BEPPE FENOGLIO'S *PARTIGIANO* ARCHIVE:
TRANSLATION, *RESISTENZA*, TESTIMONY

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Abstract. Beppe Fenoglio's most famous novel, *Partigiano Johnny*, is not actually a novel at all, but a posthumous philological reconstruction of a series of typescripts that inspired one of the fiercest Italian literary debates of the postwar period. This debate reached a fever pitch in the 1990s as Italy was coming to terms with the impact of the *Resistenza* on national identity. As a partisan-writer with no connections to fascism, Fenoglio long occupied a stabilizing role in the Italian literary canon, intensifying the stakes for academics who wished to "heal" the wounds of his fragmented text and use them to produce a coherent, redemptive Resistance narrative, with Johnny-Fenoglio serving as a contemporary Dante. However, the incomplete, incompatible typescripts structurally refute the dominant postwar rhetoric that depicts the armistice as a "radical rupture" in Italian history, a "year zero" that catalyzed Italy's rebirth. With no clear beginning or end, the texts enact a structural resistance that is echoed thematically in the partisan-protagonist's metatextual reflections on the difficulty of narrating the *Resistenza* after the war has ended, which he theorizes in Dantean terms. Reading these thematic and structural resistances, this essay argues that they suggest that the "incomplete" archive is not treatable. Rather than opposing the philological debate or taking sides, I consider how this unstable text and the surrounding efforts to reconstruct it, collectively testify to the trauma of writing and remembering the *Resistenza*.

According to a well-known anecdote, Beppe Fenoglio's first childhood act of resistance to Fascism was refusing to write. Pietro Chiodi, Fenoglio's philosophy teacher and, later, fellow partisan, recounts that when Fenoglio was asked to write a composition in praise of Mussolini's regime, "[l]a pagina rimase bianca" (qtd.

in *Lettere* 199).¹ Decades later, when he wrote short stories, novellas, and novels inspired by his experience fighting in the Langhe region of Piedmont, Fenoglio similarly refused to glorify: his partisans are not mythic creatures but human beings plagued by contradictions and motivated by high ideals as well as petty concerns. Fenoglio's critical portrayal of the *Resistenza* in the texts published during his lifetime, such as *I ventitré giorni nella città di Alba* (1952), *La malora* (1954), and *Primavera di bellezza* (1959)² garnered significant attention. However, that pales in comparison to the debates that developed with the posthumous discovery of thousands of unpublished pages that required a decade-long organizational effort on the part of philologist Maria Corti and her team. The resulting three-volume *Opere critiche* (1978), a four-thousand-page text, is “un unicum assoluto nella storia della filologia italiana per un autore contemporaneo” (Pedullà, “Le armi” x).³ While the blank page of Fenoglio's youth underwrites a portrayal of the emblematic Italian partisan-writer, the gaps in his archive have turned him into a contemporary Dante, a position that this article will investigate in dialogue with the texts' own Dantean resonances.

At the centre of this philological *questione* are a series of texts that tell the story of Johnny, first introduced to readers in *Primavera di bellezza*: a lover of English poetry, an avid translator, and a soldier, Johnny becomes a partisan after the army's post-armistice dissolution, only to die shortly thereafter. The posthumously discovered typescripts revise Johnny's story in different ways—and include versions in which he survives to fight for much or nearly all of the *Resistenza*. However, they do not amount individually or collectively to a completed novel but to “a series of drafts, different stages of a vast undertaking, an interplay of competing, ultimately incompatible, versions” (Meddemmen 998). The cloud of confusion surrounding the Johnny typescripts is so dense that Corti's *Opere* did not resolve but, instead, inflamed debates amongst philologists and, moreover,

¹ Chiodi's article, “Fenoglio scrittore civile,” from which this anecdote is drawn, has served as an important source for subsequent accounts, in particular Maria Antonietta Grignani, Davide Lajolo, and Piero Scaglione. See *Lettere* 197–202.

² These publications attracted media attention, both positive and negative; in the heated climate of the 1950s, the communists were quick to attack stories that represented the *Resistenza* in less than heroic terms (*Lettere* 59n2). For the controversy surrounding *Ventitré giorni* see Scaglione 161–166; *Lettere* 55, 59–61, 200; Mondo xi; Grignani 120. For the varied responses to *La malora* and *Primavera di bellezza*, see Mondo xi and Grignani 20.

³ The same point was also made by Isella x.

between philological and “literary” methods of reading the *Partigiano* archive. While the philological debates concern themselves with establishing the sequence in which the typescripts were written, literary critics argue that these efforts to produce a legible text paradoxically obfuscate them.⁴

Here, then, making use of the double etymology of the term “archive” defined by Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, I will argue that the question of establishing the texts’ sequential *order* serves as a site for disciplinary struggles to bring the text under an academic jurisdiction: for Derrida, the archive imposes an order that is simultaneously “sequential and jussive”—a “commencement” that is also a “commandment” (1). Insofar as the archive is “the place where things begin, where power originates, inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings” (Steedman 4), the disorderly history of the *Partigiano* archive can be traced back to its editorial origins. In Derrida’s words, “the first archivist institutes the archive as it should be, that is to say, not only in exhibiting the document but in *establishing* it. He reads it, interprets it, classes it” (*Archive Fever* 55; emphasis in original). In the case of *Partigiano*, that first archivist was not Corti but Lorenzo Mondo who, in 1968, brought *Partigiano Johnny* to a vast number of readers, unaware that they were enjoying “uno stupefacente ibrido testuale” created by Mondo—as Corti soon revealed (*Nuovi* 17).⁵ It is fitting, then, that the result of the supposed “order” was a proliferation of texts vying for the *Partigiano* mantle: producing *Partigiano Johnny* through “una curiosa contaminazione tra le parti di due diverse stesure dattiloscritte giacenti nel Fondo Fenoglio [...] e entrambe in vario modo lacunose” (Corti, *Opere* “Nota” 1207), Mondo inspired three subsequent editions that propose their own authoritative version: Corti’s *Opere* (1978), Dante Isella’s *Partigiano Johnny* (1992), and Gabriele Pedullà’s *Il libro di Johnny* (2015). As Susan Van Zyl has argued, for Derrida, “A science of the archive must concern itself not only with the way in which the archive becomes an institution and the laws that govern this institutionalization, but also with those who authorize (in both senses) this process” (40). Thus, more than authorizing one specific philological reconstruction, what seems important to observe at a 50-year distance from Mondo’s *commencement/commandment* is how, as each philologist promises the authoritative order of the *Partigiano* archive, a reciprocal relationship emerges by which the archive legitimizes the philologist at the top of a hierarchy of readers.

