

ANNALI D'ITALIANISTICA

Volume 42, 2024

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**FIFTY YEARS OF *LA STORIA*:
ELSA MORANTE BEYOND HISTORY**

In memoriam	xxii
Guest Editors , Introduction	1
1 – MetaHistory: Forms of Narration	
Elena Porciani , Elsa-nel-testo e la scrittura per el analfabeto. Considerazioni sulla io narrante della <i>Storia</i>	9
Irene Gianceselli , <i>La Storia</i> per una pedagogia del superamento: l'opera illimitata di Elsa Morante	23
Pietro Orlandi , Uno stile “creaturale”: patetismo, linguaggio infantile e dialettalità ne <i>La Storia</i> di Elsa Morante	51
Selene Genovesi , Morante's “plurilinguismo” in <i>La Storia</i> and Weaver's (Missing) Translation. Loss or Gain?	83
2 – In History: Shoah, Memory, Trauma	
Katrin Wehling-Giorgi , “Una stampa lucida”: Traumatic Images and Ruinous Landscapes in Elsa Morante's <i>La Storia</i> and <i>Aracoeli</i>	105
Sanja Kobilj Ćuić , Ida Ramundo's Journey to Consciousness in Elsa Morante's <i>La Storia</i>	125
Guido Bartolini , <i>La Storia</i> come vettore di memoria: il romanzo di Morante nella cultura del ricordo del dopoguerra	147
Shachar Livne , <i>La Storia</i> in Hebrew: A History	175

3 – *MicroHistory: The Child in Time*

- Maria Vittoria Vittori**, *Genesi di Useppe e la diaspora del sorprendente nella Storia* 199
- Ruth Murphy**, *The Child in Adult Fiction. Useppe and the Ethical Vision of Elsa Morante's La Storia* 219
- Marta Romagnoli**, *Degrees of Decreation: Tallis, Useppe e la sofferenza redentrice* 241

4 – *History in Dialogue: Comparative Approaches*

- Eleonora Conti**, *Controstoria, trauma, linguaggio: un confronto fra Elsa Morante e Antonio Tabucchi* 261
- Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski**, *Jewish Images and Transnational Histories in Italian Writing, from Elsa Morante to Helena Janeczek* 289
- Francesca Nieddu**, *Uno studio intermediale degli intertesti morantiani ne Le pupille di Alice Rohrwacher* 319

5 – *Before History: Morante's Earlier Works*

- Elisa Vivaldi**, “Specchiati nella mia faccia, non siamo forse uguali?” *Desiderio mimetico e forme della mediazione in Menzogna e sortilegio di Elsa Morante* 353
- Rebecca Walker**, “Una metamorfosi straordinaria”: *Emotional Epistemologies in “Lo scialle andaluso” and La Storia* 379
- Lorenza Starace**, *The Taboo of Romance: On Elsa Morante's L'isola di Arturo* 405

6 – *Beyond History: Morante's Legacy through Translation*

- Elsa Morante**, *For or Against the Atomic Bomb (Introduction by Maria Anna Mariani, Translation by Ann Goldstein)* 429
- Zakiya Hanafi and Ann Goldstein**, *A Conversation between Translators: Elsa Morante's “For or Against the Atomic Bomb” and More* 441
- Franco Baldasso**, *From House of Liars to Lies and Sorcery: Translating Elsa Morante's Menzogna e sortilegio into English. A Conversation with Jenny McPhee* 459
- Francesca Medaglia**, *The Transmedia Translation of La Storia: From Book to Television Series. A Conversation with Giulia Calenda* 475

Dominique Budor. *Scrivere, ovvero nascere a sé stesso. Saggio su Luigi Pirandello.* Pisa: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2022. Pp. 222. (Alessandro Toma, Master Student, *Humboldt-Universität Berlin*) 640

Ignazio Buttitta. *The Poetry of Ignazio Buttitta: A Bilingual Anthology (Sicilian/English).* Ed., intro., and transl. Gaetano Cipolla. Mineola: Legas, 2023. Pp. 224. (Enrico Minardi, *Arizona State University*) 642

Stefano Carrai. *Nell'ombra della magnolia. La poesia di Montale.* Roma: Carocci, 2022. Pp. 130. (Francesca Castellano, *Università degli Studi di Firenze*) 645

Francesco Casales. *Raccontare l'Oltremare. Storia del romanzo coloniale italiano (1913-1943).* Firenze: Le Monnier, 2023. Pp. viii + 328. (Michele Baldaro, PhD Candidate, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*) 648

Sabina Ciminari and Silvia Contarini, eds. *Alba de Céspedes e gli anni francesi.* Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2023. Pp. 234. (Serena De Filippi, Master Student, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*) 651

Paolo Desogus, ed. *Il Gramsci di Pasolini. Lingua, letteratura e ideologia.* Venezia: Marsilio, 2022. Pp. xi + 268. (Enrico Minardi, *Arizona State University*) 653

Giusy Di Filippo, Giovanni Spani, and Marco Marino, eds. *Donne resilienti. Raccolta di saggi.* Holden: Quodmanet, 2023. Pp. 173. (Fabiana Viglione, *University of Massachusetts Lowell*) 657

Laura Di Nicola. *Un'idea di Calvino. Letture critiche e ricerche sul campo. Con un testo inedito: Lee Masters, piccolo Dante.* Roma: Carocci, 2024. Pp. 239. (Clemens Arts, PhD *Leiden University*) 659

Nicola di Nino and Meriel Tulante, eds. "Revisioning/Revisiting Naples in the New Millennium." *NeMLA Italian Studies* xlv (2023). Pp. xiii + 186. (Chiara Ausiello, Research Master Student, *Utrecht University*) 662

Anna Finozzi. *La letteratura postcoloniale italiana per l'infanzia (2010-2022). Lingua, spazio, colore.* Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2023. Pp. 264. (Nina Goga, *Høgskulen på Vestlandet - Western Norway University of Applied Sciences*) 664

SASKIA ELIZABETH ZIOLKOWSKI

JEWISH IMAGES AND TRANSNATIONAL HISTORIES IN ITALIAN WRITING, FROM ELSA MORANTE TO HELENA JANECZEK

Abstract: This article first outlines Jewishness across Elsa Morante's oeuvre to show how Morante contributes to traditions of diversity in Italy, before putting Morante's *La Storia* and Helena Janeczek's *La ragazza con la Leica* in conversation with each other to examine their related representations of transnational, Jewish, and Italian history. *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* focus on female and other marginalized figures, portray the legacies of Fascism, and explore the complications of representing history. In addition, the authors' Jewish backgrounds are reflected in their works and relate to their portrayals of history.

Key Words: Elsa Morante, Helena Janeczek, Jewish, transnational, Fascism, Gerda Taro, book covers.

Introduction: Elsa Morante's Writing—Italian, Jewish, and Transnational Jewish characters, themes, and inspirations can be considered across Elsa Morante's oeuvre, from "Il ladro dei lumi" (1935) and "La vecchia" (1937), to *Menzogna e sortilegio* (1948), *L'isola di Arturo* (1957), *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (1968), *La Storia* (1974), and *Aracoeli* (1982).¹ Following these multiple Jewish representations shows how Morante's depictions of Jews and antisemitism connect to transnational constructions of race, Spanish and German history, and American culture, among other topics that reveal interconnections across nations and identities. With the focus on Italian connections to other nations and Jewish Italians, Morante's novel highlights elements and people that Fascist policies had tried to eliminate from Italian culture: the Fascist government first attempted to erase foreign influences with vocabulary regulations and limiting cultural products, and then excluded Jews, including Jewish Italians, from society with the Racial Laws. After the war, Italians brought foreign texts and films to Italy to help revive and reconstruct their intellectual landscape and national self-consciousness. Several Italian authors, such as Giorgio Bassani with *Botteghe oscure* and

¹ While *La Storia* has received the most critical attention in terms of Morante and Jewishness (Cavaglioni, Josi, Lucamante, Popoff), Orsi and Cascio analyze Morante's earlier stories and Parussa focuses on the productive relationship between Cabbalah and *Aracoeli*, Morante's last novel. These scholars show the depth of Morante's Jewish engagement, from some of her earliest writings to her last. For an overview of questions of Jewish identity, especially as they relate to Morante, see Neiger. For Morante in terms of other Jewish Italian authors see Spielman and Ziolkowski "For a Jewish."

