

Francesca (Franca) Trentin

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She was a six-year-old girl, well-mannered and obedient, when in 1926 her family left the city of Venice and came to a small village in southwestern France, where the other people spoke a different language which became hers. By the time her parents and her brothers Giorgio and Bruno returned to Italy in September 1943 to join the Resistance she was a young, combative woman with two degrees. Franca could not follow them, as the only one of her family who was a naturalized French citizen.

After forty years in France, she returned to Venice in 1966, with her second husband and a university post, at Ca' Foscari, from which her father Silvio had resigned as a professor in January 1926 in protest against the extreme fascist laws. Franca was proud of her father's decision, and she lived her whole life with the feeling of «permanent conflict».

Francette, little France

Franca, «Checca» to her family, was born in Venice on 13 December 1919, the second child of the jurist Silvio Trentin¹ and Giuseppina «Beppa» Nardari². The eldest child, Giorgio,³ had been born two years earlier, in 1917, in San Donà di Piave, Silvio's hometown, amid the wreckage of the Great War, in which his father had served as a volunteer. The family had moved to Venice

¹ For Silvio Trentin's biography cf. Frank Rosengarten, *Silvio Trentin dall'interventismo alla Resistenza*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1980, new ed. Dueville (VI), Ronzani editore, 2022.

² On the character of Giuseppina (Beppa) Nardari and the Trentin family before and during exile: Luisa Bellina, *Il contesto familiare nell'esperienza di vita di Silvio Trentin in Pensare un'altra Italia. Il progetto politico di Silvio Trentin, Atti del convegno, Treviso, 15 gennaio 2011*, Treviso, IVESER-ISTRESCO-ANPI, 2012; Ead., *Casa Trentin. L'esilio*, in Fulvio Cortese (a cura di), *Liberare e federare. L'eredità politica di Silvio Trentin*, Florence, Firenze University Press-Centro Trentin di Venezia, 2016; Ead., *Sguardo in un interno. I Trentin attraverso l'epistolario familiare*, in Giovanni Sbordone (a cura di), *Una famiglia in esilio. I Trentin nell'antifascismo europeo*, Sommacampagna (VR), IVESER-Centro Trentin-rEsistenze-Cierre, 2019.

³ On the character and biographical details of Giorgio Trentin: Giovanni Sbordone (a cura di), *Incidere, incidere, incidere. Giorgio Trentin tra etica dell'arte e impegno politico*, Florence, Firenze University Press-Centro Trentin di Venezia, 2015.

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shortly before Franca's birth, at first as guests in the Ca' de' Cuori palace in San Marcuola, owned by a Borghese princess, then settling in the elegant apartment of Palazzo Dolfin Marin above the Bank of Italy on the Rialto.

From 1924 their father, having moved to the Ca' Foscari Higher Institute of commerce in Venice to teach principles of public law – after a brief but intense parliamentary experience as a deputy of the Venetian Social Democracy and teaching as full professor of Administrative Law at the University of Macerata – was much more present in the lives of his children. The youngsters might not have been able to perceive the growing tension that fascism had created in the university in Venice with threats and assaults even against their father.

The decision to leave their home, their city, and their friends was for them completely unexpected. Silvio Trentin came to his decision on voluntary exile in a few weeks. On 7 January 1926 he presented a letter of resignation from his post as professor to the rector of Ca' Foscari, in the «certainty [...] of not being able to reconcile respect for my deepest and firmest convictions as a scholar of public law with the observance of the new duties of civil servant» imposed by decree 2300, issued a few days earlier, on 24 December 1925, which stripped state employees of their political and intellectual freedom⁴.

Twenty days later, the two parents, the two children, their paternal grandmother Italia Cian, and two farm workers from the family business of San Donà di Piave, were already on the train, heading for France, with wagons filled with their furniture, crockery, clothes, books, toys, and Beppa's piano. In the last few weeks, Trentin had quickly sold his landed properties and arranged the purchase of an agricultural estate in the south-west of France, in Pavie, a village in Gers, in Gascony, the home of the musketeers. The journey was very long, with several stops – they crossed the border on 2 February – and Franca's first conscious memory was of waiting for the train

⁴F. Rosengarten, *Silvio Trentin*, cit., p. 135.

to Auch at the station in Toulouse, her father's hand holding hers, comforting her in her loss⁵.

The well-mannered and obedient *petite italienne* was given the name *Francette*, little France, by the nuns in the elementary schools in Pavie, and this name remains in official school documents. Later, as an adult, her French friends called her *Franca*. A model daughter and pupil, she quickly learned to write in her new language, her real «mother tongue» («the mother tongue is the one you write for the first time, it is writing that is the trainer»). She was top of the class right through the school. In Auch, their second place of exile, after the bankruptcy of the Pavie farm, she attended the Collège des jeunes filles, obtaining the Certificat d'études secondaires in July 1934, and then the Lycée des jeunes filles in Toulouse, where the family moved in 1934, passing the *baccalauréat* in July 1936. Silvio Trentin used to entrust the correction of the grammar and spelling of his writings to his completely French-speaking daughter, only to be furious when Franca insisted on rewriting entire paragraphs in the «Cartesian» style.

The three Trentin children communicated between themselves exclusively in French, using Italian to address their parents, who spoke Venetian to each other. The eldest son, Giorgio, who arrived in France having already acquired the basis of written Italian at school experienced the uprooting of the foreigner, nostalgia for Italy. Bruno, born in exile (in December 1926), a rebellious son and pupil, felt himself in all respects French, propelled towards a «mother country» different from that of the rest of his family. Franca later mastered written Italian with her Italian studies. Throughout their lives Franca and Bruno continued to speak and write to each other in French, the language of emotional bonds.