⁴ See De Nicola 74 and Beccaria 9–10.

⁵ For a disavowal of Mondo, see also Grignani 125.

To read the history of the *Partigiano* archive is to witness this struggle for authorization, symptomatized by metaphors in which scholars compete in rival soccer teams, engage in custody battles, or wage war.⁶ To read *Partigiano Johnny* is, quite simply, to choose sides.

Looking back over this *academic* civil war, it cannot be coincidental that its height came precisely as Fenoglio was implicated in a broader cultural debate on the *Resistenza*. In the 1991 publication of Claudio Pavone's *Una guerra civile*, the controversial notion of the *Resistenza* as a civil war—sustained in Fenoglio's writings—reached the mainstream. A seminal work of historiography, *Una guerra civile* attests to Fenoglio's authority in a discourse whose foundations were growing ever shakier: considering Fenoglio so well-established as to necessitate no introduction (nor even a first name), Pavone cites Fenoglio's literary texts frequently, using them to confirm his historical hypotheses.⁷ For the historian, Fenoglio's texts occupy a more stable—indeed, stabilizing—role: Fenoglio belongs to an elite group of Italian intellectuals in no need of redemption for their connections with the regime.⁸ Even for those who point to a lack of a coherent ideological motivation behind Fenoglio's aversion to Fascism (De Nicola 17), that lack only serves to cast Fenoglio and his texts in a more illustrious light—above the political fray, as Giulio Ferroni's remarks suggest: “E tra le numerose opere dedicate alla Resistenza e alla guerra partigiana si rivela sempre più ‘grande’ e assoluta l’opera di Beppe Fenoglio, scrittore solitario, che è stato del tutto estraneo alla frivolezza e alle beghe politico-istituzionali della società letteraria” (9).

Thus, whether the *Partigiano* archive is read as a true reflection of the *Resistenza* (as Italo Calvino claimed about Fenoglio's *Una questione privata* [1963]) or as productively “transcend[ing] the reality of his times” (Cooke 3), the stakes of ordering this emblematic, non-existent text are as high as the archive is resistant. Structurally, the incomplete, incompatible typescripts refute the dominant postwar rhetoric that depicts the armistice as a “radical rupture” in Italian history, a “year zero” that catalyzed Italy's rebirth.⁹ With no clear beginning or end, the

⁶ For the more conciliatory metaphors, see Bricchi; for the war metaphor, see Beccaria 9.

⁷ See Pavone 30, 126, 139, 230. Fenoglio, too, understood the *Resistenza* as a civil war, an unpopular perspective in the 1950s. See Bigazzi for an analysis of Fenoglio's position. For other such treatments of Fenoglio in the historiography of the early 1990s, see Ginsborg and Gobbi.

⁸ Mirella Serri's *I redenti: Gli intellettuali che vissero due volte (1938–1948)* speaks precisely to this tendency.

⁹ On the propagation of the year-zero concept through Italian cinematic neorealism, see Fabbri.

typescripts enact a structural resistance that is echoed thematically in the partisan-protagonist's metatextual reflections on the difficulty of narrating the *Resistenza* after the war has ended. Reading these thematic and structural resistances, then, I argue that they suggest that the "incomplete" archive is not a wound that the philologist might treat; instead, the *Partigiani* typescripts and the unceasing effort to envision the "complete" version can be read as testifying to the trauma of the *Resistenza*. Here, beyond the unglossed meaning of trauma as a catastrophic event, I evoke the Freudian intertexts that inform Derrida's *Archive Fever* and psychoanalytic trauma studies more generally, in particular in essays such as "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," where the wound is not "a simple and healable event" (Caruth 4).¹⁰ Manifesting this trauma at the thematic and structural level, the *Partigiani* typescripts refuse conventional narrativization that, for Dominick LaCapra, "is closest to fictionalization in the sense of a dubious departure from, or distortion of, historical reality when it conveys relatively unproblematic closure" (15–16). In the persistent search for closure, philologists strive to heal the archive; instead, what they produce is a form of testimony, a collaborative negotiation between speaker and listener; as Shoshana Felman writes, "Because trauma cannot be simply remembered, it cannot simply be 'confessed': it must be testified to, in a struggle shared between a speaker and a listener to recover something the speaking subject is not—and cannot be—in possession of" (*Woman* 16). Rather than opposing the philological debate or taking sides, I consider how this unstable archive (of which the debates are an inextricable part) testifies to the trauma of writing and remembering the *Resistenza*.

Without question, Lorenzo Mondo's *Partigiano Johnny* together with Corti's condemnation are seminal moments of the *Partigiano* archive, setting the successive interpretive parameters. However, there are two pieces of archival "evidence" that have proved just as influential, both involving Fenoglio's Einaudi editor, Italo Calvino. In a 1957 letter, Fenoglio told Calvino of a work in progress that would narrate "the story of Johnny's life from his childhood through to the

¹⁰ For a concise overview of the two main branches of contemporary trauma studies through the late 1990s, see Herman Rapaport's review of Derrida's *Archive Fever*, esp. 76–77n2. See also LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, as well as Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, a Foucauldian approach to the history of trauma, from Freud to Caruth.

end of the Resistance” (Cooke, “Review” 220), a confession which provided the philological impetus to search for a “complete” narrative or, in its absence, to piece one together. Second, according to another oft-cited confession to Calvino, Fenoglio, known to be an Anglophile, wrote by translating: “Adesso ti dirò una cosa che tu non crederai: io prima scrivo in inglese e poi traduco in italiano” (qtd. in Isella xvi). The first thread this essay follows, then, is how Corti uses Fenoglio’s supposed practice of translation to order the typescripts into the “big book.” Following this unusual English-to-Italian trajectory, she argues that the typescripts that are almost completely in *fenglese* would be early drafts,¹¹ while the one with single words and phrases in English would be considered the most advanced.

