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LOSS AND THE OTHER IN
THE VISIONARY WORK OF
ANNA MARIA ORTESE



Vilma De Gasperin

OXFORD MODERN LANGUAGES AND
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VILMA DE GASPERIN

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	x
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1. Beginnings	19
2. Fictional Autobiography	58
3. Realist Short Stories	106
4. Fairy Tales	151
5. Animal Allegories	212
Conclusion	272
<i>Bibliography</i>	275
<i>Index</i>	301

List of Figures

1. Lanterna del Molo, Naples, 1929	39
2. Stazione Marittima, Naples, 1950	39
3. Viale Elena, Naples, 1950s	120
4. Mergellina, Naples, 1950s	120
5. The Granili building (seen on the right-hand side), Naples, late 1920s	130
6. Via Roma and Piazza Carità, Naples, 1950s	141

(Illustrations in the book are from the private collection of Antonio Gamboni (Naples).)

Abbreviations

WORKS BY ANNA MARIA ORTESE

AD	<i>Angelici dolori e altri racconti</i> , ed. Luca Clerici (Milan: Adelphi, 2006)
AV	<i>Alonso e i visionari</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 1996)
CA	<i>Il cardillo addolorato</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 1993)
CC	<i>Corpo celeste</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 1997)
L'lg.	<i>L'Iguana</i> (1986; Milan: Adelphi, 1997)
LM	<i>La luna sul muro</i> (Florence: Vallecchi, 1968)
LS	<i>La lente scura: Scritti di viaggio</i> , ed. Luca Clerici (Milan: Adelphi, 2004)
MBN	<i>Il mare non bagna Napoli</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 1994)
MN	<i>Il Monaciello di Napoli</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 2001)
PN	<i>Il mio paese è la notte</i> (Rome: Empirìa, 1996)
PT	<i>Il porto di Toledo</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 1998)
SV	<i>In sonno e in veglia</i> (Milan: Adelphi, 1987)

TRANSLATIONS OF WORKS BY ANNA MARIA ORTESE

BN	Anna Maria Ortese, <i>The Bay Is not Naples</i> , trans. Frances Frenaye (London: Collins, 1955)
MW	Anna Maria Ortese, <i>A Music behind the Wall: Selected Stories</i> , trans. Henry Martin, 2 vols (New York: McPherson & Company, 1994, 1998)
Ig.	Anna Maria Ortese, <i>The Iguana</i> , trans. Henry Martin (New York: McPherson & Company, 1987)
LL	Anna Maria Ortese, <i>The Lament of the Linnet</i> , trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Harvill, 1997)

OTHER WORKS

Av. Pin.	Carlo Collodi, <i>Le avventure di Pinocchio: Storia di un burattino</i> , 2nd edn (Milan: Mondadori, 1995)
Ad. Pin.	Carlo Collodi, <i>The Adventures of Pinocchio</i> , trans. Ann Lawson Lucas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
Cast.	Giovanni Pascoli, <i>Canti di Castelvecchio</i> , ed. Giuseppe Nava (Milan: Rizzoli, 1983)
Myr.	Giovanni Pascoli, <i>Myricae</i> , ed. Franco Melotti (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995)

Introduction

LOSS AND THE OTHER

La vita è immensa solo per quello che perdiamo. Immensa perdita, immensa vita.¹

[Life is immense only in terms of what we lose. Immense loss, immense life.]

Tutto ciò che dà del dolore a un altro è immorale. L'unica cosa giusta, rispetto al dolore (che è l'immoralità totale), è toglierlo. A chiunque ne stia soffrendo. [...] Mi piace molto il *San Gerolamo* che, nella sua cella piena di libri, toglie la spina dalla zampa del leone. (CC 132)²

[Anything that inflicts pain on another is immoral. The only right thing, with respect to pain (which is utter immorality), is to relieve it. For anybody afflicted by it. [...] I very much like Saint Jerome, who, in his cell full of books, extracts the thorn from the lion's paw.]

The literary work of Anna Maria Ortese stems from a powerful creative response to a personal wound: the loss of a loved one or life's inherent inescapable transience. This wound is suffered by the Self, a speaking *I*, an alter ego, a narrator who shapes her sorrow and longing for that which has been lost, giving voice to the inner lament and suffering through language. Yet this founding and universal experience, with its heightened awareness of grief, is wrenched open and metamorphosed when the other is viewed not as that which has been lost—the object of mourning and the cause of melancholy—but as an 'Other' who suffers; when the void created by loss is filled by the presence of creatures who bear the marks of pain, endurance, and sorrow.³ This book explores Ortese's opus from the perspective of these two major themes, *loss* and the *Other*, which are closely inter-related in her masterful literary creations.

Loss, in Ortese's texts, is represented as bereavement; or the loss of a loved one through abandonment, indifference, or departure; or it is the

¹ Anna Maria Ortese, letter to Margherita Pieracci Harwell, 2 January 1996, cit. in Luca Clerici, *Apparizione e visione: Vita e opere di Anna Maria Ortese* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 608.

² The painting to which this quotation refers is in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.

³ The term 'Other' is here to be taken in a broader sense than its psychoanalytical meaning. Lacan defined as 'specular other' the image borne out of the mirror-phase, thus a reflection of the Self, while 'symbolic Other' came to coincide with the unconscious. Cf. Marie-Claire Boons-Grafé, 'Other/other', in Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 296–9. In Kristeva the 'other' is

natural consequence of the process of growing up, the melancholy loss of youth orchestrating a lament for an irretrievable time. The treatment of these themes develops throughout Ortese's long literary career, affecting and in turn being affected by the author's experimentation with various genres and her growing engagement with social and ethical issues. This contributes to Ortese's status, not only as a great writer but also as one of the most significant critical minds in twentieth-century literature, in both the Italian and the wider European context. Although some of her themes may have been treated by some of the greatest European writers, from Mann to Proust, Joyce, and Kafka, the highly original way in which Ortese deals with them puts her in a class of her own.

Loss and the Other are mutually determined and their meaning reciprocally modified. When the theme of loss mirrors the early autobiographical experience of bereavement and abandonment, the Other is the lost person, the one whom the poet laments, and writing focuses on the Self. The notion of the Other is inherent in autobiographical writing that sees the creation of a Self made of retrieved and transfigured memories, which in fact shape the Self as an Other. Later Ortese's narrative is increasingly drawn to shaping an Other who is helpless, vulnerable, and underprivileged, an Other in which she herself would identify, but who symbolically represents human individuals, natural creatures, peoples, and layers of society who suffer at the hand of the strong.

