

## Ada Vera Bernstein Viterbo

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For Ada Vera Bernstein, only sketchy information from the memories she was urged to write in *La mia vita con Dario* (1981). A milliner and business woman from Milan, in 1930 she married the Florentine sculptor and goldsmith, Dario Viterbo, who was living in Paris, and she moved there to be with him. With the Nazi occupation, however, they had to escape: they were Jews, anti-fascists and French citizens. Uprooted from the places in which she had been living for ten years, she managed, after months in hiding, to sail for New York with her husband. Without money, it was Ada who kept them both by her own work, in a reversal of roles. Always with a longing to return. As the partner of her husband Dario, Ada Vera shared his experiences and intellectual relationships, and after his death devoted herself to the development of his multi-faceted artistic heritage.

### The years in Paris

The last of eight children, Ada Vera was born on 8 September 1902 to a well-off Jewish family in Milan. Her father, Arturo Bernstein (1855-1912), had a workshop for «ladies' garments and linens» in the via T. Grossi and the «Bernstein modern store» in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele. Upon his death, his business activities were continued by his wife, Berta Cammeo Bernstein (1866-1828), who soon sold them on to the well-known theatrical costume designer Luigi Sapelli (stage name Caramba); increasing her personal public engagement in a range of activities, she founded in 1925 an organization in support of Jewish women, which two years later took the name of ADEI, Associazione Donne Ebee d'Italia [Jewish Women's Association of Italy], of

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which she became the first president<sup>1</sup>.

Ada grew up in a milieu of great openness to culture; in 1920 she qualified at a Milan technical and commercial institution and began work at the Rosenberg-Colorni bank. In 1928 her mother died; two years later, on 8 June 1930, at the age of 28, she married the painter and sculptor Dario Viterbo, a second cousin 12 years older than her, whom she had met during the war, when he was a cavalry lieutenant and she was a young girl of 13. Since 1925 Dario had been living and working as a successful artist in Paris, under surveillance by the fascist police as a «person dangerous to the State»<sup>2</sup>. In the *Ville Lumière*, Ada began her own business activity, the import of fine Umbrian lace and production of buttons<sup>3</sup>, and at the same time weaving a close-knit network among the anti-fascist intellectuals in exile. In the Rue des Plantes, where they lived from March 1931<sup>4</sup>, as many as fifty people would meet each week in Dario's studio, and Vera would invite their nearest friends to lunch on Sundays: the painter Giovanni Costetti with Mai Sewell, a Norwegian potter who had married him in her second marriage in 1928, when they were living near Florence<sup>5</sup>; the former socialist deputy Giuseppe Emanuele Modigliani, brother of the painter Amedeo, and his wife Vera Funaro, who had taken refuge in Paris since 1925; the Roman author, Paolo

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1 Sara Follacchio, *Associazionismo femminile e nation building. Il contributo dell'Associazione Donne Ebee d'Italia*, «Chronica Mundi», 12, 1, 2017, pp. 99-126; for the archival collection see <<http://digital-library.cdec.it>> (accessed 19 January 2020).

2 Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), *A8 Persone pericolose per l'ordine dello Stato*, personal file on Dario Viterbo (1929-1941).

3 Biblioteca Marucelliana, Firenze, *Fondo Viterbo Bernstein* (d'ora in poi BMF, FVB), b. 1, f. 4; Ada Vera Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario. Appunti richiestimi da Giorgio Nicodemi, 1964-1980*, Firenze, Giuntina, 1981, pp. 16-17; Unione Femminile, *Fondo famiglia Majno*, b. 161, «Lettere di Ada Vera Bernstein e del marito Dario Viterbo a Helda», 11 August 1932.

4 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., pp. 16-17.

5 Unione Femminile, *Fondo famiglia Majno*, uncatalogued section, b. 161, «Lettere di Ada Vera Bernstein e del marito Dario Viterbo a Helda», letters from Ada Vera, 15 April 1931 and 15 October 1933. The painter Costetti (1874-1949), a signatory of the Croce manifesto, was excluded from the Biennale in 1934 for his criticisms of fascism's political culture and aesthetics; his wife Mai Sewell Costetti (1892-1975) became better known in Italy after the war as a journalist, as a correspondent for the Norwegian daily «Aftenposten». They travelled through Switzerland, the Low Countries, France, Great Britain and Norway; they returned to Italy in 1948, settling at Settignano (FI); he died the year after.