Natalia Ginzburg with Einaudi, helped to circulate international works in Italy and also wrote literature that explored the marginalization and persecution of Jewish Italians under Fascism. Morante's writing also engaged international art, bringing new aesthetics to Italian literature, and investigated Jewish experiences, but—in contrast to Bassani and Ginzburg—she is frequently absent from both discussions of international influences on postwar Italian culture and overviews of Jewish Italian literature.² Following the threads of Jewish experiences described in Morante's texts connects her not only to other twentieth-century Italian authors with Jewish heritage, such as Bassani and Ginzburg (see Speelman), but also to Helena Janeczek and Igiaba Scego, contemporary Italian authors who challenge how twentieth-century Italian history has been represented.

La Storia puts Italy's history in context with that of Germany, Spain, Ethiopia, Japan, Russia, and other countries, which contrasts with earlier postwar works, such as Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945) and Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947), that consider broader ideological implications of antifascism and partisan experiences, but do not directly explore non-Italian contexts and the Shoah.³ Italy's role in the Shoah was not widely recognized until much later, as Robert S. C. Gordon's *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2010* (2012) and Simon Levis Sullam's *I carnefici italiani. Scene dal genocidio degli ebrei 1943-1945* (2015) have shown. Morante's novel expands on important earlier works by portraying the Shoah as a central part of Italian history.

Calvino notes that Morante's novel could only come about with the distance of time: "il valore del tuo libro per me è nel partire dalla letteratura italiana del dopoguerra presa come epos collettivo, e nel dare con la forza mitica che originariamente la forma romanza porta in sé" (*Lettere* 1246). While Morante's novel built on the neorealism of previous decades to represent a new literary grappling with history, she was often grouped with neorealist writers and even considered retrograde.⁴ Explaining that Morante's

² Stefania Lucamante's work has been crucial for understanding both non-Italian influences on Morante with Proust (*Morante*) and her Jewish contexts (*Forging*). Bassani has been especially central in debates about Jewish Italian literature.

³ While in English there have been debates about how Shoah (Hebrew for catastrophe) would be a more appropriate term than Holocaust (Greek for sacrifice), the term Holocaust is too entrenched for many non-specialist audiences. In Italian, meanwhile, Shoah is more frequently used and it is common practice in Italian Studies in English as well.

⁴ Guido Mazzoni, for instance, puts Morante into a category of works that critics saw as belonging to a past period (336). In addition to the sexism that has

novel lacks the hope of neorealist works, Natalia Ginzburg calls attention to the problems with this characterization: “Quelli che hanno detto che *La Storia* ha parentela con il neorealismo, si sono sbagliati” (75). Ginzburg also argues that “La voce che racconta, nella *Storia*, è la voce di chi ha attraversato i deserti della disperazione. È la voce di chi sa che le guerre non hanno mai fine, e che saranno sempre deportati gli ebrei, o altri per loro” (75). In *La Storia* war and suffering are ongoing, not temporary, states.

In the twentieth century, the Jewish and transnational elements of Morante’s work tended to be overlooked because of an emphasis on nation-based traditions, limited views of what Italian includes, and ignoring the role Italians had played in the persecution of the Jews.⁵ In 2012, Gabrielle Elissa Popoff underscored that reviewers and critics paid little attention to the representations of the Shoah in Morante’s bestselling novel: “Intriguingly, the controversy surrounding *La Storia* excluded, as most literary criticism still does today, the book’s Holocaust content” (26).⁶ Last century, Morante’s Jewish heritage also played a minimal role in her presentations for a broader public, in English and Italian.⁷

been noted in Morante’s reception, her transnational, critical perspective was of less interest than, for instance, the connections between French and Italian intellectuals that, in contrast, suggested cultural prestige.

⁵ In their analyses of how the novel and its reception reveal gaps in historiography, Popoff and Lucamante (*Forging* 158) demonstrated the significance of *La Storia* for Jewish Italian studies in their detailed analyses of its portrayals of the Roman ghetto, October 16th, 1943 roundup, and the Shoah. See Lucamante: “With the notable exception of Giacomo Debenedetti’s *16 ottobre 1943 (October 16, 1943)*, this particular Roman neighborhood appears fully described in Italian literature only with *La Storia*” (*Forging* 155). On Debenedetti and *La Storia* see also Cavaglione, “Il grembo,” and Josi’s recent monograph.

⁶ While scholars—Cascio, Cavaglione (“Il grembo” and “Prefazione”), Lucamante (*Forging*), Josi, Orsi, Parussa, Popoff, Speelman, and Ziolkowski (“Morante” and “For a Jewish”)—have now examined Morante and Jewish contexts, overviews of Jewish Italian literature and culture tend to ignore Morante; see her absence from *The Prisoners of Hope* (Hughes), *The Italian Jewish Experience* (DiNapoli), *Qualcosa di più intimo* (De Angelis), and *Acculturation and Its Discontents: The Italian Jewish Experience between Exclusion and Inclusion* (edited by Myers, Civoletta, Reill, and Symcox). Morante is present in chapters by Cascio and Neiger in *Contemporary Jewish Writers in Italy: A Generational Approach*, edited by Speelman, Jansen and Gaiga, and Speelman’s chapter in Pugliese.

⁷ I specify Italian and English, since in some other traditions (Hebrew) her Jewish background is, for instance, prominently identified even on her Wikipedia page. Thank you to Reut Ben-Yaakov for discussions about Elsa

The 1961 Treccani entry for Morante contains no mention of her Jewish background; it starts, “Scrittrice, nata a Roma il 18 agosto 1915; moglie di A. Moravia.” The English translation of *La Storia* (1977), a work which concentrates on Jewish characters and themes, does not mention her Jewish heritage on the cover: “Elsa Morante was born in 1912 and raised in Rome. In 1941 she married the prominent author Alberto Moravia, an opponent of Mussolini’s Fascist government, and they were later forced to go into hiding until the Liberation” (Morante, *History*). In this century Morante’s background is more likely to be noted. While the back cover of Jenny McPhee’s 2023 translation of *Menzogna e sortilegio* does not include Morante’s Jewish heritage, the longer biography accompanying *Lies and Sorcery* begins, “Elsa Morante (1912-85) was born in Rome. Raised by her mother, an Italian Jewish schoolteacher, and her mother’s husband, the headmaster at a juvenile correctional institution [...]”⁸ Initial promotional material for McPhee’s recent translation had highlighted Morante’s Jewish heritage (“Morante’s celebrated first novel, *Lies and Sorcery*, written during the war, when Morante, half-Jewish, was living in hiding”), linking her war experiences with the novel, which focuses on a narrative evoked by a woman isolated in a room.⁹ That Morante’s Jewish background was, however, ultimately omitted from the press’s promotional description online and the book’s back cover indicates the continuing ambiguities of the author’s Jewish heritage for public interest and criticism.

The history of Morante’s biographical information reflects the twentieth-century tendencies to underplay Italian authors’ Jewish heritage and emphasize male authors’ importance. These trends were especially pronounced under Fascism but continued well after its end. Advertising materials and brief presentations of Morante in her lifetime underscored her relationship with Moravia, ignoring Morante’s own preferences. Moreover, Morante’s work is now recognized for its contribution to women’s writing, separate from her role as Moravia’s wife and despite Morante’s resistance to

Morante’s reception in Hebrew and the invitation to present this work to Hebrew literature scholars, whose insights were also productive.

⁸ The 2012 Treccani entry for *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* similarly starts: “Nacque a Roma il 18 agosto 1912 da Irma Poggibonsi, maestra, ebrea modenese, e da Francesco Lo Monaco, siciliano, morto suicida nel 1943” (Setti).

