

## Emotions Out of Pages: *Si può stampare* by Silvia Forti Lombroso

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**Abstract:** Silvia Forti Lombroso (Verona, 1889 – Cambridge, MA, 1979) was an Italian Jewish woman living in Italy during the Fascist regime and the Nazi occupation. Between October 1938 and March 1945, she wrote a diary, *Si può stampare*, published by Dalmatia in 100 copies in June 1945. In November of the same year, the American publishing house Roy Editors translated and published it with the title *No Time for Silence*, making it one of the first Italian documents of the Jewish persecution to appear in English. And yet, this text has been forgotten. *Si può stampare* is a diaristic chronicle of discrimination, persecution, and life in hiding. During the years of persecution, Jews were deprived of most of their belongings. The few objects that they managed to keep were, therefore, re-semanticised. Forti Lombroso perceived her diary as the only bearer of her memories and of her emotions, as the embodiment of her real self, and as the only means for its preservation when she was forced into hiding. This text is a testimonial object of and against the war. With publication, it became a physical mark of regained freedom. This article analyses the diary as an introspective prism displaying Forti Lombroso's psychological, moral, and physical changes before and during the war. At the same time, it rereads her words and her experience as representative of a generation of women who were silenced, segregated, and persecuted thus reflecting on the emotional impact of discrimination and persecution on Jewish women.

**Keywords:** *Silvia Forti Lombroso, diaristic writing, literature of hiding, Italian Holocaust literature, Italian racial laws, memory and emotions*

“Alive” we have come to an end, by a grace that many have not had; and today we do not want and we try only to forget.<sup>1</sup> (Forti Lombroso, *Si può stampare*: 204)

### Introduction

In the field of Holocaust Studies, the literary production of Italian Jewish survivors of the camps has been extensively examined. Yet the texts of those who evaded deportation have been ignored. They include manuscripts and diaries which report on everyday life in hiding. Among the vast unexplored corpus of published and unpublished material written by Jews in hiding, diaries represent a particularly interesting object of study which contributes to a fuller understanding of the Fascist regime, of the Second World War, and of

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experiences surrounding the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> Diaries therefore are to be analysed as material objects as well as literary texts and historical documents.<sup>3</sup>

This article provides the first analysis of one of the earliest diaries of this kind published in Italy, *Si può stampare* (1945) by Silvia Forti Lombroso, an Italian Jewish woman. During the years of discrimination and persecution, Jews were deprived of most of their belongings. The few objects that they managed to keep carried a new emotional weight. Forti Lombroso's diary was the only bearer of her daily life, memories, and emotions. It was the embodiment of her real identity, the only means for its preservation, when she was forced into hiding. The diary was an act of private and public resistance, an introspective prism displaying the psychological effects of racism, and a sociological record of the experiences of Jews at the time of discrimination and persecution in Italy between 1938 and 1945.

### **A tile of a mosaic**

Originally published in July 1938, the "Race Manifesto" provided the public with a theoretical justification for the coming anti-Semitic campaign. This happened before any German interference and before the war started. The Italian racial laws, which were progressively promulgated between the end of 1938 and the end of 1943, re-established and enforced discrimination against the Jews. They effectively revoked the emancipation of Italian Jewry achieved with the Albertine Constitution of 1848 and represented a profound rupture in the modern history of Italy.

Due to the immediate effect of the racial laws, Italian Jews experienced an abrupt disruption in work and education. In November 1938, 379 Jewish elementary school and high school principals and teachers, 96 tenured professors and 133 university adjuncts lost their jobs. 1,500 university students and 6,500 elementary, junior, and high school pupils were forced to leave their school and their academic path. In June 1939, Jews were banned from the liberal professions. They could not be doctors, lawyers, architects, journalists, dentists, or engineers. Other prohibitions were included in the following months. Thus, before the German occupation of 1943, Italy's anti-Semitic campaign reduced the Italian Jewish population by a staggering one-fourth by conversion and emigration alone. Those Italian Jews who emigrated mostly went to France, the UK, the US, and South America.

On 25<sup>th</sup> July 1943, the Fascist Grand Council removed Mussolini from power. On 8<sup>th</sup> September, Marshall Badoglio, Mussolini's successor, proclaimed the armistice between Italy and the Allies. On the next day, he left Rome with the

king, Vittorio Emanuele III. As a result, on 10 September, the Germans occupied the capital. With several divisions already in Italy, they swept through the peninsula to invade most of the country in just a few days. From allies, they became occupiers. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the collaborationist Italian Social Republic (RSI) was proclaimed by Mussolini. At the time, there were 32,307 Jews in the RSI territories of north and centre Italy. These Jews were at risk of arrest by the Germans who carried out surprise round-ups, they were threatened by the RSI police, and mostly they were vulnerable to denunciation by Fascist informers.<sup>4</sup> Despite this severe persecution, in Italy 81% of the Jews avoided deportation.

