Comparatismi 7 2022
ISSN 2531-7547
http://dx.doi.org/10.14672/20222029

Women's Narratives of Abuse and Trauma in Contemporary Italy

Paola Carmagnani

Abstract • The essay analyses the modalities of a narrative of trauma understood as a daily and prolonged exposure to a context of a systemic violence, such as that expressed in our society by its deeply-rooted patriarchal structures. To this end, the essay focuses on two recent Italian texts, a novel and an autobiographical testimony, which stand out within a generalized discourse aimed at presenting rape and femicide as punctual events, emergencies isolated from the roots of a wider context of violence, perpetuated by the forms and institutions of dominant culture.

Keywords • Testimony; Trauma; Patriarchy; Narrative; Literature.

Ledizioni

Women's Narratives of Abuse and Trauma in Contemporary Italy

Paola Carmagnani

1. Introduction

A feminist blog called *Abbatto i muri* (*Tearing Down the Walls*) recently launched an ongoing campaign for testimonies of violence and abuse. Called *#tuttacolpamia* (*#allmyfault*), the campaign is meant to be "a collective recovery of awareness". "While you share your stories", writes *Abbatto i muri*,

> think about why you've been told or you thought that it was your fault. Think about the phrases that have been used to indoctrinate you, to educate you in thinking that it was your fault. Think about what are the attitudes and mentality that has put you in a position to become so vulnerable and alone, because that *#allmyfault* is a way of isolating us, ensuring that we don't communicate with each other. Everything must remain a secret, in order to keep up a chauvinist and misogynous structure that wants us unprepared and victims instead of ready to react to oppression, blaming those who deserve it.

Echoed through the country's mainstream media, the widespread success of the campaign proves the strong potential of the digital activism pursued by feminism's fourth wave, marked by a more accessible discourse, both in terms of medium and form, and focusing on everyday personal experiences within an inclusive, intersectional perspective. Compared to the new virtual places of discussion, traditional media "didn't give space to anything that didn't fit in the dominant culture", argues the blogger of *Abbatto i muri*, Antonella Panepianco, better known as Eretica: their language is not meant to subvert the existing chauvinist, sexist, patriarchal culture and imagination and if anything has changed in the last few years it was thanks to the contents published by feminist activists on the web, "analysing the signs and languages that need to be deconstructed and subverted",[1] In the widespread dominant discourse, femicide and rape are in fact constantly transformed into a series of tragic punctual events, "emergencies" disconnected from the deep-rooted socio-cultural structures producing them. This lack of public awareness seems to reflect on contemporary Italian literature, where the narrative of systemic violence on women and other non-dominant groups is mostly a blank space.

This essay analyses two recent texts – Viola Ardone's novel *Oliva Denaro* and Valentina Mira's memoir X,[2] both published in 2021 – that in the general silence of Italian literature manage to shape narratives of rape within a context of systemic violence that silences and isolates its victims. This kind of prolonged exposure to a traumatic context such as patriarchal oppression has been addressed by Judith Herman's notion of Complex Post

[1] Eretica, *I nuovi media come opportunità per raccontare la violenza di genere*; Marina Bettaglio, Nicoletta Mandolini, Silvia Ross, *Rappresentare la violenza di genere. Sguardi femministi tra critica, attivismo e scrittura*, Milano, Mimesis, 2018, p. 249.

[2] Neither text is currently available in English. The quoted passages are therefore presented in my own translation, in the hope of a better translation in the near future.

Traumatic Stress Disorder and Laura Brown's deconstruction of the traditional Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders description of trauma as "an event outside the range of human experience", expanding the event-based notion of trauma and highlighting the "insidious traumata" provoked by those common, everyday events "in which dominant culture and its forms and institutions are expressed and perpetuated".[3]

Ardone's novel and Mira's memoir[4] will be considered here as part of a particular group of texts where "trauma becomes a testimony":[5] fictional and non-fictional narrative texts operating "on the certitude that one can access *truth* through a narration of *experience*".[6] In the first part of the essay, I will analyse the testimonial frames of the two texts, showing how the personal and the political intersect in a global reparative process provided by the "transformation of an unspoken, private trauma into a public story that bears witness to and offers proof of what has heretofore remained *unspeakable*."[7] In so far as the experience of trauma deconstructs the human capacity to shape events through language, its narrative representation is, however, a complex question. Stressed since the first wave of post-structuralist trauma studies, the special ability of literary language to "claim" trauma has given rise to a major trope, which sees in the disruption of conventional modes of representation a privileged, if not the only, way of accessing an experience that exceeds the possibility of narrative logic. What about testimonies, then, which in order to transform the private experience in public recognition must assimilate the traumatic events into a logical linguistic structure? The trope of post-modernist fragmentation seems to have affected mainly the reception of fictional texts, while in the field of testimonies there has been a general tendency to consider that testimonial writing possesses a literary dimension, without however specifying what this dimension might consists of.[8] In her description of the different stages of the survivor's recovery process, Judith Herman offers however an interesting insight. While the initial account of traumatic events may be "pre-narrative" – repetitious, stereotyped and emotionless – "the completed narrative must include a full and vivid description of the traumatic imagery": "a narrative that does not include the traumatic imagery and bodily sensations is barren and incomplete".[9] Commenting on Shoshana Felman's description of traumatic events as something that is always "in excess of our frames of reference", Deborah Carlin resumes Herman's notion of "traumatic imagery", writing that trauma survivors can however assemble "a narrative of his or her heretofore unavailable, because unutterable, experience" by "piecing together the fragments of memory, affect, sound,

[3] Laura Brown, *Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma*, «American Imago», 48, 1, 1991, pp. 119-133, p. 122.

[4] We use the term "memoir" to indicate a particular category of "life-writing", distinguished from autobiography as being more versatile and open, often focusing on a particular episode from a life. Its relevance in contemporary culture has been related to its "dialogical" form, neither externally focused, nor inward-looking, but rather mediating between the different dimensions (Cfr. Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, New York and London, Routledge, 2011).

[5] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, New York, Basic Books, 1992, p. 181.

[6] Deborah Carlin, *Trauma, Testimony, and Fictions of Truth: Narrative in When Rabbit Howls*, «Texas Studies in Literature and Language», 34, 4, 1995, p. 477.

[7] Ivi, p. 476.