An acute and sensitive witness of the events of society and the world at large, Ortese expresses her intellectual and ethical response not only to personal drama but also to the social, political, and economic upheavals and issues of her time: from the 1930s to the post-war period, from the unequal economic growth engendering further social injustice to the tension arising from the cold war, from the wave of violent social turmoil and terrorism that swept across Italy in the 1970s and 1980s to any form of injustice perpetrated against a helpless Other. The nature of her engagement was wide ranging, siding always with the weaker and more vulnerable, human beings who are plagued by poverty, disease, any form of marginalization, but also animals and all those creatures that she saw as victims of the de-humanizing exercise of power, from the killing and torturing of animals to the death penalty.⁴ She also voiced her dissent

the foreigner, he who is different and does not belong to the present while being deprived of his origins, and she further comes to define the other/foreigner as 'the hidden face of our identity'; see Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); first French edition, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

by addressing public opinion through the Press, with a call to counteract abuse with active kindness and assistance. In a statement written for an audience of young people in 1998, she wrote:

È il pensiero del soccorso la forza buona del mondo. E io spero che apparteniate tutti alla forza che vuole un mondo diverso, una vita di riscatto e consolazione per i più deboli e dimenticati. È grande il male che l'uomo ha fatto da sempre all'altro uomo e alla materna natura. È tempo che un'umanità nuova, più vicina alla gentilezza, inizi il suo cammino.⁵

[A willingness to provide aid to others is the principal force for good in the world. And I hope that you all belong to the force that wants a different world, a life of redemption and consolation for those who are most weak and forgotten. Great is the evil that man has always done to fellow men and mother nature. It is now time that a new humanity, closer to kindness, began its journey.]

This profoundly ethical outlook pervades Ortese's literary work and, most poignantly, what appear to be her fantastic, yet in fact deeply engaged, forms of writing. Ortese's philosophical attitude rests on these crucial concepts upon which her view of humankind is based: abuse (*abuso*) and aid (*soccorso*). And this is where a broader meaning of utter loss emerges: in inflicting *abuso* on the Other (be it human, animal, or natural), Man loses his humanity, causing a fall, utter loss, perdition, for which Ortese advocates *soccorso* towards the Other who suffers. Significantly, the work of art that in Ortese's view best depicts man's duty of fraternity and compassion in the world is the painting of *Saint Jerome in his Study* by the fifteenth-century Neapolitan artist Colantonio, in which the saint extracts the thorn from the lion's paw.⁶ Much of Ortese's work shapes this central idea of care and compassion. The recourse to the fantastic genre, which Ortese claimed she favoured, specifically allows her to unify in a single emblematic animal or fantasy *figura* the multifarious meanings

⁴ On the death penalty she actively intervened in the case of Scotty Lee Moore, a North American Indian on death row who was executed in Oklahoma in 1999. Before being put to death he had asked for his ashes to be buried near Rapallo, where Ortese had lived and from where she had corresponded with him; see Alessandra Farkas, 'Ortese: Lettere per il piccolo indiano condannato a morte', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 June 1999, p. 33, and Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 625–8. On animals, see, e.g., against the killing of animals, 'Il massacro degli animali', *Paese Sera*, 9 April 1982, p. 6; or, against bullfights in Spain, 'Poveri animali oltraggiati', *La Stampa*, 28 May 1990, p. 3. Her concern also extended to Nature as a whole, as in 'Gli animali sono importanti' (*Milano-sera*, 12 April 1950, p. 3, repub. in *Lo Straniero*, 11/12 (Autumn 2000), 62–4), where she includes plants, mountains, the sun, the sea, and all natural elements, which, in the best of cases, seem to be neglected, while in the worst they are exploited and destroyed.

⁵ Anna Maria Ortese, 'Ragazzi, voi siete la forza buona del mondo', *Tirreno*, 13 March 1998, p. 13, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 626.

of the suffering Other, which man at times condemns and at others redeems.

To illustrate the shift from a personal to a philosophical dimension within her writing, I have selected, in addition to her major novels, a corpus of texts that are particularly representative of her varied aesthetic shaping of autobiographical experience and of the growing ethical preoccupation that places at the heart of the narration a vulnerable suffering Other. This monograph thus begins with an analysis of Ortese's first published poem of 1933 and closes with a discussion of her final novel of 1996. In between, the order that underlies the grouping of texts within the various chapters is governed primarily by considerations of genre rather than chronology. The first chapter begins by looking at a small selection of early texts on autobiographical loss; subsequent chapters each revolve around one particular genre: autobiography, realist short stories, fairy tales, and animal allegories. A theoretical discussion of Ortese's adoption and experimentation with different genres introduces my analysis of the respective texts. It should be emphasized that neat division and categorization of this kind cannot be sustained absolutely, and any attempt to do so would soon be undermined by the very nature of Ortese's highly individual texts, which experiment greatly with genre, form, and language. Thus, there are further subdivisions and differences within the same broader umbrella term of a single genre—for instance, in 'Beginnings', which includes the poetic elegy, the autobiographical, and the fantastic tale; or in 'Animal Allegory', which comprises elements of genres as diverse as the fairy tale and the detective novel. Indeed, flexibility of definition is necessary with such an experimental and unorthodox writer, who engages with tradition in a provocative and challenging way.

A close correlation emerges between the themes, as already discussed, and the genre adopted by the author. Broadly speaking, but with exceptions and overlaps, autobiographical short stories, autobiography, and poetry appear to be favoured in depicting personal loss and the absence of the Other, while the fantastic and the fairy tale are embraced by Ortese when the focus shifts onto the suffering of the Other. In between lie her more realist works, which may be considered, by the author's own admission, a choice dictated more by the requirement of the times and the overall publishing vein than by any real literary preference. This raises essentially aesthetic considerations. As we shall see, the fantastic in its various guises is, for Ortese, the genre best suited to representing the suffering of the Other, suggesting that realism would simply not suffice.

