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**So this is a Man
Renegotiating Italian Masculinity Through Liminality**

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Dedication

For my family and B. whose love, support, and inspiration have carried me through every step of this report.

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Abstract

So this is a Man Renegotiating Italian Masculinity Through Liminality

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In Italy, the period directly following World War II was marked by confusion and turbulence as the people struggled to reconstruct both the ideological and physical infrastructure of the nation. While much study has been dedicated to the evolution of femininity and the figure of the woman in this particular period, comparatively little has been written on the refashioning of masculinity in the texts produced in the period between 1940 and 1955. After the fall of the Fascist Regime, Italian masculinity undergoes a drastic transformation as the generation of young men born and raised under the tutelage of Mussolini's reign attempt to separate themselves from the now-tainted codes of conduct governing male behavior. This report analyzes the renegotiation of Italian masculinity in G. Silvano Spinetti's non-fictional account *Difesa di una generazione (scritti e appunti)*, Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Beppe Fenoglio's short story "Gli inizi del partigiano Raoul" and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita*. These works, written and published in the postwar period, manipulate the

marginality and privation experienced by the Italian population during the war and postwar period into a liminal state brimming with revolutionary potentiality. The protagonists of these texts (both fictional and non-fictional), isolated from the larger social context and deprived of individual identity, property and privilege, circumvent their polluted patriarchal lines in favor of an alternative ideological patriarchy. While Spinetti, Calvino and Fenoglio's works advance their liminal narratives as a means of creating an emblematic Italian man capable of rejoining the generative discourse, Pasolini's text renounces such a progressive view. In *Ragazzi di vita*, the only possibility for a masculine identity free of Fascism resides in a maintaining a perennial liminality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the twentieth century, Italian society undergoes a series of rapid transformations as two world wars and the advent of Fascism upset the already tenuous balance imposed by the unification of 1861.¹ The horrors of modern trench-warfare as well as episodes of widespread carpet bombings, executions, deportations, rape, imprisonment abroad, and civil war redefined the way Italians view both themselves and others.² With the gradual decline and fall of the Fascist Regime, Italy is thrown into a period of social and political confusion as the people struggle to rebuild both the physical and ideological infrastructure of the nation. In this post-war period, which comes to an end with the Economic Miracle of the 1950s, Italian masculinity undergoes a marked transformation from that constructed under the tutelage of Fascism.³

During the “ventennio fascista” the Italian male becomes synonymous with the virile, dynamic *pater-familias* embodied in the literary and cinematic works created under the guidance of the Fascist Party.⁴ This creation of a specific ideal of masculinity played an intrinsic role in the propagation and imposition of Fascist ideology under the Fascist Regime of Benito Mussolini.⁵ After the fall of Fascism, however, Italian men must

1 John Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 11. As Foot briefly explains “Italy has experienced a series of high- and low-level civil wars since unification...The early unification period was marked by intense internal strife and the army and martial law were used to repress social rebellion.”

2 In *Italy's Divided Memory* John Foot discusses the ambiguous terminology associated with resistance movements during World War II. While the term “La Resistenza” was often used after the war by members of the Communist and other left leaning political parties, members of the right leaning parties often referred to battles between the *squadristi* and the partisans as civil wars.

3 For an overview of the Economic Miracle see Jon Cohen, *Growth of the Italian Economy, 1920-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The beginning of the “Economic Miracle” can be loosely dated to the mid 1950s with 1955 often representing a threshold between the poverty of the immediate postwar period and the period of relative economic stability that followed.

4 “Il ventennio fascista” is the term often used within both popular and historical discourse to encompass the period of fascist rule that ran from approximately 1922 (“year zero”) to 1945.

5 For an extensive analysis of the place of masculinity in fascist propaganda see Anthony L. Cardoza, *Benito Mussolini: The First Fascist* (New York: Pearson Longman 2006).

divorce themselves from its legacy of masculinity in order to create a place for themselves in the new anti-fascist context; the conception of masculinity thus moves from a concrete Mussolinian code of conduct to a much more fluid one.⁶

This separation is achieved primarily through the construction of a series of alternative, and often contrasting, depictions of individual and national identity during the war and the immediate postwar period.⁷ The period between 1940 and 1955 is heavily marked by the emergence of a younger generation of writers raised under the tutelage of the Fascist Regime.⁸ The works produced by this generation that came to maturity during, and directly after Fascism, offer insight into the renegotiation of Italian masculinity because they act as microhistories; they enable their creators to rewrite the patriarchal lineage of the emblematic Italian man as well as their own role within the larger social context. Writers such as G. Silvano Spinetti, Italo Calvino, Beppe Fenoglio and Pier Paolo Pasolini, as well as others, respond directly to the liminality of postwar conditions through the creation of narrative liminal spaces.⁹ The protagonists of these spaces (both fictional and non-fictional), separated from the larger social context and deprived of identity, property and privilege, refashion their identities through the detached contemplation of their communities. It is through this state that they are able to subvert the tainted legacy of their upbringings in order to propose an alternative form of social

6 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Unmaking the fascist man," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 336-365. Ben-Ghiat explores this fluidity in several films produced in the postwar period.

7 For an extensive analysis of the creation of different myths surrounding the Resistance see Romolo Gobbi, *Il mito della Resistenza* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1992).

8 Alberto Azor-Rosa, *Storia europea della letteratura italiana III. La letteratura della nazione* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 2009), 384-386. The period between 1943 and 1955 is often viewed as one in which literary output was primarily concerned with political engagement.

9 Ben-Ghiat, "Unmaking the fascist man," 337. The postwar condition was in and of itself a liminal state, particularly because it was the threshold to the political and cultural change brought by the Economic Miracle. The privation, loss of concrete social identity and the widespread destruction of personal property united the Italian people and forced them to reevaluate the values and structures of their society. In her essay Ben-Ghiat defines the postwar period as a "cultural interregnum" (or extended transition period) that redefined the Italian conceptions of history and gender.

puberty. This state also allows the predominantly male protagonists to create homosocial environments in which their masculinity need not be defined through a contrast with the rapidly evolving “modern woman,” but (as Ben-Ghiat suggests) “in relation to other men as these are perceived and presented in everyday life and public discourse.”¹⁰ G. Silvano Spinetti’s autobiographical account *Difesa di una generazione* (1948), Italo Calvino’s novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947) and Beppe Fenoglio’s short story “Gli Inizi del Partigiano Raoul” (1952) depict various carefully constructed states of liminality for the purpose of producing emblematic male figures who embody an ideological patriarchy entirely divorced from that of the final expression of the Fascist Regime.¹¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Ragazzi di Vita* (1955) depicts a similar environment with an altogether different purpose; his particular construction of the sub-proletarian liminal state undermines Spinetti, Calvino and Fenoglio’s narratives through an evocative disavowal of the possibility for a new Italian nation free of the pervasive corruption of fascist ideology. An analysis of these works can help shed light not only on the changing literary landscape of 20th century Italy, but also on the struggle of an entire generation of men to distance themselves from one of the most traumatic experiences of recent history and reclaim their place in society.

¹⁰ Ibid., 338.

¹¹ For the purpose of this report the term ideology will generally be used to indicate a system of ideals shared by a group of individuals. Only with reference to fascist ideology will it comprehend the specific social and political mechanisms used by the Fascist Regime to enforce particular behavioral patterns and worldviews.

Chapter 2: The Fascist Man Made and Unmade

The figure of the ideal fascist man proposed during the “ventennio fascista” was constructed largely in response to the Italian experience of World War I. The Great War, which resulted in the death of nearly 600,000 Italians, the injury of 450,000 and the desertion of 150,000 left the peninsula in a state of chaos and disillusionment.¹² For years after the end of the war, evidence of the conflict permeated almost every aspect of Italian society.¹³ “What did we see in that immediate postwar time? We saw excessive luxury and misery, “sharks” and the unemployed, the processions, the strikes...” writes G. Silvano Spinetti in his biographical account *Difesa di un generazione*, “We told ourselves that things were going badly and that our victory had been mutilated.”¹⁴ Spinetti’s description of the years following World War I— an experience to which he later attributes his decision to join the fascist party—is emblematic of the morale of the Italian nation during the interwar period as Italians struggled to come to terms with the devastating nature of their victory. The creation of alternate, and often contrasting, “official histories” by opposing political parties further complicated public and personal memories of World War I.¹⁵ In many ways, the forceful imposition of Fascism and its own, particularly compelling memory of the war offered an alternative to this confusion by recasting the mutilated Italian nation as a nation of heroes.¹⁶

¹² Foot, *Italy’s Divided Memory*, 32-33.

¹³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴ “Cosa vedemmo in quel tempo di immediato dopoguerra? Vedemmo il lusso smodato e la miseria, I <<pescecani>> e i disoccupati, i comizi, I cortei, gli scioperi... Ci si disse che le cose andavano male e che la vittoria era stata <<mutilata>>.” G. Silvano Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione: scritti e appunti* (Roma: Organizzazione Editoriale Tipografica, 1948), 17.

¹⁵ Foot, *Italy’s Divided Memory*, 31-53.

¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

The creation of a new masculine ideal is intrinsic to this recasting of national identity.¹⁷ Within modern Italian history, no other time period so explicitly conforms to Michel Foucault's argument on the power of official institutions in shaping gender and, consequently, individual identity.¹⁸ While *la nazione* (the nation) was often viewed as an intrinsically female entity, *lo stato* (the state) often assumed male characteristics, especially within the generative discourse. In order to accomplish its political aims, the fascist party had to reinterpret the wounded masculinity of the state, and consequently that of its citizens. The warlike nature of the individual, which for many had proven a source of shame and regret after the first collective experience of widespread trench warfare, was legitimized in fascist propaganda.¹⁹ The Italian male was encouraged to embrace his own violence and physicality. Physical prowess, demonstrated through athleticism and military service was highly praised, as was sexual virility and dominance within the familial structure.²⁰ These characteristics were part of a larger ideological discourse that valued patriarchal structures for their "intrinsic" connection to the glorious Italian past as epitomized by the Roman Empire. In his essay on the "Masculine Mystique: Antimodernism and Virility in Fascist Italy," Sandro Bellassai describes the stress on patriarchal continuity in the following terms:

17 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

18 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

19 Walter L. Adamson, "Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903-1922," *The American Historical Review* 95 no. 1 (1990): 360. Adamson offers a compelling analysis of the legitimization of violence by Benito Mussolini and the Fascist Party drawing particular attention to a speech delivered in Udine a month before the March on Rome: "'Violence,' he proclaims a few paragraphs later, 'is not immoral.' Insofar as it 'heals a cancerous situation, it is highly moral, sacrosanct, and necessary' [...] regenerative 'sacrosanct' violence—these are the essential elements of Mussolinian rhetoric on the eve of the March on Rome and they remain central for him through the final days of his regime."