[8] For an in-depth summary of the debates around the representation of trauma, cfr. Joshua Pederson, *Trauma and Narrative*, in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. by J. Roger Kurtz, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 97-109 and Marinella Rodi-Risberg, *Problems in Representing Trauma*, in Kurtz (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 110-123.

[9] Herman, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

smell, and bodily sensations".[10] In the second part of the essay I will draw on recent researches in neurosciences and cognitive literary studies, arguing that the multimodal traumatic imagery evoked by Herman and Carlin is indeed a crucial literary dimension of trauma narrative, offering an embodied simulative representation of different sensory modalities, as well as a set of related affective aspects.

As I will try to show, the common path of self-reconstruction which shapes both texts is however configured very differently in each of them. If Ardone's novel offers us a narrative that never questions its capacity to present a completed statement of traumatic events, nor the subject's ability to regain her supposed intrinsic unity disrupted by trauma, Mira's memoir is marked instead, since its title, by the awareness that a repairing process necessarily includes the acknowledgment of the loss of a part of the subject herself and that, in the face of trauma, the language of its own narrative "does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the contestation of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge".[11]

2. Testimonies

"The testimonial enterprise", writes Dori Laub, is a "mode of struggle against the victims entrapment in trauma repetition, against their enslavement to the fate of their victimization": "giving testimony is in itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival".[12] Ardone's novel, *Oliva Denaro*, and Mira's memoir, *X*, share the witnessing "imperative need to tell, and thus to come *to know* one's own story"[13], be it the personal experience of trauma told by Mira's non-fictional narrator, or the collective story of patriarchal oppression told by Ardone through the fictional self of her novel. Focusing on the traditional Sicilian society of the 1960s, *Oliva Denaro* is inspired by the well-known story of Franca Viola, the first Italian woman who successfully prosecuted her rapist, refusing the widespread legalized practice of "rehabilitating marriage" (*matrimonio riparatore*). "What happened, and still happens, to all the others?": the novel, says Ardone, was born from the necessity of imagining

> what happened to all those who, before and after Franca Viola, denounced violence, expressed themselves with a 'no', silently contributed to the affirmation of a right and were themselves the object of a process in which they should have been the injured party. All those who have not become Franca Viola, whose names have remained unknown and who have not received justice. All those who over the years – and up to now – have not been believed or have been held responsible for what happened to them".[14]

[10] Carlin, *op. cit.*, p. 476. From another side of post-structuralism, Hayden White has shown how Primo Levi's narratives elaborate a rich figurative writing, at odds with his obsession with a "scientific" style adequate to confront clearly and objectively the extreme experience of the death camps, and offering a model of how a "*literary* mode of writing can intensify the semantic and referential values of a factual discourse" (Hayden White, *Figural Realism in Witness Literature*, «Parallax», 10, 1, 2004, pp. 113-24, p. 115).

[11] Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, p. 5.

[12] Ivi, p. 11.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Viola Ardone, *Oliva Denaro, the Girl Who Said No*, 28 September 2021, web, last access: 30 September 2022, <https://time.news/oliva-denaro-the-girl-who-said-no/>.

Oliva Denaro offers a testimony of the oppression and struggle of women in Italy's not so distant past: the article of law whereby a rapist could vacate his crime by marrying his victim was not abolished until 1981, together with the article allowing reduced penalty for those who killed female family members surprised in flagrant adultery or intercourse (*delitto d'onore*, "honour killing"), and only in 1996 sexual violence became a crime against the person, instead of against "public morality". Mira's memoir provides instead a direct testimony of chauvinist violence in contemporary Italy, revealing the deep-rooted structures of patriarchy in a society permeated by a misogynistic mentality, nurtured by the legacy of fascist ideology entrenched with catholic moral. Together, these two texts offer a picture of Italy's past and present, questioning through the personal experiences of a fictional and a non-fictional subject the perpetuated forms of abuse and violence against women. In both cases, moreover, the act of testimony performed by the text is reframed and echoed within the narrative itself, where the first-person narrator is shown in the act itself of bearing witness to her own story. "Testimonies", writes Laub, "are not monologues. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an 'other' to whom the subject addresses his narrative in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as subject".[15] Reframed within a feminist approach, the dialogic nature of testimony is situated in the articulation between a personal and a collective experience, sharing individual narratives within a safe context and reconnecting isolated, private experiences in order to identify the patterns of systemic abuse, gain awareness of trauma as a symptom and tool of patriarchy and support a call for collective action. From this position of "identification and action", testimonies enact a witnessing encounter between reader and text where "the personal is the political".[16] If the reader is in these texts the ultimate "other" to whom the subject addresses her speech, the actual locus of the witnessing encounter, the act of testimony re-enacted within both narratives calls in multiple figures of "others", whose presence articulates the testimony's form and meaning.

In Ardone's novel, the first act of testimony performed by Oliva significantly posits her in the position of bearing witness to another woman's story, which symbolically marks the beginning of her journey of awareness of her own condition as a dominated subject. In one of the first chapters of the novel, Oliva tells us about a grammar lesson where she wondered how the noun "woman" could be declined in its singular form. "A singular woman. I have never seen it" says Oliva to her teacher, thinking about the world she is growing up in, where being a woman means accepting the rules of patriarchy and giving up one's own unique self. "Woman is equal to man and has the same rights", was the phrase that Oliva was supposed to decline in its plural form, and her teacher explains that "grammar can help change people's lives", that "the feminine singular is up to us, even you".[17] Mobbed and eventually forced to leave the village, the teacher is a "*sbrigugnata*", a "woman who has no shame", say the village gossiping, and this is in fact what triggers Oliva's first act of public witnessing: "If teacher Rosaria was without shame it is not because of what you say, […] but because she had nothing to be ashamed of, she never hurt anyone. It was you who hurt her".[18] This first act of witnessing immediately integrates the narrative of Oliva's experience within a collective relational dimension, furtherly elaborated through the reframing of the rape narrative already offered to the reader within a public act of testimony that marks the difficult choice to denounce her rapist. Addressed to the empathetic witnessing, the safe context provided to Oliva's testimony is immediately set in place by an activist

[15] Felman, Laub, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
[16] Brown, *op. cit*., p. 105.
[17] Viola Ardone, *Oliva Denaro*, Torino, Einaudi, 2021, pp. 34-35.
[18] Ivi, p. 39.