⁵ Franca Trentin spoke about her life in several interviews. The biographical references and citations given here are taken from: Francesca (Franca) Baratto Trentin, *Conversazione con Maria Teresa Segà*, in Giulia Albanese, Marco Borghi (a cura di), *Nella Resistenza. Vecchi e giovani a Venezia sessant'anni dopo*, Portogruaro (VE), IVESER-Nuovadimensione, 2004, pp. 163-164.

Though they spoke French perfectly, for their French peers they were *macaroni*, *caporeto* belonging to a race of cowards:

we were at once called «*petits macaroni*», they spoke to us about Caporetto; they all used to laugh in the cinema when Mussolini appeared on the newsreels, they used to laugh because he was ridiculous but he was alright for these Italians «clowns». The «feeling of shame» for being Italian was born in me immediately. [...] in the Toulouse newspapers at the Liberation I had to read «*les Italiens partisans d'opérette*». It was always hard to make the French understand that there was another Italy⁶.

In the words of her father, who in speeches and debates testified to the existence of the «other Italy», Francette discovered the pride of belonging to the great anti-fascist intellectual elite, as the daughter of a *proscrit*, who had paid dearly for his consistency in renouncing his former financial good fortune, resigning himself to menial jobs so as not to be confused with professional «refugees».

In 2000, meeting Damira Titonel, who had emigrated with her family to France in the same years as the Trentin family, Franca reflected on the parallels in their lives:

We left the same lands, very close. Venice, Treviso, Conegliano, no one asked us about anything, that is what our fathers decided, they were anti-fascists and persecuted, and it was right for us 'not to be separated. And – this also united us – we were proud of them, of their courage, of their self-denial, even if this meant misery⁷.

Having grown up as French in Italian families, both became brave couriers in the French Resistance, passing through the same places, brushing against

⁶ Casa della memoria e della storia (CMS), Venice, Archivio «rEsistenze» (AR), *Fondo Franca Trentin* (FFT), b. 13 f. 457, letter from Franca Trentin to the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, 29 May 2009, Venice. The archive which Franca donated to the «rEsistenze» association upon her death is deposited at the Casa della memoria e della storia in Venice, in the same location as the archive of IVESER (Istituto veneziano per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea).

⁷ F. Trentin, *Damira Titonel, una scelta di vita: l'inferno a vent'anni*, afterword to Damira Titonel, «*La libertà va conquistata*». *Un'emigrata trevigiana nella Resistenza francese*, edited by Carmela Maltone, Sommacampagna (VR), Istresco-Cierre, 2001, p. 146, Italian edition of D. Titonel Asperti, *Écrire pour les autres, mémoires d'une résistante. Les antifascistes italiens en Lot-et-Garonne sous l'occupation*, Bordeaux, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 1999.

each other without ever meeting, but always remaining on different levels, not communicating⁸.

I was a child of exile because my parents had left a comfortable way of life to go into poverty, whereas the Titonels have always been poor, they are anti-fascist *émigrés*⁹.

[...] Our lives were entirely different. She was a very poor foreign peasant. Mine, the life of a petty bourgeois in exile, who, even though she was poor, had only to study, was completely different. For the intellectual environment of French people, voluntary renunciation of a prestigious profession made for an aura of heroism and selflessness which drew them to surround us with kindness and help. There was a liberal prefect, in Auch, [...] fascinated by my father, he always invited us to his house, to the prefecture, which was heated [...]. In our house there was no heating, a stove in the middle of the house and lots of chilblains on the feet and hands, and also lots of lice [...]. But [...] 'class', even without money, counted¹⁰.

The Trentin family was one full of joyfulness and seriousness¹¹. Despite persistent nagging worries over lack of money, the clothes patched and turned inside out, their mother's distress at having to sell furniture and jewellery, they were bound together by a spirit of empathy, a feeling of moral superiority, with their fall in social status worn like a medal for bravery¹². The parents knew how to create a regular atmosphere of gaiety, at times even of crazy joking. A very charming couple, perfectly integrated into the French cultural circle, they held the liveliest receptions in Auch and Toulouse. Yet the upbringing of the children, severe and uncompromising, seemed *rigide, conventionnelle, autoritaire* to Lidia Campolonghi, the daughter of Ernesta and Luigi, the founders and leading lights of the Italian League of Human Rights in

⁸ Alessandro Casellato, «Mio padre si era portato dietro uno schiavo». *Modelli familiari, distanze sociali e culture politiche dall'Italia alla Francia*, in F. Cortese (a cura di), *Liberare e federare*, cit., p. 18.

⁹ F. Trentin, *Damira Titonel*, cit., p. 151.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹¹ Interview by Franco Giraldi with Bruno Trentin, *Dalla Francia all'Italia*, 1998, in Iginio Ariemma, Luisa Bellina (a cura di), *Bruno Trentin. Dalla guerra partigiana alla CGIL*, Rome, Ediesse, 2008, p.32.

¹² Maria Teresa Segà, *Le Resistenze di Franca*, in Carlo Verri (a cura di), *I Trentin a Mira nella Resistenza*, Mira (VE), ANPI-Comune di Mira, 2013, p. 68.

France,¹³ and *old-fashioned* to Joyce, Emilio Lussu's companion,¹⁴ even then a backer of rash deeds; Franca recalled that she had been treated by her as a naive and passive girl¹⁵. A traditional educational system also present in other Italian anti-fascist families in exile¹⁶ perhaps out of a sense of «patriotic» respectability, to give the lie to the shabby image of Italians. Silvio was a «possessive, jealous, moralising» father,¹⁷ but the indomitable firmness of his «moral familism», as Franca liked to define it, based on the sense of individual responsibility, on consistency with the «moral law» which requires unavoidable, albeit painful, choices, was for each of the three children the cornerstone on which to build their own life¹⁸.

«French citizenship is what I wanted with all my strength»¹⁹

University studies were tackled by Franca with zeal and method²⁰.