20 Sandro Bellassai, "The Masculine Mystique: Antimodernism and Virility in Fascist Italy," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 314-335.

By explicitly establishing a continuity with the past, the regime assumed the historic mission to eradicate once and for all those ‘modern’ degenerations that, they argued, had carried the Italian and western man to the brink of irreversible catastrophe...The cure was implicit in the diagnosis. It consisted in preserving and even energetically reviving traditional—and therefore patriarchal—values on which public and private lives should be founded.²¹

This patriarchal lineage could be accessed through “salutary immersions” in nature and physical activities that reconnected the male individual with his natural propensities toward action, violence and dominance. Excessive contemplation was tantamount to impotence; the figure of the “inetto” found in works like *Senilità* by Italo Svevo is vilified and replaced by the dynamic man of action proposed by Futurism.²²

As one of the soldiers injured in the Great War and as a dynamic and compelling political figure, Benito Mussolini embodied this positive historical interpretation promoted by the Fascist party. In fact, during this period, the specific construction of the public persona of Benito Mussolini plays an integral role in the construction of the fascist ideal of masculinity.²³ As Anthony L. Cardoza notes “most historians still agree that the Duce was the principal architect, chief interpreter, and dominant figure of Italian Fascism.”²⁴ While Mussolini officially came to power in 1922, his specific contribution to the fascist masculine aesthetic can be traced to the first biography published on him after his break with the Socialist party in 1915 and in his own wartime diaries.²⁵ These early texts, as well as those that would follow, portrayed Mussolini as a heroic figure that worked his way from humble beginnings to a position of power and authority.²⁶ Through

21 Ibid., 315-16.

22 For an extensive analysis of the relationship between futurismo and fascism, as well as Mussolini’s personal relationship with the movement, see Angelo D’Orsi, *Il Futurismo tra Cultura e Politica: Reazione o Rivoluzione?* (Roma: Salerno, 2009).

23 Cardoza, *Benito Mussolini*.

24 Anthony L. Cardoza, “Recasting the Duce for the New Century,” *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005): 722.

25 Ibid., 723.

26 Ibid.

propagandistic forms, he was proposed to the younger generation of men as a model of physical and intellectual excellence on which to base their development.²⁷ To them and the rest of the Italian nation, Mussolini appeared as a war hero, a vigorous athlete, and a sexually virile but dedicated *pater-familias*.²⁸ Later texts would go as far to propose him as a “godlike” figure.²⁹

As Ruth Ben-Ghiat posits in her essay *Unmaking the Fascist Man*, the multitude of defeats inherent in the final chapter of Italy’s involvement in World War II — especially the collapse of Italy’s colonial empire in Africa, the emotional and political ramifications of civil war, and widespread misery—comported “an eclipse of the male icon Mussolini.”³⁰ Mussolini’s dreams of a new Roman empire and a nation of warriors disintegrated. “Poor, lowly and divided against itself,” postwar Italy was the very depiction of a nation “crushed by history,” not “the heir to the splendors of the centuries, to Classicism and the Renaissance.”³¹ The virile warrior embodied by Mussolini had little place during the extended period of reconstruction that followed the war. The fascist conception of masculinity, as well as many other aspects of fascist culture, carried within them the larger connotations of life under the final chapter of the Mussolini’s regime and were therefore eradicated or disavowed in the postwar context. The generation of men that came to maturity during and immediately after the Fascist Regime found itself bereft of an accepted code of masculine conduct.

In her book *Beyond the Latin Lover: Mastroianni, Masculinity and Italian Cinema*, Jacqueline Reich posits that the figure of the *inetto* gradually supplants that of

27 Cardoza, *Benito Mussolini*, 74.

28 Ibid., 73.

29 Cardoza, “Recasting the Duce,” 723.

30 Ben-Ghiat, “Unmaking the Fascist Man,” 337.

31 Keala Jewell, *The Poetics of History: Experimenting with Genre in Postwar Italy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), ix.

the virile *paterfamilias*.³² The new man proposed by cinema is an anti-hero, “a man at odds with and out of place in a rapidly changing political, social and sexual environment.”³³ This figure, embodied by the actor Marcello Mastroianni, is representative of the crisis of Italian masculinity. It may be argued, however, that while the *inetto* reappears after the fall of the Fascist Regime, especially within popular Italian cinema, it is not the only depiction of masculinity to emerge from the rubble of Fascism. The masculine identity crisis manifests in a variety of forms as three generations of men attempt to renegotiate their past with the rapidly emerging future.

³² see Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004).

³³ *Ibid.*, xii.

Chapter 3: Turner's Liminal State in Postwar Literature

In his 1961 book *Rites de Passage*, French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep described the crucial function of rites of passage in the construction of individual identity within a given social structure:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another...Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages, with similar ends and beginning: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death.³⁴

Van Gennep's work focuses extensively on the importance of "social puberty" as a distinct entity from physical puberty. This rite of passage inaugurates the true beginning of adulthood because it reflects the moment in which the individual is ready to assume an active role, not just with the regards to the creation of progeny, but also in the construction and governance of the larger social context.³⁵

In an article entitled "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal State in *Rites of Passage*" Victor Turner explores the state of transition inherently present between the rites of passage as defined by Van Gennep, highlighting the general characteristics of the liminal state.³⁶ For Turner, the rites that terminate the transition between phases such as adolescence and maturity are preceded by a period of distance on the part of the individual who enters a liminal state on the margins of society.³⁷ During this period, the "neophyte" becomes almost completely invisible in the eyes of his society and his state is

34 Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 3.

35 Ibid., 65.

36 The liminal state acts as a threshold within the transition from one state to another.

37 Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*, ed. Pamela A. Moro, James E. Myers and Arthur C. Lehmann, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 95.

marked by the total absence of property, identity and privilege.³⁸ It is a state in which the individual becomes particularly malleable and therefore ready to acquire the fundamental elements of his particular culture. This is achieved primarily through a deeper understanding of the *sacra*.³⁹ “Thus the communication of the *sacra* both teaches the neophytes how to think with some degree of abstraction about their cultural milieu and gives them the ultimate standards of reference,” notes Turner, and “[...]at the same time, it is believed to change their nature, transform them from one kind of human being into another. It intimately unites man and office.”⁴⁰ While Victor Turner applies this analysis primarily to ethnographic studies on the Ndembu and Bemba populations of Zambia, the Shilluk of Sudan, and the Saora of Middle India, the same principles have been observed in a variety of diverse social contexts.⁴¹

The liminal state occupies a fundamental role in the narrative output of the generation that came to maturity during and immediately after the Fascist Regime. Many of the literary works produced by this generation in the period prior to the Economic Miracle focus extensively on defining a personal experience or conception of life under Fascism, during World War II and in the immediate period of postwar reconstruction. A great number of the literary works published on World War II in the period from 1940 to 1955 focus specifically on the participation of the protagonist in either the partisan

38 Ibid., 99.

39 Ibid. Turner defines the *sacra* in the following terms: “The central cluster of nonlogical *sacra* is then the symbolic template of the whole system of beliefs and values in a given culture, its archetypal paradigm and ultimate measure [...] The neophytes are also told that they are begin filled with mystical power by what they see and what the are told about it. According to the purpose of the initiation, this power confers on them capacities to undertake successfully the tasks of their new office.”

40 Ibid. Emphasis is used in original text.

41 see for example GuobinYang, “The Liminal Effects of Social Movements: Red Guards and the Transformation of Identity,” *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 3 (2000). In this phrase the use of the term “diverse” includes but is not limited to the following characteristics: developmentally, economically, geographically, culturally and artistically.

resistance movement or the experience of being taken as a prisoner of war in a foreign country. While these two experiences gain prominence in the larger narrative discourse—due in part to their importance in social and political agendas seeking to redefine public memory— they also play an integral role in the recreation of individual masculine identity for a generation of young men raised within the fascist conception of masculinity. Conversely, depictions of men defined by the misery of the reconstruction—as created by authors such as Pasolini and filmmakers such as De Sica—call into question not just the previous fascist model, but also the contemporary social context. These experiences, which by their very nature comport social isolation/invisibility, loss of identity, privation and a certain level of critical distance from one’s society, bring the individual to the very cusp of social puberty.

Yang argues that social phenomenon (such as military service and combat) “separate participants from preexisting structural constraints and give them the freedom and power to remold themselves and society [...] the total effect is a threshold effect—the experience becomes a dividing line in personal histories with immediate and long-term consequences.”⁴² The narration of war and postwar experiences in these texts allows both the author and the protagonists to definitively align themselves with the members of a particular group (isolated from the larger corrupted whole) and meditate on the *sacra* of an ideological, rather than physical patriarchy. It is a process which mirrors that explored by Alastair Duncan in West German literature produced after the fall of the Nazi regime. He writes that through literary investigation, “German male writers are learning to break free from the roles which many of their fathers and forefathers had unquestioningly

⁴² Ibid., 380.

adapted to.”⁴³ If within the fascist ideology, war acts as a rite of passage solidifying the social puberty of the male individual, the liminal state explored in the texts produced by this generation enables the protagonists of the narratives— and through them the writers— to subvert war and postwar experiences in order to create an alternative model for a non-fascist context. These works thus act as microhistories in which the liminal state directly preceding social puberty allows the writers and their characters to renegotiate the terms of their masculinity, and subsequently their roles as men within the nascent social context.

⁴³ Alastair Duncan, “Sons and Fathers: West German Writers private perspectives on a public past,” in *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-war European Culture*, ed. Graham Bartram, Maurice Slawinski, and David Steel (Keele: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 102.