Calvino not only set the philological parameters for *Partigiano Johnny*, but he also made an indelible impact on Fenoglio’s reception. Writing in the wake of Fenoglio’s untimely death in 1963, in the preface to his *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Calvino called *Una questione privata* (1963) “[i]l libro che la nostra generazione voleva fare” (xxiii).¹² Heaping high praise upon the book of his recently deceased friend, Calvino describes Fenoglio in Dantean terms.¹³ In a declaration that has become a permanent feature of Fenoglio scholarship, Calvino celebrates how, in *Una questione privata*, “c’è la Resistenza proprio com’era, di dentro e di fuori, vera come mai era stata scritta, serbata per tanti anni limpidamente dalla memoria fedele [...] ed è un libro di parole precise e vere.”¹⁴

Then, five years after the success of *Questione*, *Partigiano Johnny* appeared.¹⁵ The rough plotline tells the story of a young man who, having left the Italian army following the armistice of September 8, 1943, is hidden by his family in a house in

¹¹ Fenoglio’s English is considered so idiosyncratic as to be a new idiolect, reflected by the humorous neologism. Credited to Saccone, the term *fenglese* is repeated by others like Isella (1501) and Roberto Galaverni (101). Corti labels the manuscripts according to this criterium: *UrPJ* refers to the originary manuscript, while *PJ1* is considered an intermediary and *PJ2*, the latest version.

¹² Fenoglio’s collection *Un giorno di fuoco*, which included *Una questione privata*, was published by Garzanti shortly after Fenoglio’s death.

¹³ After the publications of the short-story collections *I ventitré giorni nella città di Alba* (1952) and *La malora* (1954), both published in the Einaudi “Gettoni” series, Fenoglio broke with Einaudi over conflicts with his editor, Elio Vittorini, moving to Garzanti where he published the novel *Primavera di bellezza* (PdB; 1959).

¹⁴ This preface appears in Cooke 1; Pedullà, “Resistenza” 16; Bricchi 119; Isella ix; Innocenti 66; Grignani 124; Lajolo 175–179.

¹⁵ For another disavowal of Mondo, see Grignani 125.

the hills to avoid conscription. Frustrated by his life of translating English poetry, contemplating the landscape, and thinking about women, Johnny disobeys his parents' order to stay in the house and goes into the city of Alba. He becomes increasingly involved in the local stirrings of unrest, until he ultimately decides to seek out the mythical partisans who are reportedly hiding in the hills. Johnny joins the first group he meets, a communist brigade, but, not feeling *truly* like a partisan in their midst, he later affiliates himself with a Badoglian group, whose political views and middle class status are more similar to his own.

On the heels of this publication came Corti's watershed declaration that the novel was "uno stupefacente ibrido testuale" created by Mondo (*Nuovi* 17), inaugurating Corti's decade-long effort to propose a philological cure. Although Corti and her team believe that the "big book" may have existed, their effort yielded only "ambigue e discontinue tracce" (*Opere*, "Nota" 1209): three decapitated, discontinuous, inconclusive typescripts that are a far cry from the totalizing partisan chronicle that Fenoglio told Calvino he was writing. Spanning from Johnny's return to the Langhe from Rome (September 1943) to the battle of Valdivilla (February 24, 1945), the typescript that Corti labels *PJ1* is the longest of the three but nonetheless is "un testo acefalo [...], mutilo [...] e forse anche incompiuto" (Saccone, "Tutto Fenoglio" 166). *PJ2* covers much the same ground as *PJ1*, often in the same words, and shares similar health problems: "*PJ2*, oltre che acefalo, è anche lacunoso" (Isella 1584).¹⁶ Calendrically, *PJ2* starts later than *PJ1* (just after Johnny leaves the Garibaldini and joins the Badogliani in Winter 1944) and also eliminates many characters and episodes.¹⁷ Although both typescripts end on the same date, their conclusions differ. In *PJ2*, the battle is interrupted by an ellipsis and the text jumps to the end of the war: "Johnny si alzò col fucile di Tarzan ed il semiautomatico... Due mesi dopo la guerra era finita" (*PJ2* 1203, ellipsis in original). Finally, in terms of historical coverage, the third typescript, *Ur Partigiano* (*UrPJ*), spans from March to April 1945 and describes Johnny's fighting alongside a division of English soldiers while continuing to struggle with his partisan identity. Containing only nine chapters (numbered II–X) written in "una forma corrotta e personalissima di inglese" (Bricchi 127), *UrPJ* is another fragment: "non è un testo autonomo, ma lo spezzone terminale di una narrazione" (Isella 1501).¹⁸

¹⁶ Corti also believes its end is mutilated (*Nuovi* 429).

¹⁷ Grignani 37–44; Isella 1587.

¹⁸ See also Bricchi 127; Corti, *Nuovi* 425; and *Storia* 62. Merry, one of *UrPJ*'s first readers and its translator, appears to be alone in his assertion that "it is a novel in its own right" (7).