from the "Italian Women's Union", within a private feminine space – "I just wanted a few minutes to make your acquaintance", says she, "have a word woman-to- woman".[19] Within this space, Oliva is offered "the one question that no one had asked me yet": "And you, how are you?", suddenly forcing her to acknowledge the pain that she had until then denied: "'I don't know', I say […]. And I don't even remember myself as I was before".[20] Addressed to a lawyer provided by the activists' organization, Oliva's following testimony fulfils the reparative function of "a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds – the world that was brutally destroyed [by trauma] and the one that it is" (Felman, Laub). It is fact through the memory of another safe context, where her voice could be heard, that Oliva eventually manages to put her experience into words:

> My heart is beating so loud that I'm afraid the pulses will echo around the room. Words have always been my friend, but now I can no longer find them, they're all gone. […] I begin, but the sentences melt in my mouth, because say it is live it again, in front of everybody and, this time, without being able to hide any longer. I bring a hand to my chest and I begin to twist a button on my blouse, like I used to do at school during the questioning with the buttonhole of my black smock. I close my eyes and I'm at the teacher's desk […]. I have studied, I know my lesson by heart and as usual I will get a good grade. So, I start breathing again and the words, one by one, slip out as if I were telling the story of another. As if I were no longer me.[21]

The few fragments of her testimony recapitulate in a matter-of-fact tone the events immediately preceding the rape, eliding the sequel already narrated to the reader in an entirely different tone.[22] The trial closes the third part of the novel and its narrative is limited to the description of the court-room, significantly resembling a church, with a crucifix at the back, of her bodily feelings – "I feel strong, suddenly, my breathing is slow, my hands dry, my gaze high" – and of her rapist on the defence's bench: "Almost a year has passed and nothing has changed in him. I moved on and he didn't".[23] The narrative elides here the account of rape, made in front a predictably hostile court in a context where the "rehabilitating marriage" was still an article of law. The trial's outcome that eventually acquits Oliva's rapist is instead deferred to the following, concluding part of the novel, which brings us twenty years later, in 1991, symbolically recalling the moment of the rehabilitating marriage's abolition. Here, the novel transforms its narrative into a sort of dialogue between Oliva and her father, where the two voices intersect and respond to each other in alternating chapters. Significantly, Oliva's testimony is provided here with a male witness who throughout the whole narrative offered her a shared space of silent resistance, crystallized in the relating expressions that punctuate their respective language – "I don't approve of", says Oliva to reject the social norms that apply to her feminine upbringing; "I'd rather not", says her father on the punctual occasions when he is requested to behave accordingly to the patriarchal male models. Transforming the father's silent resistance into the witnessing of Oliva's story, the novel entrusts him here with the previously elided narrative of the trial. Recalling "the cold look" on Oliva's face when the defence lawyer had stopped talking, his voice summarises her position within a legal context that states "in black and white, that a man who takes a woman by force is free if he offers marriage in return": "it was then that

[19] Ivi, p. 209.
[20] Ivi, p. 212.
[21] Ivi, p. 214.
[22] Cfr. paragraph 2, "Writing Trauma".
[23] Denaro, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

you realised that there would be no justice, because you were on the wrong side of the law". "It was me who took you on that dead-end road", he concludes; "It was you who took me on that road, dad",[24] connects up Oliva's voice, opposing to his guilt the acquired awareness that, in spite of her defeat, the public trial was a necessary passage. Within this dialogized narrative the novel inserts the episode that marks the completion of Oliva's recovery process: "It was you who took me on that road, dad, one Sunday morning", says Oliva, recalling how her father had accompanied her to the pastry shop owned by her rapist's powerful family, offering her the choice whether or not to accept the marriage. Now, Oliva goes back alone to the pastry shop, where her unpunished rapist is still behind the counter.

> The last time I saw him, almost twenty years ago, he had the arrogant look of one who has won: because he is stronger, because he is more powerful, and because he can count on a law that makes him right even if he's wrong. […] I have been waiting for that moment ever since he came back to Martorana, after his father's death. But it has taken time, it has taken women who are more combative than me and many other "no" shouted louder than mine, adding to my own.[25]

Through the multiple "others" who have acknowledged her testimony and the network of connections within which her story has been inscribed, Oliva can now confront her rapist. Does she really believe that she was right in refusing what he offered her on that faraway Sunday morning? What did she gain? "His tone is still mocking, but the question is true: he wants to know, him from me, whether he is guilty. The court's answer wasn't enough for him and he asks me to judge him, now, twenty years later".[26] When the victim finally owns her own story, however, she becomes a witness to herself and she is able to refuse to testify to her innocence before the violence's perpetrator: "'I don't have to account for what I desire to anybody', I answer without flinching. […] His screams no longer scare me: he's not my persecutor, he's just a man, one that hasn't even fully understood his fault. […] What did I earn? The freedom to choose".[27]

"What I insist on calling a 'story'", says the narrator of Mira's memoir in the text's opening, "are actually letters, a multitude, a tsunami of letters. On each one of them there is the name of my brother. A brother who suddenly disappeared seven years ago, without an explanation. Then, one night – on Christmas night 2018 – the cameras of our parents' garage filmed him destroying their cars. My rapist was with him, as a lookout".[28] The victim's testimony is thus immediately situated within a contradictory and problematic space, where the "other" to whom the subject addresses her speech in the hope of being heard is both the blank space of an absence and an integral part of the violence to which the text bears witness. Signalled by the X of the book's title, this space of the testimony's addressee configurates as the ultimate otherness of trauma, evoked by a text that announces itself as a narrative "in search of its own exposition", contending in the act of its telling "with what it has been, and perhaps still may be, unable to tell".[29] As in Ardone's novel, the text's act of testimony is reframed within its narrative. In this case, however, the internal addressees are identified with the multiple figures of the violence's perpetrators, re-enacting a failure that seems implicit from the very choice of the testimony's primary addressee.

[24] Ivi, pp. 265-266.
[25] Ivi, p. 285.
[26] Ivi, p. 290.
[27] Ivi, p. 291.
[28] Valentina Mira, *X*, Roma, Fandango, 2021, p.11.
[29] Carlin, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

What appears to be a testimony without witnesses is, however, a *mise en récit* of the repairing function of the text itself, where the letters have become the thirty-seven chapters of a book and the appeal to the brother's witnessing is actually a means of confronting trauma from a further position of recovery.