From the end of 1943, most Jews left their homes and hid in bigger cities or in the countryside, thus blending with other evacuees after the bombing of the major Italian cities. Some, mostly from the north, managed to escape to Switzerland by walking through the Alps. Some, mostly from the centre, reached the South which was liberated in August. Some found refuge in ecclesiastical institutions. A few hundred young Italian Jews joined anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist movements in the ranks of the partisans. Every choice was individual and familial. It was determined by personal reasons and personal contingencies. There was no coordinated rescue plan at an administrative level among the Italian Jewish communities. People found their own strategies for survival, their own ways to safety, through the combined help of the Italian Jewish resistance organisation, the Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants (DELASEM), the Catholic clergy, friends, acquaintances, and ordinary Italians.<sup>5</sup>

Silvia Forti Lombroso was among the Italian Jews who evaded deportation.<sup>6</sup> In 1938, she was living in Genoa with her husband, Ugo Lombroso, and her two children, Nora and Cesare. With the promulgation of the racial laws, Ugo, who was a Professor at the University of Genoa, was banned from the University. Nora and Cesare emigrated to the United States. In 1939, Ugo and Silvia moved to France. They committed themselves on both an educational and social level, a sign that they were expecting to live a new life in Paris. Ugo was appointed "Maître de recherche" at the École de Médecine. Silvia joined the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, whose European headquarters were in Paris until June 1940. Their plans were disrupted by the German occupation of the French capital. They left the city and returned to Italy. Following the German occupation of Italy, they went into hiding in little villages in Tuscany. In November 1943, they obtained false documents because the surname Lombroso was too recognisably Jewish. They became *signore* and *signora* Lombardi. With their new documents, they went into hiding in Florence where they remained

for almost ten months, until the liberation of the city on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1944. During those ten months, they witnessed the bloody struggle between groups of partisans and German occupiers. On 26<sup>th</sup> September, Silvia and Ugo went to Rome. They found refuge at the Cinecittà film studios, then used as a centre for displaced people. They remained in Rome until the end of the war.

During the years of discrimination and persecution, Silvia Forti Lombroso wrote a diary. The diary, entitled *Si può stampare. Pagine vissute. 1938-1945*, was published in June 1945 by the publishing house Dalmatia in 100 copies. In November of the same year, the American publishing house Roy Editors translated and published it with the title *No Time for Silence*, making it one of the first Italian documents of the Jewish persecution to appear in English. In 2019, the diary was reprinted by the Foundation Jewish Contemporary Documentation Centre (CDEC).<sup>7</sup> The manuscript is lost.<sup>8</sup> The published diary begins on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1938 and ends on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1945.

From October 1938 onwards, the Fascist regime carried out a deliberate, systematic effacement of the Jewish population and any forms of their memory. Hence the value of every act of recollection.<sup>9</sup> Forti Lombroso's spontaneous, discontinuous, and unprocessed diary is a testimonial object, a historical artefact that transmits facts, stories, and experiences which have been ignored, erased, and casually neglected, dismissed, overlooked during the reconstruction of Italian society after the end of the war.<sup>10</sup> The diary is an act of transfer which provides an inter- and trans-generational dialogue about ordinary everyday life in the extraordinary circumstances of discrimination, persecution and the war in Italy. It is a point of memory, by which the experience of the past is passed down over the years. With publication, it had the potential to reach a wider readership and promote the understanding of historical events through sensorial and emotional descriptions. Forti Lombroso's diaristic writing, as will be discussed throughout this article, enables readers to occupy the space of the narrating I, to inhabit her daily life through a first-person narrative, detailed intimate descriptions of facts and events. The present tense voice conveys embodied and immediate experiences. By showing the past from an everyday life perspective, it helps produce shared memories, contributes to the discussion of the ways in which Italian society recollects its past, and therefore turns into a vehicle for envisioning sensorial memories of the period of discrimination and persecution and for critical reflection on present-day forms of racism.<sup>11</sup>

### **An object from the past for the future**

*Si può stampare* is an act of both private and public resistance. The diaristic writing is intimate, anecdotal, and therapeutic and processed the events of Forti Lombroso's life. The diary itself includes never-sent letters to her children, reflections on her life, on her present, and on her past. It contains accounts of her thoughts, dreams, fears, and hopes. It functions as an act of resistance. She diligently copied and pasted articles, documented the phases of discrimination and persecution and she reported oxymoronic combinations of personal thoughts on identity, motherland, patriotism in light of Italian anti-Semitism.

The first Italian edition of *Si può stampare* is 230 pages long. It includes a preface written by the author on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1943, when the Fascist Grand Council removed Mussolini from power, and a brief note by the editor stating that the intention had been to print the diary shortly after the fall of Mussolini. The diary can be broadly divided into two parts, the part that was written before and the part that was written after 25<sup>th</sup> July. The former consists of 33 sections and was not composed to be published. The latter includes the remaining 12 sections and was intentionally written for later publication. In July 1943, Forti Lombroso believed discrimination and persecution of the Italian Jews were about to end, as she explicitly reported on the anniversary of Mussolini's fall:

Florence 25th July 1944

I write this date at the top of this piece of paper, and in writing it my soul trembles. A year has passed, a year since then, since that *25th July* which we will never forget, and which seemed to be the beginning of resurrection, promise, reward, hope.<sup>12</sup> (*Si può stampare*: 169 emphasis in the original)

On the contrary, as the editor's note says, "subsequent events forced the author to flee and hide" (3).<sup>13</sup> With the German occupation of Italy, Forti Lombroso's life changed dramatically.

In the preface, Forti Lombroso states her commitment to publishing what she had written: "Not everyone can produce high and admirable works; however, in the tragic conjunctures of life, everyone is given the ability to do 'something'" (9).<sup>14</sup> She discusses the title chosen for the publication, and the meaning that such a simple statement, "it can be printed [...] a simple statement" (6),<sup>15</sup> assumes after twenty years of the Fascist regime:

Only three words. Yet today, for us, three words on fire. I would not like any others at the head of these pages, which were not written to be printed, but which today – strange, unreal, improbable thing – "can" be printed. They can and perhaps even should,

although [...] what lives [...] in these pages is only one face of the prism of a great tragedy that has lasted twenty years.<sup>16</sup> (7)

The anaphoric use of “three words” and the emphasis of the aside “for us” reveals her sense of belonging to the Italian Jewish community and her commitment to giving an account of what happened from 1938 until the end of the war. She was an Italian Jewish woman who wanted to make one of the first records of the Fascist regime, of the war, and the persecution in Italy, at a time when the tendency to hide or forget Italian guilt and complicity in this history was already beginning to emerge. At the same time, she also revealed her opinion as an Italian citizen when she said that her rights and freedom started to be undermined in 1922 when Mussolini marched on Rome.