In this book, I assess the significance of Ortese's work in the context of Italian literature, but also within European literature as a whole, as evidenced by her engagement with European (and sometimes American) literary masterpieces, which she repeatedly acknowledged as having provided her with most influential models.⁷ This aspect emerges not least in my exploration of the sustained intertextual dialogue of Ortese's work with that of other authors, ranging from Giacomo Leopardi to Paul Valéry, from Jorge Manrique to William Shakespeare, and so on. In exploring intertextuality I adopt Genette's broader notion of 'textual transcendence'—that is, 'all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts'.⁸ In Ortese, intertextuality occurs in a rich variety of forms: from direct and explicit quotation, as in 'Il capitano', 'L'incendio', and *Il porto di Toledo*, where lines from other texts are quoted and highlighted in italics, to the less explicit use of allusion, defined by Genette as 'an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible'.⁹ Such is the case, for example, of allusion to Leopardi and Collodi in 'Il Monaciello di Napoli', or to Stevenson in *L'Iguana*. Also falling within this category are what might be called 'near-quotations', where the line closely resembles that of the source but is not marked, and, similarly, what might be termed as 'echoes', where the resemblance is yet more subtle and possibly created unconsciously by the author. In brief, my intertextual exploration may be encapsulated in Christopher Ricks's definition of 'allusion': 'the calling into play—by poets—of the words and phrases of previous writers'.¹⁰ Other forms of intertextuality at work include topoi, themes, narrative situations, and characters—such as the journey/traveller motif, or the ship—which function as 'archetypes of the

⁷ According to Ortese's explicit statements, the authors who were especially influential on her literary development or close to her work include, in the Italian tradition: Giacomo Leopardi, Dante, Alessandro Manzoni, and Carlo Collodi; in the Anglo-American tradition: Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Katherine Mansfield, William Blake, Charles Dickens, John Milton, Samuel Coleridge, Thomas Hardy, Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, and Joseph Conrad. In other European literatures: T. E. Hoffmann, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy, and Alexander Pushkin. Further modes of intertextuality emerge from the textual analysis of the present work.

⁸ For the theoretical framework of intertextuality, see Gérard Genette, 'Five Types of Transtextuality, among which Hypertextuality', in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newmann and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln, NB, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1–7. Genette defines 'intertextuality' as a 'relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts' and it includes, among others, quotation, allusion, architextuality, hypertextuality (p. 1).

⁹ Genette, *Palimpsests*, 2.

narrative imagery'.¹¹ Finally, I consider what Genette calls 'architextuality', the 'silent' relationship with a genre that emerges, for example, from the author's own definition of her text as 'a fable' (in the case of *Alonso e i visionari*), or 'fictional autobiography' (*falsa autobiografia*), which calls for a provocative assessment of *Il porto di Toledo* in relation to the genre of autobiography. When I deem it especially useful in aiding the interpretation of the text, I touch upon the thorny question of 'foretexts'—that is, the 'drafts, outlines, and projects of a work', which sometimes provide entirely different endings from the published version or offer more explicit insight into the meaning of the text.¹² This includes drafts of her work and materials collected in the National Archive in Naples.¹³ Needless to say, no one book can aspire to give a full account of the entire literary universe that seeps through Ortese's extremely rich work, and, I am glad to say, more work in this direction remains to be done.

As mentioned above, along with the exploration of genre and intertextual dialogue, the central concepts of loss and the Other evolve and mutually determine one another. In Chapter 1 I explore Ortese's early writing, where loss signifies separation from the Other, which is in turn defined through absence: the brother figures of Manuele and Antonio, and subsequently the abandoning lover. Such loss merges with that of youth and the awareness of life's transience, the passing of all things, while the Other becomes an emblem of loss in a broader sense. Since loss here implies a personal experience, the narrative and poetic representation focuses primarily on the void within the Self, created by the absence of the Other. Significantly, it is precisely in this void that writing emerges as a way of shaping loss. Thus this chapter explores the close relationship between loss and writing in the elegy 'Manuele' (1933), and two short tales from *Angelici dolori* that further represent the love for the brother figure and the grief of separation: 'Pellerossa' (1934) and 'Il capitano' (1937). A slightly later text, 'La cura' (1942), offers a fantastic representation of another intimate experience, that of love and abandonment, set against the existential experience of melancholy 'which is not only *Stimmung* (state of mind) but also otherness and unreachability'.¹⁴ My exploration of melan-

¹⁰ Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

¹¹ Marina Polacco, *L'intertestualità* (Bari: Laterza, 1998), 41, 42.

¹² Genette, *Palimpsests*, 3.

¹³ See Rossana Spadaccini, Linda Iacuzio, and Claudia Marilyn Cuminale (eds), *L'archivio di Anna Maria Ortese: Inventario* (Naples: Archivio di Stato di Napoli, 2006). For the complex textual history and foretexts of Ortese's novels I have made use of the critical apparatus in the collected novels, Anna Maria Ortese, *Romanzi*, i, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), which includes *Poveri e semplici*, *Il cappello piumato*, *Il porto di Toledo*; *Romanzi*, ii, ed. Andrea Baldi, Monica Farnetti, and Filippo Secchieri (Milan: Adelphi, 2005), which includes *L'Iguana*, *Il cardillo addolorato*, and *Alonso e i visionari*.

choly in Ortese draws on the cultural notion explored by Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, and on the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Klein, and, above all, on Kristeva's idea of melancholy as 'the symbol's sway' and the source of literary creation. Chapter 2 on autobiography discusses *Il porto di Toledo* (1975), where the autobiographical narrative content is moulded around reiterated experiences of loss. These coincide with the birth of the writing subject, determining the narrator's voice in the reconstruction of her past, while the lost Other merges with the idea of transient youth, harking back to Leopardi's poetic rendering of lost *fanciullezza* and further constructing of the poetic *persona* as a melancholy *figura*.

The call for documenting post-war reality within the Neapolitan intellectual entourage of *Gruppo Sud* pulls Ortese's writing towards a more realistic mode, which is discussed in Chapter 3, on the collection *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (1953). I include here also a later Neapolitan tale, 'L'incendio' (1960), which I consider particularly emblematic of the loss of childhood, and revelatory of Ortese's intertextual practice with opera—namely, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Through the short story and literary reportage, Ortese sketches Neapolitan *tranches de vie*, focusing on individual characters, both fictional and based on real life. What emerges is a portrayal both of wretched individuals and of a collectively tried and resigned society. In these narratives, Ortese unveils the existential moment where the fragile potential for happiness is ruptured because of the experience of loss (of the father, of childhood, hopes, ideals, and so on), thus initiating a life of bleak resignation. Here the image of the Other appears to splinter into a series of highly emblematic mini-portraits, which together make up the wretched face of a diseased city.

