historical woman protagonists in addition to Artemisia Gentileschi. In *Lavinia fuggita*, set in Vivaldi's Venetian Republic, Banti tells the story of Lavinia, a young, aspiring composer who works as the choral director in the conservatory of the *Ospedale della Pietà*. In awe of *il maestro* Vivaldi, and not allowed to compose herself, she works in secret and lives in constant fear of being discovered. In an interview, Banti explicitly acknowledges Lavinia's progressive character: "Un racconto che amo moltissimo è *Lavinia Fuggita*, che apre il coraggio delle donne: è un po' femminista anche." Petrigiani, *Le Signore della scrittura*, 106. In *La camicia bruciata*, Banti explores the inner motivation, difficulties, and drive for

period, Banti is able to more acutely portray each woman's struggle for success within the bounds of a patriarchal society which inherently limits it. A consequence of this action is that it holds a mirror up to contemporary society—evidencing its failures with regard to women's inclusion in the public sphere, and their ability to pursue meaningful work—and ultimately shows just how little has changed since the lifetimes of her various literary heroines. In these works, Banti often chooses examples of the “exceptional woman,” the one who must suffer for her passion, to show how gender politics and women's agency are at odds. Artemisia Gentileschi the character, for example, is modeled after many of Banti's antecedent characters. As Anna Nozzoli observes:

Artemisia si inserisce quindi con pieno diritto lungo la linea maestra della tematica bantiana, e se il suo retrocedere nel tempo la differenzia dalla realistica immediatezza degli antecedenti, non per questo ella risulta meno paradigmatica nei confronti dell'assunto ideologico della scrittrice. Il personaggio storico femminile si salda e si rapporta alle figure generate dal tessuto contemporaneo proprio in virtù dell'identico messaggio di cui si fa portatore nel percorso verso la conquista di “una parità di spirito fra i sessi.” Così, nonostante il lucido distacco che nel romanzo del '47 viene a sostituire la trepida adesione sentimentale degli esordi, Artemisia può ben ricapitolare in sé le molteplici eroine da cui rampolla la sua figura, riproponendo nella sua avventura storica il contrasto sempre vivo nell'universo femminile tra realizzazione individuale ed esclusione sociale, tra volontà di liberazione e clausura imposta.<sup>13</sup>

There are many reasons for which Banti may have decided to choose real and fictitious historical women as the subject of her novels and stories: for one, she was a skilled archivist, art historian, and academic; but also, and perhaps even more importantly, by framing the protagonist within a temporally-bounded and somewhat distant past, it is easier to isolate and subsequently represent

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independence of the notorious Marguerite Louse d'Orleans (cousin of Louis XIV), remembered for her resistance to her tyrannical husband Cosimo III de' Medici. The novel, set in Florence in the late 1600s, is lightly inspired by the translation into Italian of Sir Harold Acton's study *The Last of the Medici* (1930), and highlights the noblewoman's struggle for autonomy.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Nozzoli, *Tabù e coscienza: la condizione femminile nella letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1978), 91.

the challenges women artists faced in practicing their craft: “in questo modo le loro vicende si trasformano in una esplicita denuncia della gravità dell’ingiustizia storica, la quale è tuttora presente, sì, ma in forme più attenuate, più sfumate, più mimetiche.”<sup>14</sup> The close connection, then, between the historical woman character and the promulgation of feminist themes is not coincidental. On the contrary, this act of historical revisionism—the telling of women’s stories and experiences, and in doing so preserving their memory—is a fundamental component of her feminist poetics.

In addition to fiction, Banti uses her critical writings of the 1950s and 60s to elucidate her progressive outlook, which is ever-attentive to the status of women’s education, and ability to meaningfully take part in Italy’s economic, cultural, and political life. Her essays “Umanità della Woolf” (1952), and “Responsabilità della donna intellettuale” (1953), among others, echo the sentiment of her oft-cited declaration in the introduction to *Artemisia*, that Gentileschi was “una delle prime donne che sostennero colle parole e colle opere il diritto al lavoro congeniale e a una parità di spirito fra i due sessi.”<sup>15</sup> In the first article, she discusses the crucial need to educate women and girls, and the injustice of their educational disenfranchisement relative to the male population of Italy. Banti uses examples from the fiction and non-fiction of Virginia Woolf—an author whose modernist prose and early feminist positions greatly influenced Banti on both stylistic and thematic levels—to express the barriers women face to artistic production at the professional level. Regarding women’s education, she writes: “è un problema umano che pur le stava a cuore, quello della donna eterna pupilla, della ragazza che, almeno qualche decennio fa, raccattava le briciole di una educazione occasionale, in collegi poveri... i ragazzi si avviano alle

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<sup>14</sup> Belotti, “Anna Banti e il femminismo,” 112.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Banti, *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. Fausta Garavini (Milano: Mondadori, 2013), 245.

professioni liberali, mentre le figliole rimangono trascurate e, occorrendo, sfruttate.”<sup>16</sup> Reprising Woolf’s famous refrain “a room of one’s own,” Banti connects access to education to women’s lack of social, economic, and political autonomy, which she claims is exactly what prevents them from obtaining said “lavoro congeniale” in the context of twentieth-century Italian society.

She repeats the theme of a woman’s right to an education and to take part in the public sphere in “Responsabilità della donna intellettuale,” an excerpt from her speech at the first *Congresso della stampa femminile* in Rome in 1953, published in the collected conference proceedings.<sup>17</sup> In this paper, Banti laments poverty’s toll on the literacy rate and cultural development of women in post-war Italy. If Woolf had been aghast at the condition of poor women in England, Banti asks, what would she think of Italy, where they fare much worse? Banti address her talk to the “scrittrici, maestre, giornaliste, donne di scienza, artiste” in the audience, and assigns them the first task:

la più dura, e anche la più doverosa. La donna che si rivolge, col suo lavoro e col suo esempio, al pubblico, trova spesso nelle sue simili, ancor chiuse nella cerchia tradizionale, una curiosità pronta a diventare interesse, ma condita, bisogna pur dirlo, di qualche sospetto. Questo sospetto bisogna vincerlo col lavoro onesto. Le intellettuali mi intendono: esse sanno bene che nulla le ricompenserà meglio quanto vedere succedere a una curiosità iniziale, l’attenzione, il consenso, la confidenza, la fiducia. La fiducia delle donne: ecco il premio che vorrei promettere a quante oggi sono convenute per dar loro la malleveria a questa impresa.<sup>18</sup>

In this article, Banti’s progressive view of and interest in women’s condition in society takes on a certain level of populism reminiscent of Amelia Pinchere Rosselli. Both women were educated

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<sup>16</sup> Anna Banti, *Opinioni* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1961), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Banti, “Responsabilità della donna intellettuale,” in *Le donne e la cultura*, ed. Sibilla Aleramo (Il Primo Congresso della Stampa Femminile, Rome: Edizioni “Noi donne,” 1953), 89–93.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

members of the upper class, and while Rosselli dedicated more of her writings and community engagement to the plight of working-class women, here Banti also acknowledges the role socio-economic status plays in women's literary and cultural disenfranchisement, and implores intellectuals to acknowledge and tackle this problem.

In these essays Banti explicitly states through non-fiction what her fiction communicates instead through character, plot, and theme: that women are entitled to an education and career; and have the right to join the public sphere and participate in the production of culture, with all the privileges entailed therein. As a character choice, then, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653) furthers Banti's sociopolitical and cultural goals through her status as the first-known woman master painter. Given Banti's preference for the historical female character, her choice to engage with Artemisia's story and paintings is clear. This task, however, would have been much more difficult in the 1940s than it would be today, as significantly less was known about the Baroque painter at that time. According to Mary Garrard, author of the authoritative biography and analysis of Artemisia Gentileschi and her works, Gentileschi was the only known female follower of Caravaggio, and "adapted the bold and dramatic style of Caravaggesque realism to expressive purposes that differed categorically from those of her male contemporaries."<sup>19</sup> Despite her artistic innovation and the possession of a talent equal if not greater than many of her male peers, for over two centuries there was a conspicuous lack of scholarship on her impressive oeuvre.

It was not until the early twentieth century that this situation began to change: according to Garrard, Roberto Longhi's 1916 essay "Gentileschi padre e figlia" was the first serious piece

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<sup>19</sup> Mary D Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.

of scholarship on the Baroque painter.<sup>20</sup> Longhi's article was pioneering in that it was the first to accurately distinguish Artemisia's works from her father Orazio's, provide a detailed analysis of her artistic corpus (including a contextual overview of each work's commission and location), and situate her paintings within the context of Caravaggism. Longhi, however, did not have an easy task, due primarily to the paucity of critical resources on Gentileschi's paintings and biographical information. Longhi was thus beholden to a few early sources: two from the seventeenth century, another from the nineteenth, all three woefully incomplete and inadequate.<sup>21</sup> As late as the 1960s—after Banti had already written both *Artemisia* and *Corte Savella*—the primary sources on Gentileschi remained her husband's article and a short entry by Hermann Voss.<sup>22</sup> While scholarship on Gentileschi has greatly expanded since the late 1960s, Banti's understanding of her Baroque heroine would have been determined by the sources available in the 1940s and 50s: the transcript of Artemisia's rape trial; Longhi's article and the works that preceded it; and a few other archival resources such as correspondence and official documents.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the two primary historical points of reference for *Corte Savella*—the concern of this

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<sup>20</sup> Roberto Longhi, "Gentileschi, padre e figlia," *L'arte*, 1916, 245–314.

<sup>21</sup> Giovanni Baglione dedicated one sentence to Gentileschi at the end of his biography of her father in his *Le vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti. Da pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572 in fino a' tempi di papa Urbino Ottavio nel 1642* (1642). Filippo Baldinucci included four pages on Artemisia in *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* (1681). Jumping to the nineteenth century, Alessandro da Morrona expanded upon the previous texts, but was constrained by their brevity: *Pisa illustrata nelle arti del disegno* (1812).

<sup>22</sup> Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Banti herself is, in fact, responsible for the resurgence of interest in Artemisia Gentileschi (both in literature and art history) in the second half of the twentieth century. Specifically, the translation of her novel into English in 1988 has served as a catalyst for scholarly research on baroque painter, who has since been cast as a feminist hero of sorts. Moreover, Banti's fictional interpretation is also the foundation of a movement of spin-offs and additional fictional adaptations of the painter's story.

chapter—are Banti’s novel (and all the research that went into its composition), and the transcript of the rape trial, which Banti was able to access in Rome’s *Archivio di stato*.<sup>24</sup>

#### THE ETHICS AND STYLE OF ADAPTING NOVEL TO PLAY

The answer to the critical question this chapter poses—why rewrite a novel in the form of a play?—begins with delineating the key differences between the two texts, whose publication is separated by thirteen years and the very socially, politically, and economically influential decade of the 1950s. *Artemisia* the novel was first published in 1947 and *Corte Savella* in 1960, both by the Milanese publisher Mondadori.<sup>25</sup> In the intervening years Banti made a conscious decision to continue studying Artemisia Gentileschi’s life, works, and their meaning, both in the contexts of the Baroque and twentieth-century Italy. This second time, however, she chose to represent her explorations on the stage. This section establishes why this is the case; what societal or cultural shifts in the intervening decade may have influenced her decision; and what its implications are for the formation of a feminist historiography through theater.<sup>26</sup> In short, what is the relationship

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<sup>24</sup> The lack of critical resources on Gentileschi also had an effect on Banti’s works. *Artemisia*’s real birthday, for example, was not discovered until 1968 and thus is incorrect in Banti’s play and novel. The correct date—July 8, 1593—was discovered by R. Ward Bissell after an intensive archival investigation that resulted in her original birth certificate. The incorrect date was propagated for over two centuries by an error on the part of Orazio, who in the trial testimony of 1612 erroneously noted that his daughter was 15 instead of 18. See Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 490.

<sup>25</sup> The version of the novel consulted here is included in the Meridiani collection of Banti’s works: Banti, *Romanzi e racconti*. The novel was translated into English as Anna Banti, *Artemisia*, trans. Shirley D’Ardia Caracciolo (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Information from the *Fondazione Mondadori* compiled by Carmela Pierini reveals the context of institutional sexism during the period in which Banti was publishing. See Carmela Pierini, ed., “Anna Banti: oltre ‘quella malinconica solitudine,’” *Quanto Basta Online*, May 2011, [http://www.fondazionemondadori.it/qb/index.php?issue\\_id=54](http://www.fondazionemondadori.it/qb/index.php?issue_id=54).

<sup>26</sup> One of the most significant differences between the novel and play is extra-textual: the discrepancy in the amount and depth of scholarship dedicated to each work varies enormously.

between historically revisionist narrative and writing for the stage?

Major stylistic, formal, and thematic differences exist between the two works, some more discernable than others. They are related through subject matter but little else, as the play is “un’opera del tutto nuova e dipendente dal romanzo solo per un comune impulso d’interesse e di partecipazione alle sorti del personaggio.”<sup>27</sup> *Artemisia* the novel, for example, features a complex relationship between the narrator and protagonist, and its temporal structure oscillates between Banti’s Florence of 1944—which along with her first manuscript of the novel was destroyed by the Nazi bombardments—and Artemisia’s Italy of the early 1600s. Intricate narration and continual switches of narrator and interlocutor comprise, paradoxically, the structural foundation of the novel. The narration alternates frequently between a dialogic first person, the subject of which is ever-changing, and a more traditional third person narration. In her comparative study of Banti’s and Woolf’s grammar, critic Lucia Boldrini comments on the complexity of the novel:

The reconstruction—of *Artemisia* the manuscript, of Artemisia the historical figure and wronged exceptional woman, and of the narrator-Banti herself after the physical trauma and destruction of war—thus takes place through this reciprocal, relational dialogic nature of the narrative representation, the weaving in and out of the first and third person, often also addressing each other in the second, as if the unsettling, traumatic experience that each had undergone had destabilized the subject and broken it into myriad fragments to be reconstructed.<sup>28</sup>

Boldrini links this narrative confusion to Banti’s thematic project—the reconstruction of a historical figure who serves not just as an example of a woman artist, but also as a repository, a

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The novel is the subject of innumerable books, chapters, articles, and dissertations—both in English and Italian, as well as other languages—whereas the play is scarcely mentioned as a footnote, even in works of Italian criticism. It is often listed in Encyclopedia entries as one of her publications, and is at times mentioned in articles, however, it is described more as an afterthought rather than as a work of great thematic importance to Banti’s corpus.

<sup>27</sup> Luigi Baldacci, “*Corte Savella*,” *Letteratura* VIII, no. 46–48 (1960): 243.

<sup>28</sup> Lucia Boldrini, “Anna Banti and Virginia Woolf: A Grammar of Responsibility,” *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* 10 (2009): 11.

figure onto which she can project her own hopes, frustrations, and fears.

The play, on the other hand, is clearly dialogic—each character speaking for him or herself—and firmly rooted in time, with the three acts taking place in 1610, 1611, and 1620, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, and as is indicated by the title, *Corte Savella* focuses specifically on Artemisia's experience of the rape trial, with the whole second act (the longest in the play, both in terms of pages and scenes) dedicated to its proceedings. This act dramatizes the institutional battles women face while attempting to be heard, understood, or believed by those in power—something many of Banti's female protagonists confront, regardless of the historical period in which the work is set. Many of these protagonists are, in fact, artists, musicians, or writers of some sort—emphasizing further the extent to which Banti was focused on women's professional success, and hinting at the self-reflexive quality with which many of her works are imbued.<sup>30</sup> The novel, instead, is more focused on the oscillating relationship between narrator and protagonist, who undergo a mutual journal of self-discovery.

Geographically, the novel covers more terrain—charting Artemisia's travels among Rome, Naples, Florence, and England—and is more faithful to the few firm biographical details we know of her life than the play, which only includes episodes in Rome and Florence. It is also a more introspective text, and focuses on the emotional state of being of Artemisia the protagonist and narrator; and Banti the character and narrator. While this relationship results in a non-verisimilar integration of the text's dual temporal dimensions, it succeeds in tying together the needs of the two women—both of whom are engaged in a journey of artistic production and

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<sup>29</sup> While more temporally consistent than the novel, Banti chooses not to maintain the three dramatic unities in her play.

<sup>30</sup> This is particularly true of Agnese, protagonist of the ostensibly autobiographical *Un grido lacerante*.

recognition in the context of societies that do not value the professional contributions of women artists. The novel also addresses Artemisia's strained relationship with her daughter Porziella, who does not reciprocate her mother's affections, disdains her profession, and is determined to be as different as possible from Artemisia, who she sees as a societal outcast due to her choice of work.<sup>31</sup> While the play indeed makes note of Artemisia's motherless childhood on multiple occasions, it never specifically addresses her own relationship with motherhood, nor references the lives of her children. In the play, the vision of Artemisia as a mother is completely erased.

The novel also articulates a notably different relationship between Artemisia and her husband Antonio Stiattesi, an ambulatory Roman merchant. In the first text, she is distraught when Antonio decides to abandon their happy marriage (after a long period of absence from one another, he locates Artemisia in Florence and asks her for an annulment, having met another woman), and looks back happily on their time together at his family's home in Rome, where she felt at peace. In the play, however, Artemisia is explicit in her desire not to wed, and furious at her father for arranging their wedding without her knowledge or consent in Act I—she even comments that she feels treated no better than an animal, the last to know of her fate.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, Antonio's visit to Florence in the play is quite the opposite in both tenor and

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<sup>31</sup> According to baptismal records, Artemisia Gentileschi and Pierantonio Stiattesi had four children: Giovanni Battista (1613), Cristofano (1615), Prudenzia (1617), and Lisabella (1618). By 1621, however, only Prudenzia (named for her maternal grandmother, and who also appears as Palmira on census forms) was still alive. Although evidence only exists in Artemisia's correspondence with various patrons, it appears that Prudenzia was also a painter, however none of her works have been identified. For a detailed overview of the historical documentation pertaining to Artemisia's children, see R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 158–61.

<sup>32</sup> “Ahimè, che anche da mio padre son stimata peggio che una bestia! Così si marita una creatura? Ho ancora le mani stroppiate dai sibili e mi volete mettere l'anello? [...] Io non lo voglio [...] Cacciatemi in un sottoscala, in una grotta, il pane me lo guadagnerò col mio lavoro!” Banti, *Corte Savella*, 108.

purpose from the novel. Instead of attempting to end their relationship like in the novel, in the penultimate scene of Act III Antonio begs her to join him in Rome so that they may attempt to have a normal life together, to allow him to care for her, so that she may “vivere per un po’ di tempo come una donna qualunque, con una casa, un marito, dei figlioli... Poi, se non vi piace...”<sup>33</sup> Artemisia refuses his offer, however, admonishes his lack of understanding of the role painting plays in her life, and chooses instead to carry on in solitude, in honor of both her career and her love for the late Caravaggio.

In fact, it is only in the play that Banti addresses Artemisia’s ardent love for the famed painter, and her passion plays a large role in the unfurling of the dramatic action: “questa nuova componente rende completamente diversi dramma e romanzo, specie per la funzione altamente drammatica che assume nell’azione. La notizia della morte del Caravaggio... costituisce infatti la causa dell’*aveuglement* di Artemisia; la giovane, stordita dal dolore, si lascerà facilmente trascinare dalle ingannevoli insidie di Agostino Tassi.”<sup>34</sup> Caravaggio’s disembodied “presence” in the play is more than just a tawdry attempt at romance in order to liven up the script. Caravaggio is to Artemisia as Beatrice is to Dante, only more so: a guide, a source of inspiration and fortitude, a model. Artemisia’s adoration, however, stems from the glory of his art, not from a notion of idealized, passive physical and moral beauty. Artemisia loves the idea of him, his artistic production, what he represents, more than the physical man as such, whom she has never actually met and has only seen once at a distance. In a review of *Corte Savella*’s 1963 premiere at the Teatro Stabile di Genova, theater critic Raul Radice identifies the importance of Artemisia’s love for Caravaggio:

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>34</sup> Biagini, *Anna Banti*, 69–70.

La Banti ha immaginato che il solo amore di Artemisia, l'amore totale, tipico dell'adolescenza, abbia avuto per oggetto il Caravaggio, mai avvicinato e appena intravisto, la notizia della cui morte giunge improvvisa alla ragazza, come una percossa. Artemisia, insomma, si riconosce in quel pittore rivoluzionario e da lui acquista coscienza di sé, del diritto al proprio lavoro, anzi all'arte dalla quale si sente chiamata, e alla propria indipendenza.<sup>35</sup>

Her two passions, then, Caravaggio and painting, are actually one and the same: for Artemisia, eking out a living by her own brush, and honoring Caravaggio's legacy are identical acts.

Ultimately, Caravaggio's invocation in the play as Artemisia's eternal love interest is a metonym of her commitment to her own artistic career—a vocation which, as we see in Act III, prohibits her from building a life with Antonio. She has not the time nor dedication to spare. Thus by omitting Artemisia's experience of motherhood and substituting her love of Antonio in the novel for Caravaggio in the play, Banti fashions a dramatic heroine whose sole focus is the promulgation of her art.

While Antonio's offer to join him is tempting—a sentiment Artemisia admits to her friend and fellow artist Arcangela at the end of Act III—she could not in good faith accept, knowing that the traditions of marriage and her work as an artist are, at their core, in conflict with one another: “È una proposta onorevole, solo mi dispiace che abbiate perduto il vostro tempo [...] Insomma, vi siete scoperto, perché una donna qualunque non è fatta per farsi servire, come dicevate, ma è quieta, casalinga, di buonumore, servizievole, l'opposto di quel che sono.”<sup>36</sup> Here Artemisia articulates a key theme of the play, an idea that Banti in fact weaves throughout much of her literary corpus: women who dedicate themselves to producing art, whether it be painting, poetry, or music, render themselves incompatible with, or outside the bounds of, social

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<sup>35</sup> Raul Radice, “Con *Corte Savella* di Anna Banti aperta la stagione dello Stabile di Genova,” *Corriere della Sera*, October 5, 1963.

<sup>36</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 151.

and romantic relationships as structured in a patriarchal society. Banti outlines two choices for Artemisia: on one hand, marriage and a life of relative comfort and companionship; or solitude and a life on the margins of society on the other. She renders this choice difficult—perhaps more so than in her other texts that deal with the same dichotomy—by adding an element of romance and suspense to the situation: Antonio tells Artemisia that he has reserved a spot for her to join him on the last Rome-bound coach of the day, and that he will wait for her until the very last possible moment. The romantic potential of this moment quickly dissipates, however, when in the last lines of the play, Artemisia describes to Arcangela her dehumanizing and tempestuous experiences with love and marriage:

ARCANGELA: Perché resistere, Artemisia? Siete giovane e non è peccato farsi amare dal proprio marito. Anzi è il dovere.

ARTEMISIA: È peccato non ricambiarlo e per me sarebbe peccato doppio perché mi conosco e so che mai muterò sentimenti. E poi che so io dell'amore? La violenza, il disgusto, la rassegnazione, la vergogna. Fatemi ascoltare le parole di un innamorato fedele.

ARCANGELA: Ora mi pare che non dovrei, Artemisia, e che ne avrò rimorso. Pensateci, un marito non si trova così facilmente e il sacramento bisogna rispettarlo...

ARTEMISIA: Avete detto la parola giusta. Per rispettarlo meglio io vivrò sola, se vuoi mi aiutate.

ARCANGELA: (*cavandosi dal seno la lettera*) Come volete, allora. Guardate che bella scrittura! (*bacia il foglio e comincia a leggere*): "Dilettissima mia."

ARTEMISIA: (*ripetendo a basse voce*) Dilettissima mia...

*Sipario*<sup>37</sup>

The curtain thus falls to Artemisia's resignation, and with it, an explicit condemnation of her treatment at the hands of the men in her life—Orazio, her father; Antonio, her husband; and Tassi, her rapist—each of whom played a different role in the subjugation against which she spent her whole life fighting. Radice recognizes the connection between this treatment and Artemisia's perennial solitude, one of the core themes of the play. "È un dramma di solitudine,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 157.

sebbene su questa parola occorra intendersi,” he writes, “la sua solitudine è frutto di una emancipazione nella quale (e questo è motivo che nelle narrazioni della Banti appare con frequenza) si ravvisa una segreta, istintiva ribellione alla sudditanza del maschio.”<sup>38</sup> While Radice is correct in his observation that the solitude of Banti’s female protagonists is often a precondition of their conflict with male authority, he is incorrect in attributing it to some ill-defined, mysterious female “instinct” for rebellion. As we shall see in *Corte Savella*—and as is the case in Banti’s other fictional works—her women protagonists purposefully fight male hegemony, and are highly aware of their actions, decisions, and desired outcomes.

Outlining the principal differences between the novel and play begets an additional inquiry, one without a clear answer: why would Banti make use of certain historical elements in the novel, only to leave some of them out in the play? Banti makes no mention of this in the only interview, published in *La fiera letteraria* in 1957, in which she discusses the transposition of novel to play. Perhaps Banti leaves out certain details from the play that are featured in the novel—Artemisia’s children, her happy episode in Rome with Antonio, for example—in order to fashion a dramatic heroine whose single focus is her passion for painting. By stripping away some of the biographical details, and fostering the protagonist’s solitude, there is less to detract from Artemisia’s dedication to her art. She thus becomes an exemplary woman, one with a single objective. There is, to a certain extent, a Baroque aesthetic at play in this operation: Banti chooses to shine a direct light on her work as an artist, which in turn creates a new, more empathic and progressive way to talk about and remember Gentileschi. She is not only a victim of rape—as the historical narrative often mentions first—but also a master artist. There is a relationship, moreover, between Artemisia’s isolation, artistic production, and the conjuring of

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<sup>38</sup> Radice, “Con *Corte Savella* di Anna Banti aperta la stagione dello Stabile di Genova.”

Baroque style:

C'è nel personaggio teatrale nel quale la Banti scrupolosamente rispetta la verità storica—vorremmo dire la relatività di fronte alla storia—un'effusione di canto, talora, che ci richiama alla mente il grande melodramma secentesco: Monteverdi e Cavalli: è proprio la relatività storica del personaggio che si accende in poesia, e in Artemisia si riconosce l'eroina, come in Arianna, come in Didone. E questo a sottolineare la sua solitudine, a dare spicco all'accento e alla voce... La sua verità più profonda è tutta in quel suo coraggio di andare avanti nonostante tutto: nel contrapporre la propria voce disperata e pur ferma ai fatti che la circondano.<sup>39</sup>

The decision to purposefully pair down biographical details in order to project a certain image of the theatrical heroine contributes to the play's feminist message: everything except for painting is ancillary, even if the result is a life of solitude. Artemisia's last conversation with Antonio confirms this supposition: "Che donna son io? Non lo so, so che soltanto nella pittura trovo la mia pace, e anche la mia casa e la mia famiglia."<sup>40</sup> Regardless of her reason, Banti's choice to pair down the biographical details of the play is effective in fostering a theatrical heroine whose dedication to her art is absolute. It consequently provides for the viewer what Baldacci terms "una chiave più essenziale del carattere della donna e insieme il segreto del suo destino."<sup>41</sup> The key difference, then, between Banti's novel and play is the story that each text chooses to tell. In the first, Banti honors the life and works of Artemisia Gentileschi, and together they undergo a reciprocal artistic exchange in which the character finds her author, the author her story, and both come to terms with the historical exigencies of their respective time periods, with particular regard for the experiences of women artists.<sup>42</sup> In the play, Banti instead shines a spotlight on the

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<sup>39</sup> Baldacci, "*Corte Savella*," 245.

<sup>40</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 151.

<sup>41</sup> Baldacci, "*Corte Savella*," 243.

<sup>42</sup> "In un'affascinante scomposizione di piani, nasce il libro di *Artemisia*: biografia, romanzo, confessione, diario, storia di un personaggio che ha trovato il suo autore, e che nell'autore liricamente consuma il suo dramma." Leonardo Sciascia, "Artemisia, angelo con le ali," *Orazio*:

injustices visited against Artemisia and her ability to persevere in spite of them. In doing so, she rewrites the story of one of Italy's first professional female artists—and thus produces a history that showcases her artistic achievement, virtuosity, and dedication.

#### FOSTERING A FEMINIST VERISIMILAR

In both the novel and the play, Banti transforms Artemisia Gentileschi from the little-known historical figure into an idealized figure, the embodiment of female resistance to the patriarchal order. In this transformation, Banti engages in a dual operation that is to a certain extent, incongruent: on the one hand she praises Artemisia's dedication to painting what is real—*il naturale*—the sinew and blood of Holofernes' decapitated body, for example; on the other hand, she does not simply fill in the gaps of Gentileschi's life that are missing from the archival record, she fashions an entire character, creating a new life out of the remnants of a historical figure.

For Banti, however, the “fictional” Artemisia Gentileschi is in many ways more truthful than the images of her that have been transmitted officially by history, literature, and art; and the incomplete biographical and archival records. She is less concerned with upholding some idealized notion of objective historical truth—a problematic notion in its own right—than with fostering truthfulness in the telling of Artemisia's story. This is not a question of negating accuracy or denying the historical record, but rather, of acknowledging the flaws, gaps, and inconsistencies inherent in historiographical discourse that prevent it from adequately representing the experiences of subaltern groups, and of women in particular. Banti is indeed faithful to the idea of Artemisia that she has acquired through her own intensive archival research, but she fictionalizes her character both to create a dynamic vision of the young woman

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*Diario di Roma* IV, no. 2 (1952): 9–10.

and to communicate her political, economic, and socio-cultural agenda—one that, as we shall see, shines light on twentieth-century Italian society through the lens of the Baroque.

The desire to represent empathically and purposefully Artemisia's story is directly related to the question of genre. One answer to the question "why rewrite a novel in the form of a play?"—perhaps the key answer—is that a dramatic representation can do justice to the life and experiences of Artemisia in a way that the novel, trial transcript, or other historical documents cannot. Banti justifies creating a dramatic version of her previously-published novel by invoking the *verosimile*, positing that theater, compared to other literary modes, is more capable of fulfilling the aesthetic and moral dimensions of the concept. She adds her own definition and use of the *verosimile* to the long history of its implementation in the Italian literary panorama of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, evidenced by writers such as Manzoni, among others.<sup>43</sup> Banti opens her play with an admonition that clarifies her use of theatrical discourse as a tool with which to bring immediacy and verisimilitude to Artemisia as a historical subject with an important story to tell. In it, she acknowledges that writers have often used theater to recast previously written stories, but that it is considerably more rare for an author to take his or her own work and repurpose it into a play. Thus, she feels the need to provide her reader/viewer a justification, and the principal theme of this justification is authenticity. She explains that what she imagines or thinks happened during the lifetime of Artemisia Gentileschi comes closer to a

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<sup>43</sup> Banti uses Manzoni as a springboard for her critical discussion of *il verosimile*. She writes multiple essays on the author, including "Manzoni e noi," and "Romanzo e romanzo storico." Both essays are included in the collection of her literary criticism, *Opinioni* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1961), and were written in 1951 and 1956, respectively—between her composition of *Artemisia* and *Corte Savella*. In these essays she discusses whether or not the *fatto inventato* should take precedence over Manzoni's preferred *fatto avvenuto* in constructing a historical narrative: "La sua difesa ostinata del fatto avvenuto contro le insidie del fatto inventato, a tutto scapito dei diritti appena intravisti del fatto supposto, rattrista chi ricorda quel suo eccezionale rilievo: 'il verosimile è un vero... veduto dalla mente per sempre, o per parlar con più precisione, irrevocabilmente'" Ibid., 40.

real history of her life than the compilation of the scant factual evidence we possess today—all of which has been left to us by chance, coincidentally, as a circumstance of a history which, furthermore, has been written predominantly by men:

Le mie ragioni sono quelle di chi, raccontando un fatto non inventato ma realmente accaduto (storico e di cronaca poco importa) vien colto dallo scrupolo di aver sommerso sotto il flusso narrativo le punte più icastiche dell'azione e dei caratteri che ne formarono il nodo. In altri termini: le cose andarono così e così, ma bastava un'inezia perché procedessero in tutt'altro modo: e lo sanno bene coloro che ne son stati responsabili e ne hanno subito e patito le conseguenze. Di qui [...] l'intervento di ipotesi dirette a raggiungere quel "verosimile" spesso più intimamente vero di una realtà amputata e soffocata dalle mani goffe del caso: ipotesi che, all'atto di formularsi, reclamano modi di espressioni più o meno evasivi, più o meno concisi e rapidi. Così può avvenire che i contorni di figure e azioni veduti dapprima a distanza e in un vasto panorama, precipitino a un tratto in una concitazione che esige la parola diretta, l'aria mossa da corpi vivi. Ed ecco la tentazione teatrale affacciarsi proponendo gesti tanto più attuali quanto più costanti, voci con cadenze e accenti precisi, la ripetizione, insomma, di quel che accadde ieri o trecento anni fa.<sup>44</sup>

The live voice of her protagonist on the stage, she argues, whose screams of pain seemed almost palpable from the court transcripts, were in reality too detached and distant when retold in the form of a novel, as if filtered through a sieve—hence the decision to employ theater, to create a sense of proximity, a continuity between the events of 300 years ago and the present time. Furthermore, the clumsiness and randomness inherent to historical documentation necessitates a more creative, thoughtful approach to its narration: one that gives space to the *fatto supposto* or *inventato* in addition to the *fatto avvenuto*, which in turn allows for the representation of alternate voices. If the evidence of a life or event we are left with is purely coincidental—some structures, books, works of art are destroyed, others survive; documentation can only be completed by those who are literate and of means—then such “evidence” is somewhat suspect, as its existence due partially to chance.

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<sup>44</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 10.

Banti, therefore, posits that *il verosimile* is a more authentic aesthetic by which to guide literary production than *il vero*. As critic Luigi Baldacci notes in his 1960 review of *Corte*

*Savella*:

*Artemisia* e questa *Corte Savella* non sono, in senso stretto, né un romanzo né un dramma storico. Assai più di quel che Artemisia disse o fece sulla base del documento, vale per la scrittrice quel che Artemisia non poteva non dire o non fare. Il verosimile ha assai più autorità e valore del vero; poiché nel verosimile il vero si spoglia dell'elemento accidentale, estrinseco, documentario appunto, e diventa poeticamente necessario.<sup>45</sup>

Considering that the few documented details of Artemisia's life are incomplete and inadequate, Banti takes it upon herself to fill in the remainder through educated and imaginative conjecture, using and extrapolating from sources such as the transcript from the rape trial and Longhi's 1916 article, among others. To this end, Banti ventures beyond Manzoni's conception of the *verosimile* employed in *I promessi sposi*, in which his fictional protagonists Renzo and Lucia stand in for the lower-class everyman and woman of 1620s Lombardy. While Manzoni uses historical documentation, such as accounts of Lombard life in the early 1600s, to create a "typical" story, Banti uses the same kind of historical antecedents to expand upon and reanimate a specific story. Simply put, Manzoni's novel is invention based on historical observations, crafted in such a way as to appear true; Banti's play is a true but incomplete story, crafted in such a way as to appear even more true and complete.

One strategy Banti uses to foster dramatic realism is to identify each character by his or her regional accent. In her list of *dramatis personae*, for example, she differentiates between romano, romano-abruzzese, fiorentino, veneto, livornese, and romagnolo accents—just to name a few. This choice is historical as well as linguistic: "mancando in Italia, nel Seicento come oggi, una koinè linguistica del parlato, ho creduto necessario cercare la verisimiglianza dei singoli

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<sup>45</sup> Baldacci, "*Corte Savella*," 244.

personaggi in una struttura dei loro interventi appoggiata alle diverse cadenze regionali.”<sup>46</sup> To this end, she takes full advantage of the theater’s expressive capabilities—including the physicality of the voice—to create realistic characters.<sup>47</sup> Her reason for this choice is not only aesthetic: she states in her preface that “voci con cadenze e accenti precisi” generate a greater sense of realism.<sup>48</sup>

Dedication to the aesthetic of what could be termed a “feminist verisimilar” is why Banti chooses to bring Artemisia back to life in flesh and blood on the stage. Through the immediacy of the theater—including the voices and bodies that are a fundamental aspect of the medium—she is able to foster greater authenticity, and produce a historical narrative more attentive to the vicissitudes of Artemisia’s lived experiences. The transposition from novel to play, however, is seldom addressed by critics, and when discussed, is often viewed as a simple reprisal of the novel’s main events on the stage. Rarely is this project addressed in terms of medium—a specific

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<sup>46</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> As Tiberia De Matteis adds: “Il personaggio può riappropriarsi della sua voce viva raccontando senza intermediari la sua tragica esistenza e ripetendola sul palcoscenico. Il dialogo a due del romanzo è superato dalla presenza in scena dei veri protagonisti della storia di Artemisia.” Tiberia De Matteis, “Banti e De Cespedes: due narratrici prestate al teatro,” in *Il puro e l’impuro*, ed. Franca Angelini (Roma: Bulzoni, 1998), 122.