Enrolled in the Toulouse Faculty of Letters, she obtained the *License d'anglais* in 1939, the following year the *Diplôme d'études supérieures* with a thesis on the British writer John Davys Beresford. In 1939 she applied for a position as a French assistant in a school in the United Kingdom, accompanied by two letters, from the principal Paul Dottin and from Professor Chiarti of the Toulouse Faculty of Letters, who recommended her as an «étudiante modèle» of brilliant intelligence, with a «tenue impeccable», with a «formation

¹³ Lidia Campolonghi, *Testimonianze, in Silvio Trentin e la Francia. Saggi e testimonianze*, Venice, Marsilio, 1991, p. 180; Biblioteca civica di Jesolo, *Fondo Silvio Trentin*, b. 6, f. 3, Id., «Appunti su Silvio Trentin», typescript, undated. Cf. also Ead., *La vie d'une femme antifasciste*, Florence, Centro editoriale toscano, 1994.

¹⁴ In Frank Rosengarten, *Through Partisan Eyes. My Friendships, Literary Education, and Political Encounters in Italy (1956-2013)*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2014, p. 87.

¹⁵ M.T. Sega, *Le Resistenze di Franca*, cit., p. 68.

¹⁶ «The most conservative progressive family in Zurich», is how Franca Magnani, the daughter of Fernando Schiavetti, defines her own family exiled in Switzerland., in *Una famiglia italiana*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1992.

¹⁷ *Franca Trentin una donna anticonformista*, interview with Rosanna Bettella, «In-forma», bulletin of Spi-Cgil Padova, September 2007.

¹⁸ Silvana Tamiozzo Goldmann, *Franca Trentin*, «Belfagor» 66, 4, 2011, p. 448.

¹⁹ F. Trentin, *Cittadinanza storica, giuridica, politica delle donne (1940-1960)*, «Quaderni del Centro donna», December 1998, republished in F. Trentin, *Carte ritrovate*, Venice, Libreria editrice Cafoscarina, 2009, p. 207.

²⁰ S. Tamiozzo Goldmann, *Franca Trentin*, cit., p. 449.

entièrement française», emphasizing in particular her «*assiduité sérieuse au travail*», very flattering judgments which were undoubtedly also influenced by the prestige of his father in Toulouse's academic milieu. In a confidential letter, Chiarti wrote to her that he had learned of her father's satisfaction for the respect she had won from her teachers; for her, «*la naissance et l'éducation ont accoutumée à entreprendre avec allégresse et activité des devoirs autrement lourds*».

The application for Great Britain was not followed up. French naturalization, requested in 1939, was granted her in October 1940, thanks to the intervention of the minister Albert Sarraut, brother of the editor of «*La Dépêche de Toulouse*», and a good friend of Silvio. Having to wait ten years, as required by a new law, to obtain full citizenship and take part in state competitive examinations, Franca meanwhile sought other opportunities for study and work. In 1940, at the invitation of Lionello Venturi, now in New York a year after his exile in France and linked with Silvio by bonds of friendship, she obtained a passport and a visa from the American Foreign Service in Marseille for a six-month study trip²¹. But even this plan was shipwrecked.

In October 1942 she obtained a second degree, the *Licence de langue et littérature Italienne*, the starting point of her academic career as an Italianist. To support herself, she accepted temporary supply teaching posts, work as an interpreter and translator, as a supervisor in municipal holiday camps, and she also worked for a long time as secretary to the dean of the Faculty of Letters. We can recognize her own personal activism, as well as that of her father and her circle of relationships, around the construction of a well-defined life plan: to successfully complete her studies and become a civil servant (as she would have defined herself) of the Republic in the education sector. Everything prepared her for a future in the land of France. At the age of twenty, two things were very clear to her: her desire to become a French

²¹ All the documents, letters and certificates mentioned are held in CMS, AR, FFT, b. 1.

citizen at all costs with full rights, and her awareness that everything could be achieved only by fully assuming responsibility in studying and working.

From the war in Spain to the Resistance «a permanent battle»

I didn't have the impression of a qualitative leap in the Resistance [...]. There has always been in my life as a foreigner, as an exile, as a *macaroni*, the feeling of a permanent battle²².

For Franca and her brothers (even ten-year-old Bruno) the founding date of a conscious relationship with the Resistance was 1936, with the war in Spain, when their orderly daily life was turned upside down to give hospitality to boys little older than themselves, who had made 'rebellious' choices in life, abandoning studies, work, family, to take up a gun and go to fight for the freedom of a people. For the Trentin boys it was the discovery of a new, 'young', European anti-fascism, and a first *remise en question* of rigid family codes of behaviour, an immersion, body and soul, into the 'international' vision of things which would accompany each of them, in their separate human and professional paths, fostering intolerance for provincialism, a desire to compare themselves against the world.

After the initial excitement, they experienced turmoil with the death of so many of the volunteers they had met in the early days, the tragedy of defeat with the mass arrival of Spanish refugees to be cared for in the reception camps. Franca often accompanied her mother to the *camp de Gurs* to bring comfort and relief to the wounded. Her father sent her several times with money and messages to the exiled President of the Spanish Republic, Manuel Azaña Díaz, who had taken refuge in Montauban, near Toulouse. They now struck up a friendship with the American, Harriet Marple, a volunteer assistant for the American Friends Service Committee, who had rushed to the concentration camps to assist the refugees and then taken to heart the changing fortunes of Franca and her Spanish husband Horace by financing their studies.

²² F. Baratto Trentin, *Conversazione*, cit., p. 171.

Franca accompanied her father on a few trips to political meetings in Paris, finding a warm welcome in the networks of exile families, establishing personal bonds that lasted even after the war. In family correspondence dated June 1939 we find a dazzling and self-assured Franca brilliantly passing the provincial examination and keenly sought after in Parisian society life by the Lussus, the Nittis, the Venturis, Marion Rosselli, and the Bertaux, Jankélévitch, Saint-Saëns, Kopp and Nicoletis families²³.

