

## **‘Double trouble’ – Giampaolo Pansa’s *Il sangue dei vinti* from novel to film**

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In his monograph on Calvino, published by Edinburgh University Press in its splendid series ‘The Writers of Italy’, Martin McLaughlin dedicates an entire chapter to the 1947 novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*.<sup>i</sup> McLaughlin’s chapter, read by generations of scholars and students, describes the novel as ‘a small-scale epic’, as a ‘canonical text of neorealism’, but also as a work which ‘occupies a problematic place in the history of post-war Italian literature’.<sup>ii</sup> In 2015, in confirmation of the novel’s canonicity, *Il sentiero* was placed on the syllabus for the *maturità* exam, with students asked to write a piece of textual analysis. In the run up to the exam one student posted a question on the web: ‘Esiste un film tratto dal libro di italo calvino "il sentiero dei nidi di ragno"?’ The ‘best response’ was ‘non c’è mi dispiace (sic) se vuoi sapere la trama del libro eccola’ – and indeed a helpful summary followed.

The inclusion of the novel in the *maturità* exam, coupled with the (rather surprising) absence of a film version,<sup>iii</sup> perhaps in confirmation of the problematic status described by McLaughlin, raises a number of interesting questions about the interaction between Resistance literature and Resistance film in post-war Italy: which literary texts which offer an account of the Resistance have been transformed into films in the period from 1945 to the present day? Why do some texts not make it into a film version while others do? How are literary texts manipulated into film and what problems do they present to film makers? What kinds of changes occur in the page to screen process and what lies behind such changes?<sup>iv</sup> In this chapter I will offer an overview of these issues, while making no claims to completeness. The chapter will discuss a number of well-known Resistance texts, such as Renata Vigano’s *L’Agnese va a morire* and Elio Vittorini’s *Uomini e no*, but will dedicate most attention to the film version of Giampaolo Pansa’s novel *Il sangue dei vinti*, as it occupies an important and highly contested place in recent debates about the historical and cultural significance of the Resistance.<sup>v</sup> The chapter does not deal with films which are based on non-literary texts, of which there are many examples, particularly in the 1960s, with films like Nanni Loy’s *Le quattro giornate di Napoli* (1962) and Gianni Puccini’s *I sette fratelli Cervi* (1968) based on re-elaborations of historical texts or memoirs.<sup>vi</sup> The *quattro giornate* is loosely based on Aldo De Jaco’s 1952 book *La città insorge*, and the film about the Cervi brothers also has its basis in a text of the 1950s, Aldo Cervi’s *I miei sette figli*.<sup>vii</sup>

Calvino’s *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* is one of a small group of literary texts published in the period from the immediate post-war to the late 1940s which went on to acquire the status of ‘classic’ Resistance novels – they have all been reprinted many times over the years, appear on school and university courses in Italy and abroad, and have been frequently anthologised.<sup>viii</sup> These novels include Elio Vittorini’s *Uomini e no*, Cesare Pavese’s *La casa in collina* and Renata Vigano’s *L’Agnese va a morire*.<sup>ix</sup> *La casa in collina* has suffered the same fate as *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* and has never been made into a film. This may be because Pavese’s literary executors have refused to give consent, or because the text’s portrayal of an intellectual’s separation from history does not sit well within the various Resistance narratives which have circulated since the Liberation. There are, however, film versions of *L’Agnese va a morire* and *Uomini e no*. In both cases many years elapsed

between the publication of the literary text and the release of the film. In the case of the Viganò novel, the film version directed by Giuliano Montaldo was released in 1976, whereas Valentino Orsini's film of *Uomini e no* dates to 1980.<sup>x</sup>