⁹ Previous versions of the current website dedicated to the translation (<https://www.nyrb.com/products/lies-and-sorcery>) can be consulted but inserting the url in WayBackMachine searching tool (<https://web.archive.org/>). Of the eight versions captured, the first two (dated July 26, 2022 and March 23, 2023), contain the definition of Morante as “half-Jewish”.

the category.¹⁰ Scholars such as JoAnn Cannon (18-20), Ursula Fanning, and Lucia Re address Morante's negative reactions to the label "woman author" in their important analyses of women's writing.¹¹ The complexity of Morante's Jewish themes and background should, similarly, not be a reason for their exclusion, since Morante's work offers a significant contribution to Jewish Italian literature.

The first section of this article starts with Morante's own book covers to follow some of the threads of Jewishness in Morante that have been less discussed and that highlight transnational elements of her work. While this essay emphasizes the role of Jewishness in Morante's work, I do not want to essentialize Morante's Jewish identity or prioritize it above her other identities but argue for the importance of its inclusion.¹² When the Hungarian-born author Edith Bruck was asked how she would define herself, as "a transnational writer, an Italian writer, or an author of Jewish diasporic literature", she responded: "Let us say transnational. Unfortunately I am not regarded as an Italian writer" (Bruck and Maceri 608). Investigating Morante's work as Jewish, transnational, and Italian shows that authors such as Bruck are part of a bigger picture that also contains earlier Italian authors. Transnational Italian Studies makes a case for a more expansive view of what Italian includes, as outlined recently by Serena Bassi, Loredana Polezzi, and Giulia Riccò in their special issue on the topic:

A transnational approach to Italian Studies asks us to take into account the violent histories of nationalism, colonialism, emigration, and migration that continue to inform national identity formation, as well as the (thus far) marginal characters in the disciplinary stories we tell, who nonetheless stand at the very center of that process.

(273)

Considering Morante's work within a transnational framework highlights elements of her work that did not fit well into twentieth-century ideas of Italian literature and shows the productivity of including authors that help broaden a category (Bruck as Italian, Morante as Jewish) rather than remaining restrictive.

¹⁰ On women's writing and Morante see Amoia, Cannon, Fanning, Lucamante, Morelli, Re, Wehling-Giorgi, and Wood.

¹¹ Fanning notes how Morante's resistance may have related to the status of women authors at the time (156), which is also relevant to considerations of how and when Jewish identities have been recognized.

¹² Cavaglione has called attention to how Morante's work, like Umberto Saba's, offers an important challenge to an erroneous perception that all Jewish Italians are bourgeois ("Prefazione" 7).

The second section puts Morante's historical engagement in conversation with those of the contemporary author Janeczek, revealing their novels' Italian, Jewish, and transnational networks.¹³ Janeczek published her Strega Prize winning book in 2017, sixty years after Morante became the first female winner of the Strega Prize for *L'isola di Arturo*. In Janeczek's *La ragazza con la Leica*, three figures, who live in the United States, France, and Italy at the time of their narrations, remember their German-Polish-Jewish friend Gerda Taro, who lived in Germany, France, and Spain. Scego's "La vittoria di Helena Janeczek allo Strega va oltre la letteratura"¹⁴ argues that Janeczek's Strega Prize represents a new recognition of Italian diversity, since at the time a woman had not won the prize for fifteen years and it is rare for someone not born in Italy to receive it.¹⁴ Janeczek comes from a Polish-Jewish family and grew up in Germany, but moved to Italy and writes in Italian. Scego describes the historical significance of Janeczek's victory:

Nel 1983 si trasferisce nell'Italia del nord. Ed è qui che la lingua di Dante, Boccaccio, Calvino, Morante, la illumina e le dà la possibilità di trovare un terreno neutro dove è più facile svelarsi [...]. Ed è questa migrazione linguistica che fa della sua vittoria allo Strega una vittoria storica non solo per lei, ma per il paese. È la prima volta che la letteratura italiana è così dichiaratamente multiculturale. Lo è sempre stata, ma non si è mai raccontata in questo modo.

(Scego)

Scego's important point that Italian literature has always been multicultural, but not always narrated that way, could be expanded on even with an analysis of the four foundational authors she chose to represent the Italian language—Dante (who died in exile), Boccaccio (who is central to Mediterranean Studies), Calvino (born in Cuba and lived in France), and Morante, who widened the Italian literary landscape through her explorations of multiple identities and transnational encounters. While Janeczek has been persuasively distinguished as an author who reflects contemporary Italy's diversity, both multicultural (Scego) and global (Lucamante, *Forging* 201-40), she can, at the same time, be placed in an Italian literary lineage that includes

¹³ See Serkowska on Janeczek's navigation of being a woman author and also having a familial history that ties her to the Shoah. She concentrates especially on Janeczek's *Lezioni di tenebra*, putting it in the contexts of both the Shoah and women's writing.

¹⁴ "Con questo libro, l'autrice ha anche rotto il famoso tetto di cristallo, era infatti da 15 anni che una donna non vinceva il premio Strega. Ma c'è dell'altro nella vittoria di Janeczek, ed è legato al suo cognome, che non è quello vero della sua famiglia" (Scego).

Morante and draws attention to the historical diversity of Italy, which includes Jews, who, despite having been present continuously in the peninsula since before Christianity, have not always been considered Italian.

Morante's Writing, Transnational Covers, and Jewish Contexts

Morante's cover images indicate the importance of Jewishness and transnational contexts for understanding her work. Morante gave the format of her books careful consideration, with numerous comments about the cover images and desired paratexts.¹⁵ Jhumpa Lahiri describes book covers as the awakening of the text and an early interpretation of a literary work, the initial negotiation between an author and her first readers—the publishers (13-15). Featuring images by Robert Capa/Gerda Taro, Marc Chagall, Renato Guttuso, Bill Morrow, and Ben Shahn, Morante's own covers link her novels to contemporary, international art movements and, often, Jewish artists, revealing that Jewish experiences are a more central and consistent element of Morante's artistic production than has sometimes been assumed.¹⁶ The cover of Morante's first novel features a woman and horse by Chagall (1887-1985), a famous Russian-French Jewish artist known for his playful, modern depictions of Eastern European Jewish life (see Jonathan Wilson). The 1975 Struzzi Einaudi re-edition of Morante's second novel, *L'isola di Arturo*, displays part of a work by the Jewish-Lithuanian-American artist Ben Shahn (1898-1969), with the tagline "Il primo giorno della creazione" (*L'isola*).¹⁷ Shahn is known for his Haggadah illustrations and New Deal Murals, which depict Albert Einstein, among other Jewish immigrants, coming to the United States (see Shahn, *Haggadah*; see also Linden). Whether the rubble photograph on Morante's third novel is identified as Robert Capa's (as on the cover of *La Storia*) or Gerda Taro's (as it is today), it is by a displaced Jewish photographer who documented the Spanish Civil War.

The first edition of *Menzogna e sortilegio* (1948) features a detail from Chagall's "A l'ombre des rêves" ("In the Shadow of Dreams," 1944). Morante mentioned the beauty of the Chagall image to Giacomo Debenedetti (*L'amata*

¹⁵ On Morante's attention to her covers, see Bassi (94), Dell'Orca, Desideri, and Morante, *L'amata* (181 and 270).

¹⁶ Scholars (Lucamante, *Morante*; Calderoni; Marcheschi; Desideri) have demonstrated that the previous characterization of Morante as separate from contemporary movements ignores her considerable attention to international literature and arts. Marcel Proust, Arthur Rimbaud, Simone Weil, Katherine Mansfield, Allen Ginsberg, Franz Kafka, and César Vallejo, among others, contributed to the development of Morante's writing.

¹⁷ The first edition of *L'isola di Arturo* (1957) featured Renato Guttuso's "Ragazzo addormentato sulla barca" and has no tagline.