With publication, Forti Lombroso’s diary became the bequest of a personal possession which might sensitise non-Jewish readers of the lives of Jewish people in those days: “I hope that this little book, born out of pain, can be ‘something’. Something that goes around the world and is read by those who have not been struck down, but who, seeing others fall, have kept silence, out of indifference or fear; – and by those who being stricken have surmounted their Calvary” (9).<sup>17</sup> Her diary became a means of re-humanisation of Jews after the long denigrating racial discrimination and persecution, a means of reconciliation between Italians. It is a lens through which shows Jewish suffering and misery, her words tools to provide an emotional understanding of Jews in relation to the complex and frightening world around them:

*A woman who was suffering, – like so many others – [...] to write, had only to look inside herself, and around herself. She never found the reason for so much pain, for persecution so absurd; but she felt that, not only the reason, but also the very essence of this infinite pain was ignored by many: through carelessness, through incomprehension; not out of complicity. And so, these pages were born. Fragments of life, shades of suffering, restlessness, nostalgia, and the laughing surfacing of memories, and the mute and powerless rebellions, and the tragic breath of death, and the unconfessed longing of hopes.*<sup>18</sup> (8, emphasis mine)

Forti Lombroso’s affective documentation of events is at the core of the sociological record of Italian society and of the lives of Jewish people provided in *Si può stampare*. Through emotional and sensorial descriptions, Forti Lombroso provides readers with a rare depiction of discrimination and persecution. Her attentive eye concentrates on two major phases, the

promulgation of the racial laws and the beginning of the deportation of Jews from Italy. Passages will be analysed in the following sections.

### **A magnifying lens: the beginning of discrimination**

The pages written between October and March 1939 are all dedicated to the consequences of racial discrimination in Italy. They are in ten sections. Forti Lombroso alternates the personal and emotional repercussions of discrimination, when she writes of her son, her niece, and her husband, with thoughts on and examples of the evolving segregation of Italian Jews from society. She records silent indifference, agonising discrimination by ordinary people, and single acts of generosity and compassion.

The first pages written on 2<sup>nd</sup> October are dedicated to her son Cesare, who had just left Genoa to join her sister in the United States.<sup>19</sup> They are the intimate, painful but therapeutic farewell of a mother:

He, too, left. We are alone: dad and mum alone. We did not go to see him off on the boat; better save our strength. He went down the stairs, simple as that, just as usual: – I too went down to the end, to see him for a few more minutes, to see him get into the car and disappear at the corner of the street. Here: – everything was simple, composed, almost serene. We wanted to save him: – that's it, it's done; the price doesn't matter, nothing matters [...]. I go up the stairs, a little uncertain, a little slow: – I don't feel anything, just a sudden tiredness.<sup>20</sup> (*Si può stampare*: 13)

Forti Lombroso's sense of loss is hidden in the paratactic style of the passage, in her broken sentences. The persistent use of full stops, commas, dashes, and colons reveals the emotional repercussion of Cesare's departure.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1938, Forti Lombroso reported on the effects of segregation on a young girl, her niece Lilli, banned from school because she was Jewish. Lilli is described lying on the bed, with dark circles under her eyes and cheeks wet with tears. In the private and secure space of the diary, Forti Lombroso recalled her sense of inadequacy in the attempt to answer Lilli's questions:

First day of school; – As always, life begins again for a whole world, that of the young. For you, it does not, it does not start again, but suddenly and abruptly stops; from today you are excluded; no one must get to know you, approach you, love you, because contact and acquaintance would reveal too well *the slanders of propaganda*... I enter Lilli's room with a constricted soul; the tears of young people are the most difficult to dry, because young people want a logical and clear answer to their "why".<sup>21</sup> (19, emphasis mine)

Three days later, on 15<sup>th</sup> October, Forti Lombroso dedicated a couple of intense pages to another victim of the racial laws, her husband. He had been banned from the University of Genoa. His work due to be published now rejected.

He approaches the table, opens a registered envelope. It is his last work to be published, a work which the editor of the newspaper sends him back; a few words of embarrassing apology, he can no longer publish it, he is sorry... he opens another one; it is the President of the Academy of Sciences who warns him that following orders received he must delete his name from the list of members [...]. Again *a fearful sense of emptiness grips his soul*. It is as if they had brutally crushed all his reasons for living, it is as if everything around him had collapsed. He gets up, impatient. Everything around is the same as yesterday; everything is as usual, – everything has the same flavour as always: *yet everything has been lost, everything has changed, everything has been swept away*.<sup>22</sup> (23-24, emphasis mine)

She wrote of Ugo's dismay, which is hidden behind his mechanical gestures of a new, different routine, consequence of the exclusion from his laboratory, his research projects, and his classes. Forti Lombroso's fears and sense of bewilderment are once again perceptible within the syntax. She juxtaposed sentences about memories of her life before the promulgation of the racial laws, her present, and her precarious future. The life she wrote about was just superficially the same as the life she was used to.