For *l'Agnese va a morire* the delay can be attributed, in part, to Viganò's own reaction to the various scripts which were sent to her over the years, one of which turned Agnese into the lover of the partisan commander, but also to the vagaries of the market and the practical, as well as financial, problems encountered by film makers. Shortly after the novel won the Premio Viareggio in 1949 Viganò received the first approach from a film maker, which led to nothing. Subsequently, the first concrete idea for a film came from Gian Vittorio Baldi, who in the mid-1950s produced a number of documentaries including the ten-part documentary for RAI television, *Cinquant'anni 1898-1948. Episodi di vita italiana tra cronaca e storia*. Baldi never made the film of Viganò's novel but went on to direct the film *L'ultimo giorno di scuola prima delle vacanze di Natale* (1975), which depicts a massacre of civilians carried out by Fascists in Emilia 1944. Other subsequent proposals came from Glauco Pellegrini, a member of the cultural commission of the PCI, best known for his documentary of Palmiro Togliatti, and from Gianfranco De Bosio who in 1963 directed *Il terrorista*, a film about a Venetian *gappista* which starred Gian Maria Volonté and Anouk Aimée. The script was co-authored by De Bosio and the theatre director and playwright Luigi Squarzina.<sup>xi</sup> Eventually Montaldo, who in 1961 had directed *Tiro al piccione*, a film about a young man who remained faithful to Mussolini's RSI and itself based on a literary text,<sup>xii</sup> seems to have hit on a winning formula and to have persuaded Viganò that he was the right man for the job:

Diverse volte mi avevano proposto di fare un film dal libro, c'era stata anche la proposta di ridurlo per la televisione. Però le sceneggiature non mi convincevano. Questa volta, dopo aver letto la sceneggiatura, ho detto di sí, perché rispecchiava veramente il senso del libro. Ho parlato a lungo con Montaldo e mi è piaciuto come lui vedeva il personaggio dell'Agnese.<sup>xiii</sup>

The first clear indication that a film based on the book was to be made can be found in a short article in *l'Unità*. At the time, so the article suggested, no decision had been taken as to who would play the key role of L'Agnese but, the cast would be 'di livello qualitativo', and include Franco Nero and Mariangela Melato, neither of whom actually appeared in the film.<sup>xiv</sup> A subsequent article suggested that none other than Simone Signoret would play L'Agnese, and that Ornella Muti would also make an appearance.<sup>xv</sup> As it happened, Montaldo opted for the Swedish actress Ingrid Thulin, who is best known for her many roles in the films of Ingmar Bergman, such as *Winter Light* (1963) or *The Silence* (1963), both of which demonstrated her ability to play extremely demanding and, it goes without saying, bleak roles. In 1969 Thulin had played the part of Sophie Von Essenbeck in Visconti's *The Damned*, the first of a series of attempts to give her a wider international status. It would be relatively easy to dismiss the choice of Thulin as one dictated by her undoubted star appeal and aesthetic qualities. However, Thulin uses her experience in Bergman's rather films to create a version of Agnese which works effectively on screen, particularly during long takes and close ups of her stoic features.

In addition to Thulin, the cast of *L'Agnese va a morire* includes Stefano Satta Flores as the partisan commander, Michele Placido as Tom and Ninetto Davoli (famous for his many roles in the films of Pasolini) as 'La Disperata'. Satta Flores had previously had a role in the film *C'eravamo tanto amati* (1974) whose opening scene depicts a successful partisan action involving the three friends who

then follow different – and mainly disappointing – paths in an Italy where the ideals of the Resistance are betrayed. Placido, on the other hand, was at the time an emerging actor who would go on to become one of Italy's best known stars and, as we will see later, played the lead role in *Il sangue dei vinti*. In 1975 he had played Agramante in Luca Ronconi's film version of the *Orlando furioso*.<sup>xvi</sup>

As Viganò's own positive reaction to the script would suggest, the film version follows very closely the plot of the original novel, with only a few variations. Of these the most noteworthy is the addition of a scene at an early point in the film in which the partisans, led by Tom, efficiently execute a Fascist in what would appear to be Ravenna. The scene is immediately followed by the arrival of Rina, Tom's beloved, at the partisan HQ. The scene establishes Tom as a protagonist, and the film gives greater emphasis throughout to this character, possibly in an attempt to give him a more important role than was the case in the book, and so offer Placido more opportunities to display his many qualities. A similar process would appear to have taken place with the character of 'La Disperata'. In the book this character appears as if from nowhere, and is the subject of a separate micro-narrative (pp.179-181) in which he kills a German patrol, an episode not included in the film. In the film, however, 'La Disperata' arrives on the scene when he brings the bad news of General Alexander's winter declaration to the partisan command. Played by Ninnetto Davoli he becomes in the film a very brash Roman who dies heroically in a hail of German bullets in the final battle scene. In the book La Disperata is a quiet local boy. It is likely that the changes to the character of 'La Disperata' were occasioned by the casting of Davoli, and the difficulty of fitting him into the script.

