

# *Filling the void: Virginia Woolf and the feminism of difference in Italy*

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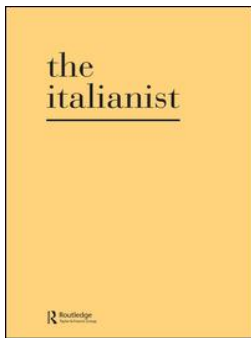
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# Filling the Void: Virginia Woolf and the Feminism of Difference in Italy

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## ABSTRACT

Using unpublished archival material, this article analyses the reception of Virginia Woolf in the Milanese feminist context of the late 1970s, attempting to understand the role Woolf's work played in the theoretical development of the feminism of difference in Italy. The study focuses on two key texts: the Italian publication of *Three Guineas* by the feminist press La Tartaruga; and the *Catalogo giallo*, the second publication of the Milan-based Libreria delle donne, which played a vital role in the evolution of the feminism of difference.

## SOMMARIO

L'articolo analizza la ricezione di Virginia Woolf nel contesto femminista milanese della fine degli anni '70 attraverso materiale d'archivio inedito, con lo scopo di comprendere il ruolo che l'opera di Woolf ebbe nello sviluppo teorico del femminismo della differenza in Italia. Lo studio si concentra sulla traduzione italiana di *Le tre ghinee*, pubblicata dalla casa editrice femminista La Tartaruga e sul *Catalogo Giallo*, la seconda pubblicazione della Libreria delle donne di Milano, luogo chiave per le produzioni teoriche del femminismo della differenza.

## KEYWORDS

Virginia Woolf; feminism;  
Three Guineas; reception;  
feminism of difference; Italy

## PAROLE CHIAVE

Virginia Woolf; femminismo;  
Tre ghinee; ricezione;  
femminismo della differenza;  
Italia

In the 1970s, Milan played a fundamental role in Italian feminist political practice, with several feminist groups that became influential across Italy and Europe emerging in the city.<sup>1</sup> Although the Milanese groups did not represent Italian feminism as a whole, Milan hosted important feminist hubs that introduced Italy to key feminist texts for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Theories and practices were developed to the extent that 'Milan can be considered the site of the earliest feminist theoretical production in Italy'.<sup>3</sup> This was partly due to the fact that Milan-based publishing houses produced the first translations of some of the most important feminist texts.<sup>4</sup> The year 1975 in particular was crucial, since it saw the foundation of two fundamental entities for Italian feminists: La Libreria delle donne di Milano and La Tartaruga Edizioni. The Libreria delle donne has played a key role in gathering, communicating, and disseminating feminist ideas ever since, and it has been not only a 'spatially visible hub where different networks have intersected over time' but also a 'platform to disseminate ground

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breaking work within the feminist networks'.<sup>5</sup> If the Libreria delle donne answered the need to spread, discuss, and scrutinise women's new ideas and transform them into a 'tesoro collettivo',<sup>6</sup> La Tartaruga answered the need to translate and publish the words of women writers from all over the world.

Using unpublished archival material, this study analyses the reception of Virginia Woolf in these two Milan-based feminist groups of the late 1970s, aiming to understand what role her writings played in the theoretical development of the feminism of difference in Italy. To address this matter, this essay answers a series of questions: Which of Woolf's texts were discussed most in these feminist groups? How was her work received? Were her works of help in the definition of their feminist political practice?

The analysis that follows is based on a two-pronged approach: first, I will consider the first Italian translation of *Three Guineas* published by La Tartaruga in 1975, and evaluate the reasons why this publication represented a turning-point in the theoretical discussions of feminism; second, I will examine the debate Virginia Woolf's works stimulated in the Libreria delle donne's *Catalogo n. 2 – Romanzi: Le madri di tutte noi*, published in 1982 by the Libreria delle donne and the Biblioteca delle donne di Parma. The women who wrote the *Catalogo* looked more thoroughly and consciously into what 'being a woman' meant, a view that contrasted with the emancipation theory that had, until then, predominantly been embraced by Italian feminism linked to left-wing parties and to the Unione Donne Italiane (UDI).<sup>7</sup> This contrasting view led to the development of the 'feminism of difference', one of the main and most influential feminist theories emanating from Italian second-wave feminism,<sup>8</sup> and one that bears the mark of Luce Irigaray's theory of sexual difference, whose founding ideas the collective identified in some aspects of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* but struggled to see enacted in the fictional worlds of her novels, as this essay will show.

## From Theory to Praxis: *Le tre ghinee*

During the 1970s, feminist Woolf studies expanded considerably, and Woolf's writing 'became central to the theoretical framing of feminism'.<sup>9</sup> In those years, feminist groups and cultural centres for women started to be organised all over Italy. Significantly, Woolf became the iconic name chosen for a feminist cultural centre in Rome. Founded in 1979 by a group of ten women<sup>10</sup> coming from different feminist groups, the Centro Culturale Virginia Woolf was 'an experiment in an alternative women's university'. It counted among its teachers 'some of Italy's most noted thinkers and intellectuals',<sup>11</sup> including Nadia Fusini,<sup>12</sup> who later became the most prominent translator and scholar of Woolf in Italy. The Centro Culturale, managed by feminists and only for women, also became known as Università delle donne, and it was meant to realise what Woolf had imagined in *Three Guineas*: a college for women. The founding of the Centro Virginia Woolf illustrates the relevance of *Three Guineas* for Italian feminism. In that 1938 essay, structured as a response to a gentlemen's letter asking Woolf to join his association to help prevent war and stop Nazi fascism, Woolf identifies the existence of a direct link among militarism, totalitarianism, and patriarchy. She examines such links from her point of view as a woman and outsider, since women had always been excluded from power and decision-making processes. Yet Woolf looks at her being a woman not only as a condition of lack of rights and

privileges, but also as a condition of 'freedom from fake links to fidelity', and she goes so far as to declare that the word 'feminist' could be burned and destroyed and that "'emancipation of women" is equally inexpressive and corrupt'.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, she will eventually donate a guinea to the man's association but will not join it, proposing to found a 'society of outsiders' instead.<sup>14</sup> Among the feminist entities that best understood the revolutionary repercussions of such statements were the independent press La Tartaruga, which began its catalogue with the first Italian translation of *Three Guineas*, and the Libreria delle donne di Milano, which, for its important political dimension, has been 'a significant point of reference for any political and theoretical debate in the feminist movement in Italy'.<sup>15</sup>

Laura Lepetit's decision to found La Tartaruga was emblematic of a need to move from theory to praxis, using women writers to help the development of a feminist political consciousness, and thus challenging the 'commonplace perception of Italian second-wave feminism as being dominated by orality'.<sup>16</sup> Lepetit was part of the group Rivolta Femminile, founded by Carla Lonzi in July 1970. Although Lonzi declared that when Rivolta Femminile was launched, she had never read anything about feminism apart from Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, she would later develop ideas that shared features with Woolf's thought, despite Lonzi only reading Woolf when she became more engaged in feminism.<sup>17</sup> For example, both Woolf and Lonzi denounced the millennial absence of women from history, and they considered history the result of patriarchal actions. They both also connected patriarchy to war and rejected the idea of patriotism as the embodiment of patriarchy.<sup>18</sup> But above all, they both focused on how women looked at themselves and how they were looked at by others, and on how women's self-awareness could only be achieved through the creation of a female language, which could give 'new meanings to everyday parlance'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, while Woolf declared that women must kill the 'angel of the house'<sup>20</sup> that prevented them from thinking freely, Lonzi theorised that women must 'first liberate themselves as women and then, and only then, accede to parity of rights and opportunities with men'.<sup>21</sup> The philosopher Luisa Muraro,<sup>22</sup> one of the founders of the Libreria delle donne, further developed this concept theoretically. According to Muraro, freedom for women did not just mean recognition of their rights, because women's freedom is grounded in women's self-awareness. Women will realise themselves only by knowing themselves as women and by making themselves known to society as women, a view that undoubtedly has much in common with Woolf's famous refusal, in *Three Guineas*, to join a men's association and her suggestion to create a society of outsiders instead.