Notwithstanding such masterful portrayals of social and individual misery in realistic terms, Ortese declared that her favourite genre was the fantastic. The two final chapters explore texts that, against any claim to realism, devote the narrative epicentre either to an elf *figura* rooted in the tradition of folklore (the three fairy tales discussed in Chapter 4), or a fantastic animal, such as the dragon, the iguana, and the puma (Chapter 5). Chapter 4, on the fairy tale, discusses 'Il Monaciello di Napoli' (1940), 'Folletto a Genova' (1984), and *Il cardillo addolorato* (1993), all centred around the character of a fantastic elf, where folkloric as well as literary sources play a major role. Chapter 5, on animal allegories, begins by analysing the short narration of a dream within 'Piccolo drago (conversazione)' (1987), which provides an emblematic representa-

¹⁴ Eugenio Borgna, *Malinconia*, 2nd edn (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001), 39.

tion of the meaning of the Other/animal as a helpless creature on whom mankind inflicts pain, and introduces crucial themes that are fully developed in the novels *L'Iguana* (1965) and *Alonso e i visionari* (1996). In the context of these works, the notion of otherness acquires yet further meaning: the Other is that which is different, belonging to another species, lacking a voice and therefore marginalized, an ultimately rejected or abused creature. At the same time, the notion of loss here becomes more complex and more abstract, less identifiable, involving a Self that represents humankind and that has either caused the Other's suffering, or undertakes a quest to relieve pain and redeem abuse. Thus the animal allegories discussed in Chapter 5, and also to a large extent *Il cardillo addolorato*, stage, along with the themes of sin and loss, those of guilt, expiation, and redemption: a loss has occurred as a consequence of man's guilt, a kind of original human sin that calls for someone to take the guilt upon himself and expiate. Loss is, therefore, amplified; it no longer concerns an individual experience, as in Ortese's earlier texts, but pervades the relationship between man and the Other in a wider, deeply ethical perspective, which calls for the re-establishment of a compassionate bond between man and his fellow creatures.

CHAOS AND FORM

'La vita, *caos*, diventa *forma*. Ed è questa l'unica realtà degna di essere guardata.'¹⁵

[Life, *chaos*, turns into *form*. And this is the only reality worthy of examination.]

In Ortese's work, themes and motifs often feed on her personal biography and on her response to events that occurred both within her private life and, as she developed as a writer encompassing more and more ethical and social issues, within society and the wider world around her.¹⁶ The following paragraphs introduce some essential biographical details that are absorbed and transfigured in her fiction.

¹⁵ Anna Maria Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1998), 244. Originally, with a slight variation, in *Angelici dolori* (Milan: Bompiani, 1937), 103.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise stated, biographical information is based on the extensive biographical study by Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*. For shorter but very useful outlines of Ortese's life, see Giancarlo Borri, 'La vita', in *Invito alla lettura di Anna Maria Ortese* (Milan: Mursia, 1988), 13–22; Monica Farnetti, 'Vita di Anna Maria Ortese', in *Anna Maria Ortese* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1998), 1–22. On Ortese's childhood, see also Dacia Maraini, 'Anna

Anna Maria Ortese was born in Rome on 13 June 1914. Her mother Beatrice (1881–1951) was born in Naples, the daughter of Brigida from Naples and Giuseppe Vaccà from the Tuscan town of Carrara. Their story is echoed in the plot of *Il cardillo addolorato* in the lives of Elmina, Albert Dupré, and their children Albert Babà and Alessandrina: like Elmina, Brigida was a seamstress and, like Albert, Giuseppe was a sculptor; they lived in Naples and had two children. As in the story of *Il cardillo addolorato*, Giuseppe had a breakdown when their first child, Alberto, died at the age of 2. After ten years he recovered, and their daughter Beatrice was born. He died shortly afterwards. Brigida died of nephritis in 1928 in Libya, where the Ortese family was living at the time. As well as in *Il cardillo addolorato*, the writer's grandparents also recur elsewhere in her narrative. The grandfather features in the early short story 'La villa' in *Angelici dolori*, while the grandmother is closely linked to the time of childhood and storytelling, and her figure appears frequently in Ortese's work, from the autobiographical memoir 'Partenza della nonna' to her fairy-tale transfiguration as Margherita in 'Il Monaciello di Napoli' and the oniric representation in 'Piccolo drago (conversazione)'.

Anna Maria's father Oreste (1883–53) was born in Caltanissetta (Sicily) to a Calabrian mother and a Catalan father originally from Barcelona (his surname was italianized from Ortez). Ortese spoke of 'origini involontarie' that influenced the Hispanic representation of her youth in *Il porto di Toledo* and the fictional depiction of her parents in the tale 'I Gomez' (echoing Ortez) in *L'Infanta sepolta*. Oreste studied as an accountant and worked as a civil servant for the Italian Home Office. Before their marriage in 1907, Beatrice worked for the Italian Mail Service. They had seven children, of whom one died in infancy and two in their twenties: Raffaele (1908–99), Maria (1910–93), Giuseppe (May 1911–July 1911), Emanuele (1912–33), the twins Anna Maria (1914–98) and Antonio (1914–40), and Francesco (1920–98). At the outbreak of the First World War Oreste went to war as an Artillery Officer and the family (two women, with five children under the age of 6) moved to the south of Italy, first to Apulia, then to Portici near Naples. When Oreste returned from the war in 1918, he was transferred, and the family thus moved with him to Potenza, in Basilicata, 'the poorest region on the Southern mainland'.¹⁷ Here Anna Maria attended the first three years of primary school, but was frequently absent owing to ill health, and in 1921 her life was at risk because of serious lung congestion, an experience that she claimed

Maria Ortese', in *E tu chi eri? 26 interviste sull'infanzia*, 2nd edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), 19–34. At present, there is very little on Ortese's biography available in English.