As with the novel, the opening scene shows L'Agnese giving assistance to a young Italian soldier journeying home after the armistice declaration of the 8 September 1943. The soldier is spotted by la Minghina, her filofascist neighbour, who warns Agnese that this act of solidarity represents a risk. And indeed word gets through to the local German soldiers that L'Agnese's house is a safe haven for escaped soldiers, leading to the arrest of her husband Palita who is taken away to be sent to Germany. The involvement of the daughters in the betrayal of L'Agnese and her husband, and their acts of horizontal collaboration with the Germans are more explicitly stated (and displayed) in the film than in the book. Indeed, one characteristic of the book which is given particular emphasis in the film is that of the danger of spies and acts of betrayal, as if to emphasise the importance of working class solidarity in the Resistance period (as well as in the 1970s).

In many ways what the film of *L'Agnese va a morire* does is to restate, in terms which are readily comprehensible to viewers, the themes which were already present in the novel: the importance of women in the Resistance, the dominant role of the PCI in the organisation of the movement, the difficult relationship between the Allies and the Resistance, the brutality and inhumanity of the Germans, the solidarity of the partisans and the peasants, and the key role played by the elements. With the exception of nature, these themes were all at the centre of historical discussions in the 1970s. 1975, the year in which the decision to make the film was made, was International Women's year. During this period there were a number of conferences, major research projects and many publications on Italian women during the Resistance. In 1977 David Ellwood would publish his detailed study of the Allies and the Italian Resistance entitled 'l'alleato nemico'.<sup>xvii</sup> Likewise, the question of peasant solidarity during the Resistance was a much discussed topic during the period. The issue of the relationship between the peasants and their surroundings was not, however, a topic of interest to historians at the time, and it is this aspect of the film which makes it most interesting.

In the novel Viganò tends to use nature in a fairly simplistic way, with bad weather reflecting the difficulties and pessimism of the partisans. The film, however, represents nature as more of a protagonist. The film was shot in the wetlands to the east of Ferrara, with a lot of the filming done in the Valli di Comacchio. From the very opening shot, in which L'Agnese pushes her barrow full of clothes against the backdrop of a huge grey sky, nature has an intimidating presence, emphasised by the number of panoramic shots taken from a low point of view. L'Agnese is frequently depicted as an isolated figure, fighting her way through driving rain or heavy snow, her face wrapped in a simple peasant scarf. As the Allies advance North the Germans blow up the dams, flooding the area and forcing the partisans to abandon their hide-out. In days long before the invention of CGI the flood is an impressive moment in the film. A further contribution to the film is made by the music of Ennio Morricone, particularly effective in the scenes when the partisans attempt to drive their rudimentary boats through the icy waters.

When *L'Agnese va morire* was released, the Resistance revival of the 1970s was at its height.<sup>xviii</sup> This might account, in part, for the film's subsequent and continued popularity – particularly among left-wing viewers. The film certainly touched a chord with wider developments of the 1970s, such as the women's movement, and the idea of a politicised Resistance movement engaged in a class war, summed up by the phrase 'la Resistenza è stata rossa e non tricolore'. By the time Orsini's version of *Uomini e no* came out in 1980 the Resistance spirit was beginning to decline, but the presence of the long-term antifascist Sandro Pertini as president of Italy meant that it remained on the agenda, above all in the fight against terrorism. It is within this context which the film version of *Uomini e no* needs to be analysed.

Vittorini's novel was first published in 1945, shortly after the liberation. It tells the story of the Milanese *gappista*, Enne 2, and focusses above all on his own anguish and isolation and his impossible love for Berta. Stylistically, the book presents a number of challenges to the film maker, notably the passages in italic script in which the narrator addresses his characters. These passages disappear in the film version, probably because they represented an insuperable problem. In the novel Enne 2 and Berta never meet, whereas in the film the love story occupies a substantial amount of the script. However, the aspect of the transformation from novel to film which is most interesting is the ending. The novel itself has a kind of double ending. In the first of these, trapped inside an apartment, Enne 2 waits stoically for his death at the hands of Cane Nero. The narrator offers to take him back to a day in his childhood and to Berta: '*Ma lui di sette anni, lo porto via. Non altro rimane, nella stanza, che un ordigno di morte: con due pistole in mano.*'<sup>xix</sup> The book then comes to an end with an unnamed *operaio* having his first experience as a *gappista*, successfully shooting three enemy soldiers, but drawing back from killing a fourth. In the film version the second ending is closely reproduced, while the first ending presents some significant variations. Rather than waiting stoically for his death, Enne 2 leaps from the window of his apartment. His pursuers are unaware that he has shortly before attached a series of bombs to his body which, rather spectacularly, explode just as he hits the ground. This significant change has, I think, two linked explanations. In part its origins can be traced to what is undoubtedly one of the most famous and heroic of all Resistance deaths – that of Dante Di Nanni in Turin in 1944. Di Nanni's death soon became a key element in PCI propaganda during the war, but it was Giovanni Pesce's unforgettable description in *Senza tregua* which most captured the imagination of his (mostly young) readers, and which is reworked in Orsini's film. In Pesce's description Di Nanni throws himself to his death as follows:

Adesso non c'è più niente da fare: allora Di Nanni afferra le sbarre della ringhiera e con uno sforzo disperato si leva in piedi aspettando la raffica. Gli spari invece cessano sul tetto, nella strada, dalle finestre delle case, si vedono apparire uno alla volta fascisti e tedeschi. Guardano il gappista che li aveva decimati e messi in fuga. Incerti e sconcertati, guardano il ragazzo coperto di sangue che li ha battuti. E non sparano. È in quell'attimo che Di Nanni si appoggia in avanti, premendo il ventre alla ringhiera e saluta col pugno alzato. Poi si getta di schianto con le braccia aperte nella strada stretta, piena di silenzio.<sup>xx</sup>

Orsini therefore takes a number of elements from Pesce's description, but with the important added detail of the suicide bomb. The reasons for this crucial addition can be ascribed to the late 1970s climate. As I mentioned above, under the presidency of Sandro Pertini (elected shortly after the assassination of Aldo Moro) the fight against terrorism, left and right, assumed new dimensions. In particular Pertini and others fought hard to break down the connection which had been made between the violence of the Resistance period and the violence of the 1970s. Enne 2's suicide bomb at the end of the film offers a clear example of political violence for legitimate ends. The film version of *Uomini e no* is, therefore, not simply a film about the Resistance, but also a film about terrorism, and a film which distinguished Resistance violence from terrorist violence.

In addition to the texts by Calvino, Pavese, Viganò and Vittorini which were published in the 1940s, this period also sees the emergence of Beppe Fenoglio whose status as the greatest writer of the Resistance is by now firmly consolidated. Fenoglio's *Una questione privata* has twice been turned into a film for TV. The most recent version (1993), screened to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Resistance, employed the services of the English actor Rupert Graves to play Milton, the protagonist caught up in a hopeless search to free his friend Giorgio and discover if he had had a relationship with the beautiful but ephemeral Fulvia. The TV version sticks very closely to the published version of *Una questione privata*, with no evidence of additions or other changes. Like other film versions which stick close to the original the value of this production was to really to repropose a literary text in a format which, arguably, is more accessible to the Italian public.<sup>xxi</sup>

All the novels and films discussed so far are characterised by their positive depiction of the Resistance movement and those who participated in it. The most consistent threat to this paradigm has come in the shape of the journalist Giampaolo Pansa. During the 1990s Pansa published a series of novels which suggested alternatives to the heroic Resistance narrative, emphasising (excessively in the views of many) the civil war characteristics which the historian Claudio Pavone had highlighted in his landmark 1991 study *Una guerra civile*.<sup>xxii</sup> Pansa's novels had some impact but it was only with the 2003 book *Il sangue dei vinti* that his 'revisionist' interpretations really hit the headlines and had a widespread impact. *Il sangue dei vinti* is an example of a kind of docufiction, in which Pansa and his female assistant set out to reveal the truth about the *resa dei conti* at the end of the war. The book is written in the form of a travelogue, with the two characters visiting various locations around Italy and describing the killings of Fascists which took place. At the end of the book Pansa's assistant reveals that she is the daughter of one of the members of the Volante Rossa, a group which carried out a series of post-war killings in Milan. *Il sangue dei vinti* has been followed by a number of similar publications, the most recent of which is the 2014 *Bella ciao. Controstoria della Resistenza*.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Giampaolo Pansa's 2003 novel has two protagonists, Pansa himself and the librarian called Livia Bianchi, who works at the National Library in Florence. The name is a, rather unsubtle, reference to the Resistance hero Dante Livio Bianco. He asks her to photocopy a book for him, which she refuses