Chapter 4: G. Silvano Spinetti and the Refashioning of Fascist Identity

While narratives concerning the Fascist involvement of a protagonist remain less visible within the literary memoryscape due to a collective attempt to create a “positive” founding myth on which to ground a new national identity, an analysis of these works (both fictional and non-fictional) can yield a better understanding of the renegotiation of national and personal identity during this period. Because membership in the *Gruppo Universitario Fascista* (University Fascist Group) or G.U.P and enrollment within the Italian army during World War II were ordinary occurrences for the young men raised under the Fascist Regime, these texts help shed light on a common, albeit often “concealed” experience.⁴⁴ “We have before us a document of which we should take note, not in order to create a weapon for controversy,” writes the editor in the preface of G.Silvano Spinetti’s *Difesa di una generazione (scritti e appunti)*, “but in order to understand the suffering, unique perhaps even within our most agitated history, that the recent years have imposed on so many Italians.”⁴⁵ The editor’s reference to the suffering of “many Italians” helps illustrate the turbulence of Italy’s search for a national identity uncorrupted by the final manifestations of Fascism. It also highlights the prominent role of literature in refashioning the collective identity of the larger social context of the period. For the members of this generation intrinsically connected to the Fascist regime, the liminal state plays a crucial role in renegotiating their role within the emerging society. Spinetti’s *Difesa di una generazione*, published in 1948, is a particularly

44 See Foot, *Italy’s Divided Memory*. Here the term concealed is used in reference to the collective rewriting of national history which often sought to downplay the fascist involvement of many of its citizens, highlighting instead episodes of partisan and civic resistance.

45 Nota dell’editore: “Siamo di fronte ad una documentazione della quale converrà tener conto, non per farsene arma polemica, ma per umanamente comprendere il travaglio, forse unico nella nostra pur agitatissima storia, che gli anni recenti hanno imposto a tanti italiani.” Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione*, 6.

compelling example of such a work. The experience detailed by the author is highly representative of those experienced by an entire generational context trapped in the “conflict between the idealism of the 1930s with which they grew up, and the historical realities of the later Fascist regime and the post-war years.”⁴⁶ In this text, the author proposes a fascist figure cleansed of the tainted features ingrained in the popular consciousness during the final chapter of Mussolini’s reign. Instead of the *squadrista* or a member of the Fascist hierarchy, he puts forward the young, disillusioned P.O.W. betrayed by an external corruption of his much purer ideology.

This autobiographical text begins with a simple enough premise. Upon his return from a P.O.W. camp in India, Spinetti finds himself repudiated by his former friends and acquaintances on the basis of his “presumed alliances.”⁴⁷ These individuals, members of his same generation, silence him with their stories of victimization under Fascism and “true or assumed partisan alliances” before he can relate any part of his five-year imprisonment.⁴⁸ In order to hasten the “repatriation” of his companions and construct a place for himself in the “active work for pacification and the rebirth of the nation” Spinetti writes a treatise in defense of those members of his generation who fought in World War II.⁴⁹ He defines his text in the following terms:

... it is also the defense of everyone who grew up and who was born when Mussolini was already in power. For those who served fascism in good faith and who now, as they accept reality without preconceptions and without nostalgia do not accept that others —who have not given proof of democratic intransigence and courage—have the pretense to re-educate them.⁵⁰

46 Francesca Gibson, “Moravia Vittorini, Pavese, Calvino: Fascism, Allegory, Humanism,” in *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-war European Culture*, ed. Graham Bartram, Maurice Slawinski, and David Steel (Keele: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 171.

47 Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione*, 9.

48 Ibid.,

49 Ibid., 10-11.

50 “[...] è anche la difesa di tutti coloro che sono cresciuti e sono nati quando Mussolini era già al potere, che hanno servito il fascismo in buona fede e che ora, come accettano la realtà senza preconcetti e senza

In many ways Spinetti's text is a response to the atmosphere of shame and fear of the period, when members of Italian society "had to make their way or recreate their own political virginity."⁵¹ As the text continues, however, the author moves away from a more general justification of former members of the fascist regime to develop a series of particular points governing the overall structure of his defense: the pivotal nature of the P.O.W. experience and the disavowal of previous generations.

Throughout the text, Spinetti goes to great lengths to differentiate between the two generations principally involved in World War II in order to emphasize the corrupted nature of the previous generation, and consequently, the innocence of his own. From the very beginning of his treatise, Spinetti highlights the strong influence of the older generation on the rest of his peers: "Because politics took place more often in the squares and on the sidewalks than in Parliament, we too stopped gladly on the streets, some to indulge a curiosity, some to participate in patriotic manifestation, and some to have their hand held by a father wearing a uniform or a black shirt."⁵² The inclusion of this particular anecdote—which follows a detailed description of the youthful enthusiasm and naïveté with which Spinetti followed the events of World War I—immediately depicts the older generation as a strong influence in the social development of their children.⁵³ A father figure dressed in fascist garb is presented as a source of pride for young Spinetti and his peers. This figure reacts against the misery of his time and inspires his sons to do the same. The fascist cause and ideology is thus transmitted strongly through patriarchy.

nostalgie, così non ammettono che altri, non avendo mai dato prova di intransigenza democratica e di coraggio, abbia la pretesa di rieducarli. "Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

⁵² "Poiché la politica più che in Parlamento si faceva sulle piazze e sui marciapiedi, anche noi ci intrattenemmo volentieri per via, chi per curiosare, chi per partecipare alle manifestazioni patriottiche, chi per farsi portare per mano dal babbo in divisa o in camicia nera. "Ibid., 17.

⁵³ Ibid., 15-17.

The Fascist Regime's close relationship with the patriarchal structure of Italian society is for Spinetti an intrinsic element of its eventual degeneration and demise. His father's generation takes the much "purer," initial Mussolinian ideology and, through the influence of the tangential theories proposed by men such as Giovanni Gentile, corrupts it beyond repair.⁵⁴ This degradation is further emphasized in his depiction of the indecorous behavior of the superior officers of the Fascist Italian army. The image introduced in the beginning of the text may be easily juxtaposed against those depicted in the chapters on the behavior of Mussolini's hierarchy and the superior officers of the Italian army during their time in the P.O.W. camps.⁵⁵ Spinetti writes at length about their overall lack of decorum, leadership abilities, forbearance, and devotion to the Italian and Fascist cause, equating these failures with a lacking masculinity.⁵⁶ The heads of government and the officers are often depicted as "whining" about their circumstances or changing their official insignia at will.⁵⁷ The importance of constancy in the male character is repeatedly emphasized throughout the text and, in many ways, it is the inconstancy of those men (who for Spinetti should best embody the Fascist ideal) that diminishes their masculinity. Furthermore, Spinetti equates that same inconstancy with the final perversion of the purer "mussolinian" ideology. The second series of images thus rapidly deconstructs and demystifies that first embodiment of Fascist masculinity. The stable *paterfamilias* initially introduced is gradually supplanted by the figure of the inconstant leader incapable of instilling hope and fortitude in his men, and therefore incapable of playing the role of ideological patriarch for the younger men under his command. Given Mussolini and the Fascist Regime's particular preoccupation with patriarchal lineages,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 63-74.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 65-66.

Spinetti's text acts as a disavowal of the physical Fascist patriarchy in favor of his own unadulterated conception of Fascism.

Spinetti's experience as a P.O.W plays a pivotal role within the larger structural context of his narrative because it assumes all the characteristics of a state of liminality as defined by Turner. Miles from home, and more importantly the European front, Spinetti and his fellow prisoners live on the very margin of the acknowledged social context.⁵⁸ They are invisible to the rest of the peers both structurally and physically. The rules of the camp and the actions of the guards concretize their lack of identity, property and privilege: the inmates are treated equally independently of rank. Spinetti further dramatizes this condition by nullifying, through his particular characterization of the "superiors," any intrinsic manifestation of superiority. This allows for the creation of Turner's "liminal group" as composed by "a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions."⁵⁹ It is only within this state of liminality, that Spinetti is able to refashion his own identity, negating the codes of masculinity imposed by the latter forms of Fascism in favor of the "Mussolinism" that spurned his initial political involvement.⁶⁰ In fact, during his period of imprisonment this particular strain of Fascist ideology serves as the *sacra* that redefines his understanding of society. It provides him with that "maximum standard of reference" described by Turner and enables him to align himself with a community he deems more appropriate and more likely to be accepted within the social context contemporary to the composition of the text. In his essay, Yang proposes that Turner's state of liminality acts as an

58 Spinetti repeatedly emphasizes the remoteness and ample duration of their imprisonment. To a certain extent, their distance from the European front also distances the P.O.W. s from the atrocities committed by the fascist government during World War II.

59 Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 95.

60 Throughout the text, Spinetti goes to great lengths to emphasize his agreement not with the contemporary fascist ideology, but with the Mussolinism developed at the beginning of Il Duce's regime. Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione*.

“antistructure” promoting “freedom, communion and creativity.”⁶¹ He builds off Turner’s notion that it is often through the distinct break with previous structural constraints that individuals are able to produce alternative myths, rituals and philosophical systems.⁶² Through his experience as P.O.W. Spinetti is able to develop his own myth of origination and therefore his own moral code, one which will serve him even in the postwar context. It also allows him to separate himself from his subservient role within the Fascist hierarchy and claim his own agency. “I decided then, as in imprisonment, to follow a code of conduct suggested by my conscience” narrates Spinetti, “I convinced myself that the right path to follow was that of my fellow prisoners who did not renounce or hide their past, but accepted reality without preconceptions and without nostalgia.”⁶³ As Reich’s notes in *Beyond the Latin Lover*, the presence of a predominantly homosocial environment gives Spinetti a physical context in which to ground his newly developed code of masculine conduct. Indeed, he depicts the final effect of his time as a P.O.W., and that of his fellow prisoners, as a rite of passage bringing them collectively to the threshold of social puberty:

Young men that, after months of war and years of imprisonment withstood with courage and a sense of dignity, now return to the Nation, disappointed and exasperated, as mature men. They have the right to make their voices heard even if they might seem unworthy to the 1946 edition of the *squadristi* because prior to 1940 they committed the sin of “mussolinism.”⁶⁴

61 Yang, “The Liminal Effects of Social Movements,” 383.

62 Ibid., 384.

63 “Decisi allora, come in prigionia, di seguire la linea di condotta che mi suggeriva la coscienza. Mi convinsi che la via giusta da seguire era quella scelta dai miei compagni di reticolato i quali non rinnegavano e non nascondevano il proprio passato, ma accettavano la realtà senza preconcetti e senza nostalgie.” Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione*, 10.

64 “Giovani che, dopo mesi di Guerra e anni di prigionia sopportati con coraggio e con senso di dignità, delusi ed esasperati, tornano oggi in Patria uomini maturi ed hanno il diritto di far sentire la loro voce anche se agli squadristi edizione 1946 possono sembrare indegni perchè prima del ’40 hanno peccato di <<mussolinismo>>.” Ibid., 20-21. Emphasis is original. In this passage, Spinetti’s use of the term “squadrista” in relation to those that would criticize his generation further separates him, and his fellow P.O.W.s, from the negative manifestations of the final period of the Fascist Regime.