The blurb on the back cover of the first Italian edition of *Three Guineas*, written by Laura Lepetit herself,<sup>23</sup> focused on aspects directly connected with these ideas. First was the ability to consider women's exclusion from history not as an impediment but as an opportunity: '[Woolf] riscopre il valore di un passato oscuro e diverso che, rendendo la donna una esclusa, le lascia nello stesso tempo uno spazio unico dove pensare a un futuro differente'.<sup>24</sup> Second was the importance of developing one's own consciousness and framing this process as a legacy to be passed on to future generations of women:

L'intensità con cui Virginia Woolf ha vissuto la sua condizione di donna e di scrittrice all'interno di una società e di una cultura che non le appartengono né di fatto, né di

diritto, ha fatto sì che tutto il suo lavoro sia una continua ricerca in questo senso, un tentativo di scoprire i fili segreti di un discorso non soltanto di letteratura ma anche di coscienza di sé, per passarli alla generazione seguente e preparare la strada alla donna nuova.<sup>25</sup>

These two ideas animated the discussions of feminist collectives, which were already discussing sexual difference theory and thus found Woolf's essay enlightening. This was why, when *Three Guineas* appeared in Italian,<sup>26</sup> despite being published by a new and independent publishing house, it immediately enjoyed commercial success, featuring prominently in the discussions held at the Libreria delle donne.<sup>27</sup> When Lepetit eventually decided in 1978 to accept Feltrinelli's offer to acquire the Italian rights of *Three Guineas* to publish a paperback edition of the essay, she did so for the sake of the book, as she explained in a letter to the Hogarth Press:

I have just received the offer of the publisher Feltrinelli for printing this text in their pocket edition. I would like to accept their offer because it is a very good publisher and I am sure I cannot sell more of this title under my own imprint and so I would not be interested in a reprint of this title myself. On the other side, I am sure they will be able to sell a large quantity of the paperback edition and this will result both as an advantage to the knowledge of Virginia Woolf and the other texts that I am going to publish in the future.<sup>28</sup>

It was not a coincidence that, when Feltrinelli decided to acquire the Italian rights of *Three Guineas*, Luisa Muraro was entrusted to write the preface. This preface includes Muraro's reflections on Irigaray's theories, which she knew well, having translated *Speculum: De l'autre femme* for Feltrinelli in 1975. In that essay, Irigaray underlined how psychoanalysis and classic philosophy produced a culture that turned language into a fundamental political myth; by analysing texts by Freud, Hegel, Kant, Aristotle, Plato, and Descartes, she illustrates how the language they used is considered to be valid for everyone while it is in fact a herald only of male values. One of the first points Muraro develops in her introduction deals with the language Woolf forged in her essay:

La retorica delle *Tre Ghinee* è essenziale a ciò che vuole affrontare Virginia Woolf, qui lo spirito vive nella sua lettera, non è un'idea ma un percorso, non è una verità ma una sequenza di segni, non è una sintesi ma una discontinuità.<sup>29</sup>

The reason why it was so important for Woolf's essay not to 'employ the tone of established authority',<sup>30</sup> but to be organised more dialogically in the form of a letter, thus suggesting that truth is something to be achieved together with her interlocutor, had its roots in Woolf's experimentations in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). As Nadia Fusini explains, in that essay,

il movimento è euristico: sulla pagina appare un pensiero alla ricerca di se stesso, che avanza né alla cieca né a tentoni, ma neppure nel modo lineare di chi abbia una tesi già in testa alla partenza, il cui sforzo sia semplicemente di trovare le parole per dire ciò che ha in mente [...]. Presi nel suo movimento di libertà, siamo trascinati in cortocircuiti che ci lasciano storditi [...] poi d'un tratto [...] tutto diventa logico: le digressioni che prima ci avevano confuso, ora ci appaiono in realtà scorciatoie in una passeggiata che [...] ci fa approdare a un territorio, lo stesso da cui eravamo partiti, ma che ora sentiamo davvero conquistato. La mappa dei sentieri l'ha disegnata lei, camminando.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf mentions the desire for self-assertion she perceives in men's writing that is 'so direct, so straightforward' and yet clouded by 'a shadow shaped something like the letter "I"' which makes all as 'shapeless as mist'.<sup>32</sup>

As Liliana Rampello suggests, in *Three Guineas* Woolf did not speak with a self-assertive 'I', but rather moved from the complexity of her own experience to talk about the complexity of the world, and in so doing she anticipated the key and founding political practice of *partire da sé* (starting from oneself).<sup>33</sup> In this sense, Woolf's essays could be read as a possible alternative to the male symbolic rhetorical structure of essay writing, and this was noticed by Luisa Muraro. Muraro also focused on how Woolf had transformed her alleged impotence and incompetence into a principle of knowledge from which women could take inspiration to build a feminist political theory and practice:

questo non esserci, non ritrovarsi, non starci, che mai prende la figura del rifiuto perché gli basta essere una constatazione e gli dà forza l'aver trovato delle parole per dirsi, articolarsi in positivo, diventerà il fondamento della politica delle donne, la loro strada per cambiare una condizione che, in pratica come in teoria, si perpetua anche in forza del loro starci e soddisfarsi colmando di sé le altrui mancanze.<sup>34</sup>

Muraro stressed how the most important element of Woolf's essay was the direct link she made between acknowledging the social inferiority and marginalisation of women and affirming their diversity in positive terms, thus avoiding any issue related to equality and emancipation of a sex that had always been considered inferior. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf's thought overlapped with the theoretical toolbox of sexual difference, and therefore to their contemporary users Woolf started to be considered the first intellectual woman to understand that 'l'inferiorità sociale può essere combattuta dalle donne trascrivendola in positivo come differenza mediante una loro politica separata'.<sup>35</sup> The need for a 'politica separata' became the pivotal issue for the feminist group of the Libreria delle donne, for whom *Three Guineas* represented the essay that allowed them to acknowledge Woolf as a 'mother of thought'.<sup>36</sup>

Feltrinelli's edition of *Three Guineas* translated by Adriana Bottini is, at the moment, the only one available in Italy, and it is Woolf's only book that has not been retranslated since the translation rights expired in 2011. La Tartaruga published other books by Virginia Woolf,<sup>37</sup> with the quick and effective campaign to acquire the rights to publish the Italian version of *Moments of Being* being particularly noteworthy. Lepetit showed an interest even before it was printed in Britain,<sup>38</sup> and it subsequently appeared in Italian less than a year after the English original, thus creating a more intimate portrait of the British writer for Italian readers and confirming the leading role played by La Tartaruga in the Italian reception of Virginia Woolf.