<sup>48</sup> Radice sees this project as a fundamental limit: “Banti non ha esitato a conferire a ogni personaggio la lingua propria della sua origine. Il pubblico è così invitato ad ascoltare una successione di brevi saggi linguistici derivati dalle maggiori città e regioni italiane... il risultato [è] di far sembrare dialettale un dramma che non lo è, e al contrario si propone di non esserlo. Questi sono gli inganni del naturalismo applicato al teatro. La verità puntualmente riprodotta si riduce e si falsifica.” Radice, “Con *Corte Savella* di Anna Banti aperta la stagione dello Stabile di Genova.” Some critics, including Emilio Cecchi, do not agree with Radice’s assessment of Banti’s use of dialect: “Le coloriture dialettali, quando discrete sono d’efficacia infallibile.” Emilio Cecchi, “*Corte Savella*,” *Il Corriere Della Sera*, July 12, 1960. See also Carlo Terron—a contemporary playwright of Banti’s—who concluded that her use of regional accents was a “lodevole, intelligente e arduo tentativo critico alla ricerca di un non contingente strumento espressivo di verità; ma che, però, all’atto pratico, si risolve in un risultato semplicistico e approssimativo, solo pittoresco.” Carlo Terron, “*Corte Savella*,” *Tempo*, no. 43 (October 26, 1963): 101.

formal choice on the part of the author that brings with it a new set of thematic, aesthetic, and moral potentialities. The paucity of critical acknowledgement of this phenomenon is not for lack of clues as to Banti's reasoning, for in addition to her play's *avvertenza*, she directly discusses this transposition in a 1957 interview with *La fiera letteraria*, shortly before *Corte Savella* was published. The interview is tellingly entitled "Artemisia dalla narrativa al teatro," and this excerpt clearly states why Banti sees the passage from novel to theater as a logical progression, both artistically and with regard to the production of meaning:

Il sussurro dei personaggi, immaginari o storici che siano, è spesso assillante e dà batticuore. Cosa dicono? Per accostare meglio l'orecchio alla loro bocca senza contorni, avviene che il romanziere possa pensare al teatro... Nel mio caso (o meglio, nel caso di Artemisia) l'istanza della protagonista era addirittura ossessiva e ne è prova la necessità da me sentita di ricostituire le pagine già scritte che la rievocano per obbedire al suo desiderio di vita e di ricordo... La figura storica di Artemisia Gentileschi e di chi le stava intorno, in un tempo risentito e veemente come i primi del Seicento, son fin troppo documentate e ricostruibili. Del processo di violenza di cui essa fu protagonista e vittima rimangono minuziosi verbali che fanno addirittura "tranche de vie" e registrano atteggiamenti, timori, proteste, astuzie, menzogne, che paiono cose d'oggi. Tali documenti, che il tessuto narrativo del romanzo aveva come velati e dati per cognitivi, mi son rimasti, per così dire, sulla punta della lingua, quasi a esprimere una domanda. E quale risposta più esplicita di una esposizione teatrale? Soltanto in essa era possibile recuperare tutto quel che il romanzo aveva trascurato e far risuonare al naturale quelle voci sepolte da tre secoli. Mi è parso che ne valesse la pena.<sup>49</sup>

Here, in a manner similar to the introduction to her play, but perhaps more broadly, Banti enumerates the features of theater that enable its efficacy: voices, bodies, and immediacy, among others. Indeed, the subsequent analysis of *Corte Savella* reveals how these elements of theatrical discourse and performance are essential in its function as a particularly propitious conduit of meaning and critique, on both micro and macro levels, and with particular regard to women's participation and treatment in Italian society. Moreover, theater is the means by which Banti can

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Banti, "Artemisia dalla narrativa al teatro," *La fiera letteraria* XII, no. 46 (November 17, 1957): 1–2.

best connect wrongs past—Artemisia’s inability to achieve justice at the Savella Court, and the “atteggiamenti, timori, proteste, astuzie, menzogne” to which she was subjected—to the status of women in postwar, 1950s Italy: a decade in which women’s juridical equality, while technically codified by law, had yet to yield meaningful economic, political, or socio-cultural societal changes, or reform traditional gender roles and their subsequent division of labor.<sup>50</sup>

#### STAGING *CORTE SAVELLA*

Part of deciphering the play’s importance to Banti’s entire oeuvre, its relationship to *Artemisia* the novel, and its status as an artistic work with political ramifications, comes from contextualizing its relative critical and commercial failure. In many ways, *Corte Savella* shows Banti to be significantly ahead of her time with regard to the prevailing aesthetics and tastes of both the theater-going public and dramatic critical apparatus of Italy in the early 1960s. At its core, the play is violent, uncomfortable, and unhappy: there is the set-up and betrayal of a young woman by both her supposed guardian and father’s friend; the frustration of an unfair trial; explicit scenes of torture; a portrait of unbecoming and violent behavior on the part of aristocratic women; and no joyful or clear-cut ending. These avant-garde elements are connected through the point of view of a young woman wronged in every way—personally, physically, institutionally, professionally—and this female-centric lens forces the characters in the play, and thus the audience as well, to confront, and perhaps even to question, the morality and righteousness of patriarchal society. Furthermore, the play does not isolate the Baroque as a uniquely unjust or violent period: it uncannily holds up a mirror to contemporary society. The

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<sup>50</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the position of women in Italian society from Unification to World War II, see Willson, *Gender, Family, and Sexuality*. For the period spanning World War II to the 1960s, see Penelope Morris, ed., *Women in Italy, 1945–1960: An Interdisciplinary Study* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

events of the play may seem distant, but in reality, many of the issues present in the play—the ability to seek justice against rape; the possibility to participate in public life given the politics of gender relations; and the economic and social parity of women—plagued the Italy of 1960 as well as 1660. Taken all together, it makes for quite the disheartening evening at the theater, particularly for an audience of the early 1960s. Furthermore, at the beginning of the decade, there were few, if any, antecedents for this type of violent, difficult drama being produced on the stage.<sup>51</sup> Violence and cruelty, however, are not the only idiosyncrasies of *Corte Savella*. As a hybrid text—part historical drama, part recreation, part transformation—it has no clear predecessor text. As Biagini notes: “il dramma novecentesco, così intriso di assurdo—e pensiamo a Pirandello, Ionesco, Giraudoux, Brecht—non poteva servire da schema ad una situazione drammatica con fondamento storico (come le ‘tragedie romane’ del Seicento francese) e che presenta, soprattutto, una linea di tensione affatto diversa dai modelli drammatici attuali.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> While Antonin Artaud’s “Theater of Cruelty” was popular at the time in France, by 1960 it had not yet crossed the Italian border in any significant or diffused way. Interestingly, in 1935 Artaud published and staged an adaptation of Percy Shelley’s tragedy *The Cenci*, centered on the infamous Italian noble family of the late 1500s. Unlike his antecedent, Artaud’s production was a flop, due in no small part to its graphic and disturbing imagery. It was performed only 17 times before closing. It is not certain if Banti was familiar with Artaud’s work, however she was proficient in French, and indeed professionally translated many literary works, including Colette, from French into Italian. While key differences remain, the story of Beatrice Cenci has strong thematic and temporal parallels to that of Artemisia: they are both Baroque women deprived of autonomy, who met with great violence during their lifetimes. Banti even includes this intertextual reference in *Corte Savella*. In Act II during the trial, the judge invokes Beatrice Cenci, warning Artemisia to behave, lest she end up like the disgraced woman: “Volete tacere, in malora? E ringraziate Dio che a quest’ora sareste in mano del boia come la Cenci!” Banti, *Corte Savella*, 97. For Artaud’s own writings, see *Antonin Artaud, Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976). For a critical overview, including on “Theater of Cruelty,” see Lee Jamieson, *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice* (London: Greenwich Exchange, 2007). On the Cenci see: Percy Shelley, *The Cenci* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991); Antonin Artaud, *The Cenci: A Play*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970).

<sup>52</sup> Biagini, *Anna Banti*, 70.

*Corte Savella* premiered on October 4, 1963 at the Politeama Genovese, a theater which, at the time, operated under the auspices of the Teatro Stabile di Genova. The production was directed by Luigi Squarzina and starred Paola Pitagora, Vittorio Sanipoli, and Checco Rissone in the roles of Artemisia Gentileschi, Agostino Tassi, and Mastro Pietro, respectively. It received a glowing review by literary critic and journalist Raul Radice, who, in his write up for *Il Corriere della Sera*, astutely observed the play's originality vis-à-vis the novel: "non si può dire che si tratti di una traduzione scenica, o di un semplice trasferimento dalla pagina alla ribalta, sebbene i fatti siano gli stessi. Soprattutto non si può dirlo in quanto la Banti ha avvertito, affrontando il dramma, problemi di cui si discorrerà più avanti"; and impressively large cast: "un numero cospicuo di attori, più di trenta, pur essendo ognuno singolarmente individuate, rispondono a funzioni corali."<sup>53</sup> Commenting on the same performance, Terron noted the extent which the Baroque features of the set and lighting complemented the actors' performances:

Le scene stupende e i costumi assai belli di Gianni Polidori hanno messo in grado Luigi Squarzina di articolare, anche sotto l'aspetto figurativo; una regia a tagli netti e a contrasti vividi di luce – che corrispondono, beninteso, a tagli e a contrasti di recitazione – evidentemente ispirata a realismo pittorico barocco. Dei quaranta e più attori, vanno ricordati la verità, la umanità e la duttilità di Paola Pitagora, maturatasi sotto gli occhi degli spettatori, da fragile e spaurita ragazzina a forte e insolente matrona, la schietta energia e la brutale evidenza di Vittorio Sanipoli, la popolare carnalità della Maestri, la sensuale e irridente perversità della Cei, stupenda; la sordida bonomia del Rissone, il controllato umorismo del Giuranna, l'umana semplicità della Bacci, del Pagliai e del Mazzoli, la tortuosità del Pescara – il perfido genio che monta tutta la cabala dell'onta e della persecuzione – l'impegno della Di Lernia, della Greco, della Zanetti, della D'Alessio e della Messeri, malmaritate donne fiorentine dalla lingua a doppia forbice.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these positive reviews, however, *Corte Savella* has been infrequently produced in the

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<sup>53</sup> Radice, "Con *Corte Savella* di Anna Banti aperta la stagione dello Stabile di Genova."

<sup>54</sup> Terron, "*Corte Savella*."

intervening years.<sup>55</sup> A lack of critical response to the play's performance history has also contributed to the further marginalization of the text itself. For example, none of *Corte Savella*'s performance record appears in the single monograph on Banti's corpus.<sup>56</sup> Biagini dedicates fewer than twelve pages to a critical discussion of the play, none of it on the play's reception, production, or review, even though the book was published in 1978—fifteen years after the early productions.

#### ARTEMISIA TAKES THE STAGE

At the foundation of this chapter lies the question of medium: why use the theater to produce Artemisia's life story? Answering this question requires a structural, thematic, and symbolic reading of the play. Banti is highly aware of her chosen medium and uses the frame of the proscenium arch as a analogy that connects the internal world of the play to its external representation: the relationship between the audience and the fourth wall resembles that of her *dramatis personae* to Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings. Everything to which the audience is exposed—including, at times, information the characters themselves do not yet have—is framed by the stage, which encapsulates the spatial-temporal boundaries of the dramatic action. Within this stage, however, is the constant presence of another framed device: Artemisia's paintings, whose symbolic and thematic resonance are central to the play's greater meaning. In many ways, Banti's socio-political convictions are transmitted to the audience through Gentileschi's paintings, which elicit tellingly strong and diverse reactions by many characters within the scope

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<sup>55</sup> Emilio Cecchi is one of the few literary critics to review the play in its textual form. His praise is noteworthy: "In sostanza, è un recupero d'umana vissuta immediatezza, che la Banti s'è proposta con la sua nuova versione della storia di Artemisia: e ci sembra vi sia splendidamente riuscita." Cecchi, "*Corte Savella*."

<sup>56</sup> Biagini, *Anna Banti*.

of the play, as well as by scholars, critics, and viewers in the outside of it. While certainly the most recognizable, Artemisia's paintings are only one of the framing devices of which Banti makes use. She also relies on windows, doors, stairwells, mirrors, and the witness stand of Corte Savella to frame the dramatic action. Starting from the outside and moving in, from the proscenium arch to the window of Artemisia's studio, framing devices are essential tool in the theatrical interpretation of Gentileschi's story.

Banti indicates the importance of painting and its relationship to framing modalities from the initial stage directions, in which Artemisia's art supplies are highlighted amongst the nondescript, somewhat unkempt Gentileschi home in Rome: "Stanza a soffitto basso con travicelli, ammattonato dozzinale [...] A destra una finestra mezzana con impannata, ma aperta. Accanto alla finestra un cavalletto col dorso rivolto al pubblico, sopravi una tela piccolo, e uno sgabello con tavolazza, pennelli, colori etc."<sup>57</sup> With the obvious exception of the courtroom in Act II, Artemisia is always surrounded by her painting tools—her easel, canvas, colors etc. They are an essential part of the *mis-en-scène* and provide the reader or viewer with an idea of her personality, and the extent to which painting lies at the foundation of her identity. Her easel, moreover, is positioned by the window, allowing her to look out on the city, providing light by which to paint, and fashioning a larger frame for the canvas in progress.

The window in Artemisia's studio is her portal to the outside world, the vantage point from which she is able to observe her own city. As was the case for many women of the era, it would have been considered untoward for her to venture out of doors without supervision; thus the window also affords her the opportunity to communicate with the world beyond the walls of the family home. This small freedom, however, is tenuous at best: when looking out, the

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<sup>57</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 19.

integrity of her character can be compromised by being seen and observed in the act of doing so—hence the long-standing historical trope of the woman at the window, admired and gossiped about by the men in the street below. Indeed, this is exactly what happens to Artemisia: she is literally framed. As the plot against her unfurls in Act I, Madonna Tuzia (her corrupt maid and nurse) and Agostino Tassi (the visiting painter and acquaintance of Orazio who will eventually rape her) use Artemisia’s studio window as a place of exposure. He purposefully strolls beneath it, so that Tuzia can implore Artemisia to come to the window to take a look at the *galantuomo* below:

TUZIA: *che si sarà affacciata alla finestra*. Eccolo che ripassa e guarda in su. E affacciati un momentino!  
 ARTEMISIA: *alza le spalle dispettosamente e seguita a dipingere*  
 TUZIA: Accipicchia, s’è messo in pompa, ci ha un mantello... Viè a vede [...]  
 ERSILIA: *affacciandosi alle spalle della madre*. Fa vedere... Uh, com’è galante! (*si ritira coprendosi la faccia*). Ih, m’ha salutata, m’ha fatto l’inchino. Così... (*fa un inchino*) [...]  
 ARTEMISIA: E via, Ersilia, vatti a fare i fatti tuoi e non stare sempre in mezzo... Stamattina ci ho un umore... (*ripiglia la tavolozza, dà un paio di pennellate, poi la lascia e si avvicina alle spalle di Tuzia, sempre alla finestra*): Se n’è andato, almeno?  
 TUZIA: Macché! Da quel cantone non lo smuove nessuno. E affacciati, dagli un’occhiata, che male c’è? Tanto tutti se ne so’ accorti che te sta dietro. Sei zitella, lui è amico di tu’ padre. Vi potete sposare e ti metti a posto. Perché fai la smorfiosa?<sup>58</sup>

There are two motives for this event: first, it is an opportunity for Tassi to show himself off and be perceived as an admirer of Artemisia by her neighbors, and second, it is a means by which to “expose” Artemisia as the type of woman who watches men in the street, and worse, who makes herself visible to them in turn. Consequently, various witnesses in the trial use Artemisia’s appearance at the window—both real and slanderously invented—as proof of her wanton character, construed as a sort of moral failing.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 23–5.

Luca Pensi, for example, a tailor who has worked for all three men involved in the suit and has clearly been bought off by Tassi, uses precisely this argument in his testimony to defame Artemisia's character: "Io mi ricordo e non mi ricordo delle cose del tempo passato, e ho buona e cattiva memoria secondo che mi occorre. Faccio i fatti miei e delle chiacchiere non mi curo. E ora mi ricordo che questa Artemisia l'ho vista delle volte alla finestra e dietro di lei c'era un uomo che la teneva abbracciata, ma non so chi fosse."<sup>59</sup> The irony here is that Luca is a plainly unreliable witness—he even speaks in such a way as to minimize his liability—yet his testimony is treated with significantly more gravitas by the judge than Artemisia's. Tuzia too claims that Artemisia's encounter with Tassi stems from her provocative presence at the window. In defending the accused man, she offers this justification: "Quando poi vidi che per strada le girava sotto le finestre questo e quest'altro e mi pareva che il signor Agostino ne avesse compassione, che sempre ne parlava di questa figliola, le dissi che si stesse buona e procurasse di farsi sposare che sarebbe stata la sua fortuna."<sup>60</sup> While in Act I Tuzia implores Artemisia to come to the window to see a potential suitor, in Act II she uses it as way to discredit the young painter's integrity. The reader/viewer knows Tuzia's statement to be a lie, but the audience of the courtroom does not; and the resulting discrepancy calls into question the possibility of truthful or objective witness, and consequently, of a fair trial for Artemisia.

The window's purpose is reevaluated in Act III, however, where it takes on new meaning as a conduit of female friendship. Here, the dirty Roman street has been replaced by the river Arno: Artemisia is now in Florence, living on her own, and making a name for herself as a professional painter. The first and last acts of the play open to similar sets—an art studio—but

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 89.

with very different details: “grande stanza chiara arredata con una certa nobiltà, tavolo di noce, sedie a braccioli di cuoio, cortine di broccato. Nel fondo una grande finestra che dà sull’Arno, e di fianco ad essa, ma voltato col retro al pubblico, il gran cavalletto su cui è l’enorme tela della Giuditta.”<sup>61</sup> Artemisia’s living quarters have improved since her time in Rome, the shoddy table replaced with a leather armchair. Moreover, instead of inviting trouble, here the window is the channel through which she meets and becomes friends with Arcangela, her neighbor and fellow artist. Artemisia is literally called to the window by Arcangela’s singing, which penetrates the studio.<sup>62</sup> Arcangela’s presence in Act III is essential, for it is through her conversation with Artemisia that Banti provides a new interpretation of and insight into Gentileschi’s most famous work, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*.<sup>63</sup>

The symbolic resonance of the window is complemented by the presence of the mirror—another device that recalls a painting and serves as a conduit of interpretation. In *Corte Savella*, the mirror becomes a theatrical mechanism that connects the worlds of text, character, and author: Artemisia the character is often seen looking in the mirror; Artemisia the historical woman is famous for her self-portrait; and Banti as the author provides a non-literal self-portrait by projecting herself onto the character of Artemisia, assimilating their shared struggles as professional women artists across three centuries.<sup>64</sup> In addition to the Judith series, Gentileschi is

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>62</sup> “ARTEMISIA: *si alza, va al cavalletto fischiando, poi si passa una mano sulla fronte. Oh, mio Dio! Si sente qualche battuta di virginale, poi il suono s’interrompe e una voce chiama. ARCANGELA: Artemisia, Artemisia... ARTEMISIA: Ah siete voi, Arcangela?*” Ibid., 119.

<sup>63</sup> For a comprehensive reading of Gentileschi’s Judith series, see Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 278–337. For images of the Judith painting and Gentileschi’s Self-Portrait, see Supplementary Materials, page 278.

<sup>64</sup> See stage directions: “ARTEMISIA che si crede sola si avvicina a un pezzo di specchio appeso alla parete e si guarda di faccia e di profilo, si ravvia i capelli, si liscia col dito intinto di saliva le

also remembered for her exceptional later work, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (1638–9), in which she depicts herself in the act of painting and as the allegory of it, thus repurposing a long-standing artistic practice and imbuing it with significance for the professional woman artist and subject. Garrard comments on the implications of Gentileschi’s innovative appropriation:

The importance of this deceptively modest work of art lies in its audacious claim upon the core of artistic tradition, as a sophisticated commentary upon a central philosophical issue of later Renaissance art theory. Artemisia indicates in the picture, her only preserved self-image, a special personal identification with her profession in terms that were quite literally unavailable to any male artist. Whereas in her individualized treatments of other iconographic themes she was concerned to offer uniquely female interpretations that were alternatives to men’s versions, in the *Allegory of Painting* she demonstrated not an alternative understanding of a subject, but a fusion of two themes that, under existing conventions, only a female artist could have combined.<sup>65</sup>

Garrard notes the simplicity and focus of Gentileschi’s *Self-Portrait*, which contrasts greatly with the work of her male peers, arguing that the artist herself “emerges forcefully as the living embodiment of the allegory. Painter, model, and concept are one in the same... Because she was a woman, Artemisia was in a position to make a statement that was at once less pompous and more profound.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Gentileschi would have required the use of a double-mirror in order to paint herself in near-profile—yet another layer of reflection and representation.<sup>67</sup> Unlike

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sopracciglia, si stringe la cintura, e simili.” Banti, *Corte Savella*, 27.

<sup>65</sup> Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 337.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>67</sup> On the mechanics of Gentileschi’s *Self-Portrait* see *Ibid.*, 361. “Whether or not we stop to consider *how* she managed to paint herself in profile, we nevertheless recognize that the image of the artist in the act of painting is a faithful reflection of the actual means by which this picture was created: the artist looks into the light, bending around the canvas to see her model, which is her own reflection in a mirror. All self-portraits require the aid of mirrors, of course, yet we are made more conscious of Artemisia’s use of the mirror by the profile self-image, and by our perpetual confrontation by the artist’s searching gaze at her model, implicitly herself. This highly-calculated self-image is thus not only a comment on the value of the artist’s work as process rather than product; it also tells us something about Artemisia’s idea of artistic

in the novel, where this painting is explicitly woven into the storyline through the inclusion of Annella de Rosa—a Neapolitan painter who rejects Artemisia’s overtures of friendship—in the play it functions mostly at the symbolic level.<sup>68</sup> This symbolic level, however, is no less important in the promulgation of Banti’s feminist message. In consistently highlighting Artemisia’s artistry, rendering it the driving force of the dramatic action, and positioning it as the protagonist’s own *raison d’être*, Banti foregrounds Gentileschi’s inventive use of her own medium to confirm her identity as a woman artist, both literally in the depiction of her face, and figuratively as the allegory of painting.

The window and mirror, therefore, in addition to framing devices that recall the form of a painting, are also metaphors in representation: a portal through which to view and be viewed in return. Indeed there is an ancient association between mirrors and displaying the truth—a concept popular in Baroque art—and one which Gentileschi utilizes to her own ends:

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inspiration, and her thoughts on the doctrine of imitation.”

<sup>68</sup> In the novel, Banti positions Gentileschi’s famous *Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting* as a portrait of Annella instead. The development of their friendship and the young painter’s ultimate rejection can be read as a matter of feminist importance. According to Jo Ann Cannon “the relationship between Artemisia and Annella as articulated in the novel seems to foreshadow recent feminist theory. Here Artemisia longs not to entrust herself to an exemplary figure but to become the ‘Symbolic Mother’ for another. Hers is not meant, however, to be an oppressive move. Although Annella spurns Maestra Artemisia’s advances, Banti suggests that to entrust herself to Artemisia would empower the young artist. The proud, younger artist, stabbed to death by her brutal husband at the age of thirty, is resurrected first in Artemisia’s memory and then on canvas as she searches for inspiration in the English court.” JoAnn Cannon, “Artemisia and the Life Story of the Exceptional Woman,” *Forum Italicum* 28, no. 2 (1994): 335. Deborah Heller observes a parallel between Artemisia (the character’s) view of Annella, and Banti’s view of Artemisia (the historical woman): “As the author’s Artemisia, in celebrating Annella and giving her life, finds that another woman’s honor also becomes her source of pride, so too Anna Banti, in celebrating and resuscitating Artemisia, finds honor for herself in another women’s creative achievement. Thus, the novelist-narrator commemorates Artemisia Gentileschi, the woman painter whom history remembers, by imagining her as commemorating Annella de Rosa, the woman painter whom history has forgotten.” Deborah Heller, “History, Art, and Fiction in Anna Banti’s Artemisia,” in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance*, ed. Santo L. Aricò (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 57.

“Gentileschi, heir both to the practical studio use of the mirror as a visualizing tool and to the symbolic tradition associating mirrors with *veritas* and self-knowledge, offered in her *Self Portrait* a distinct statement on the nature of what the mirror reveals.”<sup>69</sup> What we see through the window or in the mirror, however, is not necessarily a neutral snapshot of the world below or of the self. Moving from the Baroque to the twentieth century, Banti’s use of theater shows us that while realism may provide a “window on the real,” so to speak, and purport to be objective in its representation, the principle at times does not live up to its aesthetic and moral covenants. The many discrepancies between what the audience knows of Artemisia’s rape in Act I and what the devious, lying characters declare during the trial in Act II, for example, attest to the fact that representation is fallible, and subject to the values, goals, and judgments of its intermediary.

Gentileschi’s actual paintings are another layer of representation used in *Corte Savella*, and likewise, are also subject to the fallibility of interpretation. Gentileschi paints what she thinks is real—*il reale*—but that does not save her canvases from manifold interpretations, many of which betray the anxieties and concerns of the viewer, rather than address the work at hand. This is particularly true for Gentileschi’s portrait of the biblical heroine Judith engaged in the decapitation of Holofernes—a painting often maligned as a wronged-woman’s revenge fantasy.<sup>70</sup> While this interpretation may be simplistic, it is also reductive:

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<sup>69</sup> Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 363.

<sup>70</sup> Even Banti’s husband Longhi capitulates somewhat to the reductive notion that the Judith painting is much too violent for a woman. In his analysis of the Uffizi Judith, Longhi comments: “Ma quella scissione fra mentalità e resa, fra civiltà e creazione che già avvertiamo in Orazio, si ripete qui nella figlia con fatalità quasi tragica, visto che ne vanno perdute, per ribrezzo, qualità pittoriche di prim’ordine. Chi penserebbe infatti che sopra un lenzuolo studio di candori ed ombre diacce degne d’un Vermeer a grandezza naturale, dovesse avvenire un macello così brutale ed efferato, da parer dipinto per mano del boja Lang? Ma—vien voglia di dire—ma questa è la donna terribile! Una donna ha dipinto tutto questo? Imploriamo grazia.” Longhi, “Gentileschi, padre e figlia,” 294.

It is an oversimplification to interpret the Uffizi Judith purely as an expression of fantasy revenge against a rapist. Sensationalist fascination with the melodrama of Artemisia's rape, as well as facile association of stormy biography with violent pictorial imagery, have obscured for us not only the aesthetic complexity of the artist's identification with her depicted character, but also the fact that such artistic self-projection was by no means unusual. For if Artemisia included something of herself in the image of Judith slaying Holofernes, she followed a tradition already venerable in her day.<sup>71</sup>

One of Banti's goals, then, is to subject these paintings to new interpretation—the historical revisionist operation at the core of Act III. On top of these lenses—the proscenium arch, the window, the mirror, and the painting—yet another is layered: Banti's own authorial point of view. Each of these filters is a metaphor for what representation can and cannot do, a means by which to demonstrate the flaws inherent to historiography. Approaches to recording the past—whether through art, literature, or history—are as imperfect as those engaging in them. Through her careful construction of framing devices that betray the lens buried within, Banti comments on the mimetic nature of schools such as neorealism: the predominant aesthetic and moral ideology that guided artistic production in post-war Italy, the time during which the novel and play were written.

In choosing to adapt *Artemisia* for the stage, Banti engages in a formal and thematic exercise that fosters new interpretive possibility, most importantly, one that allows for a renewed focus on the subjectivity of its female protagonist. In using theater as a new lens through which to view Artemisia's life and paintings, Banti necessarily engages different artistic apparatuses than in her novel. Specifically, she creates theater that questions its own devices, purposes, and methods to show how Artemisia acted as an individual and was acted upon by others during the course of her life. Consequently, all three acts of the *Corte Savella* have significant metatheatrical components, each of which serve the play's main goals: liberating

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<sup>71</sup> Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 278.

Artemisia from the constraints of historical discourse; and recasting the experience of a specific Baroque woman artist on the modern stage in order to show what has and has not changed in the intervening 300 years. In brief, Act I sets up Agostino Tassi as a skilled actor and dissimulator, capable of manipulating even the most strong-willed; the trial in Act II is a theatrical production in its own right, complete with a meta-audience, cast, and script; and in Act III, form and theme merge when the Florentine noble women who observe Artemisia at work attempt to reenact the Judith painting in Artemisia's studio.

While framing modalities previously discussed highlight the positive aspects of the theater—how it produces meaning, considers its own form, and provides its subjects with immediacy—Banti uses masking and acting to showcase the potential destructiveness of theatrical language. In *Corte Savella*, Banti produces a Shakespearean treatment of the theater by showing how acting and the language of dissimulation can be used to deceitful ends on both a personal and institutional level. Agostino Tassi, Artemisia's rapist and Orazio's *paesano*, is the embodiment of theatricality and performance skills that are devious and dangerous. Instead of using words to produce clarity, he uses them to slander others, obscure the truth, and abuse Artemisia. Tassi recalls Shakespeare's Baroque villain Iago, who brings about Othello's demise through dissembling and acting, providing false information in a believable manner. Tassi's rhetorical prowess meets with success in the private space of Artemisia's house as well as in the courtroom: in the former he convinces Artemisia that her reputation has already been tainted beyond repair and shocks her with the news of Caravaggio's death to the point that she becomes a traumatized victim of his physical abuse. In the latter he lies about the incident with ease and arrogance. In order to set up this dynamic and expose it, however, Banti provides her reader/viewer and a few select characters with privileged knowledge of Tassi's true character.

She does this to evidence the extreme gulf between his purported and real intentions, painting a portrait that leaves little doubt of his dubious, loathsome morality. From his arrival at the Gentileschi home in I.4, it is clear Tassi is a man not to be trusted:

TASSI: Vi ringrazio Gentileschi, ma io non lo so se la vostra idea d'insegnare alla ragazza avrà buon fine. Io non son fatto per ammaestrar zitelle nella pittura, un tempo gl'insegnavo qualche altra cosa (*sghignazza*) e non crediate che non sia ancora buono, anzi m'offendete. Son io tutore di fanciulle? [...] Quando mai le ragazze han seminato quadri invece di figlioli? M'aveste messo come garzone il vostro Francesco, gli avrei insegnato volentieri...

ORAZIO: Voi avete un difetto, Agostino, vi credete da più che non siete, per tutti i versi. Siamo quasi paesani, ma le lezioni che darete a Artemisia io non le voglio regalate. Gliel darete in presenza di una donna dabbene nostra casigliana che sebbene siate maturo e lei una bambinuccia, son uomo di mondo e di nessuno mi fido. Quanto all'abilità, io vi dico che la figliola ne vale dieci di garzoni e Dio volesse che Francesco avesse il suo talento.<sup>72</sup>

These are Tassi's first lines in the play, and it is the only moment in which he speaks plainly. As evidenced, his true self is not pleasant: he is an arrogant, ill-mannered misogynist whose crude sexual innuendo and dismissal of tutoring a woman artist reflect his unfiltered convictions. His other appearances, then—elegant speeches, feigning to care for Artemisia and her reputation—are no more than an act. Tassi's duplicitous behavior is encouraged and paid for by Cosimo Quorli, *Furiere* of the Papal Court and the mastermind of the plot against Artemisia.<sup>73</sup> In brief, Cosimo wants to have an affair with Artemisia, but has no interest in actually marrying her. To circumvent this roadblock, he hires Tassi to rape Artemisia first—thus ruining her reputation—and Tuzia to assure that she will be available to Tassi. Once Artemisia is considered a ruined woman, Cosimo will be free to prey on her himself. Through this scene, and much of the first part of Act I, Banti foreshadows the action of the later part of the play: Orazio states that the

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<sup>72</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> A *furiere* was an important official in the Pope's Vatican residence, the man in charge of the Pope's and his retinue's lodgings when traveling. It was a politically influential position in the Papal State.

lessons will be supervised by Tuzia, but the audience/reader knows that she has already been bought off by Cosimo and will not defend the girl; and we have indelible proof that Tassi is up to no good, having previously witnessed the unfurling of Cosimo's scheme earlier in Act I.

That the fourth scene provides proof of Tassi's true character renders his performance in the seventh all the more impressive. At the end of Act I he declares his love for Artemisia, and subsequently bullies her into believing that her reputation has been irrevocably tainted, that the public knows she is a ruined woman, and that Caravaggio is a scoundrel—all this to convince her to marry him, as she has no better option.<sup>74</sup> Tassi, of course, has no intention of actually marrying her, but rather is simply trying to get her to bed in order to compromise her integrity. This process evolves slowly over the course of the scene and is a testament to his talent in manipulation. Even though Artemisia consistently pushes back against his slander, he eventually sows seeds of doubt in the young, motherless adolescent whose father is caring but distant. He begins by intruding on her privacy, insisting she tell him why she is crying. She is uninterested, however, in his confidence:

TASSI: Voi piangete per la morte del Caravaggio: non è così?

ARTEMISIA: [...] Piango perché ho male, perché mi gusta piangere e voi non siete ne mai sarete nella confidenza mia.

TASSI: Siete sconosciute, Artemisia bella. Vi confidate con una bardascetta che domani tutta via della Croce saprà i vostri guai, e a un amico di vostro padre, uno che vi vuole bene e gli preme l'onore vostro negate la luce del sole.

ARTEMISIA: Che bene, che bene! Voi non mi avete da volere né bene né male e io non vi conosco neanche per prossimo.

TASSI: Che vi voglia bene anche troppo, lo sapete e non occorre fingere, che non siete ragazza da non servene accorta. Quando uno vuole bene sa tutto della persona che ama, specie di voi che siete senza madre e agite senza consiglio. Credete forse che il vicinato non chiacchieri? I padri e i mariti son gli ultimi avvisati, ma tutti la sapevano la vostra tresca col Caravaggio.

ARTEMISIA: Ah che ribalderia vi andate inventando? Come osate accusarmi di trescare quando io il Caravaggio (*con voce tremula*) neppure gli ho parlato ed è

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<sup>74</sup> “Io non m’invento niente, purtroppo, ma una colpa mi riconosco che di voi mi sono innamorato da non trovar pace né sonno.” Banti, *Corte Savella*, 54.

grazia se l'ho visto in faccia una volta? Come si può sapere questa infamità?  
TASSI: si può sapere, si può sapere. La gente gli occhi ce li ha. Per cosa ve ne andavate girando intorno a casa sua, quando stava a Roma, e passavate le ore in San Luigi a guardare quei suoi santi spropositati? Anche se eravate una bambocia le vostre intenzioni erano chiare.  
ARTEMISIA: E che uno non può girare per Roma? È proibito? [...] Io so come sta la mia coscienza e quelle voci che pretendete non mi offendono. Esser stata donna del Caravaggio sarebbe sempre un onore!<sup>75</sup>

Tassi is sly but methodical, intending with each additional lie to push Artemisia closer to the brink. She holds her ground, however, and through her sharp responses Banti reveals her Baroque heroine's feminist inclinations. For example, in countering Tassi, Artemisia asserts that women can express themselves how they like, whether or not a male interlocutor believes it to be the logical or correct expression of emotion. She also opposes the idea that women do not belong in public spaces, defending her trip to the San Luigi dei Francesi church to view Caravaggio's paintings as an innocent act of intellectual and artistic development, rather than an indictment of her moral character. Tassi continues by insulting the recently-deceased Caravaggio—insinuating that he was promiscuous, had no interest in woman artists, and was “un uomo che a vituperare una zitella non ci pensava due volte”—as well as implying that Artemisia's father is tired of dealing with her, and would rather put her away in a monastery.<sup>76</sup> In layering insinuation upon insinuation, coupled with outright insults, lies, and contradictory expressions of admiration and love, Tassi succeeds in diminishing Artemisia's strength. Banti thus highlights how performance, in addition to being a method of showing truth and giving space to new interpretations, can also be used to devious ends by those with sinister goals. Here Tassi plays the part of a concerned family friend specifically to weaken Artemisia, if not into willing compliance, at least into submission.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 48–9.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 50, 53.

Banti's decision to stage Tassi as a dissembling, talented liar, capable of tricking even the judge, has implications for a new understanding of Artemisia the historical character, one that vindicates her strength instead of focusing on her status as victim. His impressive performance shows that Artemisia was not simply a weak-willed or naïve fifteen-year-old who willingly abandoned her principles. Instead she was tricked and deceived, compelled to believe in a fictional reality that was maliciously constructed by Tassi in order to meet his own objective—one in which her reputation had been irreconcilably compromised, her family discredited, and the character of her professional and personal idol slandered, leaving her in shock and traumatized, tragically alone with her rapist. Ultimately, Tassi is successful, and Banti explicitly stages Artemisia's screams and horror as he suddenly drops the act of caring tutor, locks her in her bedroom, and rapes her: "Lasciatemi vi dico. Perché mi stringete? Andatevene, lasciatemi sola, sto bene sola... Cosa fate? (da dentro): Aiuto! Ah traditore! Aiuto! Aiuto!"<sup>77</sup> In this capacity, there are parallels between Artemisia and the tragic heroines of classic works: "come ogni eroina tragica, Artemisia subisce l'assalto del destino proprio nel momento in cui le forze meno resistono; e qui la Banti ha molto vicini certi modelli del teatro francese, come la Phedre di Racine, altrettanto esposta ai colpi della sorte."<sup>78</sup> While Artemisia is indeed struck while down, she maintains a fundamental difference from the Phaedras and Mirras of the tragic canon: Banti endows her with a voice, which she uses to her own defense on the witness stand, and a talent—she focuses on her professional career, and vindicates herself through painting. Moreover, this episode provides further justification for the theatrical transposition of Artemisia's story: it highlights the dangerous performative forces at work that affected and shaped her personal and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>78</sup> Biagini, *Anna Banti*, 70.

professional life—something that prose fiction is unable to convey. It is acting, therefore—a fundamental element of theatrical discourse—that sheds new light on Artemisia’s personal struggle.

The trial, which comprises the entirety of Act II, is the most consistently metatheatrical experience in *Corte Savella*. In it there is a doubling of both performers and audience members: the various witnesses, court employees, and the judge become actors on a new stage—that of the courtroom. Anonymous Roman citizens, as well as characters already introduced in Act I, become the spectators of the new production. Much like the play’s own audience, the trial spectators come for entertainment—they laugh, shout, and enjoy the spectacle. The reader/viewer, then, is a double witness, watching the others watch the trial unfold on the internal stage. Banti’s stage directions, moreover, create a *tableau vivant* of colorful, bawdy, and diverse characters framed within an ominous chamber:

Un ambiente del Tribunale di Corte Savella, diviso in due da una parete in cui s’apre una larga porta, con battente sempre aperto, oppure senza battente, ad arco. A destra una antisala con panche tutto attorno al muro, una finestra e diverse porte da cui la gente entra ed esce; si riunisce a gruppi, chiacchiera etc. Un tavolino sgangherato serve a qualcuno per scrivere petizioni e simili. Circolano birri, preti, bravacci, uomini di legge. A sinistra è l’aula dove si svolgono i processi, con cattedra di legno grezzo, nel fondo, per il giudice, tavolino per il cancelliere, diverse panche, una pedana per i testimoni. Nella parete di sinistra, di fronte, cioè, alla porta che mette nell’antisala, una porta massiccia e inchiavardava da cui entrano gli incriminati già prigionieri [...] È maggio e fa caldo. È pomeriggio inoltrato. Si sentono fuori cantilene di venditori ambulanti, qualcuno ne entra anche nell’antisala vendendo semi, fusaglie, ciambelle. Due inservienti spazzano l’aula sollevando un polverone. Parlano forte, sputano, si grattano. Sono stracciati come vagabondi. Sopra la cattedra del giudice un Crocifisso e il ritratto di Paolo V Borghese.<sup>79</sup>

The ornate, elaborate nature of these stage directions recalls the aesthetics of a Baroque painting—an artistic way for Banti to remind her audience of the play’s temporal setting. They

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<sup>79</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 69.

also conjure a sense of confusion, of people coming and going, of chaos exacerbated by the heat and dust in the room. Certain details, such as the crucifix and portrait of Pope Paolo V (1605–1621), emphasize the powerful relationship between the Church and judiciary: a relationship that will prove to be corrupt and detrimental to Artemisia’s quest for justice. This corruption is evidenced at various points in the trial, most notably by the cozy relationship between Cosimo Quorli and Mastro Pietro, the judge.

