RE-THINKING THE VICTIM:
REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE
IN THE NARRATIVES OF DACIA MARAINI

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores representations of gender violence in the works of Dacia Maraini, tracing a pathway from early novels in which her protagonists suffer predominantly non-physical oppression, to later works which foreground victims of more extreme bodily violence. Taking a chronological approach, it contextualises her work and situates individual texts in their broader cultural framework, highlighting the changes and continuities that these differing backgrounds have provoked. Maraini's unique position as both author and social commentator is similarly established, with the interplay of her narrative and feminist commitment emerging as a central concern. Fundamental to the thesis is the figure of the female victim, through whom motifs that are recurrent in Maraini's oeuvre are identified and analysed.

The thesis proposes two main lines of argument. Firstly, that there is a change in the way in which Maraini represents gender violence: from signifying one manifestation of women's overall oppression under patriarchy, it becomes the dominant theme in a number of texts, presented as a specific phenomenon to be understood and exposed. Secondly, that whilst in many of her early texts her protagonists develop strategies for resisting their abusive situations, Maraini's later female victims demonstrate little agency and, moreover, appear to submit to the violence they undergo.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Dacia Maraini is today widely recognised as one of Italy's foremost contemporary writers.[1] Her career spans nearly five decades, during which time she has authored countless works of prose, poetry, theatre and journalism.[2] Throughout this period, there has existed an almost constant interplay between her narrative work and her feminist engagement. Alongside her prolific career as an author, Maraini has simultaneously remained a dedicated activist for social justice. She has long been publicly active in feminist causes, and as a commentator on politics and society. Her narrative output in turn reflects this commitment, through texts which focus persistently upon the female subject, but which also highlight discrimination and inequality in both the public and private spheres. Moreover, a number of her texts deal with what Maraini sees as the incessant mistreatment of women, and, specifically, the issue of gender violence.

In this thesis I demonstrate how gender violence is a theme which indeed permeates Maraini's entire body of work. The term 'gender violence' refers to a specific cultural situation concerning the sustained domination of women in a patriarchal society, and is commonly defined as 'violent acts (real or threatened) perpetrated on females because they are female. [...] [Its] intent is to perpetuate and promote hierarchical gender relations' (Green 1999: 2).[3] Numerous examples of Maraini's commitment to an anti-violence agenda are readily available in her texts. Attention is drawn, for example, to

[1] Her contribution to contemporary Italian literature is documented in numerous critical responses to her work, much of which I outline below. She is the recipient of a number of awards and her work has been widely translated. However, probably the greatest testament to Maraini's achievements was her recent nomination for the Man Booker International Prize, in March 2011.
[2] See Maraini's website for a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography of her works: www.daciamaraini.it.
[3] I explore the meaning and implication of the term in more depth below.

sexual violence in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990), a work that remains one of Maraini's most successful to date. In it, Maraini's protagonist is struck deaf and dumb through the shock of being raped by her uncle as a small child. Meanwhile, the 1985 novel, *Isolina*, foregrounds bodily violence suffered by women, charting Maraini's own investigations into the brutal death of a young woman in the early twentieth century. More recent works attempt to highlight the contemporary realities of gender violence: the 1994 thriller, *Voci*, narrates a journalist's investigation into the violent death of her neighbour and her parallel enquiry into why the deaths of so many women remain unsolved, whilst the eponymous victim of *Colomba* (2004) is prey to a boyfriend who drugs and uses her as a sexual plaything for him and his friends. In addition, *Buio* (1999) is a collection of short stories which focus on crimes against women and children in a newly multicultural Italian society. The stories in *Buio* take actual events as their starting point, in the same way as does one of Maraini's most recent successes, the play, *Passi affrettati* (2007). Based on real testimonies, this latter work recounts the stories of women from around the world who are, still today, victims of the physical manifestation of their historical and familial oppression.

Whilst examples of acute, physical violence evidently abound in Maraini's oeuvre, I demonstrate that violence against women can equally be defined as something fluid and wide-ranging. Alongside the works already mentioned, I consider Maraini's first literary offerings, in which her adolescent female protagonists are reduced to physical and sexual beings by their male counterparts. The characters in *La vacanza* (1962) and *L'età del malessere* (1963) are consistently objectified and subjugated by a dangerous, and ubiquitous, patriarchy. Such 'non-physical' forms of domestic violence are also foregrounded in *Donna in guerra* (1975), in which the protagonist's husband coerces her

into sexual intercourse; she also bears witness to a neighbour who is verbally and psychologically abused by her husband and sons.

Evidently there is, however, a noticeable shift in Maraini's treatment of gender violence in her narratives, from the predominantly non-physical in her early works to ever more overtly physical manifestations in texts of more recent times. When questioned about this element of her oeuvre, Maraini suggested that it reflected her belief that, in a supposedly modern society, the continued mistreatment of women constitutes an ever more pressing concern:

> La violenza è sempre stata presente nel mondo, ma ora siamo diventati più sensibili a ciò che una volta veniva considerato normale: la proprietà di un essere umano (la schiavitù), la punizione fisica di chi viene giudicato colpevole (frustate ai prigionieri, agli adulteri, bacchettate sulle mani ai bambini a scuola, ecc.), l'eliminazione fisica del nemico, l'uso continuo e dichiarato della tortura. Oggi, dopo tante battaglie per i diritti dell'uomo, possiamo dire di avere, se non proprio sbaragliato, per il meno reso illegali e inaccettabili dal punto di vista dei diritti dei popoli, sia la schiavitù che la tortura. Quindi la continuazione della pratica della violenza diventa più intollerabile e odiosa. (Maraini 2008b)

In spite of Maraini's marked commitment to the topic, violence against women is an aspect of her work that has largely been disregarded by critics, who have chosen instead to focus on themes such as maternity, familial relationships and the importance of women taking responsibility for their own lives, subjects which are all, of course, pertinent to Maraini's work.[4] However, with gender violence evidently becoming an ever more explicit theme of Maraini's novels, critics – namely Giovanna Bellesia (2000), Judith Bryce (2000) and Christina Siggers Manson (2005) – have begun to highlight this aspect of her work. Nonetheless, there is as yet no comprehensive critical work that considers Maraini's entire opus with this subject matter in mind. This thesis provides just such an

[4] For critical work on the theme of maternity in Maraini's oeuvre, see Pickering-Iazzi (1989), Dagnino (1993), Gabriele (2004b); on familial relationships, see Merry (1997), Picchietti (2002); on the call for women to take responsibility of their own lives, see Chapter One of this thesis, in which I offer an overview of critical responses.

analysis, by tracing a pathway from these initial victims of emotional and psychological violence to the very tangible violence suffered by Maraini's protagonists in works such as *Buio* and *Passi affrettati*. In so doing, it considers many interrelated areas of enquiry that are vital to an understanding of Maraini's project: institutional responsibility, the historical silencing of women, the relationship between victim and abuser, the representation of the male perpetrator and women's potential for agency, all questions to which I return in more depth below.

However, what remains the key thread drawing this thesis together is the centrality of the female victim. Her role in Maraini's oeuvre indeed appears manifest: wherever her readers look, be it in Maraini's prose, plays or journalistic output, they are confronted with a whole host of women and young girls who are raped, murdered and victimised by men. The purpose of this study is not, of course, simply to document examples of the female victim, but rather to raise productive questions about victims and perpetrators, in order to reveal in turn how Maraini's narratives do themselves consistently problematise the concept of the female victim. My premise is that there are two distinct sides to Maraini's oeuvre: whereas in her early texts, gender violence represents just one part of women's overall subjugation in a patriarchal society, in many of her texts of more recent years (from the mid-1990s), she demonstrates a decisive and ever more persistent commitment to focusing specific attention upon the phenomenon, as something to be understood, analysed and exposed. In particular, I suggest that she is questioning why, in a world that has supposedly been changed for the better by feminism, the abuse and mistreatment of women continues.

I also argue that concurrent with this shift in the ways in which she represents gender violence, there is also a (perhaps similarly surprising) change in her characters'

capacity to act autonomously and to demonstrate resistance. On this question, Maraini maintains that:

> I miei personaggi femminili sono spesso vittime di ingiustizie e discriminazioni, ma si rivoltano, prendono posizione, resistono. Da Marianna Ucrìa a Zaira [the protagonist of *Colomba*], sono tutte donne coraggiose che rispondono con energia, non certo con violenza, ma con decisione alla condizione di escluse. (Maraini 2008b)

What my reading of her oeuvre reveals, by contrast, is that where in many of her early texts her protagonists *do* develop strategies for opposition, and varying levels of self-determination, more recent works do not offer this possibility. Rather, her female victims end their stories still lacking in awareness and demonstrating unhappily little resistance to their abusive situations.

Before expanding my discussion any further, I recognise the need to anticipate problems around my choice of terminology, and specifically my use of the word 'victim'. There exists a body of criticism for which focusing on violence against women (rather than violence in general), and considering women exclusively as victims, is fundamentally anti-feminist (Genz and Brabon 2009: 64-75). In which case, a study such as this, one that takes the female victim as the fulcrum of its argument, could be considered as working against a feminist agenda, which is certainly not my intention. One particular proponent of such thought is Lynne Segal who, in her *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (1990), argues that by focusing on aggression as masculine and victimhood as feminine we are actually disseminating the kinds of traditional messages about women that have circulated for centuries and added to women's subjugation. As Segal contends, 'it is less than helpful to attempt to tie up all forms of aggression, sexual violence, institutionalized heterosexuality, warfare and ecological destruction in one neat package as "male"' (1990: xiii). In support of her position against such biological essentialism, Segal

cites several situations in which women are violent, both towards men and other women, placing particular emphasis upon racially motivated violence by women (*ibid*: 262-68). She affirms that the main reason that women perpetrate less violence than men is that:

> From an early age most women are made aware of obstacles to – and restrictions upon, the expression of their own desires [...]. More importantly, they are sensitised to greater social condemnation of female aggressiveness – shouting, fighting, swearing, and so on. Men, by contrast, in sport and elsewhere, are more likely to engage in at least the rituals of aggressive display and to enjoy greater social tolerance of many forms of violence. (*ibid*: 266)

Throughout the course of this thesis, instances of violence perpetrated by women are highlighted and analysed, most specifically in Chapter Four. In fact, just as I noted above that male violence against women can be considered a fluid construction, so too in my analysis do I take into account examples of female violence that range from passive complicity to active physical incarnations of abuse. The fact remains, however, that almost without exception, Maraini's narratives focus upon *male* perpetrators and *female* victims and, as a consequence, so too does this study.[5]

By contrast, however, to arguments put forward by Segal and others, feminist scholars have equally argued that recognising female victimhood represents a vitally important factor in understanding women's subjugation. Indeed, for Sandra Lee Bartky, 'feminist consciousness *is* consciousness of victimization' (1990: 15. Emphasis added). In line with this assessment, numerous sociological studies have sought to demonstrate some of the realities of violence perpetrated by men against women, which likewise verify the need to discuss the concept of male violence towards women as a discrete entity, separate from the phenomenon of violence in its totality. Sara Deats and Lagretta Lenker posit that, whilst research has often shown that in the context of domestic violence almost as many

[5] One exception is the short story 'Chi ha ucciso Paolo Gentile?', included in the collection *Buio*, in which a young man is killed because of his sexual orientation. In this anthology there are similarly a number of young boys who are abused and mistreated; in my discussion of the text (in Chapters Four and Six) I consider women and children together.

women hit men as men hit women, the greater average size and strength of men and their greater aggressiveness ensures that the violent man will inflict more pain and injury than the violent woman (1991: 4). It has similarly been proven that much of the violence committed by women in such situations is in self-defence, often perpetrated after many years of having been themselves the victim of abuse (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 6; Romito 2008: 18). This kind of sociological evidence in turn allows, I believe, for an analysis of specifically female victims that does not simultaneously imply an anti-feminist agenda.

It additionally cannot be denied that in Italy, as elsewhere, violence against women is a genuine social reality that continues to exist. In the early 1990s, women's rights lawyer, Tina Lagostena Bassi, claimed that, 'according to figures supplied by the Italian Bureau of Statistics, the most dangerous job in the world and one that every year causes more injuries than accidents on the road or in the workplace is [...] being a housewife' (1993: 204). Moreover, recent research by Istat has shown that around 6 million Italian women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime:

> Sono stimate in 6 milioni 743 mila le donne da 16 a 70 anni vittime di violenza fisica o sessuale nel corso della vita. 5 millioni di donne hanno subito violenze sessuali, 3 milioni 961 violenze fisiche, circa 1 milione stupri o tentati stupri (Istat 2007)

Likewise, in one year, in just one region of Italy (Emilia Romagna) some 1,500 women presented themselves at various anti-violence centres and refuges (Romito 2008: 17). Silvia Ballestra presents her evidence more anecdotally, writing, 'dal profondo Nord al profondo Sud [...] le donne cadono come soldatini di prima linea' (2006: 45). However, her message is no less strong, as her review of a number of newspaper headlines reveals:

> 'Macerata – Massacra di botte la moglie e la butta nel cassonetto'. 'Roma – Uccide la moglie e la decapita con un coltello da Rambo'. 'Veneto – Picchia a morte l'amante incinta al nono mese e la seppellisce ancora viva'. (*ibid*: 43)

Violence against women continues in Italy, and it also continues to incite anger. In the 1970s, Italian women first began to take to the streets in protest against the violent mistreatment of women; in November 2007 an estimated 100,000 people attended a similar march in Rome.[6] Such a demonstration plainly reveals both the strength of feeling that continues to exist about the issue of violence against women and, it could be argued, about the failure of state institutions to deal with the problem effectively.

Alongside these discussions, I also wish briefly to note that, whilst scholarly warnings about the potential dissemination of negative messages about women when analysing female victimhood will certainly be heeded throughout my thesis, I am equally convinced, with Mark Ledbetter, that 'it is the body violated and broken, and not the body healthy, that provides transforming moments of ethical importance' (1996: 9). I believe that in Maraini's oeuvre too, it is through an analysis of her female victims that some of the most significant moments of her narrative endeavour can be isolated and understood.

There is one other significant question that warrants early attention, and that concerns the motivation of a single author study such as this. Certainly, Maraini is not alone in tackling questions of gender violence through her narrative; rather, she can be inserted into a tradition of contemporary Italian women writers who, beginning with Sibilla Aleramo's pioneering *Una donna* (1906), have denounced abuse towards women and 'conceiv[ed] sexual violence as the primal act of female subordination to the rules of patriarchy' (Zecchi 1997: 282). Aleramo's text was to prefigure a number of works which have foregrounded sexual violence: Elsa Morante's *La storia* (1974) similarly begins with a rape, whilst in her monologue, *Lo stupro*, written in 1975 and first performed in 1979, Franca Rame narrates the rape she suffered at the hands of agents of the Italian state. As

[6] Details about the demonstration are available on the organisers' website: www.controviolenzadonne.org.

Luciana d'Arcangeli explains, when Rame first staged the monologue she did not tell the audience that it was an account of something that she herself had undergone, and this in order 'to stress the similarity of women's experiences of sexual violence' (2009: 106). Other instances of writing about gender violence appear alongside Maraini's representations in the second half of the twentieth century as well, including Biancamaria Frabotta's *Velocità di fuga* (1989), in which – in a similar manner to Maraini's own *Donna in guerra* – an act of sexual violence can be seen to mark the beginning of a new feminist consciousness. Likewise, the works of Armanda Guiducci often present male-female relationships 'in terms of violence, both passive and aggressive' (Bassanese 1994: 185), whilst her female characters have been viewed, significantly, as 'oppressed victims' (Bassanese 1990: 154).

However, these occurrences are often isolated examples in these authors' works. I would argue, by contrast, that Maraini's oeuvre demonstrates a sustained and insistent commitment to the denunciation of gender violence. Moreover, there is a specificity and a distinctiveness in the ways in which she deals with questions around the theme, in particular in her representations of the female victim. There is a uniqueness about Maraini too: few Italian women authors occupy the cultural position which she could be seen to inhabit, nor share her high profile not just in Italy, but abroad. She can similarly be considered almost a 'stand-alone' figure, without links to a particular party or movement (Maraini 2011). At the beginning of this Introduction, Maraini's dual role as both author and public figure was highlighted, and in-depth questions around both this interplay and around Maraini herself now arise as significant points of interest. In considering these questions, I also isolate the motifs that emerge in Maraini's representations of women's experiences of gender violence, before returning later in this Introduction to some of the

wealth of scholarly work that has been written on the subject of violence against women, outlining the most pertinent areas of debate. Doing so not only presents a solid methodological framework for my thesis, but also situates Maraini's position within such discourses.

I. Dacia Maraini: Author, Activist and Cultural Figure

Maraini and her work have been the subject of much Anglophone academic debate.[7] Yet she remains an author who has received relatively little extended critical attention in her native country.[8] In a 2003 study of Maraini's work, Maria Antonietta Cruciata attempts to understand this lack, writing, 'curioso destino quello di Dacia Maraini, una delle autrici italiane più tradotte e lette nel mondo, ma così poco studiata nel suo paese, né con il rigore che meriterebbe' (2003: 11). She proposes a number of reasons for this critical absence: Maraini's overt feminism in the male-dominated Italian academic arena, the vastness of her oeuvre and her predilection for a mixing of genres (*ibid*: 11). Early in her career, Maraini was also criticised for what some saw as the repetitiveness of her work; this has since been argued by others as offering instead a unifying template, which links Maraini's work across genres (Sumeli Weinberg 1993). Equally, however, Cruciata argues that the

[7] She is included in numerous studies of Italian women's writing and on women and culture in Italy: see, for example, Testaferri (1989), Merry (1990), Barański and Vinall (1991), Wood (1993; 1995a), Lazzaro-Weis (1993), Russell (1994), Panizza and Wood (2000), Giorgio (2002), Smarr and Valentini (2003), Morris (2006), Blum (2008) and Lucamante (2008). A brief outline of her work is likewise offered in Hallamore Caesar and Caesar's, *Modern Italian Literature*, (2007), thus recognising her position alongside her male contemporaries as well. Particularly noteworthy is Cannon (2006) for being the first analysis of Maraini's work to read it in the company of Italian male writers. There are also four book-length studies of Maraini's work published outside of Italy: Sumeli-Weinberg (1993), Merry (1997), Diaconescu-Blumenfeld and Testaferri (2000) and Picchietti (2002).

[8] Book-length works include Montini (1977), Gaglianone (1995) and Catturazza (2002); they tend, however, to involve descriptive outlines of Maraini's novels, interviews with her and essays about her by Italian cultural figures, thus favouring a narrative, rather than a necessarily theoretical and/or analytical approach to her work.

lack of sustained works of analysis could be a reflection of Maraini's other role as a public figure in Italian society: a social commentator and public speaker, rather than a novelist whose writings necessarily 'merit' critical analyses (2003: 11).

Maraini is certainly a figure who evades easy definition.[9] Whilst perhaps most well-known outside Italy as a novelist, within Italy she can be more readily identified as a columnist, essayist and journalist, writing regularly for *Corriere della sera*, *Il Messaggero* and *Io donna,* and appearing frequently on television.[10] Alongside her vast opus of novels, poetry and plays, Maraini has likewise published essays and compilations of articles and interviews.[11] She is additionally known through the successes of her family: her father, Fosco Maraini, was an eminent ethnologist, whilst her aristocratic mother, Topazia Alliata di Salaparuta, was an artist and art dealer. Besides this, Maraini was of course also for many years in an, at times high profile, relationship with Alberto Moravia. With such connections it is easy to imagine that, within her native land, Maraini may be judged by who she is, rather than what she has achieved.[12]

Nonetheless, her initial rise to prominence came in the 1960s by way of her own making. Her second novel, *L'età del malessere* won the Formentor prize in 1963, whilst

[9] In Chapter Six I return to a discussion of Maraini as a public figure, comparing the way in which she has been received to the ways in which some of her contemporaries are considered in the Italian cultural arena.

[10] Television appearances are often as an invited speaker, but in 1997 she also hosted the RAI programme *Io scrivo, tu scrivi*, in which she invited viewers to send in their own writing for advice and feedback, and also recommended and discussed both contemporary and classic novels: (http://www.archivionews.it/?azione=notizia&id=497539).

[11] Examples of such texts abound: *E tu chi eri?* (1973) is a collection of interviews with prominent Italian authors and writers about their childhood; *Storia di Piera* (1980) and *Piera e gli assassini* (2003) are both published interviews with the actress, Piera degli Esposti; *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (1987) is an anthology of Maraini's essays from the 1970s and 80s; *Cercando Emma* (1993) is a study of Flaubert's Emma Bovary; *Un clandestino a bordo* (1996) is an extended essay on the theme of maternity; *Ho sognato una stazione* (2005) is an extended interview with Paolo Di Paolo, in which Maraini also offers new reflection on her novels; and *I giorni di Antigone* (2007) is a collection of articles from the past decade.

[12] In recent years, Maraini has shown herself to be more willing to discuss these well-known connections. Following *Il bambino Alberto* in 1986, which was an extended interview with Moravia, Maraini has recently published *La seduzione dell'altrove* (2010) in which she describes their numerous travels together. She has also published two overtly autobiographical works, in which she discusses both her mother and father: *Bagheria* (1993) and *La nave per Kobe* (2001). *Il gioco dell'universo* (2007) is a collection of Maraini's father's unpublished notes interwoven with her own reflections and memories.

she was simultaneously establishing herself as a cultural figure through regular participation in artistic and literary debate. She also began to work collaboratively with major figures in the Italian artistic and creative fields, such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Moravia. From this point on, Maraini has continued to work prolifically and almost ceaselessly, achieving a great deal of success, demonstrated both by the literary awards that her work has received and through its translation and publication in many other countries.[13] Arguably her most copious area of production throughout the entire period of her career has been in works for the theatre, with the volumes *Fare teatro (1966-2000) Volume Primo* (2000) and *Fare teatro (1966-2000) Volume Secondo* (2000) containing over forty scripts. On her website under the heading 'Teatro' are included some sixty titles.[14] In 1967, Maraini co-founded the experimental theatre company Il Porcospino, followed in 1973 by the founding of La Maddalena, a company composed entirely of women which continued to produce theatre until 1990, when a shortage of funds forced it to close. By establishing an all-female theatre with an ambition to place women's lives and experiences at the centre, it has been argued that Maraini denounced 'the almost non-existent feminist consciousness of women working in the sphere of culture, who are still trapped within the ideological schemas of patriarchal society' (Wood 1995a: 224).

La Maddalena was not only an outlet for staging plays, it also ran workshops and discussion groups on issues of interest to women: abortion, sexual violence and prostitution, and this with the participation of feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Kate Millet. The discussion groups were an opportunity for both the sharing of personal

[13] *Isolina* won the Premio Fregene; *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* was awarded the Premio Campiello; *Buio* was winner of the Premio Strega. English translations exist of many of her most well known works and her texts have been published in at least twenty countries.

[14] See www.daciamaraini.it. Maraini's theatre has received a large amount of critical attention: see, for example, Mitchell (1990), Anderlini (1991), Cavallaro (1995), Wood (1995b), Achilli (2007) and Nguyen (2008).

experience and the work-shopping of material, where the individual experiences of one woman could be recognised as common to all. Such discussions even continued within performances, the most frequently cited example of this being in the play *Dialogo di una prostituta con un suo cliente* (1973), in which the performers regularly broke the dialogue between characters to ask members of the audience, many of them male, for their own views on prostitution and similar issues.[15] Maraini's theatrical work of this period has consequently been likened to the contemporaneous practice of *autocoscienza*, in which small groups of women met to explore female identity and the roots of female subordination (Picchietti 2002).[16]

What is evident, therefore, is quite how much Maraini's artistic output – and her theatrical work in particular – is entwined with her politics. As Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld argues:

> From the battles for the legalization of abortion in the 1970s to her involvement in activist groups fighting for the rights of Bosnian rape victims and current debates about the reassimilation of the female body by enduring patriarchal discourse, Dacia Maraini has also, throughout her long career, a constant presence in the contemporary Italian public sphere as social critic, engaging in media discussions on current issues. [...] We cannot separate in Dacia Maraini's continuous engagement with writing an aesthetic from a political imperative. (2000: 7-14)

I demonstrate that this interconnection is in evidence in her prose work as well, and would indeed argue that it is never more marked than when she chooses to write about gender violence. For, when writing about a real issue such as this but within fictional forms,

[15] Early in the play, the stage directions instruct Manila, the prostitute, to ask one of the men in the audience, 'lei scusi se ne intende di prostitute? ci è mai stato? (*Dialogo di una prostitute con un suo cliente*: 398). The similarities with the theatrical work of her contemporaries, Dario Fo and Franca Rame are thus in evidence in pieces such as this one (see Taviano 2005), as are the Brechtian influences on Maraini's theatrical work. Although predominantly based in realism, theatrical texts such as these resonate with Brecht's epic theatre, in which 'the interrupting of action is one of the principal concerns' (Benjamin 1998: 3). It can also be likened to Augusto Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed', in which audience members are encouraged to play an active role (Boal 1979). I return to discussions of Maraini's theatrical practice in Chapters Two, Three and Six.

[16] For analysis of the practice see, for example, Kemp and Bono (1993) and Parati and West (2002). I return to this discussion in Chapter Two.

Maraini is placing herself somewhere between a novelist and a commentator: writing fiction but about highly sensitive political and social issues. As such, a motif running throughout this thesis involves the consideration of Maraini's public position in relation to her contemporaneous narrative output. I establish in particular how the sustained success of her recent work, *Passi affrettati*, (re)-confirms the extent to which her 'political and aesthetic imperatives' cannot be separated.[17]

A number of critics of Maraini have equally identified her role as that of 'investigator', with Paola Gaglianone maintaining that in her work there is, 'sempre una domanda di verità, la curiosità per una vita di donna, molto diversa per esperienza ma certo emblematica di una ricerca sulla letteratura e la libertà femminile, [...] quella che spinge Maraini ancora ad un altro tipo di indagine' (1995: 51-52). JoAnn Cannon (2006), in her analyses of *Isolina* and *Voci*, proposes a similar hypothesis: reading Maraini's texts alongside those by Leonardo Sciascia and Antonio Tabucchi, Cannon's focus is on crime and punishment, justice and injustice. All the novels in Cannon's study are aimed at shedding light on social ills, through a central character who is committed to exposing injustice and, in Maraini's texts, Cannon argues that this character is in fact Maraini herself. Of *Isolina*, Cannon writes, 'the story of the author's investigation is as pivotal as the story of the murder itself' (2006: 45). This suggestion of Maraini as 'investigator' presents further corroboration that her texts and her politics are often interrelated. Whilst in her analysis Cannon stresses that her intention is not to read the novels from a *political* stand-point, she does recognise that the authors she is examining have all been engaged in political activity and acknowledges the 'social and moral responsibility' of the texts that

[17] I discuss the play and its 'success' in Chapter Six. As I describe, it has been translated into a number of languages and has been performed in a number of European countries. In this chapter, I also consider in depth Maraini's public status.

they have produced (*ibid*: 15).[18] Virginia Picchietti, whose study of Maraini concentrates primarily upon the ways in which she represents the family and how her protagonists inhabit familial spaces, has likewise noted that Maraini is 'a keen observer of social realities' (2002: 14). Picchietti goes on to contend that:

> Many of her works situate the heroines in social discourses at the heart of the changing landscape of postwar Italian society. Undertaken from the 1960s to the present, the investigation of the relationship between the heroines and these social discourses has led to the problematic site of family relationships. (*ibid*: 14)

One of Maraini's first such 'investigations' formed the basis of the novel *Memorie di una ladra* (1972), a work that is considered in Chapter Two. Maraini was driven to write the text following an enquiry into the conditions of women's prisons, and her narrative is based predominantly on the conversations she had with one particular prisoner.

Just like in *Memorie di una ladra*, in many of the other texts that are under examination in this project, Maraini's inspiration springs from such real events and testimonies. I have already noted that *Buio* and *Passi affrettati* are based on true events, and *Isolina* too is centred upon the real events surrounding a young woman's murder. Moreover, in the plays *Maria Stuarda* (1980) and *Charlotte Corday* (1989), discussed in Chapter Three, Maraini undertakes to produce a fictionalised version of the historical events in which the two women were involved.[19] Such sustained interlinking of fiction and reality – which the texts do not hide, but rather emphasise through the addition of blurbs, cover notes and their historical accuracies – has a number of consequences for the reader. Primarily, it confirms the extent to which Maraini's narrative endeavour often entails the mixing of her political agenda with an artistic commitment. Her desire to

[18] Alba Amoia similarly dubs Maraini 'the designing woman', by which she means someone who, 'by not being submissive, can improve and change herself and society' (1996: 87).
[19] These works constitute, however, a departure from what can be considered historical 'fact': they mix recognised historical events with extensive imaginative detail.

represent the experiences of real women signifies recognition of her sense of responsibility as an author: her perceived duty to uncover instances of injustice and mistreatment wherever it occurs.[20]

However, it could equally be argued that this blurring of fiction and reality also serves to heighten the sense of proximity between the reader and narrative events, in particular when those events involve instances of gender violence. In her study *Intimate Violence* (1994), Laura Tanner explores reader responses to narratives of violence – namely rape and torture – in which, she argues, 'much of the power of violence […] stems from its "intimacy", the force with which it violates the personal boundaries that define the autonomy of both victim and reader' (1994: ix). Drawing on film theory, predominantly that of Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, Tanner posits that, as literary representations of violence often appropriate the conventions of film, 'representations of violence can thus impose themselves upon the reader's imagination in the same way film imposes itself upon the viewer's vision' (*ibid*: 12). The reader can subsequently become 'surprisingly intimate with the power or the vulnerability that results from such violation' (*ibid*: ix). Whilst this appropriation of filmic conventions is not necessarily in evidence in Maraini's work, it is precisely Tanner's 'intimate' connection that Maraini establishes in many of her texts, through her examination of abuse and violations.[21] This is further accentuated when her readers are aware that what they are reading is not just fiction, but based in truth.

[20] Maraini's 1986 play, *Stravaganza*, has recently been re-produced in such a way as seems to recognise Maraini's own commitment: the actors in it are themselves previous interns of asylums, which creates, at times, difficulties for the audience in identifying what is real and what is acting in the performance. For information about this project, see http://www.accademiadellafollia.it/html/home.htm.

[21] It could be suggested that in Maraini's theatrical works which deal with gender violence (for example *Passi affrettati*), there is more of a similarity with the 'filmic conventions' that Tanner describes: in a live performance, the 'personal boundaries' between audience and victim are broken down further and the audiences' 'intimacy' with violence is ever greater.

One additional topos in Maraini's narratives that serves to heighten the reader-text relationship is the voice. Voices, and especially women's voices, are fundamental to her oeuvre, as Diaconescu-Blumenfeld underlines: 'Maraini listens to the voices of women and gives voice to their silences' (2000: 3). Certainly, we need look no further than the title of her 1994 thriller *Voci* ('voices') to illustrate their significance to the author. Besides which, in both this text and *Buio*, the perpetrators of violence are often defined by their tone and manner of speech, something that is examined in greater detail in Chapter Four. Corresponding to the assertion that much of her work has its basis in fact, Maraini also uses her narrative to give a voice to those who are unable to speak for themselves; this is exemplified in the play *Passi affrettati*, in which there is no movement, rather the actors simply read aloud the testimonies of abused women. This method has a profound effect upon audiences, who, undistracted by any action, cannot help but connect to what they are hearing.[22]

Maraini finds pleasure in other people's stories (*La nave per Kobe*: 29) and has affirmed that she sees an author's responsibility as being to pass on and to keep alive the memories of others; in her words, the future is not possible without memory (Maraini 2009d). Pertinently to her work on gender violence, she further contends that the role of the author is that of 'testimone [che] deve raccontare la realtà, *anche se dolorosa*' (*ibid.* Emphasis added). It is perhaps for this reason that voices feature so prominently in Maraini's works: having been captured to the page, the experiences of those who may not have the opportunity to recount their own lives are consigned to history. When readers 'hear' the voice of someone detailing the mistreatment that they have suffered, their intimacy with the narrative is increased. A response to what they are reading, be it through

[22] I consider audience reactions to the play in Chapter Six.

active opposition to gender violence or simply a heightened awareness of the phenomenon, is consequently demanded.[23]

By contrast, the protagonist of Maraini's novel, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, could be seen to highlight the opposing side to the prominence of the voice, and that is silence. Dubbed in the English translation 'the Silent Duchess', Maraini's central character is deaf and mute, and only able to communicate with those around her through the written word.[24] In her reading of the novel, Simona Wright compares it to the work of the Italian women's movement, which, she writes, 'protested the patriarchal hierarchy, the patrilineal tradition that had subjugated women and *silenced* them at the political, social, economic and cultural level' (1997a: 61. Emphasis added). My own discussion of the text, in Chapter Three, focuses solely on the question of silence, which, given the prevalence of the voice elsewhere in Maraini's work, is granted further significance. This chapter pursues the argument that women's silencing represents another facet of the violence that is done to them. Whilst this may seem a contentious claim, I have already suggested that gender violence has a fluid definition, as I shortly discuss in greater detail.[25] Moreover, others before me have considered silence a feature of violence. In his study *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body* (1996) Ledbetter's focal point is victims – including, he states, the silenced – and all those minorities who

[23] Undeniably, Maraini writes as a woman, she writes about women, and it could thus be inferred that she is writing (solely) for women. However, whilst no studies have been undertaken into Maraini's readership, I can affirm that at events at which she has been invited to speak, she attracts audiences that are a mix of male and female, young and old (Maraini 2009b, 2009d, 2010b). She also addresses the question of such labels in a recently published interview, in which she argues that 'le etichette [di scrittrice "al femminile" o "femminista"] some sempre limitative, per questo non le amo' (2005:59). It might also be argued that male and female readers would respond differently to her works, but the aforementioned study by Tanner (1994) on reader responses to violence does not suggest that such a gender divide exists, and I would maintain that nor does it in Maraini's works on violence.

[24] The novel was translated into English by Dick Kitto and Elspeth Spottiswood, and published in 1992.

[25] I began this thesis with a quote from December Green, which asserted that gender violence refers to acts that are 'real or threatened' and describes a cultural situation of sustained domination, manifested in a variety of ways, not all of them physical (1999: 2).

'reside uncomfortably alongside the master narrative' (1996: ix), a position which many of Maraini's characters similarly occupy. Tanner also reflects upon the silencing of the victim, by turning to the real testimony of a rape victim who endeavoured to assert her identity to her attackers as not only a body to be abused, but as a person as well, through the use of her voice:

> 'I talked constantly, trying to show them that I wasn't freaked out, that I was a human being and not something they could just pick up and do this to without any feedback. I tried to reach them, to make human contact with them. I felt that if they were aware I was a human being, they would not be able to do it. But it didn't work...' [...] As the rapists appropriate the victim's body through violence, she attempts to reclaim her autonomy as subject by positing a distinction between body and mind. (1994: 5)

As Tanner explains, the violators then used physical means to silence their victim, which, she affirms, demonstrates that 'their physical violence was a means of claiming the victim not only as body, but as speaking subject' (*ibid*: 5). It is thus clear that taking away a person's ability to speak can be considered a further, albeit not necessarily physical, form of violence against them. Having begun to focus more specifically upon questions of what constitutes gender violence, it is apt at this point to move towards a discussion of the phenomenon itself, paying particular attention to the numerous ways in which Maraini addresses it.

II. Gender Violence: Some Theoretical Perspectives

> There is always a context, or a structure, to violence, and the reader-observer-participant must be alert to how her own life experience, location, and options frame the violence that seems to mark her individual and collective existence. (Lawrence and Karim 2007: 10)

For many years, offences such as rape and domestic violence were considered to be private matters, issues that were best kept within the family, or, better still, kept silent and hidden.

What is more, such crimes were even, in some cases, considered 'natural', an accepted part of male-female relationships. Patrizia Romito, one of the most prominent Italian theorists working on issues of gender violence, highlights a popular Italian folksong that she sees as demonstrative of the way in which violence against women used to be viewed in Italy:

> *E mio marì xe bon / el xe tre volte bon / ma solo la domenica / el me onzi col baston* (Canzone popolare triestana).
> La violenza di genere è stata quasi invisibile fino a tempi molto recenti: [...] perché era talmente connaturata con la tradizione, i valori dominanti e le leggi da passare inosservata, quasi fosse un evento naturale. (2000: 9)[26]

When Maraini has been requested to discuss publically the matter of violence against women, she has underlined the damaging effects of such deeply entrenched ways of thinking (Maraini 2009b; 2010c). She has emphasised that far from being 'natural', or indeed linked to sex and desire, gender violence is instead a cultural phenomenon, which is, moreover, caught up in issues of power and control (*ibid*).

Happily, the supposed 'naturalness' of male to female abuse can no longer be considered the norm. Thanks in large part to work begun during the years of the women's movement, in both industrialised and developing countries, we are ever more aware of the frequency and consequences of all forms of gender violence. The women's movement was fundamental to raising awareness, providing resistance and developing knowledge. Yet, as Maraini continues to contend – and the statistics cited at the beginning of this Introduction demonstrate – there is still no shortage of cause for concern. Indeed in 1999, in one of the most infamous cases to come out of the Italian courts in recent times, a rape

[26] Other notable scholars working on issues of gender violence in Italy include Carmine Ventimiglia (1996, 2002), whose work often focuses specifically on men and masculinities and Giuliana Ponzio (2004), who has undertaken research into the reasons that women often remain with violent partners. Meanwhile, Tina Lagostena Bassi (1991, 1993) and Tamar Pitch (1998) both concentrate on legal aspects of violence against women. In general, however, there is a tendancy for Italian scholarly work to constitute a dissemination of existing theoretical work in English (see Comune di Torino 2004, for example), or to be rather polemical (Ballestra 2006; Danna 2007). Throughout this thesis I attempt, where possible, to situate texts in an Italian critical framework, but often find Anglophone theory to be more instructive.

charge was lifted because a judge ruled it impossible for the jeans the girl was wearing at the time to have been removed without her consent.[27] The decision was met with outrage and inspired a mass of protest, but the fact that it was passed in the first place establishes the extent to which there still exists confusion and ignorance with regards to issues of sexual violence.

I began this section with a quote which – albeit referring to the phenomenon of violence, and not specifically to gender violence – sums up not only what I believe to be Maraini's project, but is also what feminist scholars have sought to achieve in recent decades: the establishment of links between action and knowledge about gender violence, the recognition of it at play in their own lives, and the attempt to find ways to talk about it without replicating or perpetuating it. Liz Kelly (1987; 1988) was amongst the first to endeavour to reconcile feminist theory with a sociological analysis of male violence. She acknowledged not only that male control of women's sexuality is a key factor in women's oppression, but also that sexuality had long been based, almost exclusively, on men's experiences and definitions. In so doing, she developed her theory of a continuum of sexual violence:

> There are no clearly defined and discrete analytical categories into which women's experience can be placed. The experiences women have and how they are subjectively defined shade into and out of a given category such as sexual harassment, which includes looks, gestures and remarks as well as acts which may be defined as assault or rape. (1987: 48)

It has since been widely agreed that gender violence is a term that must encompass the corrosive effect of all forms of mistreatment of women by men, both physical and non-: 'not only physical and sexual violence, its threat, or both, but also emotional abuse, economic violence and institutional violence' (Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998: 56). In

[27] See Kitty Calavita (2001) for an outline of the trial and responses by the media, the public and legal institutions.

addition, there can be no denying the damaging ways that non-physical forms of violence can affect women just as much as can physical expressions of abuse:

> Many women say that emotional or psychological abuse – which can reduce and destroy self-esteem and a sense of self-worth, thereby restricting personal independence and autonomy – is the worst. Abused women are often severely depressed, overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness that greatly reduce their ability to cope with everyday tasks. They may even begin to believe that they are totally incompetent and even feel grateful to have an abusive partner. (Kramarae and Spencer 2000: 8)

Similarly, there exist in Maraini's narratives many forms of significant and painful abuse, which do not necessarily rely upon the use of physical force. Consistent with Kelly's notion of a spectrum (or continuum) of violence, therefore, this thesis addresses all the modes of violence that Maraini's characters experience, from the physical and sexual to the emotional and psychological.

In her work on sexual violence, Kelly also sought to introduce an understanding of why men commit acts of violence against women. This is obviously an area of enquiry that has received a large amount of scholarly attention, some of which is reviewed below. Kelly's focus, however, relates to the notion of sexual access, or 'the range of processes through which women are defined as sexual objects available to men' (1988: 29). For Kelly, the result of such sexual access, be it in public or private, is men's sexual aggressiveness towards women. In public, this involves the assumption by some men of sexual access to a women to whom they are unknown and can be manifested in sexual remarks and approaches, or, at its extreme, sexual assault or rape. In private, sexual access refers to the assumed rights of the male to his wife or lover, or, in extreme cases, his daughters (*ibid*: 28-30). As Kelly explains:

> There are remnants of the historical status of women and children in men's proprietorial attitudes which are most clearly legitimised in marital rape exemption clauses. Sexual access, like other resources, is determined by relational power [...] the greater his perceived right to exclusive sexual access,

> the more likely it is that some level of sexual aggression will be considered legitimate. (*ibid*: 30)

Maraini foregrounds a parallel set of circumstances in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* and *Voci*, both of which deal with intra-familial violence.

It could in fact be argued that nowhere was Kelly's hypothesis traditionally more true than in some Mediterranean societies in which women (both wives and daughters) were considered under the ownership of the male head of the family; something that Carla Lonzi, founding member of Rivolta femminile, recognised: 'verginità, castità, fedeltà, non sono virtù; ma vincoli per costruire e mantenere la famiglia. L'onore ne è la conseguente codificazione repressiva' (1974: 12). In a similar manner, the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective asserted that:

> Rape is an act of violence against the different body of women, against that element of her difference that cannot be erased. Men rape because they consider the female body something available to them and this availability is conditioned only by the state of relations between men. (1990: 76)

It was not until 1981 that the Italian law pertaining to 'honour crimes' – in which penalties were reduced for anyone killing a female member of the family if her sexual conduct had damaged the family honour – was abolished (Romito 2008: 1). Moreover, looking to contemporary Italy, Daniela Danna asserts that such idiosyncrasies of the Italian family can still be seen as a contributory factor to the susceptibility of women to violence:

> La violenza contro le donne è legitimata e persino mascherata anche da quei sentimenti positivi che nel panorama culturale italiano, descritto a ragione come 'familista', sono evocati dall'idea di Famiglia. Questo mito ha poco a che fare con le famiglie concrete: la famiglia anche nel nostro paese è l'ambito in cui gli uomini esercitano gran parte delle violenze sulle donne e sulle bambine. (2007: 74)

In accordance with Danna's suggestion, in Maraini's narrative too it is not just historically that violence takes place within the home. Evidently, this is the case in *La lunga vita*, which is situated in the eighteenth century, but *Voci*, on the other hand, has a

contemporary setting. Both texts narrate the abuse of young girls by male members of the family, abuse which is due to this mistaken belief in the availability of, and their access to, women's bodies. Questions surrounding honour and virtue also recur in Chapter Six, in which, however, the focus is not just Italy, but on texts that have a 'global' outlook. Violence against women in some Islamic societies is examined in these works, and the role that religion can play in the mistreatment of women subsequently emerges.

Likewise, when looking at Italy, and examining the family, the role of the Catholic Church can equally not be ignored. At various points in this thesis, most particularly in Chapter Two, I focus upon its role, considering whether it challenges or rather propagates traditional constructions of gender, and its status in both public and private life in Italy. Maraini has publically alluded to the Church in recent times: discussing society's complicity in abuse, she made specific reference to the accusations of child abuse made against the Church (Maraini 2010c). Similarly, when requested to contribute to an investigation into violence against women in Italy, *Amorosi assassini* (2008), Maraini chose to write about a case of repeated sexual violence against a nun, committed by a priest.[28] In her section of the study, entitled 'E la chiesa non sa', she suggests that the priest's position of power and responsibility allowed him to take advantage of numerous other women. She explains that she chose this particular case because, 'c'è dentro tutta l'Italia di oggi, in bilico fra le tradizioni secolari degli abusi che ricordano le usanze feudali e un'organizzazione tecnologica che dà l'illusione della modernità' (2008c: 19).

[28] I suggested above (and return to similar questions towards the end of this thesis) that Maraini can be considered a 'stand-alone' figure, whose work on gender violence is perhaps distinct from that of her contemporaries. By contrast, her contribution to this text demonstrates one way in which she is interacting with other writers and cultural figures: the volume contains writings by journalists and essayists and is part of a larger project, entitled Controparola, which brings together Italian women writers, 'per creare una forza di reazione, di analisi comuni e di proposte che possano servire da traino per un mondo femminile spesso troppo frammentato e insicuro' (http://www.controparola.it/chisiamo.htm).

However, the concept of sexual access initially expounded by Kelly which prompted this discussion of honour, the family and religion is just one reason amongst many that academics working in the field of violence against women have explored. There exists a wealth of research that focuses on understanding the reasons behind male violence.[29] The fundamental concept behind much scholarship, however, is the assumption that male violence is a cultural phenomenon that is linked to the domination of women by men. More specifically, research tends to conclude that authority and power are often at the root of abuse (Dobash and Dobash 1992). As Jalna Hanmer argues, whether it is perpetrated by known or unknown men, and whether it be physical or emotional, male violence is 'designed to control, dominate and express authority and power' (1996: 8). Elizabeth Stanko asserts that 'the physical and/or sexual abuse of women is a manifestation of male domination itself' (1985: 71), whilst Hester, Kelly and Radford maintain that 'violence from men to women is likely to be sexual, as in rape or sexual assault, or sexualised, that is a power "turn on" for men' (1996: 3). Subsequent chapters return to questions of power; these are not only influenced by theorists working in the field of gender violence, but also by broader notions of power and its relation to violent behaviour. In the introduction to their volume, *On Violence*, Lawrence and Karim contend that power is, 'the single most significant index to human behaviour' (2007: 13). Hannah Arendt, meanwhile, argues that:

> Nothing […] is more common than the combination of violence and power, nothing less frequent than to find them in their pure and therefore extreme form. […] It must be admitted that it is particularly tempting to think of power in terms of command and obedience and hence to equate power with violence. (1969: 46)

[29] Already in 1988, Liz Kelly spoke of a 'knowledge explosion' that had taken place in the previous decade (1988: 43). As such, Kelly explained, it was evidently not possible for her to cover everything and neither will my brief overview here.

I noted above that Maraini has also recognised the central importance of power to any understanding of gender violence and the concept is equally at play in many of her texts. It is a key idea that recurs throughout this thesis, and is especially pertinent to Chapters Two and Four, which examine the insidious nature of male power, its sanctioning by the state and both its overt and hidden manifestations.

In her public discussions of gender violence, Maraini has also ventured other hypotheses concerning the reasons for which men commit violence against women. Following the UK debut performance of *Hurried Steps* in 2009, she considered women as weapons of war, a situation that is denounced in one of the play's testimonies (*Passi affrettati*: 33-35). On this occasion (Maraini 2009b), Maraini also talked about possession and proposed that, where love is considered a right which is then taken away or denied, frustration and anger can be expressed as violence. She similarly suggested that violence could be considered a response to women's liberation, in which the weakest men react against their loss of male privileges and to punish women's perceived insubordination. In line with this, she further speculated that violence might even be a reaction against women's symbolic power: their capacity to create life. What comes across most clearly in all these suppositions is the de-humanising of women that takes place when violence is committed. Also apparent is Maraini's ability to articulate her thoughts around the issue, demonstrating the extent to which she is not simply an observer and documenter of narratives of violence, but rather an active participant in theoretical debate.

What her post-play discussion also underlines, is precisely that there is no one reason for gender violence, nor an 'easy' answer to why men commit violence against women. Numerous academics have suggested possible causes and motives, including societal factors (Davies 1994: 6-7), economic deprivation and dependence (Bowker 1998:

4), gender-role socialisation, or the learned attitudes, behaviour and emotions of men (O'Neil and Harway 1999: 13-14), and institutional failings (Romito 2008: 26). What is of course never assumed, however, is that violence is in some way 'natural' or inherent to male nature; rather, theorists are resolute in emphasising that violent men are the exception, not the rule. As Romito reminds us:

> It does not follow [...] that all men are violent (they are not), even though observing the facts leads us to conclude that they all could be, with relative impunity, if they so wished. Instead it follows that all men, even those who are not violent, receive at least some of the dividends from a patriarchal system, gaining from the violence committed by some. (*ibid*: 24)[30]

In Maraini's work too, there is no intimation that all men are abusers and all women victims, but the binary of male perpetrator and female victim is evidently a pairing that intrigues and unsettles her and it is one to which she frequently returns.

That said, Lee Bowker for one maintains that, 'violence is dominated by masculine role players in all modern, complex societies' (1998: xiv). Similarly, both Maraini's oeuvre and the work of academics paint a rather disturbing picture of being a woman in patriarchal society: 'understanding what it means to be female within contemporary [...] societies is understanding the meaning of male violence in women's lives. Many women's lives [...] revolve around strategies to avoid men's threatening, intimidating, coercive or violent behaviour' (Stanko 1985: 4). Stanko's claims take on even greater relevance when one fundamental feature of gender violence is added to the equation:

> Contrary to the myth of the unknown man attacking in a dark street, all research agrees on the fact that 70%-80% of rapists are men who are well known to the woman or child: their partner, a relative, a companion or a friend of the family. (Romito 2008: 14)

[30] Romito's comments here remind us of Bob Connell's concept of 'hegemonic' and 'complicit' masculinities (1995), concepts to which I return in Chapter Four.

Besides which, in cases in which the victim knows their attacker, the likelihood of a repeat offence is much greater (Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998: 62). Abuse carried out by a family member or friend is a recurrent motif in Maraini's texts, in which, as I have noted, the reader is confronted with violence at the hands of an uncle (*La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*), step-father (*Voci*) and boyfriend (*Colomba*).

A more problematic scenario is presented in the novel *Donna in guerra*, in which the husband of Maraini's protagonist has non-consensual sex with her, something which reflects critical discourse on the distinction between rape and coercive sex within a couple. Some theorists have suggested that 'by expanding the definition of rape to include non-consensual sexual intercourse […] it will end up "diluting" the meaning of the word *rape*' (*ibid*: 63. Emphasis in original). On the other hand, it has equally been argued that rape can occur without violence, and that sexual relations do not have to be violent to be non-consensual: 'when sex is violent, women may have lost control over what is done to us, but the absence of force does not ensure the presence of that control' (MacKinnon 1983: 650). It could therefore be proposed that there exists a discursive gap when it comes to talking about sexual intercourse when the existence of consent is ambiguous; 'rape' may give a name to many forms of sexual violation, but it could likewise be irrelevant to other associated discourses. Consent itself could be considered to exist along a spectrum, and there are surely instances in which the victim of of abuse does not see herself as such: how, then, does she describe her experiences?

I demonstrate that similar questions are raised in the novels *La vacanza*, *L'età del malessere*, *Voci* and *Colomba*. The novels are the focus of Chapters One and Five of this thesis, which propose that, although the cultural landscape differs, Maraini returns to similar issues in the latter two works as she had first explored in her debut texts. In brief,

my discussion centres upon the extent to which the 'victims' are precisely such, for in all four cases, there are instances which suggest that the characters participate, to varying degrees, in their own mistreatment. Discussing 'guilt' on the part of the victim is an area that is fraught with difficulties: the outcome to the aforementioned 'blue jeans' case plainly highlighted how complex questions of consent in sexual relations can become. Similarly, in contemporary culture, the terrible adage that a raped woman was 'asking for it' because of what she was wearing remains an issue both in the media and institutionally. In questioning whether Maraini's characters play a role in the violence they undergo, I certainly would not want to perpetuate such damaging discourses. Rather, in Maraini's work, it becomes unavoidable to question whether there is nonetheless the implication that her victims are in some way complicit in their abuse. As she asks in *Un clandestino a bordo*, 'cos'è che rende una donna complice del suo tiranno sessuale? Cos'è che attira tanto un corpo di donna verso la sua degradazione erotica e emotiva?' (*Un clandestino a bordo*: 58). One of her interests lies, I demonstrate, in what she sees as a two-way relationship between victim and perpetrator. When, as has been seen, the majority of instances of gender violence occur between two people who know each other (as is the case in the four novels under discussion), questions around this relationship do present themselves.

Speaking in 2010 at a conference that dealt exclusively with representations of gender violence, Maraini argued that, often, where there is abuse there can also be love, trust and a desire to protect. In cases of child abuse in particular, she suggested, children do not recognise their abuser as the enemy, but someone that they want to protect (Maraini 2010c). Maraini's work forces the reader to examine, therefore, not just the role of the victim, but also that of the perpetrator, and the relationship that exists between the two.

When it comes to the victim, I return repeatedly to considering the ways in which she may be, perhaps unwittingly, complicit in the violence she experiences. It is justifiable to question, therefore, whether through this recurrence of the figure of the victim, Maraini is suggesting that victimhood is in some ways inherent to female nature. Without wanting to imply that Maraini sees all women as passive, submissive, or even masochistic, I am interested in the way these characteristics recur in Maraini's work, and in particular that Maraini returns to this type of character some thirty years after having initially created her. I interrogate whether it is instead, by contrast, women's internalised concept of themselves as victims that leaves them unable to resist sexual advances. At the same conference, Maraini explored female masochism, proposing that it is a product of history and not a natural condition. She argued that everyone has a capacity for violence, but whilst in men it is sometimes be expressed externally, in women it is more often internalised, leading to behaviour that may damage the self (*ibid*). Chapters One and Five take into account these hypotheses in relation to four characters in whom the reader is compelled to consider the fine line between outwardly perceived victimhood and how that 'victim' indeed identifies herself.

Such discussion opens up a further argument about the concept of agency, or the capacity on the part of Maraini's characters for individualised choice and action (Barvosa-Carter 2005: 177).[31] The subject of agency is revisited throughout this study, as I believe it fundamental to understanding some of Maraini's principal concerns. On one hand, posing questions around women's 'complicity' in abuse can lead one to the rather disturbing conclusion that Maraini's characters could be considered to be demonstrating

[31] Catriona MacKenzie and Natalie Stoljar (2000) discuss the difficulties associated with the concept of female agency, noting that some feminists have considered it far from productive to make use of a theory that is inherently masculine. As I demonstrate throughout this study, by contrast, numerous prominent feminist and gender theorists have recourse to the term and it accordingly has a central role in my analysis of Maraini's characters.

agency precisely at those moments at which they partake in (damaging) sexual relations. By contrast, I conversely study the more 'positive' side of female agency, as a means of evading the problematic assumption that victimhood is in some way an innate feminine characteristic. Lois McNay's *Gender and Agency* (2000) is central to such a consideration. McNay reassesses theories of gender, identity and agency, in the light of transformations in the social status of women that have taken place since second wave feminism. Indeed, for McNay, 'on the most general level, a revised understanding of agency has long been the explicit or implicit concern of feminist research devoted to the uncovering of the marginalized experiences of women' (2000: 10). One of the first such explicit references comes from Sandra Lee Bartky; in a paper that was first published in 1979, Bartky states that:

> I may find it difficult to achieve what existentialists call an authentic choice of self, or what some psychologists have regarded as a state of self-actualization. Moral philosophers have quite correctly placed a high value, sometimes the highest value, on the development of autonomy and moral agency. Clearly, the economic and political domination of women – our concrete powerlessness – is what threatens our autonomy most. (Bartky 1990: 24)

Bartky is thus arguing for what she sees as the very great difficulty for women of developing agency and autonomy in a patriarchal society: her particular case study involves the psychological oppression caused by stereotyping and the ubiquitous sexism of society. If, as Bartky believes, agency is so hard to achieve for women in general, then we can only imagine how much more difficult it could be for a woman who has been the victim of some more overt form of oppression.