Milano, who after the race laws left Italy with his wife, first for Switzerland and then for Paris<sup>6</sup>; the philosopher from Puglia, Giuseppe Lanza del Vasto, a follower of the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi, whom he visited in India in 1936, before returning to Florence and Paris<sup>7</sup>; the art historian, Lionello Venturi, one of twelve professors expelled from Italian universities for refusing to swear loyalty to fascism, who came to Paris in 1932 and began to visit the Viterbo house in 1934<sup>8</sup>; and Carlo Rosselli, whom Bernstein considered «great fun»<sup>9</sup>. They were «the friends of the Rue des Plantes»<sup>10</sup>, and many of them had to escape again, both after the race laws and with the Nazi invasion of France, either to Switzerland, like the Modiglianis, or across the ocean, like Venturi, «the atheist or unbeliever» Milano, and the Viterbos themselves. The young Jeanne Modigliani (1918-1984) also left France and went to Paris. For a while she lived in the Rue des Plantes with Ada and Dario, who were close friends of her aunt and uncle Vera and Giuseppe Emanuele, known as Menè<sup>11</sup>. And «we had so many lovely times with you then, some

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<sup>6</sup> On the regular visits of Paolo Milano (1904-1988), who at the age of 18 founded the Villa Ferrari theatre in Rome and worked as a writer of satires, director and actor, see A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 69. On the eve of the German occupation of Paris, the Milanos took refuge in New York; he gave a course in theatre history at the New School for Social Research and courses in comparative literature and Romance languages at Queens College. In 1956 return to Italy; he was placed in charge of the literary page of «Espresso» from 1957 to 1986. See Lino Belleggia, *Lettore di professione fra Italia e Stati Uniti. Saggio su Paolo Milano*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2000, p. 84; Luisa Badolato, *Paolo Milano, Leggere per professione*, Roma, Oblique Studio, 2012, pp. 6-8.

<sup>7</sup> In *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 80, Ada Vera recalled: «In France Lanza del Vasto founded L'Arca, a place of peace and meditation. But previously, until 1939, he had lived in Florence and he became our friend». Giuseppe Giovanni Luigi Enrico Lanza del Vasto di Trabia-Branciforte (1901-1981), the oldest child of the Belgian Marquise Anna Maria Enrichetta Nauts and Luigi Giuseppe, a graduate in law and proprietor of an agricultural and wine-producing business, who was the illegitimate son of the Sicilian Prince Giuseppe III Lanza di Trabia (1833-1868), studied philosophy in Florence and then in Pisa; his brother Angelo Carlo, born in 1904, was an American citizen by 1939 and took part in the Sicily landings of 1943.

<sup>8</sup> ASFi, *Fondo Questura di Firenze* (not catalogued), *A8 Persone pericolose per l'ordine dello Stato*, f. «Dario Viterbo (1929-1941)». Lionello Venturi was a professor in art history at the University of Turin (1915-1931); expelled when he refused to take the fascist oath. He emigrated to Paris (1932-1939) and then to New York (1939-1944), where he taught at several universities. For his relations with the Bernstein-Viterbos, at least from April 1934, see BMF, FVB, b. 30, f. 4.

<sup>9</sup> A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario* cit., p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> BMF, FVB, b. 29, f. 4.1, type-written letter from Velia Recchi to Dario Viterbo, 26 November 1945.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. BMF, FVB, b. 1, f. 1.2, A.V. Bernstein Viterbo, *Memoirs of Ada Vera Viterbo Bernstein*.

serious, some very serious, but then such a lot of cheerful nonsense!» Mia Sewell gratefully recalled to Ada<sup>12</sup>. In 1939, under pressure from the race laws, the Bernstein-Viterbo couple requested and obtained French naturalization<sup>13</sup>.

### **The flight from the *Ville Lumière***

On the eve of the occupation of Paris by German troops, 13 June 1940, they hastily abandoned their house and Dario's art-works, taking with them just a few personal belongings<sup>14</sup>. They were anti-fascists and Jews, and by now French citizens: they had to flee.

Anyone who did not see the fall of France cannot imagine it, and I have not the strength to describe it. It was the Apocalypse! We walked and walked for 50 kilometres a day to be able to escape those German brutes.

And we were bombed by aeroplanes up to four or five times a day.

I was afraid. [...] At night I slept a few hours under a tree, but the pine-needles injured my legs and Dario's hands. [...] After ten days and many ups and downs we reached Bordeaux. The city was now empty, having been bombed several times. I was despondent. Dario dragged me [...] to the Campolonghi's house. [...] I was so overwhelmed. Being under a friend's roof and being able to have a lovely bath cheered me up. But the next day we had to leave Bordeaux<sup>15</sup>.

The journalist Luigi Campolonghi and his wife Ernesta Cassola, both from Tuscany, socialists and Masons, had escaped to France in 1923, having refounded the year before, with Alceste De Ambris, the Lega italiana dei diritti dell'uomo (LIDU) [Italian League of Human Rights], which strove especially to protect the rights to asylum of persecuted anti-fascist political activists<sup>16</sup>. Ada and Dario then found shelter with some acquaintances in the

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Summer 1980, type-written letter.

12 BMF, FVB, b. 6, f. 2.1, letter from Mai Sewell to A.V. Bernstein Viterbo, Utrecht, 8 December 1945; A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 80.