In May 1940, after the German occupation of Paris, Franca, as a secretary in the Toulouse Faculty of Letters, was approached for bureaucratic and administrative matters by students who had fled the capital and wished to continue their studies in what had become the busiest, most cosmopolitan and welcoming city in the country. Among them was a nineteen-year-old Edgar Morin, *muettement amoureux de Francette*²⁴ but discouraged by her austere beauty. «Chilling» was how he remembered Francette then, and nicknamed her «Noli me tangere», when in her first courier missions to Lyon and Marseille, to deliver messages for the resistance movement *Libérer et Fédérer* – as a naturalized citizen she could move freely – her father had her escorted by a companion with the undertaking not to 'touch her' and to ensure that no-one touched her: «I was completely sacred», Franca recalled, though to avoid drawing attention to herself she was obliged to stay overnight in brothels. «I did all these things in a semi-unconscious state» – she reflected – as though «remote-controlled», «the Resistance consisted for me in obeying orders» and sharing in her family's ups and downs, without «a way for choice»²⁵.

²³ CMS, Archivio IVESER, *Fondo Giannantonio Paladini*, b. 39, f. «Trentin. Corrispondenza», letters from Silvio and Franca to Beppa. The Trentin folder in the *Fondo Paladini*, in the IVESER Archive, contains a core of documents on the Trentin family which Franca had temporarily entrusted, for study reasons, to the historian Giannantonio Paladini, in whose archive they have remained, due to Paladini's sudden disappearance.

²⁴ Edgard Morin mentions this in an email to the Centro documentazione e ricerca Trentin in Venice, 4 April 2014. Cf. also CMS, AR, FFT, b. 8, f. 459, E. Morin to F. Trentin, 21 July 1994: «Chère Francette, quand je pense à Venise je pense à toi, et quand je pense à toi je pense à Toulouse... Si je n'étais pas été si timide à Toulouse, je t'aurais [...] demandé ta main».

²⁵ F. Baratto Trentin, *Conversazione*, cit., p. 175.

Since summer 1940 the Trentin Bookshop, already a regular stop for Toulouse professors and students, had also become a magnet for newcomers from the occupied areas and the first point of contact for resistance activities, while the «cave» served as a hiding place for agents under cover and on the run. Franca and her mother committed themselves to being in the bookstore to sort, direct, entertain and organize. Among the regulars, besides Morin, were Georges Friedmann, Jean Cassou (the Toulouse commissioner for the underground provisional government), the writer Claude Aveline, the epistemologist Georges Canguilhem, Jean Pierre Vernant (from July 1940 professor of philosophy in Toulouse), the philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélévitch, the Germanist Pierre Berteaux (founder of the clandestine *réseau Berteaux* linked to the British services, and Commissioner of the Republic at the Liberation). The sociologist Lucien Goldmann spent hours there, always without money. They all became personal friends of Franca later and many of them were *habitués* of her Parisian salon after the war. In his letter of condolence to Franca for her father's death, Canguilhem recalled the «*même atmosphère de courage*» in which all of them saw «*le père et la fille*» living²⁶. All the Italian exiles and a flood of intellectuals, writers, artists, politicians, Jews, fugitives from Belgium, Holland, Poland and Germany headed for the bookshop.

Pietro Nenni and Giorgio Amendola called at the Trentin house several times. The living room, transformed into a guest room, was the welcoming refuge for displaced persons of various nationalities, as well as for the Lussus and, for many months, of the Nittis, with their eldest son²⁷. Lidia Campolonghi no longer found that gloomy and conventional atmosphere that had struck her on previous visits: now parents and children were caught up in hectic discussions, clutter and commotion.

²⁶ CMS, AR, FFT, b. 4, f. 154, letter from G. Canguilhem to F. Trentin, 28 April 1944.

²⁷ Emilio Lussu, *Profilo di Silvio Trentin*, in S. Trentin, *Scritti inediti. Testimonianze e studi*, edited by Paolo Gobetti, Parma, Guanda, 1972, p. 20.

Despite her father's watchfulness, an event at the end of 1941 shattered the family atmosphere: her parents discovered Franca's clandestine – «dishonouring» – love story, the first defiant act of their obedient and trustworthy daughter in her search for personal autonomy. Franca reacted to her mother's violent reaction by running away from home and taking refuge with her friend Jeanne Modigliani. A rebellion quickly smoothed over: Franca resumed her courier activity and her university studies. In summer 1943 she met her father for the last time – for almost a year he had been absent from home in semi-hiding – «a trusting farewell», Franca recalled.

On 28 August 1943, when Silvio, with Beppa and their two sons, left France after almost 18 years, Franca – as the only naturalized French family member, she could not leave the country – wrote a letter to her father/teacher/friend, a sort of moral and sentimental bequest, almost a foreshadowing of a final parting: «I feel proud, touched to be your daughter, not just a daughter but a friend, understood, loved, listened to [...]». The letter was found with Silvio's last things in the hospital where he passed away,²⁸ in tatters because he had re-read it so many times, looking and looking at his daughter's portrait on the bedside table, shaking his head with a intensely sad smile, as his son Giorgio wrote in a diary of the last days of his father's life²⁹.

The trauma of separation from her family was accompanied by a sense of freedom won: «it was the first time that I was on my own and my own boss, and I was living, to some degree unconsciously, the pleasure of adventure and the joy of emancipation»³⁰. She left Toulouse and continued to take part clandestinely in local resistance movements. She had had time, before her

²⁸ Now in CMS, AR, FFT, b. 26, f. 826.