Spinetti's own narrative mirrors that maturation process described in the above passage moving from his youth, to a period of intellectual adolescence and finally to true adulthood. Spinetti's final statement further concretizes this process of maturation by emphasizing the active role that now awaits him and the other members of his generation: "...our mussolinism, that today we do not disown at all, but we consider surpassed by the events which force us to accept a new reality and to interpret the new spiritual requirements of our people."⁶⁵ In this passage Spinetti both vindicates the purity of his particular brand of Fascism against its later perversions and puts it aside to take a new role in the emergent context. To a certain extent, his is a recreation of "political virginity" not unlike that of his anti-Fascist peers. Through his description of a particular state of liminality, Spinetti subverts the traditional view held of his generation while laying claim to their place (and, subsequently his place) in generating the "new Italian nation."

Spinetti's text offers an interesting key with which to read the variety of texts that emerge in the postwar context. Many of the themes introduced in his account echo throughout the other works of the period (both fictional and non-fictional) and particularly in the texts analyzed in this report. This is particularly true of his emphasis on the disavowal and severing of patriarchal lines and his depiction of the subversive potentiality of liminal states defined by collective action. Many of the narratives produced by his generation focus extensively on the figure of the absent patriarch and its replacement by an egalitarian group created by members of the younger generation.

Although often riddled with inconsistencies, *Difesa di una generazione* plays a pivotal role, not just as a mirror of the larger cultural context of the period, but also within the career of the author himself. In the period during and after Fascism, Spinetti

65 "[...]il nostro <<mussolinismo>> che oggi non rinneghiamo affatto, ma consideriamo superato dagli avvenimenti i quali ci impongono di accettare la nuova realtà e di interpretare le nuove esigenze spirituali del nostro popolo." Ibid., 127.

publishes a number of works on the politics of his time. These works include, but are not limited to *Fascismo universale* (1934), *Fascismo e libertà: verso una nuova sintesi* (1940), *Diritto al lavoro e crisi del diritto* (1959) and “*Gruppi di pressione*” e *interessi privati nella pubblica amministrazione: inchiesta sui rapporti tra potere politico e burocrazia* (1966).⁶⁶ Under the Fascist regime, beginning in 1933, Spinetti was hired by Gaetano Polverelli (along with Annibale Scicluna Sorge) to “put into effect propagandistic forms in favor of the Fascist government.”⁶⁷ During his time in the *ufficio stampa del campo del governo* (the government’s press office), Spinetti had created a three-phase project to maximize the propagation of Fascist propaganda both in Italy and abroad. Had his plan been put into effect, G. Silvano Spinetti would have played an integral role in the propagation and imposition of Fascist ideology within an international context.⁶⁸ Spinetti’s *Difesa di una generazione*, written and produced two years after his return from a P.O.W. camp in India and three years after the end of World War II in Italy, serves as a bridge between his career during and after Fascism. While Spinetti never truly abandons his particular political ideology, his refashioning of identity through liminality enables him to maintain his previous position within society. It permits him to renegotiate his ideological paternity and respond to the “pressing needs” of his fellow citizens, thus taking an active role in the larger generative discourse.

66 Titles can be translated into *Universal Fascism*, *Fascism and Liberty: a new synthesis*, *The Right to work and the crisis of rights* and “*Pressure Groups*” and *Private interest in the public administration: inquiry into the relationships between political power and bureaucracy* respectively.

67 Benedetta Garzarelli, “Fascismo e Propaganda all’estero,” *Studi Storici*, 43 no. 2. (2002): 507-508.

68 Ibid., 509. Spinetti’s plan “remained largely on paper.”

Chapter 5: The Partisan Narratives of Calvino and Fenoglio

While Spinetti's chose to depict his experiences through a first person autobiographical account, other writers of his generation will choose to address their participation in this moment of Italian history through an altogether different narrative form. The use of fiction becomes prevalent among the young writers who emerge in this period, particularly as they attempt to mitigate the "non-fictional" memoir's "glorification" of the Resistance "at the expense of objective 'truth.'" ⁶⁹ In *Calvino and the Age of Neo Realism* Lucia Re proposes that the "experience of the war and the Resistance led to a new sense of time itself, one in which the history of individuals and the history of humanity no longer seemed separated or separable."⁷⁰ Italo Calvino and Beppe Fenoglio's literary careers begin in the immediate postwar period as the two narrative voices that emerge from the cacophony of Resistance narratives to create a lasting legacy in Italian literature.⁷¹ Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (or *The Path to the nest of Spiders*) and almost the entirety of Fenoglio's body of work are predominantly concerned (as Calvino notes in an article published in 1949) with creating an "epic and choral" representation of the experiences intrinsic to the re-legitimization of national and personal identity. ⁷²

⁶⁹ Philip Cooke, introduction to *The Italian Resistance; An Anthology*, ed. Philip Cooke (New York: Manchester University Press 1997), 10.

⁷⁰ Re, Lucia. *Calvino and the Age of Neo Realism: Fables of Estrangement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁷¹ Asor-Rosa, *Storia europea della letteratura italiana*, 422.

⁷² Italo Calvino, "La letteratura italiana sulla Resistenza," in *Calvino: Saggi*, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), 1492. Calvino cites this as a primary goal of his work and the work of others during this period, but also acknowledges that most of the texts created had failed to create such a representation.

THE PATH OF LIMINALITY-ITALO CALVINO

Italo Calvino's literary debut *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, published for the first time in 1947 and then revised again in 1964, is a semi-autobiographical, fictional text based on Calvino's brief partisan experience in the period between 1944 and 1945. It is centered around the partisan involvement of an unconventional character. The book's protagonist Pin is a young boy who, having lost both his parents to undisclosed circumstances, lives with his sister in a small town in Liguria. Italo Calvino's choice of a fatherless child-protagonist is particularly evocative given Calvino's membership as part of generation that came to maturity during, and immediately after the Fascist Regime. In his article on "Italian Neorealism and Brazilian Cinema," Antonio Traverso posits that the emphasis of Italian Neorealist films on the figure of the male child served to emphasize "the severed and yet still surviving ties between father and sons."⁷³ While Neorealist film differs substantially from its literary counterpart, Calvino's depiction of Pin serves a similar function within the larger narrative structure of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*. Initially devoid of a father figure, Pin's state closely mirrors the partisan's severed relationship with the patriarchy as represented by the previous generation and the Fascist Regime. His condition, the gravity of which is augmented by the simplicity with which the narrator relates his tale, entertains a synecdochal relationship with the more complicated experience of the partisans.⁷⁴ Their process of maturation is one and the same. Together they must renegotiate their identity and subsequently their masculinity

⁷³ Antonio Traverso, "Italian Neorealism and Brazilian Cinema," in *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*, ed. Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 179.

⁷⁴ see. Dennis Tate, "Youth Hope and Ambiguity: The Ragazzo Figure in Pavese's *La casa in collina*," in *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-war European Culture*, ed. Graham Bartram, Maurice Slawinski, and David Steel (Keele: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 135-149. Tate illustrates a similar use of the figure of the child/ragazzo in Cesare Pavese's 1949 novel *La casa in collina*. Tate argues that the child both embodies the partisan condition and the present potentiality of a future built on the efforts of the resistance.

through a state of liminality which allows them to circumvent their severed patriarchal lines.

Due in part to the tragic circumstances of his parents' demise, the strong presence of the war and his sister's job as a prostitute for the German soldiers, Calvino presents Pin as living suspended between childhood and maturity; while his coarse language and intimate knowledge of adult sexual behaviors separates him from his peers, his youth and immaturity preclude him from true interaction with the adults of his community. Pin's very existence is marked by a liminal quality that allows him to assume, from the very beginning, a critical stance as observer of the surrounding social context.⁷⁵ Calvino's principal character acts as a lens through which the narrator allows the "reader to see both what is and what is not, the other-than-the-narrated."⁷⁶

In the beginning of the narrative, Pin is predominantly concerned with taking part in the adventures he sees unfolding around him. The men with guns, the struggle between opposing forces and the powerful uniforms stimulate his imagination to flights of fancy. The character is in many ways reminiscent of Spinetti's description of himself as a young boy who was pushed, in accordance with Fascist ideology, to embrace the masculinity of action heroes.⁷⁷ In an attempt to gain access to this adult world, epitomized in his community by the small, impotent group of men who work tangentially with the local resistance movement, Pin steals a gun from one of his sister's clients.⁷⁸ The theft and Pin's subsequent arrest lead to his encounter with the young resistance hero Red Wolf

⁷⁵ Throughout the text, Pin uses jokes and songs to undermine the assumed authority of the adults that surround him. These innocent diversions reveal deeper inconsistencies and alert the reader to an underlying criticism.

⁷⁶ Ann Halamore Caesar and Michael Caesar, *Modern Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 186.

⁷⁷ Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione*, 16.; Bellassai, "The Masculine Mystique," 320.

⁷⁸ Italo Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Mondadori: Milano, 2001), 17.

and Pin's ensuing "enrollment" in Diritto's resistance band. As with Spinetti's description of the P.O.W camp in India, Calvino's depiction of the small band of nomadic partisans evokes Turner's definition of a state of liminality. Isolated from the larger social context, the small band lives on the very margins of the town surrounded by hills, farmland and heavy vegetation. Dressed in rags, they appear to both Pin and the reader as completely divested of property or identity; the names and occupations of the various members are hidden behind a series of nicknames and the group repeatedly emphasizes the communal nature of property, even going as far as to punish those who hoard the spoils of their missions.⁷⁹ Although Diritto is identified as the official leader of the group, little evidence of rank is detected within their social organization and his voice appears as one within a multitude of voices.

Pin's brief time among these men changes the course of his development. Originally fascinated by the power inherent to the "myth of squadristo," Pin gradually comes to a deeper understanding of the problematic relationship between men and power in his social milieu.⁸⁰ Within his conception, the Fascist regime goes from being a powerful, mythical entity to a childish bully bent on the indiscriminate use of violence. When Pelle abandons the resistance group in favor of the black Fascist uniform, Pin views the betrayal not as personal affront, but rather as Pelle's inability to complete his maturation process:

79 Ibid., 78-79, 108. This is particularly true of weapons, food and clothing. Pelle, a young misanthropic member of the band, is often reprimanded for hoarding guns he steals or finds during conflicts. He ultimately betrays his fellow partisans to become a member of *il Fascio*.