On 13<sup>th</sup> November 1938, Forti Lombroso presented herself as an attentive observer: "It's interesting to look around. Nothing in life interests me like getting to know souls" (25).<sup>23</sup> She observed people, their behaviour, and saw the racial campaign as a dramatic stage play:

There are "spectators" and there are "actors", or rather victims of this brand-new drama called "the racial campaign". The "spectators" are sometimes really curious; [...] partly self-serving, partly superficial and for the love of a quiet life, they have only a vague idea of the suffering that is voluntarily inflicted on some of their neighbours; on the contrary, they prefer to ignore them, to have no contact with them. Too comfortable. On my own account, I don't allow them to do that. They must know all the evil that is done around them today: they must know all the tragedies, large and small, which take place in so many families; they must measure it, albeit incompletely, the infinite pain that overwhelms so many human creatures! We must speak, not be silent.<sup>24</sup> (25)

She represented Italian society from different angles:

It is necessary to say it, the truth cannot be silenced. In the terrible times we are going through, the humblest people have been for us the most understanding, the most generous. [...] Little things, little people who understood and felt the terrible injustice we were victims of; people who the propaganda had not touched, who ambition, fear, and greed had not corrupted, and who tried in all the most delicate ways to make us feel their pain, their sympathy. But the more one climbed the ladder, not of human values, but of social position, what misery!<sup>25</sup> (32-33)

Forti Lombroso's is not a limited perspective. Her text portrays by turn widespread unawareness, blindness, and indifference as well as humanity, generosity, and compassion. She reflected on the effects and the influence on society of the processes of racial discrimination and segregation. She saw a direct relation: as higher as you go up the social ladder the more people have been corrupted by the racism of the Fascist regime. The "little people" represent hope and relief. With "it is necessary to say it, the truth cannot be silenced", she again stated her need of bearing witness to any form of intolerance and segregation as well as any gesture of benevolence. Her diary can thus be a reliable document to represent the multifaceted past.

### **A magnifying lens: the beginning of the persecution**

From September 1943, when the Germans occupied Italy, Forti Lombroso dedicates passionate and touching pages to accounts of persecution. She annotates any piece of information she can get on the persecution of Jews in Italy, narrates stories of people close to her, and writes of her life in hiding.

On 21<sup>st</sup> September, Forti Lombroso briefly commented: "Today I heard that the houses of some Jews in Mantua have been burgled; insulting phrases have reappeared on the walls of the city [...]. For us, the danger increases. I go to greet the parish priest of the town and I take him a letter to be delivered to the children in case of our death" (144-145).<sup>26</sup> The situation is getting more and more dramatic. On 10<sup>th</sup> October 1943, she reported other news: "News reached me, direct from Venice; the official persecution of Italian Jews by the Germans has begun" (145).<sup>27</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1943, when she was about to leave from Florence, she wrote of a truck "of women, children, the old, they were Jews, they were caught and arrested" (148).<sup>28</sup> Two days later, she was in Florence and continued to describe what surrounded her:

Most days, big, locked wagons stop in front of some house; shortly after, a lady, an elderly couple, sometimes an entire family go down led by S.S. [...]. The people arrested are taken directly to prison; then nothing more is known about them. Every now and then a train leaves, loaded with victims, leaves for the north, and in the prisons there is new space for new people rounded-up.<sup>29</sup> (149)

The anaphoric use of the words “leave” and “new” stresses the dramatic succession of arrests and deportations to the north, the exemplification here of the unknown. This concise but dramatic overview of persecution in Italy is followed by a couple of pages dedicated to the stories of two nieces of Forti Lombroso. On both occasions, the writer feels their feelings and reports them on the page. One was captured:

Yesterday, I learned that in Como a niece of mine was taken by the S.S. They held her in a concentration camp for a few days, then took her away; to Germany? To Poland? It was not possible to receive news [...]. I see her in the moment of desperate defence, of fearful waiting, and then, crushed by the horrible certainty, alone, abandoned, insulted; I feel that she is cold, that she is hungry, that her tears freeze in her terrified eyes; I feel that she invokes her mother, in a dark, hopeless torment. Those who know the horrible fate reserved for deported Jews say that we will never see her again, and that we can only hope that she is already dead.<sup>30</sup> (152-153)

The other managed to hide:

Another niece of mine [...] had taken refuge in a convent with her two children [...]. One night some good soul ran to warn that the S.S. would go and search the convent. New escape in the middle of the night, with the dangers of the curfew. This young and convalescent mother, with the two tight creatures trembling with cold and fear, remained hidden for hours behind a miraculously open door.<sup>31</sup> (153)

During the period of the German occupation, Forti Lombroso recorded any account of persecution she heard and knew of. At the same time, she started more evidently to disclose her own feelings, among which is manifest the sense of alienation and displacement which she felt when she went into hiding. At that point, the diary was the last refuge for her identity. And now we turn to the diary as a material object.

From the beginning of her diary, Forti Lombroso pays particular attention to objects. She says “who can deny soul to things?” (28).<sup>32</sup> The climax of these considerations is reached between November 1942 and December 1943. On 18<sup>th</sup>

November 1942, she was informed that her apartment in Genoa had been destroyed in a bombing raid. On that occasion, she reflects on what she thinks to be a tie between people and their belongings. Personal belongings appear to be talismans that prevent alienation:

Things have no voice; they look like dead substance and they are not; when you return to them, your soul immediately relaxes, and little by little, even if you are troubled and tired, you feel a sense of peace; you feel almost protected by your belongings, there is a sense of continuity, you don't feel lost in the world, without roots.<sup>33</sup> (96)

According to Fort Lombroso, through objects people can bridge frontiers in spatial and in temporal terms. Part of their identity is preserved in their belongings. She writes:

Things have soul, and in their inert substance they keep something of what we have enjoyed, and much of what we have suffered [...]. When you die, something of you attaches to things, and you still live among the living. The separation is not complete: – you are no longer there, – but in that drawer, there are still the notebooks written by you, and on the desk your pen, your letters. You are not dead, you are only far away. <sup>34</sup> (95-96)