It is clear from historical record that the trial of Agostino Tassi is only a pretense of justice.<sup>80</sup> In using theater to stage the trial in flesh and blood, however, Banti is able to demonstrate the injustice of the court proceedings in a way that the transcript (or other type of written narrative) cannot. By showcasing the preposterousness of the judge and witnesses—all unreliable, bought-off, or lying—while simultaneously providing the audience/reader with the true story, Banti is able to turn the whole operation on its head, thus reversing its effects. The audience is more than able to grasp the ways in which the system had been stacked against Artemisia, and thus in staging the trial and putting its hypocrisy center-stage, Banti can tell the truth about the episode for the first time. To this end, she reverses the effects of an historical narrative that unfairly has portrayed Artemisia as weak, immoral, or at fault.<sup>81</sup>

The trial in *Corte Savella* has its own colorful cast, complete with villains, heroes, and a

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<sup>80</sup> The trial’s original transcript from 1612 is available in English translation in the appendix to Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 407–87.

<sup>81</sup> One example of how historical documentation has perpetuated the idea of Artemisia as a fallen woman who is thus responsible for her own rape is the repeated gossip and hearsay taken as official testimony in Tassi’s defense. An example can be found in the following synopsis of Luca Pentì’s testimony: “He testified that he had seen Artemisia the window many times... According to Luca, Cosimo had been boasting the past three or four years of having had intercourse with her, while Stiattesi had said the past winter that she was a whore and had told him that Pasquino had deflowered her. He added that all of them had something bad to say about Artemisia.” *Ibid.*, 480.

chorus of sorts. Artemisia is the protagonist of this production, while the members of the Papal court—Mastro Pietro; Mastro Serafino, the *Cancelliere*; and the various witnesses—are her antagonists. The minor characters are also involved in the trial, and combine to form a kind of Greek chorus: through various interferences they provide information, truth, alternate perspectives, and moments of levity. They also highlight the presence in the court of lower-class Romans, evidenced by their use of accents such as *ciociaro* and *romanaccio*. The chorus-like interventions of these minor characters set the internal stage for the trial. In scene 1, for example, an anonymous courtroom worker announces to the audience the reason for the production: “c’è una querela che hanno fregata na’ zitella e non si riesce a sape’ si è vergine o mignotta.”<sup>82</sup> Shortly afterward, in scene 2, one of the jailers speaking with another worker foreshadows Artemisia’s humiliation at the hands of the torturers, the dramatic crux of Act II:

SECONDO INSERVIENTE: Oe’ che ce li porti a fare sti strumenti? Mo’ c’è bisogno del cavalletto quando uno ha fatto la festa a una zitella?

BIRRO: *senza parlare colloca gli arnesi e li sistema*. Ebbè che c’è da rugà? A me m’è stato comandato. Questi so’ giocherelli che solo a guardarli ti escono i peccati di quando stavi in fasciola. Qualcuno dovrà confessare no? O lui o la ragazza.

SECONDO INSERVIENTE: Che l’hai vista te, la ragazza?

BIRRO: E come no?... È bianca che pare l’erba del Santo Sepolcro, roscetta di capelli. A me non mi piace pe’ gnente, mica lo so che ce trovano, dice che tutti je stavano appresso, ma a me me sa che s’inventi tutto quello zozzone del pittore, e un altro che so io (*seguita ad aggiustare i legni le corde*). Si la metti a letto quella ti si squaglia. E poi pare na’ creatura...<sup>83</sup>

The Birro is one of the few people able to see Tassi for what he is—a liar. This realization is countered, however, by his lowly position in the hierarchy of the Savella Court. Unlike Mastro Pietro or Cancelliere Serafino—friends and confidants of Cosimo Quorli, sympathizers of Agostino Tassi—the Birro has no institutional power or ability to influence the outcome of the

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<sup>82</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 70.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 71–2.

trial.<sup>84</sup> He does, however, provide for the audience an alternate interpretation of the dramatic action.

Artemisia is the first to testify, and her performance on the stand, followed by her public torture, comprises some of the most dramatic events of the play. The scene of her testimony begins with the judge demanding she explain her relationship with Tassi in intimate detail. Initially Artemisia speaks softly, and struggles to find her words, but the judge is impatient with her explanation, demanding that she address their sexual encounter:

MASTRO PIETRO: E così senza parlare, da quand'è che vi avete cominciato a fare l'amore?

ARTEMISIA: Mai, mai ho fatto l'amore col Tassi, mai l'ho amato, non lo potevo vedere sebbene dicessero che mi stava dietro.

MASTRO PIETRO: Questa sì ch'è buona! E se non è quello che avete fatto col Tassi, cos'è secondo voi fare l'amore?

ARTEMISIA: Io non so più che tanto, l'amore non l'ho mai fatto.

MASTRO PIETRO: Ah no? E allora cosa facevate quando il Tassi vi ha conosciuta carnalmente? Non era far l'amore quello?

ARTEMISIA: O Dio, come si può dir questo? No, non era, non credo che l'amore sia così.

MASTRO PIETRO: E invece è così: e voi lo sapete benissimo. E non mi fate la monachella che qui le smorfie non attaccano e io ci ho pazienza corta. Raccontateci tutto, e spicciatevi.<sup>85</sup>

From the judge's line of questioning it is obvious that Artemisia is viewed as suspect and a *bugiarda*: no matter her reasoning or excuse, he is quick to reply with a condemnation of her behavior, both on and off the stand. Her veil is false modesty; her unwillingness to acknowledge that her sexual encounter with Tassi was consensual is manipulative obfuscation. His misogynist mentality is clear in that he has preemptively decided that her claim is a lie. In his eyes,

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<sup>84</sup> Banti demonstrates Cosimo's power from the moment he enters the courtroom. He confirms to Tuzia "fate conto che qui dentro ci comandi io e l'esame è come cavarsi un dente" Ibid., 74. He also directly addresses Mastro Serafino before the trial even begins: "E che ne dite di questa querela? Un padre senza giudizio, una figliola senza vergogna. Ma già, roba da pittore, io le conosco quelle bonelane, colla scusa dell'arte vitupererebbero Maria santissima" Ibid., 75.

<sup>85</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 80–1.

Artemisia allowed herself to be put in the position of being raped, ergo she is a loose woman who cannot claim to have been wronged. His philosophy can be reduced to the notion that “good girls” simply do not get raped. He corroborates this opinion in a rebuttal to Artemisia’s explanation of how Tuzia tried to frighten and threaten her into marrying Tassi: “Questa Tuzia la sentiremo, ma ricordatevi che le vostre scuse non servono perché una zitella dabbene, se non vuole, non si lascia consigliare male e sa come rispondere ai cattivi consigli. Adesso non andate per le lunghe, ragazza...E non cercate sotterfugi.”<sup>86</sup> Artemisia, however is cognizant of this dynamic and defends her decision to name Tuzia as party to her rape, which she in fact was:

Io già lo vedo che Vossignoria non mi ha in nessuna stima né pietà sebbene son figlia di valentuomo e non ho che sedici anni. Se ho nominato Tuzia è perché l’ho saputo dopo, che è stata lei a combinarmi questa disgrazia d’accordo col furiero Cosimo Quorli che è suo amico e non so perché mi vuol male, anche stamattina era qui con lei e ha anche parlato al cancelliere.<sup>87</sup>

Artemisia plainly gives the judge all the necessary information to make a sound and informed decision, were he actually interested in being objective and fair.

In addition to misogyny, the cards are further stacked against Artemisia through corruption: in this case, the judge has a relationship with Cosimo Quorli. By having him immediately defend Quorli, Banti demonstrates how the law can be manipulated by those in power: “Ciarliera sfacciata, come vi azzardate a immischiare un furiero di Nostro Signore nelle vostre sporche faccende? Rispondete alla domande che vi si fanno.”<sup>88</sup> Mastro Pietro forces Artemisia to speak louder, and by the end of the scene is screaming, crying, and almost

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 83.

convulsing while telling her story.<sup>89</sup> She recounts that on the fateful day of her rape she was manipulated by Tassi's lies and threats—he is, as Banti shows in Act I, an expert dissimulator—and did not know exactly what to make of them or how to respond: “Io non ci stavo colla testa e lui badava a dire che di me si parlava male, che non ero custodita [...] e un po' sospettavo e un po' gli credevo e mi sentivo sempre più disperata.”<sup>90</sup> She explains that after her rape, Tassi had promised to marry her, and after that moment she was told her only option was to consider herself married to him.<sup>91</sup> It was only months later that she discovered he had no such intention, being already married to someone else: “Mi rassegnai e gli credetti e d'allora per più mesi feci il suo volere come già fosse mio marito [...] Da ultimo seppi che aveva moglie.”<sup>92</sup> The scene ends with a supremely dramatic moment: Artemisia, who has found her voice and is confident in her righteousness, throws away the turquoise wedding ring Tassi gave her, and in a vivid condemnation of her treatment at his hands, and the court's, yells: “Questa turchina che m'ha donato per fede, ecco quel che ne faccio [...] la lascio ai birri di Corte Savella!”<sup>93</sup> This scene provides a clear dramatic representation of the systematic injustice that Artemisia faces as a

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<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the judge purposefully goads her—“alzate la voce, alla malora! Non sapete parlare più forte?”—and deliberately misinterprets her words. When Artemisia discusses how Tassi came to her room under the false pretense of giving her a painting lesson, he responds with double entendre: “Ah ah, la lezione! Prendevate lezione per fare quel che avete fatto?” Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>91</sup> The transcript of the trial makes clear that after being raped, Artemisia had considered herself married to Tassi: “From then on, Agostino continued with Artemisia and enjoyed her as if she were his own possession, having promised to marry her at the time he deflowered her, despite the fact that he already had a wife. And later on, Agostino reaffirmed this promise twice, in particular when he received word by letter that his wife had been killed, which news he corroborated by placing the letters in Artemisia's hands and reading them to her... And last of all one can see that Agostino did not want to keep his promise to marry Artemisia” Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 411–13.

<sup>92</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 85.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 86.

woman, but also of her courage and resilience. In addition to fomenting injustice, there is a sort of irony in Artemisia being labeled a liar during her testimony. Not only has Act I provided the reader/audience with the factual series of events—including how she was manipulated by the consummate liar Tassi and made available to him by Tuzia—but her paintings, which are aesthetic representations of her internal self, take as their subject and artistic parameter *il naturale*. Her artwork, then, is further evidence of her honesty for the audience.

*Corte Savella* is a modern play that tells a Baroque story of the era. Nowhere is the Baroque aesthetic more pronounced than in the penultimate scene of Act II, in which Artemisia is publicly tortured with screws. Whereas in classical and Renaissance drama violence was relegated backstage—implied but never shown—in Baroque drama violence moves to the forefront, becoming an essential element of the theater, used in works ranging from revenge tragedies to Shakespeare.<sup>94</sup> By openly staging Artemisia’s suffering, Banti recalls for her twentieth-century audience this theatrical tradition and the time period to which it refers.

While Mastro Pietro has no qualms about the procedure (“Una girata di sibili alla ragazza varrà meglio delle chiacchiere, e poi persuaderà queste birbe di pittori a mettersi d’accordo e a farla finita”), going to the disinterested length of cleaning his teeth with a toothpick while it happens, and Tassi feigns embarrassment and compassion, other characters react with more empathy to Artemisia’s suffering.<sup>95</sup> We see, for example the softer side of Tuzia, who is uncomfortable at the idea of hurting Artemisia: “Mo’ che gli fanno alla ragazza? Questo mica

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<sup>94</sup> In the Italian context, it was Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio who, in a departure from his Greek and Roman antecedents, first brought violence to the late-Renaissance Italian stage. He outlines this dramatic theory in his *Discorso intorno al comporre delle commedie e delle tragedie* (1554).

<sup>95</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 101.

l'avevate detto, io mica ci sto.”<sup>96</sup> While Tuzia is an opportunist, party to Artemisia’s violation, she is perhaps not as bad as the men who have paid her off. Even Mastro Serafino is uncomfortable—perhaps he serves as the audience’s reflection—and hesitates in carrying out the orders. Artemisia, however, is her own most vocal defender, angrily denouncing the hypocrisy of being the sole target of torture: “Ahimè, che mi volete fare? Perché a me i tormenti e non al mio assassino che dica il vero? Io che ho fatto che mi trattate da malfattore? Fateli almeno provare prima a lui e li supporterò volentieri!”<sup>97</sup> In another moment reminiscent of a Greek chorus, Porzia, Artemisia’s future *suocera*, cries out at seeing her daughter-in-law suffer, while her son Antonio attempts to reassure her. Far from confessing anything, Artemisia under torture is more defiant than ever: “*Volta al Tassi, a voce altissima*, Questo è l’anello che tu mi dai, queste sono le promesse. Ho detto la verità, non c’è altra verità, ho detto il vero, il vero, il vero.”<sup>98</sup> Finally, at Mastro Serafino’s insistence, the judge reluctantly agrees to stop the torment, and the scene comes to an end. The *dénouement*, however, further highlights the judicial corruption by explicitly showing the connection between Quorli and the judge: as Mastro Pietro leaves the courtroom he and Quorli exchange knowing glances; and he orders that Orazio withdraw his suit and make peace with the defendant.

This scene leaves the audience to grasp at the physical truth of Artemisia’s experiences, as opposed to ineffable, mythical one carried on through history books, articles, and Gentileschi’s own paintings. The physical nature of the torture act is undeniable, and grounds the audience in the present moment, uncomfortable as it may be. The torture scene also serves

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 102–3.

Banti's goal of using theater to foster *il verosimile*: it bears the truth by shining the strongest possible light on the hypocrisy of the trial. Ultimately, however, the torture is useless: Mastro Pietro uses it not to uncover the truth about Artemisia's rape and Quorli's scheme, but rather to intimidate Orazio into withdrawing his suit and settling with Tassi.<sup>99</sup> Banti, then, uses the spectacle of torture to very different ends than the judge: while he implements it to obscure the truth (with the goal of a settlement), she includes it in the play to paint a comprehensive portrait of Artemisia's suffering, one that a modern audience can palpably feel. Most importantly, however, this scene highlights Artemisia's courage and conviction of character. Indeed, one of the primary themes of Banti's feminism—and a common theme of her female protagonists—is the courage and dignity of women.<sup>100</sup> The dramatic representation of Artemisia's torture, then, has feminist repercussions as a form of truth telling that vindicates a wronged woman.

Theatrical transposition, moreover, allows the audience to hear for the first time the live sound of Artemisia's voice, both in her own defense and in protest of the unjust use of torture against her body. As Banti states in her *avvertenza*, theater is better suited to fostering an authentic representation of Artemisia's inner self as the author understands it:

In effetti, troppo distaccato mi diventava, nel romanzo ormai lontano nel tempo, il modo (letterario o poetico, non so) di filtrare attraverso il setaccio della pagina la voce viva della mia protagonista che pure avevo raccolta addirittura sentita, in grida di dolore, nella grafia turbata del cancelliere di Corte Savella [...] E se l'Artemisia del romanzo è forse più conforme a quel che ne sappiamo dalle notizie biografiche, mi lusingo che questa del dramma somigli di più all'animo che la abitava, coi suoi desideri insoddisfatti di dignità, di chiarezza, di affettuosa comprensione; più autentici, magari, dei suoi cedimenti e degli stimoli della sua

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<sup>99</sup> "Mastro Serafino, convocate il Gentileschi che dia la pace al querelato. Questa storia deve finire." Ibid., 103.

<sup>100</sup> For a thorough analysis of Anna Banti's engagement with feminist themes, both within and outside of her literary works, see Paola Carù, "The Unaware Feminist Intellectual: Anna Banti and Feminism," in *Beyond Artemisia: Female Subjectivity, History, and Culture in Anna Banti* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Annali d'Italianistica, 2003).

vanità, documentata, di donna e di “virtuosa.”<sup>101</sup>

Hearing Artemisia’s voice, and thus transforming her into a speaking subject, is an essential part of her defense. Banti’s claim that only theater can capture “la voce viva della mia protagonista” is an example of locating female subjectivity and individuality in the unique properties of the voice and the body that houses it. This focus on the voice as an instrument of subjectivity is a theme of great importance to Italian feminist philosophers, particularly Adriana Cavarero, who in her book *A più voci* outlines the idea of reclaiming female subjectivity through the voice and its essential relationship to the body.<sup>102</sup> Although feminist voice theory postdates the publication of *Corte Savella*, it can be used as an additional interpretive key to retroactively understand Banti’s transposition from novel to play.

In *A più voci* (translated into English as *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*) Cavarero deconstructs what she sees as the inaugural act of metaphysics: the separation of speech and the voice from the individual speaker or speaking body so that it may find its home in abstract thought, which is coded as masculine. Consequently, western philosophy negates the role of the body in producing both sound and thought. Cavarero discusses how this idea—and philosophy’s general “affinity for an abstract and bodiless universality, and for the domain of a word that does not come out of any throat of flesh”—inherently disadvantages women, whose subjectivity and contributions have been historically dismissed given their eternal association with the realm of the body.<sup>103</sup> Understanding Artemisia’s experience at the trial in light of this theory helps elucidate the extent to which her performance

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<sup>101</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 10–11.

<sup>102</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *A più voci: filosofia dell’espressione vocale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003).

<sup>103</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 9.

on the witness stand and public endurance of torture function as a reclamation of subjectivity and individuality. Through her passionate self-defense, Artemisia binds vocal expression to physical experience, thus opposing the traditional notion that a subject's body has no bearing or influence on its thought or intellectual faculties. Furthermore, a patriarchal symbolic order that identifies reason as masculine and corporality as feminine is precisely an order that privileges the logic of linguistics and syntax with respect to other forms of vocal emission. Theater, however, can subvert this tradition by producing representational experiences that use physical bodies, staging, lighting, sound, and the likes to generate meaning that adds to, or even transcends the parameters of linguistics. Thus through the theater, Artemisia's lived experiences—including her *grida di dolore* at Corte Savella and rape at the hands of Tassi—are dignified at the very least differently, and perhaps more completely than they would have been through canonical, male-authored historical narrative, or other genres that are completely dependent on the semantic or linguistic to produce meaning.

The trial, in addition to its metatheatrical function, is also a means for Banti to mount a critique of gender politics in midcentury Italy. By staging a sham trial, in which Artemisia is for all practical purposes, blamed for being raped and forced to marry as reparation for lost honor, the play holds up a mirror to Banti's contemporary society. Rape in Italy, for example, was only considered a "crime against public morality"—and not a criminal offence—until the 1970s. The juridical classification of rape as a moral crime consequently formalized the concept that marriage could be used as reparation for a woman's "loss of honor," as is the case in *Corte Savella*. This regressive practice was commonplace in Italy throughout the majority of the twentieth century and did not stop until the widely-publicized case of Franca Viola in 1965,

whose experience was symptomatic of Italy's regressive laws and customs.<sup>104</sup> Through the staging of Artemisia's rape, and her refusal to continue to participate in the marriage of reparation that was planned and forced by her father, Banti comments on the politics of justice, gender, and parity in both epochs, with specific attention to how women's bodies are and were commoditized by the family and the state.<sup>105</sup> Specifically, the trial showcases how women's voices and opinions are not of equal importance to men's. For example, when Tuzia takes the stand, she is reprimanded by the judge for her incoherent and rambling testimony. He publicly vents his frustration, and at the end of her speech exclaims "santa pazienza! Ma già lo vedo, altro non c'è da cavarvi di bocca che discorsi senza sugo, mannaggia alle donne."<sup>106</sup> It is not just Tuzia: as we know from earlier in Act II, it is clear that the judge, as well as others in attendance, do not believe Artemisia's account of her rape. They assume she is a liar. This type of dismissal of women's opinions recalls the institutional sexism wholly prevalent in 1950s Italy. The idea

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<sup>104</sup> Franca Viola was Sicilian teenager who refused to marry her kidnaper and rapist, pushing instead for formal legal sentencing despite the damage to her reputation and the intimidation tactics employed by the perpetrator against her family. See Marta Boneschi, *Di testa loro: dieci italiane che hanno fatto il Novecento* (Milano: Mondadori, 2002), 275–96. For a more general overview of sexual conventions and traditions in Italy, see Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, *Storia del pudore: la questione sessuale in Italia, 1860–1940* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1990).

<sup>105</sup> In 1958, shortly before the case of Franca Viola, the Italian parliament ratified the *Legge Merlin*, becoming one of the last European countries to abolish the national regulation of prostitution. While the law that went into effect in January 1958 was significantly less progressive than the original version of 1948, its passage nonetheless represented the beginning of incremental post-war changes in attitudes towards women's emancipation and participation in the political life of the new republic. The *Legge Merlin*, named for the Socialist MP Lina Merlin, was "the first of a series of laws and court cases from 1948–1963 in which women legislators employed constitutional rights arguments in their fight for the abrogation of discriminatory laws and for the promotion of women's rights." Molly Tambor, "Prostitutes and Politicians: The Women's Rights Movement in the Legge Merlin Debates," in *Women in Italy, 1945–1960: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. Penelope Morris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 131. See also Sandro Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio: il progetto Merlin e l'Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Carocci, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 90.

that women are inherently liars and naturally unreliable, is a relic of Positivism and the advent of the “criminal woman,” ideologies upheld throughout the process of Italian Unification and well into the twentieth century.<sup>107</sup>

#### THE WOMEN OF *CORTE SAVELLA*

Artemisia is not the only woman in the play whose experiences serve as a critique of gender politics. The relationship between Artemisia and the other women characters—Tuzia, Artemisia’s servant and guardian; Ersilia, her daughter; Armida, Clarice, Violante, and Laudomia, all Florentine aristocrats; Caterina, the novice artist; and Arcangela, the singer—show how female camaraderie is often constrained by the social, economic, and political conditions of patriarchy. It is only with other artists, women like herself who have followed a non-traditional path, that Artemisia is able to find true companionship and encouragement. With the others, solidarity is superficial at best, and often forsaken. Female camaraderie—the ability of women to relate to, empathize with, and support one another within the constraints of a patriarchal society—is a common theme in Banti’s corpus, among both her historical and modern characters, and also proves to be of great importance to other Italian women playwrights such as Dacia Maraini, for whom it functions as an essential component of her feminist philosophy.<sup>108</sup>

Each of the aforementioned characters contributes in a different way to Banti’s representation of women’s subaltern social and economic position. Tuzia is the first of them to appear on stage, and is perhaps the most important character with regard to plot, as her

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<sup>107</sup> Lombroso and Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*.

<sup>108</sup> On Maraini as a feminist writer, see Virginia A. Picchiotti, *Relational Spaces: Daughterhood, Motherhood, and Sisterhood in Dacia Maraini’s Writings and Films* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

participation facilitates Artemisia's rape by Agostino Tassi. She has a Roman-Abruzzese inflection, and speaks in the informal, colloquial drawl of a lower-class domestic servant. Banti immediately shows Tuzia to be at odds with Artemisia's artistic calling ("peccato quella fissazione della pittura"), setting up the notion that painting is perceived by many ignorant, uneducated people as somehow abnormal or deviant for a woman.<sup>109</sup> Tuzia is, on the one hand, fond of Artemisia; on the other, she is easily bribed into betraying her trust. This dynamic is established in the first scene of the play, wherein Tuzia is enticed by Cosimo Quorli to help make Artemisia available to Tassi, which will render her a ruined woman and thus available for Quorli's use without the consequences of prosecution or a marriage of reparation. Although the exact parameters are not given, it is clear that money is exchanged for Tuzia's participation in the scheme. Tuzia's misgivings about the arrangement show her to have a conscience, yet she pays little heed to that inner voice: "da una parte ci avrei gusto che è tanto superbiosa, pure un po' mi dispiace poveraccia di farla capitare male."<sup>110</sup> Tuzia is supposed to be Artemisia's guardian—employed by her father to watch over his motherless daughter—yet she too becomes complicit in the young painter's violation.

Although they initially trade a few insults, Tuzia's daughter Ersilia has an overall friendly relationship with Artemisia. When Artemisia hears of Caravaggio's death, Ersilia tries to comfort the despondent young woman, and shows an unsophisticated yet incisive understanding of how marriage and relationships can disadvantage women:

Non piangere, Micia, io non lo dirò a nessuno quello che m'hai detto [...] Ma questo lo so, che a noi povere ragazze, se uno che conta ci sta dietro è per rovinarci, e per questo è meglio cercarselo fra quelli come noi, il marito [...] Sono tutti uguali, si fa presto a impararlo, noialtre. Gli preme una cosa sola e quando

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<sup>109</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 20.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

l'hanno avuta e ci hanno levato quel poco d'onore, se ne vantano in piazza e noi restiamo come cani rognosi [...] In fondo, meglio che tu pianga così, senza ragione. Piuttosto, sai che ti dico? Fa contento tu' padre e fatti monaca. Mica ci si sta male, sa', in convento."<sup>111</sup>

Even though she is sympathetic, Ersilia is uneducated and has no real understanding of Artemisia's passion for painting and dedication to Caravaggio, which limits the extent to which she can meaningfully connect with her mother's charge. Ultimately, the gulf between their socioeconomic ranks deprives them of forming a meaningful relationship.

Perhaps the most important woman in the play, however, is the one whose absence is most conspicuous—Artemisia's deceased mother. Over the course of the play, Artemisia's motherless status is mentioned frequently by multiple characters: Tuzia, Ersilia, and the judge, among others. When Tuzia decries what she sees as Artemisia's arrogant demeanor, for example, she uses her motherlessness as an insult: "e chi è tu' padre? E tu chi sei? Manco sai chi era tu' madre, disgraziata!"<sup>112</sup> Likewise, when Ersilia lashes out at Artemisia for insinuating that she should court Tassi instead, Ersilia invokes Artemisia's lack of a mother to guide her.<sup>113</sup> This phenomenon is most troubling, however, in the context of the trial, where it is constructed as a character flaw, a sort of moral failing, and as such is used as an insult, an explanation of her supposed haughtiness. It is interesting to note that while Artemisia's own experience of motherhood is addressed at length in the novel, the play does not mention her children with husband Antonio Stiattesi.

The episode of the Florentine noblewomen who in Act III turn on Artemisia for her

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>113</sup> "La voi piantare di fare la principessa? [...] Figurati e me che m'importa di quello storto d'Agostino. Io madre ce l'ho e me lo trova lei il marito e lo voglio bello e giovanotto!" Ibid., 28.

“violent” art, nontraditional lifestyle, and for denouncing their game, further demonstrates how women are prevented from forming bonds with one another by social conditioning that expects and rewards deference to male authority. These women share frustrations common across social classes—controlling or violent husbands; lack of a congenial or important work; exclusion from the world outside of the home—and yet they are unable to bring themselves to support Artemisia, as she represents what they, in marrying, have been deprived of. In needing to justify their own decisions, these women succumb to the patriarchal trope of female rivalry. In holding up a mirror up to their own oppression, Artemisia’s position as a woman who eschews tradition and lives an independent life makes them uncomfortable.

On a thematic level, Arcangela is the most important female character with whom Artemisia interacts. Although she only appears in Act III, her presence serves many purposes: a means by which to articulate the social isolation and economic perilousness that professional women artists face in dedicating themselves fully to their craft; the interlocutor and participant in a woman-to-woman discussion of Artemisia’s *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, and as such the catalyst for a new, non-canonical reading of its violent scene; and lastly, she is the one woman with whom Artemisia is able to find genuine empathy and camaraderie. In fact, when Artemisia is demoralized by her castigation at the hands of the Florentine noblewomen, Arcangela affirms for her that, even though women across social classes encounter common struggles, societal convention prevents them from forming meaningful solidarity: “Ma via, non ci facciamo il malaugurio. Di coraggio voi ne avete quanto occorre e lo sapete anche voi che fra ricchi e poveri non c’è che la carità. Appena un povero si leva dagli stracci e mostra di valere qualcosa il ricco gli diventa nemico.”<sup>114</sup> Their interaction is the cornerstone of *Corte Savella*’s feminist

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 154.

foundation, which, if not acknowledged as such by the author, remains so in spirit and in deed.

#### GENTILESCHI'S JUDITH: FROM PAINTING TO STAGE

In Act III, form and theme converge in the dramatic reenactment, and subsequent reinterpretation of Artemisia Gentileschi's most famous work of art: *Judith Slaying Holofernes*.<sup>115</sup> This convergence also offers the opportunity for Banti to revise the public's perception of the famous painter and her works. At the beginning of Act III, nine years have transpired since the trial, and Artemisia has moved to Florence to pursue her painting, where she works under the patronage of the Duchess. In this act, a very important new character—Arcangela—is introduced. She is a singer, who, worried she has lost her voice and thus her livelihood as well, comes to Artemisia for support and conversation.<sup>116</sup> Female friendship and solidarity between women artists is a key theme here, and is quickly contrasted with the competition and rivalry of the four Florentine noblewomen—Armida and Clarice Torrigiani, the Marchesa Violante Mazzinghi, and Laudomia Vettori—to whom Artemisia is beholden and who come visit her studio to watch her paint. Unlike Arcangela, a fellow artist: “queste dame sono tutte ignoranti e non hanno passione che per i loro quattro cenci. Solo una ne conosco che avrebbe talento e sempre mi prega d'insegnarle la pittura, quella palliduccia Caterina Vanni.”<sup>117</sup> This description sets up the rest of Act III, in

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<sup>115</sup> In his review, Manlio Dazzi considers Act III key to the play's success: “Ancora più sottile è l'ultima scena fra Artemisia e la vicina virtuosa di canto, che le è quasi specchio. È la scena in cui tutto affiora quietamente alla coscienza: la subcosciente vendetta, la decisione di restare sola a se e alla propria arte, il tremito del cuore a parole d'amore mai intese e non indirizzate a lei.” Manlio Dazzi, “Recensione di *Corte Savella*,” *Il contemporaneo* VII, no. 27 (1960): 89–90.

<sup>116</sup> Here Banti underscores the difficulties of being a woman artist whose livelihood depends on her talent: “Non ho più fiato, non ho più speranze, non potrò più cantare.” Banti, *Corte Savella*, 124.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

that it differentiates Caterina as an artist, distinct from the four others—idle women of the upper class who seem to her envious, resentful and litigious gossips, but with a degree of evilness that renders them almost like witches or furies. Caterina, on the other hand, is still young and less hardened by and bitter about the reality of a woman’s life. She hopes to marry and have children someday, but is also an aspiring artist. Her optimism bothers the noblewomen. Artemisia continues: “vengono qui che paiono versiere, chiacchiere e maldicenze a non finire, risatacce sguaiate, a volte litigi che c’è da aver paura di vederle prendersi per i capelli. Io non dico, io le rispetto da dame come sono, ma mai che abbiano un riguardo per me, gli pare d’essere in casa loro, padrone di tutto. Si sono introdotte con la scusa dei ritratti...”<sup>118</sup> Caterina, on the other hand, who at this point is unmarried, will turn out to be like a mirror of the younger Artemisia—an aspiring young painter. The differences between Caterina and Arcangela—the artists—and the other four women play a significant role in the unfurling of Act III’s main event.

The seven loquacious women of Act III are contrasted with the only male character in their midst: Anastasio, Artemisia’s deaf-mute model, who poses almost completely nude.<sup>119</sup> It is noteworthy that the only man in this act (with the exception of Antonio, who briefly appears in the penultimate scene) is unable to speak: he serves as the object of Artemisia’s painting, and for the voyeuristic pleasure of her female audience. Scene 3 brings these characters together for the first time, setting up their subsequent dramatic encounter. First Anastasio and Caterina arrive, followed quickly by the four noblewomen, who rapidly make evident their jealousy of Artemisia’s lifestyle, which to them appears easygoing, free, and fun. They consider her lucky:

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>119</sup> As the opening stage directions indicate: “Entra ANASTASIO, modello, che saluta con un mugolio e si toglie subito tranquillamente i panni rimanendo coperto da uno straccio intorno alle reni, e stendendosi sul lettuccio di posa.” Ibid., 125.

an autonomous woman, unencumbered by a husband or children, who is able to indulge in her passion. They come to the studio to breathe the atmosphere of freedom that—as women dependent on men—they feel they lack: “mi fa piacere vedervi pitturare, mi ci diverto. Noi si viene qui per conversazione e per stare in libertà [...] In casa nostra, sapete, ci si annoia a morte, a me neppure il beneficio d’esser vedova m’ha servita, ci ho il suocero, la cognata da maritare, e quel serpente del maggiordomo che fa la spia (*ride*).”<sup>120</sup> They are unable, however, to see the struggle, dedication, hard work, or barriers to success that Artemisia has faced.

While their conversing begins innocuously enough, in scene 4 it turns biting when the women begin to vent using a very colorful, uninhibited language, adding information and stories about how their husbands are violent, frustrating, brutish, and gross. In addition to trading barbs, their discussion is increasingly judgmental of Artemisia, Arcangela, and Caterina, who they infer at times have questionable visitors. Their own complaints are accompanied by taunts and false advice to Caterina, whose decision not to marry unnerves them:

LAUDOMIA: Son venuta via di casa e non ci ritorno più se non venivo via crepavo [...] di qui non mi muovo neanche se mi manda il bargello [...] Gradirei meglio un paio di schiaffi che la noia d’averlo sempre alla sottane a inquisire su tutti i fatti miei, che se voglio star tranquilla mi convien rinchiudermi nel licet. E come mi devo comportare. E come mi devo vestire [...]

ARMIDA: Gran bestie, questi uomini...

CLARICE: Del resto beate voi che vivete in libertà: se sapeste come vi si invidia noialtre donne di condizione!

ARTEMISIA: La libertà che noi abbiamo non è per viver male, signore. Anzi, devo supplicare la contessa Vettori di dispensarmi dal darle rifugio, sebbene sia onorata della sua preferenza; ma una giovane che vive sola non ama i sussurri.

ARMIDA: Capisco, capisco: voi li fate in segreto i vostri pasticci. Del resto non dite male, meglio è che Laudomia ci ritorni da sé a casa, tanto Cosimo finirebbe per ritrovarla. E poi, ti conosco, Laudomia, dormire sola ti verrebbe a noia, Cosimo lo racconta a tutti che sei brava nelle giostre.

LAUDOMIA: Sei anche sboccata, a quando vedo, e dai del tuo agli altri che faresti due figlioli all’anno. Io non so come fai (*ridendo*) con quel tuo Vieri che pare la morte ubriaca... Certi mariti, ci danno le nostre famiglie! Che ne dici,

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 127.

Caterinella? Sento raccontare che t'hanno proposto lo Strozzi, quello un po' gobbetto. È vero o non è vero?

CATERINA: Signora Artemisia (*raccomandandosi*), per piacere, ci posso andare di là a disegnare?

VIOLANTE: Rispondi a tono, bamboccia, e non perderti a far scarabocchi [...]

CATERINA (*con voce tremante*): Io non so che vi diciate, io non penso a maritarmi.

CLARICE: Che male ci sarebbe, infine? I gobbi, dicono, sono mariti gagliardi, e per certe cose non occorre accendere il lume.<sup>121</sup>

While this scene has a comic and grotesque air, it is also tragic—a typically Baroque hybrid.

Through their piercing comments, Banti highlights how challenging and even dehumanizing institutions such as marriage and family were for women of the time. These women, even though they belong to the upper class, cannot fulfill their desires or needs, and their actions and movements are highly-controlled. They come to Artemisia's studio, therefore, to express their pent-up rage and anger, and to imagine a life in which they had Artemisia's supposed freedom. In many ways, the lives of these women are not a distant historical relic: their struggles, in fact, have much in common with the women of 1950s Italy, who experienced limited opportunities for growth and independence during the postwar period with respect to their western European and North American counterparts. Specifically, women's social, political, and economic opportunities were diminished by retrograde and binary notions of gender that were bolstered by Catholic ideology, the long-reigning and influential political party *Democrazia Cristiana*, and juridically reinforced by the slow repeal and replacement of regressive laws that limited their freedom.<sup>122</sup> Thus, in staging their frustration and rage, Banti is able to comment on the lived experiences of women in a traditional, honor-based society, both past and present.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 128–32.

<sup>122</sup> On the social condition of women in 1950s Italy see “Women, ‘Wounded Emancipation’ and the Crisis of Patriarchy (1945–68) in Maud Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 33–63.

<sup>123</sup> One of the first writers to investigate the private frustrations, worries, injustices, and problems

When, in order to escape the bickering, Artemisia offers Caterina a task in another room, Violante lashes out: “ma voi, Artemisia, non mi fate la madre badessa, che tanto lo sappiamo, non siete mica una verginella, esperienza ne avete più di noi, avete cominciato presto le vostre battaglie.”<sup>124</sup> Artemisia’s reputation has clearly followed her to Florence, yet she responds by proudly defending her career and background: “le mie battaglie, signora marchesa, una dama come voi difficilmente può immaginarle. Sono battaglie per il pane e per l’onore dell’arte.”<sup>125</sup> This incident leads to their debate on Artemisia’s artwork—more specifically the significance of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*—the unfinished canvas of which sits in plain view. Violante’s description of the painting, which oscillates between fascination and repulsion, represents the canonical or stereotypical reading of the work: that Artemisia painted it for revenge, and that the bloody painting with a beheaded male figure is aimed not just at the single man who offended her, but rather, toward all men:

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of Italian women’s lives in the 1950s was Gabriella Parca, a journalist who published the volume *Le italiane si confessano* (1959). Her book is a compendium of letters sent to advice columnists of Italian women’s magazines by mostly lower and middle-class women from all corners of the peninsula. While the letters are on diverse topics, they most often address issues of dating, marriage, sex, and family life, and betray the letter writers’ lack of formal education, tendency toward superstition, and the vastly unequal treatment of women in traditional Italian society. Parca’s contribution is so important in part because it gives voice to legions of women who had previously been excluded from post-war Italian historiography. See Gabriella Parca, *Le Italiane si confessano* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966). Penelope Morris argues that Paraca’s books is one of the first public condemnations of Italian women’s subaltern social status: “*Le italiane si confessano* presents a picture of Italian women living in a climate of ignorance, fear, and coercion and the letters about the unhappiness of wives, the violence of husbands, and the temptation of adultery, all form an eloquent indictment of the lack of education of women, the indissolubility of marriage, and the double standards codified in the system of honor.” See Penelope Morris, “The Harem Exposed: Gabriella Parca’s *Le italiane si confessano*,” in *Women in Italy, 1945–1960: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. Penelope Morris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 119.