80 For a detailed historical account of the creation of a myth surrounding armed squads during and after the fall of the Fascist Regime see Roberta Suzzi Valli, "The Myth of Squadristo in the Fascist Regime." *Journal of Contemporary history* 35, no. 2 (2000): 131-150. It appears in many of the works (both fictional and non-fictional) of the period and plays an important role in Pin's conception of Pelle's enlistment with the *fascio*.

... Pelle is now down there in the forbidden town, wearing a big death's head on his black cap and carrying beautiful new weapons no longer frightened of round-ups, and driven always by that inner frenzy of his which makes him blink his cold-reddened eyes and lick his dribbling lips, a frenzy now turned against his former comrades, but without hatred or rancour, as if he were playing a game with friends in which the stake is death.⁸¹

This passage emphasizes the immaturity inherently present in the Fascist conception of masculinity. Pin's view mirrors that of his fellow partisans. To the outside observer (as represented by Pin, the partisans and the reader), the preeminence of youth within this discourse advocates not just strength and virility, but also impulsiveness and brutality. Pelle becomes the willing participant of an ideology marked by moral and emotional stagnation; he is forever trapped in the cruel games played by his Fascist peers and is therefore incapable of participating in the construction of a new Italy. His inability to separate himself from Fascist conceptions of masculinity eventually comports his complete exclusion from the generative discourse. His story concludes with his death at the hands of the young resistance leader Red Wolf.⁸²

Immediately after his discovery of Pelle's betrayal, Pin's thoughts turn to the gun buried by the path to the nest of spiders. The "P. 38," stolen from the German soldier sleeping with his sister, acts as the *sacra* within the larger context of the narrative. Throughout the novel, Pin's thoughts return to the gun repeatedly. Calvino writes:

It's lovely, his pistol is, the only think he has in all the world now. He grasps it and imagines he is Red Wolf, tries to think what Red Wolf would do if he had this pistol in his hand. But that reminds him that he is alone, and that he can't go to anyone for help...He doesn't even know what to do with that pistol, nor how to

81 Colquhoun trans of original text: "[...] Pelle è laggiù nella città proibita, con una grande testa di morto sul berretto nero, con armi nuove e bellissime, senza più paura di rastrellamenti, e sempre quella sua furia che gli fa sbattere gli occhietti arrossati dal raffreddore, umettarsi le labra sbavate dall'ursura, furia senz'odio o rancore, così come in un gioco tra compagni che ha per posta la morte." Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, 109.

82 Ibid., 141

load it; if he's found with it in his hand they'll certainly kill him. He puts it back in its holster and covers it with stones and earth and grass again.⁸³

While guns are strongly present within life in the partisan camp, this passage highlights the importance of that particular P. 38 as symbolic of the social context present outside the liminal state. It is an object that forces Pin to think about his identity, his condition and his place within the broader social context. As an artifact of Nazi presence on the Italian peninsula and as a strongly phallic object, the P.38 embodies his emergent masculine identity. His use of that particular object will dictate the role he will come to assume in the nascent social context. Repeatedly, Pin is tempted to mimic Red Wolf or Pelle's performance of masculinity, but upon further reflection, he rejects their "shallow," immature (and incredibly violent) masculine model in favor of reflection. Although largely indicative of his fear and lack of will, his unwillingness to use the gun is also an acknowledgement of his social immaturity. Pin repeatedly buries and unburies his gun choosing every time to forego violence in favor of a continued state of formative innocence.

Within the narrative, the P.38 is only used once. At the very end of the novel, unbeknownst to Pin, Cousin uses the gun to kill *La Nera* for selling secrets to the *Fascio* and the Germans. Feigning interest in her skills as a prostitute, Cousin momentarily abandons Pin in order to destroy what he considers to be the embodiment of the Italian nation corrupted by Fascism. The episode occurs simultaneously with Pin's decision to align himself with Cousin's patriarchal and ideological lineage. Initially disappointed with Cousin's interest for his "rat of a sister," Pin's confidence is restored when Cousin

83"È bella la sua pistola: è l'unica cosa che resti al mondo a Pin. Pin impugna la pistola e immaginad'essere Lupo Rosso, cerca di pensare a cosa farebbe Lupo Rosso se avesse quella pistola in mano. Ma questo gli ricorda che è solo, che non può cercar aiuto da nessuno [...] Anche di quella pistola non sa che farsene: non sa come si carica, se lo trovano con la pistola in mano sarà di certo ucciso. La rimette nella fondina e la ricopre di pietre e terra ed erbe." Ibid., 55.

ultimately rejects *La Nera*'s services. "Pin is delighted," observes the narrator, "He really is the Great Friend, Cousin is, he understands everything; even how filthy women are. Cousin puts the tommy-gun back on his shoulder and hands the pistol back to Pin."⁸⁴ By removing the corruptive influence of Pin's only maternal figure and returning the P. 38, Cousin allows Pin to take control of the development of his own masculinity. Together they return to the state of liminality momentarily interrupted by Pin's attempt to steal back the gun from his sister: "And they walk on, the big man and the child, into the night, amid the fireflies, holding each other by the hand."⁸⁵ In this final image, the figure of the child and that of the partisan are conflated into a single entity. Their future identity will rely not on the severed patriarchal lines of the past, but on the collective creation of a new myth of origination. The reader is left with the implicit understanding that, through their return to the state of liminality, Pin and the other partisans will be able to renegotiate the terms of their masculinity through the creation of an alternative patriarchal line and thus be ready to one day assume an active stance in the construction of a social context divorced from Fascism.⁸⁶ Like Spinetti, Calvino proposes the creation of an alternative, ideological patriarchy grounded in a figure shaped by liminality. He uses this liminality and the heroic status of the partisan within the "collective memory" of the Italian people to convey the revolutionary potentiality of their shared liminal identity within the "cultural interregnum" of the postwar period.

84 "Pin è tutto contento. È davvero il Grande Amico, il Cugino. Il cugino si rimette il mitra in ispalla e restituisce la pistola a Pin." Ibid., 159. Capitalization is original.

85 "E continuano a camminare, l'omone e il bambino nella notte, in mezzo alle lucciole, tenendosi per mano." Ibid.

86 While patriarchy is an intrinsically hierarchical system, the partisans construct an ideological lineage based on their identity as a group and their relationship with one another. The figure of the ideal partisan, based on a collective identity, is therefore posited as a patriarchal figure from which these men can inherit their role within the emerging social context. It is a figure that legitimizes their assumption of authority. In *Difesa di una generazione*, Spinetti identifies the assumption of partisan identities as a means of self-legitimization. Spinetti, *Difesa di una generazione*, 9.

Italo Calvino's first novel plays an interesting role not only within the larger literary setting of the time period, but also within the career of the author himself. In 1964, Italo Calvino returns to his first novel in order to correct a work in which he "no longer recognized himself."⁸⁷ In the introduction published along with the 1964 edition he explains the particular construction of the novel's protagonist: "Full of will and youthful tension, the spontaneous grace of youth was denied me. The impetuous maturation of the times had done nothing but accent my immaturity. The symbolic protagonist of my book was thus an image of regression: a child."⁸⁸ Through this figure, Calvino is able to garner distance on his experience as a partisan in order to finally complete the process of maturation that will bring him to social puberty. In *Modern Italian Literature*, Ann Hallamore Caesar and Michael Caesar propose that *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* allows Calvino to "put himself in a position to be able to reinterpret the Resistance 'from below'" highlighting not just the glorious mythical aspects of the partisan movement, but also the more ambiguous characteristics of human nature.⁸⁹ He depicts the "glorified" resistance movement as a simple tale of a heavily flawed, but valiant generation of men that rose against the corruption of Fascism. Through the construction of the narrative, Calvino is able to rearticulate his place within the larger social structure and partake in the generative discourse of his generation. His protagonist and a depiction of the resistance as a liminal space (within both his personal and literary experience) allow Calvino to leave behind the ambiguity of his adolescent impulses in favor of a literature of engagement.

⁸⁷ Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, V.

⁸⁸ Ibid., XXII.

⁸⁹ Caesar, *Modern Italian Literature*, 186.

After publishing *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* in 1947 and a collection of similarly themed short stories entitled *Ultimo viene il corvo* in 1949, Calvino becomes a fixture of the Italian literary community. As with Spinetti, a narrative refashioning of his experience of the war serves to launch his career in the post-war/post-Fascist context. Until his death in September of 1985, his novels, short stories, essays and journalistic contributions span the decades and genres of the twentieth century. Within the second half of the twentieth century Calvino, more than any other Italian writer, demonstrates an almost “heroic” capacity “to keep up with his time” and contribute to the intellectual development of the Italian nation .⁹⁰

23 DAYS OF LIMINALITY

Italo Calvino and Beppe Fenoglio’s first works resonate strongly with one another not just for their particular focus on the figure of the partisan, but also for the innovative way in which these writers approach a much discussed topic. While Beppe Fenoglio is probably best known for his 1968 novel *Il partigiano Johnny*, his collection of short stories *I ventitre giorni della città di Alba* offers a particularly compelling illustration of the liminality of the partisan experience through a detailed fictional account of the twenty three days in which the Resistance maintained control of the town of Alba in 1944. His choice to devote a series of stories to such a specific historical moment is of particular interest given both the brevity and the national importance of the event. Within both the fictional and historical memoryscape, Alba embodies the liminal state of the partisan movement and its place within the development of Italian national and individual identity.

⁹⁰ Asor-Rosa, *Storia europea della letteratura*, 554.

In the short story entitled “The Beginnings of the Partisan Raoul” (a story in many ways emblematic of the larger collection) a young man named Sergio leaves his mother and his hometown in order to join the local resistance movement operating out of the surrounding hills. While walking toward the partisan camp, Sergio relinquishes his previous social identity by assuming the alias of Raoul, a name better “fit for battle.”⁹¹ Within Fenoglio’s narrative the assumption of an alias is depicted as a customary, even required element of partisan life and it allows the individual to temporarily refute social identities reliant on age and class.⁹² As described in Turner, this decision marks the beginning of the individual’s identity as a neophyte and allows him to become a member of the larger group. After changing his name, Sergio uses this new identity to further divorce himself from any and all familial ties: “He walked on a deserted street with a light heart. Even though he had left his widowed mother at the village alone, he felt like he was nobody’s child and this was the ideal condition for doing the two things truly grave and hard for an individual: to go to war and to emigrate.”⁹³ By abandoning the name imposed on him by his family, Sergio also renounces the responsibilities inherently comported by his role as the only son of a widow within a patriarchal system. Instead of economically and metaphorically taking his father’s place as head of the household, Sergio embarks on a journey of maturation that will one day allow him to construct his own identity, free of the constraints of his father’s now-severed patriarchal lineage.