This profound sense of identification with her objects became even stronger when she was forced to go into hiding and leave all her belongings behind. When she obtained false documents and became *signora* Lombardi, she hid or destroyed everything that carried her real name, but she kept her diary: “I have to leave here already too many things that are dear and treasured to me. These pages will come with me” (146).<sup>35</sup> The diary remains the only object left to mirror her real self:

Anything and everything that has our name on must be destroyed; any clue, even vague, of our true personality can be the end of us. The time has come to separate ourselves from everything that speaks of the past. Tonight, I crammed documents, letters, photographs into a metal box; they will be brought back to the villa and buried in a corner of the garden. From today, I become Signora Lombardi.<sup>36</sup> (149)

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1943, she confessed that her change of identity profoundly upset her. She expressed her estrangement from her new identity. Her thoughts on persecution coincide with a sense of loss and intimate struggle within her:

Gradually, I get used to being signora Lombardi. It's a weird feeling. – I'm alive, yet I'm already dead. It is no longer me; – I no longer exist; – I have another name, I no longer own anything, no home, no children, no friends, I have no past, I have no more memories. I destroyed and buried those few that were saved from the fire and the bombs [...]. It is me, and I must be someone else; a certain lady who I do not know, a certain lady who enters me subtly, little by little, with a personality of her own, who would like to destroy everything, who erases my name on every little thing that still belongs to me, the address book, the account book, the little pages of the diary.<sup>37</sup> (150-151)

Forti Lombroso commented on her transition from one self to the other through the description of the loss of her belongings, her “memories”. And it is through this correlation between subjects and objects that she showed the passage from discrimination to persecution. With the promulgation of the racial laws, she was deprived of her present and of her future, but when with the German occupation of Italy she had to change her identity and abandon her belongings, she lost her past too. Everything has now been stripped away:

I believed that they had already taken away everything of what they could take away from us: the happiness of work, which gave an intense rhythm to life: the old paternal home, and the good land that guarded the love of three generations and which would have been the home of our children. They had taken away from us all spiritual sweetness, and every material possibility of life: they had taken away that luminous and mysterious force that is the future. But they had left us a great treasure: our past: – and we clung to that in order not to sink to the bottom. It seemed they could not take this treasure from us; and now they have taken that too from us. *So, I remain rootless and branchless. And what am I without my past of love and pain? I am nothing, a poor thing thrown away and lost, a bit of flesh and bones around a terrified ghost.*<sup>38</sup> (151, emphasis mine)

Until the end of the war, the diary is the only object which connects her to her past, her memories, and her previous self. It is her act of resistance. It is what keeps her identity alive. It is the lens through which we read an under-investigated aspect of the Holocaust in Italy and appraise one of the many facets of a prism that represents the psychological consequences of the persecution.

### **An emotional bridge**

Forti Lombroso's emotional understanding of herself and the world becomes readers' understanding. The affective and sensorial descriptions provided in the diary are the means through which readers are provided with a first-hand reading of the past. Such first-hand reading engenders a personal confrontation

of readers with past characters and a recollection of readers of past events. Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory and the reflections of Caroline Pirlet and Andreas Wirag on emotional theory, for example, represent a fruitful framework within which to analyse the influence that *Si può stampare* had and still has on readers.

In *Prosthetic Memory*, Landsberg studies the extent to which the mass media influence the way in which members of a community remember their past. She examines those memories that derive from a deep engagement with a mediated representation of events and that are perceived as lived by viewers. She argues that the mass media have the potential to instil a personal and communal sense of belonging, civic engagement, and political responsibility. Literary texts, too, can be re-read and re-interpreted in light of prosthetic memory. They influence both individual and collective memory. They can steer emotions, engage people, motivate them to act, and thus become a socio-cultural mode of action. They can lead to a new social engagement by changing readers' perceptions, adding to their knowledge, and influencing their everyday communication.

The concept of prosthetic memory can furthermore be usefully linked to theories that have developed in the last fifteen years in the areas of cognitive literary studies, especially those linked to theories of emotion.<sup>39</sup> Theories of emotion and cognitive studies more broadly help explain the formative influence narrative texts have on readers,<sup>40</sup> and therefore the mechanisms behind the process of prosthetic memory.

Following these indications, the emotional framework fostered in Forti Lombroso's text can help readers to process information. Forti Lombroso's affective dimension and intimate descriptions of discrimination and persecution help readers understand and remember the events they have read about. In general terms, although emotional evaluations of readers change according to the culture or society in which they live,<sup>41</sup> there exists a basic emotional repertoire that anyone, from any culture, is capable of experiencing. According to Caroline Pirlet and Andreas Wirag, "the universal aspects of emotion (as represented by the basic emotion approach) can, at least partially, account for why readers can agree on certain interpretations in the first place and why they are able to recuperate narrativity from texts beyond their own restricted historical period or culture" (*Towards a "Natural" Bond of Cognitive and Affective Narratology*: 49). This fact allows literary texts, and this case Forti Lombroso's diary, to bridge distances. Readers become involved not merely rationally but also emotionally so that they feel for characters and suffer with them.<sup>42</sup> Readers are brought into intimate contact with experiences which may fall well outside their own lives. They are asked to look through someone else's eyes and thus to

empathise with characters, fictional or not. The emotions within a text build an imaginative and empathetic link between past actors and present readers by making the stories of others accessible and therefore memorable. As Pirlet and Wirag stated, “by selecting and establishing a hierarchy among given pieces of information, emotions *ipso facto* shape readers’ understanding of what the text is about” (38). Emotions, sense of empathy, and identification can thus influence the perception of the historical “data” re-elaborated, narrated, and discussed within a diaristic text, foster their recollection, and engender forms of prosthetic memory.