<sup>124</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 133.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

VIOLANTE: A che gioco si gioca, Artemisia? Ora mi fate anche la filosofessa, ma io vi so rispondere. Me ne sono accorta, sì: non state torneando con Oloferne? L'avete scelto bene il vostro nemico questo corpaccio mezzo ignudo par l'immagine di tutti gli uomini messi insieme. Vedete che non sono sciocca. Voi li avete messi alla gogna, gli uomini, col vostro Oloferne. Così grosso e muscoloso che gli basterebbe alzare un dito perché quella vostra Giuditta—che fra l'altro vi somiglia—finisse schiacciata come una mosca. E invece eccolo lì che si ritrova, grullo grullo, senza testa. Tutto il sangue che aveva in corpo avete voluto spargere e lo avete dipinto goccia a goccia come una gatta lecca il latte. Se un uomo vi ha offeso, come si dice, avete saputo vendicarvi.

LAUDOMIA: Questa non lo sapevo. Davvero avete dipinto per vendetta, Artemisia? Fate un po' vedere... (*gira davanti al quadro*): Uh. Che orrore! Ci avete ricamato tutto il materasso!<sup>126</sup>

This conversation effectively describes some of the painting's most famous attributes, including the mattress “embroidered” with blood, the severed head, and Holofernes' musculature. Violante even infers that Artemisia perhaps saw something of Judith in herself—reaffirming the canonical understanding of the painting as a portrait of personal revenge. Artemisia, however, quickly mounts a concise and thoughtful defense of her own work. Through this defense, Banti offers a new interpretation of the painting, one that focuses on Artemisia as a professional painter, as opposed to a woman marked only by the experience of rape: “No illustrissime, loro s'ingannano. Io non dipingo per vendetta, ma per amore dell'arte e dipingo il naturale. Cosa si vanno immaginando?” Artemisia paints what is real, Banti affirms: *il naturale*. This vision of what is natural, however, is as deeply troubling to the four furies as it is to actual viewers of the painting both past and present—especially the universally-male audience of art history academe.

The sight of the violent, corporeal painting, and all that it signifies, is the catalyst for the metatheatrical climax of *Corte Savella*: Violante, consumed with rage, implores the other women to enact with her their own version of the painting—and the effect it has on them—as a kind of *tableau vivant*. Similar to the trial in Act II, this second internal theatrical production has its own

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

cast and stage, only this time the protagonist is not Artemisia herself, but rather, her painting. Harnessing Judith's strength, they turn their attention to Anastasio, realizing that for the first time, they have power over a man, and enjoy the fact that they inspire fear in him:

VIOLANTE: Figliole, vogliamo divertirvi? Facciamogli paura davvero al gigante, fingiamo di andargli addosso tutte insieme e di volerlo graffiare così (*alza le palme colle dita a uncino. Artemisia cerca di rompere il gruppo mettendosi in mezzo*). Eh via Artemisia, non ve lo sciuperemo il vostro modello [...]

ARTEMISIA: Vossignoria non parla sul serio, lo so, e perciò non mi tengo offesa. Ma la supplico di considerare che questo povero infelice fa il suo mestiere [...]

VIOLANTE: Si dev'essere accorto di qualcosa, vèh come gira gli occhiacci. E suda, anche. Ora scostiamoci e poi gli andremo incontro all'improvviso. Tu poi, Caterina...

CATERINA: *che avrà sempre tentato di avvicinarsi all'uscio e sarà stata impedita dall'una o dall'altra*. Io me ne voglio andare, vi dico. Io queste cose non le voglio vedere ne sentire. Siete matte o cosa siete?

ARTEMISIA: In carità, Signore, madonna Caterina ha ragione.

VIOLANTE: Bada che tenerume, la nostra virtuosa, a momenti piange. Lei taglia la testa agli uomini, allaga un letto di sangue e poi non sopporta quattro sgraffietti al suo Oloferne! Vien qua Caterina, smettila di scappare, è giusto che anche a te tocchi una parte della commedia. Anzi, se è vero che sei vergine, devi recitare la parte di eroina. Un coltello... ah eccolo qui [...]

LAUDOMIA: O bene, cinque Giuditte invece di una! Cosa aspettate a dipingerci, Artemisia?

CLARICE: Ma fate a modine che il bestione ci guarda con sospetto. (*Caterina vien circondata da tutte, le mettono il coltello in mano, la spingono*).

TUTTE: Ti devi sentire come Giuditta, capace di tagliare una testa. Forte il braccio, chiuso quel pugno [...] Noi si comincia a graffiarlo e tu arrivi: anche se gliela fai davvero una scalfittura poco importa. (*Caterina s'irrigidisce come ipnotizzata e stringe il coltello*).

VIOLANTE: Aspetta il segno. Via! (*le donne stanno per slanciarsi, Anastasio si leva impaurito, Artemisia gli si mette dinanzi*).

ARTEMISIA: *porrendo le brache e il gabbano ad Anastasio gli fa segno di rivestirsi e di andarsene*. In casa mia questi divertimenti non usano. La commedia è finta, signore [...]

VIOLANTE: Vi facevo più spiritosa, signora pittrice, e, soprattutto, meno insolente. La colpa è nostra, che v'abbiamo dato troppa confidenza e le vostra parli non la meritano [...] (*In silenzio escono, senza salutare. Rimane Caterina, che s'è lasciata cadere su una seggiola e ora piange col capo appoggiato alle ginocchia*).<sup>127</sup>

Here Violante turns into the director, ordering Caterina to take part in their play, and denouncing

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 138–41.

Artemisia's hypocrisy: creating violent imagery, she argues, is no better than feigning its live reproduction. Furthermore, the heightened tension of the moment practically hypnotizes Caterina, who is subsequently horrified at what she has almost done. Here the modality of metatheater allows the four women to externalize the frustrations, anger, and jealousy they feel towards their husbands onto the naked body of Anastasio. Unlike the other men in their lives, this one has no voice to order them around and can be insulted with impunity. In many ways, this operation could be seen as an ironic play on the tradition of the male artist's silent, nameless female model who is only a beautiful, naked body, and has no voice, personality, or subjectivity.

Violante, Clarice, Laudomia, and Armida are the object of violence at home, but in Artemisia's studio they are inspired to turn the tables, so to speak, and instead become the perpetrators of violence. In Artemisia's rendition of a brave Judith beheading the biblical tyrant Holofernes—a piece of art that turns upside down a gendered power dynamic and foregrounds the potential for women's bravery, strength, and subjectivity—they are forced to come face to face with the painful repression they have suffered their whole lives, both in childhood and marriage. The Judith painting, then, is another form of mirror in the play—albeit a very dark one. This mirror goes far beyond the surface of the face, however, and penetrates deep inside their being, touching on something that moves them to expel their pent-up rage and frustration. In the painting they see a facet of their lived reality reflected back at them, and it stimulates resentment. Through their dramatic reenactment of the painting, in which the goal is to commit violence and inspire fear in a male victim, they seek to vindicate themselves against the oppression they have experienced. Ironically, however, this is the same operation of which Violante accuses Artemisia. In this metatheatrical tableau, Banti shows that regardless social or economic status, women suffer disenfranchisement in a society ruled by men.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this second play-within-a-play is what transpires in its wake: Caterina's fitful departure from painting and subsequent breakdown; Artemisia's decision not to return to Antonio; and Artemisia and Arcangela's discussion and new interpretation of the painting that started it all. After Artemisia forcefully breaks up Violante's "play," a sobbing Caterina reveals how traumatic the experience was for her. She blames Artemisia, whose violent and bloody painting has driven the women mad, herself included, to the point that she almost capitulated to using the knife on poor Anastasio. She thus decides that she will no longer draw: "è finita. Non disegnerò più, non ci verrò più da voi. È vostra la colpa, le avete fatte impazzire voi con tutto quel sangue del vostro Oloferne, e anch'io son come impazzita, non so quel che non avrei fatto con questo coltello!"<sup>128</sup> Artemisia defends herself kindly, with empathy, and tries to convince Caterina that she is not the fallen woman the Florentines make her out to be: "lo sapete bene che io non ho colpa [...] Ne hanno fatto un poco a voi, ma molto di più a me. Voi avete la vostra casa e siete una signora, io sono solo sola e povera e ho una triste vita. Ma non solo quella che hanno detto quelle dame."<sup>129</sup> Caterina will not listen, convinced that Artemisia—whom she thought she loved and could follow as a pupil—has "poison in her heart," that she wants to kill all men and teach women to hate them. Now she will never be able to see men in the same light, or be able to marry or have children as an honorable woman, as she now knows the truth demonstrated by the painting and the ladies' reaction to it: that "il mondo è fatto di uomini prepotenti e di donne che gli son nemiche."<sup>130</sup> The scene closes with Artemisia alone in her studio, head in her hands.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 143.

Caterina's break down is not without cause. Through the painting, and what it inspired in the four furies, she has witnessed the upsetting truth of gender politics, and it leads her to unravel. This, in many respects, is the moral crux of the play. Banti wants the audience of 1960 to see through *Corte Savella* what Caterina in 1620 sees through the painting: namely, that patriarchal society denies women the right to realize themselves independently of their marriages and families, and inhibits their ability to pursue a "lavoro congeniale e una parità di spirito fra i due sessi."<sup>131</sup> Women who wish to operate outside that paradigm must make themselves an exception by acquiring the strength of the mythical Judith, the dedication of Artemisia, and the willingness to live a life of solitude—something Artemisia the character demonstrates at the play's end.

While *Corte Savella* indeed concludes on the theme of solitude—the price Artemisia must pay for her artistic career—it first offers a new interpretation of the Judith painting, one that rejects the canonical reading put forth by Violante, Caterina, and others. The last scene of the play finds Artemisia again at her window, discussing with Arcangela the events that have just transpired. Their conversation in this scene recalls the female solidarity with which the act began, and that was challenged by the intervening scenes. Unlike Caterina, who has been frightened from her esteem, Arcangela professes admiration for her fellow artist when Artemisia questions the value of her painting:

ARTEMISIA: Ditemi, Arcangela, l'avete guardato bene questo mio Oloferne? [...]

ARCANGELA: Che domanda! Sicuro che l'ho guardato [...] è un quadro spantoso [...]

ARTEMISIA: Voglio dire: vi piace, è di vostro gusto? Ve lo terreste in casa se ve lo donassi?

ARCANGELA: Quella è una tela da principi e non per la casa di una povera cantatrice. E poi con tutto quel sangue... Ho idea che mi spaventerebbe.

ARTEMISIA: Questo volevo sapere. Vi spaventerebbe. E non vi ha fatto meraviglia

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<sup>131</sup> Banti, *Romanzi e racconti*, 245.

che io abbia scelto, fra tanti che ce ne sono, un soggetto così crudele e l'abbia dipinto, proprio nel momento che tutto il sangue di Oloferne gli esce dalle vene?

ARCANGELA: No davvero [...] Se avete scelto quel soggetto è perché siete animosa e il sangue non vi fa paura, massime che degli uomini siete piuttosto nemica che amica.

ARTEMISIA: Così si pensano quelle dame, Arcangela. Anzi, m'hanno saputo dire che questo Oloferne io l'ho dipinto per vendetta. Chissà da quanto gira questa storia, forse tutta Firenze ne discorre della Gentileshi che dipinge sangue per vendicarsi dell'uomo che l'ha svergognata da fanciulla [...] Allora, ecco, m'è venuta addosso una gran paura che avessero ragione.

ARCANGELA: O triste che sono! E sciocca io che m'ha tradito la lingua. Ho detto che siete nemica degli uomini a somiglianza di Giuditta o di Clorinda, donne valorose e guerriere. Ma voi non odiate gli uomini se ne avete amato uno e ancora siete fedele alla sua memoria.<sup>132</sup>

It seems that Violante's criticism and the madness elicited by the painting has provoked doubt in Artemisia. She is struck by how her reputation as a man-hater made the ladies feel entitled to come to her to vent their rancor against men. But Arcangela assures her that this is not the case—Artemisia does not hate men, but rather does not fear them. Perhaps this is Banti's way of showing how the dominant interpretation of Artemisia's corpus—and of the Judith series in particular—as revenge for her rape, and thus as hatred for all men, is reductive and does not paint a comprehensive picture of Gentileschi's aesthetic vision and artistic courage.

Artemisia confirms that her love for Caravaggio is the only thing that keeps her going, and provided her with the strength to decline Antonio's tempting offer to join him once again. Here Banti ties together two of the play's major themes: the practice of art and its incompatibility with traditional gender roles. To this end, the play closes with Arcangela imploring Artemisia to give life with Antonio a try: "Perché resistere, Artemisia? Siete giovane e non è peccato farsi amare dal proprio marito."<sup>133</sup> Artemisia demurs, insisting that in order to respect him and herself—and her immutable feelings for the dead painter and what he represents— she must

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<sup>132</sup> Banti, *Corte Savella*, 154–6.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

remain alone: “È peccato non ricambiarlo e per me sarebbe peccato doppio perché mi conosco e so che mai muterò sentimenti. E poi che so il dell’amore? La violenza, il disgusto, la rassegnazione, la vergogna. Fatemi ascoltare le parole di un innamorato fedele.”<sup>134</sup> Instead she asks Arcangela to read her the love letter from Alvisè—listening to it will recall her buried beloved and give her the strength to endure in her solitude—and the play ends with Arcangela reciting the opening address “dilettissima mia,” which Artemisia repeats quietly to herself.<sup>135</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The experiences and choices of Banti’s Artemisia demonstrate a feminist typology very much in the same vein as Virginia Woolf, Sibila Aleramo, and other early twentieth-century writers. The woman creator, writer, or artist is the exceptional case, a paradox. To achieve success she must forsake comfort and stability for passion, which is incompatible with women’s traditional responsibilities. Importantly, the idea of the woman artist as an exceptional figure is not predicated on the exclusion of other women, but rather, on the conditions of a society that requires women to sacrifice their needs and ambitions in marriage, family, and social relations. This is an isolating experience, one that Banti experienced first-hand—and as the relationship between Artemisia and Arcangela, and their conflict with the four noblewomen shows—women artists can only be understood by fellow artists. The cycle, furthermore, is difficult to interrupt: women like Violante, who are constrained by their traditional role, do not necessarily want to have a mirror held up to their oppression. Others, like Caterina, frightened by the reality she has understood for the first time, find it easier to blame fellow women for the injustices perpetuated

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

by male-dominated institutions. The social and economic conditions of patriarchy, therefore, work to prevent meaningful solidarity among women across classes and social situations.<sup>136</sup>

It is to this end that Banti positions the Judith painting so prominently in her play: it provokes in its spectator a specific effect, one of inquiry, anxiety, and awe. The operation at the foundation of *Corte Savella*, therefore, is one of parallelism: the effect of the play itself on its modern audience is conjured and reinforced by the effect of the painting on the characters behind the fourth wall. Furthermore, the painting forces its viewer to confront his or her discomfort with the representation of woman as heroine, as an acting subject endowed with power and courage. As Garrard observes:

In her paintings of Judith... Artemisia appears to have drawn personal courage from her subject, to go farther than any woman artist had ever gone—or would go, before the twentieth century—in depicting a confrontation of the sexes from a female point of view. The Uffizi *Judith* inevitably chills us, and it has offended many who commented on it, but not because of its violence, for violence is a staple of art. It offends and shocks us because it presents an antisocial and illegitimate violence, the murder of a man by a woman. Beneath the rational veneer of the moralized biblical story lies a lawless reality too horrible for men to contemplate. Holofernes is not merely an evil Oriental despot who deserves his death, he is Everyman; and Judith and her servant are, together, the most dangerous and frightening force on earth for a man: women in control of his fate.<sup>137</sup>

Gentileschi is canonically referred to as a Caravaggesque painter, and while his influence is undoubtedly pronounced in her corpus, her paintings are about more than form and style.<sup>138</sup> As

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<sup>136</sup> For more on the theme of women's solidarity and the development of feminist movements through the 1970s, see "Feminism of Difference: A New Movement and Politics (1968–83)" in Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*, 64–97.

<sup>137</sup> Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 279.

<sup>138</sup> For example, Caravaggio's depiction of Judith slaying Holofernes (1598–9) is markedly different from Gentileschi's, particularly with regard to Judith's engagement in her task. As Garrard notes: "The youthful, graceful Judith is contrasted with an elderly, weather-beaten Abra, and in her delicate femininity, she is an antipode to the rough virility of the startled Holofernes. And yet Judith and Holofernes, the chief protagonists, are hardly equivalent in their degree of

Garrard notes, they are also about content, and in that capacity they foreground the historical and mythic heroic female subject—including Judith, Susanna, Lucretia, and Cleopatra, among others. In using the modality of theater to explicate the meaning of Gentileschi’s Judith—her *capolavoro* and principal artistic legacy—Banti too engages in an act of historical revisionism. By staging the lived experiences of Artemisia; providing her with a voice to speak for herself; and highlighting the symbolic and thematic resonance of key works of her artistic corpus, Banti adds to and questions the extant works on Gentileschi, and in doing so offers new interpretive possibilities built on a distinctly feminist foundation.

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human realization. Holofernes, shown at the very moment his neck is being severed, is not yet dead, and he screams in outraged protest, a forcefully vital counterpart to the functionally effective but facially inexpressive Judith. His physically explicit, unidealized features contrast extremely with the emotionless, late *maniera* beauty of mannequin-like heroine, whose wrinkles are grafted inorganically upon her marmoreal face. Caravaggio’s rendering of such aesthetically imbalanced types—the female conventional, the male real—is less likely to be explained by Renaissance art theory or Jesuit theology than by the influence of gender on the practice of an artist who happened to be male.” Ibid., 291.

### 3. Women, Body and Politics: Franca Rame's Feminist Monologues

#### INTRODUCTION

“Quanto è difficile per una donna trovare testi e ruoli adatti per il teatro!”<sup>1</sup>

The artistic legacy and theatrical works of Franca Rame (1926–2013) are the focus of the third and final chapter because they embody the confluence of theater writing, acting, performing, politics, and activism essential to the practice of feminist theater. Through her series of dramatic monologues and one-act plays that address the unequal treatment and subordination of women in Italian society, Rame brings feminist concerns center stage, to diverse venues ranging from the Milanese establishment Teatro Odeon, to occupied factories, to Palazzina Liberty, a repurposed urban market turned into an avant-garde theater. The goal of this chapter is twofold. First, I will shed light on Rame's comprehensive career, which spanned six decades and numerous editorial, archival, and managerial responsibilities in addition to her work as a writer and actress. Rame is in a unique situation among the authors addressed in this dissertation, however, as her career and accomplishments are almost always considered in conjunction with those of her husband Dario Fo, a playwright, actor, and Nobel Laureate. While their impressive and productive half-century collaboration and Fo's dedication to feminism are essential facets of Rame's professional trajectory, it is also imperative that Rame be studied and remembered as her own subject, a distinct theatrical figure whose performances and contributions to the Italian theatrical panorama are not merely an appendage to those of her husband, but rather merit a place in the canon of

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<sup>1</sup> Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Manuale minimo dell'attore* (Torino: Einaudi, 1987), 316. A new edition of this volume was published in 2015. See Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Nuovo manuale minimo dell'attore*, 2015.

twentieth-century Italian theater.

Second, this chapter demonstrates how Rame's career serves as a particularly fitting point of conclusion in tracing a feminist genealogy of twentieth-century Italian women playwrights. In focusing on the unique methods employed in her politically-charged monologues—including autobiographical reference, improvisation, playing multiple characters, assertiveness, and directly addressing the audience—I will elucidate the aesthetic and political practice of engaging in feminist action and authorship through theater and performance, a practice that has evolved over the decades to become increasingly explicit and direct. Specifically, I will look at a selection of monologues that address the intersections of patriarchal society and violence against women: *Medea* (1977), *Lo stupro* (1975), and *Monologo di una donna araba* (1972). Indeed Rame unequivocally parses in a more explicit feminist way the same themes—marriage, family, violence, parity, and sexuality—as Amelia Pincherle Rosselli at the *fine de siècle* and Anna Banti after the Second World War. Furthermore, these monologues disseminate her unique brand of transnational, Marxist feminism that focuses explicitly on bettering the material, familial, and sexual conditions of women in the twentieth century. Through an analysis of her feminist monologues, this chapter also traces Rame's development from principal actress and creative partner in the Fo-Rame theater groups to an actively involved author and co-author—and in doing so articulates a new understanding of Rame as feminist playwright predicated on the theory of theater critic Sue Ellen Case. Despite her untimely death on May 29, 2013, Rame was a contemporary of Dacia Maraini (their careers had many parallels and overlapped for decades), and the similarities and divergences between their respective works, artistic careers, and philosophies regarding feminism provide an interesting and useful perspective on the intersections of theater, activism, and feminism at the dawn of the new millennium.

## FIGLIA D'ARTE

At only eight days old, Franca Rame made her theatrical debut in her mother's arms as the child of Genoveffa di Brabante, the noble heroine of one of the Rame family's many popular adaptations of chivalric stories and legends for the stage. On her first performance, Rame wryly comments "non parlavo molto e avevo una recitazione piuttosto naturalistica. Sapevo poco dell'epicità e dell'estraniamento."<sup>2</sup> While at that point she was not yet versed in Brechtian notions of epic theater, Rame's life-long exposure to and participation in the theater is an essential facet of her personal, artistic, and political coming of age and eventual career.

Franca Rame was born to Emilia Baldini and Domenico Rame on July 18, 1929 in Parabiago, a small town in the province of Milan. Rame's place of birth was purely coincidental—it was simply where her family was performing that day when her mother happened to go into labor.<sup>3</sup> The youngest of two sisters and one brother, Rame learned the family trade by observing her parents and older siblings from childhood. In fact, she describes her intimate familiarity and comfort with the theater as if it were gained through a sort of osmosis, or proximity to expertise. In her contribution to *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, Rame adds that in her case, all normal childhood milestones took place on stage: "avevo imparato a muovermi e parlare sul palcoscenico... quasi senza rendermene conto... imparavo le parti sentendoli recitare per serate da mia madre e dalle mie sorelle più grandi. Recitare, per noi, era semplice come camminare e respirare."<sup>4</sup> On her father's side, Franca and her family's heritage as actors and directors may be traced back to an itinerant theater troupe in the eighteenth century. Since their

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<sup>2</sup> Fo and Rame, *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, 290.

<sup>3</sup> Luciana D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Firenze: F. Cesati, 2009), 315.

<sup>4</sup> Fo and Rame, *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, 291.

foundation, the *Compagnia Rame* has toured northern Italy year-round, performing their diverse repertory based in the style of *commedia dell'arte* for gatherings of peasants, workers, and other townspeople. It was a difficult lifestyle—the company performed 363 days a year and was constantly traveling—thus for part of her childhood, Rame was sent to study at a boarding school in Varese.<sup>5</sup> While Rame enjoyed her studies, she knew that her true calling was the stage: “io studiavo volentieri: mi piaceva, ma pensavo sempre al momento in cui sarei tornata a casa a recitare... recitavamo tutti in famiglia.”<sup>6</sup> A brief stint in nursing school at the Clinica Principessa Jolanda in Milan—while a formative experience—did not stick, and Rame continued instead with her theatrical career.<sup>7</sup>

The *Compagnia Rame* performed adaptations of works ranging from Shakespeare to Ibsen, from folktales and legends to the classics of antiquity.<sup>8</sup> All of their performances, however, were mediated through the theatrical practice of *recitare a soggetto*, a technique

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<sup>5</sup> From Rame's birth until 1943, the *Compagnia Rame* faced the additional pressure of operating under the constraints of the Fascist regime. In Rame's online archive there is a fascist performance permit, which gave the company permission to perform in the province of Como in 1938 (<http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=6316&IDOpera=65>). On the intersections between fascism and theater in Italy see Gianfranco Pedullà, *Il teatro italiano nel tempo del fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994). For a sociological perspective on fascism and the fostering of political ideology through theater see Mabel Berezin, “The Organization of Political Ideology: Culture, State, and Theater in Fascist Italy,” *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 5 (1991): 639–51.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Rame quoted in Silvia Varale, “Nel laboratorio di Dario Fo e Franca Rame. Un colloquio con Franca, un'operosa ape regina,” in *Coppia d'arte, Dario Fo e Franca Rame: con dipinti, testimonianze e dichiarazioni inedite*, ed. Concetta D'Angeli and Simone Soriani (Pisa: PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Franca Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, ed. Joseph Farrell (Pisa: Della Porta, 2013), 31.

<sup>8</sup> They adapted both plays and novels for the stage, and their performances include renditions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Manzoni's *Promessi sposi*, Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and Alfieri's *Maria Stuarda*. A list of their adaptations is available on the archive: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=1090&IDOpera=65>.

similar to improvisation, but which requires the ability to recall a story and enact it, improvising dialogues and using set pieces from their repertoire of scenes in light of the interests of a given audience.<sup>9</sup> Rame acquired this set of unique theatrical skills over a lifetime—starting at birth—and was keenly aware that her family’s theatrical training was unlike that of most traditional companies of the time. Their style was not necessarily accessible or familiar to other actors who had more conventional stage experience and training.<sup>10</sup> In an interview with Silvia Varale, Fo’s personal assistant from 1998–2003, Rame discusses her immersion in the world of improvisational theater:

Mai studiato un copione, nessuno di noi bambini: né io, né le mie sorelle, né mio fratello. Nostra madre ci ha insegnato a recitare ancor prima di leggere e scrivere. Ma noi eravamo abituati a recitare a soggetto, spesso improvvisando le battute. Quando si doveva metter su un nuovo spettacolo nostro zio Tommaso leggeva un romanzo o riadattava le storie del paese dove si stava recitando e ce le raccontava, poi metteva in quinta la scaletta delle scene essenziali. Toccava quindi a noi attori sul palco improvvisare, inventare le battute. Non erano mai fisse, in pratica ogni sera erano sempre diverse. Non si sapeva mai quando una battuta finiva e ne cominciava un’altra. Era davvero un disastro per gli attori scritturati che ogni tanto lavoravano con noi in compagnia: diventano pazzi perché all’inizio non riuscivano mai a seguirci!<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> According to Serena Anderlini, “with a couple of rehearsals, no play-text at all, and the aid of a *scaletta*, the actors in the Rame company could put up a play on virtually any subject.” Serena Anderlini, “Franca Rame: Her Life and Works,” *Theater* 17, no. 1 (1985): 33. This technique and its antecedent *commedia dell’arte* were widely known, studied, and discussed in Italian theater circles in the early twentieth century. While many critics felt that improvisation and comic timing were inherently positive facets of the Italian theatrical tradition, other critics such as Silvio D’Amico noted the pitfalls of *recitare a soggetto*—including the potential lack of plot cohesion, fragmented performances, the reduction of complex ideas to a simple *canovaccio*, and its use as a platform for virtuosic displays of comedic talent. See Donatella Orecchia, *Il critico e l’attore: Silvio D’Amico e la scena italiana di inizio Novecento* (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2013), <http://books.openedition.org/aaccademia/257>.

<sup>10</sup> The *Compagnia Rame* is part of a long history of Italian touring theater troupes, or *girovaghe*, and in that sense they are not unique. Their frequent use of improvisation and *recitare a soggetto*, however, would have been unfamiliar to a traditional actor trained in the commercial theaters of Italy’s major metropolises.

<sup>11</sup> Varale, “Nel laboratorio di Dario Fo e Franca Rame. Un colloquio con Franca, un’operosa ape

Here Rame describes how her family company would use the process of *recitare a soggetto* in order to flesh out new ideas and creatively mount new productions. This technique is perhaps most famous for its parodic treatment in Luigi Pirandello's play *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930).<sup>12</sup>

For the Rame family company, improvisation was tied to their commitment to the production of a people's theater, accessible to the lower classes and rural populations. The decision to combine politics with theater was driven largely by Domenico Rame and his brother Tommaso, the "poeti della compagnia," both of whom were dedicated socialists.<sup>13</sup> Rame adds that her family's theater also had a didactic purpose, and was geared specifically toward making classic stories accessible to all by means of the stage.<sup>14</sup> In the same interview, she discusses the connection between theater and political engagement—a key theme of her own life and career—and one that was clearly nurtured since infancy by her family's legacy:

il teatro che mettevamo in scena era un teatro che ricalcava la vita quotidiana della gente semplice e umile ed era come se quella stessa gente che veniva ad assistere ai nostri spettacoli si vedesse catapultata protagonista sul palco... La

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regina," 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* is the last of Pirandello's metatheatrical trilogy that includes *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921) and *Ciascuno a suo modo* (1924), and was immensely popular during Rame's childhood. In the play, which involves a fictional interaction with its own audience, Pirandello contrasts the Italian actors' proclivity for improvisation, interpretive freedom, and emotional identification with the characters, with their German director's views that the actors must follow directions and keep their roles scrupulously separate from their own personalities, ideas, and feelings.

<sup>13</sup> Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Cinquant'anni di storia italiana attraverso il teatro: Dario Fo e Franca Rame: tournée 2001–2002*. (Viareggio: M. Baroni, 2002), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Some examples of the *Compagnia Rame's* commitment to an accessible people's theater includes performing for inmates in prison; using marionettes to stage Manzoni's *Promessi sposi*; and adapting famous operatic texts such as *Tosca* and *La Traviata* for rural and working-class audiences who would otherwise not have had access to high culture. See <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/elenco.aspx?IDOpera=65&IDTipologia=15&IDPagina=1>.

semplicità: proprio in questo stava il segreto della nostra popolarità... Ho molti documenti in cui si legge di spettacoli messi in scena dalla compagnia della mia famiglia per sostenere cause sociali... Questo mi ha insegnato che il mio lavoro può senza dubbio essere utile a raggiungere la gente, a mobilitare l'opinione pubblica, ad utilizzare la mia popolarità, la mia fama per dire le cose che mi stanno a cuore e per ottenere dei risultati laddove il cittadino comune non riesce... portare a conoscenza, magari denunciare situazioni, problematiche, disagi.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did the *Compagnia Rame* cater to a working-class public and support local causes, but they were also committed to a certain collective engagement with other area theater troupes and often exchanged hospitality. Most importantly, the experience of growing up with the *Compagnia Rame* fostered in Franca the political imperative to use theater for the purpose of engaging with society, and indeed she went on to make politically committed theater her life's work.

Despite their progressive agenda, certain traditional, gendered principles governed the *Compagnia Rame*. The women, for example, took care of organizational tasks such as ticket sales, sewing costumes, cooking, cleaning, and general care-taking of family members on the road, while the men's roles were almost completely creative or managerial in nature, and included the position of *capocomico*, which was held by her father Domenico.<sup>16</sup> Rame describes this division of labor and the influence it had on her future career with Dario:

Solo mio padre, che era il capocomico e direttore della compagnia, sapeva rivolgersi direttamente al pubblico, intrattenerlo, scherzare, provocarlo nei

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<sup>15</sup> Varale, "Nel laboratorio di Dario Fo e Franca Rame. Un colloquio con Franca, un'operosa ape regina," 12–13.

<sup>16</sup> The *capocomico* served as the lead actor and director of the company and would choose the texts to be performed. In an interview with Joseph Farrell, Franca explains how the *capocomico* would facilitate the process of *recitare a soggetto*: "Era una cosa incredibile, non so se oggi potrei rifarlo. Come ho già detto, mio padre leggeva un romanzo, riuniva la compagnia, ce lo raccontava e noi tutti prendevamo appunti. Intanto, la mamma, la zia, le sarte, le conoscenti preparavano i costumi, e dopo due giorni e un minimo di prove, debuttavamo, con una semplice scaletta degli avvenimenti appesa dietro le quinte... Leggevo velocemente le istruzioni della scaletta e poi via... in scena!" Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 23.

prologhi che lui solo eseguiva (mai durante la rappresentazione vera e propria). Noi femmine di compagnia si recitava, ci si occupava dei costumi, si stava alla cassa, si aiutava materialmente ad allestire lo spettacolo, ci si preoccupava accidentalmente di occuparci della casa e di cucinare. Ma sul palcoscenico non ci si affacciava mai a dialogare col pubblico. E così continuai a rivestire i panni e la logica della recitante non proiettata nella provocazione e nell'intrattenimento anche dopo, quando formai compagnia con Dario.<sup>17</sup>

Even though Rame was an expert and experienced improviser, learning how to directly address the audience was a separate skill she had to learn after leaving the family company. In the 1970s it would become a hallmark of her feminist monologues. Furthermore, the gendered division of responsibilities in the Rame family theater company foreshadowed some of the challenges Franca would have to face in her own family life and career decades later. While indispensable, much of Rame's hard work in managing the Fo-Rame theater collectives, and editing and publishing their works has gone either unnoticed or underappreciated: it is devalued as organizational, secretarial, and non-artistic, in other words, women's work. This issue will be addressed at greater length in the next section on the Fo-Rame partnership.

One of the major differences between Rame and Fo—as well as between Rame and the other playwrights addressed in this project—is precisely the family background heretofore outlined. Unlike her husband, Rame was born into the theater, spent her childhood acting and improvising, and was continually immersed in the operation of and participation in a traveling theater company. Fo, on the other hand, had to learn how to improvise, a skill for which he became famous but which was hard-won—a fact he often discusses in essays and interviews. Moreover, Rame was so comfortable acting on stage that she even admitted to not feeling nervous before a performance, going so far as to question actors who do: “Gli attori che conosco, prima di andare in scena... sono talmente emozionati che hanno le mani gelate, o sudate... Io

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<sup>17</sup> Fo and Rame, *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, 291.

non ho mai le mani sudate, perché questo è il mio lavoro. Ti sembrerà un po' greve, ma è come se il salumiere, affettando il prosciutto, provasse una grande emozione. L'ha fatto tante volte, è nato tagliando il prosciutto. E io sono nata in teatro."<sup>18</sup> Time and again, Rame ties her innate confidence in her artistic abilities to the ideas of work and tradition: she was born in the theater, it was her job, and that is where she was meant to be.

In 1951 Rame left the family company to settle in Milan, becoming active in the city's commercial theater circuit.<sup>19</sup> After signing with the *Compagnia di prosa Tino Scotti* she made her Milanese debut at the Teatro Olimpia in the play *Ghe pensi mi* by Marcello Marchesi. She was immediately typecast in roles that showcased her blond hair, good looks, and little else. Rame has always been aware that her career in the commercial theater began by being treated with a high degree of superficiality, and indeed this experience figured prominently in her and Dario's subsequent dedication to the creation and performance of multifaceted, complex women characters:

In Italia, nel giro del teatro e del cinema, imperversano una superficialità e una banalità sconcertanti: siccome io, lo dicevo prima, ho determinate caratteristiche fisiche, per intenderci quelle della bellona, non posso fare che la *vamp*. Questo è vero ancora oggi, figuriamoci allora. In ogni film facevo "logicamente" la *vamp* (però buona e un po' sfortunata) mai che mi si proponesse d'interpretare il ruolo di una donna qualsiasi, che magari sa parlare e pensare in proprio.<sup>20</sup>

It was during this *bellona* period while on the set of *Sette giorni a Milano* at the Teatro Odeon that Rame met and began to work with Dario Fo. The couple married shortly thereafter, at the Basilica of Sant' Ambrogio in Milan on June 24, 1954. Their 56-year long collaboration until her

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<sup>18</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 23–4.

<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive timeline that chronicles the joint career of Fo and Rame, see D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 315–36.; and Fo and Rame, *Cinquant'anni di storia italiana attraverso il teatro*, 6–29.

<sup>20</sup> Dario Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1977), 140–1.

death on May 29, 2013 was one of the most prolific and inextricable and in modern theater history, yet her contribution has consistently been seen as subordinate or marginal to his creative genius. The goal of the next section, then, is to analyze the parameters of their symbiotic working relationship, and in doing so, to elucidate Rame's manifold contributions to their partnership and her active—if at times unconventional—participation in the playwriting process.

#### RAME AND FO: AN INSEPARABLE PARTNERSHIP

During the course of her life and career, Franca Rame has been described in a multitude of complimentary and contradictory ways: extraordinary actress, blond bombshell, feminist icon, feminist traitor, editor and publisher, political activist, playwright, and pedestal to Dario Fo's genius. While each of these descriptors includes an element of truth, when left on their own or not properly tied together, they highlight the superficial way in which Rame's career is often discussed and treated as an afterthought. What is missing from the critical conversation around Rame's career is a comprehensive interpretation that elucidates and connects both her unique theatrical accomplishments and managerial responsibilities, and contextualizes them within the formidable Fo-Rame partnership. Concetta D'Angeli aptly summarizes Rame's marginalization within the critical discourse, and the prejudices that preserve and perpetuate the notion that her artistic contributions are subordinate to Fo's:

Non è stata trattata con giustizia Franca Rame. È stata snobbata dagli studiosi di teatro, soprattutto italiani, monopolizzati dalla personalità esuberante di Dario Fo, occupati a interpretarne le proposte scardinati, dare un senso al ribaltamento che compie delle norme attoriali e drammaturgiche, giudicarne le provocazioni politiche, valutare i risultati artistici. E poi in Italia la critica mantiene... pregiudizi maschilisti atavici che rendono difficile il riconoscimento delle qualità autonome di una donna. Franca Rame è stata liquidata come la metà di una formidabile coppia di teatranti, e quindi subordinata, non autosufficiente.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Concetta D'Angeli, "Proprio una figlia d'arte," in *Coppia d'arte, Dario Fo e Franca Rame*:

It is not that Rame has been ignored. Indeed she is the subject of many books, articles, documentaries, and other studies. It is instead that she is too often remembered and considered only in relation to her husband—in the roles of assistant, editor, manager, and collaborator—to the point that her status and legacy as an artist in her own right is frequently undermined. While their partnership undoubtedly served as the fundamental organizing principle for both of their careers, viewing Rame in the shadow of Fo—the lesser half of a great whole—continues to deprive her of the autonomous critical recognition she deserves as a pioneering Italian artist, actress, activist, and playwright. Also of concern is her erasure from their playwriting process and legacy. A brief chronology of their jointly-run theater companies will serve as a foundation upon which to conduct a closer analysis of Rame’s role within their partnership; the gendered nature of her work; and trace both her individual and joint artistic and authorial contributions.