### A Place for Political Praxis: La Libreria delle donne

A year before the Italian publication of *Three Guineas*, in the autumn of 1974, a group of fifteen women came together to found a cooperative and open a bookshop in Milan modelled on the Librairie des Femmes, founded by Antoinette Fouque in Paris. As Lucy Delap has pointed out, the creation of an explicitly retail space 'made feminist spaces more accessible to those who found the open political commitment of a women's resources centre or consciousness-raising group off-putting'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the women of the Libreria delle donne wanted to create a space that was not only private – as had been the approach for the groups of *autocoscienza* – but public and visible.<sup>40</sup> They also wanted to move away from a political approach based on thinking and speaking

together to one of 'making' something together, which they called *politica del fare*.<sup>41</sup> The feminism of difference in Italy was therefore founded not on the 'identification and vindication of women's rights' but 'on the activation of female subjectivity in order to produce social change'.<sup>42</sup> Lia Cigarini recounts that this desire was clearly articulated at a meeting in October 1972 of the French feminist group *Psychanalyse et Politique* at a campsite in Vieux-Ville (Normandy), where the Italian contingent met Antoinette Fouque.<sup>43</sup> It was on this occasion that the women of the Libreria delle donne understood how 'lo strumento analitico di conoscenza fosse prezioso per la pratica politica del movimento delle donne'.<sup>44</sup> This discovery led the collective to the political practice of *partire da sé*, which was to be conceived as the foundation of the *pratica delle relazioni*. This has characterised the political work of the Milanese Libreria delle donne and has also affected their reading of Woolf. While the *autocoscienza* groups had helped feminists to find the right times, means, and spaces to connect one to the other, they now needed a public and open physical space. By founding a bookshop, 'Milanese feminists developed a "specifically space-oriented strategy" of moving out of the private setting of the home and gaining separate spaces for women in the city',<sup>45</sup> which was an expression of their explicit desire to appropriate a space in the public sphere.

The Libreria delle donne thus opened in the centre of Milan in 1975, and since its foundation, it has represented one of the most significant reference points for Italian and international feminism.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Fouque's *Librairie des femmes*, the bookshop only sold books written by women,<sup>47</sup> and the relationship between women and books became increasingly crucial over the years. Books written by women stimulated a political praxis whose aim was 'dare un luogo alla parola delle donne', while in time, 'il libro stesso' became not the occasion but the 'luogo d'espressione'<sup>48</sup> of the political practice of women. Inspired from the beginning by French feminist groups and by Luce Irigaray's thinking, the Libreria 'engaged in a search for symbolic female reference points and, more importantly, a different language [...] that could give expression to this sexual difference'.<sup>49</sup> Feminism of difference radically criticised traditional politics, 'showing an alternative that did not mean adding women to an existing scenario but rather, creating a new scenario', and for this reason it still is 'of great interest to those interested in socio-symbolic change'.<sup>50</sup>

What the collective of the Libreria delle donne desired for women was not merely gender equality, but women's freedom from the culturally coded roles of masculinity and femininity. In this sense, the issue at stake was not emancipation but the need to create, and represent with words, 'a common world of women',<sup>51</sup> and the acknowledgement of the lack of a female symbolic system<sup>52</sup> to which women could adhere.<sup>53</sup> Cultivating personal and intellectual relationships among and between women thus became the foundation of their political praxis, which helped them articulate their need for a 'competenza simbolica sul reale'.<sup>54</sup> They focused on the *pratica delle relazioni* and in particular on the *pratica dell'affidamento*,<sup>55</sup> described by Mirna Cicioni as 'the recognition of, and reliance on, differences in competence between women'<sup>56</sup> and summarised by Susanna Scarparo as the practice through which 'a woman recognises that another woman has something more, *un di più* (as it is generally called), which, she believes, will also help her realise her full potential and mediate her access to the social world'.<sup>57</sup>



The crucial importance of such practices is made explicit in the 'Introduction' to the foundational book *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, written by the collective of the Libreria delle donne di Milano in 1987:

Tema di questo libro è la necessità di dare senso, esaltare, rappresentare in parole e immagini il rapporto di una donna con una sua simile.

Se mettere in parole una pratica politica è uguale a fare teoria, allora questo è un libro di teoria perché i rapporti fra donne sono la sostanza della nostra politica.<sup>58</sup>

The search for a point of reference in other women became a fundamental element in the attempt to understand the meaning of being a woman in a context where all the categories of interpretation of reality are expressions of a male subjectivity seen as the universal – and neutral – point of reference.<sup>59</sup> Irigaray discussed this concept in her essay *Speculum of the Other Woman*,<sup>60</sup> in which she highlighted the centrality of logos, which finds its point of origin in a phallogocentric culture that, in turn, influences discourse. 'Any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine",<sup>61</sup> claimed Irigaray, and in such a phallogocentric<sup>62</sup> system, women's otherness in relation to each other remains unrepresentable, because the peripheral 'other' is conceptualised as a function of and in relation to a masculine centre.<sup>63</sup> For this reason, much of the work undertaken by the group of the Libreria delle donne was focused on articulating a *linguaggio sessuato* through the reading of women's literature. The search for authoritative female sources answered their need to give strength and meaning to their search for a more authentic and free way to live one's life as women. It was this desire to come together to search for an alternative female symbolic system, and to discuss how this system could be summoned in the communal reading experience of 'figure di libertà' in key examples of women's literature, that led to the collective *Gruppo romanzi* being established.

### Praxis as Theory: The *Gruppo romanzi*

The collective *Gruppo romanzi* gathered fortnightly at the Libreria delle donne from May 1978 to June 1979. Because the name of the group might lead to misunderstandings, it is important to note that the *Gruppo romanzi* was not a reading group but a political collective that used literary texts to reflect on and shape their political praxis. From the memos of these meetings it emerges that the aim of the collective was reading fiction written by women – not (auto)biographies or diaries – to analyse how women read novels and understand how and whether women identified themselves with the characters and the situations described.<sup>64</sup> The women who promoted the group aimed, above all, to understand how politically conscious of herself as a woman the writer was. They wanted to find 'nella storia, nella costruzione del romanzo o nel linguaggio, l'inizio di una invenzione di figure donne, trovare le invenzioni che rendono conto di quello che fanno, che sono le donne, se ci sono',<sup>65</sup> because they needed to enrich their experience symbolically to reflect on their position within their contemporary reality. *Gruppo romanzi* interpreted the act of reading as a political one, and therefore the group used literary texts to stimulate personal and political observations that could orient their political praxis towards more theory-inflected articulations. Muraro clearly outlined this approach, detailing how

mentre in Irigaray il procedimento è intellettuale, di un pensiero consapevole di sé, il procedimento del Catalogo giallo è di pratica politica, di un non pensiero che si fa pensiero attraverso la modificazione della realtà. Un procedere in parte privo di rappresentabilità, almeno al momento: a posteriori, guadagnato il risultato teorico, è stato possibile raccontarlo.<sup>66</sup>

As Muraro explains, topical elements of political praxis also helped Irigaray elaborate her concept of female genealogies, because in such praxis women writers were used 'non per dimostrare che anche noi abbiamo un passato, bensì per segnare le scrittrici del passato con il segno della differenza sessuale. Per toglierle a un passato universo neutro-maschile [...] e piegarle al presente bisogno femminile di simbolico'.<sup>67</sup> Muraro recounts how this happened for *Gruppo romanzi*:

Il nostro lavoro aveva due scene. C'era il gruppo presente con il suo progetto e i suoi rapporti, detti e non detti. E c'erano le scrittrici, messe in campo nei conflitti come nelle alleanze, usate per l'espressione del non ancora detto. C'era anche una terza scena, il passato di ciascuna di noi, scena che si palesò molto presto, per alcune, come un luogo di rancore ancora vivo verso la madre e, per tutte, come luogo di un'incerta significazione della propria appartenenza alla generazione materna. La terza scena rivelava la devastazione delle genealogie femminili ad opera della società patriarcale.<sup>68</sup>