The first act of testimony is here forcibly imposed on the victim by the rapist himself. "I owe you an apology", he says the day after the rape, not naming the object of his apology and thus putting his victim in the obligation to name it herself: "Being forced to say it loud for the first time, to say it loud to him for the first time, feels like the umpteenth violence. But I force myself – he forces me, one more time it's him who forces me – to do it". Following the well-established strategy of shifting blame onto the victim, he immediately refuses to acknowledge the perpetrated violence: "I wanted to apologize because maybe we drank too much"; "that thing between us had been in the air for a long time"; "women always say no, meaning yes", "you played along". "No means no", "I said no at least ten times, I pushed you away, I was feeling sick, I was drunk…": put in the position of defending herself, the victim finally pronounces the word "rape" – "There. I said it. He finally looks me in the eyes and in his gaze, I find the very definition of the word 'hate'. […] He apologized for a rape, but he doesn't accept the idea of being a rapist". His growing aggressiveness eventually leads to a deliberate threat – "Prove it. […] Everyone saw us enter the room together. You flirted with me in front of everyone. […] Everyone saw it. Everyone saw you. And now go on, try to pass off your bullshit as true. […] If you do it, if you report me, I swear I'll ruin your life. You'd ruin it yourself anyway, you know how these things go".[30] Appealing to the complicity of patriarchal society, his repeated violence forces a deal of silence onto the victim: "'you disappear from my life', I say, trying to sound threatening, but my voice comes out much weaker than I'd like. It's the voice of one who has been defeated".[31]

The second testimony contained in the memoir's narrative is the statement provided by the victim at a police-station, in spite of the deal of silence made with her rapist and of the many cons drawn up in a list, where the only pro is that "maybe, in five years' time, my truth will be *the* truth".[32] The witness of this second testimony is a young *carabiniere* – "He was a good person, the *carabiniere*. Kind",[33] says the narrator, offering however a narrative which deconstructs the usual meaning of the word "kind".

> As I retraced aloud every passage of that evening, dwelling on what were for him the most significant details (Did you drink? How much did you drink? Did you take drugs? How were you dressed? What kind of relationship did you have before that evening? Had you two been together or just friends? Sorry if I ask, I'm just doing my work), the whole story rang false to me. Yet, it was true: it is true.[34]

Through a retrospective awareness, the feeling of her testimony's inadequacy to the truth of facts is brought back to the *carabiniere*'s questioning, which from the reader's perspective immediately appears blatantly inappropriate and which narrator in turn contextualises within a long-term historical perspective:

[30] Mira, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60.
[31] Ivi, p. 61.
[32] Ivi, p. 72.
[33] Ivi, p. 85.
[34] Ivi, p. 83.

> Why did it ring false to me? Maybe now I know. Women have been tried for witchcraft for hundred years […]. For witches, there was the drowning proof […]. Too bad that to be proclaimed innocent [the woman] had to die. That's what comes to my mind when I think of that day at the police-station. I was feeling as guilty as someone who didn't drown and tries to tell an attempted drowning. And yet I was innocent. Maybe it was because I was still floating. Maybe my sense of guilt lay there, in that ancient legacy, in a culture that without knowing still bears the marks of those deaths.[35]

Reproducing this internalized cultural structure, the *carabiniere* transforms what was meant to be an official report into an unformal face-to-face conversation, where he unwittingly reaffirms the defensive position in which a woman reporting a rape is systematically placed: he "kindly" offers a series of "good advices"[36] – find false witnesses, or a doctor willing to produce a false certificate of injuries or PTSD – and then he "kindly" invites her to dinner, forgetting the boundaries between offering support and taking advantage of the victim's vulnerable position. "He was a nice person, the *carabiniere*. Kind", but that night, after receiving his invitation from the number that she had registered as "kind *carabiniere*", "I locked myself in the bathroom and I pounded my legs so long that blood came out",[37] say the concluding lines of a chapter significantly called "*Quis custodiet custodes?*", "Who will guard the guards themselves?".

The following chapter contains a third act of testimony, addressed this time to that same "invisible brother" to whom is addressed the text itself. "I saw you in front of the house with G. You are chatting next to your motorbikes. […] *You look like brothers*. That's what I think. My brother and my rapist look like bothers. Unbearable", (89) hence the urgency to call him to witness of her rape. "Do you want to know what he did to me? HE RAPED ME, that's what he did": the truth blows up, "like a bubo of pus", "right into your face".[38] Testimonies, writes Herman, have both "a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial".[39] Signalled by the chapter's title, "Confession", the private dimension of the brother's complicity with her rapist functions here as a repetition of trauma itself, "a violence inside the violence"[40] which configurates the text itself as a deferred answer to his denied witnessing.

Here, the testimony's private dimension re-enacts a process of facing loss, revolving around the idea of an "eternal brother", "an almost abstract concept, who is not me and is not you either":[41] the loss of a brother who now exists only in the childhood memories punctually evoked by the narrative and which is, at the same the loss of what the narrator herself has been in that shared space. Testimony, writes Laub is "dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds. The one that was brutally destroyed […] by trauma, and the one that is – that are different and always remain so".[42] In order to "live through" that loss and eventually acknowledge it, the text sticks here to that "abstract idea" of brother, which mediates between the two worlds, offering perhaps a "thread of humanity" which, perhaps, "can save me".[43] If within this private dimension the brother's betrayal can be forgiven – "I forgive you, even if you didn't apologize. You went away, satisfied

[35] Ivi, pp. 83-84.
[36] Ivi, p. 85.
[37] Ivi, p. 88.
[38] Ivi, p. 93.
[39] Herman, *op. cit.*, p.181.
[40] Mira, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
[41] Ivi, p. 153.
[42] Felman, Laub, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
[43] Mira, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

with your truth which was his truth. You abandoned me"[44] – the necessary interaction of private and public dimension must bring the subject to the awareness of her own survival strength and, eventually, to the acknowledgment of his direct responsibility in the system of patriarchal violence.