²⁹ Giorgio Trentin's manuscript is kept in CMS, Archivio IVESER, *Fondo Giannantonio Paladini*, b. 39; the transcript is published in G. Sbordone (a cura di), *Incidere*, cit., pp. 99-101. Silvio Trentin, in a letter to Emilio Lussu, dated 23 October 1943, had confided to his friend all his anxiety over his daughter, since he could no longer get news of her: «I would be happy if the thought of Franca's fate didn't bother me [...]. I have moments in which I think I am going crazy», in S. Trentin, *Scritti inediti*, cit., pp. 25-28.

³⁰ F. Baratto Trentin, *Conversazione*, cit., p. 170.

departure, to reveal to her father that she had fallen in love with a young Catalan, Horace Torrubià, a hero of the Spanish Civil War, a Communist and a *maquisard* in the French Resistance. The «dramatic» *coup de foudre* between Franca and Horace took place in a field of sunflowers on the agricultural estate in Pradère-les-Bourguets of Raffaello Monti, a Turin anti-fascist exile from the «Trentin» circle, before the party of friends summoned to the harvest – a cosmopolitan band of French, Italians, Spaniards, Belgians, and Poles brought together by the war³¹. They married on 2 March 1944. So it was that thanks to this naturalized Italian woman the Spaniard acquired the longed-for French citizenship («There was a whole trade in marriages» and citizenships, on the eve of the Liberation)³². They lived for months in a cottage with a double bed on beaten earth, together with the vast Torrubià clan headed by the patriarch Pepe, one of the founders of the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, and sharing in the tormented life of the Spanish left, among militants of the PCE and the PSUC, permanently in conflict³³.

Because of the interruption of communications with Italy, family members could not be informed of the marriage, nor could Franca learn of her father's death – which occurred ten days later, on 12 March – if not after a long time, yet in an uncertain manner. It was the despair of her life not to have seen him again, and not to have had more words from him. «My father's death was foundational. Foundational even in a positive sense»³⁴.

After the liberation of Toulouse in August 1944, Franca settled in the city with Horace. She was able to apply to the university and use as permits various authentications (from Pierre Bertaux and Jean-Pierre Vernant) of her participation in the documented Resistance from 1941 to 1944. She asked for

³¹ This is documented by some photos from the Maria Celeste Monti personal archive, published in Giovanni Sbordone (a cura di), *Una famiglia in esilio. I Trentin nell'antifascismo europeo*, Sommacampagna (VR), Iveser-Centro Trentin-Resistenze-Cierre, 2019.

³² F. Baratto Trentin, *Conversazione*, cit., p. 167.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.184.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

admission to the «Association des Résistants de 1940». In 1946 she was awarded the *Croix de la Résistance*.

Given the delicate state of her relations with her family, it was Lussu who, through special channels, acted as go-between with her and her mother and brothers until the Liberation. Franca managed to reach Italy only in the summer of 1945, with an *Ordre de mission* from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which authorized her to go to Venice, requesting the French and allied authorities to facilitate her arrival. After two stops, in Turin with the Venturi family, and in Milan to look for her brother Bruno – the partisan hero «Leone» of the Milanese Resistance – she hugged her mother and brother Giorgio again in Treviso. «I experienced for the Veneto, for my relatives, a strong sense of strangeness and rejection» and also, with her mother, of tension. Her first experience of motherhood, rather than an autonomous choice, was a decision undertaken through strong pressure from the whole Nardari clan, to accept the social duty of being a mother. Silvio Torrubia was born on 1 June 1946, in Toulouse, and immediately entrusted to Beppa, who rushed to take him and carry him off to Italy, convinced that Franca «would not have been capable of bringing up a child». «I was too free, I was greedy for the outside world», Franca reflected, feeling nonetheless in some way cheated of her own motherhood³⁵.

«The strong point of my life remained my economic autonomy»³⁶

In her work Franca found the autonomy, not just economic, but also psychological, to which she aspired: to amount to something for herself, for the things conceived and built with her own strengths, emancipating herself from the role of «daughter of» and from all the conditioning and «manipulations» in which she had grown up. At the age of thirty she felt that,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

after a slow awakening, the «sleeping beauty», paralysed by her admiration for her parents, was finally beginning to «know what she wanted»³⁷.

In a trendy test in the early 1950s, when asked «Who are you?», to which she was asked to respond quickly without reflecting and singling out just three concepts, Franca said that she instantly replied: «*je suis une femme qui travaille heureuse*», associating, in a syntactically complete sentence, the concept of happiness with female identity, lived primarily in the relationship with work. Hers then was a «feminism of equality», which claimed the right of women to count as much as men, without special privileges: Franca maintained she gave birth to her children during the summer holidays so as not to take any leave and never to have let the status of mother predominate in her public working and relationships: she did not consider motherhood in any way a right.

In Toulouse she resumed her university studies and her work as an occasional supply teacher, while Horace was studying for his degree in medicine. In 1947, in Treviso for many months to be next to her son, she began to prepare for the public competitive examination to qualify in teaching Italian language and literature. In Beppa's living room at that time she met Andrea Zanzotto and other artists and intellectuals from Venice. In her impatience with the provincial atmosphere and her homesickness for France, her bonds with her brother Bruno, at that time 'a student in the Faculty of Law at the University of Padua, were strengthened, as some letters of that period bear witness³⁸.

After her failure in the competition, and her move with Horace to Paris, she decided to prepare in a more structured way, remaining housebound for a whole year to work without distractions. Horace, in the meantime, after graduating in medicine, had been appointed an *interne* at the Ville-Evrard psychiatric hospital.

³⁷ M.T. Sega, *Le Resistenze di Franca*, cit., p. 73.

³⁸ CMS, AR, FFT, b. 28, f. 853, correspondence between Bruno and Franca Trentin.

In 1951, having brilliantly passed the *agrégation*, a very demanding written and oral test lasting many days – her friend Vernant came to be present at her oral presentation – she was immediately appointed Italian assistant in the Faculty of Letters in Dijon. In the same year Horace became director of the Aurillac psychiatric hospital.