The political praxis of collectives like *Gruppo romanzi* eventually helped the philosophers who benefited from such experience – such as Luisa Muraro – to write theoretically about it.<sup>69</sup>

The notes taken during the meetings of *Gruppo romanzi* – recording the real-time flow of thoughts and feelings that was not intended for publication and wider circulation – are particularly worthy of examination because they record the feminists' first reactions to reading and discussing Virginia Woolf with a political approach. Although the *Gruppo romanzi* was not a book club, it shared with reading groups an emphasis on non-judgemental listening, and on sharing interpretations originating from personal experience. The group invited women not only to think independently, but to unlearn what they had learned or studied,<sup>70</sup> and to read the texts through the political practice of *partire da sé*. These notes thus show the personal and direct feedback of individual women in reading women's fiction, and for this reason they are particularly helpful in understanding how Woolf was first read by Italian feminists and the role she played in the discussions around the creation of a female symbolic order. The notes show how the discussions of the collective evolved mainly around three issues: first, the idea of 'void', a concept that articulates visually the condition of silence that had characterised women's visibility historically; second, the writers' biographies, used both as terms of comparison for the women themselves and as tools to interpret the works of fiction under scrutiny; and, finally, the political benefits that one could derive from reading novels written by women.

The communal reading events were publicly advertised to women-only readers, with weekly posters indicating the writer and book to be discussed. Interestingly, this was not done for Woolf: 'teniamo segreto però l'incontro su Woolf, sennò arrivano in seimila',<sup>71</sup> they noted in the memo, confirming the widespread popularity Virginia Woolf already enjoyed in 1978.

In the memo of the preliminary meeting it is specified how they would move from the shared assumption that literary language is insufficient to interpret truly reality, because it is dominated by a male symbolic system:

Teniamo tutti gli approcci, ma vediamo di avere una ipotesi comune: il linguaggio letterario non interpreta tutta la realtà perché in esso domina il punto di vista maschile. Vediamo se la letteratura di donne, magari in misura ridottissima a sprazzi momenti, fa apparire un simbolico delle donne [...]. A noi serve un arricchimento simbolico per pensarci e per pensare la realtà.<sup>72</sup>

These issues are also articulated in the memo of the meeting on Virginia Woolf, which consists of seven typewritten pages made of disorganised notes, containing a list of ideas and responses expressed by the various women present at the meeting. One thing appears clear from the start: they felt that Woolf's writing tried to 'fill a void' with her literary language, a concept that will be discussed in the next section.

Another concept repeatedly stressed during the meeting was the historical non-existence of women. During the *autocoscienza* group meetings, women explored their personal experience of 'non-existence' – that is, their experience of social, political, and cultural erasure – and the discussion led to strategies to develop a private and public identity. One of the common threads of the discussions recorded in the minutes of the meeting is the desire to come to terms with their experience of non-existence (also defined as 'void'), and how to minimise or eliminate the risk of assimilation into a man-dominated and man-made symbolic framework.

This is the language they used to translate what, in their opinion, is Lily Briscoe's trajectory in *To the Lighthouse*. Carolyn Heilbrun explained how 'what has begun to happen in women's biography since 1970 is that the consensus about the author's relation to her work (if she is a writer) has changed'.<sup>73</sup> The *Gruppo romanzi*'s approach, 'il confronto tra la nostra esistenza e l'esistenza della scrittrice come donna',<sup>74</sup> turned their reading of Woolf into a political conversation to reflect on how the female protagonists in *To The Lighthouse* came to terms with their 'non-existence'. A common feature of these discussions was the tendency to analyse the characters as *figurae* of Woolf's biographical persona. Their reading of Lily Briscoe in particular was strongly influenced by their knowledge of Woolf's biography, which led them to identify Lily's search for form with Woolf's own personal artistic journey. What is worth noting, however, is that these feminists' knowledge of Woolf's biography was mediated by texts edited or produced by men close to Woolf: most of the attendees had read *A Writer's Diary*,<sup>75</sup> edited by Leonard Woolf, and were familiar with Quentin Bell's biography,<sup>76</sup> and it is clear that these texts had strongly influenced their approach to her novels. One of the attendees stated: 'la conoscenza che mi sono fatta di Virginia attraverso la biografia, il diario, ecc., fa decadere i suoi romanzi a un aspetto della sua vita',<sup>77</sup> opening the ground for an intense discussion, with some of the women claiming that Virginia Woolf expressed herself through her writing, and an opposing faction claiming that she did so through her life.<sup>78</sup>

When the meetings of the *Gruppo romanzi* ended in June 1979, the collective decided to collect and edit the minutes of the proceedings for wider circulation. This was how *Catalogo n. 2 – Romanzi: Le madri di tutte noi* was born.

## The Mothers of Us All: The *Catalogo giallo*

Self-produced and self-distributed, *Catalogo n. 2 – Romanzi: Le madri di tutte noi* is an A4-sized self-published chap-book, with the cover printed on a yellow sheet of paper; hence

the name it became known by: *Catalogo giallo*. It was published in 1982 as the second publication of La Libreria delle donne, this time in cooperation with the Biblioteca delle donne di Parma.<sup>79</sup> It is called 'catalogo' because it is a list, an inventory of the reflections that arose during the meetings of the *Gruppo romanzi*. Organised into sections, each dedicated to the individual women writers they read, it is presented as a collective response to the reading of the writer's works under discussion. The *Catalogo giallo* is anonymous, and written in the first person plural, as is customary in the feminist movement practice of collective authorship.<sup>80</sup> Its textuality is therefore fragmented and multivocal, offering different perspectives, which means it is not always easily understandable; as a result, the memos of the meetings of the *Gruppo romanzi* are particularly valuable for understanding the more obscure passages.

The intent of the *Catalogo giallo* was to share the considerations that had emerged during the meetings of the *Gruppo romanzi*, with a focus both on the female symbolic system retraced in great women writers' novels, and on female genealogies.<sup>81</sup> Of the authors chosen to be discussed by the *Gruppo romanzi*,<sup>82</sup> the following were included in the *Catalogo giallo*: Jane Austen, Sylvia Plath, the Brontë sisters, Elsa Morante, Gertrude Stein, Ingeborg Bachmann, Anna Kavan, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and, of course, Virginia Woolf.

In the letter promoting the catalogue to bookshops and libraries, the collective explained who 'the mothers of us all' were:

Le madri di tutte noi sono le scrittrici di romanzi che abbiamo letto e discusso in un gruppo di venti donne della Biblioteca di Parma e della Libreria di Milano.