It has been suggested, on the other hand, that power itself could be considered a necessary precondition for a subject's realisation of agency. Sara Salih's reading of Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), proposes just such a hypothesis:

> Agency depends on power; it is complicit with it, so that exceeding power is not synonymous with escaping from it: indeed the subject remains bound to power, so that both the subject and the scene of agency depend on what constrains them for their very constitution. (Salih 2004: 243)

Maraini's female protagonists are often constructed as almost entirely under an oppressive patriarchal power, whether this is institutional or that of an individual. Following work such as Butler's, therefore, I attempt to identify throughout this project instances of female agency and resistance to male control. One might even propose that taking the female victim as the main focus of this project could actually signify, far from being 'anti-feminist' or working against a feminist agenda, a search for opposition to patriarchal power. I have already made some reference to Ledbetter's study of victims in literature and noted that he sees moments of violence as of 'ethical importance' (1996: 9). Ledbetter further argues that for an ethical reading of a text, we must not focus solely upon the moments of violence, but also upon how the victim responds to it, either by submitting or, by contrast, achieving an end other than that which was intended by the violator (*ibid*: 19). My reading of Maraini's work concerns this very possibility and seeks to identify moments of resistance to violence. Notably, however, as I suggested above, one of the major changes in her narrative is that from a decisive stance in her early works, in which her protagonists achieve consciousness, Maraini's later female victims appear only to submit to violence and indeed show very little of this more positive agency.

This ideological shift forms one of the bases of this thesis, whose overall focus is an examination of Maraini's representations of differing modalities of gender violence. In so doing, a large array of her texts are analysed, including prose works, theatrical scripts and discursive essays.[32] However, given the vastness of her oeuvre, I make no claims that

[32] Where appropriate, I try to consider her prose as literary works and her theatre as performance. However, given that some of her plays were only ever performed once, and there exists little testimony of them, this is not always possible. Moreover, what I seek to demonstrate throughout this thesis are in fact the linguistic

this project offers a comprehensive analysis of her career's work. What I do endeavour to achieve, on the other hand, is a study that spans this lengthy career, covering works from the early 1960s to the 2000s. The project takes a chronological approach, but is simultaneously thematic, with a subject matter identified in each chapter that represents the main motifs of Maraini's work at that particular moment.

Chapter One examines Maraini's first two novels, deconstructing the presentation of their adolescent protagonists and debating the extent to which these young girls can be considered victims. Discussion centres upon the legitimacy of child and adolescent sexuality, set beside the often disturbing reality of the girls' sexual encounters, in which pleasure rarely exists and dissatisfaction and mistreatment are more likely outcomes. The focus of Chapter Two is the violence of the state and its institutions. Here, I consider a number of texts in which Maraini's protagonists are controlled and damaged in a range of institutional settings. Drawing upon feminist readings of Foucault, I analyse both the explicit and more subtle ways in which the state imposes its power upon its female citizens. Chapter Three takes as its subject the silencing of women and explores the techniques that Maraini exploits to give a voice back to a number of silenced women. In all three chapters, I emphasise the possibilities of resistance and escape that exist. Through a variety of different means, the victims of all the texts under discussion are all offered the chance of opposing the violence they have experienced. In the three subsequent chapters, by contrast, I consider texts in which opposition and resistance are not always available to Maraini's victims.

Moreover, I maintain that in these earlier texts gender violence represents one manifestation of women's overall oppression in a patriarchal society. In the texts analysed

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and thematic similarities that exist across works, regardless of their genre. I endeavour to make links between texts and find that, on occasion, these are as manifest as the words themselves being the same (see, for example, my discussion of *Buio* and *Passi affrettati* in Chapter Six).

in the second part of this thesis, on the other hand, gender violence constitutes Maraini's central theme. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the perpetrators of violence in two more recent works, considering Maraini's constructions of masculinity in general and also offering a more in-depth look at the 'type' of perpetrator she describes. In this chapter I also reflect upon Maraini's female perpetrators and instances of redemptive masculinity to demonstrate that the paradigm of female victim and male abuser must be problematised. Chapter Five signifies the other side to this discussion, through an analysis of the victims in these later works. I discuss in particular whether these victims can be considered 'post-feminist', due to their almost willing acceptance of the violence they undergo, and also deliberate upon the legacies of second wave feminism. Finally, Chapter Six analyses texts in which Maraini's remit is broadened to encompass instances of violence on a global scale. In this concluding chapter I return to a consideration of Maraini's public role and her contemporary position in Italian society. These three chapters combined all serve to drive home quite how little some women's positions have changed since the women's movement first began to draw significant attention to patriarchal violence. Through Maraini's texts of recent years, and through all the texts under consideration in this thesis, we can trace her development as both a writer and a political and social activist, whose works reflect not only developments in Italian society, but also her growing awareness that violence and abuse against women has not gone away.

Before beginning the main body of this thesis, there remains one final consideration regarding the ethics of analysing violence against women and its literary representations. Doing so begs the question of whether writing about male violence is the most useful way of stopping it: would engaging in activism rather than theory not be more

productive? Romito has asked herself how legitimate it is to build a career on this sensitive area of academic debate, but concludes:

> Theory is not automatically saving, liberating or revolutionary. It takes on these functions when we ask it to do so and we direct our thinking to this end. [...] As many feminists have recognised, 'if you want to change the world, you need to get your theory right'. (2008: 9)

In a similar manner, Lawrence and Karim argue that, 'whilst there is no escape from violence, there is also no limit to the contexts in which grappling with violence can be productive' (2007: 13). Slavoj Žižek makes this point even more emphatically: 'this is what we should do when we find ourselves bombarded with […] images of violence. We need to "learn, learn, learn" what causes this violence' (2008: 7). Žižek is adamant that reactionary responses should not be the correct outcome to violence; instead he promotes the need to examine it critically and conceptually. This is precisely what Maraini also seeks to achieve. As such, in proposing a comprehensive examination of the many forms of gender violence that exist in her narratives, this thesis draws attention to, and critically analyses, the very real violence against women that takes place every day in Italian society and elsewhere.

CHAPTER ONE: ADOLESCENT VICTIMS IN *LA VACANZA* (1962) AND *L'ETÀ DEL MALESSERE* (1963)

Critics have viewed Maraini's two debut novels, *La vacanza* (1962) and *L'età del malessere* (1963), as both thematic and stylistic precursors to many of her later works (Sumeli Weinberg 1993; Golini 1995; Amoia 1996). In this chapter I demonstrate that the ways in which gender violence is introduced and described in the two texts likewise anticipates Maraini's repeated re-thinking of the subject throughout her career. The novels foreshadow in particular two of Maraini's more recent works, *Voci* (1994) and *Colomba* (2004), through their focus upon young female protagonists. Notwithstanding the passing of some thirty years since the publication of those debut works, I would argue that Maraini raises similar questions in all four texts regarding not only her protagonists' experiences of gender violence, but also the ways in which they themselves are constructed: as, at times, both passive and active, as both victims and agents. As such, despite *La vacanza* and *L'età del malessere* having been the recipients of substantial critical attention, I consider it vital to this thesis that I revisit both works and seek to understand in them the extent to which Maraini constructs her young protagonists as victims of gender violence.

Recent studies of the phenomenon have shown that young women can often be particularly vulnerable to physical or sexual abuse: 'hanno subito violenza fisica o sessuale negli ultimi 12 mesi il 13% delle donne nella fascia di età 18-24 anni, contro l'1% di quelle che hanno 45 anni o più' (Romito 2000: 64). The texts under consideration in this chapter both feature adolescent female protagonists, girls who are younger even than those victims identified by Romito, but who both come into contact with violence throughout the entirety of the novels. The girls inhabit, writes Sharon Wood, 'a world which insists on reducing

them to the specifically physical and sexual' (1995a: 217), a culture which – whilst not necessarily characterised by its levels of *physical* violence against the girls – nonetheless endorses their objectification and domination by a dangerous, insidious patriarchy. As I outlined in my Introduction, I argue throughout this thesis that the texts produced in the early part of Maraini's career all propose gender violence as one constituent of the multifaceted ways in which women are subjugated by the patriarchal order. Whilst my purpose in this chapter is to isolate the different modes of violence that the girls experience, I would reiterate that these instances all occur against a cultural landscape in which they are more broadly oppressed as a result of their gender.

I noted above that the two narratives have received considerable critical attention; with the passing of over forty years since their publication, this is perhaps inevitable. Yet whilst *L'età del malessere* has been the subject of significant and sustained analysis, *La vacanza* has received comparatively little consideration.[1] Moreover, the critical attention to which both novels have been subject is remarkable for its uniformity. Where, for example, later texts such as *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990) have been read in a variety of different ways,[2] what is evident from a survey of critical material on these two narratives is the restricted readings they have inspired, with most critics happy to offer a couple of lines in summary about the overarching themes and style. Almost without exception, critical focus has concentrated upon the strikingly inert and taciturn nature of the two young protagonists, who have been described variously as 'paralyzed and silenced'

[1] *L'età del malessere* has been the recipient of individual attention (see, for example, Riviello 1990; Giobbi 1995; Picchietti 2002), but *La vacanza* has only ever been read alongside other works by Maraini and not as a stand-alone work.

[2] I explore the novel in Chapter Three, where I likewise offer an overview of some of the critical analysis it has received.

(Lazzaro-Weis 1994: 219);[3] showing 'an indifferent state of near-somnambulism' (Golini 1995: 209); and living 'unconsciously, without emotions' (Amoia 1996: 93). The reader wishing to understand their behaviour is rarely offered any personal insight and finds instead that the protagonists' 'objectives are as elusive as [their] motivations' (Riviello 1990: 70). Bruce Merry contends that for two novels written in the first person, the reader is offered remarkably little access to the thoughts and emotions of the protagonists; perhaps because, Merry imagines, they are not even sure of these themselves (1997: 102).

Ultimately, however, Enrica (the protagonist of *L'età del malessere*) is able to develop self-awareness and with it, a new, decisive ability to recognise and articulate her own desires after an entire novel of passivity (Merry 1997: 199). It is through this element of the novel that the work particularly prefigures later works by Maraini, in which the protagonist's 'coming-to-consciousness' is often a feature. Aside from this, critics concur that what defines the girls above all else is their apathy and alienation. There exists, nevertheless, one significant exception to this apparent conformity of critical opinion: considering *La vacanza*, Vera Golini speculates that: 'although some literary critics consider Anna [the novel's protagonist] passive and indifferent, she is, in reality, completely open to a sentimental and sexual education [...]. She is an average adolescent in search of guidance and enlightenment' (1995: 209-10). One could similarly hypothesise that rather than her passive behaviour in her sexual relationships being an indicator of her submission, Enrica's actions throughout *L'età del malessere* actually demonstrate nothing more than an adolescent's desire for sexual experience. Undeniably, there are many aspects to the protagonists' characters that could be considered common to adolescent girls: they want access to the adult world and view sexual encounters as a means to achieve this,

[3] It is noteworthy here that Lazzaro-Weis describes them as 'paralyz*ed* and silenc*ed*', thus suggesting, as I do, that this is something that is being done *to* them. I return to this discussion below.

yet they simultaneously feel inferior to adults, believing perhaps that they lack the appropriate knowledge and understanding for full maturation. In keeping with Golini's argument, therefore, and when viewed in this way, their actions could actually be seen as a form of rebellion against the expectations of them as young women. Perhaps, as adolescents, they merely wish to explore their burgeoning sexuality and are choosing sexual encounters as developmental experiences.

I would argue, by contrast, that this behaviour is not reciprocated, and that instead the girls are consistently mistreated. The suggestion, therefore, that the girls are *choosing* sexual encounters is in itself a rather problematic view to take of the novels, as it implies that they are opening themselves up to the harm that they encounter. It is this very contradiction that I explore in the present chapter: I assert that whilst the girls are indeed attempting to understand their sexuality, their explorations lead them almost invariably not only into vulnerable situations and to dissatisfaction, but also to trauma, abuse and mistreatment. Wood has proposed that the texts, 'prefigure a feminist consciousness in their portrayal of an, as yet, unanalysed abuse and oppression of women' (1993: 16), and it is precisely this 'unanalysed abuse and oppression' that I foreground throughout the chapter.

The chapter begins with a brief theoretical overview (based, in particular, in psychoanalysis), which details some of the ways in which feminist scholarship has defined the concept of female victimhood, and applies these hypotheses to Maraini's protagonists. The particular effects of their subjugation as adolescents are then analysed: I consider the damage that patriarchal violence inflicts on their young bodies and minds, but also their potential, as they grow and develop, to escape their repressive situations. I offer an examination of the representation of family members and community in the novels in order

to determine whether the protagonists' victimhood can also be linked to a lack of familial care and positive role models in their lives. My focus upon adolescence centres predominantly, however, upon questions surrounding the legitimacy of their sexuality, in order to demonstrate that they are indeed constructed as victims, a term that has generally not been associated with them in existing critical work.[4]

I. Constructing the Victim

La vacanza tells of Anna's holiday away from boarding school with her father and younger brother. During her summer at the beach she quickly becomes an object of sexual attention to a number of men, who all imagine her as little more than a commodity to be used and then discarded. Throughout the novel she wordlessly submits to a multitude of male fantasies, ranging from her teenage neighbour who makes her strip for him in a beach cabin, to an older man who marvels at her youth and freshness, and a middle-aged homosexual who desires solely to see her bare back. *L'età del malessere* can be seen as an extension of *La vacanza*, with its protagonist, Enrica, some years older than Anna but struggling with the same issues. She too is reduced solely to her physical parts by the men she meets, is left entirely to her own devices and occupies much of the novel in the same state of listlessness as Anna.

Immediately evident to any reader, therefore, is the extent to which Anna and Enrica are defined by their isolation, silence and indifference. The wealth of critical attention about this feature of the texts attests to its significance. It is certainly also a productive starting point from which to consider the protagonists, especially as one

[4] In a similar manner to Lazzaro-Weis' assessment of the girls, Golini describes them as 'victimiz*ed*' (1995: 210), whilst Merry, rather problematically, dubs Enrica 'the classic victim of sexual liberation' (1997: 111): emphatically not, therefore, a victim of gender violence or even of a patriarchal society.

consequence of this perceived apathy is what I view as their abuse at the hands of the novels' male characters. A ready example of this alienation is identifiable in Anna's first meeting with Scanno, a much older, wealthy, gentleman who invites her back to his house, where he makes her undress for him. They first meet at the local swimming pool, where Scanno invites her to dine with him and his cousin and, during the meal, Anna can only mutely observe the two men: 'chinai la testa senza rispondere nulla' (*La vacanza*: 29). The reader is given no insight into her thoughts at this meeting, nor does she offer anything to the conversation; indeed, only once is there the – albeit oblique – suggestion that she may even have a point of view, or the slightest awareness of the situation in which she finds herself: 'mi osservarono tutti e due, in silenzio, curiosi forse per la prima volta di sapere cosa pensassi di loro' (*ibid*: 29). What should be made of this and the many other silent encounters that both girls experience? Certainly, it may be possible to view, as others have done, their passive behaviour as a reflection of the position of women in a patriarchal society, in which femininity equates to submission (Giobbi 1995: 145). I highlighted above that Lazzaro-Weis described the girls as 'paralyz*ed* and silenc*ed*'; she maintains that this is done to them, 'by their imposed female identity' (1994: 219). In a similar manner, Golini dubs the protagonists 'victimiz*ed*' by both 'males and society' (1995: 210-11).

Obedience, submission and passivity are traits that feminists have long identified with women under patriarchy; a concept to have first received sustained and thorough analysis in Simone de Beauvoir's feminist classic *Le Deuxième Sexe*, first published in 1949. In it, de Beauvoir argued that 'the passivity that is the essential characteristic of the "feminine" woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years' (1993: 294), whilst also seeking to understand how women could assume agency, as many of Maraini's early

protagonists ultimately also do.[5] I wish to focus in more detail, however, upon the concept of 'feminine traits', which, in de Beauvoir's analysis, was built in part upon Freudian theory. Freud's work has been recognised as implying women's inherent subordination, leading in turn to a notoriously problematic relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis (Mitchell 1974; Gallop 1982; Benjamin 1990), but its usefulness cannot be denied. In fact, rather than refuting its contribution, many feminist scholars have tended to agree instead with Juliet Mitchell's assertion that, 'psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one' (1974: xiii). By recognising how psychoanalytic theory can be used to question further the roots of patriarchy, scholars have thus worked from the assumption that: 'Freud was not prescribing what women and femininity should be, but describing what patriarchal culture demands of women and femininity' (Grosz 1990: 19), a fundamental objective of de Beauvoir's work as well. It subsequently becomes important to examine, therefore, what scholars have identified as Freudian prescriptions of femininity, and if and how these are at play in the construction of femininity as victimhood, as in Maraini's early novels.

Elizabeth Grosz uses psychoanalysis to read the young girl's oedipal phase as the determining moment in the establishment of her sexuality, albeit contrary to that of the young boy's in that it involves neither reward nor compensation for her abandonment, 'rather, it entails the acceptance of her subordination' (*ibid*: 69). To understand how the girl's oedipal complex is resolved, Grosz directs us to the phallus, the object of desire which, in Freudian understanding, men have and women want to be:

> The characteristics of femininity Freud outlines [1933: 132] – seductive, coquettish behaviour, narcissism, vanity, jealousy and a weaker sense of justice – are a consequence of [the girl's] acceptance of her lack. They are strategies

[5] I discussed the feminist conception of agency in my Introduction, explaining how it can be read as women's capacity for individualised choice and action, and outlining some of the most pertinent theories (Bartky 1990; Butler 1997; McNay 2000). It is a subject to which I return throughout this thesis.

> to ensure that even if she doesn't *have* the phallus, she may *become* the phallus. (*ibid*: 132. Emphasis in original)

The girl is thus immediately proposed as inferior, as lacking and as desiring to be desired: in no uncertain terms, as Jessica Benjamin further articulates, she is suggested as subordinate to the male:

> The problem that Freud laid before us with all too painful clarity was the elusiveness of women's sexual agency. [...] And, though we may refuse his definition, we are nevertheless obliged to confront the painful fact that even today, femininity continues to be identified with passivity, with being the object of someone else's desire, with having no active desire of one's own. (1990: 87)

Therefore, passivity is a trait that, in traditional psychoanalytic thought, has been associated with the female and is certainly mirrored in the behaviour of Maraini's two young protagonists. Particularly significant in Benjamin's account, however, is her recognition of the supposed absence of women's desire in sexual relationships, a consideration to which I return below in my discussion of Anna and Enrica's sexuality.

Benjamin goes on to suggest that we are no longer dealing 'just' with female passivity, but likewise its very acceptance on the part of the female: '[Freud] proposed, in fact, that femininity is constructed through the acceptance of sexual passivity' (*ibid*: 87). Similarly, in the passage quoted above, Grosz wrote that the establishment of the girl's sexuality goes hand-in-hand with the 'acceptance of her subordination' (1990: 69). Above, I proposed that instead of being read as passivity, the protagonists' sexual experiences could be seen as a choice, a hypothesis that suggests a similar level of acceptance. This situation is immediately rendered problematic, however, through its association with female masochism, a notion that feminists have explored (Mitchell 1974). Benjamin's study focuses at length upon the question, refusing to accept a simple relationship of 'doer' and 'done-to' in sexual relationships, and attempting instead to analyse the interplay

between love and domination. She conceives a two-way process that involves the participation of those who submit to power, as well as those who exercise it (1990: 5-9).[6]

This type of discourse leads to a rather more complex picture of female submission than that which was initially conceived, in which there is an element not solely of acceptance of passivity on the part of the female, but, potentially, complicity in it as well. This leads to an impending minefield of questions if Anna and Enrica are to be viewed in this way: can it thus be suggested that they are, to some extent, participants in their own mistreatment? Catharine MacKinnon, in an essay about female sexuality and sexual violence, raised similar questions: 'women […] widely experience sexuality as a means to male approval; male approval translates into nearly all social goods. Violation can be sustained, even sought out, to this end' (1989: 147). However, MacKinnon's work has been widely criticised for suggesting that, 'to speak of heterosexuality is to speak of sexual violence and danger' (Kemp and Squires 1997: 316). Indeed, in the same essay, MacKinnon includes such problematic pronouncements as, 'force is sex, not just sexualised' (1989: 135); whilst arguing later that, 'rape becomes something a rapist does, as if he were a separate species. But no personality disorder distinguishes most rapists from normal men' (*ibid*: 145). MacKinnon's contemporary, Angela Dworkin, was similarly condemned for perceiving of heterosexuality as the main sphere of patriarchal power and control. Whilst much of MacKinnon's work was centred upon sexual harassment, the focus of Dworkin's analysis of female heterosexuality was pornography. Her work was founded on the premise that the word pornography does not mean depictions or representations of sexual acts, but is derived from ancient Greek to mean the graphic depiction of the lowest whores (1981: 199-201). From this basis, Dworkin theorised that

[6] I return to Benjamin's work in Chapter Five.

the meaning remains the same: pornography is still the portrayal of whores and thus, 'the sexuality of women is perceived as low and whorish in and of itself' (*ibid*: 201). The work of both scholars seemingly propagates the belief that all women are inevitably victims of an all-powerful patriarchy. Furthermore, it suggests that female sexuality is no longer simply absent in heterosexual intercourse, but considered to be something base and abhorrent as well. What, therefore, such discourse clearly does not allow for is women's sexual choice or pleasure, as Kemp and Squires explain:

> Viewing heterosexuality as simply a manifestation of male power came to be seen by many as problematic in that it encouraged all women to identify themselves as the victim of all men, and risked making speech about sexual pleasure taboo. (1997: 317)

Nevertheless, they are theories that continue to matter, especially to texts that I believe initially present women who are precisely such victims of this supposed omnipresent male power and whose sexual pleasure similarly does not exist. It thus becomes relevant to examine whether, in Maraini's narratives as in the works of MacKinnon, Dworkin and others, 'women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water' (MacKinnon 1989: 149). I do also consider the other side of this argument, namely through instances of agency and resistance and an analysis of the girls as sexually exploratory adolescents. I initially wish to foreground, however, a number of moments in the texts that position the protagonists as victims of this 'all-powerful patriarchy', turning first to Anna.

II. Instances of Abuse and Mistreatment

Throughout her summer vacation, Anna bears witness to a disturbing insight into the sexuality of the adult male. She encounters a number of different men for whom, almost without exception and in spite of her young age, she becomes the passive recipient of their

needs and desires. Even Gigio, a thirty-year-old homosexual who pays Anna's brother's young friends to go for drives with him, acts out his fantasies upon her:

> Si voltò, mi afferrò per le spalle e tirò giù la camicetta. Rimasi a schiena nuda e sulla pelle avvertii la pressione della sua mano ossuta e fredda. [...] "La tua schiena è dura e liscia. Non ci sono segni di lacci." – si chinò per baciarmi e ficcò i denti nella carne. (*La vacanza*: 89)

At this and numerous other occasions in the novel, Anna is presented as the victim of extreme objectification, to the extent that her body becomes the target of solely sexual attention. Much like the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon, of course, a reading such as this entirely refutes the possibility of female sexual pleasure. Yet, with Anna characterised throughout the novel by her reticence, it is difficult to conclude otherwise; lacking access to her thoughts and reactions, it is difficult for a reader to judge whether there is any pleasure on her part.

By contrast to Dworkin's hypotheses, however, I would contend that whilst Anna's body is certainly accessible and available, and even a site for exploitation, men such as Gigio do not perceive her as 'low and whorish'. Instead, his reaction to her naked form is one of appreciation and desire, as is that of the aforementioned Scanno. It consequently becomes equally plausible to question whether, far from being the silent victim of unwanted attentions, Anna is in fact instilled with a great deal of sexual power. After all, during instances such as this one, she is capable of overwhelming adult males at the mere sight of her bare skin. In order to address this question, issues surrounding the legitimacy of Anna's sexuality are unavoidable. She is, the reader is led to believe, on the cusp of adolescence and, whilst her exact age is uncertain, frequent allusions are made to her undeveloped body. Moreover, when Scanno asks her age, she replies, 'undici' (*ibid*: 27).

It is even reasonable, therefore, to term her a child.[7] Any discussion, however, that centres on childhood and sexuality is inevitably a problematic one, bound up in anxieties surrounding paedophilia and child abuse.[8]

Stevi Jackson (1982) argues that there is no reason for children *not* to be sexual, and maintains that denying their sexuality leads only to danger and anxiety. Similarly, in contrast to what they identify as the hegemonic discourse, – which judges early sexualisation a damaging consequence of modern society – Gail Hawkes and Danielle Egan have sought to highlight the problems associated with such a universalising judgement, arguing that it disallows for agency and naturalises the girl as victim (2008a; 2008b).[9] By contrast, Jackson is also aware that, 'the erotic significance of an act or situation lies in the meanings we apply to it, a child who has not learnt these meanings cannot be regarded as fully sexual' (1982: 69). In other words, even if a young person such as Anna believes herself to be demonstrating agency and holding power, or if this is how we as readers wish to judge the situation, her lack of awareness of the significance of her experiences renders this power meaningless. Linzi Fredman and Cheryl Potgeiter also assert that, 'equality in relationships between adults and children rests not simply on consent, but on whether or not the meanings attached to sexuality are equivalent' (1996: 51). The problem is not sex itself, but the individual's understanding of it and, fundamentally, the association that exists between sex and power.

[7] The extent to which Anna's experience constitute child abuse is ambivalent, as I go on to explore. In Maraini's later work, *Buio* (1999), by contrast, it is a more explicit theme and one to which I return in Chapters Four and Six.

[8] Such debate remains current and contentious. In February 2010 a review into the sexualisation of young people was published by the British Government, which linked early sexualisation to increased levels of violence against women and young girls (Papadopoulos 2010). A particular focus of the report was indeed violence in teenage relationships.

[9] Corresponding to these assertions, Margaux Fragoso's recently published *Tiger Tiger* (2011) documents the author's experiences of a childhood sexual relationship with an adult man, and claims that theirs was a mutually loving relationship, staunchly refuting any suggestion of her position as victim.

Both Jackson and Fredman and Potgeiter extend their analyses to encompass specific questions of gender, which are undoubtedly also valid here. Whilst for Jackson this means that, 'children's understanding of gender will affect the ways they react to sexual information and link it to their own feelings and experiences' (1982: 79), Fredman and Potgeiter concentrate on the specificities of childhood sexuality in girls. They maintain that, as they become socialised, '[girls] often learn that their worlds are limited and compliant. [...] Their sexuality is much more a matter of something that others do to them and define for them' (1996: 52). As such, when considering inter-generational sexual relationships, not only must issues of power between adults and children be addressed, but so too must 'the power relations between men and women in society [...] [and] the power which the dominant heterosexual discourse has on childhood' (*ibid*: 50). By consequence, I do not believe it a great stretch of the imagination to suggest that a relationship which involves a young girl and a much older man is likely to be a hierarchical and dominant one, in which it is certainly not the young girl who bears the power. Elsewhere, Maraini has highlighted her own early sexual experiences and indicates a similar set of circumstances:

> Ricordo le molte volte che mani di ragazzi, di uomini, mani anche amiche, hanno cercato di sollevare, scoprire, carezzare, carpire qualcosa del mio piccolo corpo di bambina facendomi capire in modo più o meno esplicito che se c'era un desiderio che contava non era certo il mio. (*Un clandestino a bordo*: 47)[10]

The memory prompts Maraini to pose a question which resonates with the issues that Anna's presumed sexuality also raise: 'le bambine sono dotate di desiderio sessuale? A leggere Nabokov […] decisamente no. Il desiderio sessuale della bambina Lolita è

[10] Assertions such as these by Maraini may encourage a desire to associate her characters' experiences with those of her own, which is not my intention. In a more recent text, Maraini distanced herself from any such autobiographical readings, whilst also recognising, 'anch'io come la protagonista, Anna, sono stata una bambina molto molestata e assediata dagli adulti' (2005: 169).

sostituito da un abnorme e cocciuta volontà di potenza che si esprime in una petulante, insistente pratica seduttiva' (*ibid*: 47).

Returning to Anna, one of the most disturbing illustrations of her lack both of power and of sexual desire occurs during her apparently willing visit to Scanno's house. Once there, he asks her to undress:

> Gettai lontana la sottoveste e rimasi nuda. Osservavo quel viso goffo e smelato che impallidiva, prendeva una espressione di dolore e di piacere, contraeva rughe e labbra come un mollusco. Mi chiedevo se quello era l'amore. Che pure volevo conoscere. Come con Armando: la contorsione e lo spasimo da una parte, dall'altra la nudità passiva e arida. […] Quando abbassai gli occhi tutto era finito. Gioacchino inginocchiato per terra, con la testa fra le mani, ansimava facendo sobbalzare a scatti il cranio opaco dai capelli leggeri come tele di ragno. Puntellò i ginocchi per sollevarsi e mi sorrise vergognoso, asciugandosi il mento sporco di saliva. (*La vacanza*: 53)

The extract is unnerving in both its content and style: whilst Maraini may not explicitly spell out Scanno's actions, the description of his physical state is not only rather nauseating, but is also obvious enough for an adult reader to insinuate what has taken place.[11] Most striking, however, is the presentation of Anna: Maraini rejects any potential sentimentality to proffer instead a near indifference to events. Little insight into her state of mind is offered, yet it can be assumed from the text that there is no enjoyment on Anna's part towards her submission. In the place of gratification, all that can be discerned is a vague, and uncomprehending, fascination with the behaviour of the male. This lack of awareness of the situation in which she finds herself – all too evident in the question, 'mi chiedevo se quello era l'amore' – further validates arguments put forward by Jackson and

[11] In the autobiographical work, *Bagheria* (1993), Maraini also describes her own earliest sexual encounter, which similarly reminds us of Anna's experience: 'ripensavo con un misto di disgusto e di curiosità a quel suo corpo piegato in avanti, a quel fiotto di latte che mi aveva imbrattato le mani, a quella faccia vergognosa che si chinava stranamente su di me, senza però toccarmi, come se con quella vicinanza distaccata ribadisse la sua profonda estraneità a quello che stava facendo' (*Bagheria*: 45). The mixture of shame and pleasure on the part of the male and the sense of distance from, and lack of awareness of, events on Maraini's part both reflect Anna's encounter. Whilst, again, not wanting to impose an autobiographical reading on the work, Maraini's recognition elsewhere that, 'nelle esperienze sessuali precoci […] c'è qualcosa di predatorio da parte degli adulti' (2005: 169) is nevertheless significant.

others regarding the difficulty of endorsing child sexualisation when that child's understanding of their situation is so clearly absent.

Anna is so silent throughout the incident that Scanno himself is stirred to question her behaviour: 'sei così strana. Sei docile, buona. Eppure non saprei indovinare cosa pensi' (*ibid*: 53). Notably, his use of the adjectives *buona* and *docile* are revealing in the ways in which they substantiate what have traditionally been considered the 'ideal' traits of femininity. Moreover, he demonstrates little remorse for his actions, and instead continues to touch Anna's naked body as he shows her images of himself as a younger man and asks her repeatedly whether she likes him. Scanno is consequently presented as an almost pitiable character, to the extent that the eternally taciturn Anna feels compelled to comment: 'lo trovavo strano e patetico' (*ibid*: 55). In what is the one poignant moment of the whole scene, and a timely reminder of her youth, Anna stops on her way home to buy ice cream for herself and her younger brother with the money that Scanno has given her.

It is not, however, just adult males who sexualise Anna: her teenage neighbour Armando also asks her to undress, not to touch her, but in order that he too can take solitary pleasure from the sight of her naked body. Her younger brother's friends similarly objectify her: 'Pica si avvicinò a me, dondolando la testa grossa, le mani sprofondate nelle tasche. "Non hai petto, non hai fianchi, che donna sei?" – disse ridendo' (*ibid*: 81). Whilst in this latter passage it might seem that Anna is for once not a site for desire, this soon changes when Pica attempts to kiss and touch her. In both encounters, Anna's point of view is, as ever, almost entirely absent and her body is available for whichever male should want to (ab)use it.[12] For these young males, it could also be argued that their

[12] Simona Vinci's *Dei bambini non si sa niente* (1997), offers a further (and more recent) examination of sexual relationships between children who are around the same age as Maraini's Anna. Vinci's novel describes the sexual games children play, and explores both sexual desire between children and the more unsettling desire of an adolescent for a child. Just like in Maraini's text, there is an ambiguity around the

understanding of gender roles is fixed, resulting from a socialisation that begins at a young age. Anthony Tamburri has noted how in Maraini's writings children, both male and female, frequently accept male sexual domination as the norm and believe, as many will continue to do into adulthood, that sexual gratification is a male's prerogative, yet both inconceivable and shameful for a woman (1990: pp 145-7). Tamburri's evaluation of Maraini's young characters resounds with the feminist scholarship outlined above, in which it was proposed that female sexual agency is often absent and pleasure is the domain of the male.

Significantly, however, with this latter group of her brother's friends, Anna feels able to reject their advances and, when faced with the potential of mistreatment, she fights back:

> Appena fummo al riparo di una roccia, mi strinse a sé con forza; mi strizzò i seni facendomi mancare il fiato [...]. Non riuscivo più a respirare. "Lasciami" – dissi. Lui mi appicciò la bocca al collo. Lottai. Mi fissò con due occhi arrossati, furenti. Gli tirai un calcio e con una spinta mi liberai dell'abbraccio. (*La vacanza*: 82)

Similarly, towards the end of the novel, when Anna meets Scanno for a second time, she only agrees to leave with him after a great deal more insistence from him. She does, once again however, undress for him and allow herself to be touched. Yet, almost out of nowhere, she escapes his embrace and runs to the sea. As she immerses herself in the water the reader witnesses, now for the second time, some level of agency on her part. Underwater, she feels cold and breathless and yet, at more than any other point in the novel, she also feels free: 'muovevo i piedi e le braccia con facilità, come se stessi volando' (*ibid*: 117). In contrast, therefore, to some other readings of the novel, I would suggest that there are instances in which Anna demonstrates some level of autonomy. At this moment

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sexuality of her female characters, something which Vinci further problematises through their reactions to the increasingly violent pornography to which they are exposed.

especially, there is the hint that she does not return to school 'fundamentally unchanged' at the end of her holiday, as has been suggested (Amoia 1996: 92).

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, it has been well recognised that Enrica, by contrast, does achieve agency. By the end of the novel she has a better understanding of herself and of her aims and priorities in life; she resolves to find a new job and gives up her enslaving love affairs. The text has subsequently been read as a kind of female *Bildungsroman,* in which the challenges and hardships that the protagonist faces lead to her greater self-awareness and desire for self-improvement (Giobbi 1995: 141).[13] The coming-to-consciousness on the part of Maraini's protagonist is, as others have suggested, a prominent theme of her oeuvre, and one that the she has herself recognised in her work:

> In fondo io penso che alla base di tutte le narrazioni ci sia un archetipo, che è quello della favola e del mito, in cui si narra il viaggio verso il raggiungimento di uno scopo che avviene solo superando delle difficoltà, degli ostacoli e delle prove. (In Wright 1997b: 82)

In order to achieve her liberation, Enrica too must overcome difficulties not only in her family and at college, but also in her sexual relationships with a number of the novel's male characters. For, consistent with Anna's experiences, Enrica too is objectified and treated as a sexual commodity by them; a part she plays, just like Anna, with varying degrees of willingness.

The novel opens with her visiting Cesare, her long-term partner who, the reader soon discovers, is engaged to another woman. Cesare is demanding and unkind towards Enrica; after her arrival there is little time for conversation, instead he asks her immediately to undress before they partake in a bout of swift and cursory lovemaking. Similarly, on a

[13] In her recent overview of Italian women's literature and literary criticism, Laura Fontini notes, 'si sono evidenziati, sulla scena critica italiana, nuovi generi letterari cui le scrittrici si sono dedicate con risultati di indubbia originalità che travalicano anche l'orizzonte letterario italiano, quali quello […] del romanzo del divenire, punto di arrivo di una riflessione che è partita dalle caratteristiche del genere del *Bildungsroman*' (2010: 188).

later occasion, Cesare berates Enrica for arriving late, warning her, 'un'altra volta che non vieni puntuale me ne vado' (*L'età del malessere*: 43). He then initiates a round of intercourse that is not only brief and uncomfortable, but also aggressive, 'mi penetrò rabbioso e mi cercò coi denti il collo' (*ibid*: 44). Their encounters are often interrupted by telephone calls from his suspicious girlfriend, whilst during the long periods between these short meetings, Enrica can do little else but wait for him to invite her around, often at a moment's notice. In short, theirs is undoubtedly a relationship of domination, in which Enrica quietly and passively allows Cesare to treat her in any way he chooses.

Cesare is not the only character who sees the use and possession of Enrica's body as his prerogative. Early in the novel, the reader is given an insight into the life of a young woman in Italy in the 1960s: wishing to escape the stifling atmosphere at home, Enrica walks to Cesare's house and barely has she left home before she is approached by a man wishing to have access to her: 'un uomo mi passò accanto, si fermò e mi venne dietro. [...] Continuai a camminare. L'uomo si fermò perplesso e poi tornò al mio fianco.' (*ibid*: 51). Cesare's father also attempts to establish sexual intimacy with her; finding herself alone with him, Enrica is taken aback when, 'd'un tratto mi strinse a sé, selvaggiamente, cercandomi la bocca con le labbra aperte' (*ibid*: 73). Overcome by animal-like urges, he, and the other male characters see Enrica's young body as theirs for the taking. Even Carlo, the one man who is initially respectful of Enrica and maintains that he desires only her friendship, has, by the end of the novel, staked a claim to her: 'ho bisogno di averti'. He comes close to raping her, but cannot bring himself to do so: 'improvvisamente si prese la testa tra le mani e scoppiò a ridere. Lo guardai sconcertata. Vidi che tra le dita gli colavano le lacrime' (*ibid*: 193). In this particular instance, it is almost as though Carlo recognises that as a man he is expected to adhere to certain sexual norms, – that, as was

explored above, he should be the dominant one, whilst Enrica should passively accept his advances – yet he feels unable to conform to the stereotype of his gender.

Time and again Enrica, like Anna, fulfils the role of submissive female. It remains uncertain, however, whether this necessarily implies that they inhabit a society in which, as for MacKinnon and Dworkin, heterosexuality inherently entails sexual violence and danger. Certainly, Enrica's inability even to leave the house without some threat of sexual possession by a man demonstrates a level of violence and danger.[14] Likewise, whilst she is not the victim of murder, rape or beating, her constant submission to male desire is in itself a form of victimhood. There is, moreover, little pleasure in the relations she has, something which is made evident by Maraini at the end of the novel: once Enrica develops the confidence to say no, she does so to all the men with whom she has conducted affairs. What the protagonists' actions do also suggest is a further aspect of women's perceived involvement in their mistreatment, as identified by MacKinnon:

> Women who are compromised, cajoled, pressured, tricked, blackmailed or outright forced into sex often respond to the unspeakable humiliation, coupled with the sense of having lost some irreplaceable integrity, by claiming that sexuality as their own. Faced with no alternatives, *the strategy to acquire self-respect and pride is: I chose it*. (1989: 149-150. Emphasis added)

I would argue that this and MacKinnon's aforementioned suggestion that sex can offer a means to male approbation are both factors are at work in Maraini's texts. Her protagonists believe themselves to be choosing their (damaging) sexual encounters as a way to gain approval, and to (re)-build their self-respect and pride. Similar themes recur in the novels *Voci* and *Colomba* and, as such, I return in my analysis of these works not only to similar questions around women's complicity in their mistreatment, but also to the connection that can be formed between the 'doer' and the 'done-to' in oppressive relationships. What is

[14] In the later novel, *Donna in guerra* (1975), Maraini's protagonist Vannina is similarly threatened when she is out on her own: she goes to the cinema where a man tries to put his hand up her skirt, then, on her way home, she is followed and harassed by two man in a car (*Donna in guerra*: 150-53).

also clear in these early novels is that there is little possibility that either protagonist ever holds the power in her relationships. Contrary to Anna's situation, however, for Enrica this cannot be so easily explained away by her young age and lack of awareness. In order, therefore, to understand better the question of power, I now consider the intersections of female adolescence and sexual agency.

III. The Trials, and Possibilities, of Female Adolescence

Maraini has made a specific choice in these novels to focus on adolescent protagonists, perhaps because she herself had just emerged from this period. When asked about the later novel in an interview, Maraini recognised this possibility, but at the same time seemed unsure about the extent to which the text should therefore be considered autobiographical:

> Mi ispiravo in qualche modo a una esperienza vissuto da me e che avevo tuttavia sottoposto a un processo di trasposizione e trasfigurazione che ha modificato ambiente e personaggi. Alla fine di questo processo la storia non mi apparteneva più, mentre il tema lo sentivo ancora mio. Io venivo dall'avere attraversato un'iniziazione alla vita adulta, avevo passato l'adolescenza in maniera burrascosa, tempestosa, difficile e ho voluto riesaminare questa esperienza rielaborandola metaforicamente. (In Wright 1997b: 76)[15]

Adolescence is a stage that has provided fertile terrain for many authors. For female authors in particular, the adolescent girl as heroine emphasises 'the perennial contrast between individual ambitions and social rules, between the young women's dreams and the drab necessities of collective life – be it family or society at large' (Giobbi 1995: 144). Additionally for Giobbi, the adolescent girl as protagonist serves to hold up a mirror to the world in which she lives, with her disappointments a reflection of 'the mistakes and

[15] Maraini made clear in a separate interview that whilst some elements of Enrica's story reflected her own adolescence (she too had a love affair similar to Enrica and Cesare's, for instance, in which she was in love with a man who was egotistical and disinterested in her), the environment in which Enrica is growing up and her familial experiences were not, conversely, her own (Montini 1977: 104).

injustices of contemporary society: egoism, hypocrisy, aridity, meanness, prejudice are some of the hateful realities of the grown-up world which these girls are discovering for the first time' (*ibid*: 153). Life's 'drab necessities', and the cruel realities of adulthood are certainly highlighted in both novels: Anna's silent observations of her family, neighbours and adult males speak volumes about a world that she will one day have to enter. Seventeen-year-old Enrica, moreover, is closer to this world than Anna and, due in large part to her family's poverty and her mother's untimely death early in the novel, adulthood is forced upon her even more abruptly.

Adolescence has long been the subject of discussion and theorising, and not just by writers of fiction; for many scholars in the social sciences it constitutes one of the most difficult and interesting stages in the progress of a life. In Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytical reading, it is the moment at which gender roles develop and become opposed, a period in which, 'new object-relational and ego resolutions are made' and is thus a phase of, 'renewed crises and conflict' (1978: 134). Critically, it is a time of identity formation, during which the adolescent's experiences, both positive and negative, will have an impact on their adult self. In the case of female adolescence there are perhaps even more complexities than during male adolescence, and some feminist readings have maintained that it is 'the crucial moment of psychological disempowerment for many women' (Tolman 1994: 324). As Deborah Tolman further explains, 'when their bodies take on women's contours, girls begin to be seen as sexual, and sexuality becomes an aspect of adolescent girls' lives; yet "nice" girls and "good" women are not supposed to be sexual outside of heterosexual, monogamous marriage' (*ibid*: 324). In agreement with this assessment, Angela McRobbie posits that, 'adolescence for girls involves coming to grips with the demands of womanhood and with an emergent sexuality' (2000: 58). Adolescent

girls are consequently faced with the demands of two contradicting forms of behaviour: obedience versus sexuality, submission versus rebellion, and often find themselves unsure of how to behave. Similar, therefore, to other adolescent girls, Enrica's exploration of her burgeoning sexuality should not be viewed solely as indicative of her victimhood, but could be seen as a significant developmental factor as well.

Anna, meanwhile, is presented as a character who is on the threshold of childhood and adulthood, and feels constantly caught between the two worlds. By some adults she is still considered a child, referred to alongside her younger brother as *i ragazzini*, yet she regularly rejects spending time with her brother and his childish friends. Additionally, in contrast to the confinement in the domestic sphere that might be expected of an adolescent girl, Anna is granted the freedom to wander and explore.[16] Nevertheless, she is also rarely allowed the access to the adult world for which she searches and, when she has it, she appears bored by adult company. Her father's girlfriend, Nina, is especially unsure how to act with her, sometimes talking openly to her as an adult: 'ti ha chiesto di spogliarti davanti a lui? […] Lo sapevo […] È uno sporcaccione' (*La vacanza*: 36); whilst also treating her in the same childish fashion as she does the younger brother: 'alzò le sopracciglia come per dire che noi non potevamo aver capito' (*ibid*: 14).

Wood has noted that both Anna and Enrica are faced with a rather gloomy prospect of becoming an adult female as represented by the women around them; as she points out, Anna's expectations of womanhood 'gesture to the restrictive codified and antithetical roles available to women, where both physical and social identities, that of Madonna or that of whore, are conferred by relationships to men' (1995a: 218). Maraini's presentation of Nina is particularly representative of Wood's hypothesis: her sexuality is unconcealed and

[16] Enrica too is allowed a great deal of freedom; she goes to parties, travels around the city alone and appears to have no one regulating her movements. Whilst this liberty suggests something positive in their otherwise rather limited lives, these external spaces are also often the locations in which they are mistreated.

energetic, and corresponds to the one location of power to which she has access. Allusions are made in the novel towards her flirtations with the neighbours, whilst Maraini's descriptions underline Nina's sensuality through feline comparisons: 'ancora una volta notai che vi era qualcosa in comune tra quella bestia e Nina: una grazia svagata e dolcissima. [...] La vestaglia le si aprì sul petto e lei abassò gli occhi ai propri seni sorridendo' (*La vacanza*: 93). If the family is to be considered a prime location in which, for young adolescents, gender roles are first constructed, the presentation of the female that Anna is offered is not one that will help lead her to a more positive female identity of her own. Couple this with the multiple instances of abuse and mistreatment that she experiences, and it is clear that both her young body and mind are at risk at a time when they should instead be growing and developing.

It is not only, however, positive female role models that are absent from Anna's world; rather, all moments of human contact are fleeting and sexualised, instead of conducive to her emotional development. This pronounced lack of meaningful interactions only adds to the air of solitude that permeates the entire novel. Pertinently, in his analysis of Maraini's early novels, Merry writes that typical to them is, 'the marked absence of family networks':

> There are no cousins or constructed alliances based on kinship. Aunts and uncles are rarely mentioned in Maraini's narrative work unless it is in some negative aspect; grandparents have evaporated from the scene. Parents are preoccupied with chimeras of their own making. [...] There is no priest, teacher or counsellor to decode the mysteries of life for them. The figures of authority and trust have been removed. (1997: 101)

Sabino Acquaviva, in an investigation into the Italian family, argued that, 'la famiglia è [...] l'area in cui l'individuo si adatta o non si adatta a vivere in società, nella quale costruisce la sua ostilità o integrazione nel sistema sociale' (1981: 6). The lack of a positive paradigm

of familial, or any other type of care, can thus be proposed as an additional factor that leads to the protagonists' construction as victims.

Anna's father, for one, is largely absent from lives of her and her brother. They both attend boarding school for nine months of the year and during their holiday see little of their father, who instead passes the summer plotting against his boss and playing endless games of cards with his neighbours. His only real impact in the novel is at the beginning and end, picking up and then returning his children to the *collegio*; on these occasions he treats them to ice cream and shows them off to various passers-by. He pretends to be a prosperous businessman, riding an expensive motorbike and giving generous donations to the nuns, but in reality he is little more than an employee in his neighbour's shop. Enrica too is in a family in which her father has little power or influence; by contrast to the archetypal patriarchal model, it is Enrica's mother who is the main breadwinner whilst her father stays at home, obsessively building ever-more elaborate birdcages that never sell.[17] Enrica's father presents a particularly pathetic version of fatherhood, turning to alcohol to ease his problems and unable for the most part to offer any emotional or practical support to his daughter.[18] Tonia Riviello (1990) and Virginia Picchietti (2002) have both highlighted recurrent motifs in the novel that substantiate not only Enrica's father's losing role, but also Enrica's own entrapment by the patriarchal order, namely Enrica's apparently constant thirst and her father's birdcages. Riviello affirms that through an analysis of these symbols, the reader can begin to understand why Enrica attempts to resolve her troubles through sexual means. She suggests that Enrica accepts physical intimacy as a

[17] In the traditional Italian familial model, the primacy of the father cannot, generally, be denied. For analyses of his role and in particular for changes to the Italian family, see, for example, Acquaviva (1981), Gilmore (1990), Caldwell (1991), Ginsborg (2001), Saraceno (1998, 2004) and Willson (2004).

[18] In one of his rare moments of lucidity, Enrica's father does, however, recognise his absence from her life (*L'età del malessere*: 121).

substitute for love, and that it may even explain why she tolerates abuse from men (1990: 71-73).

Merry also makes reference to other figures of authority in the community, including the priest. Whereas in *L'età del malessere,* religion and the Church do not feature significantly, in *La vacanza* they have a comparatively marked presence. Their presentation foreshadows Maraini's subsequent portrayals of the position of women in relation to Catholic culture, in particular in works such as *Il manifesto* (1969) (which I analyse in the following chapter) and *Lettere a Marina* (1981). During her holiday, Anna is prompted on a number of occasions to recall her life in the *collegio,* and the picture that she paints is one that closely resembles other depictions by Maraini: Anna and her peers are taught by the nuns to be docile and submissive, and to treat any bodily experience with shame (*La vacanza*: 47, 102, 140). As I explore in more depth in the following chapter, in Maraini's imagining, the Church exerts a degree of insidious control over female citizens, which is played out through a number of both secular and religious institutions.

Besides this recurrent representation of Catholicism in the novel, we find one other illustration of its role in the lives of all Italian citizens, not just the female ones. Early in the novel, Anna's family go to church with the neighbours, not for any religious reasons, but simply because it is a place to see and to be seen, and for the men to network. Somewhat ironically, it is in church that Anna sees Scanno for the second time and, rather than concentrating on the priest, Scanno spends the entire service watching Anna and later entreats her to go to his house. This hypocrisy towards religion on the part of the adults and Anna's negative experiences of the nuns combine to demonstrate what Maraini views as the damaging role of the Church in her young protagonists' lives. Not only is it far from being an institution to whom the young girls can turn for guidance and support, but it also

is a further illustration of a place in which certain traits of femininity are formed and disseminated, traits which further advance the positioning of Maraini's protagonists as victims. I would therefore argue that, be it in the pursuit of missing love and affection, or simply the search for answers that no one at home can give, Anna finds that she has to look elsewhere; the result of which is so often her mistreatment.

In a similar manner, Enrica's family, lifestyle and living conditions all play a large role in her negative experiences. The very atmosphere of the apartment that she shares with her parents compellingly symbolises her suffocation and oppression: she regularly thrusts her head out of the windows in a desperate attempt to get some air. In *La vacanza* too, this stifling and suffocating atmosphere pervades the entire novel; the temperature, the constant threat of war, the underlying air of corruption, the endless games of cards and the regular references to sleeping all add up to a monotonous and oppressive environment that reflects the external forces that both limit and control Anna. Moreover, Enrica's very social class serves to limit her choices: she knows that Cesare would never marry someone in her impoverished condition and yet, whilst still a student, she cannot support herself financially.

The dilemma that Enrica's adolescence itself creates plays out from the beginning of the novel. Returning home after visiting Cesare, Enrica is confronted with her mother, who hopes for a good life for her daughter through marriage to this man who, the reader is already aware, is engaged to someone else: '"ti ha detto qualcosa?" – mi gridò ad un tratto, ansiosamente, attraverso la porta aperta. [...] "Devi essere furba. Renderti desiderabile. Soprattutto non concedergli niente."' (*L'età del malessere*: 13). In her study of mothers and daughters in European literature, Adalgisa Giorgio asserts that, 'studies with adolescent daughters in America and Europe show that the mother still constitutes the most

powerful influence on the daughter's acquisition of femininity and sexuality' (2002: 7). Giorgio further argues that some strands of Italian feminist thought specifically isolated the mother's negative role in her daughter's 'process of individuation, [for] acting as a regulator of her sexuality, and generally for hindering her emancipation and autonomy' (*ibid*: 5).[19] Enrica is forced to juggle her own hopes and desires with the demands of her mother, who gave up her ambitions and education to marry Enrica's father. This image of Enrica's self-sacrificing mother, together with Maraini's presentation later in the text of the lonely and unfulfilled Countess Bardengo, matches the absence of productive female figures in Anna's life. By contrast to Anna's experiences, however, critics have noted that, following her mother's death, Enrica does come to realise that she is unwilling to replicate her role (Picchietti 2002: 43-49).[20] This recognition constitutes a further example of the factors (others of which I explore below) that lead directly to Enrica's decision to act with agency and self-awareness. As such, it demonstrates that, albeit only after her death, Enrica's mother could be considered a positive force in her life. Nevertheless, the overwhelming sense that the reader receives from all the significant females in the protagonists' lives is one of both absence and incomprehension of what the girls really need: a set of circumstances which evidently differs very greatly to what Italian feminists have since recognised as the centrality of the mother (both biological and 'symbolic') for female development.[21]

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[19] Giorgio's study goes on to consider how a number of late twentieth-century Italian women writers responded to the 'feminist "discovery"' of the primacy of the mother-daughter relationship (2002: 121). Her analysis encompasses a broad range of texts and authors, amongst them Fabrizia Ramondino, Francesca Santivale and Clara Sereni, to demonstrate the influences of both Italian feminist thought and earlier women writers (of Maraini's generation, although she is not mentioned explicitly) on contemporary Italian women writers.

[20] During one noteworthy scene, Enrica sees herself in a mirror, wearing her mother's bathrobe: 'nello specchio vidi la mamma con due ditate nere sotto gli occhi e il corpo stanco e gonfio che traspariva sotto la vestaglia dal collo unto. Ero come lei. Facevo gli stessi gesti' (*L'età del malessere*: 119).

[21] The mother-daughter relationship constituted a significant feature of Italian feminist thought. See, in particular, Muraro's *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (2006) as an example of feminist thought, and Kemp

However, I wish to return to what could be considered the reason for the tensions that exist between mother and daughter, and that is to say the very existence of her relationship with Cesare. It has been well recognised that adolescence is a stage in which a person rebels against the restrictions and conventions imposed upon them by the adult world (Giobbi 1995: 144), and for many teenagers this can be through their initiation into sexual relations. At the age of seventeen, there should be no denying Enrica's right to enjoy her emergent sexuality. What I would further argue, is that whilst it may be true that she inhabits a state of inertia and lethargy for much of the novel, disinterestedly allowing things to happen to her, in reality she is at times neither shy nor reticent when it comes to exploring her sexuality. She shows little hesitation when getting into Guido, a rich lawyer's, car and returning with him to his apartment, or when responding to her friend Carlo's initially tentative advances; perhaps, in the latter example, because it is simply too tiresome to turn him down, but she is nonetheless making a choice. Once again, therefore, we return to the question of agency and to considering whether, as at no stage is she forced into having intercourse with these men, it may be possible to propose that, far from being a victim, her sexuality is entirely legitimate. Moreover, her behaviour could even to be celebrated, for granting her a level of freedom and control that she lacks elsewhere in her life.