¹⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy 1943–1980* (London: Penguin, 1990), 35.

initiated her lifelong preoccupation with death.¹⁸ In 1924 Oreste successfully requested to be transferred to Libya, which had been given by Turkey to Italy following the First Treaty of Lausanne in 1912. The family moved first to Tripoli, and then some 40 kilometres outside of the capital near the desert, where he was granted a concession comprising a quarry. He had planned to build their house with stone extracted from the quarry, but it was exhausted before the house was completed, bringing them serious financial loss and plunging them into debt, increased poverty and dismal living conditions. In Tripoli Anna Maria attended the Italian school, where she twice repeated the third year, and finished the fourth and fifth years of primary school. In 1928 Oreste was called back to Italy, and the Ortese family returned and settled in Naples, on the fifth floor in via del Piliero by the port, which provides the setting of Ortese's transfigured autobiography *Il porto di Toledo*. It is here in Naples, Ortese claimed, that she discovered her identity as an individual, and this is reflected textually in the fact that her autobiography begins at the time of her arrival in Naples at the age of 10, 14 in real life. All children were encouraged to go to school: Maria went to the *Magistrali*, her brothers to naval college, while Anna Maria attended a vocational school, but, unable to endure the boredom and constraints of the classroom, she soon abandoned it. For a while she had private piano lessons so that she might at least obtain a music diploma, but she soon gave that up, too. Thus it was that by the age of 14 she had stopped any form of regular education. She learned to typewrite and worked occasionally as a typist. At home, she read her siblings' textbooks and did their homework, becoming acquainted with various authors from their school anthologies and working on language independently, with what she described as long solitary battles pouring over dictionaries.¹⁹ Self-instruction through books and dictionaries probably accounts for her extraordinarily idiosyncratic linguistic style. She read passionately, in a household where artistic activities in general such as drawing, music, and reading were encouraged: if in earlier years their grandmother had engaged them with storytelling, Ortese recalls that their father used to read Hugo's *Les Misérables* to his children. Unusually for a girl of that time, Anna Maria enjoyed great independence within the family, which, she claimed, accounts for her erratic and assiduous reading and the freedom to wander all over Naples.²⁰ Walking around the city as a young girl is probably linked to Ortese's mode of

¹⁸ Maraini, 'Anna Maria Ortese', 31.

¹⁹ Martina Vergani, 'Il mio nome è nessuno', *Panorama*, 22 June 1986, p. 139, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 59.

representing urban reality in her stories, most notably in some of the pieces in *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, as if the narrator were a camera walking through the alleyways to absorb and later represent the city's living conditions.

Naples, with its port, ships, and the sea, was to play a crucial role in Ortese's imagery and is profoundly linked to the age of youth, while the sea soon became the emblem par excellence of separation and life's transience, in close connection with the tragic fate that befell her brothers, all of whom were to go to sea, with some destined never to return. In 1933 Emanuele died at the age of 20 falling from the *Colombo*, a ship of the *Regia Marina*, near the island of Martinique. In 1940 Antonio, sub-lieutenant of the *Regia Marina*, was stabbed to death by an orderly in Albania. With the outbreak of war, Raffaele, aboard the steamer *Recca*, was captured and interned in Cuba until the end of the war. Francesco was also at sea, and his father applied in vain for him to be discharged from service on the basis that three of his sons had already been sacrificed for the Fatherland (two killed, one imprisoned) and that the family was devastated. In an appeal to Mussolini, Oreste summarized his family's situation thus:

In conclusione, figli perduti—famiglia completamente sfasciata—entrate andate per aria—avvenire delle due figlie nubili da rifare—la salute della povera madre, compromessa per sempre nello spirito e nel corpo—io avvilito da tanto abbandono dopo tanto sangue donato.²¹

[In conclusion, sons lost—family in tatters—earnings gone to the wind—futures of two unmarried daughters to rebuild—mental and physical health of their mother forever compromised—myself dejected by such forlornness after giving so much blood.]

Needless to say, since the regime fell shortly afterwards, his appeal brought about no change whatsoever.

Anna Maria Ortese claims she began to write around the age of 14 as a way of finding an identity.²² But it is in 1933, with the death of Emanuele, that writing first imposes itself as a way of transforming and dealing with painful experiences through the means of language. She wrote a poem on her brother's death, 'Manuele', and sent it to the prestigious literary journal *L'Italia Letteraria*, where it was published in

²⁰ Anna Maria Ortese, 'Il male freddo', *Lo Straniero*, 2/3 (Spring 1998), 12, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 62.

²¹ Letter of Oreste Ortese to Benito Mussolini, dated 4 July 1943, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 23–5 (p. 24).

²² Nicoletta Polla-Mattiot, 'Il mio paradiso è il silenzio', interview with Ortese, *Grazia*, 16 June 1996, 93–6, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 70.

September 1933, nine months after the tragedy. Subsequently, the journal director Corrado Pavolini, an influential figure in Ortese's literary beginnings (transfigured as Conra D'Orgaz in *Il porto di Toledo*), published two more of her poems and encouraged her to write prose, which resulted in the publication in 1934 of her first short story, 'Pellirossa'. Her first narrative text is also an elegiac tale about Emanuele, recalling the time they shared together, then the void and crumbling of her childhood world following his death. Thus writing, for Ortese, is born as a response to grief:

Io ho sentito per la prima volta il valore della scrittura quando, da ragazza, conobbi il terribile strazio della morte di una persona cara. Mio fratello marinaio era scomparso nelle Antille e dopo due o tre mesi ho incominciato a scrivere delle poesie. Roba modesta, niente di speciale, ma mi è servita per trasformare quel mio dolore indicibile in un'altra cosa. In una forma. Credo che il valore del narrare sia proprio questo. [...] la scrittura è come un ritmo che serve a calmare, aiuta a sostenere l'orrore di certe emozioni che altrimenti ci distruggerebbero.²³

[I felt the value of writing for the first time when, as a young girl, I experienced the torture of losing somebody dear to me. My sailor brother had been lost in the Antilles and after two or three months I began writing poems. Modest things, nothing special, but it helped me to transform my inexpressible pain into something else. To give it form. I think the value of narration is precisely this. [...] writing is like a rhythm which brings calmness, helps us to bear the horror of certain emotions that would otherwise destroy us.]