181) and her first readers praised it. Giulio Einaudi wrote Morante that her *Menzogna e sortilegio* cover was causing him to lose sleep (Bassi 94) and Natalia Ginzburg called it “straordinario” (*L'amata* 270).¹⁸ Chagall's image of a woman seemingly dreaming of a white horse evokes the mysteriousness of *Menzogna e sortilegio*, which ends with a poem for a cat. Animals play a notable role in both artists' oeuvres, suggesting all that is beyond human understanding. Morante's unusual style, with its mix of realism, autobiography, fable, and dreams, creates moods of fantasy combined with the everyday akin to Chagall's, with a related mix of realism, autobiography, fables, and dreams.

Chagall fits Morante's concept of surrealism, which potentially expresses truths about contemporary times more powerfully than a photograph: “Kafka scrive delle favole surreali: eppure nessun resoconto fotografico e documentato esprime certe atroci verità del presente secolo, come le sue favole surreali, ecc.” (Morante, “Sul romanzo” 1511). Morante directly connects the Jewish author from Prague to her earlier work, stating that “L'uomo degli occhiali” was influenced by Kafka in a comment at the end of her collection (*Lo scialle* 215). “Il ladro dei lumi,” which precedes “L'uomo degli occhiali” in *Lo scialle andaluso* (1963), could also be considered within Morante's framework of the surreal. The story plays with the subjectivity of time, psychological perspective, and horror of life with its fantastical and surreal frame. The narrator, a Jewish girl who lives in the Jewish quarter of her city, complicates her position at the beginning and end of the story by suggesting that she may not be the narrator: the story could instead be her mother's or grandmother's. In “Il ladro dei lumi,” the girl watches the synagogue guardian Jusvin extinguish the lamps for the dead to save money for his six children. Jusvin, the “light thief,” develops a terrible illness that the girl views as a divine punishment for his theft of lamp oil. Focusing on the potential universality of Jusvin, Giorgio Agamben interprets him as symbolizing modern artists (232), but this 1935 story can also be considered within the context of growing antisemitism.

Menzogna e sortilegio, like “Il ladro dei lumi,” can be approached using the author's own concept of how surreal literary works can represent their times' “atroci verità” (Morante “Sul romanzo,” 1511).¹⁹ Franco Baldasso has called attention to how *Menzogna e sortilegio*, which was frequently characterized as removed from its period, in fact illustrates and offers commentary on Morante's contemporary reality (126). The novel describes

¹⁸ Ginzburg and Debenedetti were both important intellectual interlocutors for Morante and have been more central in discussions of Jewish Italian literature.

¹⁹ For relevant connections made between “Il ladro dei lumi” and *Menzogna e sortilegio* see Splendorini 7-8.

how social and political pressures can influence relationships between lovers, as well as how the power dynamics between two individuals can represent greater forces at play in society. The unsettling relationships in the novel, which reflect many of the period's complexities, have also been related to Morante's own experiences. René de Ceccatty suggests that Morante's relationship with her lover Richard (also known as R.T.M., his full name has not been identified) was a model for Anna and Edoardo's relationship in *Menzogna e sortilegio* (128-29). In 1940, Richard tried to convince Morante to leave Italy because of potential antisemitic persecution. He told her that she as a poor "meticcica" would suffer from racism, as people in Nazi Germany did:

Un'altra cosa cara sei tu e lasciami che ti porti via con me! Qui fra poco starai molto male perché con la guerra più aspra il razzismo diventerà come in Germania. Tu mia povera piccola meticcica sarai perseguitata da tutti e pure M. Ricordati di questo! Gran Bretagna non sarà invasa come essi credono.

(*L'amata* 83)

Richard tries to use Morante's background and the threat of growing racism to persuade her to move with him, emphasizing the danger she and "M" (Moravia) share because of their Jewish heritage.

After the war, Richard wrote Morante a brutal letter that shows how their breakup and the war dramatically changed his outlook: "Era meglio non vedere te più. I Tedeschi hanno pulito il mondo di tanta gente, ebrei e piccole ebre e altra gente di diverse razze e vi furono massacri e ruine e speravo te morta in qualche Campo di Concentrazione" (*L'amata* 89). While any threat of deportation was over in 1948, Morante's on and off again lover references concentration camps in an attempt to hurt her. In his racist and cruel letter, he highlights the connections between Jews and people of "diverse razze" who are in danger of persecution. Morante's Jewish heritage influenced her relationships' dynamics and contributed to her lifelong literary exploration of power and people who have been marginalized.

A number of Morante's stories focus on figures who literally lack a voice, like the light thief, in addition to being minor historically and in society, like Elisa in *Menzogna e sortilegio* or Ida and Giuseppe in *La Storia*. Morante's story "La vecchia" features the Jewish character Beatrice, who is silent, lives a long life, and is not beloved, in great contrast to Dante's Beatrice: "Per trent'anni, docile e taciturna come era stata sempre, rimase in questa casa dove nessuno l'amava" (117). Beatrice had married someone who is not Jewish and being Jewish is described as contributing to her isolation: "Ella era sola; ed essendo ebrea, non aveva neppure il Crocifisso fra le dita" (114). Antisemitic exclusion, and fear of it, are part of Morante's explorations of loneliness.

Arturo is one of the cast of Morante's characters who lives mostly in silence, abandoned: "Così, io trascorrevi quasi tutti i miei giorni in assoluta solitudine; e questa solitudine, cominciata per me nella prima infanzia (con la partenza del mio balio Silvestro) mi pareva la mia condizione naturale" (*L'isola* 972). The Shahn cover for *L'isola di Arturo* displays a bright red circle, like a sun against a yellow sky with blue waves below, suggesting the important role the ocean plays in the novel. Despite the seemingly simple image, it evokes the simultaneous nostalgia and isolation Arturo experiences reflecting on his youth. Highlighting his isolation, Morante originally planned that Arturo would be writing about his childhood from a prisoner of war camp in Africa, excluded even by fellow prisoners (Bardini 91).²⁰ Shahn explains symbolic art's potential relationship to pain and war:

A symbolism which I might once have considered cryptic now became the only means by which I could formulate the sense of emptiness and waste that the war gave me, and the sense of the littleness of people trying to live on through the enormity of war.

(*Ben Shahn* 84)

Though the prisoner of war camp is not ultimately described in *L'isola di Arturo*, the novel does portray this "sense of littleness" that Shahn notes.

Morante and Moravia themselves experienced a form of isolation when they took refuge in Fondi in 1943. While *Menzogna e sortilegio* and *L'isola di Arturo* can arguably be connected to Fascism and Morante's experiences in that period, *La Storia* explores in great detail the broader isolation and pain exasperated by war. Although Ida was never in obvious danger of deportation, she feared persecution and suffered immensely during Fascism, whose legacies do not end in the novel. Ida worries about her son Nino and how "Jewish" he may be, according to Nazi laws. She mixes together a number of the period's ideas on race, and the section in which she draws a family tree labeling members "a" (ariano) and "e" (ebreo) ends with a reflection on the United States:

Essa ricordò, per esempio, di avere udito in Calabria da un emigrante americano che il sangue scuro vince sempre sul sangue pallido. Basta una goccia di sangue nero in un cristiano per riconoscerli che non è bianco, ma è negro incrociato.

(*La Storia* 329)

²⁰ See Zagra (29-30) for an explanation of Arturo in an English prisoner of war camp in Ethiopia. Zagra also calls attention to the connection between Elisa and Arturo as "prisoners."

In *La Storia*, the anti-Black racism of the United States, antisemitism of Germany, and antisemitism of Italy are intertwined in Ida's attempts to make sense of the formulations of race and what they mean for her son, who has a Jewish grandmother.

Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini (1968), Morante's experimental poems—or as she defines it on the cover, a “manifesto, memoriale, saggio filosofico, romanzo, autobiografia, dialogo, tragedia, commedia, documentario a colori, fumetto, chiave magica, testamento, poesia,” also bring together questions about bloodlines and racist methods of defining what Black or Jewish means: “Doveva avere un quarto almeno di sangue africano. / Però / ai boccoli, alla fronte, aveva qualcosa di giudeo... / Almeno un quarto di sangue ebraico doveva averlo” (188-89). This part of the poem explores racist concepts of Jewish and Black identities in a work that also shows how embedded racism is in society. Morante includes a number of different terms, “nero” and “negro” in the passage from *La Storia*, as well as “africani,” “giudeo,” and “ebreo” in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, illustrating the confusions of racialization and the racism of racial categories themselves, with terms that have different histories of being used disparagingly. Expanding on these intertwined prejudices, *La Storia* also associates together the Shoah and colonialism in the first section: Ida's rapist and Giuseppe's father, Gunther, comes from Dachau, later a site of a concentration camp, and believes he is part of the troops headed for Africa. Gunther dies enroute, in the Mediterranean.

Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini contains a rich network of references to Jewish experiences and authors with Jewish heritage that are core parts of the work's exploration of contesting prejudice. Morante translates lines from Allen Ginsberg's poem “Song” directly into “La serata a Colono,” her poem that also includes transliterated lines of Aramaic from a Kaddish, a mourner's prayer, “IDGADDAL VEIDKADDASH SCHEMEE RABBACH” (*Il mondo* 69).²¹ Other parts of Morante's experimental poem also recall Ginsberg, the author of *Howl* and *Kaddish*, which examines his relationship with his mother Naomi, who died without the requisite number of people to say Kaddish. The first section of “La canzone degli F.P. and degli I.M. in tre parti” ends with examples of the “Felici Pochi” (F.P.) in the shape of a cross that features Benedictus Spinoza and Simone Weil, who both have Jewish heritage that played an important part in the development of their ideas of empathy, identity, and shared humanity. Like Morante, they are also

²¹ “YITGADAL VEYITKADASH SHEMEH RABA” in Vitti's English translation (*The World* 86).

authors who had complex relationships with their heritage.²² The thematic and philosophical mixing that appears throughout Morante's oeuvre reflects her own Catholic-Jewish background.²³

Morante opens "La canzone degli F.P. and degli I.M. in tre parti" by making clear that the Felici Pochi (F.P.), "ne esistono d'ogni razzi sesso e nazione / epoca età società condizione / e religione. / Di poveri e di ricchi" (*Il mondo* 123). Morante consistently considers who tends to be left out, for any reason. The Felici Pochi are "few" and often isolated because the majority of people get swept along in the illusions of the mainstream, which can lead to violence. In addition to the cross of famous Felici Pochi, Morante also has a long section on "F.P. anonimo," which expands her geographical and historical range beyond Europe:

che fu dato in pasto alle belve sotto i Cesari perché schiavo
ridato in pasto alle belve sotto i Flavii perché cristiano
sgozzato a Tenochtitlan perché femmina vergine
bruciato vivo dai papi perché empio maledetto
ribruciato vivo dai vescovi delle Fiandre perché strega ossessa
fucilato agli Zar perché rivoluzionario
impiccato da Stalin perché anarchico
rastrellato dai fascisti perché maschio di leva
gassato a Buchenwald perché ebreo
linciato a Dallas perché negro
mangiato dai Cannibali Zulú perché bianco
affogato in una alluvione del Friuli perché friulano
bombardato nel Vietnam perché stava a letto a partorire
schiacciato nei crolli di Agrigento nell'anno 1900 perché
si trovava sul cantone del palazzo a vendere i lupini

(*Il mondo* 141)²⁴

²² Albert Einstein provided the introduction for the edition of Spinoza's *Reflections and Maxims* that Morante owned (Zagra and Buttò 144). Agamben examined the similarities between Morante and Spinoza's concepts of compassion in the already discussed review of *Lo scialle andaluso* (233). Morante loved Weil, "fin quasi all'identificazione" (Coppola 90).

²³ Morante's early stories are full of angels, churches, priests, and nuns. At the same time, Jewish themes are certainly part of her short-story worlds. Orsi analyzes Jewish presences in Morante's short stories, especially "Lo scialle andaluso" (126). Focusing especially on *Lo scialle andaluso*, Cascio shows the intertwining of Jewish and Christian symbols, elements, and physiognomies as core parts of Morante's writings (42).

²⁴ The earlier edition is referenced rather than the one in *Opere* because the later version is missing a few of these key lines that indicate the breadth of prejudice with which Morante grapples.

With a list that would most likely not be produced today because of the blurring between different groups of marginalized people and periods, Morante's range risks suggesting an equivalence between very different types of persecution, but reveals that the author considered all people, for almost any of their qualities, potential targets of violence. The Felici Pochi represent the suffering of diverse people killed because of their beliefs, backgrounds, or location.²⁵ A Jewish person gassed in Buchenwald is placed in a larger context that includes violence around the world and throughout time. The perpetrators are not just Nazis, but also ancient Romans, popes, bishops, tzars, Stalin, Fascists, the Zulu people, and Americans, among others.

Thematically connected to *La Storia* in its exploration of power's corrosive effects, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* suggests even with its title the transformative potential of those who are not in positions of power and therefore see the world differently. As evidenced by *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *La Storia*, Morante's investigations of antisemitism are frequently woven together with considerations of other types of hatred, including racism and class prejudices. In 1950 Morante reviewed the 1949 film *Home of the Brave*, released as *Odio* in Italy. It focuses on an African American soldier who reflects on the racism he has experienced and was adapted from a play of the same name by Arthur Laurents (named in the opening credits), in which the protagonist was Jewish rather than Black. In the review Morante notes that if Hitler had had a different upbringing his path could have been different. She starts the review by arguing that art can combat prejudice:

L'arte, per il suo significato universale, e per la sua virtù di toccare i sentimenti oltre che l'intelletto, può essere (se di ispirazione sincera, e non dettata dalla volontà, o da un interesse, o da un'imposizione), un ottimo mezzo di propaganda contro i pregiudizi. I quali, come le malattie, hanno le loro epoche di fioritura, e le loro epoche di declino. I pregiudizi sociali sono in declino, come la tisi, mentre che i pregiudizi razziali, come il cancro, sono in pieno vigore.

(*La vita* 18)

Morante proposes that literature, film, and art could be among the most promising methods of combatting prejudice. Her work to make *La Storia* affordable and widely distributed can be seen as part of her hopes for what literature can achieve, since *La Storia* challenges prejudice and nationalist historical narratives, which the next section explores.

²⁵ See Rubinacci's persuasive reading of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* in terms of trauma studies.

La Storia and La ragazza con la Leica: Representing Transnational Histories in Italian²⁶

Covers not only reveal potential modes of interpretation for individual publications, but also create conversations between works. This section shows how the photographs on the first editions of *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* indicate the multiple connections between the two novels, which explore not only history but also the complications of representing it and focus on female, Jewish, and other marginalized figures. Morante and Janeczek both use layered paratexts that complicate the relationship between reality and their stories, experimenting with their works' forms to show the impossibility of having an objective historical point of view and challenge homogeneous, nation-based collective memory.

For the cover of her bestselling novel, Morante first considered Robert Capa's well-known "Falling Soldier" photograph or a painting by Bill Morrow, an American artist with whom Morante had a relationship (see Dell'Orca). The image instead was ultimately a red-tinged photograph of a boy's body in a pile of rubble. The change from an adult in "Falling Soldier" to a photograph of someone young, whose face is not visible and has an uncertain relationship to the war (in contrast to someone fighting), reflects *La Storia's* emphasis on those who are underrepresented in war narratives. This photograph has been given various labels, including "Dead Child in Rubble," "The Fight," "Body," "Fallen Partisan," and "Scene of Much Fighting."²⁷ This photo of the Spanish Civil War connects the cover to the novel's dedication, "Per el analfabeto a quien escribo," a quote from César Vallejo's poem "Himno a los voluntarios de la república" ("Hymn for the Volunteers of the Republic"), which honored those fighting against Francisco Franco's nationalists. The novel, its tagline ("Uno scandalo che dura da diecimila anni"), its dedication from Vallejo, epigraphs, and cover photo reference antifascism and destructive power, contributing to the novel's antifascist messages. Indeed, the novel was censored in Franco's Spain.²⁸

²⁶ Thank you to Stiliana Milkova Rousseva and her colleagues at Oberlin College for the opportunity to present this research in April 2024 and their helpful questions. I am also grateful for conversations with Daria Kozhanova about *La ragazza con la Leica* and look forward to her future work on the author.