Both Jackson and Tolman, whose work I have already considered, question the realities of adolescent girls' experiences of sexual desire. In studies that took place around twenty years after Maraini's novel was written, both scholars found a worrying level of ignorance on the part of adolescent girls about their own desire (Jackson 1982; Tolman 1994). Many of the girls were unaware that women could reach orgasm, or of the existence

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and Bono (1991; 1993) and Parati and West (2002) for critical responses. See also Giorgio (2002) on mothers and daughters in Italian literature.

and function of the clitoris (Jackson 1982: 119), and for the great majority it was believed that girls' desire was just not relevant in a sexual relationship (Tolman 1994: 325). As Jackson concludes:

> The information available to young people […] reflects masculine priorities in defining sex as intercourse, an activity that virtually guarantees physical satisfaction for the male, but is at best a highly inefficient way of achieving it for his partner. (1982: 119)

The findings of these studies are reflected in Enrica's various experiences of intercourse; any encounter with Cesare is intended solely to satisfy his desire and their relations are generally brief and uncomfortable. Likewise, Enrica describes how, when she is intimate with her friend Carlo, 'mi sentivo infreddolita e delusa. Non avevo voglia di toccarlo. [...] Facemmo l'amore con furia, ingoffati dai cappotti e dai vestiti. Alla fine Carlo scivolò al mio fianco con un sospiro di soddisfazione' (*L'età del malessere*: 23). Finally, whilst Guido, the lawyer, does have the courtesy to ask Enrica, "Ti è piaciuto?", we learn that, '[lui] non attese la risposta' (*ibid*: 77).

Enrica's desire is completely absent in these scenes and, in line with my analysis of Anna, I would propose that this lack leads directly to a lack of agency and power on her part. She too is in relationships that are founded on hierarchy and dominance, in which her position is unquestionably one of submission. Indeed, the lack of control over her own body that she here exhibits is exemplified in an eventual, and perhaps somewhat inevitable, pregnancy and subsequent abortion, a decision that Enrica makes following much coercion by Cesare. I argue in the following chapter that in Maraini's narratives abortion can be considered both a renouncement of control and a form of violence against women. Consistent with this, the abortion that Enrica undergoes involves acute pain and a surrender of her body to the hands of another. The violence of the procedure is expressed through Maraini's sparse but dramatic language: 'il dolore si fece acuto e mi attraversò come una

scossa elettrica facendomi battere i denti. Tutto si lacerava in me. Gridai' (*ibid*: 115). By contrast to the horror of the operation, however, Enrica reveals immediately afterwards how she experiences 'un senso di benessere', and the abortion is, in fact, one of the elements that pushes her to change her life.

Alongside her decision to find a job and move out of the apartment she shares with her father, the abortion marks a shift in her attitude and, by consequence, her actions. This aspect of the text has been well documented by critics, and numerous illustrations of her gradual development of self-awareness are available. Such evidence is manifest not only in her actions, but also in her voice, which becomes progressively stronger and less indifferent. She expresses a desire to drive (*ibid*: 145), realises that, 'è una vita idiota, senza senso [...] dovrò cercarmi un lavoro e una vita diversa, fuori di qui' (*ibid*: 172), and ultimately decides, 'l'estate è vicina e presto comincerà per me una nuova vita [...] il giorno dopo mi sarei alzata all'alba per andare a cercare un impiego' (*ibid*: 195). Statements such as these evidently anticipate the strong feminist consciousness that Maraini was to develop in later texts and, as such, it is plain to see why the novel has been read by so many as a precursor to much of her later work. To this convergence of critical opinion I wish to add my own suggestion: that Enrica's ability to take control of her life also marks her emergence from the trials of her adolescence. I believe this to be particularly significant given Maraini's later recourse to young female protagonists, who, as I demonstrate, are not necessarily granted the same possibility. By 'coming-to-consciousness' at a relatively young age, it is conceivable that Enrica, and Anna too, will be able to avoid further abuse, mistreatment and violence at the hands of the oppressive and powerful patriarchal society that they both so evidently inhabit.

In this chapter, through a close analysis of the thematic elements of Maraini's first novels, I have demonstrated how, from the early stages of her career she confronts the realities of women's position in a patriarchal society. Her protagonists are located for much of the texts in the position of victim, and I have established how this is performed through their age, their gender, their familial relationships and the society that they inhabit. I have also, on the other hand, underlined the moments in which they display some level of agency and how, in *L'età del malessere* especially, Maraini presents a character who is ultimately able to resist her repressive situation and imagine a new life of self-awareness and control. As I have emphasised, this is a feature of much of the critical analysis of the text, anticipating, as it does, novels which Maraini published in the 1970s and 80s and it is to some of these texts that I now turn.

CHAPTER TWO: INSTITUTIONAL VICTIMS IN *IL MANIFESTO* (1969), *MEMORIE DI UNA LADRA* (1972), *DONNA IN GUERRA* (1975) AND *IL TRENO PER HELSINKI* (1984)

For Maraini, gender violence can occur in both the private and public spheres; it can be performed by both individuals and institutions. The previous chapter analysed two young women's experiences of gender violence, revealing the different modalities of abuse that were inflicted upon them, and found that these were carried out predominantly in the private sphere, and by men who were know to them. In the present chapter, by contrast, I argue that in four texts which followed those debut novels, Maraini's focus turns to women's position in the public sphere. I demonstrate that the play *Il manifesto* (1969), and the novels *Memorie di una ladra* (1972), *Donna in guerra* (1975)[1] and *Il treno per Helsinki* (1984) all situate her protagonists as objects under the state's control. Yet similar to those early works, so too are the protagonists of these texts granted the possibility of resisting their oppression; consistent with my assertion that what differentiates Maraini's early works from those of more recent years is this very tangible chance of 'escape'. I explore later in this chapter the ways in which her protagonists challenge and oppose the controlling, violent situations in which they find themselves.

Maraini's concentration in these works upon women's public position compellingly demonstrates, I suggest, the extent to which they are products of their time. They were published at the height of second wave feminism in Italy and reflect Maraini's involvement in these external events. With regards to *La vacanza* and *L'età del malessere*, I drew attention to critics who had noted that these works, 'prefigured a feminist

[1] Giovanna Bellesia (2000) offers a comprehensive analysis of instances of violence against women in this novel. As such, I have chosen to focus mainly on the other texts and turn to *Donna in guerra* solely for contextualisation and as further illustration of some aspects of my argument.

consciousness' (Wood 1993: 16); in the works under discussion here this feminist consciousness is demonstrably more developed and overt. As such, I begin my analysis with a brief examination of the Italian women's movement in the 1970s, paying particular attention to Maraini's role within it. I described in my Introduction how one motif running through this thesis would involve the examination of the ways in which Maraini's public role interacts with her narrative output, and I believe that this is particularly in evidence at this moment in her career. By concentrating upon second wave Italian feminism, I am therefore able not only to explore this aspect of her career, but also to contextualise the narratives under question.

I then turn to the main body of this chapter, an analysis of the texts themselves. I consider a number of incidents of what I term 'institutional violence' and, later, 'compulsory maternity' within the narratives, in order to determine the manner in which, for Maraini, the state controls the bodies and minds of women in ways that are physical, psychological and sexual. In accordance with the main line of my argument in this thesis, I demonstrate how violence in these works is not as overtly physical as that which will be encountered in later works; rather, it represents one means by which women are more largely subjugated in a patriarchal society. Due to its specific focus upon institutions, my argument in this chapter is influenced by Foucauldian thought and its legacies, and addresses the following issues: firstly, the overt violence of institutions and the more insidious forms of control over female behaviour and sexuality which they exert; and secondly, maternity, by analysing the state's proposition of this as the ideal of femininity, juxtaposed with the violence of abortion. As noted, I look finally at the ways in which her protagonists eventually try to resist their mistreatment. Corresponding to my judgement that these texts capture 1970's feminist zeitgeist, I consider how this resistance is linked to

their relationships with other women and their participation in female communities, in themselves features of the Italian women's movement.

I. Maraini and Second Wave Feminism in Italy

The historical moment in which these texts were written was significant for Maraini, marking the beginning of more widespread critical attention towards, and greater public awareness of, her work.[2] The 1970s and 80s were the decades in which Maraini produced her greatest output of theatrical works, and in these she would be not solely playwright, but, on occasion, director or producer as well. This was also the period in which she became known as a public figure, involved not just as an author, but also as an activist in the struggle for women's empowerment and enfranchisement.[3] In addition, she was a prolific producer of essays and works of journalism and was often asked to act as a spokesperson for women's rights. Her level of involvement in the women's movement is certainly not under question; indeed, when it is looked at in relation to her contemporaneous artistic output, the extent of her commitment to a feminist agenda at this stage in her career cannot be denied.[4] To offer just one example of this allegiance, we can look to her establishment of the all-female theatre group La Maddalena, as demonstration

[2] Grazia Sumeli Weinberg's 1993 study of Maraini includes an excellent summary of all the articles and essays previously published about the author, many of which are from this period. Weinberg states that, prior to her own study, most reviews of Maraini's work had been limited to newspapers and monthly magazines (1993: xv). The introduction to Diaconescu-Blumenfeld and Testaferri's edited volume also contains a comprehensive bio-bibliography, which details some of Maraini's major achievements during this period and the reception these works received (2000: 4-7).

[3] This was often through her theatrical work, in projects such as her attempt to bring theatre to some of the most deprived areas of Rome, something Maraini discusses in *Fare teatro* (1974). In the final chapter of this thesis I return to a discussion of Maraini's public position, which similarly focuses predominantly upon a work of theatre, *Passi affrettati* (2007).

[4] Itala Rutter (1990) reads some of Maraini's early work alongside the writings of Teresa de Lauretis to demonstrate the extent to which both writers mirror Italian feminist thought, in particular with regards to the difficulty of separating individual and collective concerns.

of her interest in placing women's lives and experience at the core of her work. Of her theatre of this period, Maraini has stated, 'la provocazione era necessaria. Dare voce alla voce delle donne significava raccontare una lunghissima storia di silenzi, di soprusi, di umiliazioni' (2005: 47). She likewise dubbed it 'the "white-hot" time of feminism. [...] We wanted to spread ideas that very few people held and very few people agreed with' (in Bassnett 1984: 455).

In this chapter I consider one such work of theatre, *Il manifesto*, a piece first performed in 1969, which Maraini has recognised as 'un vero e proprio testo politico-femminista' (2000a: 5). It was originally written as part of Maraini's Centocelle project, in which she attempted to bring theatre to one of the poorest parts of Rome and about which she writes: 'facendo teatro si può cambiare il mondo? forse no, ma si può aiutare qualche testa a riflettere, si può risvegliare qualche coscienza, qualche moto di sdegno o di protesta' (*ibid*: 4). Evidently, Maraini perceives theatre as an ideal medium through which to raise consciousness and to educate; as such, it could perhaps be considered the most overtly 'political' genre in which she works.[5] My analysis is not limited, however, to theatrical works and indeed focuses in just as much detail on a selection of her prose work. Since the strong feminist incentive in Maraini's theatre has received considerable critical attention (Sumeli Weinberg 1993; Wood 1995b; Cavallaro 2000), I wish at this point to outline instead the ways in which I see it at work in her novels. Certainly, it is self-evident that, with their concentration upon the lives of female protagonists and their recurrent themes of female friendship, self-discovery and patriarchal subjugation, these are feminist works; by consequence, I choose instead to isolate instances in the texts in which the

[5] In Chapter Six I return to a discussion of Maraini's 'consciousness-raining' theatre, noting the similarities between early works such as this and a contemporary work.

characters interact with the very events and ideas of the period in which the works were both written and are set.

The background to, and history of, second wave Italian feminism has been well documented in a number of comprehensive Anglophone (Birnbaum 1986; Hellman 1987; Bassnett 1986) and Italian texts (Calabrò and Grasso 1985; Cutrufelli et al 2001; Bertolotti and Scattigno 2005). All explore the manifold reasons behind the development of the movement, with a number of them arguing specifically that one of the principle factors was women's dissatisfaction with the Partito comunista italiano (PCI). The PCI witnessed a surge in membership at the end of World War II, as Italians, men and women, embraced communism as an alternative to the oppressive fascist regime and a solution to what they saw as the ills of Italian society. For many women, however, the party's almost exclusive focus on workers' rights was not what they had been looking for; they soon discovered that, whilst they were certainly called upon to join the struggle, there was rarely any question of addressing the specific questions of women's oppression (Hellman 1987: 39-41). The result was a strong feeling of worthlessness and frustration amongst the party's female members, which ultimately led many of them towards feminist activism.

Capturing this dissatisfaction is one of the ways in which Maraini's narratives ally themselves to the development of second wave Italian feminism.[6] She drives the issue home in *Donna in guerra*, in which readers are offered a patent illustration of women's exclusion from the party through the character of Vittorio. He is presented as a dedicated communist and leader of the group in which Vannina, Maraini's protagonist, finds herself, and yet is also blind to the issue of women's oppression. Vannina's friend Suna asks Vittorio:

[6] Bruce Merry considers how other Italian women writers similarly interpreted this period through their examination of the class struggle, highlighting works by Armanda Guiducci and Giuliana Morandini (1997b: 51).

- Tua madre, cosa fa?
- Niente, sta a casa.
- Avete una cameriera?
- No.
- E allora come fai a dire che non fa niente?
- Beh, sta a casa, fa i lavori di casa.
- Cioè ti prepara il pranzo, ti rifà il letto, ti lava la biancheria, ti stira le camicie, ti va a fare la spesa, ti cucina, ti lava i piatti o no? [...] Ha mai avuto un amante tua madre?
- Ma che dici? Se la vedessi capiresti che la tua è una domanda borghese, fuori luogo, quella mia madre è una vecchia, mica è una donna.
- Appunto, una vecchia, senza sesso e senza cervello, una vecchia che pulisce il culo a tutti voi. (*Donna in guerra*: 72-73)

Evidently, Vittorio is not aware of women's subjugation in the home, the call for wages for housework, nor even of women's sexuality. As if to illustrate this point further, Vittorio rejects the women of the party to marry instead a woman who fits precisely his model of what femininity should entail: 'tranquilla, disponibile, innamorata, affettuosa [...]; una che sa cucinare, fare figli, tenere in ordine la casa, ma anche fare l'amore e ridere e scherzare senza troppi problemi' (*ibid*: 243).

Judith Hellman argues that this growing feeling of discontent within the women of the party had a major role in the development of a specifically feminist consciousness in Italy, as her interviews with female members of the PCI reveal:

> Perhaps the harshest and most telling feminist criticism of the PCI was directed [...] at the treatment accorded to women militants within the party. In essence, feminists argued that the communist party hierarchy and organisation perfectly reproduced the superordinate/subordinate-male/female model characteristic of the rest of society. [...] As one feminist – a former PCI member – told me tersely, 'when you see someone voting for the hammer and sickle with one hand and slapping around his wife and kids with the other, it makes you think.' (1987: 45-46)

In spite of the prevalence of this dissatisfaction, there was nonetheless a significant number of women who were involved in *la doppia militanza*: 'il far parte, nello stesso tempo, di un partito o di un "gruppo" politicamente organizzato (nella "nuova sinistra" o nella sinistra storica) e di un collettivo femminista' (Lilli and Valentini 1979: 10). The

enthusiasm with which women participated in this 'double militancy', and its success or otherwise, has been the subject of a number of writings (Seroni 1977; Lilli and Valentini 1979; Rossanda 1987), which tend to display a marked ambivalence towards the success of the two struggles working in harmony with each other. One of the most significant witnesses to this double militancy, Rossana Rossanda, was part of the PCI for many years, before rejecting it in support of the feminist struggle. On the subject of double militancy, she has stated:

> La doppia militanza la vivono proprio felicemente solo le donne che la identificano con un percorso di personale liberazione e pacificazione, una emancipazione concreta da schiavitù interne o esterne. [...] Il PCI non modificherà il femminismo, il femminismo non modificherà la linea del PCI. (1987: 59-60)

Returning to Maraini's text, we can identify within another character, Suna, the mirroring of these sentiments. Suna is introduced as a prominent and dedicated communist, who initially attempts to introduce her feminist convictions into the group. Eventually, however, she recognises the impossibility of her *doppia militanza* and is ejected from the party. Just as many female members of the PCI turned away from a party in which they recognised the impossibility of a steady political commitment for women, so too does Suna:

> Non so se sono più offesa o incazzata per essere stata cacciata dal movimento. [...] Ma poi penso che hanno ragione loro [...] dico quello che penso, non ho senso politico, la strategia non la capisco, mi interesso solo alle disgrazie delle donne. (*Donna in guerra*: 261)

For Suna and many other women, there existed an unmistakable tension and, in spite of trying to retain links with the communist party, the post-1968 era meant a severing of ties and a move towards feminist activism. What then, aside from their apparent dissatisfaction with the patriarchal structuring of the PCI, were the other main issues and forces that led to the Italian feminist movement's development and expansion? By

exploring some of these factors, I also continue to detail the areas in which Maraini's textual production of this period is situated.

As in the United States and elsewhere in Europe, Italian feminism grew in the euphoria of the post-*sessantotto* era. A change in women's legal status was one of the broad demands of the feminist movement and was, in part, achieved in 1975, with the publication of a new family code.[7] Meanwhile, Carla Lonzi's feminist manifesto of 1974, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, was a determining feature of the new wave of Italian feminism, calling for the creation of a separate women's discourse and women's alternatives to male power bases and structures. The formation of women's collectives across Italy and the development of the practice of *autocoscienza* likewise marked the expansion of Italian feminism, whilst demonstrating at the same time the emphasis that it placed upon the relationships between women (Kemp and Bono 1993; Parati and West 2002). Patriarchalism and traditional Church values were among the topics analysed within both small *autocoscienza* groups and prominent publications, in order to address the problems of private and family life, which, previously, had been considered outside the realm of state politics. Such subjects constituted the themes of Maraini's own works of the time; alongside their situating of women in public spaces, they also maintained a focus upon family life and relationships, as I demonstrate below.

Abortion was one of the most important issues to dominate the feminists' agenda; Lesley Caldwell contends that the abortion campaign occupies a central place in the history of Italian feminism, arguing that it is a debate that cannot be separated from Catholicism (1991: 93). With the Catholic prohibition of both sex education and the distribution of contraceptives, abortion (in spite of being defined a crime by the fascist

[7] This updated group of laws overturned some of the most discriminatory aspects of the previous fascist code, which had, among other things, made adultery a crime only women could commit and demanded husbands' or fathers' formal permission to women seeking a passport or job (Hellman 1987: 51).

government) had in fact become Italian women's 'birth control' of choice: between one and three million clandestine abortions were performed in 1971 alone (Birnbaum 1986: 87). Backstreet abortions such as these were causing the deaths of hundreds of women every year, and, as such, the issue of a 'woman's right to choose' became of the utmost feminist importance. In 1978, following intense campaigning from women's groups, the Italian government passed a law permitting abortions and, moreover, providing abortions paid for by the government within the first 90 days of pregnancy.[8] As Hellman notes, the most significant feature of the abortion law was the respect it granted to, 'women's self-determination – the principle that the pregnant woman and *not* her parents, her husband or lover, let alone a committee of physicians, social workers, or community leaders, be the only one involved in the decision to terminate a pregnancy' (1987: 42. Emphasis in original).

A number of novels were published by Italian women writers during this period which foreground abortion, thus adding to these debates and, moreover, making public an issue which had previously been an area of private shame and trauma: later in this chapter I discuss probably the the best-known example of this, Oriana Fallaci's *Lettera a un bambino mai nato* (1975), but Natalia Ginzburg's *Caro Michele* (1973) and Elena Gianini Belotti's slightly later *Il fiore dell'ibisco* (1985) can also be identified. Maraini was no exception: I highlighted in the previous chapter how Enrica, the protagonist of *L'età del malessere*, undergoes the procedure, and so too does Vannina in *Donna in guerra. Il treno per Helsinki*, by contrast, is noteworthy for centring upon a character who does not have an abortion, even if she might have wanted to and, for the sake of her own health, perhaps should have had one, as I explore below. Just like their depictions of women's

[8] The Christian Democrats abstained from the final vote, indicating the Catholic Church's continued opposition to the abortion law (Caldwell 1991: 92).

participation in communism paralleled an associated reality, so too by entering into the abortion debate do the texts under discussion in this chapter actively engage with the simultaneous pursuits of Italian feminism.

What is evidently most significant for the purposes of this study, however, are the ways in which they interact with questions of violence against women and of feminist reactions to it. It was, of course, during second wave feminism that many issues of gender violence were first addressed. From Susan Brownmiller's initial assertion that rape is 'nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation, by which all men keep all women in a state of fear' (1975: 5), grew the steady realisation that men's violence to women is a specific phenomenon that must be understood if ever it is to be eradicated. In Italy, the question of violence against women became a concern for feminist activists across the peninsula, with rape and pornography becoming a focus of discussion in numerous cities (Hellman 1987: 193). Similarly, demonstrations, marches and conferences took place to expose the issue, many of which were inspired by specific cases of rape and violent assault on women (Bassnett 1986: 92-97). Susan Bassnett also notes how there was an increase in the number of reported rapes during this period; she describes how feminist groups subsequently reflected upon whether this was attributable to, as the media had it at the time, men seeking revenge on a 'new generation of castrating women', or simply that more women felt newly able to speak out about instances of aggression against them (*ibid*: 96-97). Early feminist writings not only identified violence against women as a matter of crucial importance, but also anticipated some of the particular questions that the issue would continue to raise amongst theorists and activists alike:

> Sin dall'inizio, nei *Sottosopra,* la riflessione e l'analisi della violenza sessuale come un prodotto della sessualità maschile [...] nomina anche il lato oscuro femminile, cioè la rimozione della violenza che le donne subiscono. E la subiscono quasi senza consapevolezza, per paura o per amore, per conservare

> comunque il rapporto con un uomo, per sopravvivere, introiettando le regole della società, rinunciando all'ascolto del proprio desiderio. (Paolozzi and Leiss 1999: 44)

Maraini was caught up in this cultural landscape. In 1975 she published a brief article in the American feminist journal, *Signs*, which outlined current work, both academic and campaigning, that was being undertaken in Italy at the time (Maraini 1975b). Her name is likewise prominent in historical accounts of the era, as both activist and commentator (Bassnett 1986; Birnbaum 1986; Paolozzi and Leiss 1999). Moreover, Maraini has herself described how it was through her involvement in the Italian women's movement that she felt compelled to consider the issue of violence against women: in the autobiographical novel *Bagheria* (1994), she describes how she participated in *autocoscienza* sessions, during which she discovered that, 'la cosiddetta "molestia sessuale" da parte degli adulti sui bambini era una cosa comunissima, ben conosciuta a tutte o quasi tutte le bambine' (*Bagheria*: 46). Such an identification of the ubiquity of patriarchal violence demonstrates the need many women felt to vocalise their experiences and may also begin to explain Maraini's determination to represent the problem in her writings.

For many Italian women, the period of second wave feminism was marked by shared feelings of enthusiasm, hope and expectation that change was afoot, and Maraini was no exception. It seems, moreover, that there existed at this stage in her career a continual overlapping of her role as author and her involvement in feminism, which engendered a marked shift in her work towards a more developed, and overtly political, feminist consciousness. The texts under consideration in this chapter all reflect this commitment, through their exposition of the ways in which violence against women is committed in the public sphere, by the state and its institutions.

II. Discipline and Punish: *Il manifesto* and *Memorie di una ladra*

Il manifesto and *Memorie di una ladra* can be considered the direct result of Maraini's feminist activism, having been written following an enquiry she made into the state of women's prisons in Italy. She discovered a gamut of squalid conditions and harsh treatment and was compelled to present her findings through these narratives. They expose the deprivations of incarceration for women and the attendant humiliations and abuses of prison life. By so doing, they open up a discussion into the ways in which the state controls the minds and bodies of its female citizens. A number of incidents within these texts offer a patent condemnation of the treatment of women in institutions, in which they are damaged both physically and psychologically by those who observe and discipline them.[9] Indeed, it could be argued that her characters' institutionalisation is a not only literal indicator of their own oppression, but also a very powerful symbol of women's wider subjugation under patriarchy.

By proposing such a vision of state institutions, Maraini is echoing, I would argue, some of the theories propounded in Foucault's seminal, 1977 work, *Discipline and Punish*, in which he first introduced his theory of docile bodies. Foucault proposed that, rather than being self-determining agents, capable of challenging and resisting the structures of society, individuals are conceived as living in the grip of an inescapable, and nebulous, disciplinary power. Using the example of the Panopticon, a prison system that allows for the constant observation of inmates, he demonstrates how citizens become their own prison guards, behaving and adhering to societal norms out of a fear of surveillance by the

[9] The 1986 play, *Stravaganza*, also condemns the state's treatment of patients who are interred in mental asylum, but not with a gendered view: all of the play's characters, male and female, are controlled and mistreated. This play too was the result of one of Maraini's investigations, on this occasion an enquiry she carried out following the closure of the asylums.

state, and not because of other, more tangible, forms of discipline (1991: 200-02). Extending his thesis, Foucault notes that the effects of the Panopticon resonate beyond the prison walls to schools, armies, hospitals and the police, ultimately combining to create a society of surveillance, in which citizens are both subject to, and the bearers of, power. Foucault's disciplinary power is thus effective because of its ubiquity. As Lois McNay describes, 'the behaviour of individuals is regulated not through overt repression but through a set of standards and values associated with *normality*' (1994: 95. Emphasis added).[10]

I would likewise argue that the subversive female protagonists of Maraini's *Il manifesto* and *Memorie di una ladra* are frequently at odds with 'normal' modes of femininity. Consequently they must be, as Foucault would have it, 'disciplined' into femininity by the institutions in which they are detained. Is it plausible, however, to apply Foucauldian thought to Maraini's women-centred narratives and to do so with a feminist approach? It has been recognised that Foucault's theory paid little attention to gender, and that the prisoners to which he refers can be judged to have been implicitly male (McNay 1992). Sandra Lee Bartky, for example, has noted that:

> Foucault treats the body as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. […] To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the female body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been opposed. (1988: 63-64)

By contrast, McNay (1992), Monique Deveaux (1994) and Judith Butler (2004) are amongst those to have expressed the belief that this was never Foucault's intention. They

[10] In a similar manner, Pierre Bourdieu hypothesised 'symbolic violence' (1977), the predominantly unconscious control that social habits maintain over the conscious subject. Likewise, Slavoj Žižek describes what he terms 'objective violence': 'the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of dominance and exploitation, including the threat of violence' (2008: 8). However, due to its explicit reference to institutions, it is to Foucault's work that I predominantly refer in this chapter.

argued that we must look past such limitations to the ways in which the theory does indeed provide a useful framework for understanding the patriarchal oppression of women.

The protagonist of Maraini's *Il manifesto* is, from the beginning of the play, located firmly in a position of patriarchal domination. As a small child, she challenges 'typical' female behaviour and is immediately disciplined by her father for doing so: 'le donne devono stare buone e sagge, se no, guai! Hai capito Anna mia? [...] Lo so che hai appena cinque anni. Ma non importa. Devi imparare a capire cosa sei. Tu sei una donna. Ripeti: d-o-n-n-a!' (*Il manifesto*: 158). Whilst her father insists upon docility and subservience, he is confronted instead by a daughter who is wilful and vulgar, shocking him with her sexualised language: 'cazzo! […] Perché non lo mandi a farsi fottere?" (*ibid*: 161). Young as she is, Anna is likewise astute enough to recognise the sexual double standards that exist, and consequently attempts to disrupt her father's – and, potentially, Maraini's audiences' – circumscribed standards of masculinity and femininity:

> ANNA: Cosa vuol dire puttana, papà?
> PADRE: Vuol dire una che si comporta male, come te, che dice parolacce, che ride quando non deve, che non obbedisce a nessuno e fa di testa sua.
> ANNA: Allora anche Alessandrino è una puttana.
> PADRE: I maschi non sono femmine. I maschi devono essere così perché i maschi sono un'altra cosa. (*ibid*: 163)

Her father decides to send her to a boarding school (run, as the majority were, by nuns) in an effort to make her conform more to his expectations of femininity. At the school, she gains her first experiences of institutionalisation from the nuns, who make the girls march and declare their love for the school's director and for Jesus. They also endeavour to instil in them a rigid code of female passivity:

> SUORA: Vi racconterò la storia di una ragazza che disubbidiva sempre e finì come finì, sotto un tram, con tutte e due le gambe spezzate, perché il Signore l'aveva punita.
> TUTTE: O Gesù, Gesù! Ma cosa aveva fatto?

> SUORA: Non aveva dato retta alla sua mamma che le diceva: non guardare gli uomini! Non li ascoltare mai! C'era uno che le parlava tutto dolce e lei cedette e poi dopo che era incinta scoprì che quell'uomo era già sposato e non poteva rimediare. Allora il Signore la castigò e rimase senza gambe per il resto della sua vita. (*ibid*: 169)

The threat of violence and pain for any woman who transgresses is manifest is the nun's cautionary tale. Also in evidence throughout the scenes in the *collegio* is the nuns' fixation with the girls' sexuality. They are repeatedly told that a woman's virginity is her most precious commodity (*ibid*: 176); moreover, any hint of sexual assertiveness, homosexuality, or rejection of decorum amongst the girls disturbs the nuns and is immediately stamped out. One particularly unsettling example of such intervention in the girls' relationships with their bodies takes place when Anna is chastised by a nun for sleeping with her hands underneath her sheet. She is compelled to admit that she was dreaming of playing naked in the sea with another girl. To limit her burgeoning sexuality, the nun forces her to wear three layers of underwear and to sleep with her hands above the covers. In these early scenes of the play, Maraini demonstrates the extent to which the nuns are preventing the girls' newly developed interest in, and understanding of, their own bodies.

I identified a similar theme in *La vacanza* and would suggest that, in both works, Maraini is recognising how educational and religious institutions impose upon, and perpetuate, behavioural ideals towards young girls.[11] Religion endeavours to impose a particular version of femininity upon both girls, one that is docile and submissive, but one which both continually reject. Such a relationship between Catholicism and the position of

[11] *Donna in guerra* presents readers with an additional, and similarly bleak, example of an educational establishment: the school in which the novel's protagonist, Vannina, works. Much like the institutions in *Il manifesto,* the school is a degraded environment, where poverty abounds and the children are offered little chance of escape to a better future than that of their underprivileged parents. Vannina's experience in school also demonstrates the moral degradation of the children and the extent to which they have been socialised into believing the misogynistic indoctrination of their school and families (Tamburri 1990: 147-48).

women in Italy is unmistakably an area of some tension, and has provoked sustained academic debate. Caldwell, for instance, discusses the role of the Church and legal reform in the context of 'the woman question'. She recognises that an understanding of the centrality and resilience of Catholicism is no less than a 'precondition' when analysing women's oppression in Italy (1991: 2). Likewise, Luisa Accati (1995) addresses some of the distinctive issues of Italian feminism via an examination of the female symbol in Catholicism.[12] When I asked Maraini for her views about the kind of messages Catholicism transmits to women, she argued that:

> La Chiesa cattolica ha sempre proposto l'adorazione della Vergine Maria come un modello positivo femminile. Ma è un modello che richiede sottomissione, castità, obbedienza, passività e umiltà. Nel momento in cui una donna pretende di essere autonoma e di decidere della sua vita e del suo corpo, viene immediatamente messa nella categoria delle colpevoli: streghe, diavolesse e prostitute. Ovvero diventa 'la donna cattiva' per antonomasia. (Maraini 2008b)

Nevertheless, the Church is predominantly an 'absent presence' in her work, with its role rarely explicitly expressed, but its influence often permeating her characters' lives. By contrast, the difficulty involved in separating Church and state remains a fundamental consideration in Italy (Ginsborg 2001: 40-41).[13] As well as being an extremely powerful institution in its own right, the Church is also a highly influential presence across the state-run branches of Italian society, and nowhere more so than in the in the very institutions that Maraini describes. The schools, prisons and hospitals in which she situates her

[12] Marina Warner (1985) also discusses the negative self-image engendered in many women by the Catholic cult of the Madonna. Birnbaum (1993a), on the other hand, considers how Italy's cult of the 'Black Madonna' could challenge this view: in contrast to the model of submissiveness expounded through the figure of the Virgin Mary, the Black Madonna symbolises a more powerful version of femininity, one that is linked to fertility and the earth.

[13] The relationship between Church and state was formalised in 1929 with the ratifying of the Lateran pacts. See, for example, Leziroli (2003: 66-92) and Binchy (1970: 210-20).

narratives are often run by members of religious orders and aim to inculcate her protagonists with Catholic values.[14]

Rather than being a character who submits to the Church's indoctrination, however, Anna rebels against its teaching and runs away, becoming first a prostitute and then a thief. But she is not allowed to refuse the stereotypes of her gender for long and, in the second half of the play, is imprisoned in a female penitentiary. This too is a domain in which nuns and female guards discipline the inmates and where the aim of incarceration is the 're-education' of its female inmates. The level of indoctrination is epitomised in an exchange between the guard and the prisoners. They speak as one, forming a chorus line of women who are seen, and have become, one mind and one body within the prison walls:

> GUARDIANA: Il peccato cos'è?
> RAGAZZE: La natura della donna.
> GUARDIANA: La donna cos'è?
> RAGAZZE: La più umile serva di Dio.
> GUARDIANA: Il suo dovere qual è?
> RAGAZZE: Ubbidire, servire, tacere. (*Il manifesto*: 187)

It is almost exclusively women who carry out the disciplining of Anna, and this is a question to which I return below. The experiences Anna has with men, by contrast, are comparatively few. Towards the end of the play, she is summoned to see the director who, rather than punishing her for her rebellious behaviour, attempts to take on a 'fatherly' role. His manner of punishing Anna may not be physically violent, but rather represents the way in which the state uses more insidious methods to control rebellious women. He has an overbearing and patronising attitude towards the inmates, a characteristic which is evident in his chastisement of Anna: 'noi siamo una grande famiglia. Voi siete le mie dilette figliole, le guardiane sono le vostre sorelle e io sono il padre che osserva, medita e premia

[14] In 1954, an investigation into Italian prisons was undertaken by an American sociologist, who found that, 'although the church and penal system are technically separated so far as the penal system is concerned [...], there is little doubt that religion plays a prominent role in each institution' (Wolfgang 1954: 147).

secondo i meriti di ciascuno' (*ibid*: 220). Through his cloyingly paternal speech, Maraini is presenting her audience with a representation of the state's regulation of womanhood and its attempts to observe, discipline and eventually destroy those who do not submit: 'tu, piccola Anna, uccello rabbioso e smarrito, vorresti volare con le tue piccole ali chissà per quali cieli liberi e puri e invece vai continuamente a sbattere il tuo capino fragile contro i vetri di una gabbia' (*ibid*: 220). In an investigation into women's prisons in the nineteenth century, Mara Dodge recognised the contradictory position of male officials in female penitentiaries: 'women's bodies could not be subjected to the same form of discipline as men's' (1999: 914). Dodge's stance is problematic (she also argues that 'women's *unique bodily needs* imposed additional burdens' (*ibid*: 914. Emphasis added)), but her identification of the particular challenges faced by the men who were required to discipline female inmates does resound with Anna's treatment.

Discussing theatrical works which present, like Maraini's text, experiences of incarceration, Thomas Fahy and Kimball King (2003) explore the particular impact that such performances can evoke. They note that, on stage, an intimacy can be created between audience and actor, which is unlike that of reading a novel or watching a television show. In the theatre, the viewer too in enclosed and entrapped, even if it is of their own choosing. For Fahy and King, the result of this idiosyncratic environment is a unique sense of confinement which, in turn, provokes audience sympathy for those on stage: 'this shared experience [of confinement] makes us aware of our role as passive observers and our tacit acceptance of the abuses within the prison system' (2003: 1). In *Il manifesto*, this tool incites in the audience strong feelings of support for Anna and antipathy towards the director, and indeed the external state that he represents. Daniela Cavallaro (2000) specifically considers audience reactions to Maraini's play, focusing

upon her use of a Greek-like chorus of four deceased women whose conversations with Anna punctuate the play. For Cavallaro, this technique 'gives this play a tone that goes well beyond that of pure testimony' (2000: 136), transcending the boundaries of life and death and injecting into it, a 'poetic, more reflexive, almost sacral' style (*ibid*: 136). The result of Maraini's stylistic choice is for the audience, with Anna, to be reborn and brought to 'new life': 'the final scene draws […] on the analogy Anna-Christ, by promising a resurrection and salvation that will not only be individual, but for all women' (*ibid*: 138). Not only does the performance promote a heightened sense of sympathy, therefore, but it also offers a profound sense of hope, redemption and, indeed, resistance.

Maraini's other work that was produced as a consequence of her investigations into women's prisons likewise goes beyond a simple documentary style. *Memorie di una ladra* offers readers a narrative in which the prison represents, once again, women's subjugation under patriarchy. It was born from Maraini's meeting with a particular prisoner, Teresa; Maraini conducted numerous interviews with her, the results of which form the novel.[15] Whilst it can thus be read on one level as an anthropological study and a decidedly political work, it is also much more than that: the narrative's novelistic style is forged by both the creative elements that Maraini builds into the text and her clear fondness for Teresa. Maraini has since discussed both what drew her to this particular prisoner, and her process in compiling the novel:

> Teresa diviene personaggio, con una storia da raccontare. Ma non è sola. Accanto a lei, altre donne si raccontano. Altre storie si intrecciano a quella di Teresa: vicende vere, che vogliono essere ascoltate, esaminate, indagate. Il loro privato, di violenza e di sopraffazione, ma anche di fiera indipendenza, è così messo a nudo. (*Storia di Piera*: 44)

[15] The novel was later made into a film starring Monica Vitti (*Teresa la ladra* 1973).

The novel is thus a chorus of women's voices, of stories of not only their mistreatment, but also their desire to overcome it. The voicing of marginalised women's experiences is a topos of Maraini's entire oeuvre and represents an area of discussion to which I return in more depth in Chapters Three and Six.

It begins, as did *Il manifesto*, with a description of Teresa's childhood and, just as Anna was born into poverty, so too was Teresa, whose unhappy fate was sealed at birth: 'dicono che sono nata male, mezza asfissiata dal cordone ombelicale che mi si era arrotolato attorno al corpo come un serpente' (*Memorie di una ladra*: 5). Teresa is a protagonist on the social and economic margins, in a degraded environment which offers little possibility of escape to a better life. The milieu she inhabits is, moreover, a male-dominated one, in which she loses her mother in early childhood and is left at the mercy of an uncaring father and numerous, indifferent brothers. She is forced to leave home as a teenager and becomes pregnant by Sisto, who refuses to marry her but consents to her living with him. Already at these early stages of the novel, a number of aspects of Teresa's personality are clear to the reader: evidently, she is a victim of her circumstances, but she is also dangerously naive. This is epitomised for the reader by Teresa's first experience of institutionalisation. Sisto authorises her incarceration in an asylum for the mentally ill in order to gain custody of their son, and Teresa is unable to respond to, or even understand, what is being done to her:

> Monto su quell'ambulanza con facilità, sempre perché ero una ingenua, ero rimasta paesana, non avevo capito mai niente. Monto sull'ambulanza e proprio mentre monto mi sento strappare via il bambino delle braccia. Dice: ora il pupo se lo porta la signorina che se no prende freddo [...]. Era già tutto progettato. Ma io non lo sospettavo. Ero babbea. Scema. (*ibid*: 32)

Once in the asylum, Teresa's lack of control continues. For almost a month she awaits the psychiatrist, trying not to cry in case this is taken as a sign of insanity.

Ultimately, a nurse helps her to write to one of her brothers who is able to come to her aid and release her. Alongside Teresa's lack of self-awareness and credulous nature, what this part of the novel also demonstrates is the nature of the institution: an ineffectual system which promotes the cruel and irresponsible treatment of human beings. Teresa is left for days without being seen by a doctor, no-one explains to her why she is there, she is surrounded by the mentally unwell and she is in physical pain from the unexpressed milk in her breasts; this latter 'punishment' the prohibition of an act that is implicitly gendered. Nonetheless, in her typically buoyant manner, Teresa is able to joke about her circumstances, albeit in a tone that is laced with fear and anxiety: 'guardavo tutte queste scatenate e mi dicevo: a forza di stare qui non vorrei che mi venisse la pazzia pure a me' (*ibid*: 35).

In Maraini's text, *Il treno per Helsinki,* a novel to which I return later in this chapter, the reader is presented with another noteworthy example of the treatment of women within asylums. Asia, a woman who befriends the novel's protagonist, describes how, as an adolescent, she had fallen in love with her homosexual uncle. In an attempt to make herself androgynous, and thus more attractive to him, she cut at her breasts. Her mother discovered her and had her committed to an asylum where, 'a furia di elettroshock sono diventata una specie di vegetale. Dicevo sì a tutto. Allora hanno detto che sono guarita' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 198). In this short episode, Maraini makes evident once again how certain institutions are designed to carry out the work of the state in repressing and controlling the disruptive female. Asia could be considered to typify the sort of rebellious femininity that the state seeks to repress: when the novel's protagonist Armida, a relatively enlightened woman, first meets her, even she is shocked by her language and forthright attitude to sex: 'non si capisce se scherza o fa sul serio. Le altre la guardano fra

scandalizzate e affascinate' (*ibid*: 184). This description resonates with Maraini's presentation of Anna in *Il manifesto,* and undeniably so too could Teresa be deemed 'disruptive'. Her associates are thieves, prostitutes and con artists, and her life is that of an archetypal picaresque character, characterised by her adventures through the most squalid parts of Rome. They are three characters who transgress what can be considered the archetypal boundaries of femininity itself.

Returning briefly to Dodge's analysis of female prisoners, we find a mirroring of this opinion. Given that women were viewed as purer or more moral 'by nature' than men, Dodge suggests that any woman who violated the law, be it a sexual, legal or moral offence, was seen as having transgressed more than a male contemporary (1999: 908). She terms this, 'the negated female ideal' (*ibid*: 909).[16] Elsewhere, Patricia O'Brien similarly writes that, 'female criminality was perceived through the grid of what was regarded as the inferior biological makeup of women. It was explicitly linked to what were understood as fundamental traits of the feminine physiology – delicacy, nervousness, susceptibility' (1982: 68). Dodge and O'Brien's work cannot fail to remind us of Cesare Lombroso's 1893 treatise, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale,* in which he asserted that criminal traits could be identified early in women through certain physical anomalies. The text proved so convincing at the time that in the introduction to the 1895 English edition, it was asserted that Lombroso's hypotheses 'establish beyond the possibility of a doubt that the [female] criminal population exhibits a high percentage of defective biological conditions' (1895: xviii).

One result of this type of discourse was, and remains, the victimisation and mistreatment of women in prisons:

[16] In Chapters Three and Four of this thesis I consider in more detail instances in Maraini's work where women are themselves perpetrators, and attempt to reconcile the difficulty of looking at violence committed against women who have themselves committed violence.

> Women were more likely than men to receive the most severe sanctions, including solitary confinement [...] There exist two distinct institutional forms of surveillance and control operating at the male and female facilities. [...] Women in prison are overpoliced and overcontrolled. (Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998: 76-78)

Such a report takes on meaning for us when placed side by side with Teresa's experiences, for – where *Il manifesto* demonstrated the ways in which institutions sought to control women's minds – *Memorie di una ladra* draws sustained attention to the damage that they can do to women's bodies. Teresa's first experience of imprisonment occurs during the war years:

> Alle Mantellate allora il trattamento era terribile. Davano poco da mangiare, i muri erano come spugne piene d'acqua, non c'erano coperte, non c'erano gabinetti. Dovevi farla nel vaso e poi andarla a buttare nel pozzo comune. Per il freddo e l'umido molte diventavano tubercolotiche. (*Memorie di una ladra*: 65)

Any word of protest from the inmates is violently and rapidly disciplined, as Teresa learns: 'una volta che ho protestato [...] mi ha fatta legare al letto, ha ordinato di mettermi il giubetto, m'ha fatto prendere a botte dalle guardie' (*ibid*: 65). Yet, her spirit prevails and it is not long before she rebels, and is punished, once again. This time, however, her penalty is isolation: 'io per non dargli soddisfazione, cantavo. [...] Dopo qualche giorni però non cantavo più. Mi girava la testa, avevo una debolezza grandissima, ero diventata magra, smunta. Con sei giorni di pane e acqua mi sono ridotta la metà' (*ibid*: 73). Institutional violence has thus succeeded in breaking Teresa's body and spirit, through the combined impact of physical violence and psychological punishment.

The image of prison life that Teresa portrays is a degraded one, characterised by hunger, cold, sickness and abuse. Two of Teresa's experiences, however, are particularly appalling. In the first, as a punishment for unruly behaviour whilst already an inmate, she is sent to a different prison, in which she is completely alone. This, for a person of

Teresa's exuberant character, is one of the worst punishments she could experience: 'non c'era nemmeno una formica in questo carcere, c'ero solo io [...]. Io ero abituata in mezzo alla confusione, in mezzo alle amiche mie. Quella solitudine m'accorava' (*ibid*: 221). Teresa discovers that she had been sent there by a particularly cruel prison director, who had previously known and despised one of her brothers: evidently, the directors are answerable to no-one and free to abuse their power in any way they choose. Teresa is moved from the prison only after she feigns suicide, but her next destination is little better: this time she finds herself in a criminal asylum. In the asylum, Teresa observes, and experiences herself, a full range of physically violent treatment at the hands of the guards. The women are left for hours in their own faeces and urine, they eat soup full of dirt, they are forced under cold showers and they receive regular beatings.

From both Anna's and Teresa's experiences of incarceration, it is clear that, for Maraini, prisons, asylums and even schools are sites of both women's oppression and physical and psychological violence. I noted early on that the ultimate aim of incarceration was 're-education'; what has been witnessed, however, is not the kind of education that a modern-day audience would expect. Rather, it involves the repeated attempts to indoctrinate inmates into the 'feminine ideal', qualities such as docility and passivity that were similarly highlighted in the previous chapter. In a study of more recent prison narratives, Jan Alber suggests that texts which foreground women inmates tend to deconstruct traditional gender roles, and often ultimately establish protagonists who can be judged to fit Halberstam's model of 'female masculinity' (2007: 8).[17] In Maraini's narratives, I would conversely argue that where her protagonists begin as rebellious

[17] Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) used the subject of female masculinity 'to explore a queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity'; the paradigm she sought to create was one that 'calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies' (1998: 9).

characters, who disrupt traditional notions of femininity, incarceration is aimed instead at repressing this and disciplining them into submission. When this fails, violence and force are used to control and discipline. The final part of this chapter returns to a consideration of these narratives and focuses upon the ways in which her protagonists resist this attempted suppression. Before that, however, I turn to an examination of one other way in which the state and its institutions seek to oppress Maraini's characters, and that is through its regulation of maternity and reproduction.

III. Institutionalised Motherhood: *Il treno per Helsinki*

Looking back at *Memorie di una ladra* Maraini commented:

> Questo libro appartiene a un momento ideologico che non rinnego: ma oggi la mia ottica è diversa; oggi penso che sia più importante parlare, scrivere di sé. Il femminismo mi insegna che il primo sfruttato sono io, che la conoscenza di me può servire a capire meglio anche l'emarginazione altrui. (in Sumeli Weinberg 1993: 71-72)

Il treno per Helsinki, published in 1984, does in many ways represent such a return to the more private, personal style of narrative that characterised Maraini's debut novels, as seen in *La vacanza* and *L'età del malessere*. The main focus of the novel is an exploration of the protagonist, Armida's love affair with Miele, and represents Maraini's tentative steps towards analysing masculinity and its seductive nature.[18] Critics have additionally identified the novel as the most autobiographical of all Maraini's early works, narrating, as it does, Armida's difficult pregnancy and subsequent stillbirth, something which Maraini also experienced as a young woman (Sumeli Weinberg 1993: 87; Gabriele 2004a: 71).[19]

[18] This will be explored at length in Chapter Four, which takes masculinity and the perpetrators of gender violence as its theme.
[19] Maraini discusses this unhappy experience in *Un clandestino a bordo* (1996) and *Il nave per Kobe* (pp. 32-33).

Nevertheless, the socio-political aspects of the novel cannot be denied: alongside Armida's personal story, the text also recounts the events of the late 1960s in Europe. This includes the political activities of Armida and her friends and their journey to Helsinki, where they take part in the *Festival internazionale dei giovani.* Furthermore, in a similar manner to *Donna in guerra,* the narrative explores aspects of women's involvement in communism and the ways in which, within the party, there was no place for female subjectivity. Armida is asked to write a play for a politically aware group of actors; however, once she has done so, the male director makes his own changes to it and allows her no further access to her work. Besides which, by tackling the question of maternity, the novel reflects discourses that were common to the contemporaneous Italian women's movement, in particular the extent to which women in Italy were viewed primarily as biological reproducers and nurturers. For these reasons, the novel constitutes a further example of a text in which the denunciation of women's public status and the state's control of their bodies are central themes.

When the novel opens, Armida is married to Paolo, an artist, by whom she becomes pregnant. Although the pregnancy was unplanned, it delights both parents, particularly Paolo:

> Già afferrato dal fascino della paternità. Salta tutte le fasi della gravidanza. Lo vede già grande questo figlio con le gambine chiuse in un paio di pantaloncini di lanetta la mano nella mano di suo padre intenti a seguire la lunga difficile strada della vita. (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 53)

His enthusiasm soon begins to suffocate Armida, especially when he suggests that they use her studio as the baby's room; already she realises that her personality and independence must take second place to the needs of the baby. There is equally the implicit suggestion that, once the baby is born, Armida will have no further need to work. Certainly, such an attitude would not have been particularly rare in Italy at the time, and indeed constitutes

one of the major themes of Oriana Fallaci's earlier novel, *Lettera a un bambino mai nato* (1975).[20] Fallaci's text details the deep ambivalence one woman feels towards maternity and abortion, a sentiment shared, perhaps, by many women. It describes her experiences of being a single, pregnant, working woman who seeks to combine her career with pregnancy. Early in the novel, the doctor informs the narrator of her pregnancy: '"Congratulazioni, Signora". Automaticamente ho corretto: "Signorina". È stato come tirargli uno schiaffo' (Fallaci 1975: 19). The doctor's reaction to her unmarried state serves as a reminder of Italy's strong Catholic tradition, a consequence of which is that the association between women and motherhood is deeply ingrained in the Italian consciousness. As Caldwell describes, 'the Italian family especially, [is] structured around women as mothers. The basis for much political discussion [...] is that women *are*, in some deep, inexplicable way, the family' (1991: 2. Emphasis in original).[21]

The notion was one that Italian feminists began to problematise in their writings and manifestos:

> L'uomo è 'padre' come può essere considerato 'figlio', 'fratello', 'amico', 'collega' di qualcuno: la paternità è un attributo che può qualificare, insieme a molti altri, la vita di un uomo. Essere 'madre', invece, pare avere un significato ben più complesso e denso di conseguenze nella vita di una donna. (Bruzzichelli and Algini 1976: 67)

Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977) was amongst the first texts to articulate in depth patriarchy's regulation and institutionalisation of motherhood (Giorgio 2002: 11). As Rich stated at the time, 'the patriarchal institution of motherhood is not the "human condition" any more than rape, prostitution and slavery

[20] Robin Pickering-Iazzi's essay on motherhood in four Italian women's writing reads Fallaci's novel alongside Maraini's *Donna in guerra*, suggesting that both texts 'interpret a period of disrupture between the traditional attitudes and values of institutionalised motherhood and alternative notions that reflect women's knowledge and experience' (1989: 325).

[21] A more recent example of the imposition of motherhood by the Catholic Church can be found in the 2004 decision by Pope John Paul II to beatify a woman who died in 1962 after refusing a potentially lifesaving abortion.

are' (1977: 34). The text was one which evidently resounded with Maraini's own experiences, as, in 1979, she published a review of it in the journal *Signs*, which related Rich's thesis to Maraini's own experiences. Maraini writes:

> When I was pregnant I [too] could no longer write: I would vomit every time I sat down at my desk. [...] And just like the author, I too started to knit – a peculiar thing, since I had never done it before and did it badly [...]. But I felt, for reasons that were not clear to me, that I *had* to adapt myself to motherhood, by changing myself in order not to 'harm the baby'. (1979b: 690. Emphasis in original)

As already mentioned, *Il treno per Helsinki* can be considered a semi-autobiographical work. By consequence it becomes evident how, in the eyes of her husband, her family, and society at large, Armida's pregnancy likewise represents the realisation of her biological destiny.

Like Maraini, Armida does not have an easy pregnancy and at an early stage she begins to haemorrhage and is subsequently hospitalised for almost the full term. Once in hospital, Armida's body is no longer her own. She becomes merely a vessel for the child, whose survival is desired at all costs, even if this means the decline in Armida's physical and psychological health: 'gli ordini sono: immobilità assoluta mangiare molto riposare dormire bere molto e non pensare a niente' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 65). The medical treatment Armida receives is aggressive, and yet she chooses to succumb, in a state of 'passività indifesa' (*ibid*: 70), to the orders of the doctors, her husband, and mother-in-law who all take the decision, 'di fare questo figlio costi quel che costi' (*ibid*: 72). Her pregnancy also entails the renunciation of her very identity to the foetus, who, 'vuole che tutte le mie attenzioni i miei pensieri le mie voglie i miei languori siano per lui e solo per lui' (*ibid*: 71).

Throughout these pages of the novel, appropriating an effective stream-of-consciousness style, Maraini highlights quite how much maternity has become a traumatic

and painful experience for Armida. It forces her to give up her self-control, something which is represented, for Tommasina Gabriele, by:

> The vast amounts of food she must consume. [...] Like an out-of-control Alice in Wonderland, she swells up [...]. Eventually, Armida starts to vomit everything she eats, […] then notices her face in the mirror, 'gonfia di cibo maldigerito di noia e di stupida rassegnazione' [*Il treno per Helsinki*: 77]. (2004a: 72).

The passage is reminiscent once again of Fallaci's novel, in which the protagonist experiences a similarly difficult pregnancy and is confined to bed rest. Fallaci's mother-to-be, however, rejects her doctors' warnings, leaving her hospital bed for a business trip: an action which, her doctor informs her, is tantamount to murder: 'mi ha definito assassina [...] ha tuonato che vengo meno ai doveri più fondamentali di madre e di donna' (1975: 62). For John Gatt-Rutter, the novel's central theme indeed involves, 'the clash between the interests and rights of the foetus, as a potential person, and the interests and rights of the mother herself, as an actual person' (1996: 64). Writing in 1976, Maraini addressed similar questions surrounding maternity, stating:

> La donna viene al mondo con un enorme potere che è quello della creazione. [...] Oggi e ormai da lungo tempo, la maternità non è più un potere per la donna, anzi è un non-potere. Il momento del parto che dovrebbe essere il momento della sua forza, è in realtà il momento della sua debolezza. Infatti la donna non partorisce per sé, ma per conti di terzi. E quindi il parto non può che essere doloroso, drammatico, lacerante. (1976c: 62)

For Maraini, childbirth can thus become, 'una cosa violenta e mortificante' for women (*ibid*: 63), the fundamental expression of patriarchal control over their bodies. She returns to a similar theme in the 1996 essay, *Un clandestino a bordo*, an extended letter to Enzo Siciliano. In it, Maraini likens maternity to the experiences of the protagonist of Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* (1912), who takes aboard an unknown swimmer (Maraini was contemporaneously working on a translation of the story). Maraini deliberates upon the fact that whilst maternity had once been a way for women 'per provare […] di essere

dotata di un potere forte, il solo di cui siano state storicamente dotate le donne', it has now become, 'nella cultura dei padri, […] un evento di estrema passività' (*Un clandestino a bordo*: 18).