to do given copyright regulations and then offers him a coffee. Anyone who has ever studied in the National Library will realise straight away that this this is clearly a work of fiction. In the film, directed by Michele Soavi (who co-wrote the script with Pansa), these two characters are replaced by individuals who, on the face of it, have nothing to do with the original novel.<sup>xxiv</sup> Pansa becomes a detective figure in the shape of Franco Dogliani, played by Michele Placido, while the librarian is transformed into the character of Elisa, played by the then emerging Romanian born Ana Caterina Morariu. The substitution of the journalist for a detective, and the replacement of the librarian for what would appear to be an academic raises a number of questions. In the film Dogliani shares some of the characteristics of the Pansa figure of the novel in that he acts as a guide for the young Elisa, who drives him to various locations in a Volkswagen beetle. As in the book, both characters are involved in a shared quest for the truth – although what they are searching for in the film is rather different than was the case in the book. In the former, the two protagonists strive to reconstruct the history of the post-war killings during the course of a road trip. In the film the search is more about the tragedy which affects the lives of Dogliani and Elisa, and by extension all Italian families, during the climax of the war. Sensibly, the film discards the embarrassing hints of some kind of sexual chemistry between Pansa and Livia. So there are some basic similarities between the protagonists of the book and the film, but the differences are rather more striking. What might account for these quite radical transformations? There are a range of possible explanations. On the one hand, it could be suggested that the erasure of the Pansa figure is connected to a deliberate act of self-effacement. Pansa had placed himself at the centre of the novel and portrayed himself as a journalist-sage on an almost messianic mission to show Lidia and his readers what really happened at the end of the war. It could be – given the intense controversy created by the book and the inflammatory nature of Pansa himself – that it was thought wise to replace him with someone different. As a detective it could be argued that Dogliani is a rather more reliable figure than that of a journalist. Although it is fair to say that not all detectives in Italian *gialli* actually discover the truth, there is a feeling of trust amongst the viewing public that the detective is a reliable and dependable individual, sitting above the journalist in what we might describe as the epistemological hierarchy.

In this context it is also worth reflecting briefly on the status and career of Michele Placido. In 1976 Placido played Tom in *L'Agnese va a morire*, as we have seen. It is unlikely that many contemporary viewers of *Il sangue dei vinti* were aware of Placido's previous involvement in the cinema of the Resistance, nevertheless it is striking that the actor's only previous appearance in a film of this genre was in a fine example of 1970s orthodoxy. In a way Placido is counteracted as an occupant of the 'grey zone', an honest man without political views who tries to do his job, irrespective of the political situation. However, while only a few cognoscenti might have made a connection between the communist hero played by Placido in the 1970s, and the supposedly apolitical detective of 2008, many viewers would have spotted a more familiar link to Placido's earlier career, namely Corrado Cattani the Mafia hunting detective of the TV series *La Piovra*. Cattani's death in the fourth series of *La Piovra* remains one of the iconic moments of Italian television in the 1980s and still has the capacity to provoke horror and outrage today.<sup>xxv</sup> He remains one of Italy's best-known actors and has a special status on the Italian screen. His appearance in *Il sangue dei vinti* gave the production considerable lustre, a star element and a certain degree of kudos, but above all an actor associated with the search for truth, at all costs.

The film version of *Il sangue dei vinti* starts, not in the luminous surroundings of the National library in Florence, but in complete darkness. Portentous music in a minor key reinforces the tone of

complete mystery. Strange thudding noises are heard, as if from beyond the cinema screen, and then what can only be described as a 'breakthrough' occurs – a whole is punctured, we see broken bricks and a chink of light, followed by further thuds as a wrecking ball smashes its way through the screen which, we realise, is a wall, and we the viewers are inside a building. The darkness of the cinema reflects the darkness of the room. The ham-fisted symbolism of these opening shots is relatively easy to decode. We, the cinema-goers, have been fed a diet of Resistance films which have kept us in total darkness – but now the wrecking ball of Giampaolo Pansa is going to smash through years of obfuscation and show us what really happened.