Per due anni, ogni quindici giorni, abbiamo parlato e scritto di J. Austen, E. Morante, G. Stein, S. Plath, I. Compton-Burnett e altre. Non ci interessava fare della critica letteraria e neppure fare una vuota esaltazione della scrittura femminile. Cercavamo nelle storie, nella costruzione dei romanzi o nel linguaggio, l'inizio di una invenzione che rendesse conto di quello che fanno, che sono le donne, se ci sono. Così le scrittrici sono state anche un pretesto per parlare di noi. Dei silenzi delle donne, dei loro segreti, dei loro sospetti, delle loro bugie. E delle loro grandi possibilità.<sup>83</sup>

The collective put great emphasis on language, paying attention not only to how it is produced and written, but also to how it is received when it is read. By (re)reading women writers, they aimed to enrich their own language in order to better frame themselves in it.<sup>84</sup>

The influence of the *Catalogo giallo* is visible in the organisation of the catalogue of Parma's Biblioteca delle donne, which was not organised according to standard library classification systems (such as the Dewey system) but instead reflected the adoption of the concept of female literary genealogy. The first section of the library's catalogue, 'Romanzi e racconti', is divided into the initial subcategories 'Le Madri' and 'Le altre', the importance of which is outlined in the preface: 'il catalogo si apre sul nome di cinque scrittrici, la cui opera è stata ragione di scambio simbolico: sono "Le Madri" che hanno incarnato, nella storia della nostra elaborazione politica, la prima scelta concreta della mediazione femminile'.<sup>85</sup> Virginia Woolf was one of the five mothers, together with Jane Austen, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elsa Morante, and Gertrude Stein.

Even though, as seen above, Woolf was considered a catalyst for attention, and her works – above all her essays – were considered to be fundamental texts in the

intellectual formation of the modern feminist, her work provoked a wide range of reactions:

Quando il gruppo romanzi incominciò a riunirsi, eravamo sicure che Virginia Woolf avrebbe catalizzato l'interesse di molte, quasi tutte l'avevano letta, a molte era piaciuta. Il suo modo di scrivere e la sua biografia suggerivano adesione e identificazione. Quando però si sono discussi i suoi testi, si è constatato un forte calo di interesse, quasi un rifiuto. Questo probabilmente perché il lavoro fino allora fatto in gruppo aveva indebolito la tendenza all'identificazione in generale. E poi perché Virginia Woolf ci faceva intravedere una condizione faticosa da elaborare sia per lei sia per noi, e che però rimaneva irrisolta.<sup>86</sup>

As alluded to earlier, the main criticism made of Woolf's writing concerned the difficulty women had identifying with her work because of her struggle to 'fill a void' with language. The notes taken during the meetings of the *Gruppo romanzi* are fundamental for understanding why this 'filling a void' was such a crucial issue. This idea of the 'need' to fill the void emerged during one of the meetings dedicated to Gertrude Stein, when the group started discussing Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.<sup>87</sup> As an attendee put it:

da ragazzina non volevo diventare madre, ricordo che sognavo di avere una stanza tutta per me. Perché? Non lo so. Non conoscevo Virginia Woolf. Col tempo cancellai il sogno di una stanza, cancellai il mio corpo di donna; il mondo del padre mi seduceva, il mondo della madre e delle donne erano i silenzi e la rassegnazione. Silenzio contrapposto ad un turbine di linguaggio, di parole, che anch'io avrei potuto usare e dimenticarmi dell'esistenza triste delle donne che avevo sotto gli occhi.<sup>88</sup>

She read *A Room of One's Own* from this point of view, taking the room as a metaphor of a maternal space: 'come significante di un frammento femminile perché io possa significare un mio silenzio, un mio distanziarmi dal mondo del padre'.<sup>89</sup> This representation of the silence that has characterised women for so many centuries is a fundamental starting point for the feminism of difference. For the women of the *Gruppo romanzi* the concepts of 'void' and 'silence' were crucial, as they articulated in language the political consciousness of the 'symbolic non-existence of women':

Dalla riflessione fatta in un altro gruppo risultava che nel momento in cui si incomincia a mettere in discussione la struttura e il significato dei punti di riferimento dati, che sinteticamente chiamiamo 'simbolico maschile', la realtà della nostra esistenza ci appare più chiara e abbiamo l'impressione di trovarci in una situazione di 'vuoto'. La reazione è allora quella di riempirlo, di fare (figli, lavoro, ecc.); sarebbe forse importante invece [...] vivere in questo vuoto, nella sospensione.<sup>90</sup>

The collective's reading experience aimed to identify a representation of this void in novels written by women, because they felt that it could help their common search for a symbolic female language and support their political goals. Woolf's fiction proved resistant to this type of questioning:

V.W. invece vuol riempire questo vuoto; ma è uno sforzo titanico, inutile; la scrittura che ne risulta esprime proprio l'affanno di questo sforzo [...].

L'urgenza del creare, nella W. [...] nasconde l'ansia per trovare rimedio, subito e pieno, ad un'esistenza di cui non si prende coscienza, o ancora prima, per avvolgere di significato una realtà sulla quale non si ha presa, o forse il proprio non aver presa sulla realtà. [...]

In V. Woolf c'è [...] il tentativo di ricomporre ciò che tendeva a frammentarsi, l'ansia per un riconoscimento che non era soltanto del valore dell'opera, ma del proprio valore.<sup>91</sup>

The meeting of the *Gruppo romanzi* on Virginia Woolf opened by recalling the considerations that had emerged during the meeting on Gertrude Stein, and so does the chapter on Woolf in the *Catalogo giallo* titled 'Nel vuoto di'.<sup>92</sup> Although they found Woolf's metaphor of the room useful, they also found that Woolf conceptualised the desire to fill the void with a literary language that was still observant of male symbolic order.<sup>93</sup> In their view, the language used by Stein served their goal better, since the incomplete or suspended sentences characteristic of her style, and her fragmented syntax, displayed the 'void' rather than circumventing it or translating it into a finite language: 'la scrittura di Stein non è rassicurante, non riempie, lascia sospesa la frase, non conclude. Afferma e basta. Vuoto come esistenza e non conflitto di inesistenza'.<sup>94</sup> We can see why they were drawn to Stein over Woolf. The *Catalogo giallo's* writing style exhibits similar features to that of Stein (there are multiple ellipses and unfinished sentences). By questioning established conventions of decoding and understanding, the collective invited women to (re)discuss their role and their position within the literary and cultural debate.<sup>95</sup>

Once again, it is useful to go back to the notes taken during the meetings of the group to understand how the discussion had developed to reach this point. A woman in the group admitted that she harboured some reservations on Virginia Woolf because 'con la scrittura, con le parole, ha riempito il vuoto che sappiamo – e che anche lei sapeva, lo si ricava dalla biografia o dalle *Tre Ghinee*. Lei sapeva della non esistenza delle donne'.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, by choosing to leave sentences incomplete, Stein gave a shape to this void. In Stein's blank space, the women in the collective saw a visual expression of the 'non-existence' that was not articulated in the language that had been forged and used by men. In their view, Stein showed that the void might be a possible way to exist, a way to represent women's condition without using (or refusing to use) language that was ultimately imbued with male symbolism. The only novel by Woolf where they found traces of acceptance of this void is *To the Lighthouse*,<sup>97</sup> and in particular, the conversation focused on the character of Mrs Ramsay:

Nella signora Ramsay la visione si limita a farle riconoscere in sé un punto di resistenza, ove ritirarsi mentalmente, un 'cono d'ombra' che le permette di portare avanti la vita familiare, quel semplice stare in famiglia che può essere anche intollerabile. 'Cono d'ombra' o corpo a corpo con la forma (Ramsay-Briscoe) sono gli estremi della sottrazione al simbolico maschile.<sup>98</sup>

According to the women of the collective, if this was possible in *To the Lighthouse* it was because Mrs Ramsay is based on Virginia Woolf's mother, and in portraying her character Woolf cherished her silences and did not try to interpret them: 'Non lo ha riempito di parole, perché sapeva, come nessuno al suo tempo e pochi ancor oggi, che non si inventano parole per conto di chi tace'.<sup>99</sup>

The two women of *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, were also the subject of some debate because of the traditionally female roles they came to represent for the discussants:

Nelle situazioni contrastanti di Mrs Ramsay e della pittrice Lilly Briscoe era figurato il conflitto tra dar forma alla famiglia (creazione di figli, di benessere per altri, vivere in rispondenza al desiderio altrui) e dar forma a se stessi, creare per sé.<sup>100</sup>

Of all the women characters in Woolf's novels, the collective focused on Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe because in their friendship they glimpsed a relationship of entrustment, for Lily sees in Mrs Ramsay that 'something more' that could help her 'realise her full potential and mediate her access to the social world'.<sup>101</sup> Yet it is a relationship that the collective considered to be not entirely successful, since in the two women, rather than a 'recognition of, and reliance on' their reciprocal differences in competence,<sup>102</sup> they saw the gravity, tenderness, and conflict that can be found in the mother-daughter relationship.<sup>103</sup> In their search for identity and identification, the women of the collective could not but wonder to which of the two women they felt closer, only to conclude: to neither of them.