Returning to a consideration of Maraini's novels through a Foucauldian lens, I would also argue that in *Il treno per Helsinki*, the hospital can be viewed as another branch of Foucault's 'carceral city', exercising its disciplinary power over its female patients. Jason Haslam suggests that, 'in Foucault's paradigm, [...] social institutions function to maintain the status quo, to enforce values and codes of behaviour that serve to protect the status of the people who occupy the higher realm of society' (2005: 9). In Maraini's texts, this 'higher realm' can be read as the patriarchal state, which seeks self-protection through the enforcement of codes of feminine behaviour, manifested here in the promotion of motherhood. McNay has likewise defined disciplinary power as 'a normalizing rather than repressive force' in which, 'the organisation, disciplining and subjection of the human body [...] provide[s] a submissive, productive and trained source of labour power' (1994: 92-93). For the state's female citizens, this can be viewed as located primarily through reproduction. The panoptic concept of permanent visibility also encompasses a certain level of judgement, which means that women who do not 'live up' to the maternal paradigm are effectively outside 'normal' femininity. It is, once again, in *Un clandestino a bordo* that Maraini writes, 'le Chiese, gli Stati, i poteri costituiti hanno sempre reclamato a sé la regolamentazione del corpo sessuato […]. Il controllo della riproduzione è la più antica preoccupazione di ogni legislatore' (*Un clandestino a bordo*: 29).

In all of the instances of 'discipline and punishment' that I have identified thus far, what becomes apparent is that, often, it is not just the state that is at work in oppressing Maraini's at times rebellious protagonists. Indeed, the 'agents' who implement such

measures are numerous. They include the ubiquitous nuns of *Memorie di una ladra* and *Il manifesto* and countless individuals, among them Anna's father, Teresa's partner Sisto and Armida's husband. These characters reinforce institutional discourses and carry out the work of the state, facilitating the internment of Anna and Teresa and encouraging the 'fulfilment' of Armida's 'maternal destiny'. In Chapter Four, I turn to the question of the perpetrators of violence in Maraini's works, isolating certain characteristics that recur in a number of works.[22] Here, I would argue that in Maraini's overtly political texts of the 1970s and early 1980s, no one is guiltless of the perpetration of acts of violence against her protagonists. These characters demonstrate how Foucauldian power is indeed dispersed throughout society, and that citizens can be both subject to, and *the bearers of*, disciplinary power.

Whilst in hospital, Armida befriends a number of other female patients, most of whom are there due to 'aborti fatti male' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 64). They provide Maraini with a platform to explore what could be considered the opposing side to compulsory maternity, that is abortion.[23] What she describes is a concept that recurs elsewhere in her writings: that abortion, albeit representative of a woman's right to choose, also exemplifies women's lack of control over their bodies (Bellesia 2000: 123). Maraini has argued that: 'l'aborto è vissuto in maniera alienata, per conto di altri. Non siamo insomma libere di abortire così come non siamo libere di partorire' (1976c: 62). It is also a further example of an act of violence that is committed against women, as I noted in reference to Enrica's abortion in the previous chapter. Just like Enrica's traumatic experience, so too have the

[22] In fact, just as here these 'agents' are both male and female, so too in Chapter Four do I analyse both male and female perpetrators.

[23] In *Un clandestino a bordo*, Maraini writes that abortion and maternity are indeed, 'legati l'uno all'altra come due gemelli siamesi' (p. 20). Here too, in a similar mirroring of Maraini's experiences with those of Armida, she describes the meetings she had in the 1970s with women who had ended up hospitalised following their attempts at 'at-home' abortions (*ibid*: 17).

women who are in hospital with Armida all suffered 'feti trinciati uteri bucati da mani inesperte avvelenamenti da prezzemolo e da candeggina' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 64). Vannina's abortion in *Donna in guerra,* is similarly described in all its horrifying detail:

> Mi ha ficcato le mani dure, gelate nel corpo. Mi ha aperta, squarciata, raschiata a lungo con insistenza. Per il dolore brutale, selvaggio, mi mordevo le mani.[...] Sono svenuta. Mi sono risvegliata. Passavano le ore, i giorni, gli anni, lo scavo non finiva mai. Tutto il male del mondo si era accumulato nel fondo del mio ventre [...]. Dopo, volevo solo riposare. E invece mi hanno spinta fuori. (*Donna in guerra*: 267).[24]

Maraini proposes the definitive example of the violence of abortion in her 1985 novel, *Isolina* (which I analyse in the following chapter). In this text the protagonist's body is abused in the most brutal of ways: she dies from a botched abortion, carried out in the back of an inn, by means of a fork inserted into her. The distress, pain and shame that are inherent in Maraini's characters' experiences of abortion render it a degrading experience, which, in turn, serves to promote 'compulsory maternity'. 'Good' women are fulfilled through their reproductive capacities and not through interrupted motherhood. All of these examples consequently illustrate both the horror that abortion can represent for women, but also the lack of control it can, paradoxically, signify. Abortion is yet another way that Maraini sees women's bodies as being under patriarchal control, rather than their own. In spite of this, as one of the women remarks to Armida, for the majority of men, 'gli aborti sono cosarelle di donne piccole inconvenienze...' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 66).

For these reasons, the importance that the Italian women's movement placed on the abortion issue was vital. Not only did the legalisation of abortion signify a taking back of control for women, but it also led to new debate about the perceptions and expectations of Italian women. As Caldwell explains, 'the campaign for the law led to a widely diffused

[24] Vannina's abortion follows her rape by her husband, who attempts to impregnate her whilst she sleeps. One violation thus follows another in the text; indeed, the abortion allows Vannina to recognise her husband's act as a violent one (Bellesia 2000: 122).

debate on sexuality, motherhood and the mother-child bond, pleasure and the body, the difference between men and women, and its links with other conditions of life and living' (1991: 98). By consistently foregrounding the issues of maternity and abortion – from her representations of Enrica, Vannina and Armida's experiences, to those of the other women that Armida encounters in hospital – Maraini too contributed to such debates.

Eventually, however, Armida loses her baby. She then chooses to leave Paolo, who thoughtlessly suggests that they try for another baby just days after she leaves hospital. This is the first step towards her decision to take control of her life; later she will seize further control by renting her own apartment, taking up writing again and beginning a relationship with Miele. In both my Introduction and the previous chapter, I emphasised that what characterised many of Maraini's early works was the possibility offered to her protagonists of resistance and escape, exemplified here by Armida's experiences. The concluding section of this chapter explores how, in all the texts under consideration, such resistance is often facilitated by relationships between women.

IV. Resistance, Communities and Consciousness

I argue throughout this thesis that an important area of distinction between Maraini's early works and her more recent ones is how the former generally allow her characters to develop resistance to their mistreatment. However, comparing *Il manifesto* and *Memorie di una ladra,* Sumeli Weinberg noted that:

> Mentre Teresa [...] rimane la popolana ribelle ma inconsapevole della propria sorte, Anna [...] avrà il compito di riscattare la situazione di stallo in cui non solo Teresa ma anche le altre eroine della Maraini di quel periodo erano venute a trovarsi. (1993: 141-42)

To a certain extent, Sumeli Weinberg is correct: whilst the climax of the play is Anna's manifesto, which ultimately leads to the female inmates taking control of their prison, the novel ends with Teresa seemingly unchanged. She is still a victim of her environment who retains the innocence and naivety that has been the cause of so many of her troubles.

Anna finds personal strength in other women throughout the play, not only her fellow inmates, but also the chorus of deceased women to whom she tells her story. For Virginia Picchietti, this 'chorus' provides Anna with both a forum for self-expression (2002: 112-13), and an essential female genealogy that has been missing from her life (*ibid*: 162). In this way, it can be likened to the *autocoscienza* sessions that were taking place amongst Italian women at the time of the play's publication.[25] Picchietti also maintains, however, that Anna is also able to inspire other women, raise their consciousness, offer them alternative possibilities and encourage them to find strength in each other. She suggests that, as such, she could also be seen to exemplify the feminist practice of *affidamento* (*ibid*: 112-16). Both processes intended to create networks of women and to encourage mutually supportive relationships between them. However, whilst *autocoscienza* stressed the 'auto-induced, self-determined, self-directed' nature of consciousness-raising, *affidamento* referred to relationships between two women, in which one entrusts herself to the other, choosing her as a symbolic guide and mentor (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 6-11). By offering examples of both practices, the play demonstrates quite how much it is a product of its time. It also reflects Maraini's belief that opposition to violent situations was a possibility, and one that could be achieved through the creation of positive links between women.

[25] In her reading of the plays of Franca Rame, Maggie Günsberg suggests that something similar is at work in her texts: 'the first step towards the creation of genuine dramatic female protagonism might be to deconstruct traditional female characterization in order to reconstruct a more authentic feminine version (a process rather akin to that of *autocoscienza* […])' (1997: 205).

Sumeli Weinberg suggested that Teresa was not offered such an opportunity. I would argue, on the other hand, that *Memorie di una ladra* does in fact chart a process of change in Teresa. Furthermore, whilst she is perhaps not intellectually capable of inspiring other women to action as Anna does, Teresa's involvement with them does have a positive impact on her own life. Through the course of the novel, she forges many close friendships with women, which help her through the most difficult stages of incarceration:

> A questa Frosinone sono stata proprio male. Per fortuna c'era gente buona, generosa.[...] Quando avevano qualcosa da mangiare, mi chiamavano, mi dicevano: tié Teresa, eccoti un pezzo di pane, eccoti un'alice, eccoti una sigaretta. (*Memorie di una ladra*: 71)

Together, the inmates also demonstrate small, but significant, acts of resistance against the prison guards and other figures of authority. This occurs especially in the asylum, where Teresa discovers she is not the only sane woman to have been sent there as a punishment. With the support of her fellow interns, Teresa feels confident enough to approach the director and demand better treatment for them all, a request that is eventually granted. Indeed, it seems that both Anna's and Teresa's experiences are in line with Alber's suggestion that women-centred prison narratives often propose the prison as a site for the development of a productive all-female community (2007: 9). I would additionally argue that Teresa's very involvement with Maraini, who shared the proceeds of the novel with her, in itself offers the strongest possibility of escape from the poverty and degradation of her past. The conclusion to the text gives the reader hope that Teresa may achieve her aim of changing her life:

> Quando esco, basta, voglio smettere di fare la ladra, mi voglio trovare un lavoro di sarta, anche se non so cucire [...]. Voglio mettere su casa, con Ercoletto e Orlandino, tranquilla, quieta, in un posto bello, pacifico. In carcere non ci voglio tornare più. (*Memorie di una ladra*: 297)

Examples of female solidarity and productive female relationships are readily available in *Donna in guerra*. Picchietti in fact argues that Vannina's eventual liberation is made possible predominantly through her friendships with women (2002: 116). She describes these relationships in turn: Tota and Giottina, two local women, who mother and try to protect Vannina; Suna, who introduces her to feminist politics; and a fellow teacher, Rosa, to whom Vannina turns after her abortion (*ibid*: 116-23). The support that Vannina receives from these women differs greatly, but all of them allow her to develop the strength she needs to leave her husband and to abort the child that he had insisted they have.

Less critical attention has been paid, however, to Armida's female relationships, which are, nonetheless, significant. In hospital she bonds with the other women who offer her a warm and protective female community: '[la mia] storia le commuove. Mi hanno preso sotto la loro protezione' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 64). Additionally, I would propose that is it through her friendships with two women in particular that Armida achieves greater self-awareness and takes decisive steps to regaining control of her identity. Firstly Ada, one of the friends with whom she travels to Helsinki, helps Armida to understand her complex relationship with Miele and her symbolic imprisonment in the 'mondo dei Padri' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 125).[26] Observing Ada's unconventional marriage (she and her husband are not in love with each other, but are both in love with the same woman) allows Armida an insight into an alternative, and liberating, way of life. Secondly, Armida's brief encounters with the aforementioned Asia's disruptive and rebellious nature open her up to a different version of womanhood. Literally and symbolically drunk on Asia's potent

[26] I have already noted that in Chapter Four I return to the seductive nature of masculinity; I revisit, moreover, this particular terminology, which Maraini uses elsewhere.

liquor, Armida is able for the first time to speak honestly and confidently to a large audience about herself and her politics:

> Comincio a caso senza pensarci. E poi la lingua va avanti da sola. Non so assolutamente quello che sto dicendo. Ogni tanto mi accorgo che sto parlando del viaggio e di tutto quello che è successo durante i dieci giorni della sua corsa attraverso l'Europa. Il silenzio si fa palpabile. Teso. Non vedo niente. Ma sento che ascoltano. [...] Mi tiro indietro. Ammutolisco. E sono raggiunta da uno scroscio di applausi. (*ibid*: 203)

After this 'performance', whilst Miele chastises her for speaking about things that he claims she does not understand, both Asia and Ada offer her their support: 'mi hanno detto che sei stata molto coraggiosa al Palladium. C'era della gente entusiasta. [...] Eri straordinaria [...] un piccolo pezzo di teatro comico. Una farsa. Eri uno spasso e la gente ammattiva per te' (*ibid*: 207-08).

It is a common adage that where there is power, there is resistance. Scholars have noted, however, that Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* makes remarkably little reference to the response of those who are subject to disciplinary power: 'a serious problem with Foucault's notion of the body is that it is conceived essentially as a passive entity, upon which power stamps its own images' (McNay 1992: 12). The text, for McNay, is biased towards an analysis of those who hold power within institutions, rather than considering the point of view of those who are being controlled. What she argues instead, is that 'wherever domination is imposed, resistance will invariably arise [...]. Repression and resistance are not ontologically distinct; rather repression produces its own resistance' (*ibid*: 101). In the texts under consideration in this chapter, McNay's hypothesis rings true: for all four protagonists, resistance is born from their repression. Significantly, moreover, it is female friendships and communities that play a fundamental role in this resistance. Through them the protagonists develop self-awareness, effect both personal and social change, and, ultimately, escape from the state's control of their minds and

bodies. Offering this as a form of resistance is, I believe, one of the most fundamental ways in which Maraini's texts can be viewed as rooted in the women's movement, in which similar propositions were advanced.

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which institutional violence and compulsory maternity are representative of the state's control of Maraini's female protagonists. I have analysed the treatment of women in a number of institutions, the ways in which they are controlled and damaged by them, and how they are offered the possibility of escape. Having explored this socially aware, more public element of her work, in the following chapter I return to her 'private' narratives, with an exploration of the historical silencing of women and alternative strategies for resistance.

CHAPTER THREE: SILENCED VICTIMS IN *ISOLINA* (1985), *LA LUNGA VITA DI MARIANNA UCRÌA* (1990), *MARIA STUARDA* (1980) AND *CHARLOTTE CORDAY* (1989)

The previous chapter constituted an examination of a number of texts that were published at the peak of the women's movement in Italy and proposed how they could be identified as products of Maraini's own involvement in Italian second wave feminism. In this chapter I focus upon a selection of her texts that were published slightly later, but which also reflect an initiative of the women's movement, both in Italy and elsewhere: that of the recovery, discovery and (re)-creation of texts by women, in an attempt to give a voice to what was considered to be the centuries-long silencing of women.

This was an interdisciplinary initiative, carried out in a variety of ways by both individuals and groups of women. The formation of the Società italiana delle storiche in 1989 marked an attempt by Italian female historians to build networks, to carry out joint research and, 'innovare i processi di produzione e trasmissione della conoscenza' (Passerini in Società italiana delle storiche 1990: 45). As Joan Kelly has expressed, 'women's history has a dual goal: to restore women to history and to restore our history to women' (1984: 1), whilst Paola Di Cori writes that feminist historical projects were formed to combat traditional historical representation, which was, 'basato sull'eliminazione e *sulla riduzione al silenzio* della componente femminile' (1996: 10. Emphasis added). Contemporaneously, female authors were producing works of creative literature that mirrored this tendency. Reflecting upon the types of narrative that can be considered products of the Italian women's movement, Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum affirms that, 'a considerable body [...] had been produced by the mid-eighties on themes of re-discovering,

or creating, women's culture based on women's experience' (1986: 179). Similarly, in their analysis of Italian women's writing, Marotti and Brooke argue that:

> Much of Italian women's literary production consists of interpretations of women's positions in past and present history. Through fictional and nonfictional forms of narration, writers give voice to those who have been silenced, and create stories for those who were excluded from history. (1999: 15)

It is this explicit desire to give a voice to those who have been silenced that I identify within the texts analysed in this chapter.[1] I likewise demonstrate that they all represent Maraini's tendency during this period to recover and create stories about women from past and more recent history. A brief glance at her impressive oeuvre of plays affords the reader an insight into this commitment: identifiable are works on Clytemnestra (*I sogni di Clitennestra* 1978), Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (*Suor Juana* 1979), Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I (*Maria Stuarda* 1980), Charlotte Corday (*Charlotte Corday* 1989), Veronica Franco (*Veronica, meretrice e scrittora* 1991), Camille Claudel (*Camille* 1995) and Caterina da Siena (*I diguini di Catarina da Siena* 1999). Moreover, reflecting specifically on the role of silence in her work, Maraini has suggested that: 'c'è l'idea del mutismo che ricorre in molti dei miei testi e diviene il caratteristico silenzio femminile' (in Wright 1997b: 83). Certainly, in her novels too, she demonstrates a constant desire to give a voice to silenced women: in *Isolina* (1985), for instance, she attempts to excavate the truth surrounding a girl's death and, in so doing, allow this silenced girl the opportunity to 'speak' and tell her own story. Equally, in *Voci* (1994), as the title suggests, the voice is fundamental to a narrative in which, once again, Maraini narrates the search for the truth of

[1] Alongside two chapters on Maraini, Marotti and Brooke's volume contains analyses of, amongst others, Anna Banti, Elsa Morante, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli and Rosetta Loy, writers who have all – like Maraini – published works of historical fiction about women.

a young girl's murder, albeit a fictional one.[2] It is, however, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990), one of Maraini's most successful novels to date, which marks a peak in her literary investigation into the silencing of women.[3] In a statement about both the traditional silencing of women in the eighteenth century and the lasting effects of violence against women, the protagonist, Marianna, is struck deaf and dumb through the shock of being raped by her uncle as a young girl. Silence and marginalisation are thus explicitly expressed in the novel, yet Maraini subverts any assumed connotations of victimhood that Marianna's muteness could entail by allowing her to use her disability to her advantage. After initially learning to read and write as a means of survival, Marianna eventually gains access to education and autonomy through her family's extensive library.

This then, is a chapter that speaks more of resistance than oppression. The two previous chapters analysed Maraini's protagonists' eventual capacity to overcome their mistreatment. The present chapter highlights the ways in which, in the texts under consideration, Maraini re-appropriates the voice in order to put an end to the centuries of silenced women. This is not always as explicitly achieved as in *Isolina* and *La lunga vita*, and, for this reason, I focus initially on these two novels in tandem, before exploring two plays that re-appropriate the traditional stories of women from history and give a voice to the silence of their inner lives and emotions. I wish also to clarify that, whilst it could be argued that silencing does not constitute an explicit form of violence against women, this is a chapter that deals more with representation than reality. It demonstrates that, for Maraini,

[2] The purpose of the current chapter is, however, to focus upon women from history. As such, *Voci* and other texts which exploit the voice, but in a contemporary setting (also *Passi affrettati*) will be explored in subsequent chapters.

[3] *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* was an unprecedented success, and earned Maraini two of Italy's most celebrated prizes, the *Campiello* and the *Libro dell'anno*, it was published in eighteen countries and, in 1997, made into a film (Diaconescu-Blumenfeld and Testaferri 2000: 6). Maraini was also invited to adapt the novel for the stage (1991); she discusses responses to the novel in *Ho sognato una stazione*, a published conversation with Paolo di Paolo (2005: 124-25).

women's silencing is representative of the manifold other ways in which violence is done to their bodies. I likewise refer to the introductory comments of this thesis, in which I explained that my intention was not to focus solely on tangible forms of violence, such as murder, domestic abuse and rape, but also the less overt ways in which Maraini presents her readers with non-physical yet equally damaging forms of repression and mistreatment. Speaking at a conference on representations of gender violence in Italy, Maraini explicitly addressed the question of silence, maintaining that it is rarely a rational choice on the part of a woman, and indeed that 'it is always painful' (Maraini 2010c).

I. Breaking Women's Silences: *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* and *Isolina*

La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa, nearly twenty years after its publication, continues to constitute one of Maraini's most well known and also most scrutinised works.[4] In this story of a deaf-mute woman, who overcomes her disability to realise a life of independence and intellectual fulfilment, critics have read an attempt to 'universalise the female experience' through the assertion of a woman's voice (Wright 1997a). The novel has been interpreted as a representation of the position of women writers in a patriarchal society (Ryan-Scheutz 2008: 64) and a feminist revisiting of the eighteenth century (Marotti 2000). Its specific themes have also been addressed, such as motherhood (Amatangelo 2002; Fanning 2005) and its connection with the myth of Philomela (Brooke 1999). In spite of this full and far-reaching critical attention, however, the novel remains a most important text for any critic of Maraini. By approaching the historical novel, it marked a move in her

[4] See Colleen Ryan-Scheutz (2008) for a comprehensive outline of the many critical readings of the novel.

writing towards the exploration of different genres and styles.[5] Likewise, it indicated a shift towards a more personal focus in her narrative: Marianna is an aristocratic Sicilian ancestor of Maraini, whose portrait the author discovered during a visit to an old family residence.[6] Finally, given that it takes gender violence as its central theme, the novel is evidently of fundamental importance to this study.

Indeed, both *La lunga vita* and *Isolina* recount a female protagonist who suffers physical violence in its most extreme form. Whilst for Marianna this involves being raped by her uncle as a young child, the eponymous victim of *Isolina* is subject to a brutal abortion which results in her death, and her murdered body being butchered to destroy the evidence. Wood has in fact observed that, in the latter text, 'the invasion, control and eventual destruction of the female body by a dominant patriarchy is carried to its logical extreme' (1995a: 227). *Isolina* has also been read as marking the moment at which, '[Maraini's] compassion for the female victim reaches its consummate point' (Merry 1997: 187). The consequence of this patriarchal violence against both protagonists can in turn be identified as their silencing. In Isolina's case, the violence she suffers leads to her silence not only through her tragic death, but also though the suppression of her voice in the subsequent trial and countless media responses, as I discuss below. The traumatic effect of Marianna's rape expresses itself in a disability which leaves her voiceless, and with no memory of what she had experienced.

[5] In later texts, Maraini exploits a variety of different genres: *Voci* is a detective story, *Dolce per sé* (1997) is structured as an epistolary novel, *Colomba* (2004) has many fairytale elements, and *Il treno dell'ultima notte* (2008) is a further example of historical fiction.

[6] Since the novel's publication, a more autobiographical stance can be identified in Maraini's narrative, demonstrated through the novels *Bagheria* (1994), *La nave per Kobe* (2001) and *Il gioco dell'universo* (2008). I noted in the previous chapter how elements of *Il treno per Helsinki* can be deemed autobiographical and likewise in Chapter One how Maraini drew on her own experiences in the writing of her debut novels. In *La lunga vita* and these later works, by contrast, there is an explicit assertion by Maraini of her desire to investigate her own family and history; it is no longer something that is merely implied.

Repressed memory such as this is a recognised consequence of trauma and has manifested itself in literature that deals with painful events (Simborowski 2003: 14-19). Critics have thus considered literary silences as moments when an author is unwilling or *unable* to articulate certain things (*ibid*: 20). Additionally, due to their association with Holocaust writings in particular, such authorial omissions have been linked to a reluctance to re-live traumatic events, through the belief that the naming of an experience will make it real (Steiner 1967; Budick and Iser 1989). These are characteristics that are evident in Marianna's lack of speech, and Maraini's protagonist can thus be inserted into a long history of silenced victims; in fact, in her study of silence in Italian literature, Simborowski makes specific reference to Marianna (2003: 116). Simborowski juxtaposes her with the more traditional examples of virtuous, kind and quiet women in folk stories. She highlights the extent to which women's silence is deeply embedded in our culture, with loss of speech, dumbness and tongues all being symbols that feature regularly in this kind of literature. In works such as these, Simborowski maintains, 'male and female silence is presented differently. It is striking how often female speech is depicted as worthless nonsense, and, conversely, female silence is prized as virtuous or actually redeeming'; as such, 'society's stance has clearly been that the ideal role of the woman is a silent one' (*ibid*: 108-09).

Simborowski's position resonates not only with the feminist project of recovering female voices, as mentioned above, but also with numerous studies that seek to unpick this seemingly deep-seated link between women and silence. Literary connections between women and silence can be traced back to writers such as Virginia Woolf and Tillie Olsen, who sought to understand the reasons for women's absences from the literary canon.[7]

[7] See Virginia Woolf (1989), Tilly Olsen (1983) and Adrienne Rich (1979).

Evidently, with numerous women writers now published and their work recognised both by the public and by critics, this cannot still be considered the case. Yet, as Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fishkin so rightly state, 'there are still silences because women are not speaking, silences because women are not heard, silences because their voices are not understood and silences because their voices are not preserved' (1994: 13). These are precisely the silences that, throughout her career, Maraini has made it her purpose to break (Diaconescu-Blumenfeld 2000: 3).

Conversely, however, feminist critics have additionally maintained that such literary silences need not necessarily be solely destructive, but that silence can be something productive. In their study of women's silences, Hedges and Fishkin situate textual illustrations of women's deployment of silence as 'a form of resistance to the dominant discourse' (1994: 5). Italian feminist Marina Camboni similarly underlines the productive nature of women's historical silence, arguing that: 'to be unconscious means to allow words an inner experience. […] It also means to cultivate the silence which surrounds and nurtures words, the very silence out of which a woman's life might surface' (1993: 86). Such a theory has obvious echoes with Maraini's protagonist, Marianna, who does succeed in cultivating the silence that surrounds her and is, ultimately, able to present herself (through the written word) as a 'speaking' subject. Likewise, in *Isolina,* Maraini employs a number of narrative techniques that enable the girl's story to be told and, by consequence, for the abuse that she has endured to be denounced, thus resisting – as Marianna did – the dominant discourse.

Turning first to *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa,* it becomes important to consider exactly how Marianna is able to access language. Maraini narrates how, for her young protagonist to be 'heard', she must first learn to read and, more importantly, to write.

Encouraged by a loving father, Marianna spends long hours in the family library until she is able to communicate with those around her. By doing so through the written word, however, '[Marianna] must make use of a process that has been devised to perform male dominated functions' (Wright 1997a: 63).[8] Nevertheless, by appropriating language and re-inscribing it with her own rules and functions, Marianna manages to create her own form of speech: '"Papà fa scandalo con le sue ultime volontà." "Tolse al primogenito per dare alle figlie." "Cose che mai successero." [...] "La zia canonica dissente"' (*La lunga vita*: 65). Through its focus upon matters of household and gossip and its (necessarily) succinct manner, Marianna's 'speech' has what can be considered typically feminine overtones in both its content and its style. Nonetheless, as Wright further argues, through her use of language,

> [a] personal idiolect is forged and shared with the outer community. Her short and swift sentences unequivocally anticipate a reply, create a space around her, a connection with the surrounding reality that in turn makes her a pulsating being, situates her physically and emotionally in a structure of interrelated actions and reactions. [...] Her lacerated vocal chords do not hinder her ability to communicate at various levels, the physical, the emotional, the mental, the imaginative, the intellectual. (1997a: 63-66)

Regrettably, however, these levels of communication are frequently unwanted by those around Marianna, in particular her mother. When the latter informs Marianna that, aged just thirteen, she must marry her uncle, it is clear that she would have preferred silence to Marianna's brief and sarcastic (written) response, "alla mutola un marito?":

> [La madre] le sorride affettuosa ma di una affettuosità un poco recitata. A lei questa figlia sordomuta mette addosso un senso di pena insostenibile, un imbarazzo che la gela. Non sa come prenderla, come farsi intendere da lei. Già lo scrivere le piace poco: leggere poi la grafia degli altri è una vera tortura. (*La lunga vita*: 29)

[8] See also Wright's interview with Maraini, in which the author argues that language is a patriarchal structure (1997b: 75). Ryan-Scheutz agrees with Wright's proposition, positing that through reading, Marianna gains access to the male symbolic (2008: 63).

It is revealing that such resistance to Marianna's efforts to communicate comes from her mother rather than any male relatives. Even Marianna's uncle/husband (dubbed in the text 'il signor marito zio') encourages her to study and is happy to spend time 'in conversation' with her, through the exchange of written notes. This maternal opposition is perhaps in keeping with a society in which women had little freedom over their lives and were valued only for their dowries and ability to produce male offspring (Brooke 1999: 194). Marianna's mother is evidently so socialised into this patriarchal society that she is unable to see what, to a twentieth-century audience at least, her daughter requires from her. When Marianna returns home traumatised after her first night with her new husband, the advice from her mother and other female relatives to Marianna is: 'chiudi gli occhi e pensa ad altro' (*La lunga vita*: 33). Whilst such a reaction to a young girl's distress could seem cold-hearted, Maraini wants her readers instead to understand that submission symbolised these women's lives. Indeed, their own response to their difficult lives was to retreat further away from the outside world into a soporific state induced by the use of laudanum and tobacco. This then, was the life of an eighteenth-century aristocratic woman in Sicily, and it is only a deaf-mute character who is able to 'speak' about her (and indeed other women's) submission within a patriarchal society.

And 'speak' she does. The novel is characterised by Marianna's muted, yet forceful, presence within it. Albeit written in the third person, there is a strong sense of Marianna's voice throughout, a voice that is forthright and determined and that becomes progressively more so as the novel develops. Her initial communications are anchored firmly within the family sphere, and, as noted above, involve matters of family dispute and household management. What Marianna is able to do, however, that the traditional speaking subject cannot, is to collect and treasure her family's words, long after they have

been spoken, 'quelli del padre, qualcuno della madre, qualcuno dei figli li conserva e ogni tanto va a rileggerseli' (*ibid*: 143). Looking back on the novel, Maraini refers to this peculiarity of Marianna's world: 'la sua gonna è spesso ingombra di pezzetti di carta scritta che lei getta via o conserva secondo una valutazione di "durata" che è legata agli affetti e alle emozioni del momento' (2005: 125). By doing so, Marianna creates a microcosm of family life that will outlive them all, and offers a valuable insight into the private sphere, in keeping with the aims of a feminist historical project (Di Cori 1996). Marianna also develops the extra-sensory ability to 'hear' or perhaps 'read' the thoughts of her closest family and servants, especially at moments when she, and surely they, would least want her to. The most revealing of such occasions occurs during a conversation with one of her brothers. As her brother speaks to her of other things, he comes to remember (and thus communicate to Marianna) the event which led to her disability, a dark and disturbing memory which all family members had been encouraged to suppress:

> "...il fatto è che sì, ora lo ricorda, lo zio Pietro, quel capraro maledetto l'aveva assalita e lasciata mezza morta... sì lo zio Pietro, ora è chiarissimo, come aveva potuto dimenticarlo?" [...] Sembra che [Marianna] pianga, ma perché dovrebbe piangere? Come se avesse sentito i suoi pensieri [...] chissà che dietro quella sordità non ci sia un udito più fino, un orecchio diabolico capace di svelare i segreti della mente... (*La lunga vita*: 210)

In spite of her dual subordination, therefore, as both a woman and a physically impaired person, Marianna is actually granted a privileged position, an 'observatory from which the surrounding world can be filtered' (Wright 1997a: 66), which allows her to pass comment on her subordinated state. Mark Ledbetter, in his study of literary representations of victimhood, observes that, 'silenced and disembodied voices begin to embody a language of empowerment and community over the perpetrators of their violence' (1996: 18), precisely the process that Marianna undergoes. Consistent with earlier remarks regarding the productiveness of silence, it is pertinent here to recall Foucault's assertion that, 'the one

who remains silent and listens exerts power over the one who speaks' (cited in Benstock 1988: 49). From the passive receiving of a silence imposed by others, Marianna's silence has thus become her own, and it is an active and resistant process. As Ryan-Scheutz argues, Marianna eventually learns to 'fight silence with silence' (2008: 59).

Accordingly, from her initially tentative exchanges with her family, Marianna's sphere of communication grows to be ever wider, to when, following her husband's death, she becomes the head of both her family and the large estate. Marianna is subsequently obliged to consult with workers, lawyers and fellow landowners, which is not without its own problems. Initially disrespectful towards her and reluctant to listen, 'è una donna e per quanto padrona, che può capire una "fimmina" di proprietà, di grani, di debiti, eccetera?' (*La lunga vita*: 155), the men are eventually more accepting as she impresses them with her knowledge and diplomacy. It is also following her husband's death that Marianna learns to speak a new language, that of her emotions and passions, when she embarks upon an affair with Saro, a servant almost half her age:

> Come abbia fatto a trovarsi spogliata accanto al corpo spogliato di Saro, Marianna non saprebbe dirlo. Sa che è stato semplicissimo e che non ha provato vergogna. Sa che si sono abbracciati come due corpi amici e accoglierlo dentro di sé è stato come ritrovare una parte del proprio corpo che credeva perduta per sempre. Sa che non aveva mai pensato di racchiudere nel proprio ventre una carne maschile che non fosse un figlio o un invasore nemico. (*ibid*: 238)

It is thus in these latter stages of the novel that the forty-year-old Marianna learns how to 'speak' with her body as well. Subject for years to her husband's brutal caresses, in the arms of Saro she discovers sensuality and emotional expression.

Simultaneously, Marianna meets Don Camaleo, a magistrate and kindred spirit with whom she begins an intense intellectual friendship. In so doing, rather ironically, Marianna becomes the talk of society, as her eldest son warns: 'non è bene far parlare la gente' (*ibid*:

233). Neither relationship, however, can prevent her from following her own course in life and the novel concludes with Marianna on a pilgrimage to an unknown destination. Nevertheless, it is one which, the reader is made certain, will be of self-discovery and self-expression: 'la voglia di riprendere il cammino è più forte. Marianna ferma lo sguardo sulle acque giallognole, gorgoglianti e interroga i suoi silenzi. Ma la risposta che ne riceve è ancora una domanda. Ed è muta' (*ibid*: 264). Marianna, perhaps more than any of Maraini's protagonists, exemplifies the process of 'coming-to-consciousness' that is typical to so many of the author's texts. It is not only, therefore, through the breaking of one woman's silence that Maraini presents a process of resistance to abuse, but also, very patently, through the narrative itself, and an ending which epitomises her authorial project at this stage in her career.

In their study of feminist revisions of Italian history, Marotti and Brooke posit that there are two main strands to women's historical fiction:

> At one end of the spectrum, we have novels with historical protagonists in which authors offer, through fiction, a rereading of history, a reinterpretation of the psychological motivations of the main historical, mostly female, figures. At the other, there are novels in which the fictional protagonists are placed at the margins of history, excluded from the mainstream because of circumstances often linked to gender. (1999: 16)

Whilst the plays that I examine later in this chapter feature protagonists from the first group, the novels *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* and *Isolina* are not so easily categorised into one group or the other. Neither protagonist could be considered an exceptional historical figure, yet nor are they fictional women: both texts instead present a flesh-and-blood woman whose story Maraini has felt compelled to tell. In this way, the texts can be seen to function in similar ways to both the groups that Marotti and Brooke describe. With the main historical figures, Marianna in particular demonstrates 'women's potential for greatness', whilst, as protagonists on the margins of history, both women also illustrate

'women's difference in and extraneity to a world in need of radical change' (*ibid*: 17). Having demonstrated the ways in which Maraini wrote her ancestor, Marianna Ucrìa, back into history, I wish now to consider her retrieval and voicing of the life of someone who could be regarded as representative of women at the margins of history, Isolina Canuti.

Isolina, published in 1985, is a text that can be situated somewhere between a work of detective fiction and of investigative journalism, in which Maraini reconstructs the events surrounding the violent death of a young woman at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its style may thus differ from previous narrative works by Maraini, but in the themes it tackles, it is very much in keeping with what Maraini's readers may have come to recognise. In fact, this work, more than any of her earlier texts, represents her interest in the abuse, mistreatment and silencing of women. In Verona in 1900, the sawn-up remains of nineteen-year-old Isolina Canuti were found in the River Adige and it was soon discovered that she was three months pregnant, and that her death was the result of a failed abortion. Suspicion fell on her lover, a lieutenant named Carlo Trivulzio, who was a lodger at her family home. The evidence against him appeared conclusive; he had been overheard encouraging her to have an abortion, paid for medicinal powders to provoke an abortion and had associations with the *trattoria* where Isolina died, and yet he was not convicted. Maraini's novel constitutes her own meticulous reconstruction, from the little evidence that remains, of Isolina's murder, the ensuing police investigation and subsequent trial of Lieutenant Trivulzio. She explains how he shrewdly changed the course of the investigation, claiming that the accusations against him were instead an attempt by socialists to discredit the army's good name. As the case became an ever more vehement political battle between the army and the socialists, Isolina's death faded into insignificance. As Maraini persuasively illustrates, by the end of the case, 'nessuno si

ricorda di Isolina' (*Isolina*: 170); what the novel succeeds in demonstrating above all else is her absence from a trial for her own murder.

The text is more than a simple reconstruction of this trial, however. More than anything, it is an account of Maraini's processes and her professional and personal involvement in Isolina's story (Diaconescu-Blumenfeld 1999: 182). She has described how she came to write the novel, explaining:

> Mi avevano chiesto di collaborare ad una collana che rivisitasse delitti commessi tra la fine dell'Ottocento e l'inizio del Novecento. L'editore aveva chiesto a diversi narratori di raccontare questi delitti e di rivederli sotto una luce letteraria, di riscriverli, per così dire 'da narratore'. (in Wright 1997b: 89)

The novel, however, begins in a distinctly un-literary style, with the first chapter entitled 'I fatti' and presenting exactly that, the bare facts of the case, with no comment or analysis. Nonetheless, Maraini's presence can still be felt, with the reader following the same steps that she had and relying upon the same, sparse newspaper evidence to reconstruct the case, but with the author's guidance. The following chapter offers further indication of the role that Maraini plays, narrating her progress through the investigation, with her presence made clear from the first paragraph, 'Verona. Inseguendo Isolina. Arrivo il 19 settembre, un giovedì, col treno di Roma' (*Isolina*: 49). Such a heightened level of authorial closeness in relation to his or her material is evidently in stark contrast to classical histories, in which the intention is to establish an authoritative and impartial voice, rather than any personal presence. This idea of a historian is, of course, unrealistic, as it is unfeasible for anyone to present the 'truth'; there will always be an element of selection, editing and personal judgement. However, by inserting herself into the text in quite such an overt manner, Maraini typifies one of the objectives of the feminist historiographic project: the

deconstruction of the ideal of absolute objectivity.[9] This, as Diaconescu-Blumenfeld explains, 'posits an awareness that questions and politicizes the subject-object relation. The historian becomes interactive with her material' (1999: 178). With Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo, whose work on feminist standpoint theory theorises the 'knowing individual', we can identify Maraini's role in *Isolina* as precisely that: 'a historically particular individual, who is social, embodied and interested, emotional and rational and whose body, interests, emotions and reason are fundamentally constituted by her particular historical context' (1989: 6).

In spite of, or perhaps because of, her close involvement with the material, Maraini also describes how she is unable to explain fully her fixation with Isolina. She questions why she continues her investigation, when all she discovers is how fruitless her task has become, 'un altro giorno è passato [...] mi sembra di non riuscire ad afferrare il senso di ricerca che pure mi affascina e mi intriga' (*Isolina*: 63). JoAnn Cannon has suggested that Maraini's 'quasi-religious fervour' in investigating Isolina's death is an attempt to put right the wrongs that were done to the girl (2006: 50). Similarly, by drawing attention to the dreams which begin to disturb Maraini's sleep, of rivers swollen with women's bodies, Cannon proposes that, for Maraini, Isolina has come to symbolise all victims of violence against women (*ibid*: 52). Maraini is not solely interested in isolated occasions of abuse, but in violence against women as a phenomenon; as such, by writing one particular victim back to life, she is asking her readers to take note of all cases of violence against women, both solved and unsolved.[10] *Isolina* could indeed be proposed as one of the defining moments in Maraini's investigations into gender violence. It is the first text in which she

[9] Evidently, this is not just part of a feminist agenda, but is in line with developments in documentary and historical work of this period.

[10] The high number of unsolved crimes against women is an issue to which Maraini returns in *Voci*, which, just like *Isolina*, is based around the theme of a murder enquiry, albeit with a fictional investigator.

makes the issue a central theme and marks the point at which, from being one feature in women's more general oppression in a patriarchal society, gender violence starts to become a discrete occurrence to be understood and exposed. Whilst, therefore, in this text she ponders upon her own motivations and interest in Isolina, what any reader of Maraini is now able to see is that the 'quasi-religious fervour' with which she investigates here will recur repeatedly in later works in which she returns to the theme.[11]

It is apparent, therefore, that the techniques that Maraini utilises to re-write Isolina's story are in keeping with the feminist endeavours of restoring women to history and recovering women's voices that I described at the beginning of this chapter. Her narrative style in this text epitomises some of the difficulties involved in creating an objective distance to one's material, especially when that material has personal connotations. The focus of this chapter is, however, women's silence and whilst I have already argued that by telling Isolina's story, Maraini is breaking one such silence, it is also pertinent to contemplate the particular types of silence that are involved in Isolina's story. Hedges and Fishkin, in their analysis of women's silences, isolate 'silences that were intrinsic rather than external, [...] [that] might reveal reticences culturally imposed on women, [or] the workings of a repressed ideology' (1994: 5). It is such silences that, as a young woman who is on the margins of society and excluded from mainstream discourse, can be identified as having been imposed upon Isolina.[12] Chapter One discussed Maraini's adolescent female protagonists and noted that Enrica in particular was rendered powerless by her young age and low social status. A comparison with Isolina can here be made: not

[11] This is represented perhaps most compellingly in *Passi affrettati* (2007) in which Maraini once again interacts with her material on a very personal level. See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of the play and Maraini's involvement with it.

[12] It is, once again, in Chapter Six and my discussion of *Passi affrettati*, that I return to a consideration of similar issues around the marginalisation of women and their exclusion from mainstream society. There, my discussion centres specifically upon the position of migrant women in Italian society.

only are both girls the same age, but Isolina too lives in quite considerable poverty. Isolina's lower socio-cultural status is in evidence throughout the text and certainly works against her. Maraini demonstrates this through the reporting of her speech, which is thick with colloquialisms and vocabulary from her local dialect, and contrasts powerfully with Lieutenant Trivulzio's sharp articulacy. Angela McRobbie has argued that adolescent girls from the working classes can be seen as one of the most powerless sectors of society, in terms of the choices that are available to them and their access to social mobility (2000: 46). Her analysis featured case studies taken almost a century after Isolina's death and one can therefore only imagine the extent to which Isolina was powerless and marginalised.

Moreover, Isolina's silencing is twofold: not solely as a young woman on the economic margins, but through her death, after which she is evidently unable to use her own voice to defend herself. She must rely instead on the words of others, of which there are, as Maraini demonstrates, a profusion. Voices indeed dominate the narrative, to the extent that Isolina's character subsequently is determined by others: newspapers, Trivulzio's lawyers and the idle gossip of her neighbours: '[dicono di lei che] "non era di irreprensibili costume" […] "era una ragazza insofferente del freno paterno", che "tornava tardi a casa la sera"', and even that she was 'una prostituta' (*Isolina*: 14-18). The implication is, of course, that 'Isolina Canuti, si legge fra le righe, se l'è voluto' (*ibid*: 182). 'Isolina got what she was asking for': the crux of Maraini's text is that, as has historically often been the case, it is the victim who is presumed guilty. In my Introduction I made reference to the 'blue jeans case' in Italy, which demonstrated both how the rape victim can so often be found responsible, and the tardiness with which the Italian institutions were willing to change attitudes regarding 'guilt' in rape cases. Isolina's experiences resonate with these damaging cultural discourses, which are not limited to Italy; elsewhere too,

judges and the police can occasionally be guilty of such a stance (Romito 2008: 70-71).[13] By stark contrast, Trivulzio is ultimately absolved of all charges, and is even portrayed as the victim of the whole affair: 'in che brutto ambiente è caduto il povero Trivulzio ignaro di ogni cosa!' (*Isolina*: 158).

Against this backdrop of strident voices, Maraini endeavours to speak for Isolina. Merely by publishing the text, she succeeds in giving a voice to her silence and, some eighty years after her death, reclaiming a scrap of justice for her murder. It is not without irony that Maraini reveals Trivulzio's own fate:

> [...] morire stoicamente facendosi divorare da un cancro allo stomaco. Una morte che ricorda simbolicamente quella patita di Isolina. La pancia di una ragazza di 19 anni che ospitava un bambino è stata profanata e distrutta. Così lui [...] si è tenuto la malattia che lo disfaceva proprio lì nel ventre, luogo simbolico della procreazione e del nutrimento. (*ibid*: 84)

Why though was justice so difficult to achieve immediately after her murder? Why was there no-one who spoke up for Isolina at the time of the trial? Maraini notes in her first chapter that Isolina was not without friends and family, but it appears that they are unable to speak for her. Her best friend, for example, is poisoned and we are to suspect that this is carried out by those defending Trivulzio in order to silence the one person who knew the truth. Likewise, her sister Clelia attempts to act in Isolina's defence at the trial, but she too is let down by her low socio-economic status and lack of education:

> Come si vede Clelia era di un candore che a momenti rasenta la deficienza. Una bambina impaurita che cerca di compiacere i giudici e non conosce l'effetto delle cose che dice. Non pensa nemmeno a salvare la sorella. Basterebbero poche sue parole per perdere Trivulzio. Ma lei non le dice. (*ibid*: 106)

Perhaps this is not solely a question of class, however, for it is not just Clelia who is unable to defend her sister; rather, as Maraini notes with regard to all Isolina's family, 'c'è

[13] The 'responsibility' of the victim in cases of abuse is something that I also discuss in Chapters One and Five.

[...] una tale mancanza di attenzione, una tale dimenticanza di sé da farli sembrare in certi momenti i peggiori nemici di se stessi' (*ibid*: 107). Thinking back to *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, the reader here also bore witness to silence and inaction from family members when faced with a victim of abuse. Where Isolina's family are shown to be unable, and perhaps unwilling, to act in her defence, so too were Marianna's father and brother silent in the face of the truth about her rape. It is evidently a complex issue, bound up in feelings of shame and, as I demonstrated in my Introduction, dishonour. Discussing the family, Daniela Danna writes: 'è proprio questo *dover* essere rifugio dal mondo esterno, ambito dell'intimità, luogo delle cure fisiche […], a oscurare la violenza che può accadere al suo interno' (2007: 74-75. Emphasis in original). Patrizia Romito also considers the role of family members in cases of abuse and argues that the 'hiding strategy of male violence *par excellence*' is denial: 'denial involves many people and works in many ways. The perpetrators of the violence deny it; their friends, relatives and accomplices deny it; [...] because they share fundamental values, because they are ignorant and because they are cowardly' (2008: 122). Whilst 'ignorance' and 'cowardliness' could be named as the reasons for Isolina's family's silence, it may be plausible to suggest that for Marianna's relatives it is, disturbingly, Romito's 'sharing of fundamental values' that is to blame. The novel is situated in a culture that is deeply patriarchal and, as convention dictated, Marianna's family married her to the man who had raped her, thus demonstrating their acceptance of customs that perpetuate a paradigm of dominance and submission.[14]

In both texts, therefore, silence is not just a feature of these two female protagonists, but their families as well. Where, though, Maraini exploits her role as author to give the two women a voice with which to tell their stories, when considering their

[14] Gabriella Brooke notes how this pattern continues to the next generation, with Marianna's own daughter also married off at the age of twelve (1999: 195).

families, she is conversely denouncing their silence and criticising the lack of action that they demonstrate when confronted with a victim of patriarchal violence.[15] Whilst Giovanna Bellesia suggests that the reader is left feeling 'confused and ambivalent' towards Marianna's family in the face of their inaction (2000: 125), I would argue instead that this condemnation of familial complicity is intended to provoke anger in the reader and incite him or her to speak out for the silenced victims of abuse. The guilty silence of the families is most certainly at odds with the enforced silence of Maraini's victims and renders the victims' eventual ability to 'speak' all the more significant.

The role of silence is thus evident in the two novels, in which Maraini also demonstrates, quite overtly, how women's silencing is a manifestation of gender violence. Her two protagonists are marginal figures whom Maraini endows with the ability to speak and verbalise the abuse that they have suffered. By contrast, the second part of this chapter considers two major historical figures who are, however, in a similar manner to Isolina, subjected to the ultimate form of silencing through their, very public, deaths.

II. Staging Silences: *Maria Stuarda* and *Charlotte Corday*

The preceding chapter offered an outline of Maraini's theatrical work of the 1970s, exploring how it was both rooted in, and representative of, her enduring commitment to the Italian women's movement. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, her theatrical output continued apace, with the staging of plays that persisted in foregrounding themes that were similarly pertinent to women. However, identifiable in Maraini's plays of this later period

[15] Denial and complicity on the part of family members resurface in later texts by Maraini, in particular in *Voci*, in which the victim's mother is aware of the abuse her daughter was suffering, but is incapable of handling or dealing appropriately with such knowledge. I return to a discussion of this character and the role of family members in cases of abuse in Chapter Four.

is a selection of works that take prominent female historical figures as their protagonists. I term these works 'biographical' theatre, narrating as they do the lives of these significant women. This group of plays represents Maraini's efforts to (re)-insert these women into history and, by doing so on stage, quite literally break the textual silences of women that were highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. They are also works that challenge traditional cultural discourse: in fact, the two texts that I consider in detail in this chapter, *Maria Stuarda* (1980) and *Charlotte Corday* (1989), both focus on women who have been the subject of other, more well-known, works of theatre and signify a feminist re-writing of these plays. As such, they consequently denote a further representation of Maraini's historiographical project, as evidenced in *Isolina* and *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa.*[16]

Immediately, however, a couple of problematic issues become apparent: firstly, if the two women are such prominent historical figures, how plausible is it to dub them silenced? Secondly, moreover, whilst both are ultimately executed, it seems incorrect here to talk of victimhood, for, in the case of Charlotte Corday in particular, her death is the result of a brutal act of violence of her own making, namely the murder of Jean-Paul Marat. Far from being victims, therefore, Maria, Elisabetta and Charlotte can all be considered perpetrators, characters who are very distant from Maraini's usual focus upon marginalised and oppressed women. I would argue, however, that it is precisely through their deaths that

[16] Interestingly, in 1991, Maraini was asked to adapt *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* into a version for the theatre. She was initially reluctant, primarily because of the near impossibility of successfully representing the deaf-mute Marianna on the stage (Maraini 2000b: 327). Maraini overcame this difficulty by placing two 'Mariannas' on stage: one playing the deaf-mute girl and the other representing her narrative voice, thus allowing the audience access to Marianna's thoughts, whilst retaining the fundamental silence that surrounds her as a character. Notable also in the play are Maraini's heightened use of stage directions and her provision of a lengthy character list, which both, in the majority of her other theatrical works, tend to be of the barest minimum. As a result, whilst the stage directions present more opportunities for the actor portraying her to present her innermost sentiments through movement and expression, a busy stage with many characters further serves to underline Marianna's separation from the speaking subject. In the play, Marianna 'silently' occupies the theatrical space, but is given her own voice through characters that portray the different stages of her life. The play is thus inscribed with verbal elements that are not achievable in a written text. In considering these theatrical works, therefore, performance is evidently of the upmost importance, suggesting, as it does, a specific choice on Maraini's part concerning the way she wishes to represent her protagonists.

Maria and Charlotte in particular experience gender violence. As I demonstrate below, their executions are intended not only as punishment, but are political acts as well, in which their female bodies are offered as easy sacrifices to the re-instating of the patriarchal order. Likewise, in defence of their being hailed as 'silenced', I believe that in these biographical plays Maraini's desire to resist women's silences builds upon her work in the two novels analysed above, but through a focus, above all, on her protagonists' inner lives. This, I suggest, is the 'voice' that has been silenced by dominant discourse. Focusing on the representations of women in classical plays, Sue-Ellen Case similarly found that:

> Public life is privileged in these stories, while private life remains relatively invisible [...] it was this 'fictional' woman who appeared on stage representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender, while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women. (2008: 6-7)

My analysis concentrates upon the techniques with which Maraini allows these inner voices to speak, in plays which concern themselves almost exclusively with the private sphere, thus representing what Case recognised as 'suppressed' in more traditional works. It could also be argued that simply by placing female protagonists on stage, Maraini is giving women the opportunity to speak, and (re)-claiming the theatrical space. This in itself can be deemed an act of resistance against both women's historical silence and against the generic silence that the centuries-long absence of women from the stage has promoted. It is Case once again who recognises the fundamental importance of feminist theatrical practices such as Maraini's, which 'broke with the traditional concept of the "fourth wall"' and 'produced a new dramaturgical dynamic that matched the feminist sense that "the personal is political"' (*ibid*: 65).

This oft-cited feminist mantra is certainly applicable to Maraini's re-telling of the story of Mary Stuart, a figure who fascinates historians and authors alike,[17] but who concurrently, according to Maraini, 'pur godendo di tanti privilegi, [vive] la condizione generale delle donne' (in Wright 1997b: 86). One of the most enduring representations of her remains Friedrich Schiller's 1800 play, which recounts the events leading up to Mary's execution and focuses upon the complex relationship between Mary and Elizabeth I, the nature of power, and women's right to that power.[18] Themes such as these would evidently constitute motivations for Maraini's interest in both Schiller's text and the characters of Mary and Elizabeth. Whilst her desire to explore women's relationships was already manifest in plays such as *Il manifesto* (1969) and *Due donne di provincia* (1978), a focus upon exceptional women such as Mary and Elizabeth allows Maraini to contemplate whether a woman can be successful in both the public and private worlds. Her text in fact began as a re-working of Schiller's play, and has since become one of her most widely translated and performed theatrical works (Maraini 2000a: 697).

However, in contrast to Schiller's play, with its vast cast of twenty speaking parts and numerous non-speaking parts, Maraini's play is composed of just four roles, which she further advises to be played by just two actors: 'il gioco sta lì, nel continuo ossessivo scambio delle parti' (*ibid*: 697).[19] The intensity of the performance in thus heightened in Maraini's work. By reducing the cast so dramatically, she strips away all the focus on the

[17] There exist countless cultural representations of Mary, in film, theatre, television, poetry and prose; see Lewis (2001: 180) for further information about these and a brief bibliography of critical responses. For a detailed biography of Mary's life, see Antonia Fraser's *Mary Queen of Scots* (2003).

[18] For analyses of the play and further bibliography see Paul E. Kerry (2007) and Steven D. Martinson (2005).