Shortly after their marriage and a few ill-fated years in Rome working in the burgeoning movie business, Rame and Fo returned to Milan in 1957 to establish their own theater company, the *Compagnia Fo-Rame*. During these early years Fo served as the actor, director, and writer, in addition to set and costume designer, while Rame was the principal actress, collaborator, and manager of the whole enterprise.<sup>22</sup> As time passed, however, Rame’s role in their collaboration began to grow and change, encompassing new creative and editorial responsibilities. For the next decade, often referred to as their *commedia dell’arte* phase, the *Compagnia Fo-Rame* would go on to produce a wide variety of plays at the most famous theaters in Milan—including the Piccolo Teatro and the Teatro Odeon—as well as in European cities such as Paris, Prague and

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*con dipinti, testimonianze e dichiarazioni inedite*, ed. Concetta D’Angeli and Simone Soriani (Pisa: PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>22</sup> On their early years in the film industry, see the chapter “Roma e il cinema” in Fo and Rame, *Nuovo manuale minimo dell’attore*, 62–5.

Warsaw.<sup>23</sup> While this is widely considered to be Fo and Rame's bourgeois period, that label is to a certain extent inaccurate, as their theatrical works have never been extricable from political themes and engagement. As Rame states: "non è mai esistito un teatro non politico o apolitico."<sup>24</sup> It is, rather, a matter of degree. During their first decade together, Fo and Rame were less directly involved with causes of the extra-parliamentary left than they would be in the 1970s, but their works always maintained a political edge. Indeed it was during this period that Fo and Rame made one of their first public political stands: opposing state censorship on national television. When producing the eighth episode of *Canzonissima* (1962), a RAI television show connected to the national lottery, Rame and Fo were told that they would have to cut a part of their sketch due to its satirical content. Instead of acquiescing to the demands of the censor, the duo refused to perform and were subsequently banned for sixteen years from Italian television and radio—both of which were state monopolies controlled by the Christian Democrat government.<sup>25</sup>

Driven by the political developments of the late 1960s, Rame and Fo created *Nuova Scena* in 1968—a new, independent theater collective composed of over thirty actors, technicians and artists who were likewise interested in operating outside the confines of Italy's traditional theaters. It was an idealistic collective, whose roots were based in some of the same ideas that

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<sup>23</sup> During this period they produced plays such as *Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper* (1959); *Aveva due pistole con gli occhi bianchi e neri* (1960); *Chi ruba un piede è fortunato in amore* (1961); *Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe* (1963); *Settimo: ruba un po' meno* (1964); and *La colpa è sempre del diavolo* (1965), among many others.

<sup>24</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 129.

<sup>25</sup> Fo and Rame, *Cinquant'anni di storia italiana attraverso il teatro*, 12. For a comprehensive overview of Fo and Rame's dealings with state censorship, see Luciana D'Arcangeli, "Dario Fo, Franca Rame and the Censors," in *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*, ed. Guido Bonsaver and Robert S. C. Gordon (London: Legenda, 2005), 158–67.

informed the Rame family company, but it quickly unraveled: “Era un’idea utopistica, quella di creare un’isola socialista in un paese che socialista non era. Siamo partiti con delle buone intenzioni, portare il teatro dove il teatro non arrivava.”<sup>26</sup> *Nuova Scena* operated under the auspices of the *Associazione ricreativa e culturale Italiana* (ARCI), the cultural arm of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), which Rame had officially joined one year prior.<sup>27</sup> Given their anti-establishment politics, *Nuova scena* was not the beneficiary of any state arts funding and thus operated on the margins of the theater scene, often performing in alternative locations supported by the ARCI such as sports arenas, town squares, *case del popolo*, and factories. The company eventually made their home at Il Capannone di Via Colletta, a decommissioned factory repurposed as a communal art space. *Nuova Scena* debuted on October 25, 1968 in Cesena with a production of *Grande pantomima per pupazzi piccoli e medi*. Over the next few years Fo and Rame produced some of their most important plays, including *l’operaio conosce 300 parole, il padrone 1000, per questo lui è il padrone*; *Legami pure, tanto spacco tutto lo stesso!*; and *Mistero buffo*.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, by October of 1970, Rame and Fo left the company due to political disagreement. The Christian Democrats were not the only targets of their satire: Fo and Rame often critiqued the PCI as well, and after their tour of *Legami pure* was protested by party members, the ARCI denied *Nuova Scena* the use of theater spaces. Rame discusses this experience and their break with the PCI in an interview: “A un certo punto, durante una delle nostre tournée in Emilia, le case del popolo ci chiusero la porta in faccia. Non ci davano più i teatri, i burocrati e dirigenti del partito erano infastiditi dalle nostre critiche. Facevamo dei

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<sup>26</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 51.

<sup>27</sup> D’Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 319.

<sup>28</sup> *Mistero buffo*, often described as proletarian retelling of the bible and other folktales, was one of their most successful shows. It has been performed more than 5,000 times.

discorsi che imbarazzavano il segretario della sezione davanti a tutto il paese, discorsi che denunciavano il partito.”<sup>29</sup> Rame officially left the PCI in 1970 by personally turning in her membership card to Enrico Berlinguer—the secretary of the Communist Party, and a man she greatly admired. Above all, Fo and Rame’s departure from *Nuova Scena* demonstrates the depth and integrity of their political convictions, which have always been determined by substance and character as opposed to simply toeing the party line. Indeed the independence and mutability of their political ideology often earned them the scorn of establishment organizations and alternative collectives alike, further cementing their reputation for unconventionality.

After *Nuova Scena*, Fo and Rame went on to establish *Il Collettivo Teatrale La Comune*. During this time they staged plays such as *Morte accidentale di un anarchico*; *Tutti uniti! Tutti insieme! Ma scusa, non è quello il padrone?*; and *Fedayn: La rivoluzione palestinese attraverso la sua cultura e i suoi canti* at the Capannone. In 1972, however, they were not allowed to renew the lease, and in December 1973 after another round of creative and political differences, Rame and Fo broke off to form *Il Nuovo Collettivo Teatrale La Comune*. While some of their collaborators followed them to the new company, the move was difficult in that they lost all of their materials, books, and stage devices, which belonged to the previous collective, effectively forcing them to start from scratch.<sup>30</sup> It was not until 1974 that the *Nuovo Collettivo* found a permanent home at Palazzina Liberty, a defunct indoor market space in the Porta Vittoria area of Milan that they repurposed into their artistic home base. Palazzina Liberty became the home front for plays, protests, and concerts in solidarity with the struggles of the working class and

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<sup>29</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 117.

<sup>30</sup> D’Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 321.

economically disenfranchised.<sup>31</sup> They also staged many works and protests in support of the referendums to legalize divorce and abortion.<sup>32</sup> It was during these years that Rame and Fo began to produce plays and monologues with a specific focus on the socioeconomic and political condition of women in Italian society. It is also at this time that Rame's role in the company began to change: from the early 1970s onward, she became more of a creative co-director and co-author: her writing, editing, and stage notes were indispensable to the creation of new theatrical productions and edited volumes.

In March 1977, after sixteen years of ostracism from television, Fo and Rame returned to the small screen with *Il teatro di Dario Fo*—21 hours of programming showcasing some of their most famous works, including *Mistero buffo*; *Settimo: ruba un po' meno*; *Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe*; *La signora è da buttare*; and *Parliamo di donne*. This last addition was of the utmost importance: of the works collected for the television program, it was the only new group of plays, and it was the first to deal exclusively with the condition of women.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Rame's performance earned her the “Maschera con lauro d'oro” prize from the *Istituto del dramma Italiano* (IDI) for Best Television Actress. Shortly after their return to television, Rame debuted *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* at Palazzina Liberty on December 6, 1977. This marked a turning point in the Fo-Rame partnership: *Tutta casa*, a collection of monologues that highlights the condition of women, was the first work that both Franca and Dario signed as co-authors. It is also one of their most popular plays, having been performed thousands of times in countries all

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<sup>31</sup> “Alla Palazzina Liberty per mesi si mettono in scena spettacoli il cui incasso viene devoluto per aiutare le cause degli operai in lotta, raccogliendo oltre 1 miliardo di lire (il biglietto aveva un costo di 500 lire).” *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>32</sup> Fo and Rame, *Cinquant'anni di storia italiana attraverso il teatro*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> The 1977 television transmission of *Parliamo di donne* is an early version of what will eventually be known as *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (1978).

over the world and translated into many languages.

What, then, is the best way to characterize Rame's role in their joint artistic endeavors, particularly as they evolved over the course of the decades? During their fifty-six-year collaboration Rame has worn many hats: editor, organizer, publisher, archivist, advice-giver, sounding board, manager, public liaison, co-author, author, and creative partner. Editing, preparing, and publishing a play is an enormous responsibility that requires both detail-oriented and creative capacities. In her own words: "preparare un testo teatrale per la pubblicazione richiede un grande lavoro. Dario scrive il testo, io lo batto al computer e inserisco tutte le didascalie in corsivo: le entrate, le uscite, i cambi di luce, la scenografia e gli oggetti di scena, e ancora le diciture come 'scoppia in singhiozzi,' 'lentamente si toglie l'abito,' 'scoppia in una risata.' Mi permetto anche delle libertà."<sup>34</sup> It is worth considering that Fo's fame was in many respects greatly contingent on Rame's efforts. Without her dedication to documentation and editing, perhaps his works would have never made a global impact nor attained such immense popularity, for, as Joseph Farrell states, "he loses interest in his works once they are performed, leaving the task of collecting, collating, and publishing them to his wife."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Rame comments that the words she most often heard from Fo were "fai tu," implying that he trusted her completely with any matter, but also that he did not want to concern himself with the necessary but mundane matters required to run a creative enterprise.<sup>36</sup> The following section traces Rame's manifold contributions to the Fo-Rame partnership with the goal of demonstrating how her work has often gone underappreciated or taken for granted by both a scholarly audience

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<sup>34</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 91–2.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Farrell, "Franca Rame's Nose, Or What If They Had Never Met?," in *Franca Rame: A Woman on Stage*, ed. Walter Valeri (West Lafayette, I.N.: Bordighera, 2000), 206.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Passion Unspent*, 2015, 96.

and the greater public, which in turn has led to the disregard of her authorial contributions.

In many ways, Rame's contributions—particularly in the early years before she became a regular co-author—exemplify a certain type of gendered, organizational work that traditionally falls to women and goes unnoticed and uncompensated. Indeed, parallels can be drawn between her work with Fo and the gendered division of labor in the *Compagnia Rame*. It cannot be overstated, however, that her role in their joint enterprise was essential to its success. It was work that she did voluntarily and excelled at, but it also had the effect of marginalizing her artistic accomplishments—both at the time and in the future. Rame was highly cognizant of this situation, which led to frustration and humiliation, but also to a determined reaffirmation of the importance of her work. Without her, their many theater collectives and companies simply would not have succeeded. She explicitly addresses these concerns in her contribution to *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, where she exposes the discrepancy between the reality of their partnership and the public perception of it, which consistently devalued or negated her participation:

In questi anni ho capito veramente fino in fondo cosa significa la condizione della moglie, della donna e della moglie. D'accordo: Dario è quello che è: un monumento, stupendo, bravo, meraviglioso, tutto bellissimo! Ma, casualmente, faccio l'attrice anch'io; casualmente, sono in questi testi; casualmente, *Canzonissima* l'abbiamo fatta e lasciata insieme; casualmente le scelte più grosse della nostra vita, non sempre pensate solo da Dario, le abbiamo decise insieme. Ma mai che a nessuno venga in mente di dire "hanno lasciato la televisione," no, e Dario Fo che "ha abbandonato," perché è lui la testa. Questo dopo che avevamo trascorso notti in bianco per decidere insieme, perché una cosa simile non la decide uno da solo. Mi ricordo che proprio in quell'occasione viene uno e mi dice: "Ho bisogno assolutamente di un articolo del Dario." Dico: "guarda che non c'è."... Allora quello dice: "Facciamo così: l'articolo lo scrivi tu, e lo firmiamo col nome del Dario." Che, credo, è il massimo dell'umiliazione. Il fatto è che poi, io, come carattere non spingo avanti, non mi faccio largo a gomitare. Faccio il mio lavoro che, lo dico senza modestia, ritengo estremamente importante per il collettivo, perché l'organizzazione della compagnia, l'occuparmi delle edizioni dei dischi, dei libri, e i rapporti con l'esterno, e tutto il resto sono cose essenziali. In effetti, so che servo in modo determinante. C'è però quella stupenda battuta, non so più chi l'abbia detta: "Voi donne non prendete mai il Nobel." "Certo, perché non abbiamo le mogli che ci aiutino a prenderlo." Sentenza assolutamente

attendibile.<sup>37</sup>

It is prophetic that exactly twenty years before Fo would win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997, Rame comments on the gendered work that goes into supporting any such an artistic stature. It is also significant that Rame specifically connects her lack of public credit—and thus professional subordination—to her perceived position as “Dario’s wife.” Over the years she made many statements along these lines, noting how her continuing misrecognition was due in large part not to the fact that she was a woman or a collaborator, but rather to the very fact that she was his wife. In one example, after spending months collecting and editing a volume of Fo’s works for Einaudi, her name was “inadvertently” omitted from the text. Not only was she not acknowledged as a co-author, but her editorial work was also ignored.<sup>38</sup> This oversight was humiliating, but also illustrative of a system that presupposes and takes for granted a wife’s labor, not considering it worthy of explicit credit. Indeed, women’s undervalued and at times unpaid labor is a theme Rame weaves through many of her feminist monologues and one-act plays written during the 1970s. Ultimately, public conception of Dario as the brains of the operation coupled with Rame’s essential-but-disparaged editorial responsibilities further reinforces the notion that her artistic contributions as actress, comic, playwright, and creative co-director are just a facet of his genius, rather than an expression of her own talent.

It is essential to note that Dario was always a champion of Franca’s work, though he perhaps could have done more to acknowledge her essential contribution. By tracing her unique

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<sup>37</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 141–2.

<sup>38</sup> “Se non fossi stata sua moglie, se fossi stata un’altra, avrebbe dovuto, per forza di cose, mettere anche il mio nome come autrice. Einaudi ha pubblicato numerosi testi di Dario curati da me e inizialmente non figurava neanche la dicitura ‘a cura di Franca Rame.’ Quando chiesi a Roberto Cerati la spiegazione di questo, mi ripose: ‘Non ci avevamo pensato.’ Il guaio è che sono la *moglie*, e la moglie, talvolta, è un mobile di casa, un quadro alla parete, qualcosa che ti sta vicino ma che non vedi.” Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 87.

contributions as an author I am not criticizing Fo's behavior, but rather am attempting to treat her as an autonomous artist and creative subject in her own right—a privilege always afforded to him but rarely to her. That goal brings us to the question of authorship.<sup>39</sup> In many ways, Rame and Fo's collaboration questions traditional notions of authorship and artistic credit. For Rame and Fo, turning an idea into a play, then a performance, taking it on tour, and ultimately publishing the work was a complex, lengthy, and communal process. Fo attests to the ever-changing nature of their works, and the discrepancy between the first draft and the final product: “ogni testo che noi diamo alla stampa è stato messo in scena e recitato da noi e dalla nostra compagnia per centinaia di volte. Durante queste rappresentazioni, accade che si improvvisino interi dialoghi, che si inventino battute e lazzi... Succede così che al termine della tournée ci ritroviamo un testo molto diverso dall'originale di prima scrittura.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Rame insists that there is no facile answer to the question “who wrote this play?:” “A volte mi si chiede, ma questo testo l'hai scritto tu o Dario? ‘Da Dario e da me’—rispondo—e proprio così, a Dario viene un'idea... ne parliamo... si mette a scrivere... quando il testo arriva a me... a volte mi va benissimo, altre volte aggiungo... o scrivo appunti a parte. Così è per me: scrivo... Dario lo legge... poi si discute. E via che i testi sono pronti per andare in scena.”<sup>41</sup> Not only do their theatrical performance-texts change over time, but many of the intimate details of the creative

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<sup>39</sup> For a comprehensive study on Fo and Rame's co-authorship with regard to the monologues see Jacqueline Gawler and Stephen Kolsky, “Co-Authorship in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. The Writing of the Monloghi,” *A.U.M.L.A. Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association*, no. 102 (2004): 85–104. Serena Anderlini states that “a major problem in writing about Franca Rame is drawing a line between what belongs to her and what belongs to her husband.” Anderlini, “Franca Rame,” 1.

<sup>40</sup> Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Parliamo di donne; Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire*, Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame, XIII (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), V.

<sup>41</sup> Franca Rame's *presentazione* in D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 13.

process remain hidden from view, including the couple's conversations, arguments, and suggestions that led from initial draft to final product.<sup>42</sup> In interviews, for example, even their own testimony on the subject is at times contradictory, their memories inconsistent. As Joseph Farrell notes, the question of authorship will always come to the fore when writing about Rame and Fo:

The question of her contribution to the writing of the couple's theater will be discussed as long as their work is deemed worthy of performance. Both have made contradictory statements, sometimes claiming more credit than was probably due and at others modestly giving all praise to the other. As she repeated on many occasions, the two cooperated on all fronts personally and professionally, so that at times the one was genuinely unsure in retrospect of how much the other had contributed to a shared project. At what point did a helpful criticism made by Franca of an early version of a play by Dario become an act of creativity, which changed the nature of a scene, a dialogue, a character, or even the direction of the text?<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps we will never know with certainty who wrote what—but that fact is due in great part to the collaborative and fluid nature of their playwriting and performative process rather than to gaps in its documentation.

If first-person interviews and anecdotes are of marginal help in deciphering the question

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<sup>42</sup> In one particularly illustrative quote, Rame discusses Fo's respect for and reliance upon her life-long theater experience. Without providing specific examples, she also mentions how their collaboration at times led to arguments: "Dario dice che ho come un terzo occhio, un fiuto speciale per il teatro. Forse dipende dal fatto che ho cominciato a recitare fin da quando ero piccolissima. Ho dentro di me, proprio come un sesto senso, il ritmo, il tempo del teatro, delle pause, e della recitazione. Mi rendo immediatamente conto se un pezzo, una battuta regge, sta in piedi. Sono in un certo senso la peggior critica dei lavori di mio marito perché, implacabile e severa, sono la prima a leggerli e a evidenziare le parti deboli, quelle da eliminare, le lungaggini o a chiedergli di dare una svolta al testo, di riprenderne lo svolgimento con un'altra chiave, con un'altra prospettiva. Sono l'unica che può dirgli onestamente quello che pensa, che sente. Qualche volta lo mando in crisi, qualche volta facciamo delle litigate tremende, ma poi Dario accetta le mie critiche anche perché sono fatte onestamente, con coscienza e alla fine, 99 volte su cento, ho ragione!" Varale, "Nel laboratorio di Dario Fo e Franca Rame. Un colloquio con Franca, un'operosa ape regina," 17.

<sup>43</sup> Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 2015, 94.

of authorship, official publication records do little else to clarify the situation. Indeed the published volumes of their work inconsistently credit Rame for her authorship and editorship. The Einaudi series *Le commedie di Dario Fo* is composed of thirteen volumes total, many of which label Rame's contributions differently. For example, Volume VII is entitled *Venticinque monologhi per una donna di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*. This volume includes *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, among other texts, and clearly acknowledges Rame as an author, yet the series title remains *Le commedie di Dario Fo*.<sup>44</sup> For Volume IX, *Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata, e altre quattordici commedie* authorship is again attributed to both Fo and Rame, yet the series title continues to omit her name.<sup>45</sup> It is not until Volume XIII that the series title changes to *Le commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*. This volume includes *Parliamo di donne (L'eroina and Grasso è bello!)* and *Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire*.<sup>46</sup> Volumes XI and XII include a title page which states "edited by Franca Rame." On the addition of her name to Volume XIII, Rame comments "abbiamo fatto progressi: nel tredicesimo volume di Einaudi si legge 'Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame.' Questo è stato proprio Dario a chiederlo alla casa editrice. Diciamo che era ora. Mi ha fatto molto piacere, ovviamente, che il mio lavoro fosse riconosciuto, ma il più felice era lo stesso Dario."<sup>47</sup>

Despite being inconsistently credited in their official published works, it is clear that during the 1970s Rame's role in the partnership changed greatly: her writing and performance

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<sup>44</sup> Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, *Le commedie di Dario Fo*, VIII (Torino: Einaudi, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata*, *Le commedie di Dario Fo*, IX (Torino: Einaudi, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Fo and Rame, *Parliamo di donne; Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire*.

<sup>47</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 91.

styles began to emerge from under the mantle of Fo's and articulate themselves as distinctive and unique. Furthermore, after over a decade of creating politically engaged theater, they both felt that the theme of women and the issues they face at work, home, and in familial and sexual relationships was missing from their repertoire: "d'altronde, per un teatro come il nostro... mancare il collegamento con la quesitone delle donne sarebbe gravissimo. Il problema femminile oggi è troppo importante."<sup>48</sup> It seems that their joint decision to confront themes of feminist importance and the condition of women in Italian society provided the impetus for Rame to step more explicitly and openly into the roles of co-author and playwright. It was the tipping point in a long and complex theatrical collaboration that had previously seen Rame as a collaborator and editor as opposed to "author." While previously Rame had brought Fo's plays to life on stage with her irreplaceable comedic talent, the feminist monologues offered her a new artistic opportunity: that of showcasing her own opinions as a woman on politics, social norms, theater aesthetics, and the purpose of performance through playwriting. To a certain extent, Rame's new openly authorial role could be seen as a *presa di coscienza*, a version of the feminist practice popular at the time. In playing an active as well as explicit role in the authoring of the monologues, and indeed composing some of them independently, Rame exemplified the type of creative and professional autonomy and potential that she believed women the world over deserved: "Rame vuole scrivere da sé i testi che rappresenta. È un bisogno nato in rapporto alle donne e alla necessità di creare un teatro che faccia conoscere le difficoltà pratiche della loro vita e il disagio interiore che ne consegue."<sup>49</sup>

The most unequivocal support of Franca's authorial contribution to the monologues came

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<sup>48</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 144.

<sup>49</sup> D'Angeli, "Proprio una figlia d'arte," 27.

from Fo himself, who in *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo* discusses her crucial roles as author and creative voice in the making of female protagonists (though he still ascribes the crucial, “weighty” act of writing to himself):

Non avrei mai potuto scrivere personaggi femminili abbastanza solidi e, senza voler fare il modesto, di un certo peso, se non ci fosse stata Franca. Sono stati scritti, proprio, *con Franca*, non *addosso a Franca*. Lei è, sul piano della critica e del grande orecchio teatrale, addirittura mostruosa. Non le viene a caso, dipendente dal fatto di essere nata davvero sul palcoscenico, quasi fisicamente, e di aver, così, respirato ancora inconscia la dimensione della rappresentazione.<sup>50</sup>

For *Tutta casa letto e chiesa*, among other texts, Rame clearly stepped beyond the role of experienced theater counsel, becoming instead an active playwriting partner who helped create the characters, plots, themes, and jokes that made the monologues an international success. With few exceptions such as *Lo stupro* (1977), *L'eroina* (1991), and *La donna grassa* (1992)—which were composed entirely by Rame herself—the majority of the monologues were clearly written a *quattro mani*, in an imperfect and ambiguous collaboration that highlights Rame’s life-long familiarity with the theater and comedic expertise, and puts it in concert with Fo’s playwriting experience. Indeed in the introduction to *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, Fo explicitly states the collaborative nature of the playwriting: “Quasi tutti sono monologhi scritti a quattro mani da me e Franca. Spesso è successo che Franca mi proponesse un’idea, io stendevo il trattamento, si discuteva più o meno vivacemente e poi toccava a me il compito di sceneggiare il tutto. Altre volte era Franca a propormi un canovaccio da leggere, io le opponevo le mie considerazioni e lei concludeva la stesura.”<sup>51</sup> When asked in an interview about the decisively different nature of her contribution to the feminist monologues and one-acts compared to their previous works, Rame acknowledged that the idea was indeed hers, but echoed Fo’s recognition

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<sup>50</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 148.

<sup>51</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, no page.

of their writing as a shared enterprise: “diciamo che mi veniva un’idea e la esponevo a Dario. E lui di rimando: ‘Mettila giù! Mettila giù!’ E io la mettevo giù. Poi lui prendeva in mano il testo e ‘metteva giù’ a sua volta. Poi io ci lavoravo ancora... insomma, veramente si lavorava a quattro mani, anche se mai insieme.”<sup>52</sup> From this project forward, through the 1980s and 1990s, Rame ceaselessly developed her playwriting skills by continuing to be an ever more involved author, co-author, and creative force in their artistic pursuits. Indeed the unfolding of the 1970s would witness Franca Rame’s evolution from largely “decorative” principal actress of the early company to politically-committed playwright whose works address essential themes of feminist importance.

Given the preceding discussion, I now propose a new, feminist way of evaluating the question of authorship as it pertains to Rame’s engagement with the feminist monologues and one-act plays based on the theory of feminist theater critic Sue Ellen Case. The premises upon which my analysis is constructed may be distilled as follows: (1) Rame became a decisively more active co-author in the 1970s and eventually authored select works on her own; (2) most of the feminist monologues and one-acts published in *Venticinque monologhi per una donna* were written *a quattro mani*; (3) certain plays such as *Lo stupro* are known to be Rame’s alone; and (4) even if Rame technically *wrote* less of a given monologue, she remained an integral part of its conceptualization, development, implementation, and success, as her multifaceted theatrical talents bring the play from the page to the stage. Ultimately, however, the minutiae of who exactly wrote what are immaterial to the classification of Rame as feminist theater practitioner. Sue Ellen Case’s deconstruction and examination of the term playwright confirms that it is not germane to focus on which individual words were Fo’s and which instead were Rame’s—if such

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<sup>52</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 94.

information were even possible to ascertain. In *Feminism and Theatre* Case argues that in order to understand the place of women playwrights in history and to include their work in the scholarly canon, evidence from outside the written text itself must be evaluated. This is true for ancient, modern, and contemporary periods alike. Case contends that the even the term playwright—a category that appertains to a dominant cultural and artistic discourse that has historically privileged male production—must be reevaluated from an etymological perspective in order to make room for a revised understanding of the process: “The etymology of the word, its literal definition, provides a wider arena in which to work than just the discovery of written texts. ‘Wright’ does not denote writing, but means someone who makes something, an artificer. In other words, a playwright is a *maker* of plays, not necessarily a *writer* of plays.”<sup>53</sup> This definition of playwright is more inclusive of women and other groups who were for long periods of time prevented from writing and accessing other hegemonic modes of artistic and cultural discourse. Franca Rame is thus a consummate playwright in Case’s terms, in both the canonical and renewed sense of the word. As a writer, performer, and director she truly makes theater, bringing stories to life on stage. Case’s reevaluation of the term playwright brings much needed perspective to Rame’s artistic career and legacy, helping to move the critical discussion away from the perennial question of authorship to the levels of content, meaning, performance, politics, and advocacy instead.

One of the most-discussed moments in the history of the Fo-Rame theater partnership, as mentioned above, is the awarding of the 1997 Nobel Prize for literature to Dario Fo alone.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed account of Fo and Rame’s experience after receiving the news of his Nobel Prize victory see “La vittoria del fabulatore: il monologo alla corte del Nobel” in Marisa Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame: genesi e composizione dello spettacolo teatrale, 1996–2000* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2006).

Rame's formal exclusion from the accolade seemed an unjust confirmation of her status as a "second-tier" collaborator—a trope against which she had fought for decades. Especially considering that jointly-awarded Nobel Prizes are a mainstay of the sciences and social sciences, there is a hint of purposefulness to her omission. To Fo's credit, he accepted the award in both of their names with a loving speech that explicitly mentioned her contributions and their life-long partnership, although he falls short of acknowledging her as a co-author:

Without her at my side, where she has been for a lifetime, I would never have accomplished the work you have seen fit to honour. Together we've staged and recited thousands of performances, in theatres, occupied factories, at university sit-ins, even in deconsecrated churches, in prisons and city parks, in sunshine and pouring rain, always together. We've had to endure abuse, assaults by the police, insults from the right-thinking, and violence. And it is Franca who has had to suffer the most atrocious aggression. She has had to pay more dearly than any one of us, with her neck and limb in the balance, for the solidarity with the humble and the beaten that has been our premise... Believe me, this prize belongs to both of us.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps it is as much in this speech as anywhere else that Rame is acknowledged for her contributions to their particular brand of revolutionary, political theater. Even such a speech, however, could not erase the humiliation of her formal exclusion from the prize. In commenting on the award, Rame illustrated her situation with a metaphor: "Dario è un monumento, ma i monumenti non si reggono in piedi da soli... Hanno il piedistallo, e io sono il piedistallo e sono 45 anni che sto piegata, a ho 'sto monumento sulla schiena, ed ogni tanto mi pesa."<sup>56</sup> In this statement Rame laments the perception of her subordinate role in their artistic endeavors, reaffirms her essential function to Fo's success, and expresses the emotional and physical toll the

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<sup>55</sup> Dario Fo, "Dario Fo - Nobel Lecture: Against Jesters Who Defame and Insult," trans. Paul Claesson, December 7, 1997. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1997/fo-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1997/fo-lecture.html).

<sup>56</sup> Rame cited in Pina Piccolo, "Rame, Fo and the Tragic Grotesque: The Politics of Women's Experience," in *Franca Rame: A Woman on Stage*, ed. Walter Valeri (West Lafayette, I.N.: Bordighera, 2000), 115.

disparity has taken on her over the years. Rame's exclusion from the Nobel Prize is particularly egregious considering the fact that for twenty years prior she had worked as a true co-author, helping to create, stage, and disseminate texts that "scourge authority and uphold the dignity of the downtrodden," as the Nobel committee stated in their reasoning for awarding Fo the prize.

#### MARXISM AND FEMINISM: AN UNCOMFORTABLE NEXUS

During the 1970s, Rame came in to her own as a playwright and co-author by realizing and performing dramatic monologues that specifically address the condition of women in Italian society. Therefore it is essential to trace her relationship with feminism—as a movement and a set of ideas—and to place her accurately within the complex panorama of late twentieth-century Italian feminism.

In 1976, Franca Rame was asked by an interviewer if she identified as a feminist. Her answer is telling: "Sì, se il femminismo ha un taglio politico, non quando è lotta sterile contro l'uomo. Sì, se è un cammino mano nella mano. Le donne vanno aiutate a liberarsi."<sup>57</sup> Rame was uninterested in the radical, separatist feminist collectives popular in Italy at the time, and was uneasy about some aspects of the movement as they developed over the course of the 1970s. One year later, in her contribution to the volume *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo* Rame clarified her support for feminism, but maintained the position that no ideology should separate the sexes.

They must instead work together to better society:

Io ho una grande stima delle femministe, specie di quelle che non si mettono in totale antagonismo col maschio, di quelle che operano coraggiosamente per trasformare la realtà, lavorando nei quartieri, facendo gli aborti ecc. Non sono una femminista militante, nel senso che la maggior parte del mio tempo è già assorbita oltre che dal teatro, dall'attività di Soccorso Rosso, e da mille altre cose che

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<sup>57</sup> Quotation taken from the 1976 interview "Due parole con Franca Rame," available on the archive: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=14849&IDOpera=51>.

servono a tenere in piedi la baracca. Seguo però lo svilupparsi delle iniziative e delle attività del Movimento femminista.<sup>58</sup>

The key phrase in this citation is “trasformare la realtà.” Rame was interested in feminism insofar as it was a platform to inspire collective action that would in turn change the material conditions of women in society. In a similar fashion to Anna Banti, however, Rame had a complicated relationship with feminism, both in terms of ideology and as an organized social movement. While she explicitly fought for and supported the rights of women—she paid particular attention, for example, to juridical matters such as the legalization of divorce and abortion, and exposed what she saw as the unequal nature of the traditional Italian marriage—she sometimes eschewed the feminist label itself, believing that both men and women were harmed by an exploitative, consumerist, and corrupt society. Most importantly, she disagreed with any kind of feminism that considered itself separatist, excluded men, or viewed women’s subordination as removed from the concerns of socio-economic class conflict.<sup>59</sup>

Rame’s conception of social order was based first of all on divisions of class, not gender. Ultimately, she was “never able to afford women the status of an independently exploited class”—a position in conflict with the beliefs of many feminist activists and organizations who viewed women’s struggles as unique and not adequately addressed by established political parties.<sup>60</sup> This feeling of a profound disconnect between feminism and Marxism was a common occurrence among Italian women of the 1960s and 1970s who would have been inclined toward

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<sup>58</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 144. Soccorso Rosso was an organization founded by Rame to help political prisoners and their families access legal services and other forms of aid.

<sup>59</sup> Examples of such separatist feminist organizations in Italy include *Rivolta femminile*, *Libreria delle donne di Milano*, and the *Diotima* group, which will be discussed further in this section.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution* (London: Methuen, 2001), 198.

feminism but already self-identified as Communist and were members of the PCI instead. Rame wholeheartedly dedicated herself and her theatrical works to the political, economic, and social betterment of women in society—both in Italy and internationally—but disagreed with and was troubled by what she perceived as the quarrelsome attitude and estranging antics of many radical feminist groups, who at times protested and criticized her performances. In turn, some radical feminists were weary of her, and criticized her lack of dedication to their movement as not on par with her dedication to the PCI and other leftist organizations.

Both Rame's political thinking and eventual understanding of feminism were deeply rooted in the vocabulary and ethics of western Marxism and historical materialism. Communism had always been her guiding political philosophy, as she clearly states in an interview with Farrell shortly before her death in 2013: "il comunismo mi andava bene, l'ideologia comunista mi andava bene, perché mirava all'uguaglianza. Non è giusto che tu abbia settantaquattro ville se io dormo sotto le scale. La differenza sociale mi ha sempre disturbato. Io andavo alle manifestazioni del PCI, facevo i miei interventi, ne dicevo di tutti i colori."<sup>61</sup> Rame believed that the exploitation of women under a patriarchal system was analogous to the condition of the working-class with respect to the upper-classes. Women in Italy at this time, however, suffer a double exploitation: they endure the same conditions as men on the factory floor (nay, in fact they are paid less than their male counterparts), but perform countless hours of unpaid labor at home.<sup>62</sup> Rame therefore consistently connected her understanding of feminism to her previously-established practice of fighting for the rights of the working class through theater and activism.

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<sup>61</sup> Rame officially left the PCI in 1970, however Communist ideology continued to guide her artistic career and social activism until her death. Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 116.

<sup>62</sup> On gender roles in Italy at home, in public, and at work, see Franca Bimbi, *Differenze e diseguaglianze: prospettive per gli studi di genere in Italia* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2003).

She would frequently use the prologues of her plays to discuss economic exploitation, and directed her comments to the workers in attendance. Often, Fo and Rame would stage their plays at occupied factories. In the same interview, Rame comments on the importance of educating the oppressed to understand and rise up against their condition—an essential facet, in her opinion, of any feminist philosophy that claims to promote women’s liberation:

Lo sfruttamento era dappertutto, anche all’interno della famiglia. Il femminismo, se inteso nel suo vero significato, è un concetto molto alto, di un valore inestimabile. Le cosiddette femministe, *leaderine* di allora, si rivolgevano alle donne modeste, alle operaie, con un linguaggio altisonante e privo di senso, imbevuto di ideologie. Io, invece, cercai di mettere in atto la mia concezione di femminismo portando i nostri spettacoli nelle fabbriche. Dopo ogni rappresentazione, come ad esempio, *Legami pure che tanto io spacco tutto lo stesso*, si discuteva, e l’operaia capiva. Capiva, se usavi il giusto linguaggio, altrimenti era come fare un buco nell’acqua.<sup>63</sup>

Here Rame lauds feminism as “priceless,” but does not shy away from critiquing feminist activists she feels do not sufficiently, accurately, or appropriately address issues of exploitation. Instead she advocates for her own form of feminist activism, which is based on directly communicating with populations in need, as opposed to espousing abstract ideology obscured by inaccessible vocabulary. In Rame and Fo’s theater—and in the works of the *Compagnia Rame* before them—theatrical language and its political message must be accessible to a wide audience.

Rame frequently differentiated between what she saw as “true feminism” and the petty behavior of those who she disparagingly referred to as *leaderine*. Rame believed that certain groups and participants who called themselves feminist did not always act in the best interest of women, and perpetuated inequality by denigrating men instead of focusing on fostering equality between the sexes. In both interviews and non-fiction she would often tell stories that caricatured

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<sup>63</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 111.

the antics of radical feminists, reducing their behavior either to petty infighting or overreaction. In one example, Rame was picketed by a group of English feminists while performing the monologue *Una donna sola* in London in 1982. Offended by Rame's costume of a see-through lace negligee—which they believed reduced her to the status of sex object—they interrupted the performance.<sup>64</sup> Rame responded from the stage, arguing that their puritan overreaction had nothing to do with true feminism and furthermore, was a willful misunderstanding of her monologue's radical sympathy for its mistreated female protagonist.<sup>65</sup> Many of her stories stem from specific instances of being protested after a television appearance or stage performance, or when arriving and leaving the theater. As a famous woman in the public eye, and a former cabaret and TV *bellona*, she was an easy target for critique. From these examples, however, it seems that Rame's negative opinion of some aspects of feminism is anecdotal and largely based on individual experiences that do not necessarily reflect the plurality of Italian feminist organizations and critical thought.

While Rame's tendency to generalize and extrapolate larger truths about feminism and feminists based on these specific, negative interactions is questionable, she surprises the interlocutor by declaring that these types of people are not, in fact, "true" feminists, and that "real" feminism is actually about fostering economic, political, and social opportunities for women; ensuring their parity with men; and changing an unjust system through unity. Indeed, later in the same interview Rame goes on to clarify that the previous description is not actually representative of feminism. It is instead an inauthentic response by certain individuals that does disservice to the cause. She explains that true feminism has a different character entirely: "Il

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<sup>64</sup> Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 2001, 207.