²⁷ See the Italian edition of Capa's work that contains this photo (Capa, *Immagini*). For various names of the photo see Carey, and the following catalogues: The Met (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/286259>), International Center of Photography (<https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/the-fight> and <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/body-la-granjuela-cordoba-front-spain>).

²⁸ See Lucente (126-27) for a discussion of the censorship and Morante's reaction.

The cover photograph displays actual rubble from the Spanish Civil War, but was taken during a restaged battle and therefore, as Cynthia Young has pointed out, “it is impossible to know if this person is actually dead or part of the act” (230). The photo’s ambiguous relationship to truth reveals the construction involved in documenting tragedy. Morante’s cover, as *La Storia* itself, demonstrates the subjectivity of supposedly objective histories, the difficulty of representing tragedy, and the many stories that are absent from historical narratives. Its depiction of the Spanish Civil War also suggests how the novel contextualizes Italian history within a broader framework. *La Storia* emphasizes the intertwined horrors of history, with its inclusion of the Shoah, wars, colonialism, and the destructive power of numerous nations.

Morante’s 1974 edition identified the photographer of the image as Robert Capa, a pseudonym for the Jewish-Hungarian photographer Endre Ernő (André) Friedmann. Fellow travelers and lovers, Friedmann (1913-54) and the Polish-German-Jewish photographer Gerta Pohorylle (1910-37), who died during war coverage, captured many similar scenes, which were crucial to the international understanding of the Spanish Civil War and the development of war photography. They both printed some of their images under the name Robert Capa, though later Pohorylle more often used the pseudonym Gerda Taro and Friedmann firmly established himself as Capa.²⁹ Janeczek’s cover displays a winking Taro photographed by Capa and the novel itself contains multiple photographs by Capa and Taro, which in one case are chosen because of their similarities to each other. With the 2007 discovery of the “Mexican Suitcase,” which contains around 4,500 negatives from Capa, Taro, and David “Chim” Seymour, numerous photos that had been traditionally attributed to Capa (Friedmann) have instead been identified as by Taro (Pohorylle). “Dead Child in Rubble,” the image on the first edition of *La Storia*, turns out to be by Taro.³⁰ Although the photograph’s full story was not necessarily known to

²⁹ The playful title, “Una ragazza di nome Robert Capa,” of Di Paolo’s interview with Helena Janeczek shows the intertwined legacies of Pohorylle and Friedmann. Capa and Taro then also printed some photos under the collective name “Reportage Capa & Taro.” Their dynamics and reception reflect Sontag’s discussion of photographers as authors of a particular subject (113).

³⁰ For an extended discussion of the Mexican Suitcase and its significance see Young (also on this particular photo 230). The photo on Morante’s cover has been discussed as by Capa from the publication of the novel in 1974—“In copertina c’è in rosso un a foto fatta da Robert Capa (il famoso reporter di guerra morto saltando su una mina in Corea)” (Zambonini 491)—to more recently, for instance in 2018: “In copertina la fotografia virta in rosso e nero del cadaver di un bambino riverso su un mucchio di macerie. È un particolare tratto dalla serie di Robert Capa sulla guerra civile spagnola” (Borghesi 18). An important exception is Josi’s inclusion of Taro as the photographer.

Morante, her own novel highlights how history erases women, children, and other people who have been considered subject to, rather than the shapers of, society. Janeczek's novel suggests the connections between Taro and Morante's characters, all of whom suffered from poverty, displacement, and the unpredictable violence of war.

With her photographs, Taro drew attention to the role of women in the Spanish Civil War and many of the photos in Janeczek's work are of women, including of Taro herself, Leonora Carrington, and fighters in the Spanish Civil War.³¹ Taro and Morante themselves were both overshadowed by their male partners' fame in the twentieth-century but in this century are the focus of increased attention that includes literary biographies, such as Susana Fortes's *Esparando a Robert Capa (Waiting for Capa, 2009)*, Francesco Ricci's *Elsa: le prigionie delle donne* (2019), Angela Bubba's *Elsa* (2022), and Kip Wilson's *One Last Shot* (2023). Janeczek's *La ragazza con la Leica* (2017) can be seen in this broader context of works inspired by the relationship between Capa and Taro, but, while many works on Taro aim to offer her lost perspective, *La ragazza con la Leica* draws attention to the lacunae of history.³²

Many of Morante's and Janeczek's characters do not fit neatly into the guiding narratives about European Jews, which Max Czollek has critiqued in terms of Germany. In *Des-Integriert Euch! (De-integrate! A Jewish Survival Guide for the 21st century)*, he argues that Jews play one primary role in German memorial culture, while their diversity is ignored. Morante's and Janeczek's works on the contrary include a number of Jewish characters, who have a variety of ways that they relate to being Jewish, in terms of religion, culture, and ethnicity. *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* resist what Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie describes as the "danger of a single story" (2009), which prioritizes one type of narrative from a singular national and cultural perspective.

While Morante shows how international histories intersect with Italian ones and experiences, Janeczek starts with other countries and their multiple histories, but then shows how they connect to Italy. The Spanish Civil war

³¹ The fascination Taro inspires in many today prompts the question of why she was, for so long, little discussed. At the end of the third section, Kurtzikes suggests that gender and communism both played a role (291-92).

³² For more extensive readings of more of Janeczek's oeuvre see Lucamante (*Forging* 201-40) and De Paulis, Lucattini, and Zanforini. On Janeczek's *Le rondini di Montecassino* see also Suverato and Ziolkowski "For a Jewish" (140-47). On Janeczek's *Lezioni di tenebra* see Clementi and Lucamante, *Forging*. The comparison between Janeczek and Morante could be expanded to include more of both authors' works. This article focuses on the transnational, Jewish, and visual connections between their most famous novels.

is a center of *La ragazza con la Leica* because of Taro's photographs and her death, whereas it is present, though less discussed, in *La Storia*. Italian Fascism, meanwhile, may seem to have little to do with Taro, but she visited her friend Georg Kuritzkes in Fascist Italy and the third section of the novel, which focuses on Kuritzkes in Rome, demonstrates the continuing afterlives of Italian Fascism. The multiple perspectives in *La ragazza con la Leica* shows how national paths and identities constantly cross each other. The different places and time periods of *La ragazza con la Leica* mean the novel brings together a variety of histories and ideas that go well beyond Taro's life, showing also how one individual life can connect, at times unexpectedly, to those in the future.

The first part of the novel describes the perspective of Willy Chardack, who lives in Buffalo, NY, in 1960; the second part the perspective of Ruth Cerf in Paris in 1938; the third part that of Kuritzkes in Rome in 1960, which reflects on his experiences and the earlier Fascist period:

Come sembra tutto luminoso, adesso, con quella vista ampia sul Tevere nel punto dove abbraccia l'isola Tiberina, passando oltre la sinagoga incolume (l'avessero distrutta, come quelle tedesche, e risparmiato la congrega), il sole in fronte riverberato dalla massa d'acqua per un abbaglio più completo.

(3-4)

This parenthetical thought contrasts the beauty and notable physical presence of a Jewish building, with the murder of Jewish Romans during the war, referencing the roundup described by Morante. Kuritzkes considers how these pasts relate to his own existence: "Però gli pesa, a volte, la semplice ingiustizia di essere vivo" (265). The injustices of history appear repeatedly, including in one of Kuritzkes' conversations with his friend Mario Bernardi: "Ci accusano di aver fatto giustizia sommaria, ma una giustizia giusta la si è mai vista, dopo, in Italia?" (240). This question about justice in Italy goes unanswered in the work, leaving the reader to consider its implications.