[19] The play was first performed in English to high acclaim in 1992, under the direction of Nicolette Kay. When I discussed with Kay her directorial choices, she too emphasised the importance of the 'game': not only between the two queens, but also through the games that they, the privileged classes, play with their ladies-in-waiting. For Kay, the idea of play (at times tender, at times cruel), is central to understanding the intertwined emotional journeys of the two women in stage, when they are in the guise of both queen and servant (Kay 2010).

political (and, perhaps, historically masculine) intrigue involved in Schiller's work, leaving instead a detailed and intimate examination of the women's characters, their connections with each other and with their ladies-in-waiting.[20] Maraini's incessant use of 'doubling' also serves to reinforce what she perceives as the similarities between the two queens:

> Maria: Dammi lo specchio.
> Kennedy: Se l'è portato Paulet. Ha detto che una prigioniera non deve compiacersi della sua immagine.
> Maria: Mettiti davanti a me, Kennedy. [...] Come sono i miei capelli?
> [...]
> Elisabetta: Dammi lo specchio, Nanny.
> Nanny: Si è rotto un momento fa. [...]
> Elisabetta: Mi specchierò in quegli occhi di ghiaccio che hai, Nanny. Come sono i miei capelli? (*Maria Stuarda*: 705-07)

The image of one woman literally mirroring another was considered by Italian feminists an essential tool in both self-understanding and the development of a productive feminist consciousness. As Kemp and Bono explain:

> Women have traditionally been regarded as mirrors for men, and as dependent on men's gaze for their sense of themselves. But women have started being mirrors for one another, and these positive reflections have become the basis of new models of individual identity, and community. (1993: 10)

Similar to the texts analysed in the previous chapter, therefore, this can be offered as a way in which *Maria Stuarda* also has elements that are representative of the Italian women's movement. Yet in the play, this mirroring appears productive only for Maria and serves instead as an insight into Elisabetta's jealous nature. Whereas Maria desires an honest response from Kennedy, Elisabetta demands that Nanny recite a well-learned litany of compliments: 'brava, hai imparato a mentire con grazia' (*Maria Stuarda*: 707). By contrast, therefore, to the confidence that Maria shares with a woman of a lower social class, it is precisely this difference that creates a barrier between Elisabetta and Nanny.

[20] Maraini has noted that in Schiller's play, 'i personaggi femminili siano del tutto laterali, Maria Stuarda infatti compare ben poco sulla scena' (in Wright 1997b: 86).

The main thrust of Maraini's text is in fact the continual interchange between the antagonisms that the two queens feel for one another, versus what Maraini sees as their undeniable similarities. This conflict is played out through the staging of their differing emotional lives.

An effort to understand Elisabetta's depiction as the Virgin Queen also underlies Maraini's play. She presents a woman for whom marriage will only mean enslavement, which in turn leads to humiliation and servitude:

> Non pensate ad altro, voi donne… il matrimonio, i figli… a qualsiasi costo, contro qualsiasi umiliazione… volete rotolarvi nel fango dell'umiliazione, volete essere battute, comandate, seviziate. […] Meglio essere morte mille volte che sposate! (*ibid*: 721-22)

In a further significant scene, Elisabetta considers her body, which she is never allowed to see: 'ci sono parti di me che non vedo mai [...] sto invecchiando e non so cosa succeede al mio corpo [...] una regina non ha corpo...' (*ibid*: 714-15). She asks a young servant boy to stand naked in front of her and endeavours to ascertain through him what it must mean to know one's own body. Maraini has noted that, for her, the most successful stagings of the play have been those in which scenes such as this, 'volgevano al grottesco e alla bizzarria stilistica' (2000a: 697). The queens should appear both both comic and provocative at the same time, thus playing with the audience's preconceptions and challenging their assumptions. Moreover, where in my analysis of *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, I explored how, later in her life, Marianna learns to 'speak' through her body, through the expression of her sexuality in a passionate relationship, I would suggest that, as a queen, Elisabetta remains 'speechless' when it comes to understanding her body and expressing her sexuality. By placing her experiences on stage, Maraini gives her the possibility of verbalising her feelings, and resisting the traditional silencing that being both a woman and a public figure entails.

Maria, conversely, is aware of her body, and of how to use it to her advantage. She is remembered as a great beauty and was married three times, and in Maraini's play reference is made to her powers of seduction. Whilst Elisabetta is deprived of any male contact and can only imagine a love scene between herself and Robert Dudley, Maria is able to experience that which Elisabetta can only imagine, through her relationships with Bothwell, Leicester and others. Moreover, in Maraini's text, in an act of personal and political resistance against Elisabetta, Maria gives birth to a child. Case has suggested that a recurrent motif in feminist theatre involved making the female body the site of a play, and that, by consequence, birthing and mothering are a means of re-appropriating the female body from patriarchal control (2008: 29). In a similar manner, in their analysis of feminism and performance studies, Hart and Phelan have explored the role of the female body on stage, recognising it as 'iconic, seemingly less arbitrary than a linguistic sign, [...] exceptionally susceptible to naturalization, [...] the "thing itself", incapable of mimesis' (1993: 5). Maria speaks through her body, it constitutes the one area of freedom granted to her in a life marked by isolation; it is also the sole form of power that she is able to wield over Elisabetta, a woman who is psychologically distant from her body.

In spite of the hostility between the two women, but perhaps due in part to their mutual isolation (Maria through her incarceration, Elisabetta through the solitude that power bestows), Maraini presents her two queens as sharing an irresistible attraction for one another. For Elisabetta this manifests itself through her hesitancy over Maria's fate, whilst for Maria it is an overwhelming desire to receive word from the other, culminating in a powerful dream in which they finally meet. In this dream, the women bond over their shared position in life as female ruler and when Maria awakens, she even refers to Elisabetta as a sister, 'com'era tenera, com'era dolce la mia sorella!' (*Maria Stuarda*: 726).

The dream sequence permits Maria to articulate her deepest sentiments, and offers an important insight into her inner life.[21]

The conclusion of the play represents a final endeavour by Maraini to resist and subvert traditional cultural discourse. Whereas in death, Maria's ending could be seen as defeat, Maraini in fact presents it as suffused with hope and love. During her final hours she is surrounded by her faithful ladies-in-waiting and the play closes with neither power nor politics, but the voice of her beloved servant Kennedy: 'non piangete la sua morte / gioite al suo riposo [...] la stella di suo nome si è bruciata / ora passeggerà nei candidi silenzi del sogno eterno' (*ibid*: 741). Similarly, by refusing to denounce her religion, Maria dies a martyr and a myth-like figure. The aura of myth that surrounds her death is accentuated in Maraini's narrative by the inclusion of two elements that, historically, have never been confirmed (Fraser 2003: 671). As the executioner lifts Maria's head from her body, it falls to the floor and he is left holding only a wig; her famed red hair is shown to be an illusion. Her beheaded body then begins to twitch and revealed in her skirts is a small dog that had always been at its mistress' side during her lifetime. Giving space to these myths is not a way to humiliate the queen; rather, they illustrate that many centuries after her death she remains a figure of speculation who has the power to inspire both repulsion and fascination.

Ambiguity also defines the end of the play for Elisabetta. Maraini retains the historically correct version of events and has Elisabetta sanction the other's execution. Nevertheless, she also allows her the space to express both regret over her actions, 'stanotte ho sognato che l'abbracciavo... la baciavo... le davo il permesso di andare in Francia...'

[21] Similarly, in *I sogni di Clitennestra*, it is precisely in her dreams that Maraini's character is at her most liberated and communicative. For critical responses to this play, see Daniela Cavallaro (1995) and Nghiem L. Nguyen (2008).

(*Maria Stuarda*: 736), and her eventual appreciation that Maria's death is a necessity, a decision she must make out of duty to her people, rather than because of any desire to see her die: 'la storia chiede una scelta: o io o lei, o il governo laico o il governo ecclesiastico. Non sono io a scegliere, ma il popolo d'Inghilterra' (*ibid*: 737). The play charts Elisabetta's gradual recognition that in order to succeed she must find strength in herself alone, leading in turn to her ultimate realisation that, for political gain and to avoid the revolt of the people, Maria's death is her only choice. I would argue that Elisabetta can thus also be seen as both a victim and a perpetrator: she unquestionably commits violence, but is likewise the victim of a society in which, for a woman to be powerful, she must appropriate a form of masculinity and make herself androgynous.[22]

Susanna Scarparo has problematised the writing of classical biographies of illustrious women, arguing that they can 'celebrate [the protagonists] as individuals rather than as part of a group' (2005: 1). As such, they continue to marginalise great swathes of 'ordinary' women and de-value their lives, as has for many years been the case in canonical texts. By contrast, I have already noted that Maraini wished to re-write the story of the two queens precisely because she saw them as embodying the general condition of women. Moreover, in her study of feminist theatre practices, Geraldine Harris notes that what should be central to texts is 'a continuing enquiry into the *problematic* of what it means to "be a woman" in both theory and practice' (1999: 17. Emphasis in original), something that clearly motivated Maraini in the writing of this play. What Maraini additionally proposes is an avoidance of 'classical biography', through the interweaving of history and invention. She indeed plays on the preconceptions that her audience may already have about these protagonists, and presents a theatrical experience that constantly blurs the line

[22] In an edition of *DWF* that took violent women as its theme, Deborah Marsden made reference to women in martial arts films, arguing that for them to be violent, they have cross into masculine territory and transcend traditional gender boundaries (2009: 18-24).

between fiction and reality. As I note elsewhere in this thesis, the straddling of truth and invention is a recurrent feature of Maraini's oeuvre; in the case of *Maria Stuarda* it allows her not only to challenge established cultural discourse, but also to break the silence of her characters' inner lives. My second illustration of this project is through the 1989 play, *Charlotte Corday*.[23]

Charlotte Corday concentrates on events in the three days preceding the execution of the eponymous protagonist for the murder of Jean-Paul Marat. Just like *Maria Stuarda*, this play also focuses on an episode that has received attention from historians and writers: most famously in the Peter Weiss play, *Marat/Sade* (1965).[24] In addition, just as Maraini's version of *Maria Stuarda* differs from previous writings in its study of the internal rather than external, political dimension, so too does *Charlotte Corday* similarly diverge from Weiss' treatment. Whereas Weiss' play centres on the relationship between two male characters, and has been recognised as an overtly political statement, 'a Marxist reading of a violent human situation' (Peter Brook in Weiss 1994: 7), Maraini's play constitutes a contemplation of her female protagonist's inner life. The play charts her motivations leading up to Marat's murder and her reflections upon it as she awaits her own death. Weiss' text is a complex play-within-a-play, in which the residents of an asylum are attempting to stage a version of events under the direction of the Marquis de Sade. Charlotte is played by one of the inmates who, 'moves like a somnambulist' (1994: 10), is attended by two nurses at all times and appears so desperate to recite her well-learned lines that she acts out the killing of Marat in one of the very first scenes (*ibid*: 25). She is also the object of unwanted sexual attention by a fellow inmate, Duperret, as the stage

[23] The play was never performed in Italy and has in fact only been performed once, in Austria in 1990 (Maraini 2000a: 700).

[24] For critical work on the play, and further bibliography, see, for example, Roger Ellis (1987) and Olaf Berwald (2003).

directions indicate: 'he is held in the mental home as an erotomaniac, and takes advantage of his role as Corday's lover at every suitable opportunity' (*ibid*: 10).

The object of Weiss' play is markedly not, therefore, to analyse Charlotte's motivations and his treatment of her could actually make for uncomfortable viewing. Maraini's play, on the other hand, seeks solely to represent Charlotte's point of view, without trying to explore the political situation or deconstruct Marat's character. Charlotte is present in almost every scene, and is the sole focus of the play's speech and action. Moreover, in this particular theatrical work, through its structure and language, Maraini draws special attention to Charlotte's interiority. Not only (as in most of her theatre) does the action take place predominantly within the private sphere, the home rather than the street or other such public spaces, but Charlotte is repeatedly warned of the dangers of the outside world by her aunt, who cautions her more than once: 'una ragazza onesta non sta alla finestra' (*Charlotte Corday*: 292).[25] This explicit warning of the behaviour that is to be expected of 'una ragazza onesta' resonates with themes that were identified in *Il manifesto,* analysed in the previous chapter of this thesis, where I demonstrated how Maraini's protagonists are often portrayed as subversive, rebellious women whom her other characters seek to control. By contrast to Anna in that play, however, Charlotte is not actually portrayed as disruptive or in any way mutinous. In fact, throughout the text she is repeatedly complimented for her docile personality and, even as she stands before Marat, ready to murder him, he tells her: 'siete una donna grave... e decente' (*ibid*: 320), a refrain that is repeated throughout the play. Looking back on her actions, Charlotte questions this

[25] The motif of the window as an indicator of women's limited freedom is repeated in Maraini's play about the Venetian poet and courtesan, Veronica Franco, in which her protagonist laments, 'io sono qua... mi vesto, mi svesto, guardo dalla finestra, dormo, mangio... e voi venite, uscite, andate, viaggiate... la vostra libertà mi incuriosisce e mi angustia' (*Veronica, meretrice e scrittora*: 411)

perceived image of herself, asking, 'ero grave e decente? ... come vedrete, io non sono né grave, né decente... sono assolutamente frivola e immorale...' (*ibid*: 323).

Surprisingly for a play which aims is to narrate the private life of a historical figure, this final monologue, in which Charlotte considers her crime, is one of the few moments when she speaks using her own words. Instead, throughout the play, whenever Charlotte is alone on stage, she narrates her story using a mixture of reportage and other voices: 'interpretando la parte di Frédéric [...] con tono poliziesco [...] tono da notiziario [...] rifà se stessa e l'amica' (*ibid*: 286-87). The actor playing Charlotte is instructed to switch continually between a variety of different narrative voices. It is a technique which, through its use of other people's words to define Charlotte's character, has echoes of the particular style that Maraini chose when telling Isolina's story, as analysed earlier in this chapter: Isolina was categorised by the clamorous voices of the neighbourhood, rather than being able to defend herself.[26] In fact, in *Charlotte Corday,* even when the protagonist talks to her friend, she is unable to express herself with her own words and recites Shakespeare instead:

> CHARLOTTE: Come brucia male questo cero! ah chi viene avanti!? penso che sia la debolezza dei miei occhi che crea questa mostruosa apparizione. Si dirige verso di me. Sei tu qualcosa? sei tu un dio, un demone che mi agghiacci il sangue... dimmi chi sei...
> ANNE: Smettila ora, Charlotte. Non siamo più sul palcoscenico con le suore che ci guardano a bocca aperta dalla platea.
> CHARLOTTE: Perché vieni da me, spettro?
> ANNE: (*prendendo la sua parte a malincuore*) Per dirti che mi rivedrai a Filippi, Bruto. (*ibid*: 291)

At other moments, Charlotte recites the words of philosophers. She also takes on the role of Judith at several stages; a figure who is, of course, particularly significant not only for

[26] It is also a feature of *Voci*, as I identify in Chapters Four and Five.

the echoes of her story with Charlotte's, but also for the intrinsic association she has as a castrating presence.[27]

The play thus demands that the audience pay particular attention to Charlotte's inability to voice her feelings. I would thus suggest that, from this reluctance on Charlotte's part to use her own words, we can revisit some of the questions about women's historical silence that were explored above. Discussing the nineteenth-century novel, Marina Mizzau proposed that, 'the word through which the woman, long relegated to silence, begins to express herself, cannot always or immediately be articulated in a full or direct way' (1993: 66). Adriana Cavarero describes this process more explicitly: 'la donna non è il soggetto del suo linguaggio. Il suo linguaggio non è *suo*. Essa perciò si dice e si rappresenta in un linguaggio non suo, ossia attraverso le categorie del linguaggio dell'altro' (1987: 49. Emphasis in original). In an analysis of twentieth-century feminist theatre practice, Elaine Aston cites Hélène Cixous to emphasise the importance of participation in theatre projects in helping women to (re)-discover their voices:

> Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away – that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just to open her mouth – in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine. (1999: 51)

Charlotte shares this mistrust of her own voice and finds she has no language of her own with which to express herself. Yet, rather than the physical impediments to speech that afflicted Marianna, what affects Charlotte are *psychological* silences: those moments when a person is unwilling, or unable, to articulate themselves. Maraini's Maria and Elisabetta suffered from a similar affliction: both lacked the language to express their emotions.

[27] On Judith as a phallic woman and, in particular, on feminist attempts to deconstruct the traditional, psychoanalytical reading of Judith images and position her instead as a construction of the patriarchal system, see Mary Jacobus (1986), Elena Ciletti (1991) and Paola Tinagli (1997).

Where Charlotte tries to combat this through her use of citation, Maria did so by speaking with her body and Elisabetta mimicked the patriarchal language of politics.

This is not only a feature of the two plays under analysis here; rather, examples of women's wariness to use their own voices are readily available in other biographical plays by Maraini. In *Veronica, meretrice e scrittora* (1991) Maraini includes extracts of the protagonist's own poetry to allow her to express herself. Similarly, the 1995 play *Camille,* which narrates the life of Camille Claudel, opens with Auguste Rodin declaring that he is best placed to tell her story, rather than Camille herself: 'nessuno può raccontare meglio di me la storia di Camille Claudel' (*Camille*: 563). In this particular case, Camille is doubly mistrustful of her own voice: not only is she a woman, but she is also one who has been diagnosed as mentally ill and duly institutionalised. Simborowski has suggested that women's silences are the result of, 'insecurities, reticence and self-effacement [...]; and the reluctance to speak out on women's behalf, also the result of insecurity and ambivalence regarding women's "place" in society and culture' (2003: 5), characteristics which are all evident in Maraini's 'biographical theatre'.

Charlotte's 'insecurity, reticence and self-effacement' are discernible to the very end of the play. After she murders Marat, her executioners give her ample opportunity to denounce her accomplices; for them it seems impossible that she could have been working alone: 'e chi vi ha persuaso a prenderlo a coltellate? [...] Vorreste dire che avete pensato e agito da solo?' (*Charlotte Corday*: 316). A 'grave, decente' woman like Charlotte was deemed incapable of murder. It was assumed that she had to be working for someone else, a lover or some other influential man in her life, but this was not the case. Besides which, once it is accepted that Charlotte did act alone, she continues to be defined by men: her relationship to her father is highlighted, whilst in newspaper reports her name is

persistently bound to that of her grandfather, Pierre Corneille. These elements combine to contribute to the silence that surrounds Charlotte herself. Again and again, her own voice is drowned out by those who speculate about and condemn her. Just like Isolina, Charlotte is the subject of a trial in which she is given little chance to represent herself and, when she does try to do so, her words are not believed: 'qualcuno vi avrà pur insegnato a impugnare il coltello...' (*ibid*: 318). Knowing that her voice will go unheard, Charlotte ends the play with an act of silent communication to Marat's lover, Simone. In an attempt to reach out to the other woman, she sends her the only part of herself that remains, a lock of her hair. In response, Simone tells her, 'vi perdono, mia nemica' (*ibid*: 322). Perhaps these are the only words that Charlotte needs to have heard before going to her death. Finally, in a return to its main stylistic theme, the play ends with Charlotte narrating her own death using someone else's voice: 'dicono che il boia sollevando la testa davanti alla folla l'abbia presa a schiaffi... e dicono che la testa, nel suo pallore, sia arrossita di sdegno...' (*ibid*: 325). In what is very much a mirroring of the final scene of *Maria Stuarda*, Charlotte's head is shaved prior to her death, thus representing for both women a repression of their femininity, before she too is beheaded. As a result, their violent and public deaths are offered as a warning to all that rebellious behaviour in women will never go unpunished.

In her discussion of *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa,* Pina Palma takes voicelessness as her central theme. Palma notes the centrality of the voice both to narratives and to all social interactions, and foregrounds 'the daunting isolation in which "voiceless" people live' (2003: 111). Drawing upon Deborah Britzman's work on the voice in educational practice (1989), Palma continues:

> Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community [...]. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all part of the process [...] Voice suggests

> relationship: the individual's relationship to the meaning of his/her experience [and] to language. (*ibid*: 111)

It is this very relationship to oneself and to the outer world that Charlotte, Maria, Elisabetta, Isolina and Marianna all lack; at times, all five characters embody the isolation of the 'voiceless'. In the two plays, by voicing her protagonists' inner lives and by giving a voice to a woman who mistrusts her own, I propose that Maraini has demonstrated how the stage can be an ideal medium for a feminist project such as this. Moreover, through her particular choice to re-write other, better-known, works, Maraini has challenged traditional cultural and historical discourse in order to re-examine the lives of women who have previously been misinterpreted for reasons often linked to their gender. In the two novels, by contrast, Maraini concentrates upon women who have been overtly, and violently, silenced. Read together, all four texts demonstrate the techniques that Maraini employs for resisting their silences.

The narratives were all written between 1980 and 1990 and constitute a determined effort on Maraini's part during this period to voice the centuries of women's silence. Through both 'ordinary' and 'exceptional' female figures and through a variety of narrative techniques, she has established a genealogy of women who 'speak'. Where these texts focus upon their protagonists' resistance, however, the following chapters of this study will focus on texts published in the last twenty years which all, regrettably, feature victims who are not given the same chance to oppose the violence that they experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: PERPETRATORS IN *VOCI* (1994) AND *BUIO* (1999)

Grazia Sumeli Weinberg, in an early study of Maraini's oeuvre, devotes a chapter to an exploration of 'l'ostile e affascinante mondo dei padri' (1993: 85) in the author's work. The term is Maraini's own, coined in the introduction to *Storia di Piera* (1980), a published conversation between Maraini and the actor, Piera Degli Esposti, in which both women recognise their own attraction towards, and seduction by, 'i padri'.[1] Whilst Sumeli Weinberg's analysis focuses primarily on *Il treno per Helsinki* (1984) and the play *Don Juan* (1976),[2] the concept of female seduction by the patriarchy recurs elsewhere in Maraini's narrative. In her more recent autobiographical works *Bagheria* (1993) and *La nave per Kobe* (2001), significant attention is paid by Maraini towards her passion for her own father, Fosco, whom she dubs 'il tritone, il seduttore impenitente, il rubacuori, il Peter Pan che la sera ne volava via della finestra verso chissà quali paesi' (*La nave per Kobe*: 140).

Maraini's oeuvre is indeed saturated with the references to the *affascinante* male; it is a motif that emerges not only in those texts that can be classed as autobiographical, but also in her fictional works. Maraini has sought to understand her continued interest in the theme, suggesting that, 'la letteratura è piena di libri sul mistero della donna. [*Il treno per Helsinki*] è invece un libro sul mistero dell'uomo' (quoted in Sumeli Weinberg 1993: 86). The subject is additionally under discussion in *Il treno per Helsinki* itself. Towards the end of the narrative, Maraini's protagonist, who has sought throughout large parts of the

[1] In Chapter Two of this thesis, I noted that Maraini refers to the 'mondo dei Padri' in *Il treno per Helsinki*. In this instance, the character Ada describes it as an 'affascinante grandioso mondo di cui siamo tutte innamorate...' (p. 125).

[2] Of this play, Sumeli Weinberg notes that the central theme is not only 'la seduzione tra i sessi', but also 'il culto del padre' (1993: 176), motifs that recur in both *Voci* and *Buio*, as I outline below.

narrative to understand her partner, Miele, comes to realise: 'questi dinieghi gli sono necessari. Servono a lui prima che a me. Costituiscono la sua personalità. Il suo segreto. Il segreto di Miele' (*Il treno per Helsinki*: 230).

The suggestion that Maraini's male characters are seductive, 'un mistero' to be solved, and objects of passion to both Maraini and her female protagonists is an intriguing, and unsettling, one if these characteristics are considered in relation to the violence that so many of them commit. This problematic juncture provides the focus of the present chapter, which questions whether, for Maraini, the traits of seductiveness and violence are somehow implicitly linked. Previous chapters have focused almost exclusively on the victims of gender violence and it is to their role that I return in Chapters Five and Six. This chapter, by contrast, explores the representation of the perpetrators of violence, and finds that such violence is unambiguously physical in its manifestation. As I propose throughout this study, in Maraini's works from the mid-1990s onwards, violence against women often constitutes the central theme of her narrative, and this is never more apparent than in the texts that are under examination in the current chapter, *Voci* (1994) and *Buio* (1999).

My Introduction outlined some of the many reasons that critics have proposed for why men commit violence against women. These vary greatly, from possessiveness and jealousy to economic deprivation, learned attitudes in which abuse leads to further abuse, or a misplaced belief in a familial ideology in which women are under the ownership of the male head of the family. As I demonstrated, what scholars agree upon is precisely the impossibility of naming one sole motivation for gender violence. However, a unifying factor was identifiable across many writings, and that was the emphasis placed upon

power.[3] Already in this thesis I have considered power in a variety of different contexts: in Chapter One, I took into account the existence of power within an inter-generational sexual relationship, whilst Chapter Two focused upon the Foucauldian conception of power and its dispersion through society. In the present chapter, the links that exist between masculinity and power emerge as a central concern: 'the one issue that an increasing number of social scientists appear to agree upon is the feminist argument that any adequate theory of men and masculinity has to have the concept of *power* at its centre' (Edley and Weatherell 1996: 97. Emphasis in original).[4] When I questioned Maraini about her understanding of the perpetrators of violence, she similarly associated their behaviour with power, broadening her discussion to encompass all cultural situations in which domination exists:

> Credo che dovunque si crei una situazione di dominio culturale e psicologico da parte di una persona su un'altra ci può essere violenza. Molti approfittano: non solo della forza fisica (la cosa più facile), ma dell'ascendenza psicologica (vedi violenza dei padri sui figli), o culturale (degli insegnanti sui discepoli), di quella economica (del datore di lavoro sui suoi dipendenti). (Maraini 2008b)

This chapter considers how, in the texts under examination, male power is constructed and exerted over Maraini's female characters. I argue in particular that, in Maraini's construction of masculinity, physical violence offers a means of controlling women, whilst seduction keeps these women thinking that it is indeed a position in which they desire to be. Furthermore, I suggest that, more often than not, it is through their

[3] I cited Jalna Hanmer, who maintains that male violence 'is designed to control, dominate and express authority and power' (1996: 8).

[4] Psychoanalytic thought around masculinity has similarly centred upon the questions of power, placing a heavy emphasis upon the concept of domination in particular. In Freud's 1930 work *Civilisation and its Discontents*, he maintained that the individual's internal conflict between sexual needs and societal codes of conduct is the source of man's propensity for dissatisfaction, aggression, hostility and ultimately, violence. He writes, 'men are [...] creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness' (1961: 111), whilst suggesting that the super-ego is the means by which these potentially destructive drives are controlled, in order for the individual to operate in a socially acceptable manner. Bob Connell recognises that, '[although] these lines of thought remained speculative and incomplete, [...] they have profound implications. Here was the germ of a theory of the patriarchal organisation of culture, transmitted between generations through the construction of masculinity' (1995: 10).

voices that they charm and bewitch the women around them. Conversely, *Buio* in particular does not offer an 'easy' link between masculinity and violence; indeed, a number of the stories involve female characters who, although they rarely commit violent acts, are complicit in the perpetration of violence and abuse. The binary between masculinity and femininity, perpetrators and victims is thus problematised in the text, and it is this grey area that I subsequently analyse later in the chapter.

I. Constructing the Archetypal Perpetrator in *Buio*

Buio is a collection of short stories which deal, as the book's cover makes clear, with 'fatti realmente accaduti [...] in cui le vittime sono i più deboli: donne e bambini'.[5] The twelve short stories are written 'to condemn Italian society for not protecting its most vulnerable members' (Gabriele 2002: 250). They provide the reader with a litany of horrors, detailing issues such as paedophilia, rape, murder, the prostitution of young Albanian girls, and women who, after having suffered years of domestic abuse, become themselves the perpetrators of violence against their abusers. As Gabriele states, alongside longstanding social ills such as intolerance and hypocrisy, the book deals, above all else, with patriarchal violence: 'the violence long condemned by Maraini' (*ibid*: 250).

The opening story exemplifies Maraini's project. It tells of Gram, a young boy whose parents leave him alone in the family's apartment whilst they go out to work. Gram spends the day looking out the window, where he notices what his child's mind convinces him is 'un uomo piccione' who gestures to the young boy to join him outside. Enchanted by the man's promises to teach him how to fly, Gram gets into his car and is driven into the

[5] The text is one of Maraini's most successful of recent years, winning the Premio Strega in 1999.

woods, where he is brutally abused and murdered. The violence is extreme and, in spite of the story's childlike style, Maraini is unflinching in her description of what Gram suffers:

> Le mani pennute si allungano verso il bambino; gli allargano il collo della maglietta, gli slacciano la cintura dei pantaloncini. Il bambino prende a scalciare disperato. L'uomo gli torce un braccio fino a fargli perdere il respiro. Poi arriva un altro schiaffo e un altro ancora. Il piccolo Gram ha gli occhi velati. Non ce la fa neanche a piangere. Ma continua a tirare calci. (*Buio:* 13)

The narrative focus subsequently switches to the investigation and it is discovered that the perpetrator is a man who works at the local hospital as a social worker to children with Down's syndrome. Crucial to the story, therefore, is Maraini's emphasis upon the surface respectability and normalcy of the perpetrator. He is the last person whom a reader would expect to be capable of such acts and is able to use this to his advantage when he comes under suspicion. When asked for an alibi, he claims, 'ero in ospedale, coi miei bambini down', whilst on being requested to take part in an identity parade, he once again underlines his indispensability at the hospital, 'se poi un bambino down si fa male perché ero assente, vengo arrestato, si rende conto?' (*ibid*: 19-21). Rather than the disturbing 'otherness' of the murderer that we as readers might expect, Maraini's perpetrator is more unsettling to us precisely because he disrupts our norms and expectations. In their study of gender violence, Neil Websdale and Meda Chesney-Lind question whether it is possible to identify a 'typical' perpetrator of patriarchal violence, and conclude that, 'killers appear, for the most part, to be ordinary men' (1998: 62).[6] They thus infer that 'this normalcy is yet further evidence of the powerful connection between the structure of hetero-patriarchal

[6] Their hypothesis, and Maraini's representation, cannot fail to remind of Arendt's 'banality of evil' (1963), in which she proposed that unspeakable crimes are not necessarily carries out by evil fanatics, but ordinary individuals who participate in actions seemingly sanctioned by the state. Violence is thus the result of a process of normalisation. Arendt's work related to Holocaust crimes and has prompted vast academic debate (see, for example, Browning 1992; Goldhagen 1996). Maraini's perpetrators can be likened to this model of 'banality' and 'naturalisation' of evil, but my context remains, however, a gendered one and, as such, it will be predominantly to the work of gender theorists that I refer.

relations and the murder and mutilation of women' (*ibid*: 62), and, of course, children: society's 'più deboli'.

This model recurs throughout the collection of stories, with the perpetrators of abuse and violence regularly seeming to be the most reputable characters. They include a university professor, another two hospital workers and a lawyer. Not only do all work in 'respectable' professions, therefore, but they also represent institutions, offering further evidence of Maraini's meditation on the 'façade' of normality. Chapter Two examined institutional violence against Maraini's female characters and whilst in *Buio,* her victims are mistreated by individuals and not by the broader state, these individuals are allowed to hide behind the ostensibly authorising nature of the institution. The appearance of familiarity granted by the institution renders, once again, their actions more dangerous than if they were performed by someone unknown and 'other'. However, by constituting the characters that the reader would least expect to behave violently, it becomes almost too obvious to the reader by the end of the text whom the perpetrators will eventually be. Evidently, the demand for concision is a feature of the short story, in which the author must select his or her material to convey meaning within the strictest limits of time and space:

> Each word must count. The attitude and approach must be clear. [...] short stories present the close and immediate scrutiny of a few subjects. They do not foster the illusion that we know everything: a scene, a brief encounter, a gesture can be enough. (McClare 1980: 5).

Yet, I would argue, the necessarily direct style and focus of the short story are not the only reasons for Maraini's approach to perpetrators in this collection. I believe that the almost blatant obviousness of her message – that the perpetrators of abuse and violence are not just shadowy figures lurking at night in parks, but can just as easily be respectable friends and neighbours – is just the surface level of a particular model of behaviour that she sees at work between men and women across society.

In *Buio,* male power is established in two seemingly contradictory ways. Firstly, through physical violence: indeed, the level of violence that Maraini's victims experience in these stories is more extreme than in many of the texts previously analysed in this thesis. Subtler, however, is the second way in which her perpetrators establish their power. Not only are they defined by their normalcy, but also by their likeability and seductiveness. As I explore throughout this chapter, it is not just the perpetrators' respectability that is key, but it is the ways in which they charm their victims that appears to concern Maraini. One of the longest stories in the collection, 'Ha undici anni, si chiama Tano', involves the repeated denunciations of sexual abuse by a young boy against his father. The police are convinced of the man's innocence and that the son, Tano, must instead be a pathological liar. Police officers visit the family find the father to be 'bravo', 'simpatico', affettuoso' and 'gentile' (*Buio*: 95-135). Moreover, a female social worker also believes the father over the son, because, as Tano describes, 'si fa incantare […] di papà. È un bell'uomo, piace alle donne' (*ibid*: 103). Consequently, domination is constructed and perpetuated through the dual power of physical violence and seduction, performed by a dangerous, and seemingly ubiquitous, patriarchy.

Critical discourse that theorises men and maleness largely concurs, however, that such a 'one-size-fits-all' definition of masculinity is far from productive; instead, it proposes the idea of multiple masculinities (Connell 1995; Mac an Ghaill 1996; Kimmel et al 2005). This work is informed by that of other scholars, Judith Butler in particular, who have sought to deconstruct traditional sex-role and psychoanalytic thought and conceive instead of gender as a social performance: 'an open-ended process, a sequence of acts or events which does not originate and which is never fully realised' (Salih 2004: 90). Clarifying the concept of performativity, Butler writes, '[it] is not a singular act, but a

repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration' (1999: xv). Butler's writing is instructive in understanding the construction of masculinity through the use of power and domination, suggesting a model through which to read violence as a means by which men perform their masculinity. Its repetition, both individually and generationally, accordingly naturalises it. As Butler further explains, 'there need not be a "doer" behind the deed, but the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed' (*ibid*: 195), once again reiterating the extent to which subjects are defined by what they do, rather than being determined by their biology.

It can therefore be inferred that violence is not inherent to masculinity, but perhaps to a certain *type* of masculinity. Bob Connell built upon the concept of multiple masculinities to portray his theory of hegemonic masculinities, in which he argues that:

> To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. (1995: 37. Emphasis in original)

The model is productive for those seeking to understand the relationships connecting men and for its recognition of the existence of subordinate masculinities, but such focus undermines the use and abuse of male power towards women. In reality, even those men who would appear to be at the lowest rung of Connell's spectrum of masculinities benefit from a patriarchal society and enjoy some power over women. Connell acknowledges this in what he terms 'complicit masculinities'. He writes:

> The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women. (*ibid*: 79)

I would argue that in Maraini's texts, the two forms of power, the physical and the more insidious, seductive power, maintain this masculine hierarchy simultaneously. As such, whilst not all men may exercise it, the majority do profit from its advantages.

Sandro Bellassai, an Italian theorist who is also prolific in the field of masculinities, borrows from Connell's work on complicit masculinities, but seeks to understand a model of masculinity that is specifically Italian, one which he sees as 'virile, aggressiva e autoritaria' (2004: 12).[7] In the particular case of Italian masculinities, Bellassai states that, 'in un'epoca di profondissimi sconvolgimenti sociali e culturali, molti uomini intravidero un fondamento di sicurezza in quelle rappresentazioni dell'identità maschile che promettevano di proteggere e riprodurre nella modernità le antiche gerarchie di genere' (*ibid*: 13). Maraini's seductive, mysterious masculinities differ slightly to that which Bellassai suggests, but they do nonetheless resonate with his robustly virile version of masculinity. What Bellassai's work also offers, of course, is a more immediate situating of masculinity theory in an Italian context.[8]

However, alongside his discussion of hegemonic and complicit masculinities, Connell also recognises, by apparently stark contrast, the very fragility of the masculine hierarchy. Indeed, he questions the efficacy of hegemonic masculinity if violence is ever involved: 'violence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate' (1995: 84). What Connell is here underlining is that where violence is required to maintain

[7] Research carried out by Alessandro Taurino (2003) similarly demonstrates that the most prominent representation of Italian masculinity at the present time remains the stereotype of virility.

[8] By contrast to Bellassai and Taurino's studies, Elena Dell'Agnese and Elisabetta Ruspini (2007) seek to deconstruct the stereotype of the 'Mediterranean male' as passionate, a seducer, virile. Their work is built upon the premise that masculinity, like femininity, is a social construct and thus they argue that to talk about one 'type' is unhelpful. For further critical analyses of masculinity in an Italian context, see Ferrero Camoletto and Bertone (2010) on male heterosexual pleasure and the special issue of *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* on Italian Masculinities (Wanrooij 2005).

the masculine hierarchy, what this is actually highlighting is its own vulnerability. By often resorting to violent means of domination, therefore, are Maraini's male perpetrators actually laying bare the very fragility of patriarchal domination? I would argue quite the opposite: that what Maraini creates is a seemingly polished and impenetrable hierarchy, that is at work without its victims even realising it; and not, as Connell might presume, one that reveals its own weakness. Maraini's suggestion appears to be that whereas physical violence can be used to dominate women and children, the most effective facet of the masculine hierarchy is its use of seduction, which makes them almost complicit in their own subjugation.

These are problematic intimations, which suggest that Maraini's victims are perhaps 'inviting' the violence that they undergo, concepts that persist in Maraini's oeuvre and which I examine elsewhere.[9] Two stories in *Buio*, 'Macaca' and 'Muri di notte', can help readers to understand both the establishment of this relationship, and the psychology of both victim and perpetrator in cases such as these. Both tales present the reader with one particular outcome of sustained and unrelenting male domination, in which the victim responds with violence of her own. A number of sociologists working on questions of domestic violence have considered women's emotional and physical responses to their mistreatment, with Rebecca and Russell Dobash having conducted specific research into women who kill. They write that:

> When a woman dies, it is usually the final and most extreme form of violence at the hands of her male partner. When the man dies, it is rarely the final act in a relationship in which she has repeatedly beaten him. Instead, it is often an act of self-defence or a reaction to a history of the man's repeated acts. (1992: 6)

[9] See, in particular, Chapters One and Five.

Whilst this is certainly a provocative way of looking at the 'victim' of domestic abuse, in Maraini's narratives it does not present an opportunity to demonstrate her female victims as courageous, or newly empowered women who are taking control of their lives. Rather, both women can only profess remorse and guilt at their crimes. Unable to see the actions of their partners as abusive, they instead claim to have been loved and worshipped by them. Similar descriptions of the men recur throughout: in these stories too, the partners are respectable men, 'gentile, affabile, […] innamorato' (*Buio*: 92), and to outsiders their relationships appear 'perfetto' (*ibid*: 91). Yet in the first story, whilst behind closed doors the husband forces his wife into sexual acts against her will, after she has the courage to murder him she can only admit to missing his embraces. This apparent desire to be controlled is even more evident in the second tale, in which the wife declares, 'io mi dedico a lui con generosità e passione. Questo era il mio compito' (*ibid*: 91). In both instances, Maraini describes a relationship in which the craving to be needed is so strong on the part of the women that they are blind to the mistreatment that they experience.[10]

The wife of the second story describes how she was first attracted to her partner: 'mi è subito piaciuta la sua voce densa, sensuale' (*ibid*: 89). A distinguishing trait of nearly all the stories is in fact Maraini's focus upon the perpetrator's voice: describing his father, Tano also states 'quando parla lo trovano tutti simpatico' (*ibid*: 103). Indeed, in both *Buio* and *Voci* the voice is frequently the means by which Maraini's perpetrators 'seduce' not only their victims, but other characters as well. Maraini subsequently fabricates a startling discrepancy between voice and action, as the latter story of a wife who

[10] Their actions are comparable to those identified by psychologists as suffering from 'Stockholm Syndrome', a recognised survival strategy that can occur at moments of emotional and physical vulnerability and distress, which involves the identification with, and even dependence upon, one's persecutor. Originally theorised as relating to hostage situations, psychologists also recognise it at play in situations of domestic violence, such as those experienced by Maraini's characters (Graham 1994). The following chapter of this thesis considers in greater depth the relationship between victim and perpetrator, considering especially the 'love' between the oppressor and the oppressed.

murders her husband makes clear. Having heard a guilt-ridden confession by the wife, detective Adele Sòfia bluntly tells her, '[sono] parole, signora Verbano, parole. Suo marito ha tentato di ucciderla con un coltello da cucina' (*ibid*: 93).[11] Language itself is thus implicated in Maraini's presentation of violence, as a system that perpetuates and legitimates it. Elsewhere, this thesis has considered non-physical modes of violence and I would accordingly add the voice and words themselves to such manifestations. The previous chapter considered women's historical silencing, and the ascendancy of the male voice in the texts under consideration here offers a further representation of this cultural panorama.

What Maraini constructs in *Buio*, therefore, is both an archetypal identity of a male perpetrator and a certain model of behaviour between men and women. Certainly, she is not pretending that either is the only type of perpetrator or violent relationship, but they are constructions that, due to their recurrence across her work, clearly hold substantial interest and relevance to her. What is more, neither is she merely criticising the paradigm nor intimating that her victims are somehow responsible for their abuse. Instead, in a number of other texts, she endeavours to understand their motivations, entering into their psyche through an analysis of her own behaviour. It could even be suggested that one explanation for her continued focus on the seductive male is due to the recognition of his role in her own life. I opened this chapter with a brief outline of the instances at which Maraini admits to her seduction by the patriarchy, namely in *Storia di Piera, Bagheria* and *La nave per Kobe.* The main feature of this acknowledgment surrounds Maraini's much-discussed relationship with her father, which has been dubbed by Judith Bryce, 'an intense and unreciprocated passion' (1998: 221). Without wishing to imply that there was ever any

[11] The character Adele Sòfia appears as detective in both *Voci* and *Buio*. She acts as an agent for justice and constitutes an alternative version of femininity. I return to an examination of her character in the following chapter.

form of violence in Maraini's relationship with her father, the regularity with which she returns to an examination of her, often confused, feelings towards him is, nonetheless, significant.[12]

In *Storia di Piera,* Maraini foreshadows some of the issues to which she will return in her life writings. She admits: 'anch'io volevo sedurre mio padre e portarlo via a mia madre' (*Storia di Piera*: 54). Later in the text she attempts to articulate why she had this desire to seduce him, telling Piera degli Esposti, 'forse perché il tuo amore per il padre bambino è stato un amore felice, concluso, lui non ti scappava come scappava a me mio padre, ti sentivi appagata' (*ibid*: 59). Driven by a desire for her own father's attentions and a need to 'capture' him, Maraini recognises the bewitching nature of 'il mondo dei padri'. In this text she goes further, however, than just a recognition of her own view of her father. Both women also discuss their early sexual relationships and, drawing upon Piera Degli Esposti's experiences, Maraini tries to explore what may be the consequence of masculinities that are both seductive and dangerous:

> Piera: [...] quella era la prima esperienza... qualcosa che mi ha turbata come violenza ma non è che la violenza non ti coinvolga... infatti poi gli uomini come questo pompiere mi sono sempre piaciuti...
>
> Dacia: Dici una cosa che non si osa dire di solito: le prime esperienze sessuali, anche le più sgradevoli, poi tornano come memorie che si insinuano nei tuoi sensi, e c'è un desiderio di ripeterle. (*ibid*: 103)

What Maraini is here describing is a cultural situation which matches the one expressed above, in which the seductive nature of masculinities leads women into a position of submission, but concurrently makes them believe that it is a position in which they want to be. Whilst in writings such as these the 'danger' for women ends there, in some of her

[12] In Maraini's early poetry, for example the collection *Crudeltà all'aria aperta* (1968), her father is an equally prominent figure. Sumeli Weinberg argues that her poetry is the most autobiographical of all her forms of writing, and that these early works in particular are anchored firmly 'nell'ombra del padre' (1993: 200).

fiction, by contrast, this seduction is matched by at times extreme levels of physical violence also used to control and dominate. It is a construction that lies at the heart of many of the stories in *Buio*, and is likewise a central theme of the novel *Voci*.

II. The *fascino* of Masculinity in *Voci*

Voci is, superficially at least, a classic *giallo* in which the protagonist, Michela Canova, returns home from a trip to find her neighbour, Angela, brutally murdered.[13] Admitting ruefully to having barely known the young woman, Michela decides to carry out her own investigation and ultimately discovers that which the police were unable to: that the murderer was Angela's step-father, a man who, Michela discovers, had been sexually abusing his step-daughters since they were 10 years old. Michela, who works as a radio journalist, is simultaneously requested by her manager to research a series of programmes about unsolved crimes against women. The novel is hence only outwardly a classic murder mystery: these dual narratives permit Maraini to use the text as a statement about the pervasiveness of gender violence. As Michela and the reader are to learn, Angela is only one of a catalogue of women who are raped, abused and murdered at the hands of a violent patriarchy, and whose perpetrators are never brought to justice:

> Cinzia O., sette anni, trovata morta con la testa fracassata, in via Tiburtina. Tracce di violenza sessuale. Ignoti. Maria, B., 45 anni, morta per strangolamento nela sua casa di Labaro. Ignoti. Renata M., 22 anni, trovata a villa Borghese, accoltellata. Ignoti. (*Voci*: 52)[14]

[13] Crime novels traditionally challenge underlying questions about justice and the law, whilst ultimately seeking to expose a previously unknown 'truth'. In JoAnn Cannon's analysis of *Voci*, she explores how Maraini exploits and subverts the conventions of the *giallo* 'to produce an unconventional and highly original work of fiction' (2006: 59). Similarly, whilst her study does not address Maraini's work directly, Lazzaro-Weis explores the use of the detective genre by Italian women writers to demonstrate how the form can mark a feminist commitment (1993: 158-79).

[14] The fact that these crimes are never solved offers further evidence of the role of institutions in these works (here the police and courts of law): they are locations that hide and maintain men's violence against women.

Nonetheless, the central focus of the narrative remains Michela's investigation into Angela's death. Yet it is an enquiry which is complicated by the dizzying array of characters (many of them male) who vie for her attention and try to throw her off the course of her investigations with their stories, half-truths and lies. Moreover, as the novel's title suggests, often all that she has to go on to help her in her task is their voices:

> The text is dominated by a chorus of animate and inanimate voices that surround and haunt Michela [...]. [They] form a web of incomplete clues that Michela must interpret as she tries to re-construct the life of a woman who has remained voiceless. (Luciano 2006: 149)[15]

As Michela recognises, 'la mia vita ormai sembra fatta solo di voci estranee che cerco di decifrare, di analizzare' (*Voci*: 105). From the novel's opening, however, she reveals how she delights in voices, imagining that even inanimate objects in her apartment are trying to communicate with her. Likewise, what she recalls and retains of the men that she encounters are their voices. Voices thus hide and reveal: they act as clues and signifiers of the crime, but also, as above, represent the discrepancy that exists between word and action. They consequently suggest that, in this work too, language is part of the larger system of violence carried out by the patriarchy.

One such example of Michela's confusion involves her long-term partner, Marco, who remains nothing more than a voice on the telephone for the entirety of the narrative, calling from a far-off African nation to which he has been sent for work. As his role in the plot intensifies – unbeknownst to Michela, he knew Angela well and is a suspect in her murder – so too does his voice appear ever more fragmented and distant, until Michela is unsure whether his calls are even real or imagined:

[15] In so doing, Michela mirrors in many ways the work of Maraini herself, who, as I analysed in the previous chapter, has throughout her career listened to the voices of women and voiced their silences. Later in this chapter, I discuss further similarities between author and protagonist.

> Deve essere stata la telefonata notturna di Marco che mi ha avvelenato i pensieri. Diceva che mi amava ma che non ci saremmo più potuti vedere. "Ma perché", insistevo e lui, quasi piangendo, mi ha detto che ha "perso la testa". [...] Non so neanche se l'ho sognata questa telefonata. (*ibid*: 205)

His repeated declarations of love for her are countered by a refusal to name a date for his return, leaving Michela unsure of what to believe. Whilst a face-to-face encounter would perhaps have enabled her to judge what is real about his words, Maraini never grants her this opportunity. Instead it is a police officer's voice on the telephone that reveals to her that Marco had known Angela, and Marco's own final words to Michela are yet another voice recording. It seems, however, that this is enough to convince her of his innocence: 'la sua voce, riascoltandola a mente fredda, dice molte più cose di quante dicano le sue parole. Dice di un distacco avvenuto chissà quando e chissà dove [...]. Eppure so con certezza che Marco non può avere assassinato Angela' (*ibid*: 256).

Marco is only one of a number of suspects in Angela's death and, before discovering the truth, Michela has to sift through them, their pasts and the complex web of relationships that surrounded the murdered girl. The first that she encounters is Giulio Carlini, Angela's lover, from whom she begins to learn a little about the neighbour she had never really known. As she listens to Carlini, she becomes caught up in the version of events he presents. It is only when she switches off her tape recorder and speaks to him no longer under the guise of interviewer that she realises, 'in ogni movimento che fa, c'è una sotterranea voglia di seduzione. E io certamente mi sto lasciando sedurre' (*ibid*: 99). Leaving him, the spell is broken and she is able to question what, if anything, he told her was the truth. Later that day, she re-listens to their conversation and is unable to prevent herself from being, once again, seduced by his voice, 'incantatrice, [...] serpentina' (*ibid*: 105).

A thread running throughout the narrative is Michela's gradual realisation of the similarities that exist between herself and her murdered neighbour, a motif I examine in more detail in the following chapter. With relation to the male characters, however, Maraini presents this 'doubling' through their dual seduction by successive characters. As Michela notes following her conversation with Carlini, 'capisco come Angela si sia innamorata di lui' (*ibid*: 101). Whilst for Michela this never goes any further than her desire to listen to their bewitching voices, Angela becomes caught up in affairs with them, none of which are more complex than her relationship with Nando Pepi. Introduced as a pimp and small-time criminal, he appears as easily the most obvious suspect, both to the reader and to Michela, in spite of the police's initial reluctance to trace him. Nando is, however, little more than a narrative device, as Bryce points out: '[Nando's] main function, indeed, is to engineer what turns out to be an illusory atmosphere of threatened violence towards Michela as investigator' (2000: 208).

Yet his role is not without significance. Three scenes in particular evoke this threatening atmosphere, all of which involve Michela in a position of vulnerability and Nando dominating the space with his (albeit imagined) air of threat and danger. Early in the novel, Michela is on her own in a lift with him, later, they are again alone at a cemetery and finally, she watches through her peephole as he breaks into Angela's flat, fearful that he will come to hers next. All three scenes are highly cinematic and it perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that in Franco Giraldi's filmic adaptation of the novel (2000) they are repeated and expanded upon. Bernadette Luciano has analysed Giraldi's film, focusing in particular upon the narrative divergences and omissions that Giraldi chooses to make, in what Luciano terms its 're-dressing' (2006: 145). One of the most significant of these is that Giraldi's Michela ultimately falls in love with Nando and the film ends with an image

of them happily discussing a future together. This, Luciano argues, presents a 'very traditional ending; the "detective" not only solves the crime but gets the desired/desirable partner' (*ibid*: 154). Although this is seemingly not what Maraini had in mind for her protagonist, there is certainly a sense in the novel too that Michela is (once again) seduced by a man whom Angela had loved. Discussing Nando with a friend, Michela describes how, 'chi lo incontra ne rimane incantato' (*Voci*: 219), whilst during the scene in the cemetery her fear of him evaporates once he begins to speak:

> Dopo una attesa che mi sembra lunghissima, finalmente lui apre bocca e in quel momento perdo ogni paura: la scelta della parola esclude l'azione, mi dice l'istinto, o per lo meno la ritarda: che gratitudine per il mondo delle parole, che gioia sentire lo squisito suono di una voce! (*ibid*: 183)

Albeit more overt in the film, in the novel too Nando is represented as exemplifying the combination of seductiveness and danger that many of Maraini's male protagonists embody. The line between fear and pleasure is a fine one and Michela seems unable, as Angela was before her, to resist the seductive nature of male danger.

One final avenue that Michela must investigate before arriving at the real suspect is Angela's brother-in-law, Mario. Although only a minor character, he typifies, perhaps more than any of the other male characters, the archetypal perpetrator of violence against women. Angela's sister, Ludovica, arrives at Michela's flat late one night and is covered in bruises which, she explains, were the result of a beating from her husband. She, along with many other female victims of abuse, is unwilling to go to the police, fearful of not being believed and mistrustful of institutional responses. She tells Michela, 'nessuno mi crederà, nessuno... è un ingegnere così stimato' (*ibid*: 209), denoting once again the surface respectability of a violent male. Her mistrust is not unfounded, however, for when Michela convinces her to press charges, she is not believed. Considering this particular couple, Bryce writes: 'Mario Torres, a man guilty of domestic violence, is judged by Adele to be

"una persona [...] gentilissima e collaborativa" [*Voci*: 213], whereas Ludovica, his abused partner, is viewed as a pathological liar and hysteric' (2000: 216). Ludovica herself is similarly unable, as the abused women in *Buio*, to condemn his abuse and instead continually forgives him:

> Mi ha tirato uno schiaffo che mi ha fatto sanguinare il labbro. Il giorno dopo mi ha chiesto scusa, era spaventato. Mi ha curata, sapesse con che tenerezza, ogni cinque minuti diceva: stai meglio? mi hai perdonato? andiamo al mare? mi fa e abbiamo passato una giornata bellissima sull'acqua ridendo e scherzando. E sapesse come fa l'amore quando si sente in colpa e vuole farsi perdonare. (*Voci*: 209-10)[16]

Mario thus makes Ludovica dependent upon him, and indeed upon the abuse he inflicts. He uses violence as a means of controlling her, and declarations of love to convince her that it was a mistake that is never to be repeated. It is perhaps apt to think again about Connell's assertion that only a fragile form of hierarchy would need to use violence to control. Once more, what Maraini instead describes is a slick and insidious power that is far from vulnerable. This message is in many ways reiterated in a radio debate about violence against women, which informs Michela: 'nessun potere ha dominato senza una qualche forma di terrore e sembra che il mondo dei padri si sia sempre servito, storicamente, del terrore per tenere a bada la sessualità femminile' (*ibid*: 173). Employing once again a phrase that is so familiar to her readers, in this example too Maraini attempts to drive home what she sees as the prevalence of the dangerous 'mondo dei padri'.

It is in the end, however, a character whose voice is markedly absent for much of the text, whom Michela discovers to be Angela's murderer. For Ada Testaferri, by making Glauco, Angela's step-father, the killer, 'Maraini injects quite openly into the detective

[16] When discussing above these two abused women in *Buio*, I made reference to 'Stockholm Syndrome'. I would similarly argue here that Ludovica's behaviour shares many of its characteristics, especially her response to his actions following abuse: it is noted that victims of the syndrome often take even the most minor act of kindness as a positive trait in their abuser, or a sign of love, and thus feel sympathy for him or her (Graham 1994).

genre a feminist perspective whereby the indicting process of the woman detective and the denunciation of the abuses of paternal power coalesce' (2000: 45). By contrast, Giraldi's filmic version unsettles the feminist reading by making Sabrina, a prostitute, Angela's murderer: a woman who apparently kills Angela out of jealousy. As such, his ending denies Maraini's original message, in which all evidence points to the universal social ill that is violence against women and, moreover, the vast number of such crimes that go unsolved. Maraini's work re-appropriates and subverts the classic conventions of crime fiction to expose not only Angela's murderer, but this larger crime too. Just as Michela has had to sort through clues and deny surface appearances, so too must Maraini's readers look beyond the 'façade' in order to understand the extent to which gender violence permeates both public and private lives.