13 BMF, FVB, b. 6, f. 2.1; A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., pp. 38-39.

14 Ibid., p. 39.

15 Ibid., pp. 40-42.

16 Luigi Campolonghi (1876-1944) was an exile for the first time in France in 1898, in Marseille, to escape arrest in Italy; in 1901, accused of plotting, because of his militancy in support of strikes, he was arrested, expelled and escorted to the frontier. He returned to France as

Lot et Garonne countryside<sup>17</sup>, where they stayed with the historian Franco Venturi and the ballerina Vitia Gourevitch<sup>18</sup>.

For days I had the torment of being cut off from everyone – and the feeling of being lost is terrifying. Here we are with friends and people who are trying every means of escaping and ... starting again. And I am keeping myself going too with this hope. Starting again! It won't be easy! Pains and sufferings consume and age you. Dario told you his foot wounds had cleared up, but mine haven't, I've still got two that hurt. [...] For us who have no reserves there are lots of difficulties and there are moments when I really feel my brain is empty and I long to end it. But we have very good friends who give us hope. But everyone is at an impasse. [...] I thought I had already lived really bad moments in my life, but they were easy compared with what we're forced to live now. [...] We have been here for three weeks, on tenterhooks<sup>19</sup>.

At the beginning of September, after about a month, they reached Marseille, traveling by train and bicycle. «When we reached the central square the first persons we met were the Modiglianis. They almost insulted us, because they had been trying to track us down for a month» – noted Ada<sup>20</sup>. She stayed in Marseille with her husband for six more months, staying at the Hotel Rome et St. Pierre;<sup>21</sup> to support themselves they also sold the jewels she had brought with her, to which she was most attached, the jewels that had belonged to her mother<sup>22</sup>.

correspondent for «Il Secolo» and in 1923 as an anti-fascist exile. See Mino Tassi, *Luigi Campolonghi Pellegrino di libertà*, Pontremoli, Tipografia Artigianelli, 1969; Museo dell'emigrazione della gente di Toscana <<http://www.museogenteditoscana.it>> (accessed 19 January 2020); on the typically undervalued role of Ernesta Cassola, cf. Pietro Pinna, *La conquista delle migranti. Fascismo e antifascismo in Francia tra propaganda, militanza e integrazione*, in Stefano Luconi, Mario Varricchio (a cura di), *Lontane da casa. Donne e diaspora globale dall'inizio del Novecento ad oggi*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2015, especially pp. 235-238.

17 ISRT, *Fondo Giustizia e Libertà, Antifascisti ed ebrei*, b. 14, sezione VI, f. 3.1, manuscript letter from Mario Carrara to «Caro Professore», presumably the anti-fascist exile, Carlo Sforza (1872-1952), 12 August 1940.

18 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 42. The Russian Vitia Gourevitch arrived in Turin in 1919; she grew up in a family of musicians and art enthusiasts. In 1928, in Paris, she met Carlo Levi and fell madly in love, which lasted a short time and over the years became friendship. See Silvana Ghiazza, *Carlo Levi e Umberto Saba: storia di un'amicizia*, Bari, Dedalo, 2002, p. 21 and p.139).

19 Unione Femminile, *Fondo famiglia Majno*, b. 161, «Lettere di Ada Vera Bernstein e del marito Dario Viterbo a Helda», 3 August 1940 (the underlining is in the original).

20 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 43.

21 ISRT, *Fondo Giustizia e Libertà, Antifascisti ed ebrei*, b. 14, f. 3.

22 BMF, FVB, b. 31, f. 4.2.

They wanted to leave France as soon as possible and go to the other side of the ocean: «we tried several times to leave underground, but it was still impossible»<sup>23</sup>. Obtaining documents was not easy: among the exiles who had taken refuge in France for years, even the leaders of Giustizia e Libertà had to make arrangements to get away, either with false documents or with the emergency visas which were granted by Washington on the basis of lists of names. Ada was hoping «to be included among the intellectuals who could leave, but even this is still undecided», in summer 1940<sup>24</sup>. The Tuscan republican Randolfo Pacciardi (1899-1991), exiled since 1926, who was likewise trying to reach the United States with his wife from France via Algeria (which they did using false details), in a letter to Mario Carrara on 1 August 1940 urged: «I have seen the list sent to our consulate in Marseille. Among our friends [...] I would very much like [...] to make the same arrangements for these names: [...] Dario Viterbo and his wife Ada Viterbo. [...] These persons are in exceptional circumstances and deserve their friend's full support»<sup>25</sup>.

To «save anti-fascist friends scattered through France», those who were already in New York and district set up the Italian Emergency Rescue Committee, which operated on both sides of the Atlantic, with the aim of enabling emigration for the great many exiles who risked falling into the hands of the Gestapo or the Ovrà<sup>26</sup>. Chaired by Lionello Venturi, the committee, at 75 Central Park West in New York, was principally concerned with procedures for issuing visas and with financial support. The treasurer was the engineer, Roberto Bolaffio (1893-1977), a naturalized American since

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<sup>23</sup> A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Unione Femminile, *Fondo famiglia Majno*, Uncatalogued section, b. 44, «Corrispondenza familiare», A.V. Bernestein to his sister Elda, 3 August 1940.