This process of personal and collective awareness passes here through the acknowledgment of the victim's repressed anger, transforming the post-traumatic implosion of the suffered violence into the claim of a "resistant" anger, conceived as a form of justified violence: "Imagine, imagine for a moment how beautiful, and just, and almost glorious it would be to direct anger towards its sender, for once. Defying the gravity force. From the oppressed to the oppressor".[45] Eventually "embraced and nurtured"[46], that anger manifests itself through a last act of testimony, narrated in a chapter significantly called "Liberation", where the narrator writes in red spray on the wall of the perpetrator's house the word "RAPIST" under his name, publicly stating the truth uselessly repeated through all her attempted acts of testimony. The victim's isolation that, since the choice of her testimony's primary witness, permeates the whole narrative gives way here to the inscription of her own story within a collective struggle: "The words appear as if someone else were writing them, some other woman, all of them, me and the others – the murdered ones, the beaten, the raped, the unavenged, the silenced – all of them and none, and me again".[47] Finally bringing the recovery process into a network of connections that is entirely absent from the narrative, the testimony can acknowledge that the X of trauma's ultimate otherness hasn't been solved, and maybe it never will. Thus, abandoning the unknown territory of trauma, the narrative turns to its primary addressee, bidding farewell to the "eternal brother" to whom "I owe […] a handful memories, […] the kind of memories that when the night is dark you can hold in your hand and warm you with their scent of happiness, source and soul of the most genuine hope": "For these memories, I thank you: I would not and could not do otherwise. But it's too late now, and I can't keep denying to you – to myself – something else. That it's to you, to you indeed, that I owe the clearest example of what betrayal is".[48] The acknowledgment of the loss is significantly followed by a final appeal of the testimony to its addressee, no longer conceived as the "eternal brother", but as a male subject who has been complicit in the violence of a patriarchal system and who "in spite of all, is still in my heart": "Whose side are you on? Yes, I'm asking you. The brother who is still in my heart, in spite of all. You, brother, whose side are you on? […] Now, brother, it's up to you. It's up to you. If you will, if you have the courage it takes to break an omertous and gratuitously violent silence. Otherwise, we'll do without. Yours, but mine first, V.".[49] Now, behind the "you" of the ambivalent primary addressee, explicitly appears the "you" addressing the testimony to its reader, the "other" which is the actual locus of the text's witnessing encounter:

> Thanks to those who have stayed with me so far. You, reader, are at the moment the most important human being I have ever related to, and for that I thank you from the deepest point

[44] Ivi, p.105.
[45] Ivi, p.177.
[46] Ivi, p.176.
[47] Ivi, p.178.
[48] Ivi, p.183.
[49] Ivi, pp.185-186. "Now, brother, it's up to *you* ["*tu"*] It's up to *you* ["*voi*"]. If *you* ["*voi*"] will, if *you* ["*voi*"] have the courage it takes to break an omertous and gratuitously violent silence": in Italian, the text modifies the person it is addressed to, moving from "*tu*", a second person singularwhich indicates the brother, to "*voi*", a second person plural which indicates to a plurality of male subjects.

> of my heart. For what it's worth. Which, perhaps, is nothing. A nothingness that maybe was for you true listening and suspension of judgement, which is therefore a whole for me, today.[50]

3. Writing Trauma

Recent findings in neuroscience have shown that traumatic memories are embodied and inextricably integrated with the affective dimensions of associated emotional responses: recollection is *per se* an attenuated form of re-enactment, and traumatic memories are unreconcilable embodied traces of memory whose emotional profile cannot be overridden, defying the abstract semantic categories we normally use to sort, organize and manipulate memory. "Situation models for narrative comprehension", writes Seeley, "show us that these same neurobiological processes underwrite narrative understanding", suggesting that "literary texts can be used as a resource for representing, re-enacting, and understanding traumatic experience".[51] It has also been demonstrated that the reading of literary texts is a means of enhancing empathic abilities, understood as the mentalizing dimension allowing to understand what others are thinking and feeling.[52] The idea that our responses to narrative involve forms of embodied simulation, in the sense that they are physically realized in the reader's brain and body, has been the object of recent researches in cognitive literary studies. "Enactive imagery", writes Anežca Kužmičová, "amounts to a vicarious experiencing proper of the referential contents of a given passage", where "the reader may adopt the character's first-person sensorimotor experience so closely as to feel what the character feels in the storyworld".[53] Even in absence of direct perception, argues Pierre-Louis Patoine, an immersive reading can actually elicit the somatic sensations described by the text, mobilizing and combining different sensory modalities as well as a set of related affective aspects.[54] Offering an unmediated access to the characters' feelings and the text's meaning, the use of multimodal enactive images is indeed, I believe, a resource for representing, re-enacting, and understanding traumatic experience.

"Woman is a jug: he who breaks her gets her, says my mother":[55] the proverbial image that opens Ardone's novel immediately crystallises women's position in the patriarchal Sicilian society, embodying it in a metaphorical image of women's body as a frail object that must be kept intact in order to be handled to its legitimate owner. This image shapes Oliva's matter-of-fact narrative of her upbringing, presented as a list of things that her brother can do and, implicitly, she cannot do – "walking the village streets in the sun and in the dark, wearing shorts, talking with males and females of all ages, […] running to the beach and bathe. I am in favour of sea bathing".[56] Conveyed through one of those childish expressions that characterise the first part of the narrative, the frustration of not being allowed to do any of these things is followed by the image of the jug, this time applied to the

[50] Ivi, p. 188.
[51] William P. Seeley, *Neuroscience, Narrative and Emotion Regulation*, in Kurtz (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 153-166, p. 159.
[52] Maria Chiara Pino, Monica Mazza, *The Use of Literary Fiction to Promote Mentalizing Ability,* «PLoS ONE», 11, 8, 2016, pp. 1-14.
[53] Agnežca Kužmičovna, *Literary Narrative and Mental Imagery: A View from Embodied Cognition*, «Style», 48, 3, 2014, pp. 275-293, pp. 282-283.
[54] Pierre-Louis Patoine, *Representation and Immersion. The Embodied Meaning of Literature*, «Gestalt Theory», 41, 2, 2019, pp. 201-215, p. 205.
[55] Denaro, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[56] *Ibid*.

brother's male body: "He is not a jug. He doesn't break. And if he breaks, he can be put back together".[57] Rules and prohibitions become even stricter when the first menstruation – colloquially called "*il marchese*" ("the marquis") – marks the beginning of womanhood, a major event that immediately appears as a looming catastrophe in Oliva's narrative: "Don't walk alone. Don't wear skirts over the knees. Don't speak privately with men", are "the *marquis* rules", and "I am not in favour of the marquis".[58] The first image of the dreaded "marquis" is that of a red stained heap of rags in a washbowl, that "looked like the body of a little moribund animal",[59] announcing the passage towards womanhood as a traumatic entry into a threatening space of violence: "'One day it will be your turn', said […] my mother and I began to pray that that day would never come".[60]

Oliva's narrative of her first menstruation symbolically coincides with the first approach of the young man who would later rape her. In this episode, the reworked image of blood expands the feeling of fear towards a wider and more complex area of meanings.