<sup>65</sup> Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 111.

femminismo, quello vero, è un'altra storia, è esigere il rispetto di te stessa, donna, e deve esser fatto mano nella mano con l'uomo, per aiutarlo a crescere. Magari qualche calcio nelle gengive ogni tanto serve, ma si cresce in due, insieme. Tu non sei più avanti di me e io non sono più indietro di te, cresciamo insieme. Questo è il vero femminismo.”<sup>66</sup> To synthesize, Rame was often vocal about her frustration and disappointment with the actions of certain feminist groups while simultaneously insisting that “real” or authentic feminism was of the utmost importance in fostering a more just society. Given her seemingly contradictory approach, some feminists both in the theater community and beyond did not know how to respond. Instead of unifying based on their many similarities, this pattern exacerbated differences and sometimes led to mutual distrust, particularly with regard to radical Italian feminist groups that focused on sexual difference theory and separatism.<sup>67</sup>

Rame's resistance to certain facets of the feminist movement is based on key philosophical differences as well as behavioral tendencies. A brief overview of major trends and organizations within the larger panorama of Italian feminism in the 1970s, as well as Italian feminism's relationships with other organizations of the political left contextualizes Rame's alternative point of view heretofore outlined.<sup>68</sup> Due to their lack of concern for and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> According to Concetta D'Angeli: “Le rimane estraneo quanto le neo-femministe degli anni Ottanta, soprattutto in Italia e in Franca, vanno proponendo in termini di differenza sessuale; rispetto e attenzione per i patrimoni culturali e memoriali trasmessi di madre in figlia (la ‘genealogia’ al femminile); affidamento tra donne; valorizzazione di altre identità sessuale... Forse perciò, Rame è stata accettata con cautela e apprezzata, sì; ma con una certa freddezza dalle donne del movimento, e mai considerata davvero parte del teatro che esse promuovono.” D'Angeli, “Proprio una figlia d'arte,” 30.

<sup>68</sup> On the relationship between the women's movement and Socialism in Italy see Pieroni Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia*. For a more general overview on the interaction of women's movements with Italian politics see Franca Pieroni Bortolotti and Annarita Buttafuoco, *Sul movimento politico delle donne: scritti inediti* (Roma: Utopia, 1987).

acknowledgement of the specific issues facing women, the feminist movement had an adversarial relationship with the political left, who were nonetheless their fellow protagonists of revolutionary politics.<sup>69</sup> Some of these groups included the PCI, the PSI, and the *Partito radicale* (PR); various university student movements; and extra-parliamentary left-wing groups such as *Lotta continua*, *Potere operaio*, and *Avanguardia operaia*. Naturally, this put women such as Rame, whose political formation was largely based in leftist activism, in a tough spot. In many ways, Italian feminism was a response to the failure of the political left and the revolutions of the late 1960s to strongly articulate a position on women's political, economic, and personal disenfranchisement and to fight for their needs in the same ways that they did for other exploited groups such as factory workers and farmers. It was also a referendum on the left's inability to come to terms with its own internal sexism.

Notwithstanding its internal diversity, there were at least four shared elements in Italian feminism's political project: (1) the positing of "woman" as a political subject; (2) the reinvention of the spaces of the political; (3) the invention of new political practices such as consciousness raising; and (4) relations with other political actors.<sup>70</sup> Two divergent paths began

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For a comprehensive chronology of events taking place across the Italian feminist movement from 1965–1986, including the founding of organizations and groups, protests, conferences, and the passing of new laws, see Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991). On the intersections of Italian feminist and leftist movements of the 1970s see Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*.

<sup>69</sup> According to Bracke, despite various policy, political, and cultural disagreements, these parties and groups "continued throughout the 1970s to be feminism's prime political interlocutors... it was with these movements that feminism had most affinity in its political practices and shared vocabulary centered on antiauthoritarianism and liberation. It was exactly thanks to this shared cognitive terrain that feminism was able to articulate such a sharp and ultimately devastating critique of the post-1968 radical left." Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*, 13–14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

to form as feminism worked to define “woman” as a distinct political subject: radical feminism, which was focused on internal practices such as consciousness raising or *autocoscienza*; and political feminism, which engaged more closely with the established political order. The former included mostly separatist, women-only organizations that argued for self-representation based on the practice of *partire da sé*, whereas the latter was comprised of mixed-gender groups that included men in the discussion on and fight for women’s rights and social and political activism. Political feminism is also referred to as Materialist feminism.<sup>71</sup> Bracke argues, however, that these terms are only useful insofar as they help illustrate the differences between the existential and political goals of the Italian feminist movement. Ultimately, Italian feminism should be seen as continuum that includes a multiplicity of approaches, organizations, and modes of operation as opposed to two separate poles.<sup>72</sup>

As a life-long activist and official member of the PCI, Rame could most accurately be described as a Marxist feminist, whose goal was to work within the existing political structure to effect legislative and social change. While her opinions do not align perfectly with any one movement, Rame’s understanding of women’s exploitation in society dovetails perhaps most closely with Marxist feminism’s materialist focus. Italy has a rich tradition of Marxist feminism, beginning at the *fin-de-siècle* with Anna Kuliscioff and her seminal essay “Il monopolio dell’uomo.”<sup>73</sup> In the post-war era, Marxist feminists were often already members of leftist organizations—of both official parties such as the PCI, PSI, and PR, as well as of leftist extra-

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<sup>71</sup> For Materialist Feminism in the context of theater, see Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 62–81.

<sup>72</sup> “These terms are somewhat unsatisfactory. I consider all feminist groups in 1970s Italy political in their proposition of new ways of being political, and all of them were radical, as they all revolutionized women’s sense of self.” Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Kuliscioff, *Il monopolio dell’uomo* (Milano: Libreria Editrice Galli, 1890).

parliamentary groups—that attempted to challenge the male-dominated rhetoric of revolutionary politics in the years proceeding 1968, in its wake, and throughout the course of the long 1970s. The goal of Marxist feminism was material rather than existential: to bring about substantial changes in the material condition of womanhood that ameliorated their economic and political subordination. They successfully lobbied for initiatives such as maternity leave and equal pay, and often broke with party lines in their early support for the legalization of contraception, divorce, and abortion.

One of the most prominent organizations of this type was the *Unione delle donne italiane* (UDI), the women's arm of the PCI who published the journal *Noi donne* and “embodied the emancipationist tradition of the Marxist left: women were to become full citizens, equal to men, through education, employment and political participation. The illusion... was that this could be achieved without addressing the private sphere and more fundamental questions of identity and difference.”<sup>74</sup> Another group—one of the largest of the 1970s—was the *Movimento della liberazione della donna* (MLD), which was associated, albeit tenuously, with the PR. Being a Marxist feminist, however, was a very uncomfortable position for many women activists, as party leaders and members did not recognize the struggles and exploitation of women—both in society at large and within their own ranks—as unique from the larger class struggle. This led many women from the rank and file of the PCI, PSI, and PR to form their own groups that explicitly acknowledged the struggle for women's rights as unique, if complementary, to the struggle for worker's rights.<sup>75</sup> Despite their concerns about the parties' failure to represent

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<sup>74</sup> Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*, 35. *Noi donne* published articles and editorials in support of the legalization of contraceptives and divorce well before the PCI officially endorsed these causes.

<sup>75</sup> Historiography in many respects still sees the student movements and political protests of the 1960s and 1970s as universally male. Luisa Passerini was the first to analyze 1968 through the

women's issues, many women were not yet ready to abandon Marxism. This paved the way for organizations such as UDI to become more powerful and broader in scope—a way to unite women from various left-wing parties over shared feminist concerns. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the UDI reinvented itself through the lens of feminism, becoming an engine of change, pushing its party of origin to acknowledge feminist issues, and “posing the most disruptive challenge to the PCI, the left as a whole and the emancipation paradigm.”<sup>76</sup>

Radical feminism, on the other hand, originated through a rupture from Marxist and other political frameworks. This break was required in order to upend an inherently patriarchal social and governmental system. Society could no longer be analyzed or understood in terms of a political structure whose subjects were presupposed to be universally male. Indeed, Marxism served as a major fissure in the feminist movement, with radical collectives decisively on the other side of the fence. In fact radical feminism's foundational concept *partire da sé*—which ultimately led to the development of sexual difference theory—was born from the need to challenge the universal male subject of Marxist doctrine and practice. Choosing to focus on women's unique physical, sexual, and emotional experiences that had gone ignored by the established political parties was an essential first step and facet of radical feminism. Previously, entering the political arena often went hand in hand with the dismissal of women's economic, cultural, and sexual concerns for the sake of the greater political cause, which was almost always

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lens of gender, showing how the student protests were not always accommodating or interested in themes of feminist concern. See Luisa Passerini, *Autoritratto di gruppo* (Milano: Giunti, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*, 37. An example of an early group that challenged the Marxist emancipation paradigm and operated outside of the political establishment from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s is *Demistificazione dell'autoritarismo patriarcale* (Demau), for whom “women's oppression is not merely the result of the economic structure of society; its specificity lies in the sexual sphere, in the subjection in relationships in the family.” Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought*, 33.

defined by its male protagonists. Radical feminists, then, saw sexual difference theory and separatist collectives as a means by which to reject this paradigm, which was continually reinforced by leftist political parties and extra-parliamentary organizations.

One example of a radical, separatist collective is *Rivolta femminile*, a group that was purposefully apolitical: they believed participating in traditional politics to feminist ends was useless, as the system was rigged against them. Incremental progress such as securing the right to vote, to divorce, and participating in parliament or other elected positions was just another way to distract women from the inherent inequality of life under a patriarchal social and political system. Indeed, *Rivolta Femminile* specifically pointed out the “futility of Marxism to women’s liberation.”<sup>77</sup> In 1970, theorist and original founder of the group Carla Lonzi wrote in her founding manifesto *Let’s Spit on Hegel* that “oppression will continue with equality. Revolution will not cancel it... The concept of alternative is a stronghold of male power, where there is no place for women. The equality available today is not philosophical but political. But do we, after thousands of years, really wish for inclusion, on these terms, in a world planned by others?”<sup>78</sup> Here Lonzi argues for a completely new societal paradigm, one that is not built upon a patriarchal foundation and thus allows for new modalities of viewing women as active subjects in the making of history and culture. Some of the radical feminist initiatives and ideas included separatist collectives; *gruppi di autoscienza*, in which small groups of women would meet to share and analyze their personal experiences; theories of sexual difference; *affidamento*, or symbolic reciprocal-entrustment and mentorship between women of different ages; and the

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<sup>77</sup> Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*, 69.

<sup>78</sup> English translation published in Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought*, 41. For Italian see Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti* (Milano: Et al., 2010).

construction of a new paradigm that centered around a matriarchal symbolic discourse.<sup>79</sup> Many of these practices were of little interest to Rame.

Naturally, the differences between radical and political feminism played out in the theater community as well as on the larger societal stage. Indeed, many feminist theater critics divide their analyses along these lines. As established, Rame supported many feminist causes such as the legalization of divorce and abortion, yet she shied away from some of the artistic and cultural initiatives of the radical movement, including the development of all-women theater collectives such as La Maddalena. As Áine O’Healy notes, in Italy in the 1970s there was a surge of women’s theater collectives that developed in the major cities, and many of them were established and managed by militant feminist groups or members. She argues that these groups took on a special significance in Italy, where, more so than in other western European countries:

Women’s theater functioned as a forum for political protest and cultural change, since the majority of its participants were motivated by a shared commitment to “double militancy,” namely, to left-wing politics and to feminism. Indeed, theatre companies such as the Maddalena in Rome and Le Menesiache in Naples offered not only a collective reflection on the erasure of women by Western culture but also a critique of pressing social issues and a stimulus for political action.<sup>80</sup>

Dacia Maraini, for example, was perhaps the most prominent example of this type of theater activist and organizer. As discussed in the introduction, Maraini dedicated herself to radical

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<sup>79</sup> While not the focus of this chapter, it is essential to note that similar to any philosophy, sexual difference theory has been articulated over the decades by diverse thinkers and writers, not all of whom identify as separatist or radical feminists. In addition to Lonzi, some of the most important feminist theorists who articulated concepts of sexual difference include Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Teresa de Lauretis. For an overview of sexual difference theory and its role in Italian feminism from the 1960s through the 1980s see Libreria delle donne di Milano, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also Adriana Cavarero, *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milano: La Tartaruga, 1991); Luisa Muraro, *Il Dio delle donne* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> Áine O’Healy, “Theatre and Cinema, 1945–2000,” in *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 259.

feminist theater collectives run by women (as well as to mixed-gender theater enterprises), where she participated as founder, writer, director, and manager. Rame's theater advocated to similar ends, yet she chose a different means of arrival that was not predicated on separatism or radical feminism.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Rame identified as a professional actress and theater practitioner, and her expertise differentiated her from the more amateur participants of some of the radical theater collectives, Maraini notwithstanding.<sup>82</sup> At one point early in the development of *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, when she was having trouble articulating the goal of the project to Fo, Rame even reached out to various women-only theater collectives asking for ideas, scripts, and input. According to her testimony in *Il teatro politico*, the experiment was not successful: "Ho lanciato una specie di appello disperato ad alcune compagne femministe: 'Aiuto, e solidarietà! Sorelle aiuto!' Mi sono arrivati alcuni testi: racconti, storie autobiografiche... ma tutta roba molto difficile da tradurre in teatro. Ad ogni modo ci ho provato... ma che disastro... testi che non stavano in piedi manco a sorreggerli con la gru."<sup>83</sup>

It is facile to claim, as Walter Valeri does, that *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* "cemented

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<sup>81</sup> According to Sharon Wood, Rame's "feminism, expressed through plays and monologues written by Fo and elaborated with him, is not the radical feminism that would banish men from the feminist stage but a political and politicized feminism that echoes the writing and thinking of a large part of the Italian feminist movement in the 1970s." See "*Parliamo Di Donne. Feminism and Politics in the Theater of Franca Rame*," in *Dario Fo: Stage, Text, and Tradition*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Antonio Scuderi (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 163.

<sup>82</sup> On the difference between the goals of radical feminist theater collectives and Franca Rame, D'Angeli comments that: "la spinta iniziale si trova nel desiderio di esprimere, spesso in forme ingenua e improvvisate, le condizioni delle donne, il loro inedito punto di vista, di levare alta e pubblica la loro voce. La ricerca artistica veniva considerata un obiettivo secondario. Franca Rame era invece un'attrice professionista, di fama consolidata; si mostrava diffidente, talvolta irritata verso le posizioni separatiste del movimento, che sostenevano la completa estromissione dei maschi dal confronto politico e il rifiuto della doppia militanza." D'Angeli, "Proprio una figlia d'arte," 31.

<sup>83</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 143.

Rame's place in Italy's feminist movement," but it is this type of reductive declaration that has characterized scholarship on Rame's feminism and ultimately leads to the misunderstanding of her artistic and political legacy.<sup>84</sup> While it is certainly true that her series of feminist monologues and one act plays are a "breakthrough moment in the history of women's theater," Rame has never been a central figure in the feminist movement, and would not have considered herself as such. If she is seen by some a central pillar of Italian feminism, it is due to the association of her ideas with the movement, not her own membership and participation. Indeed it is tempting to conflate Rame's progressive ideology with the feminist movement: she wrote, edited, and acted in plays that directly addressed the economic, social, and sexual exploitation of women. While she espoused these ideas, she maintained a distance from radical Italian feminist organizations. Rame in fact had a very broad, global perspective on women's issues, her feminism is not parochial in any way. Ideas from De Beauvoir and British and German Marxist feminism can be traced through her non-fiction, speeches, and dramatic monologues, which often focus on the plight of women from other countries in addition to Italy, for example *Io, Ulrike, grido* (Germany); *Monologo di una donna araba* (Palestine); and *Monologo di una ruffiana: la Dc cilena* (Chile).<sup>85</sup> Thus it would perhaps be more accurate to claim that *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* cemented her place in Italian history as an outspoken and explicit yet independent advocate for women and the amelioration of their political, economic, personal, and sexual lives.

Despite Rame's fraught relationship with radical feminism, her works are nonetheless testament to her progressive political, social, and economic values—ones that she disseminates

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<sup>84</sup> Walter Valeri, "Franca Rame: Una Dona in Scena," in *Franca Rame: A Woman on Stage*, ed. Walter Valeri (West Lafayette, I.N.: Bordighera, 2000), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Rame and Fo met both Sartre and De Beauvoir on multiple occasions. On their encounters see Fo and Rame, *Nuovo manuale minimo dell'attore*, 188–96; Rame, *Franca Rame: Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 70.

through the theater and other forms of activism: “È comprensibile, dal punto di vista storico e politico, la distanza che le neo-femministe mantennero verso la Rame; eppure fu un errore. Nelle sue pièce il teatro italiano offriva per la prima volta un ventaglio ricco e diversificato di tipologie di donne, una variegata gamma di problemi legati alla quotidianità e alla realtà della loro vita, una rivendicazione ferma dei loro diritti.”<sup>86</sup> Through integrating this context on Italian feminism with a close reading of her theater texts and performances, the next section of this chapter will demonstrate that Rame and her works are fundamental to the canon of Italian feminist theater by way of what they advocate for and accomplish with regard to raising awareness of women’s issues and critiquing the patriarchal foundation of Italian society. Her performance texts also publicly articulate a unique, female voice which foregrounds the multiplicity of women’s subjective experiences. Even when her goals remain resolutely political, and the principal themes feminist in nature, Rame never loses focus on the theater, never strays far from her roots as an artist and comedic performer: “I am a feminist by personal and political choice. I am not a separatist. For women to liberate themselves, it is not sufficient for us to change our heads, or those of men, we must change society. In my plays, there is also a pitiless exposure of a society by means of laughter. I have always wanted to make people laugh while thinking and to make them think while laughing.”<sup>87</sup>

#### *VENTICINQUE MONOLOGHI PER UNA DONNA*

Franca Rame’s commitment to feminist causes is most explicit in the series of dramatic monologues and one-act plays written and staged from the late 1970s onward. With certain

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<sup>86</sup> D’Angeli, “Proprio una figlia d’arte,” 32.

<sup>87</sup> Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 2001, 197. This citation is taken from an interview Rame gave with the newspaper *La Sicilia* on March 6, 1979.

exceptions that engage a more tragic aesthetic, these works combine sharp political commentary and biting social critique with the mechanics of comic theater in order to highlight the injustices faced by women at home, work, and in society at large. Rame and Fo's feminist monologues have been collected, published, and performed in various groupings, the most famous of which is *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*.<sup>88</sup> This collection was enormously successful both in Italy and abroad, translated into many languages, and became one of their most often-staged works—second only to *Mistero buffo*. Rame has performed the work over 3,000 times throughout Italy and in international cities ranging from London to New York to Moscow.<sup>89</sup> In an interview in 1999, Rame commented on *Tutta casa*'s success, which was due in no small part to the novelty and gravitas of its principal theme: “lo spettacolo ebbe un successo strepitoso... abbiamo fatto degli esauriti ovunque, sfondato palazzetti dello sport, perché era il primo testo che parlasse della condizione della donna. Dico sempre con difficoltà la parole femminista, diciamo che è un testo che difende i diritti della donna e cerca di mettere a fuoco alcuni suoi tic negativi!”<sup>90</sup> *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* is comprised of a core group of monologues—*Una donna sola*, *Il risveglio*, *La mamma fricchettone*, *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia*, and *La Medea*—in addition to various others that Rame would often rotate and re-order between performances, ensuring that no two shows were exactly the same.

*Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* can be considered an improvisational, comi-tragic opining on the condition of women in which theater is used as “uno strumento per parlare delle cose che

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<sup>88</sup> Franca Rame, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (Verona: Bertani, 1978).

<sup>89</sup> “Questo testo è stato ed è tuttora rappresentato in moltissimi paesi. La condizione della donna, un po' più avanti, un po' più indietro, purtroppo è ancora simile ovunque. Quante repliche ho fatto? Più di tremila.” Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Rame cited in D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 204.

succedono, delle ingiustizie, degli scontri e dei dubbi.”<sup>91</sup> In brief, *Una donna sola* is the monologue of a housewife locked in her home with her infant son and a peeping-tom, invalid brother-in-law by her jealous and controlling husband. Her only interlocutor is the neighbor woman who she can see through the living room window. She has all the trappings of a perfect petit-bourgeois life—all-new appliances and the most technologically advanced home accouterments—but is surrounded by men who disrespect her autonomy and objectify her. *Il risveglio* is equally comic and ridiculous, but focuses more closely on economic issues: it is a “scathing but hilarious critique of the collusion between two oppressive systems: capitalism and patriarchy.”<sup>92</sup> The play opens to a desperately fatigued factory worker who hectically prepares her baby for day care while her clueless husband continues to sleep. Through the farcical display of a morning routine gone wrong—the mother, for instance, cannot find the house keys and in her rush pats her baby’s bottom with grated parmesan cheese instead of talcum powder—Rame highlights the toll unpaid labor takes on women and critiques the male-dominated Italian political left of the time for not recognizing this tradition as a form of exploitation. *Mamma fricchettone* tackles many of Italy’s most prominent institutions by juxtaposing the theme of motherly devotion with leftist activism, corrupt police officers, and the Catholic confessional. Composed in colloquial Italian interspersed with regional slang, the “mamma” discusses feminist issues such as unpaid labor in the home and the complexity of connecting her personal identity as both mother and political activist. In a symbolic condemnation of the corruption of Italy’s two greatest powers—the government and the Church—the play ends with the priest to whom the

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<sup>91</sup> Rame, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Sydeny Cheek O’Donnell, “Italian Mammams and Suffering Madonnas: The Strategic Deployment of Maternal Stereotypes in the Theatre of Franca Rame,” in *Essays and Scripts on How Mothers Are Portrayed in the Theatre: A Neglected Frontier of Feminist Scholarship*, ed. Anna Andes and Beth Osnes (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 98.

mamma confesses a political crime betraying her to the Carabinieri who subsequently arrest her: “Non mi vorrà mica denunciare, eh, padre? Fare la spia... Io sono qui in confessione, sotto giuramento... Prete spia, prete spia non sei figlio di Maria!”<sup>93</sup> In *abbiamo tutta la stessa storia*, Rame directly addresses the issues of women’s sexual satisfaction and abortion through a fantasy-like fable in which the vagaries of one vignette morph into the next. The play begins with a sexual encounter in which the female protagonist’s experience is disregarded for the sake of her partner’s pleasure: “Ma certo che mi va di fare l’amore, ma mica come un flipper che basta metterci dentro la moneta e poi mi si accendono tutte le lampadine e tun trin toch toch!”<sup>94</sup> Later, she focuses on the difficulty and cost of obtaining a safe abortion—especially before its legalization in 1975—and on the vicissitudes of motherhood. The shortest and perhaps most famous of the monologues is her six-page reworking of Euripides’ *Medea*. In similar fashion to Dacia Maraini’s *I sogni di Clitennestra*, Rame also refigures mythology through theater, creating a satiric-tragic commentary on the patriarchal codes of maternal sacrifice and sexual double standard.

Like many of Fo and Rame’s works, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* in addition to their other feminist monologues and one-acts saw many forms and iterations over the course of their printed and performed lives.<sup>95</sup> The 1989 edition provides the best point of entry into the exploration of

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<sup>93</sup> Rame, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, 54.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>95</sup> Selections from *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* were first presented as *Parliamo di donne* in the couple’s 1977 return to television—21 hours of programming entitled *Il teatro di Dario Fo*. (Later, in 1998, Rame would publish her two monologues *L’eroina* and *Grasso è bello!* under the title of *Parliamo di donne*. It is known that these two plays were written by Rame alone). Shortly thereafter, in November 1977 Rame debuted *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* at Palazzina Liberty in Milan. The work was printed in multiple editions, each of which orders the monologues somewhat differently. A later edition from 1981 includes Rame’s prologue, while the previous 1978 edition does not. See Franca Rame and Dario Fo, *Tutta casa letto e chiesa*

Rame's feminist theater practice. Its collection of plays dating from 1968 forward provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the myriad themes, contexts, and lenses that Rame and Fo use to parse the political, social, and economic concerns of women in Italy and beyond on the stage. To that end, this section analyzes the thematic, formal, and performative elements of a selection of the dramatic monologues authored, co-authored, and presented by Franca Rame. More specifically, it demonstrates how Rame uses the stage and its various modalities both to disseminate feminist themes and ideas, and to raise awareness of issues ignored by governmental and other societal institutions. Here my goal is to link the success of Rame's political activism to the act of performance. By articulating and publicly exhibiting a distinct female voice—a polyphony of voices, really, given her incredibly ability to take up multiple subject positions and characters while alone on stage—Rame is able to produce a tangible, audible, and visual critique of women's quotidian experiences. Furthermore, her manifold stage performances also double as a call to political action. Thus at the foundation of her aesthetic practice is a political imperative: a commitment to rendering explicit a critique of patriarchal culture and the ways in which it adversely affects Italian society, families, and women in particular. The monologues and one-acts chosen for this section specifically address the intersections of violence exhibited against women and patriarchal configurations of authority—including political, ecclesiastical, mythical,

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(Milano: FR La Comune, 1981). In the 1989 Einaudi volume *Venticinque monologhi per una donna* Fo and Rame collect of all their extant monologues and one-acts on the condition of women—even those which technically pertain to earlier works, such as *Maria alla croce*, taken from the original *Mistero buffo*—and divide it into five thematic sections: *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa, Altre storie, Giullarate religiose, Fabulazioni della resistenza*, and *Discorsi sul terrorismo e la repressione*. In this collection, some monologues that appear in the printed 1978 version of *Tutta casa*—such as *Io, Ulrike grido...*, and *Accadde domani*, among others—are instead listed here under a new section title (*Discorsi sul terrorismo*).

familial, and sexual—from a woman’s point of view.<sup>96</sup> This theme is foundational to her feminist theater practice, as it highlights her commitment to advocating for women and other exploited groups. The monologues to be treated include *La Medea* (1977), *Lo stupro* (1975), and *Monologo di una donna araba* (1972). While Rame and Fo produced many other plays that also focus the theme of violence as a condition of patriarchy, it is beyond the scope of this study to conduct an in-depth examination of each of them.<sup>97</sup> These monologues demonstrate that performance is essential in understanding how violence and patriarchy are inherently intertwined: the use of the body, voice, and movement on stage is able to more comprehensively and meticulously express—both explicitly through words and more obliquely through gestures or expressions—the physical, emotional, economic, and psychological dimensions of women’s experiences heretofore untold.

In Rame’s dramatic monologues content, theatrical form, and performance style work synchronously to advance the aesthetic and political practice of using theater and performance to promote feminist themes in the public sphere. Through this practice, Rame achieves two equally important goals: fostering political consciousness and providing lively entertainment. Formally, her works differ greatly from both dominant twentieth-century Italian theater practitioners as well as the other three playwrights treated in this study by utilizing innovative theatrical and performance techniques that break from the traditional Italian theater canon.<sup>98</sup> Some of these

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<sup>96</sup> My use of the term patriarchy here is predicated on Carole Pateman’s seminal theory of patriarchy as an unequal contract between the sexes: a system of male privilege vis-à-vis women which includes their control of women in politics, economics, reproduction, and sexuality. See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>97</sup> Other titles that address this theme include *Monologo della puttana in manicomio* (1977), *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia* (1977), *Nada Pasini* (1970), *La fiocinina* (1970), and the triptych on terrorism *Io, Ulrike, grido...* (1975), *Accadde domani* (1977), and *Una madre* (1980).

<sup>98</sup> Indeed, as Sharon Wood notes “Rame’s working methods, the theatrical tradition from which

groundbreaking strategies include interactive and didactic prologues; improvisation; autobiographical references; playing multiple roles in the same production; and direct discourse with the audience, among many others. These inventive theatrical devices reminiscent of Brecht's epic theater are employed in the service of both feminist ideas and changing the mechanisms of theater to suit a wider, more inclusive audience. Rame uses them to elucidate feminist themes such as economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, and sexual violence while explicitly exposing the ways in which traditional theater tends to marginalizes women's voices, experiences, and subjectivity.

Another formal element that differentiates Rame and Fo's plays from the works of others is the lack of a definitive written record of what happened or a precise script of what will happen on stage. While their plays are indeed published—and widely circulated at that—it should be cautioned that the printed copy is only one variation of a play that may have been performed hundreds or thousands of times and that has been reworked through numerous rehearsals and workshops (a fact easily confirmed by their own testimony as well as their comprehensive online archives filled with edited manuscripts, drafts, and other documents). While it is true for all dramatic works that the physical representation on stage necessarily differs from any written play text, for Rame and Fo this disparity is augmented by their tendency to improvise; make edits and changes between performances; and include discussions of current events and news in their prologues, which renders each performance unique. As Sharon Wood notes:

Conventional criteria are inadequate to deal with the Fo-Rame phenomenon. Theirs is never a dramatic literature but... a process that ends, rather than begins, with a written script that, in its turn, is open to change and adaptation in

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she emerges, are far removed from the fin de siècle dramatic forms developed by Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde, and Pinero... Nor is her work comparable to the fringe counterculture of much feminist theater in Britain and the States, run on a shoestring by all-women companies." Wood, "*Parliamo di Donne*. Feminism and Politics in the Theater of Franca Rame," 162.

subsequent performance or, notably, in translation. Texts are worked out on the stage rather than on the page, in rehearsal, and in a unique collaboration with audiences, whose comments and observations are frequently recorded by the company.<sup>99</sup>

The published version of Rame and Fo's feminist monologues and one-act plays collected in *Venticinque monologhi per una donna* certainly provides a complete idea of a play's plot, characters, and major themes and ideas, but ultimately it is only one version of many and lacks the essential performative element. Moreover, her own performance provides Rame with unique pedagogical, communicative, interactive, and demonstrative opportunities that render it distinct from a written literary text, delivering feeling, laughter, and empathy on a more complex level.

#### THE PROLOGUE

The prologue is one of the most important elements of Rame's feminist theater, yet learning how to address the audience directly did not come naturally to the experienced actress. Beginning with *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* Rame took on the responsibility of writing and performing the prologue—a simultaneously creative and didactic task with which Fo had been charged since the early days of their joint theatrical enterprise. While she had spent much of her childhood and adult career as an improviser, she had never been the one to personally address the audience at the show's opening. In fact, in the *Compagnia Rame* it was always her father Domenico who, as the *capocomico* and lead actor, held that responsibility.<sup>100</sup> It wasn't until Rame and Fo left the traditional theater circuit to form their own more radical companies that Rame had to learn herself how to directly speak with and involve her audience before, during, and after the a play. This skill, she insists, was not easy to learn:

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Fo and Rame, *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, 291.

Solo al momento in cui producemmo il grande salto, cioè decidemmo di abbandonare il circuito ufficiale, mi trovai costretta a imparare a intrattenere il pubblico, rivolgendomi direttamente alla platea. E non è stato facile... anzi, all'inizio mi rifiutavo assolutamente di rivestire quel ruolo. Oggi posso assicurarvi che si è trattato di una gran piroetta all'indietro. La prima volta mi sentivo impacciata, inibita. Posso assicurarvi che imparare a rivolgersi direttamente alla gente, guardarla in faccia, conversare con loro, è molto più difficile che eseguire qualsiasi pezzo recitato a singolo o in coppia, o almeno lo è stato per me.<sup>101</sup>

Here Rame differentiates between acting skills and those necessary to converse directly with the audience. It seems fitting that her development as an author and co-author during the 1970s, specifically with regard to the creation of the feminist monologues, coincided with beginning to deliver the dramatic prologues—a new performative role used in the service of feminist goals.

The prologue, it turns out, is one of the most radical elements of Rame's performance practices. It is a shared experience, one which brings together the audience and playwright-actress in a moment of didactic comedy. Specifically, she addresses the women in the audience through the first-person plural *noi donne*, which explicitly creates a connection between the stage and the *platea*, establishing Rame as performer, conversationalist, and interlocutor.<sup>102</sup> The intention of the prologue is twofold: first, it briefly introduces the various monologues to be performed that day, ensuring that the audience will have a basic understanding of the plot and characters. When the audience can follow the play without confusion, they can more easily

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>102</sup> Valeri argues that the relationship Rame forges with her audience lies at the foundation of her artistic success: "It is Rame's singular ability to combine, and sometimes confound, the roles of performer and listener that has, more than any other aspect, distinguished her theatre. Her ability to hear the audience, perceive their reactions and connect with them, influences her performance as it is unfolding and leads her to introduce new elements—jokes, lines, pauses, and timing, in every successive performance. Hers is a unique approach to writing; a theatrical literature. That is why her monologues, which speak directly to Italy's feminist struggle, have also enjoyed such remarkable success and consensus throughout the world." Valeri, "Franca Rame: Una Dona in Scena," 3.

access the political and social commentary.<sup>103</sup> The other goal of the prologue is to discuss and raise awareness of current political issues and events—and in the case of *Tutta casa*—especially as they pertain to women in Italian society. It also helps the audience relate to Rame and her characters, creating a sort of solidarity between audience and actress that aids in the dissemination of feminist themes and the development of an empathetic reciprocal exchange:

Women identify with Franca's characters because they know that Franca herself identifies with them. It may be argued that her greatest talent is her ability to communicate this both on and off stage. Her skill and breaking character to directly address the audience before, after, and sometimes during, a performance is more than just an acting technique. It is an act of communication that she established with her audience because for Franca theater and communication are inseparable; she is not interested in the former if it does not offer the latter.<sup>104</sup>

The prologue is a radical theatrical act in that it directly engages the audience in the performance they are attending and explicitly brings issues center-stage no matter how unconventional—including, for example, unambiguous discussion of women's actual sexuality, which has historically been considered almost taboo on stage and thus was, before Rame, the recipient of inadequate and only sporadic, moralizing attention. Furthermore, by way of the prologue Rame is able to introduce the guiding themes of the monologues—exploitation of women both at home and at work, the legality of divorce and abortion, repressive sexual norms, and the relationship between violence and patriarchy, among others.

In addition to its didactic purpose, the prologue also establishes feminist theater as an aesthetic practice. One of the most famous examples is Rame's comic opening on the

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<sup>103</sup> As Gawler and Kolsky note in their article on Rame's performance strategies "Her explanation of the symbolic significance of characters and plot developments relieve audience members of the laborious task of interpretation, and enable them to focus on the protagonist's delivery of the subject matter and its implications." Jacqueline Gawler and Stephen Kolsky, "Dramatising the 'Female Voice': Performance Strategy of Franca Rame," *ConVivio—Journal of Ideas in Italian Studies* 8, no. 1 (2002): 42.

<sup>104</sup> Valeri, "Franca Rame: Una Dona in Scena," 4.

intersections of language, sex, and power as the introduction to *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. In this example she plays word games; examines ancient playwrights and poets; and meditates on the function of language as it relates to her own craft of theater-making. It is poetic, evocative, witty, and explicit in its use of sexual comedy to denounce the many taboos that limit women's freedom of expression. The prologue begins with Rame's forcefully ironic statement that "il protagonista assoluto di questo spettacolo sulla donna è l'uomo. Meglio, il suo sesso! Non è presente 'in care ed ossa,' ma è sempre qui, tra noi, grande, enorme, che incombe... e ci schiaccia!"<sup>105</sup> In order to prove her point that language and sexism are indelibly intertwined, Rame cites her own inhibition in using the word *cazzo*; bemoans the lack of powerful, poetic and accessible monikers for female genitalia; and connects the two phenomena by making a comic association between male genitalia and classic literature. The premise for this entire discussion is Rame's initial claim that women's call for socio-economic and sexual parity has gone unanswered: "Chiediamo parità sociale e parità di sesso. Abbiamo fatto anche qualche passo avanti, nel sociale, ma sulla 'parità di sesso' non ci siamo. Non arriveremo mai a uguagliare l'uomo in questo campo. È del tutto utopistico sperarlo, anche per un fatto anatomico. Rassegniamoci!"<sup>106</sup>

Rame claims that penis has been afforded epic status with regard to its linguistic position and subsequent sobriquets. Specifically, she contrasts the sexual language with which men are provided with the women's equivalent to show the disparity in sound, meaning, status, and use of the terms. She notes that the exclamation *cazzo* has become a popular substitute for *dio*—

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<sup>105</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. A more contemporary theatrical work that utilizes a similarly explicit mode is Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), which has inspired a whole theatrical mode of writing and performance by women.

symbolically replacing god itself—but that terms for female organs hold no such place of power:

Una volta, infatti, a un fatto eclatante... esclamavamo: “Oh, mio dio!” Oggi, davanti alla stessa emozione, si grida: “Oh, cazzo!” Lui al posto di Dio! Inaudito, terrificante. E nessuno se n’è accorto! ... E non vi capiterà mai di sentire esclamazioni esaltanti con di mezzo l’organo femminile... Anzi, se uno deve dire che tutto gli va storto, dice “ci ho una sfiga oggi!” E se è proprio indispensabile nominare il nostro sesso in pubblico, ad esempio durante i processi per stupro, si usa il latino, una lingua morta: “cunnus cunni,” irregolare della seconda.<sup>107</sup>

This phenomenon that Rame so comically describes also has political dimensions: how we talk about our bodies is emblematic of how we view our subject position, what rights we have or do not have, what entitlements we have to others or to resources. Ultimately, Rame connects this seemingly innocuous phenomenon to the realm of sexual politics and power dynamics between men and women. How can women fight for their *parità di sesso* and sexual autonomy when the language with which they are gifted is so woefully inadequate, weak, and uncomfortable sounding? To demonstrate women’s linguistic demotion through sexual terminology, Rame composes a mock epic poem using the powerful, charged terminology ascribed instead to male sexual anatomy:

Venne altissimo Ermione  
di fronte a lui, armato,  
l’elmo levato in fronte  
PREPUZIO invitto  
appresso il fratello suo GLANDE  
splendido, montava lo scalpitante SCROTO  
Issando tra le insigne il PENE  
Per l’eroico slancio!

Bello, no? Ma, al contrario, provate a comporre un poema classico ficcandoci nei versi termini riguardanti parti anatomiche del sesso femminile:

Briseide dolcissima si fece innanzi  
e con lei, amata del Pelide,  
infuriata clitoride...

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 6.