91 Beppe Fenoglio, “Gli Inizi del partigiano Raoul,” in *I Ventitre giorni della città, La Malora* (Torino: Einaudi, 1954), 53.

92 Throughout the short story, Sergio meets various individuals whose identity is dictated solely by their aliases. Little, if any, information is given about their physical appearance, age or previous occupation. Any personal information provided on the history of an individual is mitigated by the continued use of their partisan moniker.

93 “Per una strada tutta deserta camminava a cuor leggero; a dispetto del fatto che al paese aveva lasciata sola sua madre vedova, si sentiva figlio di nessuno, e questa è la condizione ideale per fare le due cose veramente gravi e dure per un individuo: andare in guerra ed emigrare.” Ibid.

Upon entering the partisan camp, Sergio meets up with other young adults similarly divested of identity and privilege. With the exception of Marco, who dictates the organizational aspects of camp life, the young men form a predominantly egalitarian society in which previous social roles are largely ignored. These individuals work collectively toward a common goal and all resources (including the services of the young woman residing in the camp) are communally shared. The use of alternative monikers cements the identity of the group, allowing them, through their shared anonymity, to operate at the very margins of their society.

The liminality of this group is further emphasized by the prominence of the landscape in the text. As in Calvino's work, the partisan world is hidden from the larger social context by the arduous nature of the hilly countryside. This landscape plays an important role in both the better part of Fenoglio's larger body of work and in the collective memory of the Resistance.⁹⁴ It is a territory on the very margins of the Italian Peninsula, situated in a terrain that allowed for both long-term concealment and the creation of organized resistance groups. It is also the principal site of "an event" that will come dominate the construction of post-war Italian identity.⁹⁵ Within the narrative structure of "The Beginnings of the Partisan Raoul" the hilly countryside of the *langhe* surrounding Alba acts as a space that further separates the partisans from the rest of the community. Even though Sergio is but a short distance from his hometown, he views his journey into the hills as an emigration; Sergio leaves his father's land to enter a completely separate "nation" governed by its own set of rules. It is, as Fiammetta Cirilli notes, a landscape that seems to belong almost entirely to the partisans, while the city below is contended between the various groups that occupy it.⁹⁶ Situated above the town,

94 Cirilli, Fiammetta, *Alba e le langhe: L'epopea del partigiano Johnny* (Milano: Unicopli, 2005).

95 The term "event" is used to comprise the full scope of the Piemontese Resistance movement.

96 Ibid., 55.

the hills grant the partisans a view of the contended territory while simultaneously concealing them from the rest of the population. This view provides them not just with a tactical advantage, but also with the detachment necessary to criticize their communities and renegotiate their place in the emerging social context.

Sergio enters this liminal landscape with nothing but a new set of clothes and a pistol tucked into the holster around his waist. As in Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* the pistol acts as the *sacra*, forcing Sergio to engage actively in the maturation process that will one day bring him to social puberty. In the beginning of the story, the pistol allows him entry into the close-knit partisan group; Marco's estimation of Sergio increases when he sees that the young student carries a gun and it is in this moment that he asks Sergio for his partisan name.⁹⁷ Similarly, his place in the partisan comradeship is cemented when he trades his new Italian gun for Sgancia's old, rusty German pistol.⁹⁸ "Raoul made the trade, his face tight with the effort of disguising his anger and his bitterness," writes Fenoglio, "for a moment he searched Sgancia's eyes, but then it seemed that, by that exchange, he had repaid a debt of some kind."⁹⁹ By trading away his pistol for an inferior product, he abides by the unspoken rule on the collective nature of property and earns his place among the other partisans. He also symbolically relinquishes his identity as an Italian citizen of the Fascist Regime for one based on re-vindicating the tarnished masculinity of men subjected to German and Fascist occupation.

Even after this trade, his gun occupies a fundamental role in Sergio's changing understanding of his relationship with the larger social milieu. After surmounting his

⁹⁷ Fenoglio, "Gli inizi del partigiano Raoul, 56-57.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁹⁹ "Raoul fece il cambio, la faccia tirata per lo sforzo di dissimulare la rabbia e l'amarezza, per un attimo cercò gli occhi di Sgancia, ma poi gli sembrò che con quel cambio pagava qualcosa di cui era in debito." Ibid.

initial feelings of disillusionment and an impulse to return to his mother, Sergio takes a night shift that irrevocably changes his perspective on his fellow partisans:

Being alone and armed in the night was the first great sensation he felt, the only of so many beautiful sensations he imagined a partisan would feel. He was aware but unafraid; there were no dangers in the night, even if, to his too-fixed eyes, the darkness seemed to crawl and down in the valley the trees crashed against one another mimicking the sound of many waterfalls. There wasn't a single light in the dark bosom of the hills; the lights were down at the bottom of everything, where one might imagine the valley to be. He turned around and looked at the farmstead and he saw that it was dark. Before falling asleep, Kin and Sgancia, Miguel and Delio and all the others must have told themselves that they could trust him.¹⁰⁰

Once invested with the responsibility of guarding his fellow partisans, Sergio finally puts aside his apprehensions and his previous notions of masculine identity as tied to his political ideology.¹⁰¹ In the darkness, with the gun in hand, he realizes that his fate is tied to that of his companions and it is only through cooperation that they will be able to build a place for themselves after the fall of Fascism. This notion is further concretized when he dreams of being executed along with his fellow partisans; in this dream, he cowardly attempts to deny his relationship with the others and is immediately shot. His inability to align himself with the other men results in his death—both physical and moral—at the hands of the Fascists. When Sergio awakens, he relates his dream to Delio and their shared laughter awakens the community of neophytes. Sergio's laughter, which mimics

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 69. "L'essere solo e armato nella notte fu la prima grande sensazione che provò, l'unica delle tante belle che aveva immaginato doversi provare da partigiano. Stava all'erta ma senza timori, non c'erano insidie nella notte, anche se ai suoi occhi troppo fissi il buio pareva brulicare e in fondo alla valle gli alberi crosciavano con un rumore di grandi cascate d'acqua. Non una luce nel seno nero delle colline, luci c'erano laggiù in fondo a tutto, là dove si potev credere che ci fosse la pianura. Si voltò a guardar giù alla cascina e la vide tutta spenta. Kin e Sgancia, Miguel e Delio e tutti quegli altri dormivano già, prima d'addormentarsi dovevano essersi detto che potevano fidarsi di lui."

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 63. This masculinity is described as being intrinsically linked to previous political affiliations. He defines himself as loving "the monarchy the way one loves a woman" and this love dictates his relationship with other men in terms of either jealousy (toward those who also support the monarchy like Sgancia) or hatred (towards those who, like Kin, express antipathy toward the monarchy).

Delio's, displays their growing similarities and the collective nature of their maturation process. Throughout the short story, laughter is used to denote moments of camaraderie founded on the overt display of a shared masculine code of conduct.¹⁰²

Throughout Fenoglio's short story, Raoul is depicted as a young man still vacillating between adolescence and puberty. His interactions with women are often inept and childlike; he is either cajoled by his mother or mortified sexually by Jole, the camp prostitute. His inability to interact with the opposite sex hinges largely on his uncertainty regarding an acceptable code of masculine conduct. Bereft of both a paternal figure and the Fascist conception of masculinity (which with the events of the war has been forever tainted), Sergio is unsure of how to truly participate in the generative discourse. The homosocial environment of the partisan camp allows him to compare himself exclusively with other males and to build his identity on their collective activism.¹⁰³ Through the liminality of their experience, he takes his final step toward social puberty. This step will allow him to subvert the ambiguity of his upbringing and tie himself to the ideological patriarchy of the resistance.

Although Italo Calvino and Beppe Fenoglio would go on to occupy two very different roles in the second half of the twentieth century, their experiences with the resistance—and the fictional narratives based on those experiences—serve as the very birthplace for their literary careers. For Fenoglio, his short stories and novels on the partisan movement act as a bridge between his experience as a partisan and his active participation in the reconstruction of his native Alba. Unlike Italo Calvino, Fenoglio never truly departs from his focus on the partisans. Through them, he constructs a place

¹⁰² Ibid., 64. The men collectively laugh when sharing sexual exploits with Jole.

¹⁰³ Yang, "The Liminality of Social Movements," 381. Yang writes at length on the power of collective activism to shape individual identity. He states: "Work on immediate and long-term effects of movement participation underscores the transformative power of participation experience, revealing how collective experience shapes individual identities."

for himself in the postwar period while simultaneously proposing his own patriarchal lineage. In the last months of his life, Fenoglio discussed compiling all of his short stories into three groups that corresponded to as many stages of existence: *Stories of the civil war*, *Stories of the postwar period* and *Stories of Familial relationships*.¹⁰⁴ For Beppe Fenoglio, the resistance served as the epic foundation of the emerging Italian nation.¹⁰⁵ It was the moment that brought the nation and its citizens to the threshold of social puberty.

¹⁰⁴ Luca Bufano, *Beppe Fenoglio e il racconto breve* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1999), 35.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

Chapter 6: Pasolini and the Liminality of Sub-proletarian Rome

Although Pier Paolo Pasolini is largely contemporary to Spinetti, Calvino and Fenoglio, his first novel *Ragazzi di Vita* breaks away from the works previously discussed in this report due to its decidedly negative outlook on the construction of individual identity and masculinity in the postwar period. Instead of narrating the experience of Italian soldiers in distant P.O.W. camps or of partisans in the remote hills of Piedmont, Pasolini chooses to depict the social conflict of the contemporary urban context. With his novel, *Ragazzi di Vita* Pasolini introduces “a new social stratum” into the collective perception.¹⁰⁶ The partisans and prisoners of war become young men fighting to survive on the margins of the nation’s capital. Their way of life is threatened by a social discourse still rooted in Fascist notions of ideal citizenship. Scholars have often described his work as depicting marginality for the purpose of subverting popular perceptions of reality. His work served as part of his commitment “to a radical type of political activity that systematically unmasked and exposed the ideological machinations of the neo capitalist regime and its institutions.”¹⁰⁷ Within Pasolini’s larger body of work, marginality is thus conceived not as a state preceding social puberty but as a perennial state of being that exists in direct opposition to the development and maturation of mainstream Italian culture. A deeper analysis of the literary construction of this marginal state is fundamental to understanding the relationship between Pasolini and the other writers of the generation that came to maturity under the Fascist Regime.