> The village was sunshine yellow, everything boiling hot. I walked along the wall to catch the little shadow that was on the street. The world seemed empty. I saw him at the end of the street, before the fork to the square. […] He was all dressed in white and when he noticed me on the other side of the square he curtsied. I walked towards him at a brisk pace, without looking him in the face. He reached into his pocket, pulled out an orange and began to peel off its skin. He poked his fingers between the segments and split the fruit in half, showing its red.[61]

"The vividness of spatial imagery, argues Kuzmičová, is one key element in eliciting the readers' immersion into the story-world", and a "higher degree of spatial vividness […] is achieved when certain forms of human bodily movement are rendered in the narrative", namely simple and "dynamically veracious" bodily actions, triggering a "first-person, *enactive* process of sensorimotor simulation/resonance".[62] Here, the bodily movements that describe Oliva and the young man's encounter elicit the reader's immersive perception of the whole scene, where the young man allusively erotic gestures and the set of bodily sensations and emotions that they produce in Oliva elaborate around the image of the red opened orange.

> 'Take it, it's sweet', he said, stretching his arm as if to grab me. I turned around, but there was no one in the street, just me and him. He drew the orange to his face. 'It cools your mouth, see? Like this.' He sunked his teeth and tongue into one half of the fruit, sucking it until only the white part was left under the skin. 'This is for you', he said, offering me the other half. I took the fruit in my hand: it was still warm from his fingers and moist with juice. The acrid smell stung my nostrils, I was nauseated and at the same time I felt a twinge in the lower part of my womb.[63]

[57] *Ibid*.
[58] Ivi, p. 61.
[59] Ivi, p. 8.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] Ivi, p. 55.
[62] Kuzmičová, *Presence in the reading of literary narrative: A case for motor enactment*, «Semiotica», 189, 1/4, 2012, pp. 23-48, pp. 24-25.
[63] Denaro, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

The nauseous feeling and stabbing pain in Oliva's womb are the signs announcing her first menstruation, but they are perceived here, both by Oliva and the reader, as an ambivalent bodily response to the young man's seduction:

> He was looking at me as if I had something beautiful in the middle of my face […], and I felt fear. To drive it away, I began to spell out in my mind the Latin first declension […]. *Rosa, rosae, rosae, rosam, rosa, rosa*, I kept chanting to myself, until he had taken a step forward and was so close that I could smell the scent of the jasmine flower resting behind his ear. – *Rosae, rosarum, rosis,* – I shouted loudly […] and stretched the hand that was holding the orange, to keep him away.[64]

Mingling within the jasmine's smell, fear and excitement are addressed through the rhythm of Oliva's defensive chanting, embodied in another flower image. The scene closes with Oliva throwing the orange at him – "the red of pulp trickling down the white of his trousers"– and running away "with frightened blood", followed by his laughter. In the following chapter, the shocking discovery that the blood trickling down her legs is not from a wound, but is instead her menstrual blood, echoes the image of the red orange pulp on the young man's white trousers and introduces the explicit expression of guilt associated to the excitement aroused by the young man's seduction: "It's my fault, I thought. It's because of the orange, […] because of those eyes that looked at me, scrutinising me until they got under my clothes, because of that voice that was speaking to me".[65] Women are jugs, and entering womanhood means entering a dangerous space where their body doesn't belong to them anymore and is transformed into an object threatened as much by legitimated male desire as by its own unacknowledged desire.

The narrative of women's oppression in Oliva's everyday life is punctuated by a series of episodes where the use of multimodal enactive images directly conveys the violence of a patriarchal system entirely internalized by women themselves. The feminine ritual of the rosary's recitation offers here a poignant expression of the traumatic force that even common, everyday events can take on in this context. "Powerful Virgin, pray for us. Benevolent Virgin, pray for us. Faithful Virgin, pray for us":[66] the prayer sounds like an accusation directly addressed to Oliva through its rhythm, "slapping me", and through the women's lips, "protruding every time they pronounced the word 'virgin'". Suddenly, the forced immobility of the prayer's recitation becomes unbearable: "the bench became so uncomfortable that I could no longer seat and I sprang to my feet. The litany ceased for a moment. They all looked at me. […]. My flesh curled. 'I'm not a broken jug!' I screamed. I could say no more, I couldn't breathe in that room". Positing herself outside the feminine community, Oliva sees the women's identical faces – "same clothes, same hairstyle, same way of walking always along the walls, same eyes, reduced to two slits from always being in the indoor darkness".[67] "I am different", she had said in a preceding passage, "I am Oliva Denaro, but I am also them. […] I am my mother, and one day I will become like her without even knowing it".[68] Here, the narrative of Oliva's instinctive reaction of rebellion is marked by the bodily movements that break the prayer's forced stillness, enactively conveying her feeling of liberation from the oppressive context where she is forced to live: "I walked slowly towards the door, opened it and the sun hit my face. The pleading voices

[64] Ivi, p. 56.
[65] Ivi, p. 57.
[66] Ivi, p. 50.
[67] Ivi, p. 51.
[68] Ivi, p. 41.

behind me resumed monotonously. Queen of the family, pray for us. Queen of peace, pray for us. Pray for us, I repeated in a low voice, crossed myself, slammed the door and started to run. Very fast".[69] Outside, running through the village streets, the sound and words of the prayer's litany keep following her, like "a swarm of wasps attacking me": "words are weapons", and "that's why I run, because standing still the sting hurts more". Evoking the image of her shamed teacher, Oliva now imagines her running far away from the village and, maybe, walking freely amidst the traffic of a big city, with loose hair and a red painted mouth: "In my fantasy she was finally walking alone, and no man stopped to point or whistle at her. Who knows if the wasps' stings still burnt?"[70]

Oliva's rape is here the culminating point of the systemic abuse and violence that make women jugs in the hands of their male owners and the sexual violence is thus brought back to a childhood episode, significantly recalled for the first time after the narrative of the rapist's first approach. The sense of physical restriction and pain which marks the narrative of rape are thus conveyed through the parallel multimodal images of the ear-piercing, a compulsory rite of passage that had been forced on Oliva by her mother:

> The pain of back then blends with the pain of now: the heat of his limbs weighting on mine and the anaesthetic freeze on my right ear, the stinging smell of alcohol and that of his sweat, the bottle stopper behind my lobe and the pillow that he pushes behind my back, his hands grasping me, like those of my mother. […] Shut up and wait, I say to myself, shut up and wait. It stings and then the pain goes away. But the needle pushes vigorously and makes its way, lacerating and wounding.[71]