<sup>25</sup> ISRT, *Giustizia e Libertà, Antifascisti ed ebrei*, b. 14, section VI, f. 3.1, manuscript letter from Mario Carrara to «Caro Professore», presumably the anti-fascist exile Carlo Sforza, on 12 August 1940, in which is transcribed a letter received 1 August from Pacciardi <<https://archivio.camera.it>> (accessed 19 January 2020).

<sup>26</sup> As related by the Italian ambassador in Washington on 26 March 1941, quoted by Amelia Papparazzo, *Calabresi sovversivi nel mondo. L'esodo, l'impegno politico, le lotte degli emigrati in terra straniera (1880-1940)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2004, p. 15.

1929, and the secretary was the journalist, Alberto Tarchiani (1885-1964), who was an exile in France to the last<sup>27</sup>; among other who played a part were Carlo Sforza and Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, Max Ascoli, Walter Toscanini, and, of course, Gaetano Salvemini, with other Florentines by adoption, Marion Cave Rosselli, recently arrived, Guido Ferrando and his wife Anieka Wilhelmina Leggett. A friend of Dario Viterbo, she wrote to him that they were waiting for them in America [...] «Guido too would like to see you, with Ada, of whom we have heard such lovely things. She must be a great help to you»<sup>28</sup>.

It was Ada who kept up contacts from France with Lionello Venturi in New York and Alberto Tarchiani, from Milan, writing letters or sending telegrams, often in French or English. She also accepted Pacciardi's request that she should be the figurehead in helping other Italian refugees. The names of the Viterbo couple were included in the list to whom visas were granted by the Umbrian writer, Serafino Romualdi (1900-1967), a typographer, journalist and anti-fascist who had settled in the United States in 1923, first in Chicago and from 1926 in New York, until the time when he moved with his wife to South America, working for the Free Italy Committee<sup>29</sup>. In December 1940 the visas were at last ready, as Ada informed Tarchiani<sup>30</sup>. After completing the

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27 For the correspondence and other unsorted archival documentation, ISRT, *Fondo Bolaffio Roberto 1910-1970*; and cf. Aldo Garosci, *Tarchiani Alberto*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze Lettere ed Arti*, cit., under name). Documents relating to the help offered to the Bernstein Viterbos by the Italian Emergency Committee are contained in BMF, FVB, b. 14, f. 3; ISRT, FGL, *Antifascisti ed ebrei che cercano asilo in America*, b. 14, f. 3.

28 BMF, *Fondo Levasti*, «Anieka Ferrando», letter from Anieka Wilhelmina Leggett to Dario Viterbo, 20 May 1941. Cf. Valeria Masini, *Fillide Levasti 1883-1966*, Florence, Studio Per Edizioni Scelte, 1988, p. 195.

29 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 49; ISRT, *Giustizia e Libertà, Antifascisti ed ebrei*, b. 14, f. 3, letter from Mario Carrara to Carlo Sforza, 30 August 1940. Le *Serafino Romualdi Papers, 1936-1968*, are kept at the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, in particular on his activity in Latin America as representative of the Free Italy Committee and the American Federation of Labor.

30 ISRT, *Giustizia e Libertà, Antifascisti ed ebrei*, b. 14, f. 3, reported in a telegram from Ada [Bernstein] Viterbo to Alberto Tarchiani, Marsiglia, 15 December 1940. In the ISRT inventory, *Archivi di Giustizia e Libertà, 1915-2012*, revision underi Marta Bonsanti, June 2018, are also found: a telegram from A. Tarchiani to Ada Viterbo, Lisbon, 17 March 1941; a letter from A. Tarchiani to A. Viterbo: 10 April 1941, a letter from L. Venturi to A. Viterbo, 21 April 1941, a letter from A. Viterbo to A. Tarchiani, 29 August 1941.

necessary procedures for departure at the American Consulate, they managed to leave Marseille on 28 February 1941, making for Lisbon. And «with a deeply sad and tormented heart I send you my greeting»,<sup>31</sup> wrote Ada to her mother-in-law, Matilde Levi (1869-1959). They stopped off in Madrid and met Eugenio d'Ors, an art critic and Minister for Fine Arts, who undertook to secure the freedom of their friend Vitia Gourevitch, who had ended up «in the hands of the Spanish police» because she had no entry visa<sup>32</sup>. After three days, «trembling and fearful», the couple continued their journey to Portugal. In Lisbon Ada received letters from family friends in Rua Fialho De Almeida 15, near the pianist from Turin, Nella Emilia Basola Maissa, a friend of her sister Marta<sup>33</sup>:

Dear Ada, we have seen your telegram saying that you have arrived here safely and we are happy to see that you have completed the first stage of your journey, and I hope that the rest will go well. [...] I hope that you and your husband will find some rest on the other side of the pond [...] Dear, I hope my message has [...reached] your hands. I will send it again, hoping that you will be a little more calm and bold for the future. You know how sad I am, knowing you are *déraciné*<sup>34</sup>.