Presented primarily as a caring family man and an upstanding citizen, Maraini's perpetrator, Glauco, measures up almost exactly to the 'archetype' defined above. In fact, even in the midst of describing to Michela the abuse that their step-father would inflict upon her and Angela when they were young, Ludovica is unable to prevent herself from praising him: 'tutti dicevano che era un patrigno esemplare, così affettuoso, disponibile; e lo era, mi deve credere, quando non mi saltava addosso era tenerissimo e tutti me lo invidiavano quel papà' (*Voci*: 265). He is also wealthy, having made a career as a successful sculptor and, as Bryce explains, this alone appears enough to eliminate him from the list of suspects: 'there is a class dimension here, with the pimp, Nando, long treated as the prime suspect, whereas the respectable middle-class men, the engineer, Mario Torres and the architect and sculptor, Glauco Elia, are apparently above suspicion' (2000: 216).[17] Moreover, he too presents an image of himself through his voice that, as before,

[17] Not only do their professions render them 'above suspicion', but, through engineering, designing and building, they can even be viewed as literally 'constructing' society: the society that ultimately serves to hide their crimes.

emphasises the gulf that exists between voice and action: as Michela describes, 'ripenso alla voce che mi ha risposto al telefono: disponibile, ricercata, chiara e pulita [...]: una voce di persona colta, tollerante e ironica' (*Voci*: 222). Likewise, his is a voice that seduces her: it is, she states, 'sensuale e corposa', 'con una intenzione disperata di seduzione' (*ibid*: 280, 235).

He never openly confesses to Michela, but instead sends her a lengthy tape recording in which he offers his version of events. Dealing, as we are, with a narrative that places the voice at its centre, it seems apt to analyse in more depth the way in which he talks about himself, his attitude and behaviour towards his step-daughters, and the events on the night of Angela's death. In a study of male perpetrators of violence against women, Kristin Anderson and Debra Umberson analyse a number of interviews with convicted abusers, in order to speculate that the men's identities are not constructed solely through their actions but also through the discourse about violence that they provide. The outcome of their analysis gives some important insights into the ways in which violent men talk about their actions:

> The respondents in this study used diverse and contradictory strategies to gender violence and they shifted their positions as they talked about violence. Respondents sometimes positioned themselves as masculine actors by highlighting their strength, power and rationality compared with the 'irrationality' and vulnerability of female partners. At other times, when describing the criminal justice system or 'controlling' female partners, they positioned themselves as vulnerable and powerless. (2001: 374)

Glauco's discourse about violence is similarly revealing, and so too does he 'shift position' as he talks about his actions. He begins by reiterating the extent to which he sees himself as having been a good father:

> Ho cercato di dare alle bambine una famiglia; ho ristabilito degli orari che non erano mai stati rispettati; ho creato delle precedenze, dei rituali che sono importanti in ogni famiglia che voglia chiamarsi tale. [...] Posso dire di essere stato un ottimo padre. (*Voci*: 281-82)

In doing so, he admits to having occasionally used violence as a means of 'teaching them a lesson', but sees nothing wrong in having done so. Throughout this monologue there is the overwhelming sense that everything he did was 'for their own good'. Yet as he becomes more expansive, so too is Michela aware of a change in his voice, which becomes 'mano a mano più irsuta e ossessiva. Che altro avrà da raccontare?' (*ibid*: 287). What he has to say is disturbing, and exposes the extent to which he believed himself entitled to Angela's body and desirous of controlling it:

> Il suo corpo era lì a lusingarti, blandirti, era difficile resistere, nessuno resisteva in effetti... un corpo di bambina affamata d'amore, un corpo talmente arreso e morbido che invitava ad una sorta di cannibalismo amoroso... Chiunque di fronte al suo corpo, vestito o nudo che fosse, era preso di una voglia spasmodica di toccarlo, di carezzarlo, di penetrarlo, perfino di forzarlo, perché lei in qualche modo chiedeva proprio questo, voleva l'urto, la presa di possesso, l'invasione... per poi magari respingerti con ripulsa infantile... faceva no con la testa, mentre le labbra, i seni, dicevano di sì... (*ibid*: 288)

His abuses towards her body are thus, in his mind at least, legitimised through his mistaken belief that Angela 'wanted' it. Once more, we are confronted with a situation in which blame is being put on the victim of abuse; this time not, however, by institutions, but by the performer of violence himself. Glauco convinced himself that Angela's body spoke to him and he, maybe with many other perpetrators of violence, believed it to be inviting him to possess and violate it. In his legitimising rhetoric, there is also a nod towards men's proprietorial attitudes regarding women, in which female family members are considered under the ownership of the male head of the family. I highlighted this aspect of patriarchal violence in my Introduction, turning to Liz Kelly's work on sexual access: 'the greater [the] perceived right to exclusive sexual access, the more likely it is that some level of sexual aggression will be considered legitimate' (1988: 30). Glauco, the self-appointed

head of this household, believed himself entitled not only to Angela's adult body, but to that of her and her sister when they were children as well.

The outcome of Anderson and Umberson's research into discourses of violence was that, 'violence is an effective means by which batterers reconstruct men as masculine and women as feminine. [...] These batterers not only performed masculinity but reproduced gender as dominance. Thus, they naturalised a binary and hierarchical gender system' (2001: 375). Their hypothesis is influenced by Butler's work on performativity and re-iterates the extent to which, as noted above, the subject is the product of its actions, rather than the architect of them. In a similar way to the respondents in the study, Glauco too can be seen to have imagined and constructed an account of himself and Angela, in which gender roles are determined and hierarchical: she is weak, vulnerable, in need of his protection and love, and he is the responsible maker and enforcer of laws. In his mind, everything that he does to her body she both needs and has asked for.

Significantly, Glauco never admits to having killed her, in fact he even asserts that, although he was with her on the night of her murder, he left before she died and someone else, 'spinto dalle stesse ragioni che avrebbero potuto spingere me' (*Voci*: 289), must have come to her apartment later that same night and murdered her. There are a number of possibilities for this absence: it could be a conscious choice to reveal only certain details to Michela in the hope that she will accept the version of himself he wants to give: a family man incapable of murder. In fact, throughout the recording, he repeatedly beseeches her to believe him. By contrast, the omission could also be the unconscious act of a deluded man, whose carefully constructed web of lies is falling down around him. Finally, it may reflect a wider cultural situation in which (male) authority figures do not feel they have to justify themselves. The text does not offer any easy answers, but does compellingly represent the

discrepancy between the perpetrator's voice and action that is evident in both *Voci* and *Buio*. Ironically, in the end it is Glauco's actions, and not his voice, that lead to proof of his guilt. Rather than running away, as he had told Michela he would, he kills himself, allowing the police to take a blood sample that offers irrefutable evidence that he was indeed Angela's murderer. In addition, however, renewed reflection upon his final tape recording to Michela does also provide persuasive evidence of his motives. After all, he had been mistreating her since she was a child and it is only at this point that his abuses turned to murder, something which Maraini seeks to explain.

Glauco tells Michela that he had noted a change in Angela on the night of her murder; she spoke to him differently, in what he identifies as Ludovica's voice:

> Ho capito immediatamente che in lei parlava Ludovica. […] Mi ha detto che le avevo rovinato la vita, che il suo corpo era morto, morto per sempre. […] Era fuori de sé, come non l'avevo mai vista […]. "Guardalo, questo corpo nudo", mi ha detto, "sei tu che l'hai reso così assolutamente estraneo e assente". (*Voci*: 292-93)

Angela's newfound ability to challenge Glauco prompts a change in him: finding himself suddenly powerless, he reacts with violence. In some of the masculinity theory outlined above, there was the intimation that virility and aggression are in fact defence mechanisms in what could be considered a particularly difficult historical moment for men (Bellassai 2004: 13). The supposed 'crisis in masculinity' has been presented as a motivation for male violence, as Eugenia Roccella explains: 'la libertà femminile provoca ancora, nei maschi, disagi profondi e scatena talvolta una rabbiosa e aggressiva volontà di sopraffazione' (2001: 12). Moreover, in Hannah Arendt's decisive work on violence in all its manifestations (not just male violence against women), she argues that: 'force is only used when power is in jeopardy' (1969: 56). Arendt's evaluation suggests that men may use violence against women when they sense powerlessness; it is thus particularly relevant

to Glauco, who perceives his long-held power over his step-daughter to be finally slipping away. It is a situation to which Maraini has elsewhere drawn attention: following the UK debut performance of *Hurried Steps*, she contended that male violence against women can occur when the weakest men react against their supposed loss of male privileges (Maraini 2009b). On this occasion, she further suggested that possession and love can often become confused in the perpetrator's mind; when this 'love' is then denied, frustration and anger manifest themselves violently against the one who has taken it away (*ibid*).

From all these character analyses, it would perhaps seem conclusive that, for Maraini, masculinity is implicitly linked to aggression and dominance, and that her female characters inhabit a world in which the masculine hierarchy is maintained and perpetuated through a powerful combination of violence and seduction. It is salient to pause momentarily, therefore, upon the question of whether either text ever challenges this assumption of masculine violence, through the inclusion of any 'types' of masculinity which could be deemed 'redemptive'. Masculinity theory concurs that instead of talking about a single masculinity, the concept of masculinit*ies* should instead be recognised, in which aggression and violent behaviour perhaps characterise one type, rather than being systemic to all men. Echoing this conclusion, Maraini likewise offers some positive examples of a non-violent masculinity, although they tend to be peripheral characters and are undoubtedly a minority. One such example is Ispettore Marra, a detective who appears throughout *Buio*. Marra is presented in a sympathetic light, not only professionally, as a character who helps to bring about the attainment of justice, but also personally: 'la sua generosità e la sua solerzia non deludono mai' (*Buio*: 131).

Similarly, one such secondary character in *Voci* also exemplifies this non-violent, redemptive masculinity. Mid-way through the novel, Michela turns to a sometime

contributor to the radio station, an older lawyer, signor Merli, for advice about her investigation. She is able to discuss the case with him at length, and his intelligent and considered responses help her to clarify her thoughts and gain new perspective on the investigation. Following a conversation with him, she even regrets not having recorded it, certain that his comforting and supportive voice would have helped her: 'non ho avuto il coraggio di portare il registratore dall'avvocato Merli e adesso mi dispiace, le sue parole ragionevoli, affettuose, mi aiuterebbero, oggi che sono perseguitata dai dubbi' (*Voci*: 205). Yet in spite of his intellectual strength, physically, he is weak. He is too ill to go to work and Michela must visit him at home, where she finds him alone, bedridden and hungry. In this particular pairing, Michela can be the dominant force, noting him to be 'vulnerabile e perso' and providing him with food and entertainment: 'lo vedo contentissimo di questo mio progetto mattutino. Deve essere davvero solo se non ha un amico, un parente che gli porti un poco di latte quando sta male' (*ibid*: 204). It is easy to read in the couple a father-daughter relationship that Michela has lacked since the death of her own father. This connection assumes further significance if we consider, with Testaferri, the importance of fathers in the narrative more generally:

> References to the father are interspersed throughout the story disguised as dreams, myths and fables. They foreshadow the final act of the book, the accusation brought against Glauco of prolonged violence leading at first to rape and incest and in the end to murder. (2000: 45)[18]

Michela's own, deceased, father actually makes a number of ghostly appearances in the novel, and in these scenes too it is possible to read affection and reassurance from this alternative version of masculinity. Additionally, where signor Merli was physically weak, these ethereal apparitions by Michela's father mean he lacks entirely a bodily presence.

[18] I considered the role of the father in Chapter One, in which I noted that Maraini's protagonists' fathers generally lacked the power and influence that might be expected in traditional Italian families. I return briefly to a discussion of fathers in the following chapter, where I examine the role of the victim's father in *Colomba*.

Perhaps in Maraini's imagining, therefore, for masculinity to be redemptive, some level of physical vulnerability must also be required.

The apparitions by Michela's dead father may also prompt in the careful reader of Maraini a recognition of the similarity between Michela and Maraini herself. After one such visit, Michela recalls her fear as a child of losing her father, and the subsequent description mirrors almost exactly a passage from the autobiographical text, *La nave per Kobe* (see *Voci*: 93-94 and *La nave per Kobe*: 67). Whilst there are numerous dangers associated with an autobiographical reading of any work of fiction, it remains nonetheless an interesting connection to make, specifically in the context of this chapter.[19] For if this link is acknowledged, it becomes difficult to avoid the theme of seduction: as I have already stressed, a central theme in Maraini's life writing relates to her passion for her own *affascinante* father. With a connection between author and protagonist thus established, it is equally possible to read in *Voci* what Bryce terms 'the seductive father and the desiring daughter' in Maraini's autobiography (2000: 216). Doing so, however, further confuses the idea of redemptive masculinities which might have been suggested through the 'father figures' in *Voci*: albeit non-violent, this type of masculinity may well be just as seductive as those analysed above. In turn, this suggests that even in relationships in which physical power and violence are absent, the maintenance of the masculine hierarchy is in many ways still alive and well.

At the outset of this chapter I also noted that the link that can be perceived between masculinity and power, although strong in both texts, is also problematised through the inclusion of a number of female characters who are themselves both active and passive perpetrators of violence. In this way, I suggested, Maraini calls into question the 'simple'

[19] On autobiographical writings by women, including work on these 'dangers', see Benstock (1988); Gilmore (1994); Parati (1996); Smith and Watson (1998); Cossu (2009).

dichotomy of male perpetrator and female victim. The final part of this chapter explores these at times ambiguous female characters, seeking to understand what might incite them to abusive behaviour.

III. Problematising Perpetrators: Female Complicity

Returning to the first short story in *Buio,* in which a young boy, Gram, is brutally murdered by a local social worker, the role of the mother provides a productive starting point from which to consider Maraini's thoughts about women's responsibility for, and participation in, gender violence. Maraini makes clear in this story that Gram is easy prey to his murderer because of the neglect he experiences at home, and it could thus be inferred that she is condemning the behaviour of his too-young, negligent mother and making her complicit in his death. However, one might also interpret this differently; towards the end of the story Adele Sòfia reminds Gram's distraught mother, and Maraini's readers, that she is not the one who has murdered her son: 'l'ha ucciso una persona precisa, con nome e cognome' (*Buio*: 14). Instead of criticising the mother, therefore, Maraini is criticising a society in which there is neither extended family nor caring neighbours to assist in the protection of a young boy, and in which parents are obliged to work to support financially an already fragile home life. I began my discussion of *Buio* with the suggestion that whilst the stories all deal predominantly with violence, they also expose societal problems of other kinds as well, a consideration to which I return in Chapter Six in which I analyse further some of the collection's stories.

Nevertheless, Gram's mother is just one in a long line of female characters in *Buio* who, to a greater and lesser extent, could be deemed complicit in abuse. In the story

'Alicetta', for example, a nurse in a hospital where child sexual abuse is taking place is too busy with her own patients to observe the others and, fearful of repercussions, she chooses not to investigate her suspicions. Similarly, in 'Chi ha ucciso Paolo Gentile?' and 'Il pastore Ahmed e le tre ragazze nel bosco', the wife of one perpetrator and the mother of the other keep quiet to protect these men, whilst the mother of Tano, whose story I discussed earlier, lies to the police in order to defend her husband against their son's accusations. Her explanation for having done so was that whereas she could accept that he had sexually abused their daughter ('è più normale'), with regards to their son, 'era impossibile, impossibile, l'ho detto: me marìo [sic] faceva l'amore con me, tutti i giorni. Non ci sono mai piaciuti i maschi' (*ibid*: 133). In all these examples, Maraini is implicating not only society at large (as noted above), but also individual women in the crimes committed against her characters. She consequently encourages her readers to question whether this type of complicity is in some ways equal to the very real violence her male perpetrators repeatedly commit.

In addition to these 'complicit' females in *Buio*, Maraini's presentation of Angela's mother in *Voci*, 'takes the conventional, negative line in creating the character of Augusta Elia described by her daughter, Ludovica, as "cieca e sorda" [*Voci*: 261]' (Bryce 2000: 214). Ludovica explains to Michela that even when she told her mother about the abuse their stepfather was inflicting upon them, '[mia madre] mi ha dato uno schiaffo. Sei gelosa perché si occupa più di Angela che di te, mi ha detto' (*Voci*: 261). Augusta may not have been a direct perpetrator of abuse to her daughters, but she is certainly guilty of complicity in it. Elsewhere, critics have identified a potentially difficult attitude towards mothers in general in Maraini's oeuvre (Bryce 1998; Gabriele 2004b), and it may be tempting to suggest that these problematic figures in *Voci* and *Buio* simply constitute further examples

of this. They could be seen as remnants of Italian feminists' provocative attitude towards the mother, an idea which was first vocalised in the 1970s, as Adalgisa Giorgio explains: 'feminist analyses of women's cultural and social subordination published in the 1970s put the mother on trial for her complicity with patriarchal norms and for being the agent of their perpetuation' (2002: 5). I would argue, however, that in the two texts here under discussion Maraini is actually proposing a situation more complex than one in which mothers are simply 'problematic'. Indeed, during a discussion that focused upon gender violence, Maraini touched upon the question of mothers who do not denounce abuse. She argued that mothers in general can be seen to invest a great deal in their families and marriages, and so, when faced with something that will potentially destroy its delicate balance, they can be extremely reluctant to betray the stability that they believe themselves to have created (Maraini 2010c).[20]

Maraini's 2004 novel *Colomba,* a text that I analyse in detail in the following chapter, contains a protagonist, Zaira, who learns that her daughter was the victim of abuse at the hands of a family member. Pertinently, Zaira questions: 'ma perché le madri non vedono mai quello che succede nelle proprie case, sotto i propri occhi?' (*Colomba*: 175). She is unable to find a satisfactory response, but recognises herself amongst those, 'madri innamorate, che credono [...] più nelle consuetudini amorose che negli agguati dentro le ombre di una abitazione troppo nota e conosciuta' (*ibid*: 175). Similarly, in *Voci*, Ludovica describes how her mother's ignorance of the abuse her daughters were suffering was almost deliberate: 'era come mia madre mi avesse fatto capire che quello era il sacrificio necessario per tenerlo in famiglia, per mantenere la sua protezione, la sua benevolenza' (*Voci*: 262). Both mothers deny the abuse, perhaps because this is the easiest way to deal

[20] Daniela Danna similarly foregrounds 'l'idea di sacralità della famiglia […] condivisa […] da alcune donne', which makes them reluctant to denounce, or escape from, abusive situations (2007: 75).

with it.[21] In the previous chapter of this thesis, I touched upon the subject of familial denial in the novels *Isolina* and *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, and looked to the work of Patrizia Romito on 'hiding strategies' (2008). Later in that study, Romito uses Valentina Pisanty's comments relating to Holocaust denial (1998), to affirm that:

> The temptation to deny the existence of a phenomenon is in proportion to the extent of the phenomenon itself. Sexual violence against girls and boys is so wicked and destructive and at the same time so widespread and pervasive that historically mechanisms for denial have had to be increased, developed and refined to maintain the status quo. (2008*:* 127)

Therefore, alongside the mothers', perhaps understandable, desire not to destroy what they see as the benefits of family, it could likewise be suggested that at work in all of these examples is a robust and enduring sense of denial.

The final story in *Buio*, however, presents the reader with a distressing representation of female complicity, and indeed overt participation, in abuse, that cannot be explained by denial nor love, and as such warrants individual attention. Entitled 'Ombre', it tells of the repeated prostitution of an eight-year-old girl to an old man by the girl's own grandmother. Maraini uses a similar style to that in 'Il bambino Gram', giving the narrative a childish feel that only accentuates the horror she is describing. The grandmother seemingly embodies cruelty, handing her granddaughter to the old man quite willingly. Moreover, upon discovering that he has died whilst with they were together, she calmly gives the young girl her instructions to forget everything and tell people they had been at the supermarket. Then,

> [c]on gesti precisi e frettolosi, infila una mano nella tasca della giacca appesa alla sedia, ne estrae il portafogli da cui cava fuori due carte da centomila lire. "È quello che mi doveva. E niente più, [...] non sono una ladra". (*Buio*: 208-09)

[21] Romito (2008: 68) discusses institutional responses to mothers who do not denounce abuse against their children. She explains that, in the United States in particular, such 'failure to protect' can lead to women being tried and convicted of abuse themselves.

In spite of this, Maraini hints at the grandmother's recognition of her own guilt: 'guarda i due che spariscono nel corridoio macchiato di ombre e qualcosa le scava nel ventre come un topo in gabbia' (*ibid*: 207). She likewise suggests why the grandmother may behave in such a way: 'ogni tanto una immagine fastidiosa le torna alla memoria: un'altra mano ossuta, un altro portone, tanti anni fa: sua madre Agatuccia l'accompagnava, come fa ora lei con la nipote, a "guadagnarsi il pane"' (*ibid*: 207). The generational nature of abuse has been theorised, and although, evidently, abuse will not always necessarily beget abuse, it has been recognised that violence suffered as a child is a powerful contributor to the probability of becoming a violent adult:

> An action performed by the parent not only gives the child a template to copy, it also provides the child with an example of the moral standards by which that family is governed. If a parent strikes a weaker member of the family, the child usually assumes that, at least within the family, social morality allows the strong to hit the weak. (Deats and Lenker 1991: 5)

Yet whilst such theorising might offer, to some extent, an explanation for the grandmother's behaviour, there is surely a broader situation at work here that incites and perpetuates female participation in male violence.

Elsewhere in this thesis, I have identified other female characters in Maraini's oeuvre who commit acts of violence, amongst them Charlotte Corday and Elisabetta, for whom I suggested that there were political motivations for their violent behaviour. Their actions are thus difficult to compare to those of Maraini's female perpetrators in *Buio*. A recent edition of *DWF* likewise considered the theme of 'donne violente' and proposed a number of reasons for aggressive behaviour on the part of women – including the rational use of violence for the common good (Schiavon 2009) and as a means of vengeance (Turco 2009) – which it is once again difficult to apply to the characters here under discussion. I also highlighted in Chapter Two, however, the nuns who ran the institutions in which

Maraini's protagonists were interned, and suggested that they were themselves the performers of violence. These characters reinforced institutional discourse and disseminated the messages of both Church and state; as such, I argued, they reflected the Foucauldian thesis that citizens are both subject to and the bearers of power. If in this chapter I am considering the maintenance of a masculine hierarchy, preserved through differing forms of power, then once again it would be worthwhile to look at the holders of power to understand those who are subject to it. Indeed, to borrow Chomsky's term, it might even be possible to talk of 'manufactured' complicity, in which a pervasive patriarchal power inculcates women with certain beliefs and codes of behaviour.[22] The slickness and impenetrability of the masculine hierarchy that I identified above could be seen to be working here to manufacture female collusion in male violence, potentially unbeknownst to the female perpetrators themselves.

Feminist critics have identified the damaging effects that internalised sexism and internalised oppression can have upon women:

> To be psychologically oppressed is to be weighed down in your mind; it is to have harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem. The psychologically oppressed become their own oppressors; they come to exercise harsh dominion over their own self-esteem. Differently put, psychological oppression can be regarded as the 'internalization of intimations of inferiority'. (Bartky 1990: 22)

Building on work such as Bartky's, Penny Rossenwasser additionally posits that internalised oppression not only results in, 'group members loathing themselves', but also in them 'disliking others in their group' (2000: 565). It may be possible to suggest, therefore, that female complicity and participation in abuse is, for Maraini, the result of such internalisation of oppression. This leads to a perceived need to damage other women, rather than the realisation 'that these beliefs are constructed in them by oppressive socio-

[22] See Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988)

economic political systems' (*ibid*: 565). Where above I described the startling discrepancy that Maraini evokes between voice and action, with regards to her female perpetrators it is similarly possible to identify a gap between conscious thought and action. Indeed, after having informed her mother about their abusive step-father, Ludovica describes: 'ho sentito che facevano l'amore, rumorosamente, come per farsi sentire da noi e farci sapere che la giustizia procedeva nella sua folgorazione...' (*Voci*: 262). The masculine hierarchy maintains its power through its credibility and status, imbuing women with messages of male privilege and female oppression. It may be that at its most potent, these messages can lead to female involvement in male violence.

Finally, I have focused a great deal on the nature of seduction in this chapter, and if, as in Chapter Two, I turn very briefly to Foucault's ideas around the insidious nature of power, this time under discussion in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), it is possible to read one further motive for Maraini's female characters' complicity. Describing power, Foucault writes, 'power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch. Pleasure spread to the power that harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered' (1976: 45). Power is attractive, it seduces and, as such, it may even incite those in its grip to collude in behaviour that damages those around them. Looking once again to the way in which Ludovica describes her step-father, we find this: 'lui era il marito, il padre, l'uomo di casa, e noi rimanevamo segregate nel cerchio della sua magia...' (*Voci*: 262). The girls' mother, perhaps along with many other women who are involved in violence and abuse, was in the control of her husband's seductive power and it seems that she would do anything to remain that way.

For Maraini, perpetrators are thus undoubtedly problematic. I have demonstrated in this chapter that there is an archetype that recurs, which illustrates the perpetuation of a

particular model of behaviour by both male and female characters, and leads to the maintenance of a masculine hierarchy. As I have repeatedly underlined, perhaps the most disquieting aspect of this model is the extent to which this type of violence is implicitly linked to seduction. By consequence, there is a sense that Maraini's female victims are themselves complicit in their mistreatment. As Ludovica states about her sister's death, '[Angela] gli ha aperto la porta, questo è certo, ha aperto la porta al suo assassino' (*Voci:* 267). I now turn to an analysis of this implication, through a consideration of two of Maraini's victims: *Voci*'s Angela and the eponymous victim of the 2004 novel, *Colomba.*

CHAPTER FIVE: 'POST-FEMINIST' VICTIMS IN *VOCI* (1994) AND *COLOMBA* (2004)

Chapter One of this thesis focused on Maraini's two debut novels, *La vacanza* (1962) and *L'età del malessere* (1963), and demonstrated that their adolescent female protagonists were persistently subjugated and abused by the novels' male characters. In the texts *Colomba* (2004) and *Voci* (1994) Maraini once again places young women at the centre of her narrative, but, this time, their victimhood is even more overt in its manifestation. As was seen in the previous chapter, *Voci* centres upon the brutal murder of Angela, a woman who had been abused since she was a young girl. In *Colomba*, the reader learns of a young woman (called Colomba) who has been entreated away from the safety of her grandmother's home to live with a man who abuses her, both physically and emotionally, almost to the point of death. Consistent with the central arguments of this thesis, alongside this more explicitly physical nature of their mistreatment, the two latter 'victims' also assume less agency than their antecedents and, as I explore below, any agency they do assume is highly problematic from a feminist perspective.

Strikingly, however, Angela and Colomba do not inhabit the same world as many of Maraini's other female victims, in particular those early protagonists Anna and Enrica, who lived in a society that was recognisably patriarchal. Instead, Angela and Colomba are products of a society that has lived through feminism and supposedly been changed by it. Is Maraini suggesting, therefore, that in spite of the demands made by feminism, little or indeed nothing has changed for women? Or is she rather describing a different set of

contextual circumstances and a different kind of victim, one who could be tentatively termed 'post-feminist'?[1]

By post-feminist, I refer to what has been recognised as a belief that the feminist struggle is over and that all necessary gains for women have been made. This has led, it has been argued, to the potentially false feelings of empowerment, choice and sexual liberty that some young women believe they hold (Genz and Brabon 2010: 64-75, 91-105). I recognise that these are contentious issues which have divided feminist scholars for a number of years and, as such, I begin my analysis with a discussion of some of the main theories surrounding the 'post-feminist' era. I then propose a reading of Colomba and Angela as this new kind of victim: one who, I argue, inhabits a cultural landscape that encourages her towards damaging sexual relations, seemingly of her own accord. I concluded the previous chapter with a quote from Angela's sister, who suggested that the young woman, 'ha aperto la porta al suo assassino' (*Voci*: 267); so too in the later novel does Colomba appear to collude with her abuser. In my Introduction, I foregrounded questions around female agency and outlined the opposing sides of it that are present in Maraini's oeuvre: the 'negative' expression of agency through complicity in abuse and its 'positive' counterpart through resistance and autonomy. Both expressions are portrayed in the two novels and are under discussion in the present chapter. I examine first whether Angela and Colomba can be regarded as agents who are in control of their lives and fates. Later, I analyse the role of two other characters in the novels: Colomba's grandmother, Zaira, and *Voci*'s detective, Adele Sòfia. Not only are both women agents of justice in the novels, but they are also presented as more independent, empowered women. They are

[1] Christina Siggers-Manson suggests a similar reading of the two novels; her view of post-feminist is, however, mostly un-theorised and suggests only that Colomba is 'largely unaware of feminist issues' (2005: 96). I explore the term in depth below and propose a deeper analysis of the ways in which the novel interacts with post-feminist culture.

additionally, however, women from a different generation and I consequently question whether both novels are in fact deliberations upon youth versus experience. The chapter concludes by discussing whether Maraini is arguing not that the women's movement failed to produce a more equal society, but that its failure has been in its inability to transmit its message to subsequent generations of women.

Before beginning my analysis, it is worth briefly describing the novel *Colomba*, which, I believe, signifies a notable change in style for Maraini. At some 400 pages, it is over double the length of many of her previous novels, and, through its scope, structure and use of language it represents a fuller and more complex read than some earlier texts.[2] The novel is set in Abruzzo, where Maraini herself has spent an increasing amount of time and she actually appears throughout the novel as a fictionalised version of herself, dubbed 'la donna dai capelli corti'. In these passages, the character Maraini reflects upon her own processes as an author and considers the nature of storytelling. She is recognisable in a further motif in the novel: recurrent throughout the text is a scene in which a young girl implores her mother to tell her stories in order to help her sleep; these descriptions mirror others by Maraini of the relationship between herself as a child and her own mother (*Colomba*: 355; *Nave per Kobe*: 116). This more determined move towards life writing can be identified in Maraini's work of the last decade and is similarly in evidence in *Colomba.*[3] Yet the text's autobiographical elements constitute only a small part of its identity. The central feature of the narrative recounts, by contrast, the history of six generations of the fictional Del Signore family, through whom Maraini simultaneously

[2] Paolo Di Paolo highlights the novel's complexities, writing: 'un libro, *Colomba*, che non nasconde difficoltà, smarrimenti, fatiche, pericoli' (in Maraini 2005: 206).

[3] For discussions of Maraini's autobiographical writing, see Bryce (1998) and Fanning (2005). Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted autobiographic traces in a number of Maraini's works, including *La vacanza, L'età del malessere, Il treno per Helsinki* (1984) and *Voci*. In both Chapters One and Four, however, I warned against a strictly autobiographical reading of Maraini's work.

interweaves a cultural history of twentieth-century Italy. The text touches upon the war years, communism, the student revolutions and even elements of more localised history such as the bandits who terrorised the countryside of Abruzzo.

At the heart of the novel are two female members of the Del Signore family: Zaira and her granddaughter Colomba. Their story begins a year after Colomba has gone missing and narrates Zaira's determined quest to find her granddaughter. Against the advice of her neighbours, Zaira persists in searching the local woods and mountains in the belief that she will eventually find Colomba. The 'donna dai capelli corti' explains at the beginning of the novel that she was initially reluctant to tell the two women's story: 'non se la sente di raccontare la vicenda, molto comune a dire il vero, di questa Colomba che è scomparsa di casa' (*Colomba*: 11). Maraini's stated view of the writing process is, however, that characters write their own stories (*ibid*: 9), and she is accordingly virtually powerless to stop Zaira's incessant urgings to recount this one.[4] Yet, as the narrative unfolds, both the author and reader come to understand that *Colomba* is not just the story of a missing person. Rather, like so many of the female characters in Maraini's oeuvre who have been identified and explored throughout this thesis, so too can Colomba be classified as another unfortunate victim of gender violence. Both she and Angela are exposed to violent mistreatment; it is indeed the foremost way in which they are subjugated in a society that, far from bearing witness to the parity which second wave feminism might have hoped to achieve, appears to remain largely patriarchal.

[4] During a question-and-answer session at the University of Birmingham, Maraini similarly discussed the autonomy of her characters, arguing that they decide their own endings and it is not for her, as author, to intervene (2009d).

I. Post-feminism

'Post-feminism' has been recognised as a label that evades a single frame of definition; rather it evokes a multiplicity of meanings and enjoys a broad and diverse variety of manifestations (Genz and Brabon 2009: 2). All such assumptions, note Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, can broadly be defined, however, as having to do 'with the "pastness" of feminism, whether this supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned or celebrated' (2007: 1). The 'post' to which I refer would most likely equate to Tasker and Negra's 'mourning' of the loss of feminism, and could thus be considered a rather negative, one-dimensional use of the term. Many readings dismiss this reading of 'post' as equating to 'anti', and choose instead to focus upon feminism's coming of age: 'its maturity into a confident body of theory and politics [...] a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism' (Brooks 1997: 1). As Genz and Brabon contend, a negative interpretation of the label, 'leads to a perception of [post]-feminism as a retrogressive, anti-feminist backlash that retracts and invalidates the gains and sexual transformations brought on by or through the feminist movement' (2009: 5).

Nonetheless, in my reading of post-feminism in the texts *Voci* and *Colomba* I wish to draw upon scholars who do favour the more problematic, 'negative' definition of the term, the characteristics of which I recognise as being at work in the two texts. Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1992) was one of the earliest texts to identify a shift towards anti-feminist sentiment. This mood-change was fuelled, she argued, by a hostile media which blamed feminism for all women's contemporary problems, in particular the perceived inability of women to 'have it all'. Faludi further maintained that this backlash was linked

to ‘an equally retrograde postfeminism that lures women into silence and inaction’ (Genz and Brabon 2009: 14). More recent criticism has, however, identified a move beyond a form of post-feminism that silences women, to a situation defined by ‘aggressive individualism, by a hedonistic female phallicism in the field of sexuality, and by obsession with consumer culture’ (McRobbie 2009: 5). McRobbie’s study, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, is central to my understanding of a post-feminist culture and how Maraini’s protagonists could be seen as victims in it; as such it is worth briefly laying out the central tenets of her argument. McRobbie theorises a process of ‘undoing’ and ‘disarticulation’ at work in the contemporary cultural landscape, in which, rather than a mere backlash against feminism, aspects of it have actually been taken into account and used to undermine both feminist thought and years of feminist gains (2009: 1, 11). She states:

> Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’, these elements [of feminism] are then converted into a much more individualist discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism. (*ibid*: 1)

The results of this undoing are, for McRobbie, multifarious, from the promotion of a new traditionalism and a return to domesticity, to the view for many young women of feminism as unpalatable and irrelevant to their lives, and, significantly, to a new understanding of what ‘femininity’ should and does mean to them. Clarifying the latter, McRobbie describes what,

> in Foucauldian language, we might refer to as technologies, each of which are made available to young women as part of a process of substitution and displacement and each of which also appears to offer possibilities of freedom and change in the status and identity of young women today. (*ibid*: 7)

Amongst these possibilities, McRobbie identifies the ‘phallic girl’: ‘this is a young woman for whom the freedoms associated with male sexual pleasures are not just made available but encouraged and also celebrated’ (*ibid*: 83). As Ariel Levy (2005) similarly argues,

young women can be considered to inhabit a culture in which sexually provocative behaviour is associated with freedom. Any refusal or defiance of this kind of behaviour leads them to be labelled killjoys and prudes.[5] Additionally, for Rosalind Gill, contemporary femininity can be seen as a condition in which the possession of a 'sexy body' is offered as women's key source to identity (2007: 255). In the model of sexuality here proposed, women are offered independence by their voluntary objectification; it is accordingly to such scholarly work that I refer when discussing the existence and consequences of the similarly false feelings of empowerment and sexual liberty in Maraini's protagonists.

In a discussion that followed the UK debut performance of *Passi affrettati* in Leicester in 2009, Maraini made a couched reference to precisely such a cultural situation. Considering gender violence in contemporary society, she highlighted today's consumerism, and suggested that sex too is a market in which anything can be bought (Maraini 2009b). Post-feminism has evolved in the context of late capitalism and Maraini's remarks are thus pertinent to the construction of my theoretical framework. In *Ho sognato una stazione* (2005) Maraini addresses the issue more overtly, arguing, in line with the work of post-feminism, that:

> Siamo libere di spogliarci, di esibirci, di suscitare pubblicamente il desiderio maschile: non è davvero una conquista? Ma in questa luccicante libertà esiste una trappola che spesso le donne non distinguono: il corpo femminile si è trasformato in puro linguaggio di scambio. (2005: 52)

Moreover, in the same discussion, she also draws specific attention to younger women, noting that whilst in the day, 'sembrano […] prese da un disinvolto progetto di emancipazione', in the evening, when going out or spending time with their male peers, 'si

[5] See also Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls* (2010) which puts forward a similar thesis to Levy's texts but is situated in a British context.

sentono in dovere di modellarsi su quella ragazza sessualmente esibita ed esposta al desiderio maschile che tutti si aspettano' (*ibid*: 50).

Aside from Maraini's own contribution, however, it could be argued that my understanding of 'post-feminism' is a situation limited to Britain and the United States, and one that may thus have little relevance in Italy.[6] Yet in recent years Italian feminist researchers have also begun to re-consider the position of women, particularly young ones, in contemporary Italian society. Already in 1997, in *Le donne fanno paura*, Chiara Valentini noted that:

> Molte, soprattutto le più giovani, hanno la convinzione che la partita sia conclusa, che fra uomini e donne non esistano più differenze. È uno stato d'animo che per molto tempo ho condiviso anch'io. Ma è proprio lo scarto fra questa visione ottimistica e la realtà delle cose a provocare un malessere che oggi mi sembra particolarmente forte. (1997: 12)

Likewise, Eugenia Roccella argues:

> Contrariamente a quello che è avvenuto per il Sessantotto [...], sul femminismo non c'è più dibattito, non c'è più il calore dello scontro, di passioni e opinioni diverse. [...] L'apparente unanimità di consensi, [...] sembra certificarne lo stato di non pericolosità, di morte apparente o reale. (2001: 9)

The recognition by both scholars of a culture in which the hard-fought-for equality that many women believed to have won has not been fully realised is developed by Francesca Zajcyzk into a situation in which: 'le donne giovani hanno sì dato per acquiste alcune fondamentali conquiste, ma si sono trovate *sole* a scontrarsi con le battaglie sul campo, soprattutto nel mercato del lavoro' (2007: 15. Emphasis added). 'Aggressive individualism' was a feature of McRobbie's reading of post-feminism, and demonstrates the lack of collective thought and action that had characterised much of second wave feminism.

[6] Claudia Mancina's study, *Oltre il femminismo. Le donne nella società pluralista* (2002), considers the identity and representation of women in a post-feminist society, from an Italian perspective. Its focus, however, is upon issues that were central to second wave feminism, amongst them abortion, maternity and sexual difference, rather than a deconstruction of what a post-feminist society might involve.

In Italy critics have additionally noted the emergence of a 'new traditionalism', which is so celebrated in British culture through television shows and cultural figures (McRobbie 2009: 34). Eleonora Cirant's work on the current state of young womanhood in Italy recognises this trend, foregrounding the increasing number of women who are choosing marriage and motherhood over degrees and careers (2005: 94). There may be a difference in the ways these changes manifest themselves in Italian culture, but fundamentally, the situation mirrors that of Britain and the United States: a context in which young women appear to believe that they are equal to their male peers, but in reality their choices are limited, and both the gains and perceptions of feminism are being gradually 'undone'. It is salient to question, however, whether McRobbie's 'phallic girl' can also be identified within this landscape. Although she is perhaps yet to be theorised to the same extent in Italian culture as in Anglophone, she is certainly embodied in a variety of forms. Melissa P.'s novel *100 colpi di spazzola prima di andare a dormire* (2003), for example, offers a young protagonist who could be seen to exemplify the supposed sexual liberation of post-feminist women. The text documents the girl's willing participation in a large number of sexual encounters, with the result that her identity is constructed almost entirely through her objectification.[7] For another incarnation, we can turn to Loredana Lipperini's *Ancora dalla parte delle bambine* (2007), which presents an investigation into the images and role models that young girls are offered, be it on television, in books or through advertising. Lipperini demonstrates how, almost without exception, the message of these media is that beauty and 'sexiness' are the only way to be 'feminine'. Such indoctrination begins, moreover, from the youngest of ages. The documentary, *Il corpo*

[7] For a critical reading of the novel, see Alistair Fox (2005). Isabella Santacroce's trilogy of novels – *Fluo* (1995), *Destroy* (1996) and *Luminal* (1998) – also offers a problematic construction of female sexuality, and her female protagonists' bodies too are subject to violence. The works have been read in a postmodern, but not necessarily post-feminist, context (Lucamante 2001; Ross 2007).

delle donne (2009), likewise highlights the exploitation of women's bodies on Italian television. It demonstrates how, for many Italian girls, the sexualised female form that is ubiquitous on Italian television constitutes the only available model of femininity.[8] What we are dealing with, therefore, is not solely an American or British phenomenon: in Italy too we can recognise similar patterns of behaviour and similar attitudes.[9] Cross-culturally, it appears, 'new and seemingly "modern" ideas about women and especially young women are [...] disseminated [...] aggressively, so as to ensure that a new women's movement will not re-emerge' (McRobbie 2009: 1).

Having identified this current of thought and behaviour as a significant and relevant aspect of a post-feminist society, it subsequently becomes important to consider my use of the word 'victims'. There is considerable mileage in the argument that, far from being implicitly damaging, a renewed version of femininity that promotes young women's independence and empowerment does in fact provide women with a productive way of negotiating their gender. Likewise, for many, living one's sexuality 'like a man' could be presented as an emancipated way of being that represents, once and for all, women's parity. Yet the type of imagery that surrounds all of these 'new' possibilities for women – from the pursuit of a feminine image and a return to the hearth, to the 'pornification' of women's culture – is similar to that which feminists of the 1960s and 70s identified as patriarchal concepts, which, as was recognised at the time, ultimately render women inferior and powerless. Indeed, the 'empowerment' promoted by this imagery is not for some women concrete, but can be false and illusory. Moreover, the emphasis upon individualism disallows the possibility of societal change through collective action that

[8] See www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/?page_id=89. The documentary has now also been made into a book (Zanardo 2010).
[9] In the following chapter I consider other links that exist in Maraini's work between the global and the local, situating her recent texts in the context of transnational feminism.

otherwise could, potentially, subvert this assumed intersection of femininity and inferiority. Finally, whilst the growth in recreational sex by young women may represent the appropriation of the freedoms typically associated with male sexual pleasures, there is no criticism in this appropriation, nor are the damaging, negative aspects to which it can conceivably give rise taken into account.

I argued in the first chapter of this thesis that whilst Anna and Enrica were demonstrating agency through their sexual behaviour, they were also opening themselves up to danger and mistreatment. In contemporary society, sex is celebrated as an ever more 'light-hearted pleasure' (*ibid*: 83), and consequently, so too have some of the potential dangers associated with it increased. I now go on to demonstrate that this is a state of affairs that Maraini is highlighting and criticising in the two novels under discussion in this chapter.

II. Angela and Colomba

As I described in the previous chapter, in *Voci*, Maraini's protagonist Michela quickly realises that she knew about little about her murdered neighbour, Angela, in spite of having lived next door for her for some time: 'mi chiedo cosa so della mia vicina ammazzata a coltellate: niente; una donna è stata uccisa dietro la porta accanto e io non so neanche come si chiamasse' (*Voci*: 9). At this early stage in the novel, Michela has only two clues to her neighbour's identity, the apartment in which she was murdered and a recording on her own answering machine: 'una voce femminile che non conosco "Cara Michela Canova, io sono..." ma la comunicazione viene interrotta con un clic misterioso. Mi ricorda la voce della vicina, ma perché avrebbe dovuto telefonarmi?' (*ibid*: 11). The

apartment offers Michela the greatest indication as to the circumstances surrounding the girl's death: tellingly, the door was not forced and a neat pile of clothes testifies to Angela's willingness to undress for her murderer. It is, however, the disjointed voice on the phone that most intrigues Michela, who, as we have seen, has a great passion for voices.

With little other evidence available, Angela's identity is constructed entirely through others, a theme that is reminiscent of two other characters analysed in this thesis, Isolina and Charlotte Corday. Unable to speak to Angela in person, Michela instead forms an image of her that others have defined. Giulio Carlini describes Angela as 'straordinaria, [...] generosa e gentile, [...] e amabile, quanto amabile!', yet at the same time having 'un carattere sbilanciato', and being 'una persona difficile, [...] notturna, misteriosa e rivoltata' (*ibid*: 96-97). A similar account is offered by Angela's sister, Ludovica, who depicts a woman who was 'fragile, disordinata, incapace di organizzarsi', whilst simultaneously being 'dolcissima, tanto dolce e remissiva quanto insicura' (*ibid*: 37). Ludovica also hints at the complexity of Angela's web of sexual relationships: 'gli uomini si innamoravano di lei, come pere cotte, ma poi la lasciavano. Forse ne avevano paura' (*ibid*: 41). This aspect of her identity is developed by Sabrina, a woman who works as a prostitute (Sabrina also insinuates that Angela too had, on occasion, sold her body for money): 'che volete sapere? che era una bambina [...] con la testa dura... voglio qua e voglio là; agli uomini gli piaceva fargli girare la testa in tondo... più giravano e più era contenta... tutti ci cadevano perché era carina' (*ibid*: 77).

In this latter description, Sabrina's choice to call Angela 'una bambina' seems particularly apt: what is most striking in all the discourses about her is her perceived inability to look after herself. This kind of female vulnerability is one of the aspects of

more traditional notions of femininity which have been re-appropriated in the media and in popular culture as a way for young women to 'empower' themselves in contemporary society (Genz and Brabon 2009: 78). Angela's own helplessness manifests itself in her desire be looked after by a man, but, as both Ludovica and Sabrina recognise, she also believes that the only way to attract male attention is through the use of her body. Much like the young women that Levy, Walters and McRobbie describe in their discourses on post-feminism, 'Angela non sapeva, non conosceva altro modo di interessare la gente che usando il suo corpo...' (*Voci*: 291). Sadly, of course, far from leading to her independence and emancipation, the ultimate consequence of Angela's behaviour is her death. Her murder at the hands of a lover was, as Ludovica explains, perhaps the inevitable conclusion of her (mis)-use of her body: 'ha aperto la porta al suo assassino perché voleva sedurlo, è una cosa sicurissima, voleva dimostrare che lei è più forte' (*ibid*: 267).

By apparently stark contrast, Maraini's other 'post-feminist victim', Colomba, is initially presented to the reader in rather different terms. Her grandmother Zaira describes the young woman as, 'un tipo riservato e silenzioso. Non amava il chiasso. Le piaceva passeggiare nei boschi [...]. È giudiziosa, calma. Lavora tanto, a volte mi telefona: nonna, non torno a casa, faccio straordinari fino alle nove. Alle nove e cinque arriva' (*Colomba*: 73). In a similar divergence from what the reader learns of Angela, we are also led to understand that Colomba is, 'delicata, sensibilissima, [...] taciturna e seria, meticolosa, dolce e arrendevole' (*ibid*: 258). A quiet, sensible girl, whose situation is not, it might seem, comparable to Angela's. It is once again worth mentioning that this description comes from someone else: readers are not allowed to form their own picture of Colomba,

but rather are directed to one by a third party.[10] What we repeatedly encounter in Maraini's texts are female characters whose personalities are constructed by those around them; rarely are we privy to their own accounts of themselves.

Where Angela seemed almost destined to be a victim, in the early part of the later text, Maraini offers no intimation that the same fate awaits the *dolce* Colomba. This fact alone could go some way to explaining why the 'character' Maraini is initially reluctant to involve herself in Colomba's story. The 'donna dai capelli corti' discusses with a friend that the most likely explanation is that Colomba is simply one of the many people who go missing every day, in all likelihood, 'se n'è andata in città, vive benissimo da qualche parte e non vuole essere scocciata' (*ibid*: 69). Yet her curiosity is aroused and she cannot help but be concerned about the young girl's story. The plight of missing persons constitutes a social ill that was, until *Colomba*, absent in Maraini's work; its investigation thus marks her continued commitment to exposing injustice in all its forms. Whilst, as she admits, there are undeniably people who disappear voluntarily, 'altri no, altri vengono rapiti, uccisi, trascinati dove non vogliono, addirittura pretendono di essere scovati, anche se morti, se non altro per fare sapere come sono morti' (*ibid*: 69). In a statement characteristic to her oeuvre, the character Maraini reflects upon the silences that missing persons leave behind:

> Dove sei, bambino mio, moglie mia, sorella, madre, padre, fratello? [...] La risposta però non arriva. Il silenzio è pieno di echi sinistri, tracce di richiami falliti, di grida soffocate, di segnali di fumo che il vento ha disperso. (*ibid*: 70)

Accordingly, in *Colomba* as in numerous other works, Maraini uses her narrative as an arena to voice such silences and to speak for those who are otherwise voiceless.

[10] In this instance, of course, that person is a loving grandmother, so any negative description would perhaps be unlikely.

As both Maraini and Zaira delve into Colomba's past, in an attempt to understand her present, they discover that she may not simply be the quiet, obedient girl that her grandmother had imagined. Zaira meets Sal, a young man claiming to be Colomba's friend, who informs her that there was much that she did not know about her granddaughter. Their conversation prompts Zaira to recall that she had noticed a small, but significant, change in Colomba before she disappeared: 'solo ora si rende conto, a posteriori, che i silenzi di 'Mbina [Colomba] si erano fatti più acerbi e dilaganti, che a volta restava ferma a fissare il vuoto, quasi dormisse a occhi aperti' (*ibid*: 80). It is at the novel's shocking conclusion, however, that Zaira is to discover quite how great the disparity was between what she thought she knew of her granddaughter and the reality of her life. Zaira eventually finds Colomba in a caravan in the heart of the woods, where Sal is keeping her as what amounts to a sexual plaything for himself and his friends, from whom he takes money for the use of Colomba's body. Maraini depicts an image of utter depravation in the caravan: it is suffocatingly hot, it smells, it is filthy and in the midst of this squalor, 'Zaira stenta a riconoscere sua nipote in quella ragazza dalla faccia pesta, gli occhi spenti, le braccia senza carne' (*ibid*: 353). Colomba's body has been harmed beyond recognition and she is also heavily drugged, made dependent by Sal, in order to remain physically and emotionally reliant upon him. As Siggers Manson rightly states, 'the drugged Colomba stands for the ultimate state of female passivity in patriarchal society: she is inert, incapable and totally subject to a man's control' (2005: 94). Nevertheless, she is conscious and, to Zaira's horror, claims not to want to leave: 'Sal mi ama e io amo lui' (*Colomba*: 353).

The reader, with Zaira and Maraini, is compelled to question what can have made a once sensible, quiet girl leave behind a loving grandmother and a peaceful life to live

instead a depraved existence of isolation, drug abuse and prostitution. In their study of patriarchal violence, Websdale and Chesney-Lind explain that despite the fact that it is not always possible to identify 'typical' characteristics of victims of abuse such as that experienced by Maraini's protagonists, certain social conditions can be isolated that do make women more vulnerable to violence. Women who are in a weak position economically, for example, or those who work in exposed occupations, or who use drugs can be more at risk (1998: 61-69). Angela, a woman who appears to live from day to day without any real job or economic security, fits almost undoubtedly into this model. It could also be suggested that Colomba is in a similar position: whilst she has security in the form of her grandmother's home and financial help, her own job at the local post office does not constitute any form of personal stability. Moreover, she lost her mother at a young age and has little contact with her father. This economic weakness and emotional insecurity becomes ever more apparent as she falls further into Sal's clutches.

One aspect of recent Italian feminist debate has centred upon the question of *la precarietà*, meaning economic and social instability, in particular amongst the young. In fact it has been considered a theme of such importance to warrant a special edition of the *Feminist Review* (2007). As the editors of the volume describe, 'precarious, used as an adjective, indicates a lack of security and stability that threatens, and produces danger' (Italian core group 2007: 3). The opening article is based on the very assumption that, 'precariousness is a constitutive aspect of many young Italian women's lives' (Fantone 2007: 5). Daniela Danna makes an explicit link between *precarietà* and gender violence, arguing that 'più il mercato di lavoro è precario, più […] si trova anche a dover fronteggiare la violenza maschile' (2007: 85). By constructing characters whose lives are similarly defined (and put in danger) by 'precarity', Maraini is demonstrating the extent to

which she is responsive to and engaged with contemporaneous feminist debate.[11] This is a topic to which I return in more detail in the following chapter, in which I read some of Maraini's recent work alongside aspects of contemporary feminist theory.

Many of the conditions that Websdale and Chesney-Lind outlined are also those that can also be experienced by women working in the sex industry, and they indeed demonstrate that prostitutes do often come into contact with tremendous levels of violence, rape and sexual assault at the hands of men (1998: 67). The reality of this suffering experienced by many prostitutes is in many ways amplified, for, as they correctly note, 'people often see prostitutes as unrapeable; incapable of being harmed, and "deserving of" being raped' (*ibid*: 67). To return briefly to the perpetrators of violence in Maraini's texts, I would also note that both Sal and Angela's step-father, Glauco, see their victims as 'unrapeable'. As I argued in Chapter Four, Glauco too believed that his victim was in some way prostituting herself and was thus 'deserving of' abuse. Levy's work on what she dubs the 'pornification' of contemporary society posits that some young women feel obligated to participate in raunch culture – that is to say stripping, watching porn and wearing provocative clothing – which, as she so acerbically points out, 'sounds like a fantasy world dreamed up by teenage boys' (2005: 17). The damaging result of this for young men, however, can be the internalisation of a belief that this is how all women are, or should be, and thus that the use of women's bodies is in many ways a male privilege. Sal, who not only abuses Colomba himself, but allows his friends to do the same, is evidently unable to think of her body as anything other than a site for such 'fantasies'.

In terms of Maraini's victims, however, notwithstanding the benefits of Websdale and Chesney-Lind's research from a socio-cultural point of view, in *Voci* and *Colomba*

[11] Maraini's recent collection of short stories, *La ragazza di via Maqueda* (2009), contains a story which also addresses *la precarietà*: in 'Tanto vale vivere' a young woman struggles to find permanent work in spite of having two degrees.

Maraini analyses not just societal reasons for patriarchal violence, but presents a set of circumstances in which her victims appear to be submitting to violence almost willingly. As I have already noted, Angela both let her killer into her apartment and undressed for him, whilst Colomba argues that she would rather stay with Sal than return home with Zaira. This arguably voluntary objectification could be viewed as a result of the post-feminist culture outlined above. As part of Natasha Walter's study of post-feminism, *Living Dolls* (2010), she interviewed a number of women who have worked in the porn industry, as lap dancers and as prostitutes. In one particularly revealing conversation, a sex worker admits, 'I believed what everyone said, that all this promiscuous sex was so empowering' (2010: 52). In a similar vein, as Zaira attempts to draw Colomba away from the caravan that has become her prison, the girl declares, 'guadagno pure, lassame sta [sic]' (*Colomba*: 353). Just like Angela, Colomba too seems convinced that only sex will make her valuable; there is even a sense of pride in the way she describes this new 'position'.

III. Re-thinking the Victim

In their presentation of Colomba and Angela, the two texts resonate with many of the issues that I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, about the construction of Anna and Enrica as victims in *La vacanza* and *L'età del malessere.* Not only are there similarities in their age and behaviour – both 'pairs' of girls seemingly choose sexual encounters that ultimately lead to harm – but also in their characters: notable is the repetition of the taciturn young protagonist, an important feature of those early novels and here repeated through the presentation of Colomba. Whereas I maintain that Colomba's and Angela's

behaviour differs due to the influence of a separate cultural landscape, it is nonetheless pertinent to confront, as I noted in my Introduction, Maraini's recourse to this type of character throughout her career. Without wanting to return to biologistic discourses, nor to argue that femininity is for Maraini intrinsically linked to 'weak' characteristics of passivity and submission, I am, by contrast, struck by her apparent interest in female masochism and victimhood. I noted in my Introduction that is a subject that she has addressed during conferences, arguing that violence is part of what it is to be human and something of which we are all capable. She counters, however, that where in men it is expressed externally, in women it is internalised, and suggests that masochism is, therefore, a product of history and not a natural condition (Maraini 2006b; 2010c). These are certainly ideas that it is worth considering in more detail.