Ordering these manuscripts based on the degree of English contained in each one, Corti produced a sequence that makes Fenoglio's writerly journey legible at the expense of Johnny's, as the typescript that covers the latest part of the story, *UrPJ*, becomes the beginning—the *ur*-text. As crucial a landmark as Corti's *Opere* are, this dating hypothesis compounded by the general inaccessibility of the *Opere*, earned her no end of criticism.¹⁹ With an eye to correcting this, in 1992, Dante Isella published a new edition that, like Mondo's, includes parts of *PJ1* and *PJ2* spliced together according to his philological theory. Although Isella documents his decision (and includes the additional chapters in an appendix to satiate the philologically inclined), he was not spared a scathing critique; Cooke strongly condemns the "wretched operation Isella has carried out on Fenoglio's masterpiece" and claims it is no different than Mondo's approach ("Review" 219), while Corti re-asserts the authority of her own version, using economic metaphors to equate Isella's "legibility" with profitability and the "sacrifice" of philological integrity (*Nuovi* 428). Decades later, Gabriele Pedullà published his own philological reconstruction of the "big book" that favours the oldest available version of each section, with an eye towards resolving the "impasse" created between the seemingly incompatible objectives of legibility and integrity (xiii). Whether or not the book will shape subsequent generations of Fenoglio readers, it sets itself apart with a new title, *Il libro di Johnny*.²⁰ In his cogent preface, Pedullà recognizes at once the cultural force of the preceding editions and asserts the need for a new one for a new generation of Italian readers; the next step would be for an English-language publisher to produce a new translation, insofar as Stuart Hood's *Johnny the Partisan* works from the Mondo edition, despite being published in 1994.²¹

Partigiano Johnny, then, bears the unusual distinction of being an emblematic text of the *Resistenza* but also virtually inaccessible except to a small subset of "professional" readers. The proliferation of *Partigiano Johnnys* produces

¹⁹ On the controversy, see O'Healy 43. The "dating" question effectively divides those who view *Partigiano* as the starting point or the culmination of Fenoglio's narrative production (*Nota* 1207–1208). Corti and her followers sustain the former, and Eugenio Corsini, Giovanni Falaschi, Saccone, Bigazzi, Isella, and Cooke, the latter. The most accessible summary of this debate—and the only detailed account available in English—is chapter one of Cooke's *Fenoglio's Binoculars, Johnny's Eyes*.

²⁰ In his review of Pedullà's 2015 *Il libro di Johnny*, Giancarlo Afano frames the discussion with the central but paradoxical role held by Mondo's *Partigiano*.

²¹ Hood, in his preface, acknowledges that he is translating "an editorial conflation."

a hierarchy, moving from the serious scholar (humorously named “un ipotetico Lettor Sotutto” by Paolo Valesio), to the average-but-enlightened reader (Isella 1583), and, finally, to the ignorant but happy “lettore comune” (Grignani 125).²² The majority of readers, then, approaches it through only one of the editions, each with its compromises. Rather than take sides, I engage with two of the major philological proposals for ordering the manuscripts: Maria Corti’s suggestion of *UrPJ* + *PJ1* + *PJ2*; Roberto Bigazzi’s hypothesis that *Primavera di bellezza* (*PdB1*) should be read together with *PJ1* followed by *UrPJ*.²³ As I discussed above, Corti uses Fenoglio’s creative process of self-translation as an ordering principle, following Fenoglio’s development as a writer; Bigazzi, instead, traces Johnny’s development through the typescripts, treating him as a literary pilgrim and the text as a conversion narrative whose tripartite structure roughly maps onto Dante’s *Commedia*. Although these efforts are incompatible philologically, together they provide a point of entry into the typescripts’ metatextual concerns of what it means to narrate the *Resistenza* between the promised “big book” and the archive that not only preserves but, as suggested by Derrida’s *mal d’archive*, destroys.²⁴ Extending Corti’s interest in translation to include not just the process by which the text was composed but also a thematic interest within its pages, Johnny can be understood to be producing himself as a partisan through multiple translations. In these translations, we witness his project to resist not just by *using* the pen—but also by refusing to wield it. Thus, the gaps in the narrative demand that the Dantean pilgrim-poet relationship, which Bigazzi astutely locates, be read as such, not healed. From such a perspective, instead of an authoritative confession, the *Partigiano* archive gives way to a collaborative testimony of the fraught *Resistenza* context where civil war destabilizes meaning within the Italian language itself.

²² In his review of the *Opere*, Valesio astutely notes the work’s general inaccessibility, particularly in regards to the absence of footnoting in such an expensive edition of such a lengthy text (“Le maccheronee”).

²³ The pioneer of the late-dating thesis that Bigazzi maintains is Corsini; others who support it include Falaschi, Cooke, Saccone, and Isella.

²⁴ Based on the Freudian death drive from “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Derrida’s “archiviolithic is that archival penchant for self-effacement that would leave no intelligible archive of that effacement” (Saint-Amour 175).

In organizing the *Partigiano* archive around translation, Corti is encouraged by Fenoglio and by Johnny, both Anglophiles and avid translators.²⁵ In *Primavera*, Johnny's conventional definition of translation subordinates it to "lo scrivere in proprio" (1278),²⁶ and it is this view that Corti relies upon in her preface to the *Opere*, as she justifies her exclusion of Fenoglio's translations as *non-creative*.²⁷ However, Corti believes that the *Partigiano* project was produced through a series of self-translations in which Fenoglio used English "come scala per salire all'atto espressivo" (*Storia* 24).²⁸ Thus, the stages of his self-translations allow Corti to plot a narrative through the archival maze:

Conquistato un discreto grado di bilinguismo, lo utilizza per un'operazione linguistico-stilistica rivolta a due esiti: una scrittura in inglese e una scrittura mista, entrambe concepite come fase privata, lavoro di cantiere in vista del passaggio a una scrittura finale quasi completamente italiana, dove il vocabolo inglese ci sia solo in casi di particolarissima connotazione. (*Storia* 24)

Fenoglio soon surpasses the first rung in the ladder, interlingual translation: "Tradurre per Fenoglio fu concepito presto come un noviziato allo scrivere" (*Storia* 23). Fenoglio's proper journey as a writer begins with his return from the war, "carico di memorie drammatiche che si cingono nel ricordo di un alone visionario" (*Nuovi* 425). Corti conceptualizes a form of non-creative translation, which she contrasts with translation as transformation, closer to the generative vision articulated by contemporary translation theorists.²⁹ The road thus paved,

²⁵ The primary scholarly contributions on Fenoglio's interlingual translations are Mark Pietralunga's *Beppe Fenoglio and English Literature: A Study of the Writer as Translator*, and articles by Bruce Merry, translator of *UrPJ*, and John Meddemmen, who, in addition to editing *UrPJ* for the *Opere*, edited and wrote an introduction to Fenoglio's translation of Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, *Il vento nei salici*.