An unknown character enters the building with a torch, which soon illuminates a skeleton, while a caption informs the viewer that we are in the San Lorenzo area of Rome in the 1970s. At this point the scene cuts to a shot of Dogliani entering a building in Rome - perhaps a cinema or a lecture theatre – to watch black and white images which also appear on the screen before us. The images, given a semblance of authority by the appearance of the Istituto Luce symbol which appears in the top right of the screen that Dogliani is himself watching, depict executions, of individuals and of groups. It is not initially clear who are the victims, nor indeed the executioners, but a connection is made between the recently discovered corpse and a group awaiting execution whose hands are also tied by barbed wire, an obvious symbol of oppression. As Dogliani insouciantly watches the images, which include a woman whose head has been shaven being paraded around the streets by exultant partisans, some of whom wave the Italian flag decorated with the Savoy crest, there is a further cut which involves the addition of another timeframe. The scene is now inside a bus as a young woman writes in her diary. It is 19 July 1943 and she is on her way to Rome to spend her honeymoon, staying with her brother. Her husband sits beside her as the words 'tratta dall'opera *Il sangue dei vinti*' appear on the screen. The young woman cannot wait to see her brother, but she doubts that 'Francesco' will be able to meet them. Francesco, we deduce, is the character played by Placido who we see entering a flat where the bloodstained corpse of a woman in a blue dress, her hands tied with barbed wire, has been found (the skeleton in the earlier scene). In this scene Placido's hair, previously grey, is a lustrous (though not entirely convincing) brown. Further cuts suggest that the scenes involving the detective in the flat and the married couple are taking place simultaneously. It is at this point that the young couple become aware of American bombers heading to Rome. The images of the bombers appear to be documentary footage – they are in colour but nevertheless look like authentic images. The intercutting of fictional and documentary footage is most likely a reference to Rossellini's *Paisà*, which used this technique in order to give a fictional film an authentic gloss. While a reference to *Paisà* might be viewed as an act of homage to a canonical Resistance film, given Pansa's well-known iconoclasm it is more likely that the allusion is more a piece of criticism, suggesting that films like *Paisà* have contributed to a rhetorical vision of the resistance which the current film is determined to cut through, or to judge by the opening frames, to smash.

The results of the bombing of San Lorenzo are twofold. Firstly, the young bride loses her husband when their bus is strafed, and decides as a consequence to enlist with the Fascist *ausiliarie*. Secondly, the evidence of the murder in the flat is covered up, with the body remaining interred until the 1970s demolition team inadvertently uncover her. In each case the people who are held responsible are the allies and their bombs. It was the Allied bullets which killed Lucia's husband, leading to her decision to become an *ausiliaria*, and the Allied bombs which covered up the evidence from the flat, while destroying the lives of innocent families in the San Lorenzo area. This attribution of guilt represents an interesting departure for Pansa and a new development. In a sense he seems

to be shifting the blame away from Italy and the Italians and placing it squarely on the shoulders of the Allies. Lucia's decision to join up is, it is made clear, born of the love of country as well as for her dead husband. Yet either way the spark is not a political one – the belief in Fascism – but rather a decision based on the interaction of the personal and the intimate with feelings of national pride and the need to maintain the honour of the nation following the outrage of the Allied bombing of Rome.

Lucia's decision to join the *ausiliarie* occurs at a relatively early point in the film, but by this stage viewers will have got their bearings. If they had read the novel *Il sangue dei vinti* they would have been entirely justified in asking themselves a simple question: what has all that has appeared on the screen so far got to do with the original novel? The book, as outlined earlier, does not deal at all with the events of 1943 but is instead confined to a relatively narrow period of history, the end of the war and the bloody settling of accounts. Why does the film version stretch the narrative to a much earlier point in the chronology of the war? Why include a fascist *ausiliaria* in the plot? The answer to these questions, and others, lies in the choice of the name of Lucia for the widowed bride. The reference to *I promessi sposi* could not be clearer, although surprisingly none of the press articles on the film and even the review by that most intellectual of film critics, Paolo Mereghetti, makes no mention of a Manzonian intertext.<sup>xxvi</sup> The transformation which takes place in the film is that of a move away from a book which claims to reveal the truth about the horrors of the *resa dei conti*, to a national epic which strives to reveal the colours and cadences of the Second World War in Italy, a civil war which tore families apart and in which the defeated were the real victims. As the film develops Dogliani slowly begins to understand and unravel the murder mystery. Several pages would be required to give anything like a meaningful account of what is an extremely convoluted plot. The victim is, so it seems initially, a prostitute and the identical twin of an actress (both played by Barbara Bobolova). However, as the narrative proceeds, Dogliani discovers that the actual victim was the actress, murdered by the prostitute's sister. In a doubling reminiscent of Medardo in *Il visconte dimezzato* the actress is the bad sister, while the prostitute (a victim of the tragic circumstances of the Second World War) is the good sister. Given the Roman setting of the early stages of the film, it would seem reasonable to suspect that the figures of Romulus and Remus are being referred to. As such, the twin sisters could be interpreted as the twin souls of the new Italy whose reconstruction has been impeded by a failure to understand that they are essentially two sides of the same coin.