### The arrival in New York

*Déraciné*: uprooted from her home and from the places where she had lived for ten years, Ada Vera had to start again another life at the age of 38, with a husband who was 51. At the end of March 1941, with French citizenship and a QIV (quota immigrant visa) stating that they were going to stay with Harry Bernstein in New York, they both sailed from Lisbon on the Carvalho Araujo, a ship with 395 passengers, built in 1930 at Monfalcone by a Portuguese firm<sup>35</sup>. They docked on 3 April, welcomed by Arrigo and Elena, Ada's brother

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31 BMF, FVB, b. 31, f. 4.2, ms 28 February 1941.

32 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 55.

33 Nella Emilia Basola (1914-2014), married in 1936 to the Portuguese Jew Ricardo Renato Maissa, was an acclaimed pianist, in exile in Lisbon from 1939.

34 BMF, FVB, b. 11, f. 4.2, a letter from Marta Bernstein Navarra for her sister Ada Vera, 12 February 1941.

35 Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger search*, «Viterbo Ada» <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed by log-in 20 October 2019).



and sister-in-law, who had arrived about a year before, after passing through France, with their three children, aged from 13 to 3<sup>36</sup>. They put them up at their house, in 65 Lakeview Ave, Scarsdale, a northern suburb of New York in New York state, returning the hospitality they had received in Paris. The Viterbos stayed for five months, and these were «difficult months». They started off again from zero: without money or customers or working tools<sup>37</sup>. And Ada came to feel herself coming under criticism, on Venturi's part, for not dealing well with the task of bringing the money intended for Italian refugees, on behalf of Randolfo Pacciardi<sup>38</sup>. She was fond of him, as she was of his wife Luigina Civinini, known as Gigina, with whom she resumed working in New York<sup>39</sup>.

Dario turned to the Emergency Committee in New York that same month; on 25 April 1941 he reported for the first interview. He made a good impression: *very alive and enthusiastic*. He returned periodically to the office at 2 West 45th Street: on the sixth visit, on 11 February 42, he «came in in despair to say that if he did not get a fellowship soon, he did not know how he could get along»<sup>40</sup>. The particular difficulty of his case, in difficult times for everyone, was that to continue his activities as a sculptor he needed expensive material, especially marble and bronze. How could he make himself known if he did not have the possibility of creating and exhibiting his works? In the meantime, however, he and his wife have first of all to know where their

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36 Arrigo Bernstein and Elena Verona were married in 1927 (Archivio ebraico Terracini, <<http://archivioterracini.it>>, accessed 19 January 2020); they had three children: Sergio, Myriam Mirella, Vera Graziella, who, when they left Genoa on the Conte di Savoia in May 1940, were respectively 12, 5 and 2 years old. See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger search*, under name <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed by log-in 20 October 2019). Arrigo, who had worked in Milan for the Excelsior property company, started in the New York Produce Exchange in September 1940; cf. Intesa historical archive San Paolo, file «Bernstein Arrigo (1932-41)» <<https://asisp.intesasanpaolo.com>>, accessed 19 January 2020.

37 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 27.

38 BMF, FVB, letter from Ada Viterbo to Lionello Venturi, 12 May 1941. It is difficult to piece the facts together, but it had something to do with the committee and a certain Enzo Colombo.

39 Account given to the authors by Lionella Viterbo, granddaughter of Ada and Dario Viterbo, Florence, March 2019.

40 NYPL, MAD, A.I. Grantees, file «Viterbo Dario», 1934, 1941-45; Rosenwald, b. 34, folio 2, see list with annotations on the matter, dated from 25 April 1941 to 10 May 1944.

bread is coming from»<sup>41</sup>. Perhaps teaching in an art school? He asked around. Not even this seemed an easy aim to achieve. Ada was certainly not twiddling her thumbs. From what they appear to have told their relatives, she decided to attend a millinery course to obtain an American qualification. After which she rented a studio with her husband, dividing it in half with a curtain: on one side she set up a fashion workroom and a *fashion shop* for clothing, hats and accessories, on the other an art workshop for Viterbo. At first they were at 875 West End Avenue, in December they set up at 111 Waverly Place, in a detached 1900s house in Greenwich Village<sup>42</sup>. Ada liked to recall that in New York she made some famous clients; among the first, Carla and Wanda Toscanini, the wife of the maestro and one of his daughters, to whom Dario dedicated a bronze bust which was exhibited at the end of 1942 at the Duveen Gallery on Fifth Avenue. Later, Elizabeth Schermerhorn and Virginia Esmerian; the cellist Luise Mendelsohn, wife of the architect Erich; and the manager of the Tempo Music record company, Ruth Ellington, a beautiful coloured woman, sister of the famous musician<sup>43</sup>. «Thank you for your exquisite work», Hede Vasen wrote to Ada on 10 May 1946, fond and attentive, and in another on 8 October 1957: «I'm looking forward to seeing your collection»<sup>44</sup>.