Immobilised and broken by pain, Oliva's body is perceived as a stranger to herself, while the rapist's body sifts through it, "piece by piece, in order to bring out his own pleasure". "I am not my own master anymore. Maybe I never was", says Oliva, once again bringing rape into a broader context of misogynist violence, where since childhood female bodies are alienated and deprived of the freedom and desires that remain a male prerogative. At the centre of this network of multimodal images, the image of blood returns here as the leitmotif of Oliva's journey through the violence of womanhood, accompanied by an implicit to image of the breaking jug: "A long, sharp pain breaks me and I don't know where to hold to keep myself from shattering, and so I cling to him with all the strength I have, because he is alive and I'm dying, I feel the blood gushing out of me, dripping onto my skin and on the white cloth. Then all my senses go out, one by one, and I no longer feel anything. […] I have become a woman by force".[72]

In Mira's memoir the narrative of rape opens up with the description of the specific social and cultural context where the violence takes place: a middle-class Roman neighbourhood and a private catholic high-school, with a relevant component of students belonging to fascist organizations. The title of the chapter is "*Cinghiamattanza*", which is in fact the title of a fascist song translatable as "Belt slaughter", resounding from inside the house where the narrator's school-mates are celebrating their graduation: "*Push your way into the stadium /push your way into the arena /push your way into life / Push, push!*".[73] The narrator ironically makes clear her position of critical distance, not just within the present time of narration, but also at the time of the narrated facts – "I don't push my way into

[69] Ivi, p. 51.
[70] Ivi, p. 52.
[71] Ivi, p. 158.
[72] Ivi, p. 159.
[73] Mira, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Fabio's house. Instead, I politely ring the bell, almost regretting to be here".[74] Having entered the house, she observes "these pubertal males with shaved heads and tight jeans" performing the song's dance: "*First: I take off my belt!* […] *Two: the dance begins!* […] *Three: I aim. Four: BELTSLAUGHTER!* Apotheosis. Beltslaughter: the guys start belting each other. They seem to be having great fun […]. The sound of leather suggests a group sadomasochistic ritual".[75] If in Ardone's novel rape finds its place within the well-known context of a traditional patriarchal society whose violence is made clear since the beginning of the narrative, here it functions instead as the traumatic event revealing a context of submerged violence that finds its roots in the legacy of fascist mentality, directly made available to the reader through the words of the song and the gestures of the dance. "*Push your way into the stadium, push your way into the arena!* / *Push your way into life, push, push!*", the song's words blare again after the rape:

> Push your way into women, doesn't it say that? […] 'It's a nightmare', I whisper. I repeat it two, three times. I don't know if alcohol is speaking, or if it's me. I don't know if I dreamt it all. I don't know when it will end. I'd like to find the words, but I don't know them. Rape? That's the word I'm looking for. But it's too strong, and I've never felt weaker that this. *Push your way into the arena, push your way into life, push, push*…[76]

Within the song's frame, the narrator records the gestures and sensations that mark the transition from consent to violence:

> The truth is that this is starting to make me sick. His touch is too hasty, his breath too heavy. So, when he rudely lifts my dress and unbuttons his jeans I say no. 'No.' The tone of my voice is sharp. Sure. Serious. "Come on…", he whispers […]. "I don't feel like it", I insist, so that he understands, "I'm drunk" […] "Let's stop talking, *shhh*", he says, then he licks my earlobe. I shudder, but it's not the right kind of shiver It's not pleasure, it's fear. […] There is a little struggle. I don't understand if he's joking or not. It's weird: I'm not joking, but I push him away feebly, as if I was joking – weak, too weak. As in those nightmares where your legs are weak. He seems to be joking, but he controls his strength so that I don't run away or scream. Eventually, however, he locks me on the bed and it's at that point that I realise that he's serious. That he's not joking either.[77]

As in Ardone's novel, the narrative of rape resorts to the memory of another violence, emanating from the same system of patriarchal abuse, through which the text manages to convey the victim's reaction of freezing:

> Then, instinctively, I give up. I paralyse, literally. I feel like when I was a child and my father used to drink, and he would get mad at us, and there was this man I didn't know, smashing everything, who wasn't my father, and the only thing I could do was to pretend I did not exist and hope it would pass soon. I am again that little girl. A little animal trying to escape the emergency by disappearing, camouflaging itself.[78]

The image of blood on the white sheet also returns here. Through it, the narrative expresses the feel of guilt of the victim, instinctively searching for a proof of her innocence:

[74] Ivi, p. 29.
[75] Ivi, pp. 30-31.
[76] Ivi, p. 45.
[77] Ivi, pp. 36-37.
[78] Ivi, p. 37.

> I feel dump under me. I look at the bed […]. As a flower, a big very red poppy, a stain of blood blossomed on the bed sheet, testifying a precise will. The same will that I had repeatedly expressed in words. In a state of trance, I touch that blood – my blood – with a finger. If there's blood, there has been fight. I admire the way my body tried to resist more than me.[79]

The image is significantly preceded by a direct appeal to the brother who didn't believe her, urging him to visualize the proof of her denied consent: "I look at the bed. (Look at it, you too. Look at it because here, on this sheet, there is something that you won't forget. Here is the proof that my words weren't just words; that a no is sometimes much more than a word. It is a barrier. A resistance. […])".[80]

"Then, all my senses go out, one by one, and I no longer feel anything",[81] says Oliva describing the rape's immediate aftermath; "Now, at that precise moment, I don't feel anything",[82] says here the narrator. If in Ardone's novel the post-traumatic emotional numbness and silence is mostly eluded by a narrative fundamentally focusing on the victim's repairing process, here the trauma's after-effects – "the victory of silence over noise, but above all of nothing over everything"[83] – are the main object of the narrative. "Nothing", however, is something "difficult to explain, maybe boring", and the text, which is at the same time an account of the victim's post-traumatic experience and the reparative means that enables her to transform it, must find a way to bring out from that "nothing" words, feelings and meaning – "as a good punk song says, 'we have truer tears than a well told story'": "This is my bad story badly told: the after-effects of my rape, here they are".[84] The identification of the text's primary addressee with the brother who, "in spite of all, is still in my heart", is in this sense a crucial element, embodying the narrative's appeal to the reader's empathetic understanding. "You left me sink in that cold sea", says to him the narrator, "full of ice that goes into your throat and won't let you speak because you're too busy trying not to die". Transforming the victim's post-traumatic silence and emotional freezing into the bodily sensations of a drowning person, the image conveys the narrator's personal and then furtherly expands it towards its contextualisation. In that cold sea there is an iceberg – "if you could only open your eyes, you would see it" – against which "it is very difficult not to crash" and drown, because it is submerged and "everywhere. As everywhere is male violence".[85]