This is of course all rather hackneyed, but that is not the point. The film has a clear didactic objective and neither Pansa nor Soavi are concerned about subtleties, as will become even more evident as we look at the rest of the film. The theme of the doubling of the twin sisters is also reflected in the character of Lucia and her other brother Ettore Dogliani, played by Alessandro Preziosi. Ettore is a partisan with strong Communist beliefs who, naturally enough, disapproves of his sister's decision to join the opposition. Wholly predictably, their lives become increasingly entangled as the film progresses. In a key scene Ettore's partisans attack the barracks where Lucia and her fellow fascists mount a spirited defence. Ettore sprays machine-gun fire through a top floor window, failing to hit any of the fascists, but his bullets rip through a map of Italy, half of which falls to the ground. No doubt a serious point is being made here – the Civil War tore Italy in two, but it is achieved in such a guileless fashion that it is difficult to take seriously. Lucia manages to escape from the barracks and holes up with another fascist who snipes at partisans from a bell tower. Before their final defeat the sniper manages to shoot Ettore dead. The Resistance hero is covered in the tricolour flag while his



fascist sister who – it is clear – also fought for her country, is subjected to a range of tortures (including rape) and paraded around the streets in a ghoulish display of public execration and obloquy. Despite Franco's desperate attempts to rescue her she is executed. At the end of the film Elisa takes him to the place where she was buried, in a field next to a graveyard. The long grass which grows above her forgotten corpse is reminiscent of Pavese's *La luna e i falò*, and sure enough the voice-over recites the celebrated lines from *La casa in collina* in which Corrado muses on the victims of the Civil War. The film of *Il sangue dei vinti* thus manages to do something which no other Resistance film had done – get Pavese's *La casa in collina* onto the screen.

In the various reworkings of Resistance novels which this chapter has analysed there is one common element which runs through all of them, with the exception of *Il sangue dei vinti*: the almost absolute fidelity to the original. There are some minor variations, but the Resistance novel would appear to be a kind of sacred object when it is placed into the hands of film-makers. By contrast, in the films analysed in *Filmmaking by the book* Marcus detects evidence of an Oedipal struggle between film and text, as well as the presence of 'umbilical scenes' which frame the rereading of the text. There are few signs of these processes in the films I have discussed, perhaps indicating that the Resistance occupies a different space in the history of Italian textual transformations.

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<sup>i</sup> Italo Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Turin: Einaudi, 1947).

<sup>ii</sup> Martin McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>iii</sup> The Modena City Ramblers have, however, made a song out of the novel. Entitled *Il sentiero* the song first appeared on the 2005 album *Appunti partigiani* and is more an act of homage to Calvino than an adaptation of the novel. The CD also contains a version of Calvino's own Resistance song *Oltre il ponte*, as well as *Il partigiano John*, a homage to Fenoglio.

<sup>iv</sup> The best analysis of these questions in the Italian context is Millicent Marcus' pioneering study *Filmmaking by the book* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>v</sup> Renata Viganò, *L'Agnese va a morire* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949), Elio Vittorini, *Uomini e no* (Milan: Bompiani, 1945), Giampaolo Pansa, *Il sangue dei vinti* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2003).

<sup>vi</sup> There is an interesting variation of this process in Rossellini's 1959 film *Il generale della Rovere*. The film is loosely based on Indro Montanelli's own experiences, which were turned into the script. Montanelli then went on to publish a novel, bearing the same title: Indro Montanelli, *Il generale della Rovere* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1959). In 2011 RAI produced a two part mini-series based on Montanelli's book.

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<sup>vii</sup> Aldo De Jaco, *Le quattro giornate di Napoli: la città insorge* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1953), Alcide Cervi, *I miei sette figli* (Rome: Edizioni di cultura sociale, 1955). The text of *I miei sette figli* was in fact a joint project involving the collaboration of *L'Unità* journalist Renato Nicolai who, it is likely, ghosted the book in its entirety. Versions of *I miei sette figli* published after 1956 are interesting, amongst other things, for the removal of references to Stalin. On this point see Philip Cooke, 'What does it matter if you die? The Seven Cervi Brothers' in *Assassinations and Murder in Modern Italy: transformations in society and culture*, edited by Stephen Gundle and Lucia Rinaldi (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 33-44.