As in Kuritzkes' comment about his own survival or Bernardi's reflections on Fascist atrocities that Italians did not collectively discuss, many of the engagements with history in the work are very personal. *La ragazza con la Leica* shows the impact of history on even smaller personal interactions, such as Kuritzkes and Taro sending each other letters. When Kurtizkes wrote to Taro from Turin, the Italian colonial war altered the speed of their communication:

Intanto Mussolini aveva dichiarato guerra, in tre giorni conquistato Adua nel ripugnante tripudio revanscista della *Stampa* e del *Corriere della Sera*. La Società

delle Nazioni si era riunita annunciando misure punitive. Le poste, travolte dalle comunicazioni patriottiche, minacciavano di inghiottire la corrispondenza tra Torino e Parigi.

(274)

Colonialism is not the primary focus of *La ragazza con la leica*, but, as in *La Storia*, it is embedded in the work's depiction of Italian history.³³

Morante's and Janeczek's inclusion of different voices and perspectives reflect the diversity of national and ethnic perspectives. Not only do characters have different backgrounds, but this results in distinct relationships to history and ideas about historical responsibility. In *La ragazza con la Leica*, Kuritzkes considers the very different reactions to the United Nations' role after World War II: "I bianchi difendevano in maggioranza il ruolo che l'ONU si era prefissa di mantenere, una linea che per i colleghi africani, ma anche turchi, indiani eccetera, si stava rivelando una farsa pilatesca" (206). The novels' presentations of multiple characters' perspectives relate to their framing of any one national narrative as necessarily limited.

Taro died in 1937, but the characters in *La ragazza con la Leica* who reflect on her death also consider the other Jewish lives lost in the 1930s and 40s, underscoring the impact of antisemitic persecution. In the process of remembering Taro, the three primary characters all question their memories, examining lost information and knowledge. The main character of the last section, Kuritzkes, cannot recall the full chronology of his relationship with Taro in terms of her development as a photographer and partnership with Capa: "Gerda gli aveva scritto di quella foto venduta prima che si rivedessero a Torino, nell'aprile del '35?" (272). Kuritzkes also considers what history may or may not have changed in their relationship: "Sarebbe finita, probabilmente, anche se a dividerli non fosse arrivato Hitler" (214). Thus, the work examines the personal losses caused by both war and time, showing not only the gaps between the three primary perspectives of the novel, but also the uncertainties even within one point of view.

While Morante's novel offers a strong critique of fascisms, prejudice, and the destruction of war, the narrative portion starts with the perspective of the Nazi rapist Gunther, aptly described as "innocent and immature" by Stefania Porcelli (64), who calls attention to Gunther's complicated position as both naïve and the

³³ As when Kuritzkes reflects on the synagogue, the buildings of Rome are a constant reminder of parts of the country's past it would rather forget. In 1960 Kuritzkes works for the United Nations in a building that recalls Italian colonialism and its legacies (197). On Italy, colonialism, and architecture, see Fuller.

ultimate expression of gendered violence. Despite his assault and allegiances, he is also, as Tiziana de Rogatis point out, “one of the first-level illiterate people to whom the novel is dedicated” (“Traumatic Realism” 175). The opening of *La Storia*, with its sympathetic description of the very different perspectives of Gunther and Ida, contributes to how the novel challenges the reader to consider other perspectives, that reflect diverse national, class, religious, and other identities. Even before the initial chronology and then narrative section focused on Gunther and Ida, *La Storia* starts with quotes from Vallejo (a Peruvian poet), a Hiroshima survivor, the Evangelist Luke, and a letter writer in Siberia. Indicating the various perspectives from which the events could be approached, *La Storia*’s multiple voices—with the dedication, epigraphs, poems, quotes, chronologies, and prose narrations—destabilize a cohesive historical view.

La ragazza con la Leica also disrupts the idea of any one perspective with its narration of multiple voices, numerous quotations of other authors, and photographs.³⁴ The three sections of Janeczek’s novel are framed by the prologue, which is preceded by two epigraphs, and an epilogue. Each section also includes a date, place, the name of the primary figure, and at least one epigraph. Chardack’s part is preceded by epigraphs from Guido Cavalcanti and Friedrich Hollaeder/Robert Liebmann (performed by Marlene Dietrich); Cerf’s part has epigraphs from Mischa Spoliansky/Marcellus Schiffer (performed by Marlene Dietrich) and Gérard de Nerval; Kuritzkes’ part has an epigraph from Ingeborg Bachmann. This last section connects to the work’s very first epigraph, by Kuritzkes, and the prologue and epilogue have the same words in their subtitles, “Coppie, fotografie, coincidenze.” The work’s structure creates certain echoes, as the three people remember intersecting, and at times conflicting, qualities of Taro and events from her life. The first two photos in *La ragazza con la Leica*, one by Capa and one by Taro, are of the same couple that is associated with the photographer couple themselves, confusing subject and artist. The repeated images, with their small differences, also prompt a reflection on how photographers shape the image and, as Giorgia Alù has argued, “invite viewers to interrogate and integrate the story that was fixed by the camera” (17). Janeczek’s and Morante’s novels encourage the reader to question their construction.³⁵

³⁴ In addition to Morante and Janeczek’s notable success, some reviewers wanted narratives that offered more clarity and consistency in their historical perspectives, objecting to the narratives’ constructions. Pier Paolo Pasolini, for instance, critiqued *La Storia* for its inauthenticity and inconsistencies (See Borghesi’s analysis and collection of reviews of *La Storia*). Janeczek’s has been described as “abstruse” and “convoluted” (Miecznicka). These stylistic elements relate to the novels’ modes of representing history, which in part question their projects of historical engagement.

³⁵ As de Rogatis writes, Morante’s “narrative devices ensure a constant supply

The authors' formal experimentation relates to their deep engagement with documents. The notes for *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* make clear the works draw on extensive sources. As I have observed elsewhere regarding Morante's endnotes (Ziolkowski, "For a Jewish" 134), her paratexts underscore the novel's Jewish themes: her final note acknowledges a number of the sources her novel builds upon, the majority of which relate to the deportation of Jews from Italy, such as Giacomo Debenedetti's *16 ottobre 1943*, Robert Katz's *Black Sabbath*, and Bruno Piazza's *Perché gli altri dimenticano*. Janeczek's work, meanwhile, could only follow both a broad cultural understanding of the Shoah and works such as Irme Schaber's *Gerda Taro* (1994), as the author herself mentions (331).

Morante's and Janeczek's novels build on the possibilities offered by earlier historical work as well as highlight gaps in historiography. Newspapers are embedded in *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica*, showing the history behind the works and, at the same time, how much history does not make it into print. *La ragazza con la Leica* considers how one subject from the novel's first photographs reacted to Taro's death: "Sì, è proprio lei [Taro]: nell'articolo c'è scritto pure dell'«ilustre fotógrafo húngaro Robert Capa que recibió en París la trágica noticia»" (15). As in Morante's dedication, the quote is kept in Spanish. The quotes and images of *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* are part of their questioning of history and transnational approaches.

Conclusion: Photographs, Transnational History, and Personal History

Starting with their striking front covers, photographs are significant historical sources in both works, which add to their texts' multiple perspectives and transnational engagements. *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* investigate how photographs can and cannot connect viewers to the past. Their incorporation of photographs, materially or through descriptions, is part of how they construct and interrupt concepts of history. As Sarah Carey has argued in the case of Morante, "*La Storia's* cover image is just the first photographic operation that Morante undertakes in the ideological enterprise of conceiving of history as (to use Hayden White's contentious distinction) a 'kind of art'" (68).³⁶ *La Storia* describes the high circulation of Shoah images, along with the horrors they shed light on: "La pagina riproduceva qualche scena dei lager nazisti, dei quali, fino all'invasione alleata, si avevano solo notizie sommesse e confuse" (*La Storia* 691).

of narrative potentialities to the plot" (172). The mysterious narrator of *La Storia* enters intrusively at various moments. Garboli proposes the narrator is Morante herself (188).