But this success for her did not come at once; in the early years Ada and especially Dario had a lot of trouble moving forward. In January 1943, still

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41 Ibid., from Mrs John Winter Thompson to Mr. Laurens H. Seelye, 30 April 1941.

42 The first address is derived from BMF, FBV, letter from Ada Viterbo to Lionello Venturi, 12 May 1941; the move, on the other hand, is announced in NYPL, MAD, A.I. Grantees, «Viterbo Dario», letter from Dario Viterbo to Laureen Seelye, 23 December 1941. See the photograph at <<https://www.google.com>> (accessed 18 January 2020).

43 BMF, FBV, b. 19, f. 2.1, letter from Carla Toscanini (1878-1951) on 31 October 1944 and from Wanda Toscanini (1907-1998) on January 1945; b. 18, f. 2.1, letter from Elizabeth Schermerhorn to Bernstein, 4 January 1955; b. 7, f. 2.1, letter from Ruth Ellington (1915-2004), 6 March 1969. On Eric and Luise Mendelsohn, who emigrated from Berlin to England, to Mandate Palestine, and finally to New York, cf. the documentary film by Duki Dror, «Mendelsohn's Incessant Visions», Israel, Zygotte Films 20111 <<https://www.lbi.org>> (accessed 18 December 2019). A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., pp. 37-38, and pp. 8-9.

44 BMF, FBV, b. 20, f. 4.1, letters of 10 May 1946 and 8 October 1957; A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 64.

without work, he presented a formal request for a grant to the ECADFS, accompanied by letters of recommendation from two academic lawyers, Max Ascoli and Alexander Pekelis, though both were aware that his case was not one of those provided for by the New York committee, both because it concerned an artist and not an academic and because grants could be requested and awarded not directly for the person concerned but for an institution which wished to take him on<sup>45</sup>.

While he «is suffering quite visibly under the strain», as the secretary of the Emergency Committee, Betty Drury, noted<sup>46</sup>, Ada stood firm. Her brother in New York had already helped them and they could not ask again: Arrigo's 14-year old son had had a terrible accident while he was doing a chemical experiment; he was not dead, but had lost an eye and a hand, probably at the beginning of 1943, and all the savings that Harry Bernstein could make working in a brokerage house in Wall Street necessarily went to look after the boy, Dario Viterbo wrote to the president of the ECADFS, which usually asked those they assisted if they had relatives in the USA who could help them in financial terms.

How were they doing then? «my wife struggled with me, making hats for friends of hers to earn a little money but our living has been more and more difficult». In the meantime they had changed accommodation and moved within the same neighbourhood, to 62 West 11th Street<sup>47</sup>. In April 1943, two years after their arrival in New York, Dario at last obtained a grant for 12 months, less than he had requested (\$1200 rather than \$1500), but valuable. Without fail, a month before it lapsed, in March 1944 Dario came forward again to ask for a renewal of the grant. It was refused, as could be foreseen. Ada once more had to support him and she also, in January 1944, lost her

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45 NYPL MAD, A.I. Grantees, Viterbo Dario cit., letter from Max Ascoli 29 January 1943, and from Alexander Pekelis, 1 February 1943.

46 Ibid., minute from B[etty] D.[rury] to Henry Allen Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation in New York, 13 March 1943.

47 Ibid., Dario Viterbo to Stephen Duggan, 18 March 1943. See on Google Maps <<https://www.google.com/maps>> (accessed 18 January 2020).

sister Elda, who a few months before had escaped to Lugano with her husband Edoardo Majno and their three children, but having a heart condition died at the age of 47. It was also to Switzerland in 1943 that her brother Giorgio and her sisters Marta and Alma had fled, all of them with spouses and children. Dario Viterbo managed, despite everything, to put on his exhibition in December 1944 with Wildenstein & Co, French art dealers who had emigrated to New York in 1941: «a success, though more material than moral», Ada recalled. The gallery owner's elder brother exclaimed

*c'est magnifique, c'est magnifique...* But he didn't buy anything. Still, it is something that he didn't ask a penny for the hire of the room. But all the same we have the costs for transport and the catalogue. In total 800 dollars. Where can we get that? We're still poor. Thank goodness we still have help from good people<sup>48</sup>.