Ortese briefly adopted the pseudonym Franca Nicosi in order to prevent her family from teasing her, and then her first volume of thirteen short stories, *Angelici dolori*, was published in 1937 with the support of the writer Massimo Bontempelli (Bento in *Il porto di Toledo*). A friend of Benedetto Croce's daughters, Ortese would often visit the philosopher's home, where she was also able to take advantage of a quiet place in which to write. During the late 1930s and early 1940s she associated with the young intellectuals of the *Gruppi Universitari Fascisti* (GUF), set up by the fascists but increasingly a breeding ground for covert opposition to the regime. In 1939 Bontempelli and his partner, the writer Paola Masino, hosted Anna Maria for a brief period in Venice, where Bontempelli was confined for political reasons, and helped her to find accommodation and work. Here she lived for a couple of years, working first at the *Mostra del Cinema* and then as a proofreader at the newspaper *Il Gazzettino*. In 1939 she took part in the literary competition of the *Littoriali* in Trieste, winning first prize for poetry, and second prize for prose with 'Il Mona-

²³ M. Cristina Guarinelli, 'Anna Maria Ortese e l'arte del dolore', interview with Ortese, *Marie Claire*, 6 (June 1994), 236–7, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 71.

ciello di Napoli', repeating the feat the following year by again securing second prize for prose.

In 1940 she was called back to Naples by her brother Antonio, to stay with her mother and sister, since all other family members were away. Following the bombing of Naples on 4 December 1942, they were forced to evacuate and went to live in various parts of Italy until the end of the war. They first went to Mede Lomellina in Lombardy, then Rome, Viterbo (Lazio), and Venice on the island of Burano, and in 1945 they finally returned to Naples, by then a city utterly devastated by the war and occupation. As the historian Paul Ginsborg describes it:

The period of Allied occupation of the city, lasting from September 1943 to December 1944, was an unmitigated disaster. Severe bombings of the area near the port had left 200,000 Neapolitans homeless, and in the autumn of 1943 there was very little water and the sewers did not function. With the connivance of many levels of army command, an estimated 60 per cent of merchandise unloaded in the port disappeared on the black market. By July 1944 only 3.4 per cent of the goods in Naples were available in the form of rations to the population. The city acquired a face of degradation and disease that it had not known since the great plagues of the seventeenth century. Most of the poorer women were forced into prostitution, and severe epidemics of typhus and venereal disease afflicted both the civilian and military population.²⁴

With their former home destroyed, the Ortese family lived in Naples until 1948 on the top floor of a house in via Palasciano, which appears as 'Vicolo della Cupa', its former name, as the setting of the early short stories, depicting the miserable living conditions of the poorest layers of Neapolitan society in 'Dolce splendore del vicolo' (1947) and 'Un paio di occhiali' (1949). Norman Lewis, a British Intelligence Officer in Naples at the time, witnessed 'the struggles of this city so shattered, so starved, so deprived of all those things that justify a city's existence'.²⁵ He noted: 'Fifty or sixty per cent of poor families occupy one windowless room, and have been bred to endure airless nights on the ground floor of the palazzi, or in gloomy, sunless back streets.'²⁶ This was indeed the actual setting of some of Ortese's tales, which portray such an unimaginable environment and dreadfully deprived characters. In her realist productions of the 1950s, such as *Il mare non bagna Napoli* and, five years later, *Silenzio a Milano*, Ortese depicts the existential conditions of deprivation suffered by the poorest, most vulnerable members of society, acting as an extremely acute

²⁴ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 37.

²⁵ Norman Lewis, *Naples '44: An Intelligence Officer in the Italian Labyrinth* (1978; London: Eland, 1983), 46.

²⁶ Lewis, *Naples '44*, 65.

and sensitive witness to the suffering of others. It was at this time that Ortese joined the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), the Italian Communist Party, in search of shared ideals for a better society. Ortese's political commitment, however, was to the social cause and never to a particular political system as such. From Milan in 1948, she wrote to Pasquale Prunas: 'io non posso sentire la lotta di classe se non in funzione di quella contro il Male [...] ch'è tanto, è solo in parte dovuto al fattore economico' [I can't feel the class struggle as anything other than the battle against Evil [...] which is so great, it is only partly due to economic factors].²⁷ Ortese was not a militant communist, and her political engagement stemmed not from ideological beliefs, but rather from her profound attention towards the poorer strata of society, which she identified with the Left.²⁸ Ortese's connection with the PCI was in fact far from smooth and her writing was on occasion perceived as a betrayal of communist ideals, particularly *Il mare non bagna Napoli* and even more so 'La Russia vista da una donna italiana' [Russia seen by an Italian woman], a reportage on her journey to Russia as a member of the delegation of fifteen Italian women in 1954.²⁹ The latter ultimately alienated the Milanese Left, and that year she ceased her association with the PCI for good, thus anticipating the disillusionment that many other writers, including Calvino, would experience some two years later following the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956.

After the end of the war Ortese wrote numerous reportages for various magazines. The most important intellectual experience of this time was her involvement with *Gruppo Sud*, a group of intellectuals gathering around Pasquale Prunas, who founded and edited *Sud: Giornale di cultura* (1945–7): writers such as Luigi Compagnone, Domenico Rea, Raffaele La Capria, Vasco Pratolini, Michele Prisco, Samy Fayad, and Gianni Sconamiglio, but also journalists (Franco and Ernesto Grassi) and several artists. By that time Ortese was already a published author and was invited by Prunas to collaborate with *Sud*, where her name appears as one of the journal's editors in three issues, beginning 20 June 1946. The journal was dedicated to culture, literature, cinema, and art, with the aim of embracing a wider European scope. It focused on the problems of the

²⁷ Anna Maria Ortese, letter to Prunas, 19 August 1948, in Anna Maria Ortese, *Alla luce del Sud: Lettere a Pasquale Prunas*, ed. Renata Prunas and Giuseppe Di Costanzo (Milan: Archinto, 2006), 92.

²⁸ Cf. Rossana Rossanda, letter to Luca Clerici, 26 March 2000, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 285.