³⁶ On Morante and photography see Wehling-Giorgi ("Come un fotogramma" and "Traumatic Realism") and Carey. On Janeczek and photography see Alù.

Giuseppe sees these photographs on pages from a popular publication that was then used to wrap fruit. Like *La Storia*, *La ragazza con la Leica* makes clear—in a description of Taro and Capa’s work—how war photos reached many who did not pursue them, in part because of how newspapers were reused:

Raccontano la città in subbuglio nella lingua universale delle immagini, che dalle pagine esposte nelle edicole di mezzo mondo, affisse nelle sedie di partito e sindacali, sventolate dagli strilloni, riutilizzate per avvolgere uova e prodotti della terra, saltano in faccia persino a chi non compara o non legge i giornali.

(11)

Especially since Capa had been forced to leave his homeland, his brother emphasizes the significance of this international circulation, using the same phrase (“lingua universale”) as Janeczek: “My brother Robert Capa / was born with a language not useful beyond the borders / of a small country, Hungary. / Yet he managed to travel all over the world / and to communicate his experiences and feelings through / a universal language, photography” (Capa, “Remembrance” 9). With its inclusion of photographs, the novel explores the complicated legacies of this universal language.

While the images of *La Storia* are not included in the novel, they are primarily ones that should be familiar to the reader: people behind barbed wires, piles of bodies, piles of shoes. The novel lists six sets of photographs but does not directly describe Giuseppe’s reaction to them:

Resterà per sempre impossibile sapere che cosa il povero analfabeta Useppe avrà potuto capire in quelle fotografie senza senso. Rientrando, pochi secondi appresso, Ida lo trovò che le fissava tutte insieme, come fossero una immagine sola; e credette di riconoscergli nelle pupille lo stesso orrore che gli aveva visto in quel mezzogiorno alla Stazione Tiburtina, circa venti mesi innanzi.

(*La Storia* 692-93)

The quote underscores that Giuseppe cannot read any of the information provided along with the photographs, but shows the impact this “lingua universale” can have on an individual. The term “analfabeta” also highlights Giuseppe’s connection to the novel’s dedication, the analfabeta of the Vallejo quote, which links Morante’s illiterate to those of the Spanish Civil War. Finally, although it is unclear how much Giuseppe understands, especially since the printing quality is low, the quote reveals that Ida associates her son’s experience of seeing people in the process of being deported with his observation of photographs of concentration camps. In other words, the novel associates

Giuseppe's trauma by trains full of people with his trauma seeing these photos, indicating a link between observing a tragedy unfolding in actuality and viewing photographs of it afterwards, which suggests the "vulnerability" of viewing a photograph Susan Sontag analyzed: "that vulnerability is part of the distinctive passivity of someone who is a spectator twice over, spectator of events already shaped, first by the participants and second by the image maker" (169).³⁷ This vulnerability also connects Giuseppe to both his readers and author.

Whereas Giuseppe's viewing partially relies on the reader's knowledge of the photographs, *La ragazza con la Leica's* inclusion of photos provides a reader with an example of their vulnerability, as described by Sontag. While many components of a photo, as artifact, observed, subject, and photographer's identity, can be read into *La Storia* (see Wehling-Giorgi, "Traumatic Realism"), these elements are more directly addressed in *La ragazza con la Leica*, suggesting how Morante's archival and mediated portrayal of the Shoah is especially productive to consider in the twenty-first century, as Gabrielle Elissa Popoff shows: "*La Storia* illuminates the struggle to understand and speak of the Shoah in an era in which witnesses to the actual events number ever fewer" (27). Concetta D'Angeli examines how Morante's engagement with historical documents distinguished her writing from her contemporaries, which contributes to her relevance today: "her attentiveness to the documentation of the background of her works, together with the attention bestowed on their form and detail, remove her work from the fads and fashions of the moment" ("A Difficult Legacy" 190-91). The structures of *La Storia* and *La ragazza con la Leica* both bring into focus how much is unknown in historical accounts, but Janeczek's novel also interrogates the lacunae of memory and archives directly, demonstrated by the work's discussion of the included photographs.

Janeczek's novel also addresses the author's relationship to the material more directly.³⁸ The epilogue describes the links between the author and the material:

³⁷ Sontag notes the particular relationship between this pain of spectatorship and war (167). Wehling-Giorgi argues: "The abundant photographic imagery in *History: A Novel* hence not only mirrors the palimpsestic temporality of trauma, further complicated by its firm situatedness in a historically specific time, but it also provides a glimpse into an otherwise silenced traumatic reality that haunts the text in periodic intervals" ("Come un fotogramma" 62). This haunting relates to direct experiences, but also to how the past connects to the reader through news and photos.

³⁸ Critics have also explored the resonances between Morante's biography and *La Storia*, focusing on the intellectual Jewish anarchist Davide Segre, whose outlook reflects many of Morante's (Amoia argues that Morante is "Davide Segre of *La Storia*," 52-53), and Ida Ramundo, who, along with her mother, shares many qualities with Morante's mother. Tuck's 2007 foreword to the English translation of the novel emphasizes the connection between Morante's

I miei genitori si sono fidanzati nel ghetto, si sono ritrovati dopo la guerra, si sono amati e, a tratti, odiati, divertiti e sopportati, finché morte non li ha separati. Mia madre, che di Gerda aveva la *coquetterie* testarda, avrebbe potuto esserne una cuginetta. Mio padre, grande affabulatore come Capa, un fratello minore. No, non fatico a immaginare Robert Capa e Gerda Taro su una panchina di Central Park, lei che gli dice di sistemarsi la camicia, lui che sbuffa *mein General, jawohl*, prendendo in giro il suo accento indelebile, e lei si irrita che debba ancora fare il buffone, il gradasso.

(330)

Janeczek sees her parents in Taro/Capa and Taro/Capa in her parents. This association contributed to her interest in their stories and helped her imaginative process. *La ragazza con la Leica* continues the author's personal exploration:

con questo romanzo, benché lontano dal mio vissuto, stavo comunque portando avanti un discorso personale sulla memoria aperto vent'anni fa con *Lezioni di tenebra*, dove facevo i conti con i miei genitori sopravvissuti allo sterminio nazista. La memoria perduta, cercata e ricucita, i suoi vuoti riempiti dall'immaginazione.

(Di Paolo)

As in her novel *Le rondini di Montecassino*, Janeczek subtly embeds her relationship to the material, her parents' survival, and how her Polish-German-Jewish background contributes to her motivations to narrate particular stories. Janeczek was led to her investigation of Gerda Taro in part because critics questioned why a woman wanted to portray war, as she did in *Le rondini di Montecassino* and Taro did through photography ("Helena Janeczek racconta Gerda Taro").

Both Janeczek and Morante have personal relationships with the horrors of the Second World War, but also grapple with their distance, including how to represent the Shoah. Like *La Storia*, *La ragazza con la Leica* examines the difficulty of understanding what happened in the 1930s and 40s, of placing individual personal narratives in their tragic historical contexts, and of addressing the long afterlives of war. Considering Janeczek and Morante together, especially in terms of their relationships to archives and the Shoah, indicates how Morante's innovative grappling with the history of the 1930s and 40s reverberate with Italian literature written in the twenty-first century.

own background and *La Storia*, opening "I should be grateful to Mussolini," Elsa Morante was reported to have said once. "By introducing the racial laws in 1938, he made me realize that I myself was a Jew" (ix).

Morante's and Janeczek's Italian literary worlds are in constant negotiation with multiple histories, art movements, and places. Morante's *La Storia* showed the importance of recognizing these entanglements, an ongoing process that has grown in contemporary literature. Fifty years after *La Storia*, the continual relevance of the never-ending fascisms depicted in the novel becomes only clearer.

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