Already in this thesis I have made some reference to Butler's concept of performativity to emphasise how supposedly gendered traits become naturalised through their recurrence.[12] With Butler we can agree that identity is certainly a fluid construction, even if it may appear stable and singular, yet at the same time, as Butler writes, 'the subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects' (1999: 198. Emphasis in original).[13] Later in this chapter, I consider the very tangible effect of generational repetition that is at work in the two texts; here, I would propose that victimhood could be considered a means by which Maraini's protagonists perform their femininity. Vulnerability is a type of feminine performance which has become habituated

[12] See Chapter Four in which I relate the concept to the construction of a violent type of masculinity.
[13] This hypothesis reminds us also of Freud's 'compulsion to repeat', first described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principal* (1955). It is particularly resonant as Freud's thesis concentrated upon the re-enactment of *traumatic* events, which would undoubtedly be the way in which to describe the abuse and violence the protagonists undergo. I make further reference to this later in the current chapter.

due to its very repetition, similarly to the way in which, as I argued in the previous chapter, one type of masculinity has come to be defined by dominance and aggression. Maraini's protagonists have seemingly internalised these 'typical' female characteristics and types of behaviour to the extent that they almost passively accept their mistreatment. For Siggers Manson, both novels contain a poignant reminder that the girls' abuse was not against their will: for Colomba, this is the immaculate bedroom she leaves behind, whilst for Angela it is the pair of shoes she places neatly at her door: 'in both cases, this tidiness implies an element of choice on the part of the victim: there has been no desperate struggle to escape some terrible danger, but instead a seemingly passive acquiescence in whatever fate awaits them' (2005: 95).

Moreover, significant not only to Angela and Colomba, but to Anna and Enrica as well, is the lack of awareness that all demonstrate towards their own status as a victim. I would even maintain that instead all see themselves as agents who govern their own body and sexuality, a ready example of which is Colomba's aforementioned 'pride' in her new lifestyle. In Butler's exposition of performativity, she gives space to agency, arguing that the performative identity is not a site that is opposed to agency, but rather that agency occurs within its constraining norms (Salih 2004: 93). Butler writes, 'all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency" then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition' (1999: 198). For Maraini's protagonists, by contrast, there exists a discrepancy between the belief in one's own agency and the reality of their situations, in which, I would argue, agency is almost entirely absent. There is an incongruity, therefore, between *being* and *seeming* a victim.

This discrepancy between perception and reality can be likened to the idea of the feminine masquerade, first described by Joan Riviere in 1929. Riviere's thesis focused on

women who wished to disguise their 'masculinity' (be it homosexuality, professional ambition or intellectual acumen) under a mask of overt 'womanliness'. Ultimately, Riviere argued, such women were able to convince themselves that appearance equated to substance; they buried their 'masculinity' and believed in the realisation of their 'femininity'. As Riviere makes clear, however, there is no difference between the two: 'they are the same thing' (1989: 38). So too, I would suggest, do Maraini's protagonists wear a mask of agency, burying and rejecting their victimhood. What Maraini presents to her readers, time and again, is a victim who believes her behaviour to be the exploration and expression of her sexuality, but who, in reality, is opening herself up to mistreatment. Any agency these female characters demonstrate appears to result in bodily damage, a damage which could consequently be considered self-inflicted. The young women's repetition of behaviour that puts them in danger indicates violence not only done to them by another, but also violence done to themselves.

By putting forth such a hypothesis, it could be seen that I am doing Maraini a disservice, suggesting that in her narratives she is criticising recreational sex and disallowing women's sexual expression. Certainly, what Maraini has sought throughout her career is precisely the opposite, to argue instead for the liberation of sex from historically rigid, and equally destructive, norms.[14] It is thus fundamentally important to stress that, just as I argued in the previous chapter that Maraini is not suggesting that all men are abusers, neither is she here implying that Angela and Colomba are emblematic of all women. Instead, they represent a particular type of relationship and certain specific

[14] In contemporary society, women do, of course, enjoy greater levels of sexual liberty, but restrictions continue to exist and, in particular in Italy, the Church and other institutions still succeed in governing female sexuality. For an up-to-date overview of sexuality in Italy, see Barbagli, Zuanna and Garelli (2010). The text describes the results of a survey of 7,000 Italians, and discusses, amongst other things, virginity, contraception, masturbation, infidelity and homosexuality.

character traits that Maraini seeks to understand, traits that draw her characters towards relationships of oppression and domination.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Maraini often creates male characters who are simultaneously seductive and violent and how her victims were accordingly seduced by them. I explored how, in turn, Ludovica, Angela and even Michela were all seduced by Glauco in *Voci* and similarly in *Colomba*, Maraini presents Sal as a charming and bewitching character.[15] Unlike *Voci* and *Buio*, however, in which emphasis was placed upon the perpetrators' voices, in *Colomba* Sal is depicted almost exclusively through his physical presence, which both bewilders and fascinates Zaira:

> Zaira osserva quella bocca tornita, bellissima, a cui mancano però due denti di lato. Esamina le mani del ragazzo che sono lunghe e delicate, con le nocche leggermente arrossate. Quelle mani diafane ed eleganti, quasi femminili, si immergano con brutalità nella vaschetta. (*Colomba*: 82)

> I coetanei di Colomba, non tutti, ma molti, animati da una inquietudine cupa, hanno un gran senso della teatralità, fanno del loro corpo un palcoscenico, dei loro gesti una pantomina. [...] Amano stupire e truccare [...], pensa Zaira osservando quel bel ragazzo così portato ai travestimenti e alle mascherate. (*ibid*: 78)

A discussion such as this one cannot fail to raise similar questions to those I explored in Chapter One, regarding pleasure on the part of the female in relationships of domination. I concluded in Chapter One that this did not appear to be the case for Anna and Enrica, who rarely demonstrated little more than indifference to their sexual experiences. In her analysis of *Voci* and *Colomba*, Siggers Manson (2005) also considers it important to focus on a similar aspect. She devotes considerable space to the question of why many women love their oppressors, a question that is repeated not just in these novels, but throughout

[15] Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the ubiquity of the *affascinante* male in Maraini's opus, Colomba's father is himself described in similar terms, 'Che gran bell'uomo era![...] [tutte le sue studentesse] erano matte per lui' (*Colomba*: 253); he even shares the characteristic seductive voice of the perpetrators analysed in the previous chapter, 'una voce che in classe ammaliava le studentesse' (*ibid*: 255). I discuss his role further later in this chapter.

Maraini's writing. In *Un clandestino a bordo*, Maraini includes an essay on pornography, which, she proposes, is representative of:

> la storia antica della separazione dei compiti; l'uomo che agisce, prende, fa, abusa, domina sessualmente e la donna che si fa prendere, si fa abusare e si fa dominare. […] [La] donna che cerca, supplica, implora il dolore erotico come fine supremo della felicità sessuale femminile. (*Un clandestino a bordo*: 57)

It is a question that even Zaira asks herself: 'si può odiare e amare nello stesso tempo una persona che ci ha fatto del bene e del male?' (*Colomba*: 175).

In order to understand the protagonists' seduction by the patriarchy, Siggers Manson looks to *La cornacchia del Canadà,* a children's song to which Maraini makes reference in both *Colomba* (p. 33) and *La nave per Kobe* (p. 47). The song tells of the relationship between a hunter, Cecchino, and his prey, the eponymous Canadian crow. The bird is in love with Cecchino, who will, of course, inevitably kill her. For Maraini, Siggers Manson writes, the song illustrates the love that the oppressed can have for their own persecutor:

> Both Angela and Colomba, who through her name ['dove'] is especially connected with the song, invite their oppressors into their homes. [...] The analogy with the Canadian crow may perhaps suggest that these two victims have sought out violence, falling under Cecchino's spell. (2005: 93-95).

In *Storia di Piera* too, which, as I have explored, anticipates many of the issues of victims and perpetrators that Maraini draws upon in later works, Maraini and Piera Degli Esposti discuss the love that women can have for their persecutors: 'è l'amore per il carnefice... le donne lo conoscono molto bene' (*Storia di Piera*: 69). It is manifested in Colomba's unwillingness to leave Sal and her blind insistence in his love for her, and in the love that both Angela and Ludovica came to feel for their step-father:

> Io credo di averlo amato, perché si finisce per amare chi passa la notte nel tuo letto, anche se è il tuo carnefice [...] e come non amarlo? era bello, colto, conosciuto e stimato... [...] dovevo essergli grata per avermi. (*Voci:* 266)

Nonetheless, with Degli Esposti, Maraini also described the 'aspetti sempre nuovi e sorprendenti' that exist in the love between victim and oppressor (*Storia di Piera*: 69). In *Colomba* it could be argued that further analysis of these *aspetti* occurs towards the end of the text, through the inclusion of a story about a hunter and his prey, the most beautiful and powerful deer in the forest. Maraini foregrounds the story with the question, 'possedere vuol dire distruggere?' (*Colomba*: 331), summing up in just a few words what can be seen as one of the novel's fundamental themes. The story goes that, out of his desperation to catch this magnificent beast, the hunter follows it to a cave; the deer then speaks to him and, in so doing, avoids what would have been certain death: 'la pietà è la nemica più feroce dei cacciatori' (*ibid*: 336). Maraini thus demonstrates that it can be possible for the oppressed to become strong and, in this case, overpower their oppressor through intellectual strength. Jessica Benjamin likewise analyses the relationship between the dominant and the dominated, to conclude that the oppressed will often submit willingly to their oppressor out of a desire for recognition and in an endeavour to appropriate their strength: 'the individual tries to achieve freedom through slavery, release through submission to control' (1990: 52).[16]

Given such evidence, it might be tempting to conclude that Colomba and Angela are thus potentially in a position of power and that the paradigm of victim-perpetrator is not solely a relationship of male domination and female submission. Maraini, however, soon dispels any such hope, by offering an alternative ending to the tale of the hunter and the deer. She writes, 'ci doveva essere un seguito a quella storia. Sarebbe cambiato il

[16] Benjamin's analysis makes extensive reference to Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O* (1954), a text that Maraini likewise mentions in the aforementioned essay on pornography in *Un clandestino a bordo* (p. 57). The hypothesis Benjamin proposes mirrors, in some ways, of the objectives of Lonzi's *Sputiamo su Hegel* (1974), which sought to condemn and problematise the inherently gendered dynamics of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

giorno dopo? [...] [Il cacciatore] sarebbe tornato in montagna col fucile carico e tanta voglia di vendetta?' (*Colomba*: 338). In a similar manner, both Angela's and Colomba's oppressors are the ones who hold 'il fucile carico', denying their 'prey' the possibility of achieving freedom through submission or subversion of the power balance. Ultimately, there is certainly no happy ending for Angela, whilst Colomba too only narrowly avoids death.

Motifs that are common to Maraini's narrative, such as women's internalisation of oppression, female masochism and submission, and the seductiveness of the patriarchy thus all contribute to the (re)-construction of the victim in the two novels. The texts demonstrate quite how fine a line exists between sexual freedom and sexual slavery and explore the extent of awareness with which the two young women cross over it. In *Colomba* in particular, however, Maraini introduces a further theme which signals an added dimension to her ongoing investigation into the gendered nature of violence, and that is the generational character of abuse. In the previous chapter, I cited research that demonstrated how those who are abused as children can in turn become abusers themselves (Deats and Lenker 1991). Research also suggests that women who have previously experienced victimisation directly related to their gender in the form of incest, sexual abuse and rape can often be susceptible to further abuse and violence (Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998: 72; Romito 2008: 14). It is to Maraini's take on this issue that I now turn in the final part of this chapter.

IV. Generational Legacies

The main storyline in *Colomba*, as I explained at the beginning of my analysis, involves the telling of one family's history. The novel intertwines the story of Colomba and Zaira with those of previous generations and thus becomes a chronicle of the people that Zaira has lost lost throughout the years, and her attempt to keep them alive through storytelling. Significant attention is paid by Zaira to the stories of the family's female characters, and the similarities that emerge with regards to all these women's fates are startling: time and again, the women of the Del Signore family find themselves as young mothers, who have been abandoned by the babies' fathers. As Zaira, who is herself a single mother, describes:

> Come si ripetono le cose attraverso le generazioni, quasi un destino, una fatalità che si tramanda da padre in figlio, da madre in figlia. Da noi è successo più volte che le ragazze siano rimaste gravide senza volerlo, è una storia di famiglia che si ripete di generazione in generazione. Non so nemmeno se sia una maledizione o una benedizione. (*Colomba*: 307)

Colomba is the only one to escape this particular fate, and yet her story does echo those of the women of her family in other ways, especially that of her mother (Zaira's daughter), Angelica.

Zaira describes Angelica as having turned from a relatively happy child to an angry, highly-strung teenager who drinks, stubbornly refuses to speak anything but dialect and gets involved with the violent clashes of the student revolutions (*ibid*: 158-68). It is only when Angelica becomes pregnant that Zaira discovers the cause of her behaviour: Angelica tells her that Cignalitt', Zaira's step-father, had abused her as a child. To Zaira he had only ever been an exemplary step-father who looked after her long after the death of her mother, supported her pregnancy and who, she believed, had cared for Angelica like

a granddaughter. It is revealed, however, that Cignalitt' had instead been molesting Angelica as a little girl. Angelica's life is shaped by the abuse she suffered as a child; as an adult she turns to alcohol, suffers bouts of anorexia and forms a relationship with a man who, whilst not physically mistreating her, oppresses her in other ways. Her partner, Valdo, is one of Maraini's typical male characters, a 'mitico Don Giovanni' (*ibid*: 261), attractive and bewitching to both his wife and daughter: '[Colomba] aveva una adorazione per il suo papa, cercava ogni occasione per uscire sola con lui, non si saziava mai di baciarlo, gli dava sempre ragione' (*ibid*: 261). Yet, whilst he marries Angelica, Valdo simultaneously has affairs with numerous other women, and spends long periods of time away from his family, eventually leaving them to fend for themselves. Angelica, already weakened by the abuse she received as a child, cannot cope with this abandonment and suffers a breakdown which culminates in a fatal, alcohol-fuelled car accident. Whilst the descriptions of Angelica as a young woman, 'invecchiata prima del tempo' (*ibid*: 270) mirror those of Zaira's own mother (*ibid*: 140), her story of misplaced love for an oppressive partner prefigures what Colomba will experience. Theirs is evidently a family in which the 'compulsion to repeat' is strong (Freud 1955; Butler 1999).

A similar paradigm of generational repetition emerges in *Voci* through Maraini's portrayal of Angela's mother. In the previous chapter I explored how, 'blind and deaf' to what they were experiencing, Augusta could be considered complicit in her daughters' abuse. Besides this, Maraini also depicts an aspect of Augusta's character that will anticipate Angela's own behaviour as an adult:

> [Augusta] è una donna che mostra molta sicurezza, ma è tutto fumo: nel suo intimo è una bambina di sei anni. Ha sempre avuto bisogno di un uomo a cui affidarsi, mani e piedi legati, perché da sola lei si sente inesistente, non ce la fa. [...] Lei semplicemente cessava di esistere quando usciva dalle attenzioni di un uomo. (*Voci*: 259)

The description is remarkable in its resemblance to those given of Angela, down to the use of the word 'bambina'. Moreover, Michela learns how, following the death of her first husband, Augusta was unable to cope and subsequently became entirely dependent upon Glauco and submissive to him. Both Angela and Colomba, therefore, bear witness to their mothers' behaviour and learn to mimic it in their own relationships.

When discussing their construction as victims above, I analysed the extent to which they had internalised society's expectations of women to be passive and submissive; it could further be suggested that the generational repetition of these characteristics naturalises them in a similar way. The performativity of gendered identity is defined as a sequence of acts that is always occurring and repeating, or, as Butler describes it:

> To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organises them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms. This is not a prescriptive task we must endeavour to do, but one in which we have been endeavouring all along. (1987: 131)

Angela and Colomba's behaviour is thus learned, repeated and acted out by them as a 'performance'; their identity comes to be constructed solely through their passivity and submission. The ostensible 'inevitability' of their victimhood is also reminiscent of Bourdieu's habitus (1977), the set of acquired thought and behaviour patterns which generate our social action, as McRobbie explains:

> The body for Bourdieu is marked by its own habitus, it bears the mark of its own "incorporated history", it is then always a social body, inclined to act in certain ways as a result of the force of this impregnated history. Thus we could say that the woman victim brings [...] her own bodily hexis already marked as inferior or flawed. (2009: 135)

McRobbie's reference to Bourdieu is especially helpful at this stage as the 'woman victim' to whom she refers is to be found in the post-feminist landscape that I too am focusing upon. The circumstances may be substantially different to Colomba's and Angela's

(McRobbie's case study involves women who participate in television makeover shows in which they are often subject to the 'symbolic violence' of public humiliation),[17] but just like McRobbie's 'victims', so too are the bodies of Maraini's characters marked by the 'incorporated history' of their mothers; so too are they already 'inferior or flawed'.

For Maraini's protagonists, oppression can thus be an 'inherited' characteristic, which descends through generations. This situation is further exacerbated for Angela and Colomba by the cultural landscape they inhabit, which inculcates them with the belief that their sole value is their sexuality. Nevertheless, whereas in *Colomba* Maraini's scope stretches no further than the Del Signore family, *Voci* can be understood as concerning, above all, the ubiquity of patriarchal violence against women. The text is rife with references to gender violence and the reader is left in no doubt that Maraini is using it to attest to the prevalence of the phenomenon. As she investigates both Angela's death and material for her own radio show on the unsolved murders of women, Michela uncovers a host of deplorable information about women's mistreatment: newspaper reports about unsolved crimes, data regarding the incidence of violence linked to religion, alcohol abuse and depression, and even a radio debate which analyses the use of rape as a weapon of war. Faced with the pervasiveness of gendered violence, Michela can only recoil in horror: 'ho un improvviso moto di disgusto e di rifiuto per tutti quegli orrori. Non voglio più sentire né vedere niente che mi parli di corpi femminili straziati, violati, ridotti in pezzi' (*Voci*: 274).

Additionally, as Maraini insinuates through the 'mirroring' that is interwoven into the narrative, Michela recognises herself in Angela. As Michela becomes ever more embroiled in the investigation, the similarities with her murdered neighbour become

[17] The term 'symbolic violence' is Bourdieu's and refers to the unnoticed domination that social habits exert over the conscious subject (Bohman 1999: 131). It has echoes of the institutional violence that I foregrounded in Chapter Two and also, to a lesser extent, in Chapter Four.

progressively more apparent: early in the novel, for instance, Angela is described as 'imbranata', the same term which Michela's neighbour had just used to describe her (*ibid*: 37), whereas later she sees a picture of Angela as a child that bears a striking resemblance to her own family photographs (*ibid*: 114). Both Ada Testaferri (2000) and Judith Bryce (2000), in their analyses of *Voci*, have commented upon the 'doubling' of Michela and Angela.[18] Bryce argues that:

> In spite of [Michela's] apparent autonomy, the same interrelated characteristics of fear, of profound insecurity and uncertainty, and of precarious identity link the narrator to the murdered woman. For this reason, the death of Angela Bari as an archetypal victim of male violence against women is early on perceived by the narrator as 'una offesa fatta a me personalmente' [p. 30] (2000: 214-15)

Not only are references made to the similarities between Michela and Angela, but the motif of the double is also evoked when describing other women in the novel: 'Ludovica becomes one with Angela, Sabrina recalls Ludovica, Adriana looks like Angela, and so forth' (Testaferri 2000: 48). In the light of this 'doubling' the reader is left to question whether Michela too is a potential victim of gender violence and whether, indeed, any woman is necessarily exempt from the dangers of a violent patriarchy.

Yet there are exceptions in both works: Zaira remains untouched by the violence that appears otherwise rife against the female members of her family. The text thus requires us to question how, if she too is part of this legacy of female victims, does she avoid victimhood herself? Alongside Zaira, *Voci*'s detective, Adele Sòfia, is also 'spared' mistreatment. Moreover, both act as agents for justice in the novels, with Zaira eventually discovering the caravan that has held her granddaughter for almost a year and Adele, as detective, representing institutional justice. With female agency already identified as a fundamental theme in Maraini's work, it is important to consider how these two characters

[18] Testaferri focuses on intertextuality, analysing this doubling alongside Maraini's many references to Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* in the novel; she suggests that the use of mirroring serves to underline women's solidarity (2000: 46-49).

achieve it. In her reading of Butler, Lois McNay argues that a limitation of her concept of performative identity lies in its lack of social specificity:

> The idea of the performative provides a compelling account of the open temporality of structure that permits the emergence of autonomous action, but it does not really consider how this symbolic indeterminacy relates to other social structures and how it may catalyse or hinder change. (1999b: 176)

The influence of social structures is crucial to a reading of *Voci* and *Colomba,* if we are to consider Zaira and Adele as characters who act with agency. As McNay underlines, 'an analysis of the transformatory effects of resignification upon entrenched norms requires a contextualisation within wider socio-economic relations and an understanding of agency not just as a structural potentiality but as a set of embedded practices' (*ibid*: 183). For McNay, therefore, agency requires a catalyst, in the form of a set of contextual circumstances conducive to effecting a change.

Comparing the socio-economic situations of Adele and Zaira to those of the 'victims' of the two novels offers some significant points of reflection, including the wider social landscape in which they both grew up. Zaira describes how, upon returning to the village with a young child and no husband, no one judges her, or gossips about the whereabouts of the baby's father, which 'in altri tempi l'avrebbero fatto' (*Colomba*: 156). As she explains, 'dopotutto erano i primi anni Sessanta e i pregiudizi contro le madri nubili erano considerati cosa del passato' (*ibid*: 156). If we compare this to the circumstances described by Cirant, and highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, it seems that rather than moving forwards, contemporary attitudes and expectations may have actually regressed: the Italy Cirant portrays is one in which many young women believe that having a husband and children is the ideal, and perhaps sole, destiny for them (2005: 94).

Their lives also differ from those of the younger generations in terms of stability: I noted above that Angela and Colomba's lives are rather 'precarious'. By contrast, both

Adele and Zaira have built careers and independent lives. Zaira moved away to gain a university education and, even though this was interrupted by her pregnancy, she later succeeded in establishing a career as a translator. This background constitutes a significant foundation for her independence as an older woman and her determination in finding Colomba. In my Introduction, I highlighted Maraini's own thoughts on her characters' agency and autonomy, giving a quote in which she made specific reference to Zaira: 'i miei personaggi femminili […] si rivoltano, prendono posizione, resistono. Da Marianna Ucrìa a Zaira, sono tutte donne coraggiose che rispondono con energia' (Maraini 2008b). Adele too is anything but weak and passive: she has survived and excelled in a traditionally male-dominated arena, in which she enjoys professional success and is respected by her colleagues.[19] Like Zaira, her professional life represents a socio-economic background from which agency is more likely to arise. Fundamental, therefore, is the context from which both women emerged: they belong to the same generation as Maraini herself and, even if it is not explicitly stated, can surely also be deemed to some extent products of 1970's feminism. Through the female characters in the two novels, Maraini is thus, I would argue, reflecting on different generations of women and, in particular, on the legacies of feminism.

Also vital to the character of Adele is her personal life. She invites Michela to dinner at her home on a number of occasions, thus demonstrating – both through the food she cooks for her and the emotional support she offers to Michela's own investigation – her maternal qualities (Bryce 2000: 215).[20] On these occasions, Maraini also intimates that Adele is in a relationship with another woman, although her lesbianism is never overtly

[19] In *Buio* particular reference is made to the positive relationship she has with a male colleague (*Buio*: 131)

[20] Critics of crime fiction by women have explored how many writers use food scenes to flesh out their characters (The Sisters Wells 2001). Food is also a theme that has been explored in Maraini's oeuvre; of *Voci* and *Stravaganza*, Francesco Tauro writes that Maraini uses it as, 'uno strumento di denuncia delle problematiche antiche e moderne che affliggono il nostro paese' (2008: 191).

stated.[21] The role of the lesbian detective is, nonetheless, fairly prominent in crime fiction by women,[22] and, in a study of the genre, Maureen Reddy argues that:

> Most of the lesbian detectives are estranged or otherwise cut off from their families and have established families of choice. The authors of lesbian crime novels make criticisms of traditional families [...] [as] oppressive to women and perpetuating the patriarchal power structure. (1988: 128)

Adele's stable relationship certainly contrasts with the 'traditional family' embodied by Angela's destructive home life, but also significant is Reddy's identification of the lesbian detective's 'family of choice'. Adele's relationship with her partner Marta appears to be one that is beneficial to both women, and Michela remarks upon the depth of trust and understanding the women share: 'tanto Adele Sòfia è estroversa, diretta, e di mente fredda, quanto Marta Girardegno è concentrata, ombrosa, pudica. [...] Eppure, nonostante le differenze, si sente che il loro è un sodalizio profondo, una amicizia complessa e di lunga data' (*Voci*: 154).

By contrast, the lives of Angela, Colomba and even Michela are all marked by a distinct lack of female friends, colleagues or links. During Michela's investigations into Angela's death, she speaks almost exclusively to male acquaintances, whilst Angela's only female 'work colleague' is the prostitute, Sabrina, from whom she encounters jealousy and a compulsion to lie about Angela's past. Not once does Zaira mention any friends of Colomba who might be able to help her in her search, and the only young person she meets who knew Colomba is Sal. This is somewhat surprising for texts by Maraini, which often, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, contain strong female networks. Furthermore, I have argued that such communities are beneficial sites for the production and development of a female consciousness, which often help Maraini's characters to

[21] Bryce notes that this intimation is, 'perhaps surprising, given the presence of lesbian relationships elsewhere in Maraini's fiction' (2000: 215)

[22] See Mirna Cicioni (2008) for a discussion of lesbianism in the crime fiction novels of Italian writer Fiorella Cagnoni and a consideration of the Italian context.

escape their abusive situations. Underpinning this thesis is the contention that whilst the protagonists of Maraini's earlier works are granted this possibility, more recent characters such as Angela and Colomba are not. Colomba does eventually leave the caravan, but it is only because Zaira forces her to do so. The novel ends with Colomba recovering in hospital but even here, it is not entirely clear whether she has yet understood the full extent of her mistreatment by Sal.[23]

Part of the socio-economic context so central to McNay's concept of the potentiality of agency thus resides, for Maraini, in these female networks. Zaira too, when she moves away from home, develops a friendship with her landlady who helps her once Angelica is born. Inter-familial female relationships, as those described in the two novels attest, can often be damaging. Productive and trusting relationships established with women from outside the family appear, by contrast, to be most significant for Maraini's characters. It is Michela's relationship with her 'symbolic mother', Adele, which ultimately leads to her own 'liberation': at the end of the novel, she decides to become a writer, a decision that is prompted by a conversation with Adele (*Voci*: 301). Once again, therefore, we are confronted with the implicit suggestion of a distance between generations of women, and Maraini's consideration of the inheritances of feminism, one of which is this need for women to develop positive female relationships.[24]

Such absence of female networks is a recognised feature of a post-feminist society, in which, it is argued, collective responsibility has been replaced by discourses of individualism. McRobbie writes: 'with all of this feminist influence behind her, [the post-feminist girl] is now firmly pushed in the direction of independence and self-reliance. […]

[23] Equally, her death at the hands of Glauco means that Angela is neither able to escape, nor come to understand the mistreatment he inflicts upon her.
[24] As discussed in Chapter Two, in which I made reference to the feminist practices of *autocoscienza* and *affidamento*.

These female individualisation processes require that young women become important to themselves' (2009: 59-60). She draws upon the concept of individualisation to criticise the extent to which the young girl is abandoned not just to make her own life choices, but to make the *right* choices: 'by these means new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime and personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably' (*ibid*: 19). It is a situation that Maraini is also undoubtedly criticising, as the fates of Colomba and Angela make evident. As so many of her previous works demonstrate united action is key to both personal consciousness and societal change. In her vision of a post-feminist society the lack of such collectivity is similarly damaging both to individuals and to women as a whole.

For a number of reasons, therefore, we can see that Adele and Zaira could be considered stronger women than those of subsequent generations, who have more potentiality to act with agency. It would be plausible, and tempting, therefore, to consider Zaira a 'symbolic mother' to both her daughter and granddaughter; as Adalgisa Giorgio states, 'maternal legacies must be established and passed on from mothers to daughters, if relationships of exploitation and dependence are not to be reproduced' (2002: 141). Yet, even as Zaira brings up Angelica, and later Colomba, she is not able to successfully communicate this strength to them. This could be seen as a marked failure in the transmission of her values and strength, but her existence alone is not enough: in order to be beneficial, the younger women must want to accept her guidance and support. Instead, Zaira is disregarded, considered outdated and, in particular for Angelica, she represents the past rather than looking forward:

> [Angelica] sembrava provasse gusto a usare il dialetto sapendo parlare un ottimo italiano. Ma era anche quello un modo di opporsi a [Zaira], come quei capelli arruffati che non lavava mai, le scarpe infanghate "mò pulisce, mò..."

> [sic] rispondeva sgarbata e non c'era verso di sapere cosa era successo. (*Colomba*: 164).

In her study of young Italian women's relationship with feminism, Cirant describes contemporary attitudes towards it as 'qualcosa di [...] ostile o inutile', 'tabù' and 'una parola-territorio' (2005: 96-98), all serving to underline women's unwillingness to attach themselves to the label, and, moreover, the denigration of the word itself that has taken place in recent times. McRobbie takes this discussion further to encapsulate the idea of 'disarticulation' that is in question throughout her study:

> By disarticulation I mean a force which devalues, or negates and makes unthinkable the very basis of coming-together [...] on the assumption widely promoted that there is no longer any need for such actions. [...] Disarticulation operates through the widespread dissemination of values which typecast feminism as having been fuelled by anger and hostility to men. This is now understood as embittered, unfeminine and repugnant. (2009: 26)

Evidently, there has been a failure somewhere, be it by feminists themselves, or the fault of a hostile media. The result has been for young women apparently to reject feminism and substitute it with the false feelings of liberty that currently appear rife. Similarly, so too has Zaira proven unable to pass on her ability to act with agency to the successive generations in her family; as such, Angelica and Colomba become even more susceptible to violence and mistreatment.

I do not believe, however, that Maraini thinks we should lose hope. Indeed, change will certainly never occur if we only look backwards; perhaps her protagonists are right to defy feminism, disregard their foremothers and set about making their own mistakes. Cirant recognises that, as with all social movements, feminism too should perhaps involve this pattern of rejection and starting anew:

> Pare che il femminismo abbia questa caratteristica: di dover ricominciare sempre da capo. Con lo scorrere delle generazioni, le donne che hanno partecipato al movimento femminista si chiedono se e come "il testimone" venga raccolto delle nuove generazioni; prende forma con urgenza una

> domanda intorno alla 'memoria di genere', cioè la trasmissione del sapere tra generazioni di donne. (2005: 103)

Contemporaneous, in fact, with the post-feminist era, a period of 'third wave feminism' has also been recognised, which involves renewed activism and feminist visibility, alongside the recognition of the plurality of the female experience and a need for feminism to diversify. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, 'post-feminism' itself could be seen to signify the emergence of a new feminism that is in line with post-modernism and post-structuralism (Brooks 1997). This shift is apparent in Italian culture too with recent research demonstrating that feminist dialogue and activity are still alive and well (Magaraggia et al 2005), a consideration I return to later in this thesis. Maraini has equally made clear that she is optimistic for future generations of young women. Whilst in her texts she may present her characters as victims, when questioned about her understanding of young women in contemporary society, she argued that, although they might not like the word, in their attitudes and expectations they are more 'feminist' than she herself has ever been (Maraini 2009d).

What Maraini proposes in *Colomba* and *Voci*, therefore, is a renewed reflection upon the victim of gender violence, and a deeper analysis of her psychology than she has previously considered. Her protagonists are specific to their time, but also mirror in many ways their antecedents in novels such as *La vacanza* and *L'età del malessere.* Her unrelenting desire to understand these victims demonstrates her recognition of the continuing abuse that many women undergo, and her hope that, through her narrative, men's violence against women can be better understood. Whilst *Voci* in particular hints at the disturbing ubiquity of violence against women, her inclusion of characters such as Zaira and Adele demonstrates that, even if all women are *potential* victims, not all will necessarily become them. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, however, I consider a

‘group’ of victims for whom, due to their marginality, resistance is an even more difficult endeavour.

CHAPTER SIX: GLOBAL VICTIMS IN *BUIO* (1999), *I GIORNI DI ANTIGONE* (2006) AND *PASSI AFFRETTATI* (2007)

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated how gender violence has played an ever more central role in Maraini's narrative work, and how her characters have simultaneously assumed progressively less agency. In the texts under discussion in this final chapter, I demonstrate how her investigation into the lives of women who have been abused, mistreated and oppressed reaches a peak. In *Buio* (1999), *I giorni di Antigone* (2006) and *Passi affrettati* (2007), Maraini's focus encompasses issues such as the trafficking of women and children, prostitution, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and lapidation. The forms of violence against women that she tackles in these texts are demonstrably more extreme and more varied than in many of her other texts and I thus consider the three works to be indicative of Maraini's continued engagement with feminist causes, and her recognition that gender violence remains a central feature of women's oppression in a patriarchal society. They are also works in which her victims demonstrate little opposition to their mistreatment and, consistent with my arguments in the previous chapter, I go on to suggest that this similarly reflects Maraini's increasing concern that some of the gains of second wave feminism are gradually being revoked.

What is also quickly discernible in the three texts is the extent to which her gaze has moved outwards, to comprise the difficulties faced by women not just in Italy, but around the world. Indeed, I perceive in these works a resolute desire to highlight and address the various 'problems' of gender violence in a society that is increasingly global.[1]

[1] An early allusion by Maraini to the concept of 'globalised violence' can be found in *Madri e figlie. Ieri e oggi* (2003), in which Maraini discusses a range of issues with fellow authors Anna Salvo and Silvia Vegetti Finzi. Maraini introduces questions about lapidation and the prostitution of young Albanian girls to their conversation (Maraini 2003b: 43).

Feminist scholars have similarly recognised how globalisation has contributed to, and exacerbated, inequality in all its forms, including between the sexes. As Daniela Danna writes, in the introduction to her study of violence against women in a global era: 'la globalizzazione rafforza un sistema sessista, escludente e patriarcale. Incrementa la femminilizzazione della povertà ed esacerba tutte le forme di violenza contro le donne' (2007: 18).[2] Globalisation has thus created *more* and *different* opportunities for male violence against women, through the 'exporting' of such crimes onto those who are especially vulnerable to entrapment, abuse and enslavement: women and children who are poor, from the developing world or migrants. Referring specifically to migrant women, Anna Agathangelou informs us: '[they] are caught in a matrix of neoliberal global restructuring where they become targets of exploitation and violence, and objects of desire for the facilitation of the status and power of the middle and upper classes' (2004: 1).

Questions around women's oppression in a globalised society are occasionally, however, avoided both institutionally and by cultural figures due to a misplaced fear of causing offence by discussing issues that can be deemed 'private', 'culturally specific' or 'culturally sensitive' (Pojman 2006: 150). Maraini, however, does not appear to be afraid of confronting such issues. Instead, her hope is that through highlighting and talking about them, change may one day be achieved. As such, I would argue that in works such as these, Maraini's role as not just author, but also social commentator and political activist, is at its most evident. In Chapter Two, I considered the ways in which her 'private' and 'public' positions overlapped at one particular moment in her career, namely the 1970s. Later in the present chapter, I revisit some of the questions surrounding these intertwining

[2] Danna also highlights the positive implications of a more globalised world for its female citizens, suggesting that it has promoted women's freedom from familial control: '[le donne] hanno raggiunto lo status di persone formalmente indipendenti e non più di beni di cui un'altra persone, il padre o il marito, può disporre' (2007: 19).

roles. I examine in depth her position in Italian society and consider academic responses to her public persona. Drawing upon the work of feminist theorists who have considered the female public intellectual, I question whether Maraini too can be thus described, noting how this is a nomenclature that has more typically been associated with prominent Italian males.

First, however, I offer a close analysis of the texts themselves. I have already, in my analysis of perpetrators in Chapter Four, discussed Maraini's award-winning collection of short stories *Buio,* which draws attention to some of the 'darkest' instances of oppression and mistreatment in contemporary society. In this chapter, I focus upon three stories in the collection that can be judged to have an overtly global outlook: in 'Viollca la bambina albanese', Maraini addresses the trafficking of young girls from Albania into Italy; 'Le galline di suor Attanasia' focuses upon the consequences for women of religious war, by narrating the assault upon a nunnery in Morocco; and 'Il pastore Ahmed e le tre ragazze nel bosco' features a *clandestino* immigrant who is wrongly accused of murder.[3] The second text under consideration, *I giorni di Antigone,* is an compilation of Maraini's journalistic writings, collected between 2000 and 2005 from her contributions to *Il Messaggero, Corriere della sera* and *Io donna.*[4] It represents a different side to her textual production, yet the themes she addresses reflect her contemporaneous narrative output. The anthology features an entire section devoted to writings on violence against women (*I*

[3] In this chapter I use a number of terms to refer to migrants to Italy: a *clandestino* migrant describes a person entering the country without permission; *straniero* refers to any foreigner; and *extracomunitario* literally means a person not from the EU, but is regularly used to describe any immigrant, notwithstanding their country of provenance. For a useful discussion of terminology when describing the phenomena of migration, immigration and emigration in Italy, see Pojman (2006: 12).

[4] A similar collection of her journalistic output was published in 1987: *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino,* which compiled newspaper and magazine articles written in the 1970s and 80s.

giorni di Antigone: 111-65), many of which focus upon the persecution of women around the globe.[5]

The final text to which I refer in this chapter is the play *Passi affrettati*. Just like in *Buio,* in this text too Maraini's stimuli are real events, in this case Amnesty testimonies from women from around the world, who tell of the violence they have suffered. The women's stories are recounted in a stark and honest manner; there are no stage directions and no action, just the voices of the women, their persecutors and those who seek to help them. The performances are generally followed by a panel discussion about the issues raised in the play with experts from a variety of different organisations. The play has been translated into a number of different languages and has been performed across Europe and could thus be considered one of Maraini's most successful works of theatre in recent years.[6]

I see the incidents, events and characters that these three texts narrate as representative of two opposing sides to gender violence in a globalised society: whilst many of Maraini's representations examine violence 'elsewhere', in a number of them she looks 'inside', to Italy itself. The distinction may appear to be an unnecessary one: evidently, both sides raise a number of similar questions surrounding blame, authority and strategies of representation. Whilst these issues are certainly interlinked, I have chosen in this chapter to split my analysis down these lines. Doing so allows me to isolate the specific issues involved in these differing portrayals, in particular, the potential dangers that are inherent for an author seeking to represent a culture that differs from her own. My discussion is informed by the work of transnational feminists, who have sought precisely

[5] The fluid conception of gender violence is also here demonstrated: the articles in this section cover topics such as the treatment of female inmates, the wearing of the burqa and the right to life for those on life support machines.

[6] It debuted in France in 2008, and in the UK and Spain in 2009.

to theorise the spaces at which the global and the local intersect. By dividing my analysis in this way, I am likewise able to examine the interplay in Maraini's work between her depictions of gender violence in Italy and its victims elsewhere. I thus situate her texts alongside such contemporaneous feminist discussion, and, from there, move on to exploring her position as an engaged and committed writer, whose work is alive to current debate.

I. Looking Inside

My main focus in this section is the story of Viollca, a young Albanian girl who is trafficked into Italy to work as a prostitute. She is a character who appears in both *Buio* and *Passi affrettati*, and, much like Maraini's recourse to Adele Sòfia in *Buio* after her initial appearance in *Voci*, this reflects an especial interest in the character on Maraini's part.[7] Moreover, I would argue that by choosing to focus upon a character who has migrated to Italy (non-voluntarily of course), Maraini is here situating herself within a recent, broader movement of 'migrant'/'migration' literature in Italy. Looking briefly at this 'genre' of writing thus offers a productive framework from which to examine Maraini's text. It has been well documented how, once a country of emigration, in the 1980s and 1990s Italy became a destination of immigration from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe (Maher 1996: 160-64), to the point that immigrants currently account for approximately seven per cent of the population in Italy (Istat 2010). This social change manifested itself (albeit on a very small scale) after 1990 with the publication in Italian of

[7] In spite of their differences in genre, the two texts are very similar, with the same language used in the play as in the earlier short story. As with all the 'stories' in *Passi affrettati*, Viollca's is based on an actual testimony and represents Maraini's re-working of the original words. However, there are, of course, differences in the two and later in the chapter I discuss the performative aspects of Maraini's later work.

a number of texts by writers such as Salah Methnani, Pap Khouma and Mohsen Melliti: immigrants to Italy who made their voices heard through their novels, autobiographies and diaries. Their writings were prompted, Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi argue, by 'il bisogno di narrare, di raccontare e di diffondere la propria esperienza di migrazione' (2003: 19). In recent years, scholarly interest in this genre of literature has grown apace, both from academics working within Italy and those on the outside.[8]

What is significant for the purposes of my study, however, is that this early catalogue of texts contained few by women, in spite of a longer history of immigration than their male counterparts. Women from Asia and Africa had been arriving into Italy as domestic staff long before the newer trend of African men coming to Europe in search of work began (Andall 2003; Macioti and Pugliese 2003). In an attempt to account for this comparatively small presence, Burns suggests that, 'spending their lives mainly indoors, [female migrants] gain a minimal knowledge of Italian, which explains the apparent absence of women amongst the immigrant writers' (1998: 218). Equally, nomadism has long been considered a male prerogative, something which Paola Bono and Federica Giardini consider to be a contributory factor to the scarcity of female migrant voices in published texts. As they explain, 'scelta e movimento sono invariabilmente legate agli uomini e alla mascolinità, mentre metafore di tradizione, coercizione e casa vengono associate alle donne e alla femminilità' (2006: 3).

Nonetheless, as Graziella Parati notes, migrant women did begin to narrate their experiences of immigration, and of life in Italy:

> Women's texts appeared later and narrated experiences different from those [...] of male texts, as the female voices that surfaced told of privileged migrations. Only later did women's narratives begin to portray a plurality of

[8] See for example Parati (1997, 1999, 2005); Burns (1998); Burns and Polezzi (2003); Gnisci (2003); Curti (2006, 2007).

> experiences [...]. Immigrant women's narratives define the loneliness and isolation inherent in the act of migrating, they [...] present women's isolation in both the native land and the host country. (1999: 28)

Indeed, the publication of texts by women has increased to such an extent that, in their 2009 study, Cristina Mauceri and Grazia Negro assert that 'la [...] percentuale di presenze femminili (44,3%) è quasi tanto elevata quanto quella degli scrittori (55,7%)' (2009: 25). In this timely study, Mauceri and Negro analyse narratives written by migrants alongside those by contemporary Italian authors that contain representations of migrants and other foreign-born inhabitants of Italy. In terms of gender, however, they find that where writings by migrant women may have increased, the percentage of texts by Italian women writers that consider the phenomenon of migration is significantly lower than that of their male counterparts (*ibid*: 25).[9] Furthermore, it appears that the themes of narratives by and about migrant women are remarkably uniform: as Mauceri and Negro explain, the majority discuss the position of the *colf* and *badante* (*ibid*: 99-116, 128-34), whilst a smaller selection consider 'privileged' female migrants, who are either already integrated or 'in via d'integrazione' (*ibid*: 64-5, 134-40).

It might consequently seem that, for any number of reasons, both Italian and migrant writers are less willing to expose issues around migrant women who work in the sex industry. This in spite of it being, as Pojman notes, an area of grave concern associated with migration to Italy: '[during the 1980s] Italian women in the sex trade got off the streets and moved into a higher-end call girl industry as migrant women took over these lower-end roles. [...] Today, Nigerian and Albanian women are most associated with prostitution' (2006: 47). There is certainly some mileage in seeking to avoid what Pojman warns is the 'compartmentalization' of migrant women into the binary categories of

[9] Maraini is included in this statistic, precisely for the stories in *Buio.* Also mentioned are Paola Capriolo, Susanna Tamaro and Melania Mazzucco, amongst others.

domestic worker or victim of sex trafficking (*ibid*: 8). Yet prostitution not only constitutes a worrying destination for large numbers of migrant women to Italy, but is also 'an area that combines aspects of gender, violence and health care' (*ibid*: 47).

Maraini's representation of Viollca does not, however, exist in a vacuum. Mauceri and Negro draw attention to a number of representations of migrant sex workers both by Italian authors (mostly male) and migrant authors (mostly female) (2009: 196-240). Particularly striking in their analysis is their recognition that in nearly all of these works the figure of the prostitute is a minor character: what these texts are patently not exploring are the reasons behind the women's prostitution, their backgrounds or even their characters. Rather, the prostitute acts, at most, as a literary device, facilitating the reader's understanding of a male protagonist. One such example is Younis Tawfik's *La straniera* (1999), whose protagonist is a privileged migrant who came to Italy to study, married an Italian woman and works as an architect.[10] Upon meeting Amina, a clandestine migrant who, after trying unsuccessfully to find regular work, turns to prostitution, the protagonist is flooded with memories of his native country. He is subsequently prompted to re-consider a past that he had hitherto sought to suppress. Amina's role in the novel can thus be considered rather problematical: she remains a marginal, disempowered character throughout the text, who functions predominantly as a motif for homeland and 'otherness', rather than her subjectivity being represented and the daily realities of her life in Italy being explored.

What Maraini attempts to do in her story of Viollca, on the other hand, is to give a voice to a girl who would otherwise be silent in Italy, and to recount a story that would otherwise most likely go untold in mainstream discourse. In Maraini's text, the

[10] See Mauceri and Negro (2009: 69-71) for a brief analysis of the text.

reader/spectator is confronted with a character who embodies several stages of marginalisation: as migrant, as female, as *clandestina* and as a prostitute. As Parati notes in her study of Elvira Dones, an Albanian writer who also tackles the subject of the trafficking of women, 'prostitutes cannot create alliances, acquire mobility or have a voice' (2005: 89). Maraini's account of Viollca, by contrast, allows a young girl who is marginalised in society to be made central to the text. Her story is thus disseminated and her subjectivity represented on a large scale.

Viollca's story begins in Albania, where we learn that she is being sent by her parents to Italy to earn money for the family back home. As she leaves they remind her how lucky she is, and what a privilege it is to be getting such a chance: 'una coraggiosa signorina che va a conquistare l'Italia' (*Passi affrettati*: 52). Viollca too is excited and proud of the 'opportunity' she has been given: 'sorride pensando alla faccia di sua sorella Anjeza quando l'aveva vista con quei tacchi' (*Buio*: 24). Maraini highlights the straightforwardness of Viollca's entry into Italy; told by her 'protector' to change her name, pretend they are father and daughter, and 'non aprire bocca' (*Passi affrettati*: 52), Viollca soon arrives in Rome. It is Parati again who recognises 'the ease of movement across borders when the goods are women's bodies to be sold for prostitution, in contrast with the rejection of other immigrants and forms of immigration' (2005: 89).

Once in Rome, Viollca is taken to an apartment where there is another young Albanian girl, Cate, and Mà, a woman who acts as the girls' madam. Viollca is initially thrilled with her new surroundings, which include a television, a fully-stocked fridge and a bedroom to herself; she even anticipates with excitement what the night will have in store for her: 'e hop andiamo a ballare. Hai capito Cate? Andiamo a ballare?' (*Passi affrettati*: 55). Maraini describes how, in preparation for the evening ahead, the girls are 'lavate,

disinfettate, truccate e pettinate' (*ibid*: 56), and dressed as, 'due personaggi di fumetti porno' (*Buio*: 30): re-created as identical 'baby-prostitutes'. As the girls are driven across the city for their first night's 'work', Maraini's narrative pauses once again to consider the straightforwardness of their operation. The car passes two policemen and Viollca's pimp fears that they will be spotted; however, 'i due poliziotti sono intenti a chiacchierare fra di loro. Non rivolgono nemmeno uno sguardo alla macchina con le due bambine' (*ibid*: 31).

In both the play and the short story, once the first client arrives and Viollca's initiation to prostitution begins, the narrative voice is given almost entirely to her. Previous references to both her excitement and to the teddy bear that she is so reluctant to relinquish had acted as constant indicators of her age and naivety, but it is this change to a description of events through her eyes that underlines most forcefully the particular effects of her exploitation. She is completely ignorant to what is happening to her, seeing her first client as 'un nano buffissimo', in whose hat she thinks she sees a rabbit, and whose penis she describes as 'una salsiccia bruna' (*ibid*: 32-33). Likewise, as her second client forces himself upon her, she can only imagine that he is 'un cane trasformato in uomo' (*ibid*: 35). The young Viollca even feels pity for one of the men who, she imagines, may have lost a daughter: 'ha l'aria così fragile. Ma poi all'improvviso quell'uomo buffo diventa furioso, mi si getta addosso, mi schiaccia col suo corpo e mi scuote come se volesse farmi a pezzi' (*Passi affrettati*: 60). The consequence of this violent, premature induction to sexual intercourse manifests itself as absolute psychological trauma upon the girl: she describes how her body 'è diventato un sasso' (*ibid*: 61). This is an image that Maraini extends in *Buio* to demonstrate the utter separation that Viollca feels from not only her body, but also her home and by consequence, her childhood:

> Nel buio della stanza aspetta che il suo corpo di sasso torni a farsi carne. Ma i sassi non si sciolgono. Rimangono sassi in eterno. È così che ora vede le sue

> braccia, lontanissime da lei e pesanti come rocce, le sue gambe di pietra, che non riesce a spostare. Il suo ventre è un macigno che giace immobile e indifferente come sono le pietre, su quel letto estraneo e gelato. (*Buio*: 36)

At this point, Maraini's depiction of Viollca in *Passi affrettati* comes to an end. The audience is left with an image of the young girl unable to sleep and contemplating her numbed body. The penultimate words are spoken by the girls' madam, who orders, 'mai rubare, mai tenere soldi per sé. Sennò botte. A me non nascondi niente, capito, niente, kuptove?' (*Passi affrettati*: 62). It is a familiar refrain, already driven home to the girls from the moment they arrived; as such, the spectator can only assume that this now is to be the pattern of Viollca's life: nights spent 'working' and days in which sleep eludes her and Mà keeps watch. Significantly, Maraini also intended this to be the final story to be recounted when staging *Passi affrettati*, meaning that this final image of Viollca would be the one with which the audience left the theatre.[11]

In *Buio*, by contrast, Viollca's story continues. She describes how, following the horrors of that first night, 'nei giorni seguenti tutto diventa più facile' (*Buio*: 36). Whilst Viollca's own body remains 'di sassi [...] [che] ogni notte si fanno [...] più pesanti' (*ibid*: 37), Cate learns to deaden both her body and mind through the consumption of alcohol and tranquilisers, to the point that she is incapable of washing or dressing herself: 'si lascia guidare dalle mani dure e affettuose di Mà' (*ibid*: 36). One night, however, Viollca is visited by a police officer pretending to be a client and the following day the girls are rescued. In this version of Viollca's story, the final image is of the young girl talking to Adele Sòfia, who promises her, 'quei due li prenderemo' (*ibid*: 39).

The change is a significant one, all the more so if we consider that *Passi affrettati* was published after *Buio*. Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn, in a study that seeks to

[11] The play has gone through a number of changes since it was first published. Stories are added and removed depending upon where the play is being staged. The story of Viollca remains, however, one of the play's fundamental elements.

highlight the many human rights abuses to which women are subject around the world and to call readers to action, argue that accounts of abuse with 'happy endings' are in fact more likely to inspire people to want to help (2010: 258-78). If we agree that this is also ultimately Maraini's aim in her play in particular, then the new conclusion is worth exploring. Its open-ended nature, and the terrible sense of repetition with which the scene closes, could suggest, one might argue, the universality of the girl's experience, hinting to the spectator that Viollca is just one unfortunate victim of a ubiquitous practice. Above all, however, this particular conclusion offers, I believe, a condemnation of the society in which it is being allowed to take place. I have already cited two instances in which an implicit denunciation of Italian institutions can be discerned, through the simplicity of Viollca's trafficking and exploitation. Certainly also under accusation in the texts are the clients who visit these young girls. In one of the many articles in *I giorni di Antigone* that deal with the question of prostitution, Maraini discusses the particular culpability of the client who is integral to the cycles of abuse and exploitation faced by young girls such as Viollca and Cate: '[molti clienti] non si rendono conto o non vogliono rendersi conto che oggi comprare una ragazza, specie se giovane e proveniente da Paesi poveri, significa diventare complici di un orribile sistema di schiavitù metropolitana' (*I giorni di Antigone*: 186).[12] Mauceri and Negro, moreover, understand in the story a further subtle criticism of the clients, not solely for their taking advantage of these two young girls, but also for their hypocrisy in so doing: 'la scrittrice evidenzia le contraddizioni del cliente che non ha remore a farsi masturbare da una bambina, ma si stupisce per il modo in cui è vestita e definisce ladri i suoi protettori, dandole dei soldi da nascondere' (2009: 205).

[12] Child trafficking, and questions of guilt and complicity, are themes that Maraini also explores in a separate article in *I giorni di Antigone* ('Bimbe violate e vendute, lo scandalo sono le leggi inapplicate' (pp. 157-59)).

Likewise, neither can the character of Mà be ignored. We are led to believe that she too is Italian (in *Passi affrettati* she is called Gabriella), and is, even more than some of the passively complicit females previously identified in Chapter Four, a facilitator of the girls' mistreatment. There, I considered those female characters as unconscious actors who participated in abuse through the internalisation of their own victimhood. Here, by contrast, I believe Maraini is presenting the reader with little more than a woman driven by greed and her ability to 'other' the girls to the extent that they become nothing but merchandise, like any other that is shipped across from Eastern Europe. In this instance, the prejudice, and violence, against the two girls on the part of the female perpetrator is not a gendered situation, but a racial one that forcefully demonstrates Mà's unhesitating objectification of the supposedly inferior other. Working alongside her are the two men who drive the young girls to their evening appointments. Aside from an initial, but brief, use of force against the girls, these men do not generally mistreat them, as Viollca describes: 'la sorveglianza si fa meno feroce. Non si parla più di frusta né di botte. Qualche volta il giovane arriva perfino ad offrire loro una sigaretta' (*Buio*: 37). Yet, for these men too the girls exist not as people, but as objects from which there is a great deal of money to be made: seeing the girls in their new outfits, one of the men exclaims, 'Uau! Uno schianto... Faremo un mucchio di soldi' (*Passi affrettati*: 56). Their hypocrisy is similarly in evidence in their unspoken criticism of the 'avvocati, ingegneri, dottori' (*ibid*: 58) who are ready to pay a high price for the girl. They see these latter men as the deviant wrongdoers, whilst believing themselves to be merely providing a service that would continue whether they were involved or not.

As such, the text stands as an overt accusation against all those in Italy who, both actively and passively, permit the continued exploitation of girls such as Viollca and

Cate.[13] At this point, it is worthwhile also to mention briefly Maraini's other story in *Buio* that could be considered to look inside Italy, whilst maintaining a global theme.[14] In 'Il pastore Ahmed e le tre ragazze nel bosco', two Italian girls are brutally murdered and suspicion falls upon a clandestine migrant who was working as a shepherd close to where the crimes took place. Ahmed is innocent, but Maraini underlines the ease with which some Italian people's stereotypes about migrants such as him – and, moreover, their inherent racism – can convince them of an innocent man's guilt. Ahmed is described thus to Adele Sòfia:

> Un vagabondo, un selvaggio [...] ha visto tutta quella carne nuda e ha perso la testa [...]. Da come ammazzava le pecore [...], ho capito che il sangue gli piaceva [...]. Si tratta di un uomo povero che ha sempre visto la ricchezza come un insulto personale. D'altronde quelle ragazze andavano in giro sole, mezze nude [...], un uomo che sta sempre solo, in mezzo alle pecore, che cosa può fare? (*Buio*: 195-6)

By contrast to this deeply stereotypical description of the shepherd, the girls' assailant was instead a seemingly respectable lawyer who lived nearby. Whilst he was not known to the girls, his guilt does offer another example by Maraini that strengthens the hypothesis that gender violence is rarely committed by a dangerous 'other', but often comes from much closer to home. It also, moreover, substantiates what I argued in Chapter Four, regarding Maraini's persistent representation of perpetrators who are ostensibly irreproachable figures.