Written on the eve of the Economic Miracle, *Ragazzi di vita* chronicles the passage into physical puberty of a group of Roman boys living in the sub-proletarian

106 Joseph Francese, *Cultura e Politica Negli Anni Cinquanta: Salinari, Pasolini, Calvino* (Roma, Lithos, 2000), 96.

107 Lucia Re, “Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde,” *MLN* 119 no. 1 (2004): 142.

realm of the *borgate*. While this novel also focuses extensively on young protagonists who renegotiate their own masculinity (and subsequently their role in society) through a state of liminality, the novel does not end with the hope to one day contribute to the construction of the emergent Italian nation. The “liminal *borgatari*” (as Ward denominates them) live and die in liminality; the only character that embraces social puberty loses all integrity and identity to disappear among the consumerist masses.¹⁰⁸ In many ways, Pasolini’s first novel calls into question the dominant, progressive conception of national and individual identity as proposed by writers such as Spinetti, Calvino and Fenoglio. He stands in direct opposition to the proponents of literary commitment in favor of a more nuanced shift in perspective.¹⁰⁹ For Pasolini, the only hope for a masculinity divested of the tainted legacy of Fascism, is a masculinity that exists in the evanescent, liminal world of the roman *borgate*.

As in Calvino and Fenoglio’s partisan narratives, the very setting of the novel introduces the liminality of the experiences explored in the text. In his chapter on Pasolini’s “urban films,” Myrto Konstantarakos argues that Pasolini’s preference for that “shapeless” space where “the boundaries between city and countryside are blurred” was due largely to the fact that it was a space through which one could escape the ideological and structural constraints of mainstream Italian society.¹¹⁰ The *borgate*, a Mussolinian initiative to rid the center of Rome of the “undesirable elements” of society, was a series of public housing projects constructed in the periphery of Rome beginning in 1928 and

¹⁰⁸ David Ward, *A poetics of resistance, narrative and the writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1995), 88. Ward uses the term in relation to one of the protagonists of Pasolini’s other Roman novel, *Una vita violenta*. For Ward this character attempts to free himself of the borgate only to be pulled back into the environment that created him.

¹⁰⁹ Jewell, *The Poetics of History*, X.

¹¹⁰ Myrto Konstantarakos, “Is Pasolini an urban filmmaker?” in *Spaces in European Cinema*, ed. Myrto Konstantarakos (Portland: Intellect Books, 2000), 118. For Konstantarakos Pasolini is drawn to the liminality of the borgate because they provide a space in which he can express the liminality of his own political identity and homosexuality.

ending shortly before World War II.¹¹¹ Mussolini and the Fascist party intended to relocate the poor in order to expand the streets and bring the capital back to its former Imperial splendor. By removing the poor, they concealed any potential blemish to the power and virility of the Fascist government; the *borgate*'s position on the very margins of the city placed them well beyond the gaze of the rest of the contemporary social context. Ousted from the center of both public and commercial life, the inhabitants of the *borgate* lived in isolation. Marcella Delle Donne offers a compelling depiction of the conditions governing life in the Roman periphery:

In general such places had no water or lavatories, only communal fountains outside. Doors opened directly onto the streets, and generally only one main road would be paved. There was no greenery, no trees, no grass. Public toilets typically contained twenty-five toilets to be used by more than five thousand people. The borgate lacked markets, pharmacies, post offices, and butcher shops, although given the residents' financial situation, the latter was hardly missed.¹¹²

In the postwar period, due largely to the conditions described by Delle Donne, and to the anti-urbanization law passed to prohibit the emigration of the poor back into the city, the *borgate* were dominated by poverty, crime, and a general lack of formalized education.¹¹³ In his biography on Pier Paolo Pasolini, Enzo Siciliano encapsulates the tension present between the inner city and its periphery when he describes the borgate as forming a "threatening belt around the capital."¹¹⁴ The conditions created and perpetuated by the structures imposed in the period preceding the Second World War served to isolate the sub-proletarian population from their fellow citizens well after the fall of the Fascist Regime.

111 Nico Naldini, *Breve Vita di Pasolini* (Parma: U. Guanda, 2009), 55.

112 Marcella Delle Donne, "Rome the Capital: The Impending Suburbs and Strategies of Integration-Decentralization," *Journal of Architectural Education* 46, no. 1 (1992): 22.

113 Ibid.

114 Enzo Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005), 211.

Siciliano depicts Pasolini's first encounter with the world of sub-proletarian Rome as a strenuous voyage into an unknown land; the *borgate*, which serve as the setting not just for Pasolini's novels *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta* but also for his feature films *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*, were a far cry from Pasolini's preconceptions of the Italian capital.¹¹⁵ Once acquainted with the *borgate* and the so-called *ragazzi di vita* (boys of life), Pasolini became enthralled with what he called the "concentration camps for the poor" and their potentiality to subvert the dominant political ideologies of his time.¹¹⁶ He uses the *borgate* and their citizens to demystify any conception of a progressive Italian state. "The borghate built by the Christian Democrats are identical to those built by the Fascists," writes Pasolini in *Stories from the City of God*, "because the relationship between the "poor" and the State remains unchanged. It is still an authoritarian, paternalistic, and profoundly inhuman relationship based on 'religious' mystification."¹¹⁷

Ragazzi di vita offers a dramatically candid depiction of these dynamics. The novel begins with il Riccetto's first communion and confirmation, the moment in which, according to Catholic teaching, the individual reaches the spiritual maturity necessary to fully participate in church life. Pasolini writes:

Il Riccetto, who was supposed to have his first communion and his confirmation, had gotten up at five; but while he was going down Donna Olimpia St. with his long grey socks and white blouse, he looked more like a newbie walking along the Tiber, all dressed up and trying to pick up girls, than a messenger or soldier of Christ. With a group of guys exactly like him, all of them dressed in white, he went down to the church of Divine Providence where at nine o'clock Don Pizzuto gave him communion and at eleven the bishop confirmed him.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 194.

¹¹⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Concentration Camps," in *Stories from the City of God: Sketches and Chronicles of Rome 1950-1966* (New York: Handsel Books, 2001).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 175; Konstantarakos, "Is Pasolini an Urban Film-maker?" 119. In addition, Konstantarakos posits that he viewed the *borgate* a space dominated by a "natural and primitive" character and therefore as a space in which the natural could encroach upon man made constructs.

¹¹⁸ "Il Riccetto che doveva farsi la prima comunione e la cresima, s'era alzato già alle cinque; ma mentre scendeva giù per via Donna Olimpia coi calzoncini lunghi grigi e la camicetta Bianca, piuttosto che un

The above passage plays two fundamental roles in the larger narrative structure of Pasolini's 1955 novel: it depicts (with marked irony on the part of the narrator) the "practices of mystification" employed by the state while simultaneously introducing the social context that exists in direct opposition to these practices. Il Riccetto, Agnolo, Marcello and the other *ragazzi di vita* immediately appear as a liminal group of young males almost entirely divested of property, identity and privilege. From the very beginning, the narrator stresses not just the similarity of their appearance, but also the code of behavior that intrinsically unites them: their walk to the church is marked by their collective arrogance and overt sexuality. While this "false" right of passage fails to invest il Riccetto with any religious fervor, it does however signal his entry, and that of his fellow *ragazzi*, into a state of liminality.¹¹⁹

Through this Catholic ritual, and their evident physical puberty, the *ragazzi* symbolically abandon the vestiges of childhood. Devoid of any concrete significance within the world of the *borgate*, however, the rituals of communion and confirmation do little to provide the boys with a place within the larger social context. This social ritual is immediately followed by a depiction of marginality as il Riccetto abandons his family to walk down the empty streets of the outer limits of the *borgate*. Trapped in the liminal space between physical and social puberty, the *ragazzi* therefore assume an ambiguous role within the acknowledged social structure of the text and the novel follows them as they trudge along the margins of their society, largely invisible to the rest of the population.

comunicando o un soldato di Gesù pareva un pischello quando se ne va acchittato per lungoteveri a rimorchiare. Con una compagnia di maschi uguali a lui, tutti vestiti di bianco, scese giù alla chiesa della Divina Provvidenza, dove alle nove Don Pizzuto gli fece la comunione e alle undici il Vescovo lo cresimò." Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1979), 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Immediately after the ceremony, Il Riccetto gets annoyed with the scenes of religious devotion and leaves.

Throughout the text, the characters, differentiated only by their nicknames, interact almost exclusively with other males in their same position. Their identity is formed not in relation to traditional patriarchal constructs, but solely through their interaction with one another. Together the *ragazzi* form an egalitarian community which largely “transcends the distinctions of rank, age, [and] kinship position.”¹²⁰ Little if any information is provided on the background of any of the principal characters; the overall lack of physical descriptions and biographical information consolidates their identity as a group. This is further emphasized through their shared behavior and common language. The novel as a whole is dominated by this homosocial environment and its distinctly individual code of conduct. As the boys grow within their state of liminality, they develop the tools necessary to survive within their given social context. While maintaining the bonds and equality of comradeship among one another, the *ragazzi* take advantage of the outside community through calculated theft and spontaneous acts of violence. The authority governing life in the city center and adult life in the *borgate* seems entirely alien to the young men’s experience of everyday life. Indeed, the laws of the state are deeply incongruent with the *ragazzi*’s strategies of survival and thus, their entire way of life. The few contacts between the *ragazzi* and the members of the community are brief and fraught with tension. Adults, police officers and other figures of authority are depicted as an extension of the state; repeatedly, the very parents of the principal characters attempt to force them into traditional roles through work or devout Catholicism, two entities far removed from the reality of the *borgate*. Encounters between the *ragazzi* and these individuals often end with either incarceration (as in the

120 Turner, “Betwixt and Between,” 95. Little attention is paid to blood relationships. Within the group, all members relate to one another as equals. The members of the group are often valued above blood relations. When Marcello is on his death bed, the narrator focuses on Marcello’s goodbye with the other *ragazzi* rather than on his visit with his family.

case of il Riccetto) or death (as in the case of Amerigo).¹²¹ The liminal space—and the alternative form of identity it creates— is thus in danger from a still intrinsically Fascist context; this context would see the *ragazzi* integrated within their conception of individual and national identity or annihilated.¹²²

The particular use of language in *Ragazzi di vita* further concretizes the separation intrinsically present between the liminal experience of the *ragazzi* and the mainstream social context. Throughout the novel, the characters express themselves solely through the use of the Roman dialect. David Ward argues that the presence of this dialect temporarily “complicates and delays” the relationship between the reader and the novel in order to highlight the inherent difference of the subjects analyzed in the text and their marginality within Italian society.¹²³ Pasolini’s attention to the spoken form of his principal characters is of particular interest due to the Fascist Regime’s pointed attack of dialectal forms which they viewed as a manifestation of “all that was wrong in old Italy, including political regionalism, cultural disunity and antimodernism.”¹²⁴ For Pasolini, the “direct discourse” present in his text allowed the readers to simultaneously experience “the other” and “the nostalgia for something that is about to disappear.”¹²⁵ Within the

¹²¹ Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita*, 123; 83-84.