In her six years in Dijon Franca had the opportunity to prove herself in the long-awaited role of civil servant in the French Republic.

To be a civil servant of the French state – which is one of my strongest identities – was a function that gave fullness and pride in an administrative structure that recognized your value, your abilities and your efficiency. The expression so often pronounced by me in my representative functions, *en vertu des pouvoirs qui me sont conférés*, had a strong structuring value³⁹.

When in 1978 she was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* in Venice, she expressly wished to thank the consul who, in wanting to consider her a fully fledged French citizen – «à part entière»– , had recognized her loyalty to «a particular way of living the profession of civil servant» at the service of the State which is special to France, in accordance with a concept of public service that favours competence and discipline⁴⁰. It was in her rigorous preparation and organization that she constructed for herself the role of leader and «woman of culture»: she became *chargée d'enseignement* in 1953; she founded the chair of Italian which has been much sought after ever since; she managed the Institute of Italian language and literature; she created a section of the «Dante Alighieri» Society, making the learning of Italian popular and prestigious; she received personalities, organized conferences; she established a channel of trust with the Italian embassy, obtaining a large grant of books.

In 1954 she divorced Horace. She had in the meantime met Mario Baratto, cultural secretary of the Italian Communist Party in Venice and later reader in Italian language and literature at the *Écoles normales supérieures* in Paris.

³⁹ F. Trentin, *Cittadinanza storica*, cit., p. 208.

⁴⁰ CMS, AR, FFT, b. 1, f. 3, Franca Trentin's address on the conferring of the *Légion d'honneur*.

She married him in 1956, recovering, in her «toing and froing», her Italian citizenship. In 1958 her son Giorgio was born.

In 1957, on the death of her teacher Henri Bédarida, she was appointed to replace him in the Italian Department at the Sorbonne, appointed *chef de travaux* in 1959, and from 1961 *maître-assistant*, as well as carrying out the function of trade union representative in the Paris university.

From 1956 to 1959, as *attachée de recherche* at the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique), she undertook research activities in the Faculty of Letters at the Sorbonne, first under the guidance of Bédarida and subsequently of Paul Renucci. Her research plan, which initially focused on «*la littérature féminine de la troisième Italie*», later focused on Verga, with the project of a work on «*la condition intérieure de l'écrivain Verga*». In the feelings of strangeness, bad conscience, and loneliness experienced by Verga in Milan, torn between love and rejection of the homeland, between pride for his Sicilian roots and the cultural ambition to become a 'national' writer, even though attracted by the European capital of culture, Paris, Franca found a reflection of the problematic nature of her own identity:⁴¹ in the *Avvertissement* to the *Plan de travail* of the thesis, which she entitled *Verga ou la Patrie Impossible (ou la Patrie Interdite)*, she explained the reasons that had induced her, an «*Exilée-naturalisée*», to deal with the Sicilian writer were to be found in «*mes rapports difficiles avec "ma patrie impossible"*»⁴². Of all this extended research and the translations of several Verga short stories, Franca published nothing, apart from two articles which appeared in the mid-1960s⁴³. Not even the preparatory manuscripts of her lectures on Svevo at

⁴¹ Archives Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), 2011090/260; CMS, AR, FFT, b. 13, f. 712, «Rapport de Madame Baratto-Trentin», 27 February 1958, and «Rapport de Françoise Baratto-Trentin», 25 February 1959. Andrea Verri has dealt extensively with Franca Trentin's research on Verga in the chapter *Franca Trentin, Verga e la Sicilia*, in Id., *Per la giustizia in terra. Leonardo Sciascia: Manzoni, Belli e Verga*, Mira (VE), Art&Print editrice, 2017, pp. 173-195.

⁴² CMS, AR, FFT, b. 13, f. 712, F. Trentin, «Avvertissement. Verga ou la patrie impossible (ou la patrie interdite)», in «Verga. Plan de travail», typescript.

⁴³ F. Trentin, *Giovanni Verga*, «L'Avant-scène du théâtre», 340, 1965, pp. 7-8; Ead., *Verga en France*, «Rivista di letteratura moderna e comparate», 3, September 1966, pp. 189-202.

the Sorbonne, so praised by Tullio Kezich, and used by him for the theatrical dramatization of *Zeno's Conscience* under the direction of Squarzina in 1964, ever saw the light. Permanent disregard for her writings characterized her entire career as an Italianist in France and as a French scholar in Italy.

Francette's salon

I stayed in France and this new face of Italy was like a payback, like a great hope: perhaps Italy would become a clean and honest homeland⁴⁴.

Franca did not limit herself to making people discover new Italian literature and filmography in university classrooms. With her second husband, she became a point of reference for Italian writers, intellectuals and journalists to be presented to a wider French public. A personal payback too: no more exiled *macaroni*, no more shame for fascist Italy, she now wanted to be the ambassador of the «new face of Italy». «Our ambassador» was how Giorgio Amendola defined her in a letter from 1965:⁴⁵ the communist leader used to ask Franca, although not a member of the PCI (yet with two communist husbands), to introduce journalists and politicians into the Parisian political and intellectual milieu and to «train them», making them less provincial in outlook. Besides promoting cultural events, Franca, *la passeuse*, the «ferryman», as an article in «*Le Monde*» defined her after her death,⁴⁶ managed a skilful dialectic of social relationships in her *salon*, creating multiple crossings of worlds and diverse disciplines⁴⁷. Here Italian and French intellectuals and artists mingled, teachers and students, old friends from the time of exile and the Resistance – such as Jean-Pierre Vernant, Georges

⁴⁴ Ead., *Antifascismo italiano e Resistenza francese*, speech delivered in Turin, Istituto francese, 1976, in Ead., *Carte ritrovate*, cit., p. 183.

⁴⁵ CMS, AR, FFT, b. 2, f. 22.