Returning to the character of Ahmed, however, it appears that Maraini is wishing to highlight Italy's problematic relationship with migration, by presenting one unhappy consequence of the misconceptions held by some. This discussion mirrors work that is

[13] In a similar manner, in her analysis of the figure of the prostitute in post-war Italian cinema, Danielle Hipkins suggests that she is representative of Italian guilt (2007: 84).

[14] In *Passi affrettati* there is one other story set in Italy. Here, Maraini recounts the story of Carmelina, a young girl whose brother 'sells' her to a friend in return for the cancellation of a debt. The story not only highlights a further example of sexual violence against young girls, but also criticises an Italian tax and legal system that results in poverty and debt for many families.

being undertaken by some Italian feminist critics, who likewise recognise this difficult set of circumstances:

> Credo che in Italia non sia stato recepito veramente e a fondo il dibattito internazionale che lega migrazione e multiculturalismo [...]. L'Italia non è mai uscita della sua dimensione monoculturale anche se a molti piace dire che siamo molto diversi al nostro intorno. (Tessitore and Luongo 2006: 13)

Through stories such as Viollca's and Ahmed's, Maraini is hoping to denounce, with academics such as Tessitore and Luongo, some of the issues surrounding the increasingly globalised nature of Italian society, whilst simultaneously contributing to a discourse that remains on the margins, that of giving a voice to those in Italy who remain 'others'. In particular, however, Maraini wishes to draw her readers' attention to the acts of violence against women that are taking place today within Italy. By consequence, she is able to highlight that it is not just a problem happening elsewhere, but that Italians too must acknowledge the extent to which it is being allowed to take place in their own country. She also demonstrates how, for some, it is necessary to assume a share of the guilt.

What cannot be ignored, however, is that in Viollca's story responsibility for her exploitation does not lie solely in the hands of Italy, its individuals and institutions, but it also lies abroad, in her homeland. The role her parents play in her trafficking, for example, is significant. As we have seen, Viollca's story begins in Albania, where her parents are excited for her and encourage her to leave; at the end of *Buio*, however, they are mentioned again, once Viollca has been rescued. The Italian police contact them, but, under questioning, 'giurano di non sapere niente' (*Buio*: 39). Yet Maraini insinuates that the family cannot be as naive to Viollca's fate as they appear; she describes how, 'i fratelli, invece, non sembravano contenti che lei partisse. [...] [Uno] aveva gridato che sono tutti pazzi, tutti pazzi' (*ibid*: 25). Paola Monzoni, in a study of trafficking and prostitution, considers the case of Albania, and posits that, 'in paesi come l'Albania la prostituzione,

che fino a pochi anni fa era un tabù, ora è vissuta come un'opportunità da parte della populazione' (2002: 51). In her analysis of gender violence in Eastern Europe, moreover, Danna argues that the proliferation of human trafficking from this part of the world must be seen as nothing less than the most recent manifestation of the patriarchal war being waged on women's bodies:

> Sono cominciate le migrazioni da tutta l'Europa dell'Est e anche un traffico di giovani donne destinate alla prostituzione in altri paesi, facendo sembrare l'esito dell'implosione del sistema sovietico una sorta di applicazione della 'legge' del più forte in cui i maschi vincitori dell'Europa occidentale hanno prese le donne nel nemico sconfitto: questa volta non con stupri di guerra ma con la mediazione del pagamento in denaro a donne che hanno poche altre scelte e che frequentemente vengono constrette a prostituirsi con la violenza. (2007: 126)

Whilst the reader can obviously never be certain of the parents' knowledge of, or culpability in, their daughter's mistreatment, Maraini is evidently criticising a culture in which the sale of young women and girls has become increasingly customary. In so doing, she is, once again, adding her own voice to contemporaneous feminist and academic debate. Viollca's story demonstrates not only Maraini's criticism of Italian and Albanian society, but also her overwhelming desire to raise awareness about the issue of human trafficking in general. As such, the stories must be read as consciousness-raising narratives, which mark a return to the kind of texts that Maraini was producing most prolifically in the 1970s.[15] It is for this reason that they constitute such a productive starting point from which to (re)-consider Maraini's role not just as author but as activist and commentator as well, as I do later in this chapter. Before that discussion, however, I

[15] In my Introduction and Chapter Two, I briefly noted the links between Maraini's theatrical work and that of Dario Fo and Franca Rame. In terms of the contemporary period, however, there are less points of comparison with other figures, perhaps because, as Paolo Puppa writes, 'Peter Brook's famous jibe that if theatre went on strike nobody would notice is, in Italy at least, not a joke but the brutal truth' (2006: 379). Nonetheless, Puppa does go on to catalogue those currently working in the Italian theatrical scene, including a number producing 'political' theatre which can be likened to Maraini's work with *Passi affrettati* (see *ibid*: 379-93).

concentrate first upon some of the ways in which she confronts questions of gender violence that are taking place around the world.

II. Looking Outside

Amongst the many issues that Maraini tackles in her articles collected under the banner of 'Violenza contro le donne' in *I giorni di Antigone*, one that stands out for both the horror it describes, and the impassioned way with which Maraini addresses it, is the subject of lapidation. In two articles Maraini discusses the death penalty for women who, both consensually and through force, have extra-marital sexual intercourse (*I giorni di Antigone*: 122-32). She links the practice to the manifold other ways in which women around the world are being abused and mistreated in countries and communities in which, 'quando l'intolleranza religiosa si fa più impellente, le prime a essere demonizzate sono le donne, viste come pericolose portatrici di sregolatezza e perversione' (*ibid*: 127).[16] As Maraini explains, all too often we can assume that, at the beginning of this new millennium, parity has been achieved and women share equal rights and opportunities with men. The reality, she suggests, is rather different:

> L'Europa è un piccolo giardino fortunato rispetto ai tanti Paesi in cui le donne ancora sono trattate come schiave, considerate spesso incapaci di intendere e di volere, scambiate e messe all'asta come carne da macello, assoggettate e tenute segregate nelle case come serve a vita, senza diritti e senza dignità. (*ibid*: 124)

Certainly, in this statement, her contention that Europe exists as an advantaged entity is one that she herself has dispelled through her work on gender violence in Italy and other European states. What is relevant to my own discussion, however, is that articles such as

[16] Danna's chapter on violence against women in countries that are predominantly Muslim similarly provides a picture of the various abuses that are still taking place under the guise of 'il controllo di un uomo sulla sessualità delle donne che gli appartengono' (2007: 133-48).

this unquestionably mark her current interest in examining women's position, and women's exploitation, around the world. They likewise verify my contention throughout this thesis that, for Maraini, gender violence exists on a spectrum and reveals itself in a variety of forms.

It is perhaps, therefore, as a consequence of the strength of Maraini's sentiment around the subject of lapidation that in *Passi affrettati* she gives a voice to two women who share this appalling fate: Aisha and Amina. In fact, much like her return to Viollca's story in *Passi affrettati,* the story of Amina, a Nigerian woman, is itself a re-telling of events already narrated in an article included in *I giorni di Antigone*, entitled, 'Sharia di oggi, Inquisizione di ieri'. Maraini exploits, in both the journalistic piece and the play, a number of narrative techniques which induce a heightened emotional response in the reader/spectator. In the article, she offers a prolonged and meticulous description of the process itself, focusing first upon the involvement of Amina's family and neighbours, who must collectively prepare the hole in which she is to be buried, 'certamente per renderli complici' (*ibid*: 130). She describes the types of stone that they throw at her, 'non saranno pietre troppe grandi che la ucciderebbe subito, né troppe piccole che la ferirebbero soltanto' (*ibid*: 130), and wonders whether someone in the village will pause to question the acceptability of this punishment. She imagines in the crowd a young man who, caught up in his fervour at the event, throws his stone with, 'una smorfia di piacere' (*ibid*: 131), whilst also intimating the expected reaction from the women involved: 'dovranno imparare le altre donne che rimarranno in vita, ma attanagliate per sempre dalla paura' (*ibid*: 130). Her rhetoric in the passage is, by her own admission, rather strong, but also, she argues, entirely justified: 'lapidazione: tutti la pronunciano questa parola, ma non sanno bene come si svolga la cerimonia arcaica' (*ibid*: 131).

By contrast, it is Amina's own voice that narrates the story in *Passi affrettati.* She speaks to her new baby, whom she encourages to grow up to be strong and proud, and to enjoy every moment of her life:

> La vita è piena di cose buone. Come il sapore del mango la mattina appena alzata quando le gocce d'acqua coprono ancora le foglie della magnolia vicino casa. Come l'odore del fumo di sandalo quando accendi il fuoco e prepari il pranzo per la famiglia. (*Passi affrettati*: 44)

Whilst Maraini may be guilty here of exoticising her character somewhat, the audience is nonetheless encouraged to form a picture of a young girl who is full of life, delighted with her new baby, and who cannot understand why she is to be disciplined in such a way. Maraini draws particular attention to the intrinsic contradictions of the sentence: whilst Amina faces death by stoning, the baby's father goes unpunished: 'è nel suo diritto sedurre le donne' (*ibid:* 42). The story finishes with the voice of a Unicef worker, who, just like Maraini's own journalistic voice, implores people to take notice of women like Amina, and thus help to stop this inhumane practice.

Passi affrettati's other story of a young woman who is sentenced to death is set in Jordan. It features a young woman named Aisha, and describes how she falls in love with a man from her village who promises to marry her. They make love, but afterwards he disappears and Aisha is left with his unborn child. When her family find out, her sentence is to be burnt alive, with the punishment carried out by her brother-in-law. Aisha survives because someone takes pity upon her and covers her with a blanket to extinguish the flames; for treatment, however, she is forced to go to a hospital many miles away, for 'nessun dottore osa curarla perché andrebbe contro le leggi del villaggio' (*ibid*: 30). In this story, Maraini explores in depth the realities of life for those unlucky enough to be born female in Jordan: even in the heat of summer, Aisha and her sister must cover every inch of their skin, their lives involve only the daily drudgery of looking after the sheep, and any

indiscretion is severely punished by their father. Aisha describes how once he cut all her hair off after she allowed some of the sheep to escape: a penalty that, through a subsequent elimination of her femininity, is in itself an unmistakably gendered one. Maraini suggests, however, that the girls are accepting of such punishments: 'questa era la legge del villaggio. Anche nelle altre case le ragazze e le donne venivano picchiate tutti i giorni' (*ibid*: 22). Aisha's memories become more upsetting, however, as she describes how, as a young girl, she observed her mother suffocating a newborn baby girl. Recalling the number of pregnancies her mother had experienced, Aisha realises with revulsion that all the female babies had been killed: 'questo era normale. Tutti lo facevano al villaggio. [...] Era sempre colpa della madre se partoriva solo figlie femmine' (*ibid*: 24).

In spite of this terrible female destiny, just as Amina was portrayed as cheerful and full of appreciation for life, so too does Maraini depict Aisha as a lively, spirited young woman: away from their father's watchful gaze, Aisha describes how, 'ridiamo fra sorelle, mangiamo il formaggio che ci siamo portate dietro, ci gustiamo un cocomero fresco' (*ibid*: 20). Likewise, upon meeting Ahmed, she is filled with hope for her future, 'non ero mai stata così felice. Stare vicino a lui anche per pochi minuti, era meraviglioso. Per la prima volta nella mia vita ero qualcuno. Ero viva' (*ibid*: 26). Through portrayals such as this, Maraini's audiences consequently come to feel an emotional attachment to her protagonists, who are made flesh-and-blood by these added details. I made reference above to Kristof and Wudunn's text that seeks to raise awareness about women's mistreatment around the world. In it, the authors argue that, in any kind of call to arms, statistics are particularly bad as motivational tools, whilst a focus on individuals is instead key (2010: 258-78). The stories in *Passi affrettati* all work from such a premise: audiences

are confronted not with endless statistics, but real women. Accordingly, the horror that these women undergo is rendered all the more intense for those watching.

Debating issues surrounding women's position in Islamic communities such as those described in the two stories can be considered to be fraught with problems when discussed by people who, like Maraini, recognise their own distance from the very communities they examine and, at times, condemn. This has not prevented, however, scholars, and feminist scholars in particular, from addressing the specific problems associated with Islam and women's condition; indeed, as far back as 1982 a special issue of *DWF* entitled 'Islam. Tra un mondo e l'altro' was published in Italy. The edition included an article on female genital mutilation, a subject that Maraini too has explored (*I giorni di Antigone*: 124).[17] In the 1982 article, Maria Antonietta Saracino uses Somalia as a case study from which to understand the motivations behind the practice, and argues that 'i concetti di "vergogna" e "onore" sono concetti centrali nella società nomadica. La castità della donna rappresenta l'onore della famiglia' (1982: 138). Zine-Eddine Zemmour, in a more recent analysis of the daughter's role in Arab-Islamic families, similarly explains that virginity and chastity are fundamental concepts:

> La verginità della ragazza [...] non è considerata come una proprietà o uno stato che riguarda solo la ragazza. È una nozione che supera il personale perché va nel senso della continuità e del prolungamento di un sistema di valori in cui l'insieme della famiglia si considera implicato, e di cui quest'ultima revendica la proprietà e la protezione. (2002: 50)

Such discussions are central to an understanding of the reasons behind the punishments that both Amina and Aisha receive. The girls are being chastised for having supposedly brought shame upon their families; their sentences are offered as a public warning to other young girls that such 'dishonourable' behaviour will never go unpunished. In addition,

[17] In Maraini's recently published collection of travel writings, *La seduzione dell'altrove* (2010), she likewise discusses female genital mutilation in an article that describes her travels in Kenya with Moravia (pp. 145-66).

Maraini views practices such as lapidation and female genital mutilation as, 'ciò che i Paesi poveri, tenuti sotto il dominio di un regime militare o religioso, fanno alle donne' (*I giorni di Antigone*: 124), thus making central to her discussion the role that certain interpretations of Islamic doctrine can play, especially in countries in which poverty is a daily reality for many.

Maraini's 'Le galline di suor Attanasia', a story in *Buio*, offers a further examination of religiously motivated violence against women, in this instance as the result of religious warfare between Christian and Muslim groups. In this story, however, rather than the women under question being punished specifically for some 'crime' or indiscretion, they are the unwitting victims of male violence during conflict. The story recounts Attanasia's pregnancy, which is the outcome of a rape during a violent attack upon the nunnery in Morocco where she lives and works. Maraini's main focus in the story is Attanasia's fervent desire to keep her child in the face of strong opposition from her religious leaders back in Europe. It similarly documents her reflections upon the impossibility of hating her baby, in spite of it being the product of a violent enemy.[18] The story also concentrates, however, on the motivation for the assault, which was carried out by a group of religious extremists. For these men, the attack was one part of a larger 'war': 'si tratta di una guerra fra religiosi ed eretici. Loro [the extremists] sono i veri religiosi, gli altri [the nuns and the order they represent] gli eretici. Sono stati questi ultimi a saccheggiare, stuprare, uccidere' (*Buio*: 46).

Tensions have historically arisen when two divergent groups attempt to co-exist (Danna 2007: 140), yet the main thrust of Maraini's story is not to criticise such complex political situations, but to emphasise that women are the victims, and rarely the aggressors,

[18] See Tommasina Gabriele (2004b) for an analysis of the story; Gabriele's focus in this article is the theme of 'interrupted maternity', and reads this text alongside *Il treno per Helsinki* and *Isolina*.

of war and other emergency situations. Maraini similarly demonstrates her recognition of the rarity of this kind of violent manifestation of Islam, with one of the Sisters stating: 'io non penso che i veri musulmani credano a questa balla. Maometto, come Gesù, predicava la fratellanza e l'amore, non l'odio e il delitto' (*Buio*: 43). Neither is Maraini's criticism reserved solely for the assailants; rather, the text also stands out as a denunciation against the Catholic Church's treatment of her. Forced to give up her baby, Attanasia no longer has the strength to live and her body is found amongst her beloved hens.

Attanasia's surrender here to her despair represents one instance of the way in which, in these texts, Maraini's characters differ so greatly from their predecessors in works analysed earlier in this thesis. The protagonists of these later texts are not presented as 'coming-to-consciousness', nor as having gained a feminist awareness or demonstrated some form of resistance; instead, they are shown simply to be victims and it is only a few isolated figures of authority – a doctor, lawyer or police officer – who are there to offer them support and aid. In the previous chapter I foregrounded scholars' identification of the individualisation of contemporary society (McRobbie 2009) and suggested that it was a circumstance that Maraini too was criticising in *Voci* and *Colomba*. In *Passi affrettati*, Maraini is also alerting her audiences to this problem, and indicating, perhaps, a shutting down, or a closing of ranks from the collectivity of previous generations, and specifically of the women's movement.[19] Theatre could indeed be considered a primary way to do this, being a tool used – as I discuss below – to raise consciousness and to promote a sense of community.

However, it is also vital to note that Maraini is not implying, as I highlighted in the previous chapter, any suggestion that her characters in *Passi affrettati* are choosing, or

[19] I return to similar questions in my Conclusion.

accepting of, their mistreatment. The texts certainly do not point towards the masochism or false feelings of empowerment that could be seen to characterise some of Angela and Colomba's actions, and I would suggest that this is due to their very different cultural context. The 'post-feminism' that I explored previously should be perceived as a predominantly Western concept, which has little in common with the experiences of characters such as Viollca, Amina and Attanasia. That said, the texts under discussion do also all establish Maraini's identification of some of the meeting points of gender, poverty, religion and globalisation. As such, I would suggest, they situate her firmly within current transnational feminist debate and confirm the extent to which her work is connected to contemporaneous discourse, a discussion to which I will return shortly.[20] It is worth briefly exploring at this point, however, some of the characteristics of transnational feminism. Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp write that, 'feminism today, with all its local variation, is best understood to be a truly global phenomenon' and thus, 'the transnational arena is the intersection of the international and the local' (2006: vii-viii). Since Rosi Braidotti's assertion that, 'in so far as axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of the nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once' (1994: 4), Italian academics too have begun to explore the ways in which Italian feminism can inform global feminism and vice versa (Luongo 2008; Pomeranzi 2008).[21] Indeed, to offer just one example of such interplay in Maraini's oeuvre, I would

[20] I also noted at the end of the previous chapter that some of the themes raised in *Voci* and *Colomba* had echoes of work being carried out by 'third wave' feminists, thus providing a further productive example of this intertwining.

[21] Both articles are included in the 2008 edition of *DWF*, *Femminismi del mondo. A sud*. In Paola Bono's introduction to the issue, she explains that it looks to 'quella ricca, complessa, troppo sconosciuta galassia che sono i movimenti femminili/femministi in altri continenti' (2008: 3). See also Cristina Demaria (2003) for some considerations of global and transnational feminism from an Italian perspective, and in particular a discussion of the legacies of post-colonialism on feminist thought. In her outline of critical approaches to gender and sexuality in Italian Studies, Charlotte Ross considers transnational intersections, arguing, 'albeit

return to my discussion above regarding the concept of honour in Islamic communities and propose that the issues raised can be seen as highly pertinent to the Italian context. In both my Introduction and Chapter Four, I considered the extent to which some instances of gender violence in Italy were, historically at least, the consequence of a familial model in which male members controlled and monitored female sexuality. This paradigm has patent resonances with not only Aisha and Amina, but also other of Maraini's protagonists, such as Marianna Ucrìa and Angela. Key to transnational feminism are precisely these junctures between the global and the local, a concept that Ferree and Tripp term 'intersectionality': 'intersectionality means that privilege and oppression, and movements to defend and combat these relations, are not in fact singular' (2006: 10). In *Buio, I giorni di Antigone* and *Passi affrettati* Maraini looks to both local and global examples of gender violence, exploring links between the two and underlining how, combined, they reveal the centrality of violence to women's wider oppression.

Transnational feminism is also built upon the refusal of 'othering' (Ferree and Tripp 2006). Speaking at a conference that discussed global feminist activism, Nisha Mistri related this concept to a specific consideration of violence against women (Mistri 2009). She explained that any such othering of the phenomenon (by talking solely about poor communities or developing nations, for instance) ignores the violence that is in everyone and that is taking place everywhere. Moreover, Mistri argued that specific acts of violence against women cannot be separated from the violence of daily life that many women experience (*ibid*). Transnational feminism has thus sought to find ways in which minority cultures can be both discussed and given their own voices. Put another way, it endeavours to facilitate the subaltern's ability to speak, to borrow Spivak's term (1990),

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in a limited fashion, [Italian] concepts have influenced work in Italian contexts, just as Anglophone thought has entered the Italian sphere' (2010: 172).

without the often privileged and/or hegemonic positions of western feminists meaning that they are actually preventing minority groups from speaking for themselves.

It is a challenge that Italian feminists have certainly also faced. In her study of the relationships between Italian feminist movements and migrant women, Pojman explores the ways in which Italian feminist groups first attempted to reach out to migrant women, in what were, she argues, rather unsuccessful attempts to 'help' them:

> There has been an overwhelming tendency to approach them as pupils to be educated in the ways of western women's emancipation. The one-sidedness of women's associations shows that Italian women are not always aware that they too can benefit from working with and not on behalf of migrant women. (2006: 164)

Pojman also recognises, however, that more recent efforts by Italian women, such as the development of events and cultural exchanges, have avoided 'the colonizer-colonized relationship with immigrant women', because they were 'serious in scope but did not treat immigrant women as inferior or victimized' (*ibid*: 73). Is Maraini, however, to be judged guilty of a similarly naïve attempt to 'help'? It is a topic that she addresses in *I giorni di Antigone*, acknowledging how difficult it can be for someone from the 'privileged' West to comment on other cultures.[22] Yet, she argues: 'chiediamo che non ci si nasconda dietro il rispetto delle diverse culture e si chieda apertamente la fine di certe pratiche antiche, nel semplice nome della sacralità del corpo umano, della sua integrità e della sua libertà di esistere' (*I giorni di Antigone*: 125).

I would further argue that she is able to avoid this paradigm of 'colonizer-colonized' primarily by taking real events as her impetus and, in *Passi affrettati* in

[22] In Chapter Two, I made a link between Maraini's work and that of Oriana Fallaci, and a similar parallel cannot here be avoided. In some of her final work, Fallaci too engaged with issues around Islam, but in ways that were, of course, highly controversial and problematic (Fallaci 2001, 2004). In *Ho sognato una stazione*, Maraini discusses the aftermath of 9/11 and explicitly distances herself from Fallaci (2005: 68-83).

particular, actually using the women's own words.[23] As such, any danger of her imposing a middle-class perspective upon them is hopefully avoided. Maraini's use, and often blurring, of the fictive and the real is a feature of much of her oeuvre, as I have explored elsewhere, and it serves here to give a voice to the otherwise silenced subaltern. Already in this thesis I have raised similar issues with regards to her protagonists Teresa, Isolina and Charlotte Corday. Articulating the words of those who are marginalised is an intention of much of Maraini's narrative work, and is certainly not limited to those whose voicelessness is linked to their ethnicity. Rather, Maraini actively seeks out any woman whose story, she believes, needs telling and whose experiences may help or inspire others.

One further way in which Maraini can be credited with avoiding the binary of 'western privilege' and 'disadvantaged otherness' is through her inclusion in *Passi affrettati* of stories of women who live in such supposedly advantaged societies. I believe that, for Maraini, the understanding and representation of gender violence on a global scale goes hand-in-hand with an awareness that such violence continues in 'privileged' cultures as well. In the original version of *Passi affrettati,* she includes the story of Juliette, a middle-class Belgian woman whose husband beats her. The audience also learns of Teresa, a Mexican woman living in the United States, who is eventually killed by her violent partner; her story concludes with the voice of a journalist who informs the audience that, 'negli Stati Uniti, secondo le ultime stime, ci sono stati, solo nell'anno 2001, 700.000 casi di violenza domestica. Circa un terzo delle donne uccise ogni anno, sono vittime del marito o del compagno di vita' (*Passi affrettati*: 50). In a version of the play presented for the first time in the UK in 2009, Maraini included the story of Sarah, a Welsh woman who is the victim of a partner whose abuses against her are both physical and psychological.

[23] The individual stories all have their basis in Amnesty testimonies.

Sarah's husband holds her hostage for over a week, before ultimately killing her and trying to run away with their son. Like all the stories in the play, so too was Sarah's story based on real events, thus representing once again Maraini's commitment to demonstrating that gender violence is a reality everywhere, and not just a problem 'elsewhere'. To take this argument one step further it could even be suggested that wealthy, ostensibly progressive, developed and irreproachable nations can, just like charming perpetrators, reveal heinous brutalities.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, *Passi affrettati* has experienced a great deal of success, with its dissemination spreading across Europe and beyond.[24] This represents a quite unprecedented success for a play that was, Maraini has explained, to be performed just once (Maraini 2010b). I also suggested earlier that the play can be seen as a piece of consciousness-raising, more overtly political theatre, much like a large amount of work that Maraini produced in the 1970s, and slightly different to many of her plays that have experienced success in the years in between.[25] Prompted by this 'return' to politicised theatre, the final part of this chapter will shift the focus to Maraini herself and examine in detail her interconnected 'public' and 'private' roles.

III. Maraini's Public Role

Discussions about the role of the intellectual in Italian society are relatively prevalent in recent work taking place in Italian cultural studies (Forgacs and Lumley 1997; Ward 2001; Barwig and Staunder 2007; Bolongaro et al 2009). Likewise, the concept of *impegno*,

[24] As of April 2011, the play has been translated into ten languages, including Arabic, Japanese and Russian (http://www.passiaffrettati.it/).
[25] Plays such as *Maria Stuarda* and *I sogni di Clitennestra*, which, as I explored in Chapter Three, are more committed to exploring the interiority of women whose lives are in the public domain.

meaning engagement and/or commitment, continues to provoke debate amongst academics researching contemporary Italy (Burns 2001; Antonello and Mussgnug 2009). Given that Maraini is a recognised political figure in Italy, as comments in my Introduction demonstrated, and that her works are often undeniably political in scope, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that she is notably absent from such discussions. In fact, a brief survey of these studies suggests that, whilst women are certainly present in the Italian cultural panorama, they are largely missing from such critical volumes.[26] Evidently, such absences could simply be the accidental consequence of editorial and marketing decisions. Yet, I do not believe it to be too problematic to suggest that critical work has tended to posit *impegno* as a predominantly male domain, and that Italian female (public) intellectuals have been similarly marginalised in critical discourse.

Turning first to the notion of *impegno*, I would argue that there can be little doubt that Maraini should be considered alongside her *impegnati* male counterparts. Burns' definition of the term is one that has been applied to many individuals and pieces of work since her important study was first published in 2001, and it would appear that Maraini and her work are consistent with the concept:

> [In the late 1960s] the word *impegno* renders the sense of a creative task at hand which demands of the individual writer a serious moral, intellectual and aesthetic investment. The definition of *impegno* which Vittorini, Calvino and Pasolini gradually make space for, and which carries forward to the writers of the 70s, 80s and 90s, is perhaps: treating responsibly the task of artistic communication in the contemporary social environment. (2001: 37)

Later in the text, we learn of an individual whose 'responsibility is to her art as much as to her society' (*ibid*: 35); a description that seems to be an unquestionably apt way to refer to

[26] In Barwig and Staunder's volume of the almost thirty individuals being considered, just three are women. Burns' study contains one chapter in which 'women writers' are analysed as a group, and the rest of the text is devoted to male writers and intellectuals. One of the most recent contributions to the *impegno* debate (Antonello and Mussgung 2009) does, on the other hand, devote a chapter to feminism, with a particular focus upon Adriana Cavarero, but this too is set alongside a number of chapters on male figures.

Maraini. Her unwavering commitment to representing those who face not only violence and abuse, but manifold forms of discrimination and exclusion, certainly demonstrates a responsibility to her society. Whether this is achieved through her texts or her public activity, her responsibility to her art likewise remains strong.

More difficult to define, perhaps, is what constitutes a public intellectual. Primarily key, it had been suggested, is the individual's ability and willingness to comment upon a range of issues (Edgeworth 1999: 2). Common also is the emphasis placed upon the prerequisite of his or her autonomy, and ability to function without political allegiance and outside of state institutions (Said 1994). In their discussion of Italian intellectuals, Barwig and Staunder turn to Umberto Eco, who strongly believes that, 'sarebbe sbagliato per l'intellettuale entrare nella politica professionale e tentare di occupare in questa un posto di responsabilità; gli conviene meglio preservare la sua indipendenza' (2007: 16). As such, Barwig and Staunder argue, 'liberi dal sospetto di pronunciare discorsi solo per ottenere dei voti o per fare carriera nei partiti, [gli intellettuali] sono più credibili dei membri del parlamento quando prendono posizioni rispetto a temi d'attualità sociale' (*ibid*: 18). Maraini does see herself and her work as autonomous of institutionalised politics, and considers her role purely to be, 'dalla parte delle donne' (Maraini 2011). That said, she has voiced her opposition to the Berlusconi regime, perhaps most notoriously in an open letter to Veronica Lario, published in *Corriere della sera* in May 2009. The letter had, however, an undeniably gendered focus, thus verifying that even in the world of politics, Maraini's target remains staunchly aimed at women's rights:

> Come interpretare questa rabbiosa intolleranza verso il genere femminile? Forse le donne stanno diventando troppo brave: le migliori nelle università, le migliori nella pedagogia scolastica, le migliori in tante professioni. Questo

> certamente mette in discussione la supremazia culturale maschile che per molti deve rimanere alla base del rapporto fra i sessi. (Maraini 2009c)

Edward Said has written specifically on the writer as intellectual and here it may be possible to find more significant resonances with Maraini's work. Said writes:

> During the last years of the twentieth century the writer has taken on more and more of the intellectual's adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority. (2002: 25)

The description offers many pertinent echoes with Maraini's recent work, especially with *Passi affrettati*, which undoubtedly is a text that bears witness to the suffering of others. Maraini's is a voice that speaks out and opposes persecution, frequently on behalf of those who are unable to do so. The 'voicelessness' of those she seeks to represent in itself finds resonance in Said's argument: he further states that, 'the intellectual's role is [...] to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible' (*ibid*: 31). Not only are abused women often silenced, but also the perpetrators of violence against women can be deemed to be in possession of Said's 'unseen power'; it is both types of 'quiet' that Maraini attempts to defeat.

It could be suggested, therefore, that in the eyes of both her public and her critics Maraini does have a voice in contemporary Italian society and it is merely the result of a critical blindspot that this position has not been recognised in broader critical analyses. By contrast, Kathryn Edgeworth (1999) makes a number of interesting points regarding the dearth of female public intellectuals in Australia, which could help to further explain Maraini's absence. Edgeworth argues that these women are often denied the designation public intellectual because much of their discourse privileges the private over the public sphere: 'where participants in public debate focus on the "private", they are necessarily marginalised as speakers by the gatekeepers of public thought' (1999: 2). She indeed

claims that, 'common to descriptions of public intellectual discourse is the need for issues that intellectuals speak and write about to not only be concerned with public life, but indeed *limited* to the public realm' (*ibid*: 2. Emphasis added). Such a classification does not sit comfortably alongside the feminist maxim that 'the personal is political' and Edgeworth accordingly confirms that, 'just as political theory has historically denied the relevance of domestic concerns in public life, so public intellectual life affords status to civic and state matters while ignoring their reliance on activities carried out in the private domain' (*ibid*: 3). Both Maraini's written work and her public discourse, with their emphasis on women's rights, role and subjectivity, would no doubt be deemed 'private concerns', which may go some way to explaining her absence from discussions of the figure of the intellectual in Italy.

Nevertheless, Susanna Scarparo, in her discussion of some significant Italian feminists, puts forward a convincing argument for why these women should indeed be considered public intellectuals:

> They are public not only because they interact with and operate in public institutions such as the school or university, the literary or academic journals, publishers and so on, but that they are public in so far as they operate within an *agora* (or public space) of their making. (2004: 209)

In this definition, Scarparo's use of the term 'agora' to denote a public space is clearly significant; she identifies it as, 'a place emblematic to public life which is given a political validity without it being political in institutional terms. For Italian feminist intellectuals there is another *agora*; that which women have put into existence through their network of relationships' (*ibid*: 208). For Scarparo, therefore, it is not that women cannot be designated 'public intellectuals', but rather that the definition of such an individual must be broadened to incorporate the different kinds of spaces in which they function. Maraini's presence in the institutions described by Scarparo is unmistakable: not only does

she regularly appear on television, but she is frequently invited to speak at schools, universities and other public places.

In terms of Scarparo's 'agora', or the space developed through networks of relationships, I would further contend that one of the interconnecting features of the texts under discussion in this chapter is their emphasis upon dialogue. The final section of *I giorni di Antigone* is composed of Maraini's responses to her readers' letters. Touching on a range of subjects, from prostitution to depression, the modern-day housewife to the terrorist attacks on Moscow, these letters present Maraini with the opportunity to exchange ideas with her public and to form a new space for dialogue.[27] In discussing the Italian feminists' 'agora', Scarparo cites Paolo Bartoloni, who asks, 'who is it that invests [public intellectuals] with this function? What kind of public legitimates their voices?' (2004: 208). Much as Scarparo defends their place as intellectuals through their *pratica delle relazioni*, so too would I propose that Maraini's dialogue with her readers validates her voice.[28]

Communication and interaction are also fundamental to *Passi affrettati*. The play is traditionally followed by an audience discussion concerning the issues raised and, in some cases, an account of the provision of local services for women who have experienced abuse. This clearly replicates her theatrical practice of the 1970s in which, as I have noted, dialogue also emerged as a key characteristic.[29] Moreover, speaking at a performance of

[27] In the Introduction to this thesis, I briefly discussed whether Maraini was writing for an assumed female readership and suggested, by contrast, that as a public figure and theatrical producer, she attracts mixed audiences. These letters, however, are from her contributions to the magazine *Io donna*, and it is thus inevitable that, in a case such as this, she is both writing as a woman and writing for women.

[28] Maraini is also an active participant on the 'forum' section of her website (http://www.daciamaraini.com/tools/maraini-2.shtml) and her Facebook 'fan' page (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dacia-Maraini/35736668883), demonstrating her commitment to such alternative networking spaces and her willingness to promote dialogue with her readers and supporters.

[29] My Introduction highlighted the Brechtian influences in Maraini's work at that stage. *Passi affrettati* can similarly be linked to Brechtian practice, which dictated that: 'epic theatre takes as its starting point the attempt to introduce fundamental change to [the] relationships [between stage and public]. For its public,

the piece in Florence in April 2010, Maraini underlined the importance of dialogue not just taking place during such events, but also continuing outside the theatre, a claim that validates the authenticity of her *impegno*. At this event, she described violence against women as, 'una ferita sociale', in which 'siamo tutti coinvolti [...] la violenza ci riguarda tutti' (Maraini 2010b). By accentuating the importance of community and laying emphasis upon the idea of collective responsibility, Maraini made it clear that gender violence is not just about the one person who experiences it. In order for it no longer to exist, a cultural shift is required, not merely a change in individual attitudes.

Maraini has likewise called attention to the sense of a dialogue that takes place between the actors and the audience: on stage, she argues, actors are aware of, and able to respond to, those watching them (*ibid*). Theatre is thus a two-way activity: being 'davanti ai corpi vivi' and in the presence of actors 'chi parlano col corpo intero' (*ibid*) adds, Maraini maintains, an immediacy and interaction to a theatrical text that is quite unlike watching a film or indeed reading any kind of written text. A sense of shared embodiment undoubtedly also engenders a sense of shared responsibility. When I questioned her about what she sees as the particular role of theatre, Maraini indeed responded that, 'il teatro ha sempre avuto una funzione di sensibilizzazione della coscienza collettiva. E come tale penso che possa aiutare a cambiare l'atteggiamento della gente nei riguardi della violenza' (Maraini 2008b). In a similar manner, Janelle Reinelt suggests that political theatre such as *Passi affrettati* should encourage spectators to 'grasp their positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle' (cited in Taviano 2005: 20).

Through *Passi affrettati,* Maraini has created a space for dialogue between herself and her public, and encouraged debate within communities beyond the confines of the

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the stage is a […] convenient public exhibition area. For its stage, the public is […] an assembly of interested persons whose demands it must satisfy' (Benjamin 1998: 2). I consider the role of the actors in Maraini's work below.

theatre. Whilst any play, and indeed any text, can of course be considered a form of communication, this is rarely truer than in a work such as *Passi affrettati*, which actively responds to its audience. Different versions of the play are performed dependent upon the country or community in which it is taking place.[30] Such a sense of fluidity and readiness to change for its audience positions the text as a self-reflexive piece of work which is in communication with its public. The various forms of dialogue the play exemplifies – from the very real one that takes place at the end of the performance, to less tangible types such as its mutability – situate once again both it and Maraini herself within Scarparo's conception of a public intellectual. As Scarparo hypothesises, 'this public space provides them with the legitimising authority that does not derive from institutional power. This space is created through their *pratica delle relazioni* and is also the space in which they publically practise their relational politics' (2004: 209).

Passi affrettati is a work which breaks silences, calls its spectators to action, stands as a direct act of intervention and consciousness raising, and one which, it is hoped, will have an effect beyond the theatre.[31] As such, I believe that it exemplifies the extent to which Maraini's role extends far beyond the written word to encompass that which is also required of the public intellectual. Much of the success of *Passi affrettati* is undeniably down to Maraini's own readiness to participate in so many of its performances: at its UK debut in Leicester, many in the large audience were attracted to the event because Maraini would be present. What they took away from it, however, was a greater awareness of the many issues surrounding gendered violence (Kay 2009).[32] Additionally, Maraini's

[30] I noted above, for instance, that a new story was added when the play first toured in the UK.
[31] The benefits of the play are also financial: proceeds from the sale of the text itself go towards helping women who have suffered abuse and violence, and many performances are followed by a collection for local women's shelters.
[32] Nicolette Kay directs the English-language version of *Hurried Steps*, which debuted in Leicester in March 2009 and has continued to tour in 2010 and 2011 (http://www.newshoestheatre.org.uk/Home.html).

willingness to prepare new stories and to attend performances as the play moves from one country to another demonstrates her genuine concern for its dissemination.

I argued above that all the texts under discussion in this chapter could be considered to be alive to, and in dialogue with, contemporaneous feminist debate. In the previous chapter, I similarly noted that *Colomba* and *Voci* both demonstrate the extent to which Maraini is alive not only to changes in feminist scholarship, but also, through their portrayal of young women, to youth culture. Maraini's career currently spans almost half a century and yet she remains today as engaged and committed to defending women's rights as she was when she first began publishing. In recent texts her perspective has broadened to encompass the abuses that minority women are suffering within her native country and the mistreatment of women around the world. Whilst Maraini's feminist activity has thus shifted and matured in response to both theoretical developments and her increased awareness of the new challenges to be faced when considering women's roles in a globalised society, her ultimate goal has not changed. She continues to argue that violence against women is a social ill, and that only through discussing and representing it will there be a chance of it being eliminated. In conclusion to this chapter I would suggest that, whilst the academy may be reluctant to deem her such, Maraini is without doubt a figure who maintains an important public position in Italian society and one whose work and activism consistently demonstrate her to be *impegnata*.

CONCLUSION

Maraini begins one of the short essays included in the collection *Un clandestino a bordo* (1996) with a series of questions relating to women's relationships with their bodies: 'perché la parola "corpo" pesa tanto sulla lingua delle donne? perché ha un peso specifico così grave? perché in questo peso riconosciamo il luogo mitologico di ogni possibile contraddizione: gloria e mutilazione, potere e perdita, lusinga e lacerazione?' (*Un clandestino a bordo*: 39). They are questions that encapsulate some of the ideas that lie at the very heart of her oeuvre. The paradox she here identifies of women's bodies as both attractive and repellent, as supposedly imbued with a great deal of power but ultimately revealing their own vulnerability, and as sites of abuse and exploitation, has, moreover, a direct correlation with the issue of gender violence. The bodies of her numerous female victims are located at precisely this problematic intersection: caught between being desired and abhorred, the result is all too often their mistreatment.

Throughout this thesis, I have foregrounded the many and diverse ways in which Maraini's female characters are subject to gender violence and demonstrated that, across her career, the topic has become an ever more pressing concern and an ever more prominent feature of her narratives. I have similarly argued that Maraini's later characters, in spite of the supposed advances in women's self-awareness and autonomy brought about by feminism, are granted less agency than their antecedents in earlier works. In so doing, I have raised a number of interrelated questions that are likewise fundamental to her authorial project: the dichotomy of the voice and silence, the intertwining of the real and the fictional and, most extensively, the roles and typologies of victim and perpetrator, and the power relations that are at work between them. However, by way of a conclusion, I

would like to introduce two new directions to my project, areas that I have touched upon, but of which a deeper understanding will help to draw this thesis to a close. The first is linked to questions of agency and considers the ways in which Maraini ends her narratives, specifically relating to the attainment or otherwise of justice, and reflecting upon the effect that this may have upon her readers. Secondly, I return to a subject raised in Chapters Two and Six: Maraini's public role. Here, by contrast, I consider her own thoughts on this; in particular, her opinions on contemporary Italy, the spaces that continue to exist within it for debate, and the legacies of feminism, issues which are themselves linked to my main research questions.

In my early chapters, in which I analysed works that were published prior to the mid-1990s, I emphasised how significant it was that Maraini allowed her protagonists to rebel against, resist and eventually escape from their abusive experiences. She does not always discuss in these texts whether the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice, but this could be viewed as an immaterial omission. The fact that her texts end with such a positive affirmation of her protagonists' agency could be considered enough 'closure' for a feminist reading. By contrast, as I have shown, Maraini's more recent victims are not granted this type of agency and thus, with the violence that they undergo being ever more overt, there is arguably even more reason for Maraini to focus upon the consequences for her perpetrators instead. Neat conclusions to the narratives, in which those responsible are found guilty and sentenced accordingly, would undoubtedly allow the reader to have faith that, in spite of the apparent universality of patriarchal violence, and the seemingly disappointing absence of women's responses to it, its perpetrators are being brought to account for their actions. In Chapter Six, I made reference to research by Kristof and

Wudunn (2010), which similarly maintained that so-called 'happy endings' in stories of abuse are more likely to inspire readers to action.

In *Voci*, Glauco is recognised as the culprit and, had he not committed suicide, it is assumed that eventually he would have been answerable to the law. Michela's final decision to end her relationship and potentially make a brave career change to become a writer additionally gives the novel a feminist perspective. Nonetheless, as JoAnn Cannon recognises, 'when the Bari case is solved, the narrator is neither self-congratulatory nor jubilant. The solution of one crime among the mind-numbing number of murder cases, files and mutilated corpses periodically inventoried throughout the novel offers little reason for jubilation' (2006: 70). Likewise, whilst Zaira is eventually able to remove Colomba from the caravan that has become her prison, the reader is given no indication that it is actually what the young woman wanted. The last image of her is in Zaira's dream, in which Colomba tells her grandmother that she is not sure whether she wishes to live or die, that Sal is 'un ragazzo dolce', and that she was happy with him because of the 'treats' he brought her: 'quelli che mi fanno stare bene, vanno dritti nelle vene, […], i cucciolotti di polvere, è una tale delizia, una tale pace, quando li prendo in braccio' (*Colomba*: 358). Later, Zaira discusses Sal with her father; both agree that he should be jailed, but Zaira explains that, as yet, the police have not apprehended him and his friends, and there is no suggestion that they will.

Buio presents a similarly difficult response to the question of justice. Adele successfully apprehends most of the perpetrators, but one tale hints to the reader that this might not be the end of the story. In 'Alicetta', a young girl in a care home dies after suffering months of abuse by two members of staff. Adele finds the culprits; a year later, the narrator sees a story about them in the newspaper:

> Dopo la prima condanna a diciotto anni di carcere per violenza carnale e omicidio, l'infermiere Bruno Mocci e il portantino Demetrio Perelli sono stati prosciolti in seconda istanza per mancanze di prove. Ora l'ultimo è tornato a fare il portantino, assunto da un'altra clinica privata, e l'infermiere si è messo a fare l'autista di taxi. (*Buio*: 84)

Not only have they not been sentenced, but both men have also since found employment that will bring them into easy contact once again with the weak and the vulnerable. Finally, in my analysis of *Passi affrettati* I discussed the ways in which some of the stories ended: Viollca, for example, is simply abandoned to her fate; Aisha, on the other hand, manages to get to a hospital where the burns that have been inflicted upon her are treated. I noted that the 'stories' presented isolated examples of institutional help, but what is apparent with regards to the perpetrators in these stories is that once again Maraini is offering no easy solutions. Moreover, the religious motivation for many of the crimes that are committed against the women in these stories often disallows the punishment of their perpetrators. I isolated one such case in my analysis, in which a young woman was stoned to death for adultery: the young man involved goes unpunished, and those who carry out the stoning are celebrated by the rest of the village. Perpetrators of violence are universally condemned by Maraini, but she is also suggesting that the reality is rather different: that the law does not always lead to justice for the victims of abuse. As such, these latter texts do not offer an uncomplicated sense of finality for the reader. Where, at the end of Maraini's early works, the reader is left encouraged and optimistic that her characters' self-awareness and autonomy have developed in numerous productive ways, few characters or stories in these later works effect a similar response.

Perhaps, however, this is precisely the reaction that Maraini intends. Indeed, in her non-fiction work of the same period she has often raised questions about the position of women in contemporary Italy, about the changes in the ways that women are perceived

and, moreover, about their self-perception, and the picture that she paints is at times similarly bleak.[1] She argues forcefully that, 'le ingiustizie continuano e il mondo inventa costantemente nuovi modi di discriminare le donne', suggesting in particular that, 'si trasforma il corpo femminile in linguaggio pubblicitario, togliendole, con l'illusione della libertà sessuale, la parola' (2005: 50-51). Her belief that women continue to be silenced, albeit differently (and, potentially, through their own complicity), is in direct correlation with the questions of agency and victimhood that I raised in later chapters. In contemporary society, Maraini appears convinced that, 'il corpo femminile […] non parla più, ma è parlato da altri' (*ibid*: 52), thus explaining why her later characters may find it so difficult to develop strategies to resist, speak out about or prevent the abuse that they experience. Consequently, rather than wanting to offer a sense of resolution for her readers, she would prefer that her narratives incite anger in them and provoke them into action. In Chapter Six, I discussed the ways in which audiences have responded to *Passi affrettati*, explaining that Maraini wished for debate to continue after the performance. I described how the participation of local women's groups and organisations was intended to foster a sense of community that would persist beyond the confines of the theatre. It could be argued, therefore, that the very endings of the texts themselves are all part of Maraini's (potentially renewed) dedication to producing narratives that are committed and political.

In that chapter, I concluded that Maraini should be considered, above all else, as a cultural figure, as a person in whom the act of writing cannot be separated from her politics. However, when I asked Maraini herself about this she seemed not to agree, suggesting instead, 'mi definisco "Raccontatrice di storie". È la cosa che mi piace di più.

[1] These issues are confronted explicitly in *Un clandestino a bordo* (1996), *Ho sognato una stazione* (2005) and *I giorni di Antigone* (2006).

Poi viene Scrittrice, poi Critica e poi Commentatrice' (Maraini 2011). In this definition, Maraini places social commentator at the end of the list, and chooses instead to dub herself a 'Storyteller', a title that could be viewed as minimising the very great impact that her narratives continue to provoke. Conversely, women have historically been linked to an oral tradition, with story-telling and song long being the methods that women employed to share and pass on myths, cautionary tales and family history (Warner 1994).[2] Indeed, Beverly Allen identifies a 'current of lament which can be found in the utterances of women throughout Italian oral tradition' (1986: xix). Maraini thus inserts herself into this tradition, in which 'storytellers' such as her were considered integral to communities, and had a role that stretched beyond the recounting of stories, to that of educator, historian and transmitter of culture and traditions (Warner 1994).

Additionally, corresponding to her self-definition, I have already noted how Maraini often turns to marginalised subjects and can be deemed an intermediary who facilitates the voicing of their silences. She is thus, one might argue, a teller of *their* stories. Moreover, Maraini has published a number of works since *Passi affrattati* that would not be dubbed overtly political: I have already mentioned her shift towards life writing, and this is manifested more recently in *Il gioco dell'universo* (2007) and *La seduzione dell'altrove* (2010). Together with this telling of her own story, and that of her family, Maraini has also continued to narrate other women's stories, both in the novel, *Il treno dell'ultima notte* (2008) and the collection of short stories, *La ragazza di via Maqueda* (2009).

By contrast, following her response concerning her perceived 'role', Maraini went on to outline to me what she sees as her politics:

[2] The relationship between history and orality was examined by Società Italiana delle Storiche, a group that I briefly discussed in Chapter Three (Passerini 1988).

> Appartengo all'area della sinistra, ma non sono mai stata iscritta a un partito. Voglio sentirmi libera. Mi sento anche vicina al movimento delle donne, ma senza legami ideologici. Mi sento dalla parte delle donne. E faccio quello che posso per rimediare alle immense ingiustizie che subiscono le donne nel mondo. (Maraini 2011)

Her refusal to see herself associated with, or affiliated to, one particular group is insistent, and yet at the same time she admits to her desire to participate in movements for change and to a continuing involvement in activism. As she later describes, this latter area is not solely *dalla parte delle donne*: 'io ero alla manifestazione del 13 febbraio a Roma. E sono stata sorpresa dalla quantità immensa di gente, sia donne che uomini che bambini, che partecipavano per dire "basta" a questa politica, a questo governo' (*ibid*).[3] In her published work too, alongside the texts mentioned above, there is equally a new area of engagement in Maraini's narrative output, one that is quite clearly political and not necessarily feminist: the mafia.[4] In 2009, Maraini published *Sulla mafia*, a collection of fictional and non-fictional writings on the subject, whilst 2010 saw the debut performance in Palermo of a new play, *Mi chiamo Antonino Calderone*. This is Maraini's theatrical adaptation of Pino Arlacchi's, *Gli uomini del disonore* (1992), a text which narrates the memoirs of mafia *pentito*, Calderone. Nevertheless, it could equally be argued that as well as being political, her choice to re-tell another narrative fits precisely with her self-definition as 'Raccontatrice di storie'.

Conceivably, of course, the inference is that Maraini is not a person whom we should attempt to classify at all. Instead, it may be enough to underline that what both

[3] The demonstration to which she refers was a large-scale, anti-Berlusconi protest, entitled, *Se non ora, quando?*. Its mission statement reads: 'noi chiediamo a tutte le donne, senza alcuna distinzione, di difendere il valore della loro, della nostra dignità e diciamo agli uomini: se non ora, quando? È il tempo di dimostrare amicizia verso le donne' (http://senonoraquando13febbraio2011.wordpress.com/).

[4] Doing so can be considered a further way in which Maraini has begun, more recently, to approach her life through her writing: she has discussed how for much of her career she was reluctant to tackle the subject of Sicily, the place of her childhood and one with which she has a problematic relationship (*Ho sognato una stazione*: 125-27)

these new publications and her on-going activism demonstrate, above all else, is that across the board – as author, critic, commentator, cultural figure – Maraini remains as committed today as when she began her career in the 1960s. In the previous chapter, I discussed Scarparo's work on Italian feminist intellectuals and her theorising on the *agora* as a location for debate of their own making (2004). I would propose that Maraini has established her own *agora*, a space in the Italian cultural landscape which allows her the freedom to be whomsoever she may wish, without the shackles of institutional affiliation. In addition, whilst she may not see herself as 'ideologically' linked to the women's movement, her current work does bear the mark of feminist legacies. Undeniably, it would be strange if, having been such an integral part of the women's movement, its influences did not continue to affect her. When I asked Maraini whether she thought the legacies of 1970's feminism continued to shape and inspire women today, she responded that:

> Le ideologie sono morte, non solo quelle femministe. Rimangono le pratiche per aiutare le donne in difficoltà, rimangono gli studi sulla storia delle donne, rimangono le analisi sul sociale, ecc. Rimane insomma la prassi, di cui fa parte anche il mio lavoro teatrale. È un lavoro legato a piccoli gruppi e poco coordinato. (Maraini 2011)

Recent studies of the state of Italian feminism in the twenty-first century have in fact suggested a similar set of circumstances (Bono and Giardini 2000; Magaraggia et al 2005). Bono and Giardini describe the ways in which current feminism stands at a point of '*taglio*, that is, a cutting line, a fracture in our way of looking at, experiencing, signifying ourselves and the world' (2000: 1027). They see this as a point of both 'crisis and adventure', in which new generations of feminists are both building upon and breaking away from the influences of their foremothers. Magaraggia, Martucci and Pozzi's essay (2005) similarly discusses third wave feminism in Italy and, in part, its bonds with historical feminism. Their central focus is the current 'plurality' of feminisms that exist:

the ways in which individual women and groups interrelate with each other, form networks and participate in a variety of networks. Within the 'map' they create of contemporary feminisms, they find numerous women who, like Maraini, 'decide not to define themselves as feminists'; for some of whom this is 'to identify a clear separation with pre-established ideologies' (*ibid*: 32).

Learning from the lessons of second wave feminism, creating new spaces, interconnecting with different women and looking for new ways to define oneself: this is perhaps what it means to be 'feminist' in Italy today, and it strongly resonates with the space that Maraini has established for herself. Further to her comments about contemporary Italian feminism, Maraini added that, 'però forse qualcosa sta cambiando […]. Le voci isolate non sono ascoltate, mentre i grandi movimenti di folla fanno effetto e possono provocare grandi cambiamenti' (Maraini 2011). We can only hope that is she right, and that things are beginning to change for women both in Italy and around the world. However, I would maintain that what Maraini's extensive career has in fact proven, is that isolated voices *can* be heard: all that is needed is for someone to help them to speak.

This thesis has charted Maraini's long commitment to understanding and exposing the many forms of violence that women across the world continue to experience. It has analysed her representations of gender violence and identified the motifs that recur across her oeuvre. It has contextualised her work and situated individual texts in their broader cultural framework, highlighting the changes and continuities that these differing historical backgrounds have provoked, and, expressly, some of the more negative effects that a society in the aftermath of feminism has had upon women's lives. It has also stimulated further avenues for research, such as Maraini's move in the past decade to a more concerted focus upon autobiographical writing, questions of female sexual agency, and the

broader issue of the 'post-feminist' era in Italy and the inheritances of second wave feminism. Most of all, it has established Maraini's unique position as an author whose works have spanned half a century and whose writings have had a direct impact upon countless lives. It seems apt therefore to close with Maraini's own thoughts on what drives her to carry on writing:

> Scrivo perché mi piace. Senza scrivere mi sentirei persa. Scrivo per sentirmi esistere. A volte, è vero, mi sovraccarico di lavoro. Ma è difficile porre un limite, stabilire delle regole precise. Si tende ad accettare più impegni di quanto potremo poi soddisfare e qualche volta mi sento proprio stanca. Ma vado avanti. Lo farò finché potrò. (Maraini 2011).

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