In *Si può stampare*, emotions are the indestructible core of the records of everyday life experiences. They are the intangible link that forms a bridge between Forti Lombroso’s life and ours. Through her affective and sensorial writing, facets of macro- and micro-temporal structures, representations of Italian society and personal stories, become perceptible, therefore more understandable, and memorable. In this sense, *Si può stampare* represents a valuable document in which to learn about WW2, discrimination, and persecution in Italy. So far un-explored, it can be eventually turned into a lens through which read about our past.

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- <sup>1</sup> “‘Vivi’ siamo arrivati alla fine, per una grazia che molti non hanno avuta; ed oggi non si desidera e non si cerca che di dimenticare”. In 1945, *Si può stampare* was translated into English. However, the two editions do not coincide. Translations are mine unless stated differently.
  - <sup>2</sup> Every possible term for naming the genocide of Europe’s Jews and other Nazi genocides brings with it problems and limitations. I have opted for the most common term in English and Israeli English-language publications: “Holocaust”.
  - <sup>3</sup> My research has been greatly facilitated by the following works: Lejeune, *On Diary*; Freedman,  *Holding On and Holding Out*; Ben-Amos, *The diary*; and Blanchot, *The Book to Come* particularly chapter 4.
  - <sup>4</sup> From the end of November 1943, a decree, by Guido Buffarini Guidi, the Interior Minister of the RSI, ordered the arrest and internment in provisional concentration camps of all Jews in Italy and the seizing of all their properties, thus marking the beginning of the RSI’s anti-Jewish policy. The Italian police became responsible for locating, arresting, and interning local Jews. Bands of the Republican Fascist Party acted as auxiliary police forces in the major cities, taking the responsibility for tracking down Jews and handing them over to Italian police stations or to the German police. These militias relied on a network of informers who were promised money for every Jew they reported.
  - <sup>5</sup> My collection of historical data on this matter has been greatly facilitated by the following works: De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*; Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*; Id., *Salvarsi*; Zimmerman, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi rule*; and Picciotto & Lerner, *Italian Jews Who Survived the Shoah*.
  - <sup>6</sup> Silvia Forti was born in Verona in 1889 into a Jewish upper-middle-class family. She was the third of four sisters. In 1913, she met the Jewish antifascist Ugo Lombroso, the son of Cesare Lombroso, one of the most renowned physicians and anthropologists of XIX century Italy. Silvia and Ugo got married in the same year and went living in Turin, Ugo’s hometown. They had two children, Nora, born in 1914, and Cesare, born in 1917. At the beginning of the First World War, Ugo was called to run a field hospital while Silvia stayed between Turin and Verona. By the end of the war, they moved to Sicily. Ugo was appointed a university chair first in Messina (1919-1923) and then in Palermo (1923-1935). In 1935, the family moved again. Ugo joined the University of Genoa. Biographical aspects have been found in Forti Lombroso, *Si può stampare* and in Id., *Case di sogno case di mattoni*.
  - <sup>7</sup> The 2019 edition of *Si può stampare* was published by the Venetian publisher Il Prato.
  - <sup>8</sup> In May 2020, I contacted Silvia Forti Lombroso’s grandchildren, Anna and Paul Lombroso, to see whether the Lombroso family still had Forti Lombroso’s diary. Anna and Paul Lombroso said they did not. There is no archive available neither for the Italian or the American publishing house: Dalmatia and Roy Editors. At the moment, the manuscript of the diary is believed lost.
  - <sup>9</sup> According to Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the past can be traced in documents which have not traditionally been assumed to transmit historical data, providing different but also foundational insights into the past through collective representations, myths, and images. On this see for example: Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*; Herubel, *Historiography’s Horizon and Imperative*; Megill, *Coherence and Incoherence in Historical Studies*.