Tra l'amorosa cancellazione e l'autorealizzazione personale, c'è per noi un margine aperto. Alla negazione storica delle donne non sovrapponiamo lo sforzo di una presenza di valore, preferiamo rallentare e deviare i percorsi. La cancellazione si tramuta così in distanza, e in questa sospensione qualcosa comincia a dirsi di quello che vogliamo.<sup>104</sup>

This is the main element of their criticism: working as they were on the concept of identity and sexual difference to describe, and shape, a new woman, they contested this dualistic image of women in Woolf's novel. Moreover, one of the main questions of sexual difference theory was how to 'unfasten one's attachment to and identification with certain images, forms of behaviours and expectations that are constitutive of femininity'.<sup>105</sup> In Woolf's need for critical approval of her work, which strongly emerges from *A Writer's Diary*, they saw an attachment to expectations that was typical of the male symbolic order, which the collective rejected: 'quello che le donne fanno per avere riconoscimento, ricade dentro l'ordine simbolico maschile e lì riceve, com'è inevitabile, la sua definizione. Lo dicono quanto basta le ansie mortali di Virginia Woolf'.<sup>106</sup> The end of the chapter on Woolf sounds like a declaration of poetics, if not a political declaration *tout court*:

Noi possiamo lavorare meglio sulla contraddizione che sulla definizione in positivo. Ciò che ci tocca significativamente è la mancanza di parola. Noi facciamo l'esperienza di un parlare con parole che di fatto ci vengono messe in bocca, per noi stesse restando mute. Questo silenzio deve avere un senso. Apprezziamo la scrittura di Virginia Woolf, compresa la sua grande fatica, perché ridice una sessualità incerta, alla ricerca di sé. Ma sappiamo che il linguaggio della creazione artistica, su cui lei ha contato fino in fondo, come pure quello della scienza e del potere, è impermeabile all'esperienza che noi viviamo. Il nostro essere mute non vi è iscritto significativamente.<sup>107</sup>

The collective saw in Woolf a conflict between male intrusiveness – an intrusiveness that Woolf acknowledged – and the fact that she does not liberate herself from man-made social conventions. In their words: 'Virginia Woolf aveva il problema del dislivello tra una grande lucidità e il sentire: questo fa di lei una eccellente saggista e una romanziera non pienamente riuscita'.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusions

The main question that this study aimed to answer concerned the role Woolf's work and thought played in the theoretical development of the feminism of difference in Italy. To answer such a question, the translation of *Three Guineas* by the feminist press La Tartaruga and the publication of *Catalogo n. 2 – Romanzi: Le madri di tutte noi* by Milan Libreria delle donne, 'the site of the earliest feminist theoretical production in Italy',<sup>109</sup> are of crucial significance. They testify to the 'potential for reciprocity between politicised



feminist space and the marketplace'.<sup>110</sup> The *Catalogo giallo* in particular identified those female writers who could help women to reflect on themselves as women by answering a different question: 'C'era questo bisogno che ci spingeva a cambiare completamente la domanda rivolta alle scrittrici: non più darci la prova che anche le donne possono essere grandi scrittrici [...] ma: darci da vedere, pensare la realtà nella fedeltà del nostro sesso'.<sup>111</sup> Unsurprisingly, Virginia Woolf was one of the writers who stimulated most debate. The documents and memos held at the Centro Studi Movimenti in Parma provide an insight into the discussions that arose among feminists reading Woolf for the first time in the 1970s. The collective of the Libreria delle donne appreciated best Woolf's idea of preferring women's liberty to women's emancipation,<sup>112</sup> because it mirrored their search for a new definition of feminism, as demonstrated by their use of the word 'genealogy', not 'feminism', to define their practice.<sup>113</sup> Italian feminists considered Woolf a 'madre del pensiero', yet they were not uncritical readers of her work, as the discussions held in these collectives and discussed above demonstrate. 'La prima "pratica genealogica" nel femminismo è stata proprio di fare conoscenza di quelle donne che ci hanno preceduto', affirmed Luisa Muraro; the knowledge of those women who had been the source of their original strength became their 'precedente di forza',<sup>114</sup> and Woolf was such a precedent. Muraro also pointed out how the collective *Gruppo romanzi* marked and exemplified the birth of a new configuration of social relationships between women, which found its theoretical framework in Irigaray's female genealogies.<sup>115</sup> The *Catalogo giallo* was one such example of female literary genealogies identified and laid out by Italian feminists. The *Gruppo romanzi* laid the seeds for fundamental philosophical developments that led to seminal theoretical texts like Muraro's *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (1991), and Woolf acted as a 'precedente di forza' in such reflections. It was not by chance that the novel on which feminists' discussions focused most was *To the Lighthouse*: the relationship between Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe was scrutinised against the backdrop of the widespread feminist practice of affidamento.

What this analysis has shown is that, while Woolf's essays – *Three Guineas* and *A Room of One's Own* in particular – helped to enhance the theoretical toolbox of sexual difference theory in the Milanese feminist context, the same was not entirely true for her novels. While *Three Guineas* became a milestone in the feminist discourse and also a reference text in their political practice, the political usefulness of Woolf's fictional world was greatly debated, because hers was considered a language of artistic creation, not one of self-expression and self-understanding. That is why Italian feminists of difference in the late 1970s and early 1980s ultimately considered Woolf's novels to be less useful tools for the political praxis they were trying to build.