The wealthy father of a young woman from Chicago, sent by the singer Jessie Hopkins, a friend of Viterbo from the Paris years, and thrilled by the master's work, offered to raise the money needed. But for day-to-day living it was Ada who kept them both. «it seems that all my resources are exhausted and it is only Ada who provides for our existence with her millinery work», her husband admitted in summer 1945, writing to his mother<sup>49</sup>. The roles were reversed: she had her hands full and «could not be involved with the house... the whole household is on my shoulders, from shopping to cleaning the bathroom and the kitchen, from making and stripping the bed to shelling peas and cleaning beans [...] you cannot imagine what it means not to have a servant», he complained again in a letter to his mother<sup>50</sup>. In any case, the same thing had happened to Ada's brother as well: in New York, Arrigo, unable to afford housekeepers or servants any more, had had to get busy at home, washing dishes and floors, and even the laundry, because he realised that without help his wife had become very tired, especially with little

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48 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., pp. 65-66.

49 BMF, FBV, b. 31, f. 4.2, letter from D. Viterbo to his mother Matilde Levi, 23 August 1945.

50 Ibid., letter from D. Viterbo to his mother Matilde Levi, 19 July 1946.

children<sup>51</sup>. Ada at any rate was appreciated by their guests, who thought her «round and very Jewish looking the [?] sweet and full charme as ever»<sup>52</sup>. She saw to cultivating acquaintances and contacts in the right quarters, necessary so that Dario could get known as an artist and also find work. At their house, «maestro Giorgio Polacco [the composer] often came to their little Sunday lunches, as did many other friends». Over the years the list became quite long: the singer and composer Carol Longone<sup>53</sup>; the Florentine dealer Primo (Primitivo) Raddi, who had also come via France, and was a friend of the English scholar, Guido Ferrnado, who taught at Vassar College<sup>54</sup>; Giselda Sorell and her husband Carlo, she a biochemist and pharmacologist, he a doctor, who had both worked at Florence University before being expelled and moving to New York; the husband and wife Erich and Luise Mendelsohn; the Polish soprano Rosa Raisa and the Italian baritone Giacomo Rimini, both naturalized Americans; the Polish linguist Wolf Leslau, Jewish in origin, who had been arrested in 1939 by the French police and interned in Camp des Milles with his wife Charlotte Halpern and their son: in 1942 they managed to escape to New York<sup>55</sup>. At the beginning of the 1950s Ada's niece, the daughter of her sister Alma, came to visit, as did Emma Pasquinelli with her husband Enrico Peressutti, a professor at MIT, both of them architects and extremely busy.

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51 Unione Femminile, *Fondo Famiglia Majno*, b. 44, letter from Arrigo Bernstein to his sister Elda, 5 August 1940.

52 Erich Mendelsohn Archive (EMA), *Correspondence of Erich and Luise Mendelsohn 1910-1953*, letter from Erich to his children, 17 June 1950 <<http://ema.smb.museum>> (accessed 19 January 2020); in BMF, FVB, b. 11, f. 4.1, there are 56 letters in English (28 September 1942 - 29 December 1980) from Luise for Ada. See A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 64.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 16; regarding the friendship with Carol Longone cf. BMF, FVB, b. 31, f. 4.2. Longone was also a customer: in a letter of hers of 16 April 1956 it reads, for example «I love your hats» (*ibid.*, b. 9, f. 2.1).

54 Primitivo Raddi, born in Florence in 1902 to Ettore, sailed for New York from Lisbon on 7 May 1940, having lived for a period in France, and gave as his reference the address of his friend Guido Ferrando at Vassar College. See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger search*, under name <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed by log-in 21 December 2019).

55 Monica Devens, *On the Occasion of Wolf Leslau's 100th Birthday*, «Aethiopia», 9, 2006, pp. 220-221; Fikre Tolossa, *Wolf Leslau (1906-2006)*, «International Journal of Ethiopian Studies», 3, 2007, pp. 121-123.

### Yearning to return

From summer 1947 the couple managed to put aside money for summer holidays in Europe, especially in Italy. Practically every year they stopped in Paris, Milan and Florence, returning between the middle and end of September to New York, where they appear still settled at 62 West 11th Street. These are the return trips: the first time, from Paris on 14 September 1947<sup>56</sup>; on a KLM flight on 13 September 1950, they travelled on French passports from Amsterdam to New York; the year after, they left Le Havre on 18 September on the *Liberté*, sailing tourist class and with Italian passports; on 10 September 1953 with French passports they sailed on the Queen Elizabeth from Cherbourg in Normandy, repeating the five-day crossing on the same ship or on the Queen Mary the following summer and in summer 1956, and even afterwards. In 1953, thanks to the sale of some of Dario's work, they acquired a plot of land in the via del Gignoro, on the southern outskirts of Florence<sup>57</sup>. When they came, they started to visit the Palazzo degli artisti in viale Milton 49, a meeting place for those who had a studio there: the sculptress Evelyn Scarampi, the painter Giovanni Costetti, his wife, the sculptress and potter Mai Sewell, the painter Fillide Levasti<sup>58</sup>. Ada also often saw Bice Cammeo, sister of the late Federico Cammeo, who had established the Law Faculty at the University of Florence, and her mother's cousin: Bice was the sole survivor in her own family, and after the war she did not resume her many social engagements and activities for women's rights<sup>59</sup>. Their

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56 See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger search* <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed by log-in 21 December 2019); in the database his name does not appear in the 1947 voyages, because registered as Vitterbo [sic] Ada, housewife, travelling with Dario, artist. The crossing data provided by the Ellis Foundation currently go as far as 1957.