²⁶ Citations of Fenoglio's texts come from Corti's *Opere*: pages 1–365 refer to *UrPJ*; pages 389–924 to *PJ1*; pages 925–1203 to *PJ2*; pages 1257–1426 to *Primavera di bellezza—prima redazione* (*PdBI*); pages 1427–1568 refer to *Primavera di bellezza—seconda redazione*.

²⁷ Meddemmen laments this decision, evoking translation's traditional outcast status (88).

²⁸ See also Galaverni 100.

²⁹ Seidman writes: "The notion of translation as transformation steers clear of the assumption that translation must proceed through a strict equivalence, a fidelity to original sources, if it

Fenoglio can travel from the “English” of *UrPJ*, to the “lingua ibrida” of *PJ1*, and finally to the Italian of *PJ2*, which is even *more* original than “original” writing (*Storia* 63; *Nuovi* 439). After a transgressive encounter with English, Fenoglio books a *return* trip home, bringing with him an improved Italian (Galaverni 95).³⁰ In Johnny’s explanation to his friend, “l’anglofilia, l’anglomania se vuoi,” serves him “come espressione del mio desiderio, della mia esigenza di un’Italia diversa, migliore” (1278). Taking a cue from contemporary translation theory that expands the privileged focus on *interlingual* translation and linguistic equivalence, Corti’s privileging of translation may be productively rethought in terms of how it intersects with problems of *intra*lingual translation—specifically, the effort to stabilize meaning in the post-armistice world, where terms such as enemy, ally, partisan, and even Italy are called into question.³¹

As stated above, Johnny’s vision of interlingual translation is similar to Corti’s, as Johnny subordinates it to “original writing” in *PdBI* and associates it with his marginalized political position in *PJ1*. Forbidden by his family from leaving the secluded house where they have hidden him after the armistice for fear of his deportation, translation serves as a temporary distraction from the world beyond the window. Before September 8, translation is his constant activity: “Ora traduco: sto traducendo come un pazzo, conducendo tre versioni simultanee” (1277–1278). Afterwards, hidden in the countryside, he turns to it once again; “miracolosamente” finding the tragedies of Marlowe in his hand, he decides, “L’avrebbe tradotto, consumato la sera a tradurlo: non visivamente, ma con penna, l’avrebbe messo in carta con una scrittura elementare, minuziosa e calcata, la grafia come un ceppo di salvezza.” However, translation fails to perform its salvific function: “Springò in piedi, alto sul fuoco della miseria, dell’impossibilità, serrò il libro con uno schiaffo secco come se volesse schiacciarci tra i fogli tutti i pidocchi di quella sua miseria” (401). In keeping with this mindset, when Johnny becomes a partisan, he refuses the pen in favour of the gun.³² When Johnny’s partisan captain asks him to serve as a translator, his response is unequivocal: “Johnny shrunk

is not to risk their absolute betrayal; transformation assumes rather than translation, as André Lefevere argues, is one mode of ‘rewriting’” (10). See also Littau.

³⁰ See also Galaverni 87; Grignani 44; Bricchi 127.

³¹ Gentzler, *Theories* 167.

³² Gian Carlo Ferretti has described Johnny’s “conversion” into a partisan “dal libro alla pistola, da traduttore di Marlowe a giustiziere dei fascisti” (“Fenoglio-Johnny” 102).

violently. 'Io non farò nulla di simile. La penna l'ho lasciata a casa e non ci penso a sintassi e grammatica. Per tutto il tempo che starò qui non intendo stringere in mano che un fucile'" (454-455).

Despite Johnny's initial repudiation, *Partigiano* shows that translation is by no means an abstract literary concern but instead has historical relevance: the reversal of the German/English, ally/enemy binary that structured wartime relationships is only one of many transformations. As the words "German" and "English" acquire new meaning in the post-armistice, entire languages and nationalities become unstable signifiers—with life and death consequences. For example, the arrival of the Allies, which had been understood to be synonymous with victory, actually means more fighting: "And one of the new escort cried: 'Boys, the war is over!' and as all the others gaped at him, he explained: 'Didn't we ever say that the war was over when the Allied here?'" (53).³³ Moreover, the English language, which Johnny equates with its literary tradition, falls from grace at the moment Johnny begins his work as an interpreter, and he discovers that the English soldiers are not characters from his beloved literary texts: "Twas 4,30 and the world was sadness. [...] And in that sadness a nail-thought into the chilled Johnny's mind: 'These are poor Englishman. The poorness of these Englishman!'" (9). In the place of the glory of literature or of liberation, the text foregrounds England's role as a colonizer, when one of Johnny's officers gives him the possibility to practise his English with escaped South African prisoners: "'Sorry, non sono inglesi purosangue. Sono sudafricani. Un surrogato paracoloniale.'" ³⁴ If "proper" English serves to distinguish colonizers from colonized even as both are fighting on the *same* side, it is a traitorous source of distinction between enemy and friend: Johnny warns his English companions, "'Please abstain from speaking English aloud, for you'll be mistaken for Germans and at once sawed down by raffle'" (27).

As linguistic, geographical, and political boundaries collapse, a general crisis of signification results. This need to decode the once-familiar is, in Pavone's analysis, a material consequence of the armistice: "gli italiani [...] si trovarono costretti a riquificarci reciprocamente, a richiedersi l'un l'altro nuove credenziali,

³³ A note in regards to the citations of all three typescripts, but in particular *UrPJ*: I will not single out grammatical "errors" with the traditional "sic." All "mistakes" in the citations are Fenoglio's own, and, to the best of my ability, not typographical errors.