<sup>viii</sup> While an analysis of the phenomenon is outside the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note how, in another form of textual transformation, there are numerous examples of 'readings' of selected passages of Resistance novels which have appeared in various media. For example, Radio 3 transmitted a series of 'Pagine – Le parole della Resistenza' in 1995, including a reading by Oreste Rizzini from *La casa in collina*: <http://www.teche.rai.it/2015/09/la-casa-in-collina-cesare-pavese-letto-da-oreste-rezzini/>. There are now many examples of such readings on Youtube.

<sup>ix</sup> Pavese's novel was originally published together with *Il carcere* in *Prima che il gallo canti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949).

<sup>x</sup> It is interesting to compare this long delay in Italy with two cases from the USA and France. John Steinbeck's novel, *The Moon is Down* (New York: Viking, 1942), depicting the potential of Resistance in Northern Europe (and originally a two-act play), was made into a propaganda film the following year. Vercors' *Le silence de la mer* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1942), on the other hand, was adapted into a film in 1949.

<sup>xi</sup> Squarzina had in the late 1950s, written and directed one of the very few Resistance plays to have had any impact, *La romagnola* in *Teatro* (Bari, Laterza, 1959). For a discussion see Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, (New York; Palgrave, 2011), pp. 80-81.

<sup>xii</sup> The novel in question is Giosé Rimanelli's *Tiro al piccione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1953).

<sup>xiii</sup> *Matrimonio in brigata: le opere ed i giorni di Renata Viganò e Antonio Meluschi*, edited by E. Colombo (Bologna: Grafis, 1995), p. 188.

<sup>xiv</sup> 'Montaldo dirigerà il film *L'Agnese va a morire*', *L'Unità*, 3 August 1975, p.11.

<sup>xv</sup> 'Cominciano a Ravenna le riprese de "*L'Agnese va a morire*"', *L'Unità*, 10 January 1976, p. 9.

<sup>xvi</sup> The film, first shown in 1975, was itself an adaptation of Ronconi's theatrical version of the *Furioso*.

<sup>xvii</sup> David Ellwood, *L'alleato nemico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977).

<sup>xviii</sup> The film was premiered in the city of Naples and the showing coincided with the anniversary of the 'quattro giornate di Napoli'. It transpires that this initiative was taken by Maurizio Valenzi, the Communist mayor of Naples. See 'In anteprima mondiale "*L'Agnese va a morire*"', in *L'Unità* 27 September 1976, p. 5.

<sup>xix</sup> *Uomini e no*, p. 191 (italics in original).

<sup>xx</sup> Giovanni Pesce, *Senza tregua* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1967), pp. 136-45.

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<sup>xxi</sup> Another film from the 1990s, Luchetti's *I piccoli maestri* (1997) is a case in point. The film version struggled to cope with the subtle irony of Meneghello's original, replacing it with rather hamfisted comedy. For a discussion of Luchetti's film and Guido Chiesa's excellent film version of *Il partigiano Johnny* see Cooke, *The Legacy*, pp. 188-89.

<sup>xxii</sup> Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Giampaolo Pansa, *Bella ciao. Controstoria della Resistenza* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2014). For a much longer discussion of Pansa than is possible here see Cooke, *The Legacy*, and Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (New York: Palgrave, 2009). More generally on the battle over the memory of the Resistance see Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria. La Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2005).

<sup>xxiv</sup> At the time of writing the full-length version of the film was available to view on Youtube. It had been uploaded on 6 April 2016 by 'SEMPER FIDELIS A NOI', an individual whose avatar is Benito Mussolini. There are currently two comments 'Grazie Fratello, questo film è bellissimo! A Noi' and 'uno dei film più belli di tutti i tempi!'.

<sup>xxv</sup> In the same year as his TV death (1989) Placido went on to stand as a Republican/liberal candidate in the European elections, garnering over 11,000 votes. Though not elected (Giorgio La Malfa won the seat) this was a rather better performance than two of his fellow candidates, Ernesto Galli Della Loggia and Bruno Zevi, who did not break through the 3000 mark. The 1989 elections were, as far as I know, Placido's only serious foray into politics.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Paolo Mereghetti, Review of *Il sangue dei vinti*, *Corriere della sera*, 1 November 2008.