²⁹ The piece was originally published in the weekly magazine *L'Europeo* in six instalments between 14 November and 19 December 1954. The first three instalments appeared as *Il treno russo* (Rome: Pellicanolibri, 1987), and are now in Anna Maria Ortese, *La lente scura: Scritti di viaggio*, ed. Luca Clerici (Milan: Adelphi, 2004), 77–108.

south and post-war Naples in particular, but at the same time it engaged with European cultural innovations and stimuli. It published articles and/or translations from Émile Zola, Christopher Isherwood, Mallarmé; English contemporary poets such as Eliot, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis; and then authors such as Kafka, Klopstock, Heine, and Hemingway, as well as Sartre's essay on existentialism.³⁰ After only seven issues the journal ended in 1947, mainly because of financial problems, which were not eased by Prunas's firm belief that culture ought to be entirely free from political ties. This would lead him to refuse funding that would have implied any sort of indebtedness. Ortese portrayed the group's endeavour with hindsight in 'Il silenzio della ragione', published in 1953, which focused in particular on Pasquale Prunas, Luigi Compagnone, and Domenico Rea, depicting what she saw as a loss of enthusiasm among the former members of the group, and the disillusionment of a whole generation of post-war intellectuals. This caused great waves of hostility towards Ortese, and such was the bitterness that Ortese never returned to Naples after 1953. Sometimes, she recalled, she would catch a train from some town up north, arrive in Naples, and go back without even getting off the train.³¹ Considered in the right context and read without personal involvement, *Il mare* has long been acknowledged as an extraordinary portrait of Naples, its ills, and the conditions of its inhabitants.

During the late 1940s Ortese lived in various parts of Italy: Calabria, Genoa, Pesaro, Trieste, Milan, mostly writing reportages and articles for magazines. She was in Rome in 1947, where she frequented the literary circle in the *salotto* of the writer Maria Bellonci. Here she met members of the literary world such as Alberto Moravia, Sibilla Aleramo, and Alba De Céspedes, but she did not mix with them, nor would she ever, throughout her career, coalesce with literary fashions and prevailing orthodoxies. She portrayed the Roman literary elite in 'Roma, la capitale', published in *Sud* in 1947, which gave an intellectually unflattering portrayal of one of Rome's most eminent literary protagonists, Alberto Moravia.³² Altogether she published some 240 articles between 1937 and 1953 and was awarded the prestigious Saint Vincent prize for journalism twice, in 1952 and 1954. Her first three books largely consist of previously published pieces ranging from fantasy to realism; her eclectic production is also reflected in

³⁰ A reprint of the journal has been republished: *SUD: Giornale di cultura 1945–1947* (Matera: Palomar, 1994).

³¹ Clerici on the TV programme *Anna Maria Ortese: Donne e uomini da non dimenticare*. Programme by Loredana Rotondo. Rai Educational. Broadcast on Rai Uno. 10 January 2006. See also Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 181.

³² Anna Maria Ortese, 'Roma, la capitale', *SUD: Giornale di cultura*, 2/2–6 (July–September 1947), 11–12.

the diverse genres of *L'Infanta sepolta*, a collection of mostly fantastic stories (1950), and the denunciatory realism of *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (1953) and later *Silenzio a Milano* (1958). From the early 1950s Ortese lived primarily in Milan, and these years would later be represented in her two complementary autobiographical novels, *Poveri e semplici* (1967) and *Il cappello piumato* (1979), portraying the life of the young writer Bettina, the author's alter ego, her love affair with Gilliat, a journalist of *Fomà* (fictional name for the communist newspaper *L'Unità*), and the enthusiasm and struggles of a group of young intellectual friends sharing lodgings, poverty, and ideals.

Ortese's mother died in 1951 and her father in 1953. From 1957 Anna Maria began living on a regular basis with her sister Maria, who worked for the Italian mail service (*Poste italiane*). The sisters moved between Milan, the centre of the Italian publishing industry (roughly 1957, 1959–61, 1965–9), and Rome (1958–9, 1961–5, 1969–75). In Rome in the early 1960s, working on her folding bed in the tiny kitchen where she slept and worked, Ortese wrote her first novel, *L'Iguana*, which came out in 1965. In 1969 Ortese penned the first draft of her autobiography, *Il porto di Toledo*, published in 1975. Unlike *Poveri e semplici* and *Il cappello piumato*, this work further distanced itself from realist representation, experimenting in an innovative way with the autobiographical genre. Suffering a similar fate to *L'Iguana*, which was appreciated by some critics but struggled to sell barely a thousand copies, *Il porto di Toledo* was considered unacceptable, unreadable; it was ignored and eventually withdrawn from the market, owing, according to Ortese, to a change in direction on the part of the publisher.³³ Both works would later be republished and acknowledged unanimously as literary masterpieces.

In search of a quieter place to live, Maria and Anna Maria left Rome in 1975 and moved to the smaller town of Rapallo on the Ligurian coast, where they would live for the rest of their lives. In 1986, following an appeal initiated by the poet and friend Dario Bellezza, in which numerous intellectuals took part, Ortese was granted a life income annuity by the Italian state, the 'vitalizio Bacchelli', awarded to citizens who have distinguished themselves in the arts and sports but find themselves in financial difficulty. This gave the Ortese sisters some relief from lifelong poverty. From this point on she also began publishing with one of the major Italian publishing houses, Adelphi.

The writer's sister Maria had been ill for several years, and, when her health deteriorated, their younger brother Francesco joined them in

³³ See CC 49–50.

Rapallo from Canada. Maria, with whom Anna Maria had lived for about thirty-six years, died in 1993. After Maria's death, Francesco remained with Anna Maria until the end. In 1993 she published *Il cardillo addolorato*, which finally brought unanimous critical acclaim and became a best-seller. In 1996 Ortese published her last novel, *Alonso e i visionari*, and then worked on the revisions for the final edition of *Il porto di Toledo*, which she was just able to finish. She died in the hospital in Rapallo on 9 March 1998 and is buried in Staglieno, the memorial cemetery in Genoa.³⁴ Francesco died a few months later in Milan, on his way to delivering some of Ortese's manuscripts to her publisher Adelphi.