³⁴ Despite Johnny's indignation that he had not been notified of the presence of the South Africans, he himself is condescending: "'How territorial do they both look!' pensò Johnny, inclinandosi su loro" (463).

a sforzarsi di capire chi fosse un complice e chi un perseguitato. Nessuno poteva prevedere più con sicurezza, secondo i vecchi canoni, il comportamento altrui” (26). In the context of civil war, the Italian language becomes a site of contention; one of the signs of a traitor is that he speaks Italian. As a result, dialect—rejected by the Fascist regime’s *Riforma Gentile* as an impediment to national unity³⁵—becomes an invaluable tool in establishing new boundaries, “the proof of proofs” that unifies local groups of partisans (261). When encountering a stranger, Johnny advises his companion Ettore, “soprattutto, parlagli in dialetto e fatti rispondere in dialetto. E al primo dubbio, spara, spara, spara” (815).³⁶

In order for Italy to move past the division and destruction of civil war, this shoot-first logic cannot be the solution. To this end, when a captured Fascist official asks Johnny and Pierre, “‘Ci sarà ancora un’Italia con voi?’” their response is affirmative: “‘Certamente. Un’altra Italia, un’Italia a modo nostro, ma sempre Italia’” (632). Consider, however, how the same answer is given in *PJ2*:

“Posso figurarmi che possediate tutta l’Italia. Bene: che farete, ragazzi, dell’Italia?”

“Une petite affaire toute serieuse,” disse Johnny, e Pierre assentì con la sua inimitabile earnestness.

“Voglio dire,” insisté il maggiore, “Ci sarà ancora un’Italia con voi?”

“Certamente. Per favore, non se ne preoccupi.” (982)

Johnny’s anomalous reply in French points to the necessity of the foreign in defining the nation. Moreover, the description following Johnny’s comment—“e Pierre assentì con la sua inimitabile earnestness”—introduces an English word into the text, effacing linguistic borders precisely while evoking the nation’s. When the Major insists that Johnny respond (in Italian), Johnny is dismissive. In *PJ1*, his answer is simply the negation of *their* (Fascist) Italy in favor of *ours*. In order to fill the placeholder of “modo nostro,” one must perform a fraught intralingual translation: to define *partigiano* in a country and in a language torn by civil war. As a new role and a new word, the word *partigiano* “esige allora per sé anche una lingua nuova, un italiano adeguato e diverso” (Galaverni 104). However, if civil war is betrayal of the worst order, it is fitting, then, that it be

³⁵ See Valerio Ferme (28–29).

³⁶ This theory is put into practice in *PJ1* (831 and 846) and *PJ2* (1148 and 1162).

Johnny's teacher, Cocito (whose name evokes the realm of Dantean traitors), who roots the struggle in the need to define this elusive term: "Tutto sta nell'intendersi sul vero significato della parola partigiano." The only definition he can give, however, is a negation of Fascism: "Partigiano è, sarà chiunque combatterà i fascisti" (409). However, this distinction collapses in the encounters with Italian civilians: "Di che razza siete?" Johnny pronunciò lisciamente la parola, e l'altro: 'Sarete partigiani, ma se foste malfattori?' Egli intendeva dire 'fascisti'" (619). As *partigiano* becomes interchangeable with Fascist in Italian, Johnny again makes recourse to dialect to maintain the opposition. Here, then, faced with the crisis of intralingual translation, the impossibility of locating *true meaning*, signification as Derridian *différance* emerges.³⁷ To this end, Saccone's gloss on the interminable struggle to define *partigiano* is particularly apt: "nient'altro se non della differenza" (*Fenoglio* 185).

Following this thread, the concept of translation transforms and is transformed by Johnny's experience: initially translation is what keeps him from being a partisan, only to become a necessary element in his efforts to define and, ultimately, narrate the partisan experience. Here, then, Bigazzi's theory of the *Partigiano* typescripts in terms of a "pellegrinaggio" (42) offers important insight into the text and its reception. While Corti privileges the development of Fenoglio-author, Bigazzi has his philological cake and eats it, too, by arguing that the tripartite narrative is a *Commedia*, whereby the character's journey catalyzes the author's, becoming one and the same at the ending. In creating a trajectory of Johnny's transformation from soldier in the Italian army (*PBI*), to committed partisan (*PJI*), to interpreter for a division of English soldiers (*UrPJ*), to author of *Partigiano Johnny*, Bigazzi proposes not a stylistically unified narrative but one that achieves coherence around the character's ideological development, such that the protagonist unites with his author at the end: "solo con questa ultima verifica potrà davvero ricongiungersi al suo autore, che lo ha benevolmente ma anche criticamente seguito nel suo lungo percorso, affidandogli la biografia intellettuale, tra guerra e dopo guerra, di un'intera generazione" (90).³⁸ In tracing this voyage through which pilgrim becomes poet, Bigazzi's approach resonates with Calvino's praise of *Una questione privata*, as the *libro che la nostra generazione voleva fare* and

³⁷ See Moi 64; on the relationship between translation and *différance*, see Kathleen Davis (13).

³⁸ Saccone summarizes the tendency of critics such as Bigazzi, Grignani, and Gina Lagorio to read the texts in terms of a *Bildungsroman* (*Fenoglio* 163).

the notion that it contains “la Resistenza proprio com’era, [...] vera come mai era stata scritta, serbata per tanti anni limpidamente dalla memoria fedele” (24).