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- <sup>10</sup> With regard to the sociocultural phases of the memory of the Holocaust in Italy see for example: Gordon, *Which Holocaust?*; Bertilotti, *Contrasti e trasformazioni della memoria dello sterminio in Italia*; Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*.
- <sup>11</sup> See for example: Hirsch & Spitzer, *Testimonial Objects*. On diary and the Holocaust see for example: Piketty, *Résistance et écriture intime*; Roseau, *The Diary as Witness to the Holocaust*; Rudin, "Because We Must Not Forget"; and Goldberg, *Trauma in First Person*. References to the diaries of the Jews who have been deported are beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth mentioning at least two Jewish Italian women who left their testimony of deportation through affective and sensorial descriptions in their diaristic writings. They are Millu in *Tagebuch* and Valch Capozzi in *A 24029*.
- <sup>12</sup> "Firenze, 25 luglio 1944. Scrivo questa data in cima a questo foglietto, e nello scriverla mi trema l'anima. Un anno è passato, un anno da allora, da quel 25 luglio che mai dimenticheremo, e che pareva dovesse essere l'inizio della resurrezione, la promessa, la ricompensa, la speranza."
- <sup>13</sup> "Gli avvenimenti successivi obbligarono l'autore a fuggire ed a nascondersi."
- <sup>14</sup> "Non tutti possono fare opere alte e ammirevoli; a tutti è però dato, nelle congiunture tragiche della vita, di poter fare 'qualche cosa'."
- <sup>15</sup> "Si può stampare [...] un'affermazione semplice."
- <sup>16</sup> "Tre parole sole. Eppure oggi, per noi, tre parole fiammanti. Altre non ne vorrei a capo di queste pagine, che non sono state scritte per essere stampate, ma che oggi – cosa strana, irreali, inverosimile – 'possono' essere stampate. Possono e forse anche lo devono, benché [...] quello che vive [...] in queste pagine, non è che un solo lato del prisma di una grande tragedia che ha durato venti anni."
- <sup>17</sup> "Io spero che questo piccolo libro, nato dal dolore, possa essere 'qualche cosa'. Qualche cosa che vada per il mondo, e venga letto da chi non è stato colpito, ma ha veduto intorno a sé colpire, ed ha taciuto, per indifferenza o per timore; – e da chi è stato colpito ed ha salito il suo calvario."
- <sup>18</sup> "Una donna che soffriva, – come tante altre – [...] per scrivere, non ha avuto che da guardare dentro di sé, e intorno a sé. Il perché di tanto dolore, di così assurda persecuzione, non l'ha mai trovato; ma le è parso che, non solo la ragione, ma anche l'essenza stessa di questo infinito dolore, fosse ignorata da molti: per leggerezza, per incompienza; non per complicità. Così sono nate queste pagine. Frammenti di vita, sfumature di sofferenze, inquietudini, nostalgie, e il ridente affiorare dei ricordi, e le ribellioni mute e impotenti, e il tragico soffio della morte, e l'anelito inconfessato delle speranze."
- <sup>19</sup> In October 1938, Nora and her husband Bruno Rossi were already in Chicago; Cesare joined them first and then moved to Boston.
- <sup>20</sup> "Ecco partito anche lui. Siamo soli: soli il papà e la mamma. Non siamo andati al piroscampo; meglio risparmiare le forze. È sceso per le scale, così, semplicemente, come sempre: – sono scesa anch'io fino in fondo, per vederlo qualche minuto in più, per vederlo salire in macchina e sparire all'angolo della strada. Ecco: – tutto è stato semplice, composto, quasi sereno. Volevamo salvarlo: – ecco, è fatto; il prezzo non importa, niente importa [...]. Risalgo le scale, un po' incerta, un po' lenta: – non sento niente, solo un'improvvisa stanchezza."
- <sup>21</sup> "Primo giorno di scuola; – la vita che ricomincia come sempre per tutto un mondo, quello dei giovani. Per te no, non ricomincia, ma si interrompe d'un tratto brutalmente; da oggi sei una esclusa; nessuno deve conoscerti, avvicinarci, amarti, perché il contatto e la conoscenza rivelerebbero troppo bene la calunnia della propaganda... Entro nella stanza di Lilli con

- l'anima stretta; le lacrime dei giovani sono le più difficili ad asciugare, perché i giovani vogliono una risposta logica e chiara ai loro 'perché'."
- 22 "Si avvicina al tavolo, apre un plico raccomandato. È il suo ultimo lavoro già in corso di stampa, che il Direttore del giornale gli rimanda; poche parole di scusa imbarazzante, non può più pubblicarlo, è dolente... ne apre un altro; è il Presidente dell'Accademia delle Scienze che lo avverte che per ordini ricevuti cancella il suo nome dall'elenco dei soci [...]. Di nuovo un pauroso senso di vuoto gli attanaglia l'anima. È come se brutalmente gli avessero stroncato ogni ragione per vivere, è come se tutto intorno a lui fosse crollato. Si alza impaziente. Tutto all'intorno è uguale a ieri; tutto è solito, – tutto ha il sapore di sempre: eppure tutto è perduto, tutto è mutato, tutto è travolto."
- 23 "È interessante guardarsi attorno. Niente nella vita mi interessa come la conoscenza delle anime."
- 24 "Ci sono gli 'spettatori' e ci sono gli 'attori', o meglio le vittime di questo nuovissimo dramma che si intitola 'campagna razziale'. Gli 'spettatori' sono a volte veramente curiosi; [...] un po' per egoismo, un po' per superficialità e per amore del quieto vivere, non hanno che una vaga idea delle sofferenze che vengono volontariamente inflitte ad una parte del loro prossimo; preferiscono anzi ignorarle, sfiorarci sopra. Troppo comodo. Per mio conto, non permetto loro di farlo. Devono saperlo tutto il male che oggi si fa intorno a loro: devono conoscerle tutte le tragedie, grandi e piccole, che si svolgono in tante famiglie; devono misurarle, sia pure incompletamente, l'infinito dolore che travolge tante creature umane! Bisogna parlare, non tacere."
- 25 "È necessario dirlo, perché la verità non va taciuta. Nei terribili tempi che attraversiamo, la gente più umile è stata per noi la più comprensiva, la più generosa. [...] Piccole cose, piccola gente, che però aveva capito, che però aveva sentito la terribile ingiustizia di cui eravamo vittime; gente che la propaganda non aveva toccata, che l'ambizione, che la paura, che l'avidità non avevan corrotta, e che cercava in tutti i modi più delicati di farci sentire la loro pena, la loro simpatia. Ma più saliva nella scala, non dei valori umani, ma della posizione sociale, che miseria!"
- 26 "Oggi ho saputo di alcune case di ebrei di Mantova svaligiate; sono riapparse sui muri della città le frasi ingiuriose [...]. Il pericolo per noi aumenta. Vado a salutare il parroco del paese per portargli una lettera da consegnare ai figliuoli nel caso di nostra morte."
- 27 "Ho potuto ricevere notizie dirette da Venezia; la persecuzione ufficiale degli ebrei italiani da parte dei Tedeschi, è cominciata."
- 28 "Carico di donne, bambini e uomini anziani, tutti ebrei, sorpresi ed arrestati."
- 29 "Quasi tutti i giorni grandi carrozzoni chiusi si fermano davanti a qualche casa; poco dopo scende fra le S.S. una signora, una coppia anziana, qualche volta un'intera famiglia [...]. Questi arrestati sono portati direttamente alle carceri; poi non se ne sa più nulla. Ogni tanto un treno parte, carico di vittime, parte per il nord, e nelle carceri si fa nuovo spazio per le nuove retate."
- 30 "Ieri ho saputo che a Como una mia nipotina è stata presa dalle S.S. L'hanno trattenuta in un campo di concentramento pochi giorni, poi l'hanno portata via; in Germania? In Polonia? Non è stato possibile avere notizia [...]. La vedo nell'attimo di disperata difesa, di attesa paurosa, e poi, stroncata dall'orribile certezza, sola, abbandonata, ingiuriata; sento che ha freddo, che ha fame, che le lacrime le si gelano negli occhi atterriti; sento che invoca la mamma, in uno strazio cupo, senza speranza. Dicono, quelli che conoscono l'orribile destino riservato agli ebrei deportati, che non la rivedremo mai più, e che non c'è che da sperare che sia già morta."