No, non funziona! Ci hanno appioppato dei termini orribili! Utero! Sembra un insulto!... Con questi termini si può al massimo costruire un racconto dell'orrore:

I pipistrelli volavano all'imbrunire  
le VAGINE gracchiavano nello stango  
era il momento che depositavano le OVAIE  
un UTERO tremendo si levò nella notte  
gli SPERMATOZOI morirono tutti di spavento!<sup>108</sup>

In this passage Rame is purposefully shocking and inflammatory, forcing her audience to confront a linguistic disparity previously overlooked. Additionally, by refusing to abide by a long-standing taboo—well-behaved women should not use sexual language in public—Rame helps to tear it down. By parodying Euripides—indeed she even claims that terms for male sex organs would work marvelously in one of his plays—she appropriates tragedy, the highest-level of theatrical discourse, and uses it in a comic farce to her own ends. Moreover, in this section of her prologue Rame shows that language and its use in poetry, literature, and theater has the power to shape how we view two seemingly unrelated things such as anatomy and power. Most importantly, she makes her entire argument laugh-out-loud funny, skewering patriarchal linguistic configurations by calling a spade a spade—or in this case, a vagina a vagina.<sup>109</sup>

#### MEDEA

The prologue as feminist performance strategy is even more clearly outlined in the shorter prologues that accompany some of the individual works in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. They have

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 6–7.

<sup>109</sup> Rame reiterates many of the ideas outlined in the prologue to *Tutta casa* in her contribution to *Il manuale minimo dell'attore*, where she gives a new critical reading of *Alcestis* and continues her discussion on sex, power and language: “Bisogna anche dire che il maschio, fin dagli albori della civiltà, ha sempre chiamato con nomi magniloquenti il proprio organo... Invece con la terminologia che hanno appioppato a noi femmine non si può ricostruire un bel niente... No, non c'è niente da fare, l'hanno pensati apposta 'sti termini i maschi per mortificarci.” Fo and Rame, *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, 311–12.

a similar introductory function but are specific to the play at hand and often more pointed in their critiques. *Medea* is an example of a monologue that includes its own prologue, one that is almost equal in length to the play itself and essential for its interpretation—both textually and performatively—as its tonal and stylistic differences help explicate the greater meaning of the play. *Medea* premiered on November 20, 1977 at Palazzina Liberty and was often included as the last monologue in performances of *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. In only six pages and a prologue Rame uses the stage to reimagine mythology, creating a satiric, tragi-comic commentary on the patriarchal codes of maternal sacrifice, violence, and sexual double standard that lie at the foundation of Euripides’ original text of 431 BCE. Rame’s *Medea*, however, differs greatly from her Attic predecessor: she has been transported to the central Italian countryside and speaks in an Umbro-Tuscan dialect.<sup>110</sup> All the roles, including *Medea*, Jason, and the chorus are interpreted by Rame alone on stage.

One of the most interesting and challenging aspects of *Medea* is the contrast between the prologue and the monologue itself. Rame opens the prologue with a admonition that this play, which would often conclude the night’s performance, is very different in tone from the preceding monologues and has a pointed feminist message: “Dico subito che questo pezzo è assai diverso agli altri, non è comico. Anzi, è profondamente drammatico e col più alto contenuto politico

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<sup>110</sup> According to Eva Marinai, Rame and Fo also take inspiration from popular Tuscan theater of the 1700–1800s, specifically the play *Il delitto di Medea* by Pietro Frediani. She parses their use of regional dialect, clarifying the antecedents of a literary umbro-toscane: “È possibile che il carattere popolare, lo stile poetico e spettacoloso, la sinteticità scenografica, la recitazione ieratica e iconica del maggio tragico abbiano influenzato stesure e messinscena della nuova drammaturgia. Mentre il linguaggio arcaico, ricco di sonorità ed accenti espressionistici, non somiglia alla lingua letteraria del maggio toscano ma risulta un’*inventio* lessicale scaturita da una commistione di siciliano, antico umbro delle *laudi* di Iacopone da Todi e toscano. È forse da attribuire alla *laude* il legame che Fo individua con il canto teatralizzato umbro.” Eva Marinai, “Vieni fuori, Euripide!,” in *Dario Fo e Franca Rame, una vita per l’arte: bozzetti, figure, scene pittoriche e teatrali*, ed. Anna Barsotti and Eva Marinai (Corazzano, Pisa: Titivillus, 2011), 49–50.

femminista di tutto lo spettacolo.”<sup>111</sup> Here Rame sets the expectation that *Medea* will not emulate the lough-out-loud monologues that preceded it. Ironically, however, her subsequent introduction is quite the opposite. The prologue to *Medea* is very colloquial, irreverent, and funny. Rame explains the predecessor text directly to the audience in an accessible, comic fashion, ensuring that the story is comprehensible to a diverse range of interlocutors—not just those who are well versed in mythology (“Chi era Medea? Una bellissima con poteri magici. Era una strega! Passa di lì, certo Giasone, che andava per ‘velli d’oro.’ Oggi si va per funghi, nell’antica Grecia tutti andavano per ‘velli d’oro.’”)<sup>112</sup> Through the prologue she introduces the plot and the main themes of the text: sexual double standards that see women’s influence and viability expire with their age and looks; and the patriarchal ideal of maternal sacrifice and female subservience to her husband’s desires, however treacherous. Rame’s explanation of these ideas, however, is anything but dry. She makes jokes and contemporary references, and utilizes an informal type of speech that minimizes the distance between herself and the audience: “Vanno a Corinto, si sposano, hanno due figli e vivono felici e beati. Fino a quando? Ahimè, sorte comune a moltissime donne, fino a quando Medea non incomincia ad invecchiare.”<sup>113</sup> She also uses a vocabulary with political undertones—including key words of the feminist movement—that would be easily recognizable to an audience of the time. For example, she calls Euripides *progressista*, Medea a *strega*, and her journey to defy Jason’s orders a *presa di coscienza*. Furthermore, to foster solidarity among her female audience members, she even concludes the prologue with a

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<sup>111</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 67.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 68. When explaining how Medea uses magic to make Jason young again (by stewing him in an enormous pot), Rame jokes “a questo punto mi interrompo per avvertire le donne presenti: con la pentola a pressione non viene bene!” Ibid.

dedication on their behalf: “È un pezzo che amo molto e che tutte le sere dedico alle donne giovani e non più giovani presenti in sala.”<sup>114</sup>

Through the prologue Rame is also able to connect divergent temporal dimensions—Medea’s “ancient history” and the quotidian experiences of twentieth-century Italian women—which fortifies her feminist critique. After explaining the story of Medea and Jason, her soliloquy seamlessly changes tack, moving from the particulars of Euripides’ characters to the all-too-common practice of older men leaving their partners for younger lovers:

Sei in quella certa età, i tuoi figli sono cresciuti, hanno una loro vita, la loro famiglia, tuo marito ti manda a “morire ammazzata” e tu vuoi veramente morire. È tremendo vedere come noi donne, a qualsiasi ceto sociale si appartenga, risultiamo fragili nel momento in cui siam poste in una simile situazione... Vero è che per una donna è assai difficile, quando non è più giovane, rifarsi una vita... e poi ti viene addosso l’umiliazione, la frustrazione di essere respinta... È dura mettersi da una parte e fingere di non esistere più! È la più veloce cura dimagrante che esista! Quanta disperazione ho visto, conosciuto!... L’uomo, per amore o no, può avere una donna più giovane. La donna no! Infatti se una donna... diciamo “adulta,” ha un amore con uomo più giovane di lei, si dice subito: “Ma non si vergogna quella?! Che puttana!!” Invece per l’uomo vecchio con la ragazzina, ci si tira giù il capello: “Hai visto che dritto quello!” E come ci soffriamo noi! Io penso spesso che se i nostri uomini ci abbandonassero per mettersi con delle donne di ottanta-ottantacinque anni, potremmo capire... saremmo comprensive! “Povero ragazzo, ha avuto un’infanzia infelice. Ha bisogno della nonna.” Invece no, ci lasciano per delle bellissime, stupendissime, giovanissime.<sup>115</sup>

In this excerpt, Rame speaks in a variety of tones ranging from the serious and despondent to the comic and blithe, moving between the two poles unexpectedly and with ease. She also covers vast territory: the hypocrisy that sees men’s sexual satisfaction as more important than women’s, a system that valorizes women solely on age and beauty, and the double-standards that bind women’s interpersonal relationships. Rame even nods to her own experiences, speaking in the first person plural *noi donne* and implying that she and Dario have dealt with similar issues in

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<sup>114</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 70.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–9.

their own marriage (“Quanta disperazione ho visto, conosciuto!”).<sup>116</sup> In her performance, Rame delivers these lines much like a witty *comica dell’arte*, pacing about the stage, speaking quickly, and emphasizing each punch line.<sup>117</sup> To conclude the prologue, Rame connects the dots between Medea’s story and this picture of present-day life, effortlessly turning the discussion back to Medea once more, leaving her audience with zero ambiguity as to how the two stories relate. If women today are distraught at the phenomenon of being abandoned by their partners, she argues, “figuriamoci Medea, che era quella là che non aveva dialettica, come reagisce quando viene a sapere che Giasone, senza neanche dirle: ‘Guarda, cara mi sposo oggi alle tre,’ se ne va per sposarsi con una giovane bella ricca e potente, la figlia del re! Il meglio che si ritrova sulla piazza! Ha un giramento!! Greco!”<sup>118</sup> Of equal importance to the content of her self-expression is the form it takes: Rame opines on these weighty issues with the lightest of touch, consistently creating humorous vignettes and causing her audience to laugh out loud at what is in reality a heartbreakingly unjust system for women. In this citation, for example, Rame conveys the depth of Medea’s betrayal through humor by imitating a conversational, glib Jason (“Guarda, cara mi sposo oggi alle tre”) and using a pun (“un giramento! Greco!”) to describe Medea’s violent retribution for her personal humiliation.

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<sup>116</sup> Both Rame and Fo have discussed marital issues publicly, on stage and in interviews. This is the foundational theme their later comedy *Coppia aperta, o quasi spalancata* (1983). On Rame’s use of the prologue to express her personal opinion, Gowler and Kolsky comment: “The tone of her address is one of empathy, and suggests a depth of understanding that perhaps derives to some degree, from her own experience as a not-so-young woman... Rame’s own anger at the patriarchal representation of women therefore finds expression through not only her character’s outrage, but also in the prologue, where, out-of-character, she is able to give voice to her own personal frustration at society’s double standards.” Gawler and Kolsky, “Dramatising the ‘Female Voice’: Performance Strategy of Franca Rame,” 44.

<sup>117</sup> See Video 1 in Supplementary Materials, page 278.

<sup>118</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 69.

The switch to a more tragic tone begins in the last lines of the prologue, when Rame admits that “ho recitato centinaia di personaggi, ma questa Medea ogni volta, nonostante le quattrocento e rotte repliche, mi prende sempre allo stomaco.”<sup>119</sup> From this point on, the tragic register that Rame mentions at the beginning of the prologue takes over. This tonal change is especially noteworthy considering the fact that many critics continue to view Rame as an exclusively comic performer—despite that the works written by her alone are indeed of a more somber nature and parse difficult and unpopular subjects such as drug addiction, depression, and rape (*L'eroina*, *Grasso è bello*, *Lo stupro*).<sup>120</sup> The monologue is completely different from the prologue in tone and style, however they both work to explicate the same underlying thematic concerns. The colloquial, conversational language of the prologue morphs into an other-worldly, dialect-infused Italian, while Rame's jokes and contemporary references are replaced with Medea's eventual infanticide. The theatrical atmosphere created by these stylistic changes reinforces the foundational message of the play: that the patriarchal laws governing women's subordination to men in all arenas of life are a purposeful human invention and not a natural or biology-driven phenomenon.

This message is communicated from the onset of the play, which opens to women of the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>120</sup> There are very few studies on Rame as a tragic performer and playwright in Italian, and none in English. In Italian see Paolo Puppa, “Franca e la paura del tragico,” in *Dario Fo e Franca Rame, una vita per l'arte: bozzetti, figure, scene pittoriche e teatrali*, ed. Anna Barsotti and Eva Marinai (Corazzano, Pisa: Titivillus, 2011), 55–67; Marinai, “Vieni fuori, Euripide!” In fact, many English-language critics are either unfamiliar with or tend to ignore her more serious works. For example, in her lengthy treatment of Rame as a feminist performer “Franca Rame: Militant Isabella, Feminist Colombina in Twentieth Century Italy, Radulescu only discusses the comic. See Radulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution*. In her chapter “Center Stage: Franca Rame's *Female Parts*,” Maggie Günsburg does the same, focusing more closely on comedic performance and themes of materialist feminism rather than tragedy. See Maggie Günsberg, *Gender and the Italian Stage: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

village gathering around Medea's house, attempting to persuade her to hear reason. Note that the women of the chorus are all played by Rame, and that in performances she modifies her voice to differentiate the various "speakers": "Accorre! Accorrite! Aiuta! Medea rinchiusa s'è derentro la sua casa colli so' dua figlioi!'... 'Tutta è stravolta dalla gelusía! Non si capacita che l'omo suo Giasone, con donna più giovine s'abbia ad accasare!' 'Non intende raggione di sua casa sortire e li figlioli abbandoare.'"<sup>121</sup> When Medea refuses to be placated, and laments that Jason has replaced her with a new bride, the chorus implores her not to be angry, but rather to see his behavior as the natural order of things: "L'omo nostro de nova carne zovane e fresca se ne vada a cerca. Da sempre, è la legge du lu monno!"<sup>122</sup> Medea, however, refuses to accept this premise, and argues that the law is not natural, but rather was purposefully invented by men to disadvantage women.

La legge de lu monno?! De quale legge m'annate parlanno o donne? De una legge che voialtre amiche mee avite penzato e detto e scritto, e poi bandito... e battuto tamburro, voi, nella piazza per dare avvisata che 'sta legge, e segnata e sacrata? L'ommini, l'ommini, l'ommini, contro de noialtre femmene l'hanno penzata 'sta legge, e segnata e sacrata, e sacra fatta per scrittura dello re!<sup>123</sup>

While there appears to be a nascent solidarity amongst the village women and Medea, the latter inveighs against their unconscious internalization of patriarchal norms.<sup>124</sup> Later, this budding camaraderie is completely broken when, after hearing of Medea's plan, they refer to her as a "cagna rabbiosa" and a "puta stregata." Rame is careful to show both the audience and the women of the chorus that Medea's rage is not based on the irrational jealousy historically

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<sup>121</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 70. See Video 1.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>124</sup> "Medea, con noi sorte a parlare... che anco noi de toa stessa sorte n'abbiamo patito e pianto! Che anco a noialtre li nostri ommeni ne hanno fatto torto... e noi te se pole capire." *Ibid.*, 71.

attributed to women, but rather is connected to the ideas of subjectivity, purpose, and identity. The condition of the *donna respinta* that Rame discusses in the prologue is impossible for Medea to accept specifically because within a system that valorizes women only as wives and mothers, it erases her existence altogether: “Restare, restare. Sola!, derento cotesta casa mea... sola... come’na morta, senza voci, senza risa... senza amore... dello marito, delli figlioli, che tutti s’envanno a far festa avanti d’averme seppellita.”<sup>125</sup> Medea views infanticide as her only escape precisely because it removes her from such a system, thus returning to her a sense of autonomy and subjectivity. In Rame’s performance of this section, she creates an obviously pained Medea who passionately rebuts her friend’s suggestion to live in humiliation.<sup>126</sup> “Restare” she whispers, and then repeats almost as a cry, her eyes closed to emphasize the pain. As Rame delivers the line, her voice moves from the quite sadness of a strained whisper to the firm speech of a determined woman, building in intensity. At one point, she closes her red shawl around her face.

In many ways, the use of dialect estranges the audience from Rame’s theatrical language, making it feel less relatable. It is as if members of the audience are experiencing something alien, something of which they could not be a part. This phenomenon is particularly evident when contrasted with the preceding prologue, which indeed is structured as if it were conversation between audience and actress. It is precisely due to this estrangement, however, that Medea’s ultimate act of violence is able to be allegorized, its meaning decoupled from its brutal theatrical reality, finessed instead into feminist symbolism. As she states in the prologue—“Non è, donne, che come indicazione dello spettacolo vi si dia quella di andare a casa e sgozzare tutti i figli. No, è un’allegoria!”—Rame is clearly not advocating that the audience or reader kill his or her

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>126</sup> See Video 2 in Supplementary Materials, page 278.

children.<sup>127</sup> For Rame, Medea's infanticide is symbolic, intended to represent the casting off of patriarchal law, an unjust system that she outlines in her frenzied, one-sided conversation with Jason:

E penzavo che 'sta gabbia derentro la quale ci avvete imprigionato, con alligati, incatenati al collo li figlioli, come basto de legno duro alla vacca, per meglio tenerce sotto a noi femmene, manzuate, per meglio poterci mungere, meglio poterce montare... penzavo fosse lo peggio recatto de codesta vostra infame società d'ommeni. Coteste follie penzavo, Giasone. Coteste follie penzavo. E le penzo ancora!<sup>128</sup>

Here Rame deprives Medea's intended interlocutor of a voice or presence. He is not on stage, he does not speak. In the performance Rame acknowledges his character only by way of an empty chair. In many ways, these lines are directed as much to the audience as they are to Jason, a dramatic explanation of the same themes addressed in the prologue. This reading is corroborated by her performance strategy—she turns away from Jason's chair, looks straight ahead and evocatively acts out the images created by her words.<sup>129</sup> She slowly bends over to show the “basto de legno duro alla vacca,” and kneels on the floor, eyes closed, breathing sharply between each phrase—“per meglio poterci mungere.” Medea's rejection of Jason's control over her coupled with the symbolic power of infanticide illustrates the deeper meaning of her last lines, which she first speaks softly and then yells a second time, arms raised in protest: “Mori! Mori! Pe' fa nascere 'na donna nova!”<sup>130</sup> The originality of Rame's allegorical interpretation is clear here. By obliterating all vestiges of her participation in the patriarchal system over which Jason rules, Medea is giving birth to a new, free woman. Rame thus repurposes Euripides' text to

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<sup>127</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 70.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>129</sup> See Video 2.

<sup>130</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 75.

advocate for a *presa di coscienza*, a willful rejection on the part of women to accept the “natural laws of the universe” that keep women at a political, economic and social disadvantage. Given this line, it is clear why Rame would chose *Medea* as the conclusion to *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*.<sup>131</sup>

Rame has performed *Medea* thousands of time since its debut in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. In the performance described here, however, Rame and Fo include an additional visual feature: Fo’s own pictures and drawings of the play’s characters, including portraits of Rame as *Medea* in past productions.<sup>132</sup> In 2005 Fo and Rame mounted productions of *Maschere, pupazzi e uomini dipinti* and *Medea* at the Museo Internazionale della Maschera “Amleto e Donato Sartori” in Abano Terme, near Padova.<sup>133</sup> The staging of this later performance differs from those of the 1970s and 80s in terms of both costume and set. Whereas in the earlier productions Rame is often seen wearing more traditional costumes, such as Grecian robes or all black, here she wears a scarlet shawl—which she wraps around herself in a witch-like fashion during the show—and performs her monologue in front of a rotating digital backdrop of Fo’s original artwork.<sup>134</sup> The set is sparse except for the background: a neoclassical façade with a central

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<sup>131</sup> For a different reading, see Marga Cottino-Jones, “The Transgressive Voice of a Resisting Woman,” in *Franca Rame: A Woman on Stage*, ed. Walter Valeri (West Lafayette, I.N.: Bordighera, 2000), 26. “*Medea* represents the highest point of Rame’s quest for that ‘collegamento con la questione della donna’ mentioned in 1977. Indeed this play highlights the main controversial factors that make up a woman’s life, her potentially conflicting relations with husband, children, society, and her own self, and brings them to shocking, and yet unavoidable, tragic results.”

<sup>132</sup> Fo’s sketches, pictures and portraits relating to *Medea* are available on the archive: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/galleria.aspx?IDOpera=182&IDTipologia=17&IDPagina=1>.

<sup>133</sup> This production was broadcast by RAI 3. See Videos 1 and 2 in Supplementary Materials, page 278.

<sup>134</sup> In the photographs from a 1980 performance of *Medea*, Rame sits on an empty stage, wearing all black: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=9774&IDOpera=182>.

doorway flanked by two large digital projectors that showcase both Fo's art and images of ancient museum pieces. There are two chairs on stage, which serve as Rame's only props. Fo's sketches and drawings—completed mostly between 1978 and 1980—are an eclectic combination of ancient and modern, realistic and fantastic, color and black and white. Their most prominent feature is the reconfiguration of Medea through Rame's likeness. In these portraits the actress is depicted head in hands, an anguished expression on her face. In other drawings, she is portrayed raising her arms in self-expression, much like in the dramatic moments toward the end of the performance. There is even one group picture in pastel, which appears to depict the chorus listening to and looking up in awe and fright at Medea. The full-length sketches of Medea (as opposed to the portraits) show costumes similar to the photographs of the early productions—floor-length, cape-like wraps that could potentially envelop the whole character. This meta-theatrical staging, in which Rame plays Medea in real-time while framed by images of her past-self engaging in the same theatrical act, adds symbolic weight to her feminist revision of the classic myth.

Before continuing with a discussion of other monologues, it is essential to investigate the significance of Rame as the sole performer on stage, and the ramifications of this practice for the making of feminist theater. Rame unapologetically and explicitly brings the concerns of women center stage, defying taboo and tradition to explicate feminist themes. The monologue form is in itself integral to this practice, as it provides “uninterrupted speech to the central female character, ruling out the possibility of a reactive male discourse.”<sup>135</sup> Ultimately, the monologue is the means by which Fo and Rame realize their commitment to investigating “la questione della donna” on stage. It is not, however, just a matter of a woman's point of view, or of “giving voice

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<sup>135</sup> Gawler and Kolsky, “Dramatising the ‘Female Voice’: Performance Strategy of Franca Rame,” 39.

to” certain “types” of women or characters; it is a matter of her own body and her own voice on stage. Through the device of the monologue and the ever-present, implicit dialogue with other women, Rame creates a new feminist theater that for the first time allows a woman, and actress-author, to speak for herself.<sup>136</sup>

In refashioning *Medea* through her own monologue and presence on stage, Rame’s voice denounces the injustices of a patriarchal culture that confines women to the roles of wife and mother, and articulates the process of one woman’s *presa di coscienza* and “birth,” all without the interference of other characters or voices. She is not just an actress acting and giving voice to a feminist-type character; she is the new woman’s author, creator, and voice.<sup>137</sup> In *Lo stupro*, the monologue prevents the rapists from having any kind of voice or representation. They only exist insofar as the Rame allows them to, giving her the power to negate or include their presence for her own dramatic purposes. In *Monologo di una donna araba*, the abuse of a traditional marriage, the Palestinian revolution, and political activism are all seen exclusively from the perspective of one woman’s experiences. Rame’s monologues are thus very different from other examples of feminist theater discussed in this project, which are instead based on a more traditional multi-act structure. While the idea of excluding men from the stage appears to align

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<sup>136</sup> For a different perspective see D’Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 202–3: “Questo mettere la donna, sola, al centro della scena, sia come attrice che come protagonista, il rappresentare donne di ogni età ed estrazione sociale, il dare voce a problematiche, di genere e non, da un punto di vista femminile che mette in discussione la tradizionale rappresentazione verbale e visuale della “natura femminile” è la grande novità che porta a definire questo teatro Fo-Rame “femminista.””

<sup>137</sup> Paolo Puppa suggests that the conclusion to Rame’s *Medea* can find its antecedents in Ibsen’s *Nora*. Both plays end with women protagonists walking out on their former lives: “Distruggere i figli costituisce per lei infatti più un omaggio alla memoria della Nora ibseniana che una mera rivisitazione della creatura euripidea, in quanto senza i ruoli responsabilizzanti di figlia, di moglie e di madre, oltre a liberare se stessa elimina allo stesso tempo la fonte di dolore e di angoscia, per togliersi tutte le croci di dosso.” Puppa, “Franca e la paura del tragico,” 66.

more closely with a radical feminist theater practice, Rame's choice is actually a pragmatic one based on her knowledge of theater forms and practices: the monologue is simply the best vehicle for the dissemination of her own voice and through it, a plurality of women's voices and experiences as she sees and speaks them.

The monologue form thus works in the service of what Maggie Günsberg terms a new female protagonism, a concept which requires the deconstruction of "traditional female characterization in order to reconstruct a more authentic version... The stereotypical female character would then be displaced by an alternative, more proactive version that would function differently in both formal and thematic aspects to its patriarchally constructed, and constricted, counterpart."<sup>138</sup> The presence of only one woman on stage, however, should not be misinterpreted as reductive one-dimensionality or narcissistic protagonism of the female subject. On the contrary, Rame's monologues are always in fact dialogical and multi-voiced, in the sense that they involve other women—the spectators. Building on and expanding the comic asides of *commedia dell'arte*, in which actors addressed the audience directly, into a veritable system of feminist interconnection of her own, Rame creates a different approach to the theater and performance.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Günsberg, *Gender and the Italian Stage*, 205.

<sup>139</sup> On Rame's rapport with her audience and its feminist and subversive implications, see Wood, "Parliamo Di Donne. Feminism and Politics in the Theater of Franca Rame," 164: "In Rame's case, traditional, orthodox categories of voice, authorship and performance are disrupted. The special relationship Rame has developed with her audiences breaks down the fourth wall, turning her audience into a fundamental part of the show, enabling her to slide between her own voice and that of her characters, between reality, fiction, and metafiction. This process explodes a traditionalist and essentialist vision of the female subject in a rearrangement of parts that embodies both the fragmentation of women's lives and the joyful, carnivalesque subversion of oppressive philosophical and sociopolitical casting."

*LO STUPRO*

One of Rame's principal goals, in fact, is to show the multiplicity of women's lived experiences, combating the patriarchal notion that a woman's identity is or can be singularly rooted in the roles of wife and mother.<sup>140</sup> She achieves this by performing diverse portraits of women's lives—including the factory worker, the housewife, the political activist, the prostitute, the drug addict, and the professional, among others—and also by playing multiple characters on stage, which subverts traditional acting practices that equate one character with one actor.

Yet perhaps nowhere is the connection between performance, politics, and feminism more unequivocally established than in *Lo stupro*, Rame's first-person account of her own rape by neo-fascist thugs in 1973.<sup>141</sup> Alone on stage with one chair, low lighting, and no other setting

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<sup>140</sup> Some feminist theater critics, including Günsberg, argue that Rame at times reinforces traditional gender roles because her plays largely showcase heterosexual configurations of socialization, marriage, sexuality, and parenting. I disagree with this characterization on the basis of authentic self-expression: if Rame often represents heterosexual women with children on stage it is because she herself is creating theater from within the boundaries of her own marriage to Fo. Given her own experiences, and the state of public discourse in 1970s Italy, it would be ahistorical to expect her to present first-hand knowledge of alternative family units (it was not until Luisa Muraro that feminist critiques of heterosexuality and lesbian feminism began to be theorized in Italy). For Rame there is no utopist, separatist repurposing of the roles of wife and mother. Her plays argue instead for the economic, political, and sexual parity of women within contemporary society and its institutions. This focus runs parallel to Rame's preference for materialist as opposed to radical feminist ideas and discourse. Furthermore, representations of traditional female roles do not preclude their critique. Indeed, critiquing the status quo of women's role in society is exactly what Rame accomplishes through biting satire, informative prologues, and other feminist performance strategies.

<sup>141</sup> On March 19, 1973 Rame was brutally attacked by a gang of four men hiding in a parked van in the center of Milan. They captured her as she was walking home from the hairdresser, and proceeded to torture and gang rape her while driving around the city in broad daylight. For further information on the specifics of the crime, including the botched investigation and collusion of the Carabinieri, see Luciana D'Arcangeli, "The Rape by Franca Rame: Political Violence and Political Theater," in *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969–2009*, ed. Alan O'Leary and Pierpaolo Antonello (London: Legenda, 2009). In 1998 the Carabinieri's involvement in the attack was officially established, and Rame received a state apology from Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, *Presidente della Repubblica*.

or props, Rame's chilling performance augments the feminist message of the monologue, creating a direct and unambiguous link between Italy's patriarchal society and government, and violence against women. After two years of silence, Rame began to write about her experience, eventually composing the monologue *Lo stupro*, which would later become a part of *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. By staging a dramatic interpretation of her experience of the assault, Rame is able to directly discuss with the public—especially women—the issue of sexual violence: “La Rame capisce l'importanza di rivolgersi al pubblico femminile su temi che vedono direttamente coinvolte le donne e lo stupro sarà, comprensibilmente, uno degli argomenti più vicini a lei negli anni a seguire.”<sup>142</sup> Moreover, Rame only decided to perform *Lo stupro* in 1979 to lend her support to a political movement that lobbied to change the classification of rape from a crime against public morality to a crime against a person. In the introduction to her performance, she lays bare the inherent misogyny of classifying rape as a “moral crime” instead of a violent crime exhibited against a person: “Ancora oggi, proprio per l'imbecille mentalità corrente, una donna convince veramente di aver subito violenza carnale contro la sua volontà, se ha la ‘fortuna’ di presentarsi alle autorità competenti pestata e sanguinante, se si presenta morta è meglio! Un cadavere con segni di stupro e sevizie dà più garanzie.”<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the reclassification of rape as a criminal act was an essential issue for Italian feminists and left-wing groups in the later decades of the twentieth century.<sup>144</sup> Rame's decision to perform this monologue in solidarity with the fight for changing rape law showcases the extent to which she views theater as a political tool—

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<sup>142</sup> D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 231.

<sup>143</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 91.

<sup>144</sup> On the UDI's fight for the redefinition of rape as a criminal offense as opposed to a moral crime, and to criminalize marital rape see Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy*, 163. See Chapter 2, note 104 of this study on the case of Franca Viola, a Sicilian teenage who in 1965 refused to marry her rapist and insisted on formal legal prosecution.

ultimately, she was able to take a brutal autobiographical experience and use performance to turn it into a call for actionable change on institutional and juridical levels.

Initially, Rame did not acknowledge that *Lo stupro* was based on her own experience. She claimed instead that it was based on a story from the magazine *Quotidiano donna*, and was simply paradigmatic of the type of violence and sexual assault that women all over Italy and the world deal with on a daily basis. It was not until November 29, 1987 that, after performing the monologue on the Saturday night variety show *Fantastico* with Adriano Celentano, she acknowledged the autobiographical element of her monologue. Her revelation sparked both admiration and controversy: some sponsors and listeners felt that the content was inappropriate for children, while other viewers expressed gratitude and relief that she would discuss such a personal experience with the public, thus raising awareness about and fighting stigmas surrounding rape.<sup>145</sup> Her detractors, Rame argued, were proving her very point: stories about rape and violence need to be disseminated in spite of society's imposed *pudore* in order to take power away from the perpetrators; and to change the mechanisms and prevailing attitudes that allow for its continued occurrence. In sharing her own story, Rame personifies what is, in fact, a shared experience for many women worldwide: "Nel caso di *Lo stupro*, il bruciante dato autobiografico si stempera nella coscienza che la violenza sessuale è, per la popolazione femminile del mondo, una tragedia condivisa."<sup>146</sup> In this sense her monologue's political purpose is also deeply personal. Rape, she argues, is a collective wound, a scourge on society that can only be fixed by outing its continued existence, enlisting men in the fight against sexual

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<sup>145</sup> Newspaper articles chronicling these reactions are catalogued in the archive. See <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/elenco.aspx?IDOpera=170&IDTipologia=34&IDPagina=1>.

<sup>146</sup> D'Angeli, "Proprio una figlia d'arte," 35.

violence, and campaigning for legal recourse.<sup>147</sup>

Rame's decision to write about her assault was in itself a journey. For years she oscillated between the compulsion to write and feeling disturbed by the memories. According to her archival manuscripts, Rame first wrote about her experience while on a train in 1975 as a means by which to dispense with some of the original trauma. In this passage, worth citing at length, Rame describes the release she experienced from sharing her experience with Dario:

Sforzarmi di scrivere quanto avevo addosso mi è stato indispensabile; dovevo assolutamente liberarmi, almeno in parte dalla tensione nella quale vivevo ancora dopo due anni, 24 ore su 24; tensione che mi impediva d'uscire da sola, stare in casa da sola. Se i segni sul mio corpo stavano sbiadendo, l'immagine dei fatti era ben presente nella mia testa in ogni momento. Dovevo anche, assolutamente raccontare a Dario la mia umiliazione—ma proprio non mi riusciva di parlare. Il primo momento di sollievo è stato quando guardavo Dario leggere, parola dopo parole, quello che alla mattina avevo scritto in poco più di un'ora, seguendo una spinta interna inarrestabile. Lo guardavo leggere sapendo che lui sapeva già nella sostanza quello che mi era successo... Lo guardavo leggere, gli passavo un po' di quello che avevo addosso. Respiravo profondo e mi sentivo meglio. Quella è stata la prima volta che ho pianto.<sup>148</sup>

After documenting her experience, Rame's next step was performance. She attests, however, that

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<sup>147</sup> Telling women's stories from their own point of view has always been a central facet of Rame's theatrical project. This goal is particularly important with regard to experiences of rape and sexual violence. Rame and Fo have written and staged multiple of plays in which rape is a central event. In *Nada Pasini* (a monologue from within the collection *Vorrei morire anche stasera se dovessi sapere che non è servito a niente*), a nurse tending to wounded partisans is interrogated and raped by her German captors. In *La fiocinina*, also from *Vorrei morire*, a Chioggian peasant woman who joins her father in the resistance is molested by fascists and objectified by her fellow partisans. Much later, Rame wrote the story of Maria, a woman raped in Cologno Monzese. The monologue was published under the working title *Maria, anni 58, stuprata alle due del mattino sul ciglio della strada da un giovane, cosiddetto "per bene, di buona famiglia."* *Testimonianza raccolta, riscritta e rappresentata innumerosi occasioni da Franca Rame. Milano, 20 marzo 2001.* Interestingly, Maria specifically brought her story to Rame, knowing that the playwright would understand her trauma. On their meeting Rame comments: "Mi ero molto emozionata a quell'incontro, tanto che immediatamente ho scritto la sua storia, vera tragedia, piena di violenza brutta, rabbia e umiliazione." Quoted in D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 240.

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=5674&IDOpera=170>.

the leap from page to stage was challenging: “Mi ci è voluto parecchio tempo prima di riuscire a recitarlo senza troppa sofferenza.”<sup>149</sup> Even in the early stages of processing her assault, Rame was highly aware of rape’s use as a political tool. In the same manuscript, she acknowledges that the violence exhibited against her was also threat, a warning against her continued work as a political activist: “Io sono una donna che fa politica... colpendo me, avevano colpito tutta la mia famiglia, con una lezione ben chiara, che mi segnava nel corpo, che ci segnava nel cervello, profondamente, affinché ce lo ricordassimo chiaro, e per molto tempo. Tutto quello che ci era successo avrebbe dovuto servire a toglierci la voglia di continuare a fare politica, specie col teatro.”<sup>150</sup> Rame rightly understands her rape as the act of men whose aim was to forcefully and violently dissuade her from continuing her work as a politically-committed artist.

While the autobiographical nature of *Lo stupro* is not an isolated occurrence in Fo and Rame’s theatrical oeuvre, it is perhaps more fully developed here than in any other text, informing the entire foundation of the play as opposed to a single intervention or idea. Yet writing and staging a play based on an autobiographical experience has formal ramifications with regard to acting style and technique. In representing her own experience, the temptation to fall into naturalistic recitation could indeed be high. As an expert actress, however, Rame is able to avoid this path, choosing instead to portray her personal experience by means of the epic style of acting that is one of her fortés. Both Rame and Fo have at times found it necessary and politically useful to build their stage presence around the Brechtian notion of epic theater, which requires a distance between actor and character that allows for the critical reflection of the

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<sup>149</sup> Rame quoted in D’Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 234.

<sup>150</sup> <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=5674&IDOpera=170>.

audience.<sup>151</sup> By using the technique of *Verfremdungseffekt*, the audience's emotional proximity to the character is disrupted through the estrangement of the actor from his or her character. This double distance is what allows the audience to approach the material on stage analytically instead of unconsciously consuming its values, such as with propaganda. This approach directly conflicts with a more traditional, naturalistic style of acting (in the vein of Stanislavsky's Method School) through which an actor becomes completely immersed in the character he or she is representing. The techniques of epic recitation are essential to the success of much of Fo and Rame's theater.<sup>152</sup> For example, Fo explicitly mentions the necessity of epic acting methodology for some of their theatrical works—other actresses who attempt to play parts written with and for Franca, he argues, often struggle: “Mancano della sapienza, e quindi della cultura epica che permette il grande distacco dal ruolo che vi fa essere sempre nella situazione critica di creare ritmi e controtempi... la difficoltà è sempre quella di riuscire davvero a recitare epicamente, e non naturalisticamente, questi testi.”<sup>153</sup> In *Lo stupro*, it is the V-effect that effectively allows Rame to overcome her trauma. Rame broadens the scope and goal of the monologue to make a universal political statement. She may herself be a victim of rape, but through the depiction of one emblematic experience, she raises awareness about a political-feminist issue—forcing the audience to acknowledge its continued presence in society—and thus frames rape as a collective

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<sup>151</sup> On Brecht's theater and performance theories, see Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn, trans. Jack Davis (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015); Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Performance: Messingkauf and Modelbooks*, ed. Tom Kuhn, Marc Silberman, and Steve Giles, trans. Charlotte Ryland (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015).

<sup>152</sup> In addition to *Verfremdungseffekt* (referred to in English as V-effect), other techniques of epic theater include playing multiple characters, breaking down the fourth wall to directly address the audience, and fostering a sense of engagement with the issues presented on stage.

<sup>153</sup> Fo, *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, 152.

act of violence against all women, not just herself.

*Lo stupro* is composed of three parts: the divided pre-prologue, which includes Franca's introduction and a preposterous line of questioning by male officials during a rape trial; the official one-sentence prologue in which Rame states that the subsequent play is based on a story she read in *Quotidiano donna*; and the monologue itself, which is not quite four pages in length. Perhaps the most radical aspect of Rame's monologue is the title, which translates directly as "the rape." Given the many euphemisms used to describe rape in both cultural and legal contexts—sexual assault, violence, sexual violence etc.—using the actual word is in itself a radical act of acknowledgement. Even twenty and thirty years later, some critics demure when discussing Rame's monologue, choosing to employ a euphemism instead of using the term rape.<sup>154</sup> Once on stage, Rame does not actually begin *Lo stupro* with her own experience of rape. Instead she begins with a different, less explicit form of violence—the additional negative treatment women endure when attempting to report rape to the police. Rame stages this experience through the fictionalized transcription of a questioning during a rape trial. She includes the voices of a doctor, police officer, judge and lawyer—all men of institutional power who display more suspicion than empathy for the victim before them. It is putatively a transcription of a trial, that Rame reads: "questa che vi leggo è la trascrizione del verbale di un interrogatorio durante un processo per stupro, è tutto un lurido e sghignazzante rito di dileggio."