¹²² Although the Fascist Regime comes to an end with World War II, the government that follows maintains many of the structures created under Mussolini’s administration. In particular, as Pasolini himself discusses in “The Concentration Camps,” the conception and treatment of the poor in the *borgate* does not really change. The necessity to keep them outside the city center results in the construction of new *borgate* which simply replace the older edifices. This architectural continuity underscores a certain level of ideological continuity between fascism and the Christian Democracy. This is further reiterated in the Christian Democracy’s highly conservative stance on familial structure. Pasolini, “The Concentration Camps.”

¹²³ Ward, *A poetics of resistance*, 51.

¹²⁴ Filippo Canistraro, “Mussolini’s Cultural Revolution: fascist or nationalist?” in *Fascism: Critical Concepts in Political Science, Volume III Fascism and Culture*, ed. Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 192.

¹²⁵ Carla Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino: Per una letteratura impura* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), 31.

larger narrative structure, this dialect thus assumes the role of *sacra* for the individuals and the reader. It is a singular entity that encompasses the values of the liminal world of the *borgate* and allows the *ragazzi* to examine the theoretical construction of their society. The pervasive presence of derogatory remarks not only allows the young men to refer to one another on a plane of equality and brutal honesty, but it also allows them to subvert and re-appropriate terms that might be used against them by members of the upper classes. Those boys who cannot participate in the mutual exchange of derision, are not true members of the liminal space and are therefore pushed out by force: Piattoletta, a young boy who follows the group but is incapable of truly participating in their linguistic rituals is set on fire and left to die.¹²⁶ The deleterious intrusions of the exterior social context are also depicted in linguistic terms; each episode of conflict with a member of the larger community puts an end to the boys' spoken interactions. In no episode is this as vividly displayed as in the scene chronicling Marcello's death. After Marcello makes his final request, Agnolo and Oberdan go back onto the streets of the *borgate* "without saying a word."¹²⁷ Silence also marks il Riccetto's final exit from the liminal state. After letting his fellow *ragazzo* drown, il Riccetto does not exchange a single word with the other boys present at the scene. The boy, *ragazzo* no more, crosses the bridge that leads toward the city center and disappears into silence.¹²⁸

Throughout *Ragazzi di vita* Pasolini uses a state of liminality to propose a masculine figure that stands in direct opposition to the tainted legacy of the Fascist Regime. In many ways these boys and their environment are depicted like the prisoners of war and the partisans of the works previously discussed, but unlike Spinetti, Calvino,

126 "[...] senza dire una parola." Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita*, 145.

127 Ibid., 47.

128 Ibid., 201.

and Fenoglio's masculine constructions, Pasolini sees no hope for their entry into social puberty. Although they are the living embodiments of a purer ideological patriarchy, his *ragazzi di vita* will never be able to participate in the reconstruction of the emergent Italian nation. The very mechanisms that would allow them to participate in some sort of generative discourse—those of marriage, work or politics— are still intrinsically tied to Fascism. Their only hope lies in the subversive potentiality of a sustained liminality.¹²⁹

Pier Paolo Pasolini is ostensibly one of the most controversial authors to emerge from the young generation that came to maturity during the Fascist Regime. “In order to understand the ‘scandal’ of the publication of *Ragazzi di Vita*, and its brilliant success, the debate it created, it is necessary to turn to images of newspaper-films of the period,” writes Siciliano.¹³⁰ Pasolini, like Calvino, was heavily involved in the political debate that took place over the newspapers and journals of the period as well as in the various narrative forms available to those members of his generation. He also interacted actively with the poetic, literary and cinematic fields producing a wide variety of texts in the forms of poetry, novels, and feature length films. His first novel, and those that would follow, act as the foundation of his active role in the politics of the postwar period. Although Pasolini's novels differ substantially from the other works heretofore discussed, the author is similarly concerned with redefining Italian society through the depiction of potentially subversive states of liminality. While Spinetti, Calvino, and Fenoglio use these subversive states to create a place for themselves and/or their protagonists within the postwar context, Pasolini seems to negate the possibility of maintaining an individual

¹²⁹ Ward, *A poetics of Resistance*, 68. Ward notes that this perennial marginality is of particular “interest to Pasolini precisely because their nonparticipation in the narrative of history has given them no sense of future expectation. As such, they remain open to the possibility of the unexpected and unforeseen.” Through marginality, they resist the “homologizing forces” inherently present in the construction of historical narrative.

¹³⁰ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, 209.

identity within the emerging Italian nation and thus places himself at odds with the dominant literary rewriting of his period.¹³¹ *Ragazzi di vita* take its place in his larger criticism of a society that is unable to acknowledge the continuity present between the contemporary social context and that created by the Fascist Regime.¹³²

131 Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino*. Benedetti's text offers an extensive analysis of Pasolini's works and their place within the larger literary milieu. She juxtaposes him particularly to Italo Calvino, an author with whom he had engaged repeatedly in a vivacious debate on the role of the intellectual in society.

132 Cesare Cesarino, "Oedipus Exploded: Pasolini and the myth of Modernization," *The MIT Press* 59, (1992): 29.

Chapter 7: In Conclusion

In Italy, the second half of the twentieth century was marked by a sequence of social and political upheavals that would forever change not just the contemporary social context, but also that context's relationship with the past. The constant tension between the various parties contending for power wrought innumerable changes to individual and national conceptions of identity as did the rapidly shifting economic currents.¹³³ In the postwar period codes of conduct governing gender were particularly prone to change due to their place within the propagation of the various party ideologies. When they acquired the vote in 1946, Italian women became inextricably tied with "the imagery of the Republic which counterposed itself to the overt masculinity of Fascism" and the place of both genders within the larger social context became less fixed.¹³⁴ The Italian *paterfamilias*, and subsequently the organization of the larger social context, was permeated by the legacy of Fascism's final, inglorious chapter.

This series of events called for the tempestuous refashioning of the role of the intellectual and for works that could provide readers with a way to interact dynamically with their extremely volatile present. In an essay entitled "Il Midollo del leone" Italo Calvino proposes his own understanding of the purpose of literature during this time:

Because, among the possibilities that open themselves for literature to act upon history, this is the one that best belongs to it, maybe the only one that isn't an illusion; to understand for which type of man this history, with its multiple, contradictory activity is preparing the battlefield and to dictate then his sensibility, his moral release, the weight of his word, the very way in which that man must

133 Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory*. Foot provides an extensive explanation of the particular impact of the tension between left and right leaning political parties on the construction of Italy's memory of the war.

134 Stephen Gundle, "Feminine Beauty, National Identity and Political Conflict in Postwar Italy, 1945-1954," *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 3 (1999): 359.

look about himself in the world. Those things, that is, that only poetry—and not, for example, philosophy or politics—can teach.¹³⁵

The four authors discussed in this report each interact with the confusion and desperation of the postwar experience through the literary investigation of a complex liminal state. Each draws upon his own personal experiences of marginality to retell a war or postwar experience that allows the individual to imagine the possibility—as unrealistic as such a possibility may be—of a personal and national identity completely divested of the tainted legacy of the final expression of the Fascist Regime. Through a manipulation of the common experience of marginality (as constructed through the loss of identity, property and privilege), these authors attempt to provide their readers with a way of circumventing their physical patriarchies and redeeming Italian masculinity. They put forth a figure shaped through collective liminality that stands in direct opposition to the Fascist models proposed during the final chapter of Mussolini's reign. But while Spinetti, Calvino and Fenoglio's literary contributions reflect the hope present in the immediate postwar context, Pasolini's novels reflect the disillusionment of the moment in which the Italian intellectual was forced to "come to terms with the fact that the cultural and political foundations of the solidarity of the moment of resistance had irreparably collapsed or at least that they were no longer sufficient to overwhelm the looming feeling of emptiness and uncertainty."¹³⁶

135 "Perchè, tra le possibilità che s'aprono alla letteratura d'agire sulla storia, questa è la più sua, forse la sola che non sia illusoria: capire a quale tipo d'uomo essa storia col suo molteplice, contraddittorio lavoro sta preparando il campo di battaglia, e dettarne la sensibilità, lo scatto morale, il peso della parola, il modo in cui esso uomo dovrà guardarsi intorno nel mondo; quelle cose insomma che solo la poesia— e non per esempio la filosofia o la politica—può insegnare." Italo Calvino, "Il Midollo del Leone," in *Calvino: Saggi*, ed. Mario Barenghi, (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), 9.

136 "...a fare i conti con una realtà completamente mutata nelle quale i presupposti culturali e politici di solidarietà sono irreparabilmente crollati o per lo meno non sono più sufficienti a colmare una sensazione incombente di vuoto e di incertezza." Binetti, Vincenzo, "Marginalità e appartenenza : la funzione dell'intellettuale tra sfera pubblica e privato nell'Italia del dopoguerra." *Italica* 74, 3 (1997): 365.

Despite their intrinsic limitations, through their particular depiction of liminality these narratives shape not just the individual careers of the authors, or the perceptions of their contemporaries, but also the “collective memory” of the events that would transform the course of the twentieth century. Through their works, these authors transfigure the common experience of marginality into a threshold brimming with revolutionary potentiality. While much study has been dedicated to understanding the evolving role of women in the postwar context, the development of the male persona in the period between 1940 and 1955 merits further study. Such an investigation could potentially lead to additional insight into the masculine models that emerge in the second half of the twentieth century and into the social, political and cultural manifestations of a refashioned patriarchy built on specific memories of World War II.

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