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## Notes

1. To name only the most relevant ones: Demau, founded in 1966; Rivolta Femminile, founded by Carla Lonzi in 1970; the Collettivo di via Cherubini; the Via Col di Lana groups; and Anabasi.
2. Apart from publications such as the *Sottosopra* or journals such as *L'Erba voglio*, Milan was the base of Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, which counted among its publications Carla Lonzi's seminal work *Sputiamo su Hegel – La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale* (Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1974), as well as publishers such as Feltrinelli, who published feminist essays, including Elena Gianini Belotti's *Dalla parte delle bambine* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1973).
3. Andrea Hajek, 'A Room of One's Own: Feminist Intersections between Space, Women's Writing and Radical Bookselling in Milan (1968–1986)', *Italian Studies*, 73.1 (2018), 81–97 (p. 83).
4. Simone De Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* were both published by the Milanese Il Saggiatore, in 1961 and 1963, respectively. Woolf's *Three Guineas* was published by La Tartaruga in 1975, and in the same year Feltrinelli published Luisa Muraro's translation of Luce Irigaray's *Speculum: De l'autre femme*. Feltrinelli also published a translation of the seminal text written by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, translated by Angela Miglietti as *Noi e il nostro corpo: Scritto dalle donne per le donne* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974).
5. Elena Vacchelli, 'Geographies of Subjectivity: Locating Feminist Political Subjects in Milan', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 18.6 (2011), 768–85 (p. 769).
6. Chiara Martucci, *La libreria delle donne di Milano: Un laboratorio di pratica politica* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008), p. 9.
7. Libreria delle donne di Milano, 'More Women than Men', in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. by Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 110–23 (p. 110).
8. There were also groups and collectives – such as the Mld (Movimento di liberazione della donna) – that tried to reconcile identity and emancipation, freedom and rights. These groups contributed to shaping 'gender theory', the other main theoretical framework of Italian feminism, that related more to Simone De Beauvoir's ideas and contrasted with the theory of difference. For a detailed analysis of the Mld see Beatrice Pisa, *Il Movimento di liberazione della donna nel femminismo italiano: La politica, i vissuti, le esperienze (1970–1983)* (Rome: Aracne, 2017).
9. Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 130.
10. Annarita Buttafuoco, Michi Staderini, Maria Grazia Minetti, Sandra Begnoni, Susanna Menichini, Roberta Tatafiore, Alessandra Bocchetti, Pia Candinas, Maria Fiorelli, and Francesca Molfino.
11. Isabella Bertoletti, 'Feminist Theory: Italy', in *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, ed. by Rinaldina Russel (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 113–16 (p. 114).
12. A scholar of English and comparative literature, Nadia Fusini translated and edited works by Virginia Woolf, John Keats, William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, and Mary Shelley. In 1998 she edited Woolf's works for Mondadori's classics series 'Meridiani'. She was awarded several prizes for her translations, including the Premio Mondello for the translation of *The Waves* (Turin, Einaudi, 1995). In 2017 she was awarded the Premio Europa for her literary activity. She is co-founder and president of the Italian Virginia Woolf Society.
13. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2006), pp. 101 and 137.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
15. *Italian Feminist Thought*, p. 109.
16. Hajek, p. 83.

17. *Dal movimento femminista al femminismo diffuso: Ricerca e documentazione nell'area lombarda*, ed. by Anna Rita Calabrò and Laura Grasso (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1985), p. 235.
18. 'In the destruction of the patriarchal system [...] we can see, in outline, a far more realistic solution to the problem of war than any of those offered by the usual studies on this topic'. Carla Lonzi, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', *Pensiero Femminista Radicale* (1970) <<http://femrad.blogspot.com/2014/01/sputiamo-su-hegel.html>> [accessed 9 October 2019].
19. Maria Ines Bonatti and Maria Rosaria Coglianese, 'Diotima', in *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, pp. 68–70 (p. 69).
20. Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women', in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 6–12 (p. 9).
21. Bonatti and Coglianese, p. 69.
22. Muraro was also the Italian translator of Luce Irigaray's work.
23. Unless otherwise specified, information regarding La Tartaruga and Laura Lepetit is taken from the interview I carried out on 20 February 2020. This video interview is available on my website at <<http://www.italianwoolf.reading.ac.uk/interviews>> [accessed 10 February 2021].
24. Back cover of Virginia Woolf, *Le tre ghinee* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1975).
25. Ibid.
26. Translated by Adriana Bottini, herself part of the group Rivolta Femminile.
27. 'THREE GUINEAS has had good reviews and is a great success at the feminist bookstore in Milano. I don't know about the sales in general yet, it takes so long! But I think it will take some time to become a success in sales too, but eventually it will'. Letter of Laura Lepetit to Rita Spurdle (The Hogarth Press), 29 January 1976, typewritten. Reading, University of Reading Special Collections (hereafter UoR), The Hogarth Press archive (hereafter HP), MS 2750/c/11/4.
28. Laura Lepetit to Rita Spurdle (The Hogarth Press), 27 February 1979, typewritten. UoR, HP, MS 2750/c/11/4.
29. Luisa Muraro, 'Introduzione', in Virginia Woolf, *Le Tre Ghinee* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 5–14 (p. 10).
30. Carolyn Heilbrun, in *Writing a Woman's Life*, affirmed that 'if Virginia Woolf had employed the tone of established authority she would have denied the experience of her life' (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), p. 42.
31. Nadia Fusini, 'La Foresta della prosa', in Virginia Woolf, *Saggi e racconti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. XI–LI (p. XXXI).
32. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 149–50.
33. Liliana Rampello, *Il canto del mondo reale* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2005), p. 169.
34. Muraro, 'Introduzione', p. 11.
35. Ibid., p. 12.
36. See note 23.
37. *Momenti di essere*, translated by Adriana Bottini (1977); *Flush*, translated by Alessandra Scalero (1979); *Lunedì o martedì*, translated by Francesca Duranti (1980); *Le donne e la scrittura*, translated by Adriana Bottini (1981); and *Ore in biblioteca e altri saggi*, translated by Daniela Daniele (1991).
38. The Hogarth Press sent a copy of the book to La Tartaruga at their request on 19 May 1976, fifteen days before the English publication.
39. Lucy Delap, 'Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000', *History Workshop Journal*, 1 (2016), 171–96 (p. 188).
40. *Dal movimento femminista al femminismo diffuso*, p. 365.
41. Which I translate here as 'political praxis', as opposed to mere theory.
42. Cited in Paola Bono, 'Women's Biographies and Autobiographies: A Political Project in the Making', in *Across Genres, Generations and Borders: Italian Women Writing Lives*, ed. by Susanna Scarpato and Rita Wilson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 10–21 (p. 11).
43. Fouque was a psychoanalyst, publisher, and leader of the groups that formed the Mouvement de Liberation Féminine. She was the founder of the Librairie des Femmes and