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- <sup>31</sup> “Un'altra mia nipotina [...] si era rifugiata in un convento coi due bimbi [...]. Una notte qualche anima buona è corsa ad avvertire che le S.S. sarebbero andate a perquisire il convento. Nuova fuga in piena notte, coi pericoli del coprifuoco. Questa mamma giovane e convalescente, con le due creature strette e tremanti di freddo e di paura è rimasta per ore nascosta dietro un portone miracolosamente aperto.”
- <sup>32</sup> “Chi può negare l'anima alle cose?”
- <sup>33</sup> “Le cose non hanno voce; sembrano materia morta e non lo sono; quando ritorni a loro, subito l'anima si distende, e a poco a poco, anche se sei turbata e stanca, provi un senso di pace; ti senti da loro quasi protetta, hai il senso della continuità, non ti senti sperduta nel mondo, senza radice.”
- <sup>34</sup> “Le cose hanno un'anima, e serbano nella loro materia inerte qualcosa di quello che abbiamo goduto, e molto di quello che abbiamo sofferto [...]. Quando muori, qualcosa di te resta attaccata alle cose, e tu vivi ancora fra i vivi. Il distacco non è completo: – tu non sei più, – ma là in quel cassetto, ci sono ancora i quaderni scritti da te, e sullo scrittoio la tua penna, le tue lettere. Tu non sei morto, sei soltanto lontano.”
- <sup>35</sup> “Già troppe cose che mi sono care e preziose devo lasciar qui. Questi fogli verranno con me.”
- <sup>36</sup> “Ogni e qualsiasi cosa che porta il nostro nome deve venir distrutta; ogni indizio, sia pur vago, della nostra vera personalità, può perderci. È venuto il momento di separarci da ogni cosa che parla del passato. Stanotte ho pigiato in una cassetta di metallo documenti, lettere, fotografie; verranno riportati in villa e sepolti in un angolo del giardino. Da oggi sono la signora Lombardi.”
- <sup>37</sup> “A poco mi abituo ad essere la signora Lombardi. È una sensazione strana. – Sono viva, eppure sono già morta. Non sono più io; – non esisto più; – ho un altro nome, non possiedo più nulla, non più casa, né figli, né amici, non ho più passato, non ho più memorie. Quelle poche che si erano salvate dal fuoco e dalle bombe, le ho distrutte e le ho sepolte [...]. Sono io, e devo essere un'altra; una certa signora che non conosco, che entra in me subdola, a poco a poco, con una personalità sua, che vorrebbe distruggere tutto, che cancella il mio nome su ogni piccola cosa che ancora mi appartiene, il notes degli indirizzi, il libro dei conti, i foglietti del diario.”
- <sup>38</sup> “Credevo che già ci avessero tolto tutto quello che potevano toglierci: la felicità del lavoro, che dava un ritmo intenso alla vita: la vecchia casa paterna, e la terra buona che custodiva l'amore di tre generazioni, e la casa nostra, che sarebbe stata la casa dei nostri figli. Ci avevano tolto ogni dolcezza spirituale, ed ogni possibilità materiale di vita: ci avevano tolto quella forza luminosa e misteriosa che è l'avvenire. Ma un gran tesoro ci avevano lasciato: il nostro passato: – ed a quello ci si aggrappava per non andare a fondo. Sembrava non potessero togliercelo, questo tesoro; ed ora invece ci hanno strappato anche quello. Resto così senza radici e senza rami. E cosa sono io, senza il mio passato di amore e di dolore? Un niente, una povera cosa sbattuta e sperduta, un po' di carne e d'ossa attorno a un fantasma atterrito.”
- <sup>39</sup> On cognitive literary studies see for example: Herman, *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*; Bernaerts, *Stories and Minds*; Zunshine, *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*; and Burke & Troscianko, *Cognitive Literary Science*.
- <sup>40</sup> On the theory of emotion see for example: Zillmann, *Mechanisms of Emotional Involvement with Drama, Poetics*; Hogan, *Simulation and the Structure of Emotional Memory Learning*; and Id., *What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion*.

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- <sup>41</sup> Contexts determine emotional life. Emotionology is the umbrella term spanning the collective emotional standards of a given culture. See for example Stearns & Stearns, *Emotionology*.
- <sup>42</sup> Through empathy, readers, individuals, and groups are able to see situations from the complex perspective of another, one who has been traditionally considered as other. Suffering and traumas can emotionally resonate providing an understanding of how others feel and why they might feel the things they do. On this see for example Fierke, *Whereof We Can Speak*; Hutchison & Bleiker, *Emotional reconciliation*; and Ahäll & Gregory *Emotions, Politics and War*.