57 A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., p. 63; BMF, FVB, b. 6, f. 2.1. The plot seems to have been chosen in association with their friend Mai Sewell Costetti.

58 Ibid., b. 6, f. 2.1; b. 18, f. 2.1.

59 BMF, FVB, b. 11, f. 2.1. Thus Marta Bernstein to her sister, 13 July 1949: «I've just seen Bice, who at once told me how nice you were». During her long campaigns and on the National Council of Italian women, Bice Cammeo (1875-1961) had set up in Florence the first information and support office, the foundation for vagrant children and the temporary emergency refuge for abandoned boys (<<https://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it>>, accessed 19 January 2020), as well as a bank for small loans to combat usury: see P. Guarnieri, *Tra Milano e*

shared friends included Piero Calamandrei, a pupil of Cammeo and fellow student of Dario at the liceo Michelangelo, as well as a teacher of Alexander Pekelis, whom Dario and Ada had often met in Florence and New York, until he died in an air crash in 1946<sup>60</sup>.

On 11 November 1961, with a long-standing heart complaint, Dario Viterbo died at their home in New York. The year after Ada decided to return to Italy for good, as Dario would have wished. She continued her millinery business, with clients in Florence and in New York: «I know from Elena [Arrigo's wife] about your success, which could not fail, considering your refined taste», her sister Marta wrote to her on 12 November 1963<sup>61</sup>. But above all she devoted herself to promoting her husband's artistic work; she published posthumously the *Meditazioni sull'arte* (1962) and organized exhibitions in his honour, in Rome, Milan and Florence<sup>62</sup>. From 1972 she carried on a correspondence, full of «affection and great friendship» with the art critic Lara-Vinca Masini, who published a monograph on Dario Viterbo with Sansoni in 1973.

In 1987 Ada gave the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Firenze a remarkable collection of her husband's papers and her own: about 5,000 letters in Italian, French and English, press-cuttings and manuscripts. The *Viterbo Dario e Bernstein Viterbo Ada Vera* collection contains thirty-three folders, with a provisional inventory (revision being edited by Laura Morotti in April 2018)<sup>63</sup>.

Ada Vera Bernstein died in Florence on 7 November 1987, and was buried, like Dario Viterbo, in the Jewish cemetery in the Via di Caciolle.

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*Firenze: Bice Cammeo a Ersilia Majno per l'Unione Femminile*, in Giovanna Angelini, Marina Tesoro (editors), *De Amicitia: scritti dedicati a Arturo Colombo*, Milano, Angeli, 2007, pp. 504-515.

<sup>60</sup> A.V. Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario*, cit., pp. 60-61

<sup>61</sup> BMF, FVB, b. 21, f. 2.1; b. 22, f. 2.2.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. for example: Giulia Veronesi, *Milano. Dario Viterbo*, «Emporium», 1963, pp. 222-223; Leonardo Borgese, *Dario Viterbo*, «Corriere della Sera», 2 February 1963; Giulio Bedoni, *Rassegna postuma di un artista solitario*, «Il Quotidiano», 27 February 1963, p. 3; *Dario Viterbo. Scultura e grafica: Palazzo Vecchio, Sala d'arme, April-May 1977*, Firenze, Arti grafiche Giorgi e Gambi, 1977. See inoltre BMF, FVB, b. 10, f. 2.2.

<sup>63</sup> See the description in Siusa, *Fondo Viterbo Dario e Bernstein Viterbo Ada Vera* <<https://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it>> (accessed 20 January 2020). The collection is currently being catalogued by Giovanna Lambroni.

### Major publications

- Ada Vera Viterbo, *La mia vita con Dario. Appunti richiesti da Giorgio Nicodemi, 1964-1980*, Florence, Giuntina, 1981.
- *Ricordi di Ada Vera Viterbo Bernstein. Estate 1980*, unpublished typescript in BMF, Special collections.

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- ASFi, *Fondo Questura di Firenze* (not catalogued), *A8 Persone pericolose per l'ordine dello Stato*, f. «Dario Viterbo» (1929-1941).
- Archive of the Unione femminile di Milano, *Fondo famiglia Majno* (not catalogued), letters from Ada Vera Bernstein and her husband Dario Viterbo to Helda Bernstein and Edoardo Majno (8 January 1931 - 15 June 1946) and family correspondence (29 July 1940 - December 1940).

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