⁴⁶ The article was published on the occasion of the very well-attended tribute to Franca, *Franca Baratto-Trentin: les engagements d'une vie entre France et Italie*, organized by her Parisian friends almost a year after her death, on 13 October 2011, at the Italian Cultural Institute of Paris, in order to – so the invitation to the event read – «retracer les multiples facettes» of this «*citoyenne française de sang italien*». See Anna Fontes Baratto, *Franca ricordata all'Istituto italiano di Parigi*, in *Franca Trentin. Una vita plurale*, conference held in Venice on 13 December 2011 <<http://www.centrotrentin.it>> (accessed 17 July 2022).

⁴⁷ Claude Perrus, *Le stagioni parigine di Franca: ricordi di una testimone*, chapter in *Franca Trentin. Una vita plurale*, cit.

Canguilhem, Marc Saint-Saëns, Wladimir Jankélévich – and new talents to be brought to light. The *petit comité* of the regulars included famous actors, writers, directors, such as Patrice Chéreau, Bernard Dort, Jacques Lassalle. In Rue du Renard, after a conference or presentation organized by the Trentin Baratto couple there came, for example, Gianfranco Contini, Paolo Grassi, Dario Fo, Gianfranco De Bosio, Mario Socrate, Mario Spinella, Natalino Sapegno, Raffaello Ramat, Leonardo Sciascia. In 1960 Eugenio Montale thanked her for having organized a meeting in Paris in his honour, as did Paolo Grassi after the triumphant Parisian representation of the *Baruffe chiozzotte* in 1966. After an evening at Franca's, Gianfranco Contini wrote to her: «Our meetings are infrequent, but you have the art of making them memorable. You have a peculiar 'double', because you have a superficial structure of sensuousness and a deep one which is a message of friendship»⁴⁸.

At the «farewell party» in June 1966 in Madeleine Saint-Saëns' Montmartre garden, with a crowd of guests to wish Franca and Mario well on the eve of their permanent departure for Italy, the entire troupe of the Théâtre national populaire, with Jean Vilar, suddenly burst in.

Even in Venice, Franca continued to play the role of weaver of cultural and emotional networks between the city of her birth and her adopted city, with an open salon, full of opportunities for intellectual and political meetings, movements of ideas, a place of 'warm', witty and light-hearted enlightenment, and, for the younger ones, of 'schooling' in conversation and knowledge of 'the world'⁴⁹. These reflected Franca's multiple affiliations, her dual nationality/citizenship, Italian and French, an identity lived not as a permanent anchorage but a dynamic process always in tension, fluid like 'her' homeland, above individual homelands, an expanded, tolerant, European homeland – «the community of ideas constitutes my homeland» she loved to

⁴⁸ CMS, AR, FFT, b.6, f. 194, b. 10, f. 325, b.13, f. 454.

⁴⁹ S. Tamiozzo Goldmann, *Franca Trentin*, cit., p. 446. Cf. also Jacqueline Risset, *L'allegria dell'intelligenza*, chapter in *Franca Trentin. Una vita plurale*, cit.

say. The pre-existing and foundational model underlying Franca's 'salon', both in Paris and Venice, which fans out infectiously from one circle to another, and is handed down vertically from one generation to the next, is the Librairie Trentin in Toulouse, a model rooted in the European experience of anti-fascism⁵⁰.

In 1976 her director friend Ariane Mnouchkine, principal of the Théâtre du Soleil, invited France Trentin to play Mademoiselle de Scudéry, the «*précieuse*» hostess of an erudite and elegant literary salon, in the section devoted to *L'école des femmes* in the monumental film *Molière* on French television.

The final return to Venice

In 1966, when her husband obtained his qualification to teach Italian Literature in Italy, Franca asked the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a posting to the Faculty of Languages of Ca' Foscari in Venice as a lecturer in French Language and Literature: «I was leaving behind me what is called a brilliant career», a renunciation compensated for by the «stronger – and pleasant – feeling, even if a little defeatist, [...] of finally having no career, no power, of not having to compete any more with anyone, of having achieved the peace of teaching to the last»⁵¹.

I was a «language assistant», called *Madame* to give local colour, and especially to avoid awarding me any university degree, and I felt like those French governesses in Russian novels, who give a particular tone to the life of the nobles⁵².

But in fact Franca never allowed herself to be locked into the narrow confines of the language assistant role. She always expressed a free mind, but strong in her solid double apprenticeship as an Italianist and as a Frenchist, with her

⁵⁰ A. Fontes Baratto, *Franca ricordata*, cit.

⁵¹ CMS, AR, FFT, b. 1, f. 3, F. Trentin, «Discorso di congedo da Ca' Foscari», 1986.

⁵² F. Trentin, *Giannantonio Paladini, un generoso dispendio di sé*, «Nexus», 59, January-April 2005, republished in Ead., *Carte ritrovate*, cit., pp. 232-236: 233.

own vision of literature as an opportunity for personal training and self-analysis.

An inflexible and open teacher, «an anomalous intellectual» in the Venetian academic panorama, she brought fresh air to teaching, breaking the moulds both on the didactic-pedagogical level and in reading and literary analysis, approaching an idea of the female person that runs through French literature⁵³.