- co-founder of the Éditions des Femmes, the first women's publishing house in Europe, in 1972.
44. Lia Cigarini, 'Introduzione', in Antoinette Fauque, *I sessi sono due: Nascita della femminologia*, trans. by Nadia Setti (Milan: Pratiche, 1999), pp. 7–12 (p. 7).
  45. Elena Vacchelli, 'Milano 1970–1980: Women's Place in Urban Theory', *Research in Urban Sociology*, 9 (2008), 29–51 (p. 40).
  46. Martucci, p. 10.
  47. The reasons are outlined in Libreria delle donne di Milano, *Non credere di avere dei diritti: La generazione della libertà femminile nell'idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne*: 'La scelta di tenere e vendere soltanto opere di donne [...] viene motivata a) con l'importanza che hanno avuto e ha per noi il conoscere ciò che altre hanno pensato prima di noi, b) con il proposito di privilegiare i prodotti del pensiero femminile contro il misconoscimento sociale del loro valore'. (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1987), p. 102. The bookshop now has a shelf labelled 'Gli amici delle donne' where a few volumes written by men are displayed.
  48. *Dal movimento femminista al femminismo diffuso*, p. 369.
  49. Hajek, p. 92.
  50. Susanna Scarparo, 'In the Name of the Mother: Sexual Difference and the Practice of Entrustment', *Cultural Studies Review*, 11.2 (2005), 36–48 (p. 37).
  51. Libreria delle donne di Milano, *Sottosopra verde: Più donne che uomini* (Milan: Libreria delle donne di Milano, 1983), available at <<https://www.libreriadelledonne.it/publicazioni/sottosopra-verde-piu-donne-che-uomini-gennaio-1983/>> [accessed 23 July 2020].
  52. To translate what the feminists of the Women's Bookstore called *simbolico femminile*, I chose the translation Rosi Braidotti used in her essay 'Sexual Difference Theory' in the *Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. by Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 298–306.
  53. *Sottosopra verde*: 'L'esistenza sociale si conquista in una gara sessuale di uomini. Quando viene meno la discriminazione la donna può entrare in questa gara, che però resta una gara di uomini. [...] L'emancipazione femminile equivale a far entrare la donna in questa gara sessuale dove la cosa che si afferma è la virilità. [...] Insomma, l'emancipazione ci mette nel gioco sociale con parole e desideri non nostri'.
  54. Martucci, p. 12.
  55. For an in-depth discussion of the term 'affidamento' (entrustment) and its fundamental political implications, see the introduction to *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, in particular pp. 11–12; and *Italian Feminist Thought*, in particular p. 110.
  56. Mirna Cicioni, "'Love and Respect, Together": The Theory and Practice of Affidamento in Italian Feminism', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 4.10 (1989), 71–83 (p. 71).
  57. Scarparo, p. 42.
  58. *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, p. 9.
  59. Martucci, p. 12.
  60. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).
  61. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
  62. The term is a blend of the words 'phallogocentric' and 'logocentric'. It was coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to 'everything in western culture that ties proper meaning, authority and presence (in a word, the Word: *logos*) to the imaginary and symbolic power of the phallus'. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 122.
  63. Braidotti, p. 301.
  64. The memos are part of the file 'Gruppo Romanzo Milano' (hereafter GR), n. doc. 37, Fondo Letizia Artoni (hereafter FLA), Centro Studi Movimenti, Parma (hereafter CSM).
  65. 'Appunti maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
  66. Luisa Muraro, *Il concetto di genealogia femminile*, workshop, 19/20 March 1988 (Centro culturale Virginia Woolf, Materiali di lavoro, Gruppo B), p. 18. Biblioteca delle donne Mauretta Pelagatti, Busta 5, fasc. 15, FLA, CSM.
  67. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

68. Ibid., p. 20.
69. Particularly in works such as Luisa Muraro, *L'Ordine simbolico della madre* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1991).
70. 'Il bello di questo gruppo è che qua si parla senza essere convenzionali, in nessun senso. Finalmente la Ruota Libera'. GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
71. 'Appunti maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
72. Ibid.: 'fa apparire un simbolico delle donne. Un simbolico parziale che si divide in due. Se si può parlare di un linguaggio sessualizzato'.
73. Heilbrun, p. 29.
74. 'Appunti maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
75. Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953). The book was translated into Italian by G. De Carlo and V. Guerrini, and published by Mondadori with the title *Diario di una scrittrice* in 1959.
76. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, trans. by Marco Papi (Milan: Garzanti, 1974).
77. 'Virginia Woolf', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
78. Phyllis Rose considered Quentin Bell's biography an example of misleading and biased biography in her *Writing on Women: Essays in a Renaissance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985).
79. The first being *Catalogo di testi di teoria e di pratica politica, 'Sulla servitù della scrittura e sulle sue grandi possibilità'*, published in 1978.
80. It would be the same for the *Sottosopra* and for the aforementioned *Non credere di avere dei diritti*. For collective authorship see also *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. by Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielsen (London: Routledge, 1987), in particular 'Part Four: Support and Communication'.
81. Libreria delle donne di Milano, *Catalogo n. 2 – Romanzi: Le madri di tutte noi* (Milan: Libreria delle donne, 1982), p. 1.
82. The list of the novels to read included Virginia Woolf's *Gita al faro* (*To the Lighthouse*) and *Momenti di essere* (*Moments of Being*); Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Un dio e i suoi doni* (*A God and his Gifts*) and *Più donne che uomini* (*More Women than Men*); Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; Emily Brontë's *Cime tempestose* (*Wuthering Heights*); Jane Austen's *Orgoglio e pregiudizio* (*Pride and Prejudice*); Violette Leduc's *Teresa e Isabella* (*Thérèse et Isabelle*); *La signora del renard* (*La Femme au petit renard*) and *La bastarda* (*La Bâtarde*); Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'La carta gialla' ('The Yellow Wallpaper'); Gertrude Stein's *Le tre esistenze* (*Three Existences*); Colette's *La vagabonda* (*La Vagabonde*); Elsa Morante's *L'isola di Arturo*; and Jean Rhys's *Il gran mare dei Sargassi* (*Wide Sargasso Sea*). 'Appunti Maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
83. Invitation sent from the Parma Women's Library, Biblioteca delle Donne Mauretta Pelagatti, Busta 2, fasc. 9, FLA, CSM.
84. 'un arricchimento per pensarci. Così, in effetti, le abbiamo deformate e ridotte a una frase a una immagine a un'invenzione linguistica'. *Catalogo n. 2*, p. 2.
85. Biblioteca delle donne, *Catalogo: 1987, Supplemento del Posto al Centro* (Parma, March 1987).
86. *Catalogo n. 2*, p. 46.
87. The essay first appeared in Italian translated by L. Bacchi Wilcock and J. R. Wilcock for il Saggiatore in 1963, in the collection *Per le strade di Londra*. It was then republished individually with an introduction by Marisa Bulgheroni, again for il Saggiatore, in 1980.
88. 'Appunti maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. 'Appunti dalle discussioni sui contributi scritti particolari (marzo-luglio 1980)', pp. 2–3, GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
92. *Catalogo n. 2*, p. 39.
93. Ibid.
94. 'Appunti maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.

95. Ibid.: 'L'esperimento di scrittura della Stein riflette meglio una esigenza che ho adesso e che mi viene dalla pratica politica delle donne: stare nella sospensione, non riempire di senso, di parole, quello che siamo'.
96. Ibid.
97. Most of the women read the novel in Italian as *Gita al faro*, in the translation by Giulia Celenza (Milan: Treves, 1934). Nadia Fusini's translation of the novel for Feltrinelli with the title *Al faro* would only be published in 1992.
98. 'Appunti maggio 78 giugno 79', GR, n. doc. 37, FLA, CSM.
99. Muraro, 'Introduzione', p. 14.
100. *Catalogo n. 2*, p. 47.
101. Scarpato, p. 42.
102. Cf. Cicioni, p. 71.
103. In *Non credere di avere dei diritti* the relationship between Woolf and Vita Sackville-West is given as an example of *affidamento*; see 'Introduzione', p. 17.
104. *Catalogo n. 2*, p. 48.
105. Braidotti, p. 302.
106. *Catalogo n. 2*, p. 48.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
109. Hajek, p. 83.
110. Delap, p. 192.
111. Muraro, *Il concetto di genealogia femminile*, p. 19.
112. As Bono and Kemp explain: 'It is not a matter of rejecting the importance of the historical struggle for equal rights, which cost many women such effort and sacrifice, and which has won us the vote, financial independence, access to education, etc. [...] Difference means duality; it means man's difference, not only woman's. It has to do with the full acceptance of the partiality of both the female and the male subjects'. 'Introduction: Coming from the South', in *Italian Feminist Thought*, pp. 1–29 (p. 18).
113. 'I fatti e le idee che esponiamo hanno avuto luogo fra il 1966 e il 1986 principalmente a Milano. Comunemente vengono messi sotto il nome di femminismo. Ora noi vorremmo portare in luce il loro senso vero e quindi anche il loro nome. Il nome è "genealogia". *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, p. 9.
114. Muraro, *Il concetto di genealogia femminile*, p. 5.
115. Ibid., p. 21.

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