Bigazzi’s interest is predominantly in the *Commedia*’s structure (153), but he bolsters his thesis by noting Dantean echoes, among them an allusion to the *Vita nuova* and the presence of the “donna-guida” Dea-Beatrice (108–109, 111–112). Moreover, there is an abundance of evidence suggesting a textual drive to plot a conversion narrative: Johnny desires not only to *become* a partisan but to pinpoint the precise day, even the precise moment, of his transformation. In fact, on several occasions he figures his transition topographically:

Lo scottava dentro, e poi lo raggelava, pensare che stasera, la sera del suo panico, fatidico giorno d’ingresso nei partigiani, avrebbe bussato ad una locanda per il pernottamento, non ancora partigiano, ma ancora miserabile viandante qualunque. E se il locandiere, squadrata la sua già diversificata faccia, gli avesse richiusa la porta in faccia...? (439)

Johnny’s efforts to locate the moment of his own conversion are rife with tension, starting with the ambivalent burning/freezing sensation in the passage above. Paradoxically, Johnny is “not yet a *partigiano*” but marked by difference on his “already diversified face.” When the moment of his “entry” comes—“Johnny passò dalla neve stradale al cemento della rotonda, come se il cemento rappresentasse l’investitura partigiana”—the subjunctive undermines the definitive nature of that passage and, in the next sentence, so does one of the characters: “Il siciliano s’accorse del trapasso e marciò verso di lui, irritato e vendicativo. ‘Chi ti disse d’entrare?’” (441). It is this “failure” to progress in a linear manner towards this partisan identity that is the basis of Saccone’s critique of Bigazzi’s conversion-narrative thesis (*Fenoglio* 213). Instead of a development, Saccone identifies an “oscillation” that allows for the coexistence of paradoxical opposites (*Fenoglio* 175). Thus, whereas *UrPJ* provides a “culmination” for Bigazzi (89), for Saccone its truncated ending is symptomatic of its pendular movement (*Fenoglio* 84–86). Saccone’s reading, here, is amply confirmed by the text, as Johnny constantly grasps a sense of partisan identity only to have it deferred. The “sign” of partisan identity appears to be an intrinsic part of him: “il segno era sempre su lui: partigiano in aeternum” (526). Yet it, too, proves mutable: “He was becoming conscious of his new being, yet a partisan, but addicted to the English mission, therefore a special partisan” (47). Later, he appears to have “um”-converted, feeling a “queer and

crooked and angent sense of umpartisanship due to his English aggregatedness" (99). Johnny's transformation resembles more closely the hellish repetition of one of Dante's damned souls than the divine progress of the voyaging pilgrim. And, indeed, when Johnny laments that he must end the war with the English after having so desired to meet them, his companion describes it as a "proper contrappasso" (175).

The Dantean motif continues shortly thereafter with an infernal metaphor that prefaces the most explicit discussion of how the *Resistenza* is to be represented—and by whom: Marino, a fellow partisan, likens their host's obsession with Radio London to "Ugolino [feeding] on the skull of Bishop," a synesthetic metaphor that evokes one of *Inferno's* most heinous acts of betrayal and casts an infernal shadow on Johnny's following prophecy (*Inf.* XXXIII.1–3). After Marino requests permission to include a portrait of Johnny in his diary and asks whether his writing habit "strikes" him, Johnny informs him that the partisan writers are ubiquitous:

"I can quote you at least ten of them only in North's army. As soon as the war ends, there will be no other concern for them than editors."

"And [...] and who will emport the laurel? Who will have written the book of books on us?"

Johnny sighed: "Nobody of you, nobody of us. The book of books on us will be written by a man is yet unborn, the woman will bear him in womb is not yet more than a baby now, growing in the midst of our reports [...]."

Marino flapped a puzzled, disheartened hand upon the rich cover of his secret book. "That's sad." He ceased flapping and fixed on the book a desperate but contained look. "And say, Johnny... won't our work aid him to his aim?"

"Quite not, in my naked opinion. The man will simply see and transfer." (243)

Philip Cooke reads this passage as a metatextual victory lap: "as Fenoglio is here close to finishing the final part of the first draft of a work, in which he appears to be Johnny, it is not unreasonable to assume that the work which will carry off the laurel wreath, the work in which its author 'sees' and 'transfers' is precisely this one" (22). Cooke, like Bigazzi, makes an assumption about *Partigiano's* "end,"

characterizing it as the moment when the “unborn potential writer” becomes the “recently born *de facto* writer” (23). This, however, effectively contradicts Johnny’s conceptualization of the “end” and its presentation in the “mutilated” *Partigiano* typescripts. To wit, none of the texts provides a culminating birth-of-an-author moment, as Dea, the “*donna-guida*” reminds us. In a moment of intimacy between Johnny and Dea—and a rare sexual encounter in Fenoglio’s *oeuvre*—after she asks him to take her virginity, he tells her, “You know, Dea, I’ve a strange feeling...’ ‘Which one...?’ ‘...to be out of the war...’” (293; ellipses in original). After the war, each partisan will be “inevitably decayed, the moment itself, it sorted from the war.” Nor is Johnny any exception: “You too, you Johnny, will be as diminished, as opacized” (293). Here, Dea refutes Dante’s notion that Johnny will leave the “war,” purified and ready to write from his flawless memory (*Inf.* II.3–6); indeed, as Saccone points out, Fenoglio’s protagonists find themselves in a perpetual state of war that extends beyond the borders of any specific conflict (“War”).

Thus, the divergence from Dante is plain. Whereas Italy’s most famous literary pilgrim ends his journey with a moment of “radical discontinuity” that allows character to transform into author (Freccero 265), Johnny’s journey and Fenoglio’s texts eschew the restorative ending of “conventional narrative” (LaCapra 52). This is why it is important not to attempt to *heal* this textual trauma by restoring cohesion to the contradictory typescripts but to use their metatextual considerations on the subject of endings to problematize their fragmentary status, much as has been done for another famously “incomplete,” linguistically hybrid text from the same years, Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *Quer pasticciaccio brutto di Via Merulana* (1957).³⁹

Thus, the end of the *UrPJ* typescript proves instructive, with the paradoxically violent arrival of a sign of peace. As the partisans fight the Germans with the English beside them, the manuscript ends, “The short raffles caused explosive-jets of gravel...a white kerchief, stone-weighted, flew shortly in the middle-air and crashed on the road” (365; ellipsis in original). With this white kerchief, *UrPJ* could be said to have ended in a truce, yet it crashes down unexpectedly on the road and on the narrative path. From this perspective, the ending of *UrPJ*, whether or not it was Fenoglio’s intended ending, corresponds rather well to Johnny’s own self-reflection:

“What the use of splitting your head about the end. First, the end will come quite unexpected. Yes, believe me, quite unexpected. You

³⁹ See Marchesini, who also foregrounds the Dantean intertext in her reading of *Pasticciaccio*.

know, you feel it will come before the end of April, anyone of the remaining days to April 30th. But, believe me, it will be anyway so unexpected that remembering the very vigil you'll find it miraculous. You'll find yourself out and over it quite unconsciously, credimi. Then, don't worry about the end, for you have no remedy against it. You will go into it, as you have ever gone into all from the beginning. So, seeing you will certainly go into it, cease splitting your head." (333)

If we read according to the chronology of the war or according to a Dantean conversion narrative, the ending of *UrPJ* comes sooner than expected, for we want the closure provided by April 25; when we arrive at the conclusion, readers of Italian history feel "unprepared," like Johnny prior to his final battle (341). Thus, when Cooke says *UrPJ* cuts off "unfortunately," he means unfortunately for *us*, the reader who wants traditional closure (145). However, if we read according to the dislocated, belated temporality of trauma as expressed by Johnny in the passage above, then the multiple endings of Johnny's story in *UrPJ* and *PJ2* become "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 7; emphasis in original).

Thus, as it evokes and refutes Dante's *Commedia*, the *Partigiano* archive suggests that the *Resistenza* cannot be narrated according to a conventional confession-conversion schema. Approaching the end of his partisan experience, Johnny has indeed transformed in terms of his desire to become a writer—but his is a reverse trajectory with respect to Dante's pilgrim-poet, resisting rather than embracing the writer's laurels. In *Primavera di bellezza*, he suffers in the days before he joins the army, at the thought of dying without having left a written trace:

Pensava che presto sarebbe partito soldato ed ogni giorno, ogni momento della sua vita sotto le armi avrebbe acerbamente rimpianto anche una sola di quelle tante ore di libertà che adesso non sapeva fecondare. Poteva benissimo morire come Italo Morra per una bomba aerea, o cadere sul fronte russo come Bosca, e non avrebbe lasciato niente di sè, nemmeno un racconto. (1319)

After anguishing over the fact that he would not be known as a writer (1322), in his hillside refuge, the pen is not strong enough to overtake his desire to pick

up a gun (401). Finally, fighting side-by-side with the English in the latter part, Johnny teases Marino for his documentary passion; in making his prophecy about the author of the book of books, Johnny excludes himself, divining that he will be two generations removed, the child of a woman who is only a baby at the time. The suggestion that the writer of the *Resistenza* will be someone who has neither lived, nor even read, it escapes rational logic; in recalling the reference to Ugolino, perhaps the prophecy is meant to be read in an infernal key, a betrayal of the worst order. Regardless of how it is interpreted, however, this prophecy foregrounds the question of intergenerational transmission that is central to the *Partigiano* archive as to the *Commedia*: in telling the story of how the pilgrim becomes poet, Dante's *Commedia* can be read as a meditation on the survivor's responsibility to narrate what he has witnessed; in struggling to piece together Johnny's and Fenoglio's stories for half a century, the readers of the *Partigiano* archive help the survivor testify to what he cannot, in isolation, confess.

Isella, too, in his prefatory comments to his own edition, is concerned with the question of witnessing as it relates to the debates surrounding the *Partigiano* archive. He writes:

Le stesse incertezze hanno potuto alimentar, per lui scrittore d'oggi, e per la datazione di un romanzo nato da un'esperienza di cui siamo stati testimoni diretti, una discussione ingegnosa e vivacissima, con decisive implicazioni critiche, simile a quelle dibattute solo per autori o per opere circonfuse dal mistero del caso o dalle tenebre della lontananza. (x)

As Isella identifies the reason *Partigiano* has generated such passionate debate, he no longer talks about common versus philologically inclined readers, but instead privileges readers who are *direct witnesses* of an unnamed experience. The danger posed by the uncertainties surrounding this unnamed, undisciplined book comes, then, as they threaten to dislocate their status as witness by pushing the experience contained therein into the "shadowy distance." If one of this essay's goals is to show how philologists have ordered the *Partigiano* archive, another is to show the way in which that order at once produces and forecloses certain readings and, indeed, certain readers. For when Isella refers to *Partigiano* as "un romanzo nato da un'esperienza di cui siamo stati testimoni diretti," he draws a tight circle with nowhere to expand. Thus, if on the one hand this essay seeks to critique the way

this context has *produced* and *restricted* the *Partigiano* that is read today, on the other hand it suggests a way in which we—and here I mean those of us who access Fascism and the *Resistenza* at a generational remove—may access the *Partigiano* archive as symptomatic of a concession to, and a refusal of, the irrevocable loss of traumatic experience, a manifestation of the “archive desire” that comes from “the possibility of forgetfulness.” As Derrida reminds us, “there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive” (19). By reading the multifaceted, contradictory *Partigiano* archive—indeed, by insisting that it be understood not as a curable text but precisely *as* archive—this essay signals its struggle to resist the inexorability of death and, in this way, to participate in this testimony. The final word goes, then, to Johnny’s friend and to Partigiano, where the intertwining of resistance and storytelling takes place between partisans in a single minute before the crushing force of sleep:

E Pierre implorò. “Per favore, non ci addormentiamo subito! Resistiamo, e raccontiamoci l’un l’altro com’è andata...facciamo in modo di dormire il più tardi possibile,” e certamente era grande tenersi desti e godere scientemente di ogni attimo di quel riposo, d’ogni atomo di quel beneficio, d’ogni fibra di quella sorridente, ridente sensazione di pace e sicurezza, ma il sonno in un minuto li schiacciò sotto il suo nero tallone. (776; ellipsis in original)

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