Contextualised throughout the whole narrative within a chauvinist society that under its democratic institutions justifies the fascist "theory and practice of the survival of the fittest",[86] rape finds a heightened emotional expression in one of the text's last chapters, within an episode that resumes the previous image of the victim as a little animal trying to survive and directly assimilates it to the animal dynamics of prey and predator. Observed by the narrator, a big dog is dragging a rabbit on the roadside, "playing with it", sticking its teeth in the rabbit's fur and tossing it. The dog's movements, the small blood puddle forming on the ground, and the "horrible, piercing, suffering sound" of the rabbit's

[79] Ivi, p. 39.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] Denaro, *op. cit.*, p.159.
[82] Mira, *op. cit.*, p.42.
[83] Ivi, p. 51.
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] Ivi, p. 105.
[86] Ivi, p. 106.

screaming convey here the pain that the narrative of rape couldn't express, "pain in its clearest, least misunderstandable form". The societal complicity with the rapist's violence, repeatedly stressed throughout the narrative, also finds here a direct affective representation in the image of the dog's owner, laughing and congratulating it for its predatory abilities.[87] These images are then furtherly elaborated through the narrator's reactions to the scene, explicitly identifying her with the female rabbit that she saves from dog's fangs and calls Hope: "It seemed to me that it was the projection of the best part of me, the embodiment of my child soul, so naked, wounded, tattered and yet a little patched up. Still having some hope".[88] The following death of the rabbit, despite the loving care, significantly bring us towards the narrative of a second violence suffered by the narrator, which marks the death of that wounded child soul who seemed to have some hope of healing. Sexually blackmailed by the director of the newspaper where she works, the narrator tells us, in a chapter called "She-Wolf", her attempt to adapt to the patriarchy's animal law, transforming herself from prey into predator: "If society must rape me", she can bend to blackmail and "tell myself that I'm using him".[89] At the end of the day, however, she ends up realising that this adaptive strategy doesn't work: "I look at my nails: there's blood underneath. It's not his, but mine. I had them stuck in the flesh of my hands the whole time and I didn't even notice. I'm the only she-wolf who bites herself and not others".[90] Bringing with it the absolute desperation in the face of an endless repetition of violence and guilt – "I don't deserve anything anymore. […] I'm the one who's asking for it. You were right, maybe, not to be on my side for the rape thing. […] I'm the one who is wrong. I'm a whore. I don't even want this job anymore, I just want all this to end. I want life to end. Because this life is not a life"[91] – the she-wolf image, however, also introduces, the repairing process contained in the last chapters of the narrative: "What can I say? A she-wolf is a she-wolf. It may be that there was a full moon. It may be that it was me who was full. Full of anger, full of poison, and instead of silencing it, […] I embraced it, nurtured it",[92] not in order to adapt and reproduce the patriarchy's law of the fittest, but to transform the prey's anger into a collective struggle of resistance.

The appeal to the reader's empathetic understanding is not limited here to the use of multimodal narrative images that address the text's referential contents. Another set of mental images offered by the text proceeds in fact from an opposite strategy of deconstruction of the words' referents, defamiliarized through their transformation into visual and acoustic images which convey what the narrative language might be unable to say. "The only thing that a woman who has been raped will say to you – the only thing, before losing her gaze in the void, trying to dig into the repressed, where it hurts – is that, when it happens, you break into a thousand pieces",[93] says the narrator after the narrative of her rape. These words – "a thousand pieces" – give shape to an X that occupies an entire page, providing the reader with a visual image which embodies the breaking pain in the fragmentation of the words, whose scattered pieces are recomposed in the very sign of trauma's unknown. Around that X the narrative moves, searching for a way to bring out of from its key-words the feelings and meaning that they cannot convey. The word "*stupro*" ("rape"), that the narrator couldn't bring herself to pronounce immediately after the suffered violence

[87] Ivi, p. 154.
[88] Ivi, p. 155.
[89] Ivi, p. 174.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] Ivi, pp. 174-175.
[92] Ivi, p. 176.
[93] Ivi, p. 40.

("too strong"), is thus decomposed into its acoustic image, from which are brought out the victim's feelings of guilt and shame:

> *Stupro*. The word itself is unpleasant, it sounds like an invitation not to pronounce it: *s-t-u-p-r-o*. It has a strong sound, maybe too strong – it feels like a laceration. And there's that *tu* ["you"] in the middle, s-tu-pro.; that *tu* ["you"] that looks like a pointed finger and you never know, while you say it, if you're pointing it towards another or towards yourself.[94]

That "invitation not to pronounce it" is successively resumed and identified with another word, "taboo": "Taboo. Taboo. Listen to it: it has the sound of an archaic word. Ancient. Like a brick on which rest thousands of years of civilization. It evokes the sound of drums; public executions in the streets, dogmas, stonings, bonfires".[95] Bringing out from the acoustic image of the word the multimodal images of patriarchy's archaic violence, the text deconstructs again the societal discourse which is at the origin of the victim's guilt, shame and silence. This same kind of images, which enactively contextualise the victim's guilt within thousands of years of patriarchy, are also used in another passage, where they are however more traditionally brought out from the text's referential contents:

> I have a black hole inside my stomach. That's what I feel. Eve who bit the apple, the witches burning of hangover, a guilt that I shouldn't have because it's not my fault, but nobody ever told me and no one will ever tell me, so here it is, the ancestral guilt revelling inside my stomach along with Eve and all the other witches in the hell of my nameless shame. A hell like an unknown. Like the X in an unsolvable equation.[96]

Moving on the margins of that unknown, the text desperately attempts to bring out from its own narrative and from the very words that compose it the images that may convey a direct affective understanding, in the full awareness, however, that the equation cannot be solved and that the narrative itself necessarily configurates as a struggle with language which cannot be entirely won.

[94] Ivi, p. 25.
[95] Ivi, p. 108.
[96] Ivi, p. 53.