After stepping down from teaching in 1985 at the age of 65 (her husband, the dean of the Faculty at Ca' Foscari, had died the year before), she continued to collaborate with the Department of French Language and Literature in conferences, thesis supervision, and seminar organization. In addition to the decoration of *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, conferred on her in 1978, she was awarded in 1997 the rank of *Officier dans l'Ordre national du mérite*. For years she engaged in training courses for teachers of French language and in literature conferences for the Italian-French Cultural Association of Venice (of which she was appointed vice-president in 1989), in political militancy (she joined the PCI only after giving up the status of French civil servant), in countless initiatives related to the women's movement and the study of the Resistance (from 1996 to 2000 she was president of the Venetian Institute for the history of the Resistance and contemporary society). She resolutely followed the initiatives of the «Silvio Trentin» Study Centre, founded in 1974 in Jesolo, and the publications of her father's *Selected works*, edited by the historian Giannantonio Paladini, the friend who «pushed me to know, to discover, the 'intrusive' person of a father, and helped me to bear the thankless role, unmerited, of a daughter»⁵⁴. In constructing the narrative of the family history, with interviews and public interventions, she showed interest not so much in deepening the historiographical aspects, but rather in highlighting the essential values and strong passions of her anti-fascist

⁵³ S. Tamiozzo Goldmann, *Franca Trentin*, cit., p. 451.

⁵⁴ F. Trentin, *Giannantonio Paladini*, cit., p. 235.

training by linking them to significant episodes and people of the Trentin 'epic', assuming, with pride and effort, the care of memory, without 'family' narrow-mindedness,⁵⁵ while reacting furiously to cancellations or manipulations of her father's life or thought. On her death she left a letter to the four grandchildren, her brothers' daughters, to pass on to them the baton as custodians of the Trentin history:

After me, there will be no one to remember the story that formed us, that made me, the memory of your grandfather, my father, and your grandmother, my mother [...] you are Trentins, and you shouldn't be ashamed to keep alive the heritage of these roots of ours. It's good to have models, to convey continuity, to be happy with a history. [...] Women are more fruitful and generous and know how to protect⁵⁶.

She also wanted a route to the feminine for her archive, donating it a few months before her death to the association for the memory and history of women «rEsistenze», of which she was a founding member. A large part of it is taken up by correspondence, with as many as 735 Italian and French contributors. She had the wise «eighteenth-century» manner of letter writing. Written correspondence was her wider salon, where during an extended span of time multiple chains of relationships intersected, of which she was energetically at the centre, handing out kindness, reprimands, rebukes⁵⁷. To friendship, in the *esprit des Lumières*, she attributed a fundamental value, a rigorous pact between individuals yet within a web of links, a form of public ethics, open and transparent, in contrast to the «amoral» reticence in which Italian «familism» curls up tight like a hedgehog, the permanent target of her «pedagogical militancy».

The archive also includes fragments of family memories inherited from her mother, who had survived moves and bombings. In addition to the rich photographic collection extensively used in the exhibition *Una famiglia in*

⁵⁵ «What struck me immediately was the non-proprietary way you approached your father's memory. You opened the archives, you multiplied spaces, you refused any monumental embalming», in Giovanni De Luna, *Franca sulle tracce dell'azionismo*, contribution to the conference *Franca Trentin. Una vita plurale*, cit.

⁵⁶ Silvia Trentin private archive.

⁵⁷ «The affectionate and inflexible»: so Mario Isnenghi defined her, remembering her on her death (M. Isnenghi, *Franca Trentin, l'affettuosa e l'inflessibile*, «Il Manifesto», 30 November 2010).

esilio. I Trentin nell'antifascismo europeo,⁵⁸ numerous pieces have been preserved of «domestic» correspondence dating back to the years of their exile. Several documents relating to Silvio Trentin had already previously been split off from the family archive: Beppa donated significant papers to the Piero Gobetti Study Centre in Turin, for the establishment there of a Fondo Silvio Trentin, as did Franca herself for the Centro Studi Silvio Trentin in Jesolo⁵⁹.

Given her reluctance to write for publication, in 2009, for her 90th birthday, her friends collected 160 pieces in a book, *Carte ritrovate*,⁶⁰ – the texts «recovered» within folders, missing manuscripts, audio recordings, negligently abandoned by the author – of lectures on topics of French literature given during forty years of her life in Venice and some papers, from the last decades, of a militant feminist and «anti-fascist woman», her favourite self-definition. Under the terms of her will, «anti-fascist» was the only word to appear with her name in the family obituary on her death, which occurred in Venice on 28 November 2010. At her funeral, which was very well attended, her favourite song, *Le temps des cerises*, and the inevitable *Bella ciao* rang out. A few days before she died, by now exhausted from her illness, her last understandable message, spelled out clearly to her friends around her bed, was: «I am a Voltairian»⁶¹. Italian anti-fascism and French enlightenment were the cornerstones of her life path until the end.

Principal publications

- *Giovanni Verga*, «L'Avant-scène du théâtre», 340, 1965, pp. 7-8.
- *Verga en France*, «Rivista di letteratura moderne e comparate», 3, September 1966, pp. 189-202.

⁵⁸ The photographic exhibition *Una famiglia in esilio, I Trentin nell'antifascismo europeo* was organized in 2017 by the Centro documentazione e ricerca famiglia Trentin, IVESER and the Associazione «rEsistenze»; cf. the catalogue G. Sbordone (a cura di), *Una famiglia in esilio*, cit.

⁵⁹ Now the Fondo Silvio Trentin at the Jesolo public library.

⁶⁰ F. Trentin, *Carte ritrovate*, cit.

⁶¹ S. Tamiozzo Goldmann, *Franca Trentin*, cit., p. 453.

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- *Carte ritrovate*, Venice, Libreria editrice Cafoscarina, 2009 <<http://www.centrotrentin.it>>.

Franca Trentin also wrote essays and articles on French language teaching, particularly for the magazine «LEND. Language and new teaching», and numerous articles relating to French literature and culture were published in local newspapers and magazines.

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- Maria Teresa Segà, *Le Resistenze di Franca*, in *I Trentin a Mira nella Resistenza*, a cura di Carlo Verri, Mira (VE), ANPI-Comune di Mira, 2013, pp. 67-75 <<http://www.centrotrentin.it>>.
- Silvana Tamiozzo Goldmann, *Franca Trentin*, «Belfagor», 66, 4, 2011, pp. 445-454.

Luisa Bellina

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