Ortese's life was plagued by poverty, anxiety, poor health, and difficulties of many kinds. Born into a large bourgeois family, she had known poverty and hunger since early childhood, a situation that was aggravated by the war and was destined to continue for most of her life. A very prolific writer of articles, stories, and reportages for several newspapers, magazines, and journals, the author of six novels and several collections of stories (Clerici counts forty-five different editions of her books, and more have been published posthumously), Ortese devoted her entire life to writing, but this was not accompanied by adequate financial reward, probably because of the linguistic and narrative complexity of her literary work. Anna Maria and Maria, living together, hardly managed to make ends meet: Maria had a regular income from the *Poste* (Italian mail service) and later a pension, whereas Anna Maria's special circumstances had entitled her to her father's pension. She would often write to publishers asking for an advance in order to have some respite from economic pressures and to be able to concentrate on her books. They were in perennial search of a home, changing cities, struggling with bills, rent, lack of adequate space, and the tranquillity desperately needed for writing. In addition, both sisters suffered from poor health, which was closely related to their living conditions and required extra expenses for medical treatments. She wrote to Prunas, to whom she sometimes appealed for a loan: 'È triste non poter dire a nessuno che siamo poveri, senza timore di sentirsi improvvisamente meno stimati' [It is sad not being able to tell anybody that we are poor, without the fear of feeling suddenly less respected].³⁵ When the author's poverty was made public in 1986, and publishers' interest subsequently increased, Ortese regretted that 'uno scrittore deve affidarsi alla cronaca della povertà e della rovina sociale, per suscitare l'attenzione degli editori (che la conoscono da decine d'anni)' [a writer must rely on the news of her poverty and social ruin in order to arouse the attention of publishers who

³⁴ Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 638, 641.

³⁵ Anna Maria Ortese, letter to Prunas, 11 January 1952, in *Alla luce del Sud*, 118.

have known her for decades].³⁶ Ortese explicitly attributed part of her difficulties to being a woman writer, with no family support, and no formal education, who wanted to make a profession in literature in 1930s Italy. Looking back at her life in 1993, she wrote:

Dall'età di 17, 18 anni, mi sono sempre battuta. Il problema dell'esistenza è stato sempre davanti ai miei occhi. Non avevo mestieri, non avevo denaro, né una famiglia che potesse servirmi da appoggio materiale. Ho potuto fare una cosa sola: scrivere. Non è stato facile. Per un uomo, essere scrittore, negli anni in cui ho iniziato io, era un modo di vivere di tutto rispetto. Per una donna era diverso.³⁷

[From the age of 17, 18, I have always fought. The problem of existence has always been before my eyes. I had no skills, no money, nor a family who could offer me financial support. I could only do one thing: write. It has not been easy. For a man, being a writer, in the years when I began, was an entirely respectable means of making a living. For a woman things were different.]

As Ortese remembers, a literary career at that time was an unusual path for a woman, even more so if she has no social status;³⁸ in those days, a woman who would place, like she did, literature before anything else was considered absolutely strange.³⁹ She had a firm belief in her own and women's independence, and claimed that the underlying thought in *Poveri e semplici* was that mothers ought to pass on to their daughters the desire for independence and the belief that women must be in a position to make their own choices.⁴⁰ Ortese made several such statements on the difficult status of women writers within twentieth-century Italian society and suggested that, as a woman, she was seen as a woman-writer, a kind of talking beast. Most importantly, however, she saw herself as a 'scrittore che non prenda gli Ordini' [a writer who takes no Orders] (*CC* 51), which may account, on the one hand, for her uneasy position within mainstream Italian culture, and on the Other, for the highly original and profound richness of her literary work.

³⁶ Anna Maria Ortese, letter to Ferruccio Parazzoli, 22 January 1987, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 563.

³⁷ Silvia Sereni, 'Storia straordinaria di un best-seller (e della sua incredibile autrice)', *Epoca*, 27 July 1993, p. 93.

³⁸ See Anna Maria Ortese, "'Anna Maria Ortese rompe il silenzio": Lettera dell'autrice alla *Stampa*, a proposito dell'applicazione della legge Bacchelli in favore della stessa', *La Stampa*, 10 April 1986, p. 3, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 542.

³⁹ Anna Maria Ortese, 'Se l'uomo è sperduto [...]', *Paese Sera*, 5 May 1976, p. 5, cit. in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 90.

⁴⁰ Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 412.

1

Beginnings

FROM LOSS TO FORM IN ORTESE'S EARLY WRITINGS

Some of Ortese's early writings openly represent loss, bereavement, melancholy, and a growing sense of the passing of youth, all of which have their roots in the author's autobiographical experience. We begin the exploration of the diverse genres through which Ortese shapes loss through an analysis of her first published text, 'Manuele',¹ and two early autobiographical short stories 'Pellerossa'² and 'Il capitano',³ collected in *Angelici dolori*, which are emblematic of loss. These express bereavement within the family, together with the waning of adolescence. 'Manuele' and 'Pellerossa' are centred on the figure of Ortese's brother Emanuele, whereas 'Il capitano' focuses on the severed bond with her twin, Antonio. These texts demonstrate how Ortese's early writing originated from autobiographical loss, which is experienced not only as premature death, but also as the inevitable consequence of growing up, signalled by the emotional detachment of the older siblings and their departure. These texts are therefore of an elegiac nature, lamenting death, the passing of time, and the end of the happy time of childhood to which the brothers had belonged. The last text, 'La cura',⁴ deals with a different kind of loss, resting in melancholy and abandonment in love. Although the object of love that is lost (brother, lover, or an unidentified object giving rise to melancholy) and the nature of its loss are different in these texts, they

¹ Anna Maria Ortese, 'Manuele', *L'Italia Letteraria*, 3 September 1933, p. 1; repr. with few variants in Anna Maria Ortese, *Il mio paese è la notte* (Rome: Empiria, 1996), 11–17. All quotations from the original 1933 text.

² Anna Maria Ortese, 'Pellirossa', *L'Italia Letteraria*, 29 December 1934; repr. as 'Pellerossa', in *Angelici dolori* (Milan: Bompiani, 1937), 21–37, and in *I giorni del cielo* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1958), 21–32. Now in *Angelici dolori e altri racconti*, ed. Luca Clerici (Milan: Adelphi, 2006), 21–30, from which I quote. With variants and the title 'Piel Roja e il fanciullo apasa (Comanche)', this is the first of the prose texts ('rendiconti') incorporated into *Il porto di Toledo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1998), 49–61.

³ Anna Maria Ortese, 'Il capitano', in *Angelici dolori*, 77–95, now in *Angelici dolori e altri racconti*, 54–65, from which I quote. With the title 'Capitano sommerso (la Squaw)' this appears as the last of the 'rendiconti' in *Il porto di Toledo*, 483–98.

⁴ 'Anna Maria Ortese, 'La cura', *Tempo*, 158, 4–11 June 1942, p. 23; repr. in *In sonno e in veglia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1987), 73–81, from which I quote.