MEDICO: Dica, signorina, o signora, durante l'aggressione lei ha provato solo disgusto o anche un certo piacere... una inconscia soddisfazione?

POLIZIOTTO: Non s'è sentita lusingata che tanti uomini, quattro mi pare, tutti insieme, la desiderassero tanto, con così dura passione?

GIUDICE: È rimasta sempre passiva o ad un certo punto ha partecipato?

MEDICO: Si è sentita eccitata? Coinvolta?

AVVOCATO DIFENSORE DEGLI STUPRATORI: Si è sentita umida?

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<sup>154</sup> One example of many of this phenomenon can be found in Cottino-Jones, "The Transgressive Voice of a Resisting Woman."

GIUDICE: Non ha pensato che i suoi gemiti, dovuti certo alla sofferenza, potessero essere fraintesi come espressioni di godimento?

POLIZIOTTO: Lei ha goduto?

MEDICO: Ha raggiunto l'orgasmo?

AVVOCATO: Se sì, quante volte?<sup>155</sup>

Here the men who question an unnamed victim attempt to implicate her as complicit in her own rape through a perverse explication of her sexual experience. Not only does Rame demonstrate the misogyny and voyeurism inherent in this line of questioning, she also compels her audience to watch the ensuing monologue with this experience in mind. This allows Rame to show that in the context of twentieth-century Italy, victims of rape experience a secondary, “institutional” assault whereby powerful professionals—traditionally men—discredit first-person accounts and engage in victim-blaming. In her 1987 manuscript Rame is explicit about the importance of this section of the monologue—it is as vital as the representation of the rape itself: “La sera di *Fantastico* avrei voluto avere la possibilità di presentare *Lo stupro* come faccio in teatro. Avrei voluto spiegare alla gente cosa succede a tante donne che nella speranza di avere giustizia, affrontano, SUBENDOLO, un processo. Processo, che per come è condotto, si rivela, SEMPRE, una seconda violenza bruciante, quanto e più della prima.”<sup>156</sup> In many ways, this questioning could indeed be seen as a modern version of Artemisia Gentileschi’s rape trial as depicted in Banti’s *Corte Savella*. In that example too a woman attempting to seek justice against her rapist is exposed to a humiliating interrogation all while having her moral character called in question through slanderous rumors and insinuations regarding her sexual experience. It could also be seen as a significantly more explicit version of what Amelia Pincherle Rosselli documents via her protagonist Olga at the turn of the century in *Anima*. While no legal process or trial is

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<sup>155</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 91–2.

<sup>156</sup> <http://www.archivio.francarama.it/Scheda.aspx?IDScheda=5674&IDOpera=170>.

depicted in *Anima*, it does demonstrate the devastation and humiliation of rape on the protagonist, who is abandoned by her fiancé after he discovers her “impurity.”

In a similar fashion to *Medea*, the prologue to *Lo stupro* is dry and ironic (if not humorous) while the subsequent monologue adopts a significantly more tragic tone. Like in many of her other prologues, Rame at times improvises this beginning—using the daily news to inform her introduction—which means that it is never exactly same from performance to performance. The monologue itself is composed primarily of the unnamed protagonist’s stream-of-consciousness description of the violent experience. In the published transcription there are no discernable paragraphs, and many sentences simply taper off with an ellipses instead of coming to a traditional end. This reflects the pain and disorientation of the woman, who questions where she is and what is happening to her. Seeking to understand her situation, she is faint, confused, slow, unable to remember how she got in the van. She finds herself listening to a radio and repeats the rhyming song lyrics slowly, as if just regaining the ability to think: “C’è una radio che suona... ma solo dopo un po’ la sento. Solo dopo un po’ mi rendo conto che c’è qualcuno che canta. Sì, è una radio. Musica leggera: cielo stelle cuore amore.”<sup>157</sup> These are the first lines of Rame’s monologue, and set the stage in both tone and form for the following three pages. Clearly, the song reflects the exact opposite of what she is experiencing in that moment. There is no sky—just the roof of the dingy van above her—and obviously no love, just its perversion in the form of the violent sexual encounter that awaits. Music from the radio is a consistent point of reference during the course of the monologue: changes in music signal to the protagonist (and viewer) that something is about to happen (“Non capisco cosa mi stia capitando. La radio canta,

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<sup>157</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 92.

neanche tanto forte. Perché la musica? Perché l'abbassano? Forse è perché non grido").<sup>158</sup>

There is a sharp contrast between the protagonist's line of questioning and the discrete, precise acts of violence visited against her. Her self-questioning ("Dio che confusione! Come sono salita su questo camioncino? Ho alzato le gambe io, una dopo l'altra dietro la loro spinta o mi hanno caricata loro, sollevandomi di peso?") is punctuated by queries about and synthetic descriptions of her captor's behavior ("Perché me la storcono tanto? Io non tento nessun movimento... Ora, quello che mi sta dietro non tiene più il suo ginocchio contro la mia schiena... s'è seduto comodo... e mi tiene tra le sue gambe... fortemente... dal di dietro.")<sup>159</sup>

This pattern of question-description both augments the audience's suspense and emotion, and creates a sense of distance between the actual event and its dramatic representation through her matter-of-fact delivery. The technique is next repeated with cigarette burns—the first explicit act of torture exhibited against her person. The protagonist can tell something is amiss, thus her stream of consciousness again turns to questioning ("Fumano? Adesso?... Sta per succedere qualche cosa, lo sento") followed quickly by a concise description of the attacker's behavior ("un calore, prima tenue e poi più forte, fino a diventare insopportabile, sul seno sinistro. Una punta di bruciore. Le sigarette... sopra al golf fino ad arrivare alla pelle").<sup>160</sup> In many ways this pattern is almost like the externalization of an inner monologue that is constantly seeking information and answers. Details are divulged little by little, with few particulars and an almost medical-like precision. Over the course of the monologue, as the protagonist is burned, cut and raped, Rame does not rely on extraneous, gory detail, but rather employs singular, precise phrases that

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 93.

soberingly detail her pain and suffering. For example, when one man slices off her shirt with a blade, the protagonist describes the experience not with images of blood and cut flesh, but rather through the words of the medical report that will be issued after the fact (“Nella perizia medica misureranno ventun centimetri”).<sup>161</sup>

These descriptions are at once haunting and immediate, and during her performance Rame augments their dramatic potential through pained facial expressions and small but expressive movements. In the 1987 television performance of *Lo stupro*, Rame sits rigidly on a single chair, legs straight out in front of her, leaning back as if uncomfortably restrained.<sup>162</sup> The stage is empty and the dual spotlight shining on her creates an uncanny double shadow, casting two silhouettes of Rame onto the empty stage below her chair, each diverging forty-five degrees from the actress herself. Unlike in *Medea*, where Rame performs in front of digital slide show of Fo’s original artwork depicting the mythic woman, in *Lo stupro* the only focal point for the audience is Rame herself. There is no set, artwork or other adornments on stage. Even her outfit—black pants, black sweater, pink scarf and long earrings—is more reminiscent of typical clothing rather than a theatrical costume. In this version of the performance, Rame is briefly introduced by Adriano Celentano, makes a few remarks of her own (“una settimana fa ho telefonato a Celentano proponendogli questo brano... È una violenza sessuale subita da questa donna raccontata minuto dopo minuto. È un brano che io amo moltissimo per il suo significato”), but for time restraints foregoes her original introduction with the trial, jumping straight into the monologue instead. For the next nine minutes Rame performs the protagonist’s experience, remaining firmly in the chair until close to the very end. Her only self-made movements are

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>162</sup> See Video 3 in Supplementary Materials, page 278.

twitching her hands and fingers, and turning her head and neck from side to side—both of which express her character’s pain and fear. The other movements—opening her legs and eventually standing up and leaving the “van”—are made in tandem with her explanation of her captors’ actions.

Rame’s subtle but purposeful movements in the live performance reinforce the monologue’s linguistic patterns. Toward the end, however, the earlier question-and-description pattern is traded for a juxtaposition between internal versus external thought. For example, one of the most profound moments in the play is the representation of the rape itself. At this point the protagonist ceases to ask questions, choosing instead to externalize her immediate visceral fear and disgust: “Io mi concentro sulla parole delle canzoni; il cuore mi si sta spaccando, non voglio uscire dalla confusione che ho. Non voglio capire. Non capisco nessuna parola... non conosco nessuna lingua. Altra sigaretta. ‘Muoviti puttana fammi godere.’ Sono di pietra.”<sup>163</sup> Rame’s evocative delivery of these lines fosters a sense of fright and pain in the audience. During this section her body and limbs are in the chair, immobile, all movement and expression coming instead from her face. She speaks the lines quickly, but with distinction and intention. Each phrase is punctuated by her audible, gasping breath. Her facial features are tightly scrunched up, the most compelling physical representation of her pain thus far. As D’Arcangeli notes, the few details provided by her lines are “sufficient to convey the appalling truth of her powerlessness.”<sup>164</sup> The conspicuous lack of detail leaves the spectators to envision the protagonist’s pain for themselves. Instead of gruesome detail, it is the rapists’ phrase “muoviti puttana fammi godere”—repeated four times—that most explicitly expresses the horror of the

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<sup>163</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 94.

<sup>164</sup> D’Arcangeli, “*The Rape* by Franca Rame: Political Violence and Political Theater,” 109.

experience. After this section, the monologue quickly comes to its end. As she describes the men redressing her, Rame begins to move toward sitting upright. She represents the protagonist's exit from the van by finally standing up from her chair while saying "il camioncino si ferma per il tempo di farmi scendere... e se ne va."<sup>165</sup> As the protagonist finds her bearings outside of the van—wrapping her sweater around her chest, leaning against a tree, trying to ascertain her location—the play closes with her expressing uncertainty and trepidation about reporting the rape to the authorities: "Senza accorgermi, mi trovo davanti alla Questura. Appoggiata al muro del palazzo di fronte, la sto a guardare per un bel pezzo. Penso a quello che dovrei affrontare se entrassi ora... Sento le loro domande. Vedo le loro facce... i loro mezzi sorrisi... Penso e ci ripenso... Poi mi decido... Torno a casa...torno a casa... Li denuncerò domani."<sup>166</sup> Rame ends *Lo stupro* with a dramatic reenactment of the antecedent to the rape trial parodied in the introduction. Through her protagonist's struggle—which the audience has been forced to confront—she highlights the institutional mechanisms that perpetuate rape, dissuade victims from reporting their experiences, keep abusers safe from prosecution, and make justice either improbable or impossible to obtain.

Each feminist playwright included in this study addresses rape at some point in her works. While it is a common theme for feminists artists, its representation on stage changes over the course of the twentieth century along with prevailing theater aesthetics and political movements. In *Anima*, for example, Rosselli does not use of the term rape. She instead relies on euphemisms and implications to communicate the gravity of Olga's harrowing adolescent experience. Rosselli is just as strong as Rame in her condemnation of rape—and in particular,

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<sup>165</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 95.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

her criticism of a society that harshly judges victims instead of condemning perpetrators—yet she abides by traditional notions of theatrical decorum in its representation. Unlike Rame, who is able to convey the terror and powerlessness of rape through an explicit reenactment, Rosselli communicates Olga’s devastation and trauma through Act I, where she explains that the experience left her feeling like a living ruin and necessitated the purposeful rebirth of her soul, which is hers alone and cannot be violated. In *Corte savella*, Banti is similarly direct in her political commentary but takes it a step further by suggesting a continuity in prevailing attitudes on rape and sexual violence between the Baroque and the mid-twentieth century. While Artemisia in many ways experienced something very similar to Olga—both were raped by older men in positions of familial trust and authority—Banti frames her story in such a way as to foster critique of the politics and policies that surround rape and its prosecution. She accomplishes this by focusing very specifically on juridical matters: she entitles her play *Corte Savella* after the name of the Papal court itself, and dedicates one-third of the stage time to a representation of the trial, which is shown to be a complete sham, and thus a condemnation of an Italian legal system that denies women justice across the arc of history. Rame builds upon the feminist playwrights who preceded her by using the stage and innovate performance strategies to foster and disseminate an even more explicit dialogue about rape. By staging a first-person account of her own experience she unequivocally condemns a society in which that type of violence is not only allowed to flourish and go unpunished, but is also backed by governmental bodies and agents. In many ways, the title alone of Rame’s monologue is able to accomplish something extraordinary: to unambiguously call out rape and the patriarchal configurations of society that support and encourage it.

*MONOLOGO DI UNA DONNA ARABA*

The final play to be addressed here is *Monologo di una donna araba* (1972). In this piece Rame looks beyond the Italian border, to issues and traditions of marriage, sex, violence, politics and revolution in the Middle East during the 1960s–70s. At eight pages and an introduction, this monologue is significantly longer in length than either *Medea* or *Lo stupro* and predates both by about five years. *Monologo di una donna araba* is only one section taken from the larger Fo-Rame work *Fedayn*, a collection of plays and songs dedicated to the Palestinian resistance movement and first published and premiered in February 1972 by Il Collettivo Teatrale “La Comune” at the Palazzo dello Sport in Milan. This particular section of *Fedayn* was born of Rame’s own initiative and interest in uncovering and representing women’s stories the world over—particularly those of marginalized peoples and the proletariat. Rame, in fact, was so dedicated to this goal that it was she who initiated contact with revolutionaries in Lebanon and the West Bank, and subsequently organized a trip to Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon to conduct research and in-person interviews, and find local dancers, singers, and actors to accompany them back to Italy to take part in the production. Per usual, in *Fedayn* Fo and Rame spare no political group or leader from critique, which led to protests and heated debates around the play’s production.<sup>167</sup> While the complexities of the Israeli-Palestine conflict of the 1960s and 70s are not the focus of this study, I will briefly contextualize the play as a whole in order to better situate Rame’s monologue within it. The purpose of commissioning *Fedayn* was to bring awareness to the struggle of Palestinian resistance fighters by way of a collective transnational

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<sup>167</sup> Specifically, the play teases out differences between the radical Marxist organization The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the more moderate and well-funded group Al Fatah (both were members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, or PLO). For examples on their disagreement, see excerpts from the second edition of *Il teatro politico di Dario Fo—Compagni senza censura, secondo volume* on the online archive: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=4338&IDImmagine=2&IDOpera=66>.

Communist effort. Through extensive first-person testimony, research on the ground in the Middle East, and incorporating cultural elements such as song and dance, Fo, Rame, and the local actors and performers use the stage for the joint didactic-political purposes of bringing awareness to an Italian (or western European) audience of an issue just across the Mediterranean. In her introduction to the play, Rame is explicit about its political commitment: above all, the play is “un documento politico e una dichiarazione di solidarietà verso i palestinesi oppressi.”<sup>168</sup> With regard to theatrical form, *Fedayn* is non-traditional even in comparison to other Fo-Rame works: it follows no classic model, nor has a clear expository direction. Instead of a defining narrative arc, it is a constellation of fragments: testimony, readings, sketches, debates, and commentary, all presented on stage. It also makes use of both professional and non-professional actors and actresses. Political theater critic Aldo Paladini, however, does not believe that these dramatic elements are a disservice to the play’s message, rather they enhance its success: “ma proprio con questi elementi, molto più di quanto avrebbe potuto un’opera di fantasia, lo spettacolo riesce a trasmetterci il senso della tempesta che ha travolto il popolo palestinese e fa della sua lotta per sopravvivere una disperata epopea.”<sup>169</sup>

*Monologo di una donna araba* takes the form of a Bedouin woman’s first-person testimony and can be divided three distinct sections: her childhood and escape from an abusive marriage; her life in Egypt as a nurse and member of the underground communist party; and her return to Jordan, which resulted in her membership in the Democratic Front and her role as the assassin of police chief Mohammed Jaffis. Rame begins the monologue with an introduction that outlines the difficult process of obtaining the primary source materials necessary to add a

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<sup>168</sup> Rame quoted in Aldo Paladini’s article “Dario Fo, nipotino politico di Piscator” from the online archive: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=8514&IDOpera=66>

<sup>169</sup> See Paladini: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=8514&IDOpera=66>.

woman's perspective to *Fedayn*. While in Lebanon, she asked the director of a refugee camp to assemble a group of residents who were also actors, musicians or dancers so that the show could be authentically presented from the point of view of a first-person narrative. Rame was disappointed, however, to find no women in that group, nor other women, who were willing to talk about their life experiences. When pressed by Rame to account for the discrepancy, the camp director prophetically noted that “il problema dell’emancipazione femminile per noi sarà senz’altro il fosso più profondo da superare.”<sup>170</sup> In her introduction, she describes the genesis of the monologue: she asked a woman, baby in arms, if she would talk about her life, and unfortunately, as Rame explains, “mi ha fatto cenno di no, che non aveva niente da dirmi.”<sup>171</sup> Yet soon after returning to Milan, Rame received a recording of the unnamed young woman's testimony from a contact in Beirut. She had the transcript translated from Arabic into Italian, and the resulting imaginative adaptation forms the body of play (“Un compagno mi ha consegnato un nastro registrato. C’era incise una voce di donna che parlava in arabo. L’ho fatta tradurre, naturalmente. Ecco cosa diceva”).<sup>172</sup> Rame weaves this creation story into the monologue itself: the first line of the play functions almost as a call-and-response with the last line of the introduction (“Io sono la compagna che non ti ha risposto al campo. Ora ti posso dire di me”).<sup>173</sup> The rest of the play is a dramatic retelling of the young woman's life's story as adapted by Rame in terms that she believed her audiences in Italy could grasp.

*Monologo di una donna araba* is notable for its rich, descriptive language and

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<sup>170</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 223.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

illustrative vignettes commensurate with its testimonial mode. With regard to register and form, however, it adopts a very different aesthetic than the previous two monologues addressed here. Instead of acting a part, Rame is actually representing someone else's story, rendering the work a sort of reading in absentia more than a traditional performance.<sup>174</sup> While *Medea* and *Lo stupro* are clearly “dialogic” monologues—feminist recastings of a myth and an autobiographical experience, respectively—*Monologo di una donna araba* leaves the reader feeling not quite like a spectator, but rather as a witness to one woman's far-away journey. While the particulars of dress, religion, language, custom and tradition are meant to evoke the distinct cultural difference of the protagonist and her world, the play's major themes closely parallel issues Rame parses in her other feminist monologues: violence against women at home and in marriage, the toxicity of patriarchal cultures, and the difficulty women face when attempting to take part in the political and economic spheres.

The monologue opens with the unnamed female protagonist describing her childhood as a farm laborer; her brief, traumatizing marriage; and her daring wedding-night escape. As the daughter of a nomadic Bedouin mother and peasant father, she grew up laboring under the sun, resentful of her family's poverty—“quel crepare di fatica come le bestie, sempre affamati di pane e di sonno”—and its effects on women, her mother in particular.<sup>175</sup> She notes how the women in her life were always bent over in subservience, not only as a fact of daily labor, but also in deference to the more powerful men in their lives: “Le donne poi erano... sempre chinate. Chinate sui campi a strappare l'erba, a tagliare il raccolto, chinate sul pozzo a cavar acqua...

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<sup>174</sup> I have been unable to obtain a video recording of Rame performing this monologue. The subsequent analysis will be based only on the written text and other documentation pertaining to *Fedayn* made available in Rame's online archive.

<sup>175</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 224.

chinate davanti al prete, davanti ai padroni, chinate davanti al proprio uomo, chinate perfino sui figli ad allattarli... Mia madre, che da ragazza era stata una gran bella donna, ora sembrava ridotta a un pezzo di terra da mattoni.”<sup>176</sup> The protagonist’s powerful image of women’s metaphorical and literal subordination to poverty and patriarchal configurations of power characterizes much of the subsequent story. Influenced by her mother’s fanciful stories of life as a Bedouin woman, the protagonist constantly strives for something beyond her “vita da bestie” through education: she is an excellent student who finishes sixth grade despite the family admonition “una donna non deve mai farsi scoprire tanto intelligente;” and a talented horsewoman—a skill that ultimately proves both useful and lifesaving.<sup>177</sup>

Despite these ambitions, in the monologue the woman narrator reveals how tradition prevails and she marries a horseman from a neighboring village at only sixteen years old. At the wedding she is introduced to a whole manner of violent, misogynist customs designed to denigrate the bride and emphasize her subordination to the husband. While at first she sees them as innocuous—such as the “gioco del pestone” whereby the husband crushes the wife’s foot “per imporre la sua potestà, l’autorità del maschio” and to which she retaliates by reciprocally crushing his as well—as they build in intensity she quickly realizes the violence inherent in the institution of marriage as practiced by his family. In the subsequent vignette, the protagonist comes face to face with the antiquated traditions of corporal punishment she had heard rumored as a child:

In verità, entrando nella grande camera da letto, l’avevo notato un po’ impacciato. Quando siamo rimasti soli, mi ha detto: “Sai, adesso ti devo picchiare, ma non avere paura, non pesterò molto forte, importante è che tu pianga e gridi abbastanza da farti sentire da basso.” “Cosa?—ho detto io. — Ma sei scemo? Tu

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

prova a toccarmi e io ti spacco quel vaso di rame sulla testa.” “Ma cerca di capire! È la regola, io ti devo picchiare, ne va della mia dignità!” “Dignità di un corno, qua siete una massa di trogloditi, se mi metti una mano addosso t’ammazzo!” e ho alzato il vaso pronta a tirarglielo in testa. A ’sto punto è scoppiato a piangere: “Non farmi fare ‘sta figura,—e frignava,—ti prego, ti scongiuro, fammi almeno il favore di gridare un po’, piangi, per tuo conto, e io batto delle pacche qui sul materasso, così...” “No, sul materasso se vuoi picchio io, tu piangi. Sì, più forte, grida!”<sup>178</sup>

Here the protagonist demonstrates the violent reality of the patriarchal ideal that a man’s dignity is contingent on his domination over women, his wife in particular. As the lead-up to the wedding night progressively worsens, the protagonist plans her escape. After beating her “come mi volesse uccidere,” he tries to initiate sex, at which point the protagonist defends herself: “gli ho mollato un calcio tale nel ventre, un po’ in basso, che è diventato tutto paonazzo, ha mugolato come un cane castrato, e poi si è messo a vomitare. In piena notte io sono scesa nella stalla, ho sellato il mio cavallo e via, me ne sono andata di gran carriera, portandomi via il fucile d’argento di mio marito.”<sup>179</sup> An important formal difference in this monologue—particularly evident in the wedding-night scene—is that Rame specifically demarcates the lines of other characters in addition to the female protagonist, as if there were multiple actors on stage. Yet Rame recited each part herself. Neither Fo nor Rame indicate in any essay or interview that the work should be acted by more than one person.<sup>180</sup>

After her daring escape—which ends in a horse chase and shootout—the protagonist establishes herself in an unnamed city where she finds work as a nurse and ultimately becomes head of her ward. Always present in her story, however, are descriptions of the degrading

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>180</sup> No video footage of *Fedayn* or *Monologo di una donna araba* is available on Rame’s online archive, making it impossible to ascertain the particulars of the performance.

treatment women face in all facets of life, whether at work or at home. She notes, for example, that instead of being seen as an escapee from abuse, her past is understood as evidence of her lack of moral character: “la gente che sapeva del fatto che ero scappata dal marito mi guardava come si guarda una prostituta... C’erano degli ammalati che si rifiutavano addirittura di farsi toccare da me.”<sup>181</sup> It is at this point that the monologue shifts focus from the protagonist’s personal history and background to the details of her fledgling interest and involvement in revolutionary politics. After being transferred to Alexandria, she joins the clandestine Egyptian communist party that had been recently disbanded by President Nasser after his election. The protagonist recounts her frustration at Nasser’s hypocrisy: his spies were everywhere, often arresting and torturing suspected communists and dissidents, all while he met and made deals with Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR. She was arrested herself, but freed in a bout of leniency after the Six Day War of 1967, after which she decides to move back to the area around her childhood home in Jordan.

It is at this point that the protagonist joins the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine—and thus her story aligns with and complements the others in *Fedayn*. Just like in childhood, marriage, and work, however, she finds that being a woman and a political activist is not an easy or socially acceptable combination: “Non era facile restarci,” she comments on her experience with the Front, “di donne eravamo una decina... Una donna rivoluzionaria per la mentalità araba è una donna indegna.”<sup>182</sup> Even though her work as an activist renders her indispensable to the organization, she is treated as an outsider. The monologue reaches its dramatic climax when the protagonist is asked to embark on a dangerous quest to avenge her

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<sup>181</sup> Fo and Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, 227.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

arrested, tortured, and murdered comrades by assassinating Mohammed Jaffis, Hussein's notorious police captain. It is important to note that this mission is not of her own choosing, but rather is an assignment from her male commanders: "Io in principio ero contraria ai regolamenti di conti, ma i miei dirigenti mi convinsero che in quella situazione tanto disperata, un esempio del genere avrebbe ridato un enorme slancio a tutta la lotta."<sup>183</sup> Here the protagonist expresses reservation about the plot, but is ultimately persuaded to participate despite great personal risk—she will have to pose as a nurse, catch Jaffis' eye, lure him to bed, and evade his personal guards after one of her comrades assassinates him. In designing her disguise, the protagonist adopts a blue silk veil in memory of her mother's stories about the fanciful garments the Bedouin women would wear while dancing and performing: "Mi ricordai del velo blu della tribù della mia mamma e me lo misi, fingendomi una maomettana osservante che girava sempre velata al modo antico."<sup>184</sup> Her disguise, however, carries a double meaning: in this moment of political agency, she dons a symbol of her mother's memory—the person who exemplified the injustices women face and thus inspired her to reach for a life beyond poverty and servitude. It is also a religious symbol, and suggests a certain level of devotion. This detail is particularly noteworthy to a contemporary audience in that it recalls the more secular nature of post-World War II Middle Eastern societies, when a woman wearing a veil would have been the one to stand out, as opposed to the other way around.

Despite the breakdown of the plot—the comrade in charge of the assassination itself was discovered and murdered, leaving her to complete the task alone—the protagonist successfully assassinates Jaffis and escapes the compound, leaving in her wake a trail of police "in giro a

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

cercare una donna con il velo blu alla moda delle musulmane ferventi.”<sup>185</sup> The monologue ends with the protagonist recounting the aftermath of the assassination plot: two innocent women were accused, jailed as suspects, and tortured before being released. Afterward, however, in solidarity with the wrongly-accused, other women from all over Amman began to send in letters confessing to the crime, completely overwhelming the police administration. For the protagonist, this collective action demonstrates the camaraderie of her fellow female revolutionaries: “Le donne del popolo arabo con quel gesto volevano dirmi tutta la loro solidarietà, volevano far capire a tutto il paese di essere disposte ad ogni sacrificio, di essere con noi, completamente, ad ogni costo, con la rivoluzione, la nostra rivoluzione, quella del proletario arabo.”<sup>186</sup> This last line of the monologue is an illustration of collective political defiance by a network of women engaged in a common cause. Even though the protagonist concludes on a promising note of female solidarity and revolutionary action, her “testimony” is underpinned by numerous, pointed examples of her own subjugation at home, in marriage, at work, and even as a political activist. After this last vignette, it is clear how each section of the protagonist’s story demonstrates the deep connections between power, sex, violence, and politics, showing how their intersections can be particularly damaging for women worldwide. In bringing this twentieth-century, Middle-Eastern version of the Judith and Holofernes myth to the stage, Rame shows an Italian audience that there is a continuity between the experiences of women the world over, regardless of cultural differences and political contexts. Violence as a means to suppress women’s subjectivity flourishes in all patriarchal societies, not just in an Italian or western European context.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 231.

## CONCLUSION

Rame's feminist monologues have been staged in countries across multiple continents and in many languages, from Russia to the United States. Their continued transnational significance and persistence is a testament to their acute insight, wit, comedic timing, and universal empathy with the material and social conditions faced by women in patriarchal societies. While her most famous works, such as *Una donna sola*, *Il risveglio*, and *Medea*, have experienced consistent and positive exposure on the English, North and South American, and continental European stages, even her less-well known *Monologo di una donna araba* has been rendered in English translation and performed in the United Kingdom.<sup>187</sup> It was also the subject of a 2016 podcast on the Arab Spring from the vantage point of five years later.<sup>188</sup> From their creation and production in 1970s Italy to their continued diffusion on the contemporary international stage, Rame's dramatic monologues on the economic, political, personal, and sexual lives of women are a testament to her undisputable status as a feminist playwright, one whose works merit a place in Italy's canon of twentieth-century theater.

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<sup>187</sup> *Monologo di una donna araba* was performed in 2010 at the Tron Theater in Glasgow, Scotland, where it received excellent reviews in periodicals including *The Scotsman* and *The Guardian*. See [http://www.tron.co.uk/event/from\\_the\\_west\\_bank/](http://www.tron.co.uk/event/from_the_west_bank/); and <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/theatre-review-betrayed-from-the-west-bank-tron-theatre-glasgow-1-803344>.

<sup>188</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/radio3arts-ideas/free-thinking-the-arab-spring>.

## Conclusion: Women as Subjects

In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis asks “how should the feminist critic approach her work with texts?”<sup>1</sup> To answer this question she turns to the theater, which, as this study has demonstrated, is uniquely able to address the confluence of performance and textuality, and their roles within a feminist critical discourse. More specifically, she considers the play *Nonostante Gramsci*, a work produced collectively by La Maddalena in 1975 for the Sant’Arcangelo di Romagna theater festival. In *Nonostante Gramsci*, the performance is combined with an innovative and ideologically-motivated playtext, which together provide a unique opportunity for the historical reevaluation of a canonical political figure from a feminist perspective.<sup>2</sup> The play presents the relationships among Gramsci, his wife Giulia, and her sisters Tatiana and Eugenia, and resurrects their correspondences, which have been omitted from Gramsci’s prison notebooks and published letters. By investigating the women at the center of Gramsci’s personal life for the first time—women left “outside the pale pathetic hagiography constructed by Gramsci’s biographers”—Cambria elucidates the experiences of his forgotten interlocutors.<sup>3</sup> Structurally, *Nonostante Gramsci* resists traditional literary forms such as the epistolary collection, historical novel, or realist drama, opting instead for a fictional overlay

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<sup>1</sup> de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 84.

<sup>2</sup> Following the established practices of La Maddalena, the play was produced, directed, and performed collectively, while the playtext itself was edited by the well-known feminist writer Adele Cambria. See Adele Cambria, *Amore come rivoluzione* (Milano: SugarCo, 1976). The performance and published text were released simultaneously, with the volume juxtaposing the script and production notes. De Lauretis notes that the published text is self-consciously “historical and artistic, and deliberately presents itself as tendentious and critical. It is a text with its ideology clearly stated and with a basis of original research behind its fiction.” de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 86.

based on historical documentation that is dramatized in the form of a character—“The Girl”—who morphs from narrator to commentator to historical figure. Most of the dramatic language is taken directly from the women’s letters to Gramsci and among one another, and the volume includes excerpts of the original documents punctuated by Cambria’s own comments and additions. To this end, the play intersperses historical record with personal experience, confounding the roles of reader and writer, performer and audience: “the text is produced and meant to be received as the intersecting of the personal and the social, a process articulated dialectically on subjective codes and on objective realities.”<sup>4</sup>

Although de Lauretis is not otherwise specifically interested in studying the tradition of Italian women’s theater, when she classifies Cambria’s project as a political one—namely, “to rewrite history, inscribing in it the missing voices of women”—she could just as easily be describing one of the principal moral and textual axes of Rosselli’s, Banti’s and Rame’s theatrical works.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, providing space for women’s voices that have been omitted from the historical record or literary canon is a primary focus of twentieth-century Italian women playwrights who span the decades and have diverse relationships with feminism. Furthermore, it is a major thematic concern that connects the writers in this study. Such historical revisionism is perhaps most evident in Anna Banti’s *Corte Savella*—a work that brings Artemisia Gentileschi to the stage, and in doing so, endows her with a voice for the first time. This operation allows Gentileschi to become the protagonist of and an active participant in, so to speak, the making of her own biography. It also facilitates a new interpretation of her artistic oeuvre—a critical task in feminist art historical discourse. Historical (and contemporary) modeling also lies at the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 86.

foundation of Amelia Pincherle Rosselli's works. In *Emma Liona*, for example, she rewrites the story of young woman who has been mythologized in male-authored narratives of various genres and media (opera, film, painting, poetry, etc.) as a capricious, dangerous beauty who for no reason other than whim incites political chaos. While not modeled on specific historical persons, in her other plays Rosselli nonetheless focuses on women protagonists who deal with both practical and existential struggles specific to issues of gender, including marriage, family, political engagement, and the artificial divide between body and mind. In this sense *Anima's* Olga can be seen as a sort of archetype for all women of the era in Italy, a character who refutes the positivist theory that women are defined only by the physical and lack the capacity for rational or spiritual depth. Many decades later, Rame engages in a similar process. In her innovative feminist monologues she uses humor and farce to show the plight of the Italian everywoman who is exploited or mistreated at home, work, or in familial and sexual relationships. She also dramatizes the stories of diverse women past and present, fictional and historical—from participants in the antifascist Resistance, to the unnamed Bedouin revolutionary, to the mothers of imprisoned political activists—all this in addition to the dramatic rendering of her own rape at the hands of neo-fascist criminals, which she uses to lobby for a change in the criminal code. Other Italian feminist playwrights not discussed in this study also utilize historical women characters as a key dramatic conceit. Dacia Marini, for example, often recasts historical women on stage (many of whom happen to be artists or writers) including Veronica Franco, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Isabella Morra, Catherine of Siena, and Mary Queen of Scots, just to name a few. With regard to mythic revisionism, in a similar fashion to Rame, Maricla Boggio produces her own version of Medea, while Maraini rewrites Clytemnestra's story from the *Oresteia*. Focusing on the experiences, accomplishments, and activities of women

past and present is a powerful way for feminist playwrights to position women as subjects, actors, and participants in society, working against the notion put forth by much traditional cultural production that they are instead accessories to history's forward march.

Most importantly, de Lauretis proposes *Nonostante Gramsci* as a new model of feminist cultural production that does not imply an essentialist framework that presupposes an innate style of "women's writing." Cambria's interplay of documentation and fiction based on historical research can instead be considered a new modality of textual and performative production from a feminist perspective that foregrounds women's engagement with history and culture:

Working along these lines, we can perhaps develop a *feminist theory of textual production* which is neither a *theory of women's writing* nor just a theory of textuality. In other words, it is not a matter of finding common elements among the texts written or produced by women and defining them in terms of a presumed femaleness or femininity, which, to my mind, is highly suspect of sexual metaphysic; rather, it is our task to envision a feminist theory of the process of textual production and consumption, which is of course inseparable from a theory of culture. . . . It is not a question of what or how women write, but of how women produce (as makers) and reproduce (as receivers) the aesthetic object, the text; in other words, we need a theory of culture with **women as subjects**—not commodities but social beings producing and reproducing cultural products, transmitting and transforming cultural values.<sup>6</sup>

De Lauretis' new theory that posits women as subjects and makers of cultural products (in this case drama) is a wider theoretical lens through which to view the goal of this study: outlining and articulating a tradition of Italian women playwrights across the twentieth century that helps to revise the national theater canon. The purpose of separately evidencing and analyzing women playwrights such as Rosselli, Banti, and Rame is not to define an essential category ("the woman playwright") with an essential aesthetic or form ("women's writing"), but is rather to show that women have been and are still participants in the panorama of Italian theater, and that when they have the opportunity to make plays, they engage with the dramatic product in such a way as to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 92–3, bold emphasis mine.

highlight women's participation in history and contemporary society. By writing for the theater, they draw attention to themes of feminist importance such as women's economic, political, and sexual self-determination, among others, and thus interrupt the production of traditional theater that so often reinforces stereotypical and reductive configurations of women.

Feminist literary critics and theater scholars have made considerable progress in documenting and analyzing modern theater authored by women in Italy, and I hope this dissertation has laid the groundwork for a new, better appreciation of the Italian feminist tradition of plays written by women. To be sure, there is still much work that needs to be done in order to bring to light a dynamic dramatic canon that may reflect the diverse experiences of women and socio-cultural constructions of gender in contemporary Italy. The task of teasing out and separately discussing the works and accomplishments of women playwrights and performers in Italy from all eras needs to continue until their legacies are included and documented alongside their male counterparts in Italian theater anthologies, compilations, and histories. Within the field of Italian feminist theater, however, there are many sub-fields that need to be addressed further in order to trace more comprehensively the breadth of the practice—especially as it continues to grow and change in the twenty-first century. Building off the premises of this dissertation, future scholarship could be conducted on lesbian, transgender, and queer modalities of Italian feminist theater.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, any future work on Italian women dramatists should consider transnational and migrant voices such as Gabriella Ghermandi in order to accurately reflect how current demographic changes in Italy affect its theater and performance cultures.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Some work has been published in this field in Italian. Further engagement is required, however, to bring this topic to an English-language audience. See Eleonora Dall'Ovo, *Scatti di teatro lesbico: drammaturgie di teatranti lesbiche* (Milano: Il dito e la luna, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Ghermandi is an Italian-Ethiopian writer based in Bologna who examines the Italian-migrant experience and identity in works ranging from the novel to the stage.

## Supplementary Materials

### IMAGES FOR CHAPTER 2:

Image 1 is Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (c. 1638–9). This painting is part of the Royal Collection and is housed at the Cumberland Art Gallery at Hampton Court Palace, United Kingdom.

Image 2 is Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (c. 1620). This image is housed in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy.

### VIDEOS FOR CHAPTER 3:

All videos of Franca Rame's performances have been accessed from the Franca Rame online archive. Video clips discussed in this dissertation are available in the following supplementary materials as well as on YouTube at the URLs listed below. Video 1 is the prologue and beginning of *Medea*, while Video 2 is the end of the monologue. This production of *Medea* was performed in 2005 at the Museo Internazionale della Maschera "Amleto e Donato Sartori" in Abano Terme, Italy and broadcast on RAI 3. Video 3 includes highlights of Rame's performance of *Lo stupro* on Adriano Celentano's television show *Fantastico*, which was broadcast on RAI 1 in 1988.

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kmrsM7-K6o>

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zNr6yta-xQ>

Video 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzh7FmmNDAM>

Franca Rame's online archive: <http://www.archivio.francarame.it/IndiceCronologico.aspx>

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