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An International ‘Non-*revue*’: Cultural Conflict and the Failure of *Gulliver* (1964)

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1960s, the international literary journal *Gulliver* involved intellectuals of different nationalities: the French Dionys Mascolo and Maurice Blanchot; the German Hans Magnus Enzensberger; the Italians Elio Vittorini, Francesco Leonetti, and Italo Calvino. The distances between them were quite obvious from the start. It was not so much a geographical matter as a different conception of literary patterns and commitment. These difficulties worsened after the construction of the Berlin Wall: the urgency of German writers to reflect upon their historical condition collided with the French authors' preference to represent contemporary society. In their correspondence, the discussions about *planning* an international journal became more important than actually *making* an international journal. Therefore, they never managed to reach an agreement on the structure of the journal itself — to the point that Leonetti, in a letter addressed to Vittorini in November 1962, explicitly wrote of a ‘non-*revue*’. *Gulliver* was a unique experiment: it was published in 1964 as the seventh issue of the Italian literary journal *Il Menabò* (printed by the publisher Giulio Einaudi and edited by Vittorini and Calvino between 1959 and 1967). It is, undoubtedly, a failure of cultural mediation. However in the Italian scenario of that time, it represents one of the most relevant attempts to create a cross-border intellectual community, broaden national topics, and gain a European dimension.

KEYWORDS

Il Menabò, *Gulliver*, Einaudi, Elio Vittorini, Italo Calvino, Francesco Leonetti, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Dionys Mascolo, Maurice Blanchot

Introduction

The vicissitudes of *Gulliver* are known and have already been investigated: this international trilingual journal, which was conceived between 1961 and 1963 and scheduled to be published in Italy, France, and Germany, was released as a single issue in 1964 as the seventh number of *Il Menabò*, a magazine edited for the publisher Giulio Einaudi by Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino from 1959 to 1967.¹ But what is less well-known and understood is why the project ended as it did. In this essay, I propose to examine how the initiative was carried out on the Italian side, on the basis of exchanges of letters and archive documents kept by three institutions: the Archivio Storico Giulio Einaudi Editore at the State Archives in Turin; the Archivio Elio Vittorini at the Centro APICE–Archivi della Parola, dell’Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at the University of Milan; and the Fondo Francesco Leonetti, at the Centro Manoscritti–Centro per gli studi sulla tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei [Centre of Manuscripts of Modern and Contemporary Authors] at the University of Pavia. In 2016 most of the letters and documents, which up to that time had been largely unpublished, appeared in a collection of papers related to *Il Menabò*.²

Through these materials I will reconstruct the debate amongst the Italian editorial staff, which, besides Vittorini and Calvino, also included Francesco Leonetti who coordinated the Italian group and the international epistolary exchange between the founders. The same role was held, respectively, by Louis-René des Forêts for the French group and by Uwe Johnson for the German group, while the lead editors were Vittorini in Italy, Dionys Mascolo and Maurice Blanchot in France, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger in Germany. I intend to highlight how, within the specific Italian context, the *Gulliver* project was designed according to Vittorini’s own personal working method. This method derived from his international vision, which had already been expressed in the magazine *Il Politecnico* (1945–47) and in the series of books *I Gettoni* (1951–58), both edited by him for Einaudi. It also reflected the central function he assigned to literature and culture in relation to society, especially concerning the historical and civic responsibility of intellectuals. Finally, it revealed what has been defined as his tendency for ‘incompleteness’; that is, excessive planning that led him to abandon many publishing initiatives, leaving them unfinished. This was true not only for novels but also for magazines, as in the case of *Gulliver*.³

This last circumstance, combined with the practical difficulties of coordinating different national groups, inevitably led to the magazine’s failure. However, this is a secondary element, which serves only to reinforce my central line of argument: it was cultural conflict that had the greatest weight in the failure of this initiative. The mediation that was needed to smooth away the different conceptions of the relationship between literature and history, particularly contemporary history, was lacking or ineffective. Here lies the core problem with *Gulliver*, and with all of Vittorini’s activities.

- 1 Michel Surya, ed., *Dossier de la 'Revue Internationale'*, Special issue, *Lignes*, no. 11 (1990), 159–301; Anna Panicali, ed., *'Gulliver': Progetto di una rivista internazionale*, Special issue, *Riga*, no. 21 (2003); Marta Temperini, ed., *'Gulliver': Carte Vittorini e Leonetti in Europa nel Sessanta (1961–1967)* (Milano/Lecce: Lupetti/Manni, 2000).
- 2 Editorial documents and archival papers are published in Silvia Cavalli, ed., *'Il Menabò' di Elio Vittorini (1959–1967)* (Torino: Aragno, 2017). For the genesis and the history of the periodical directed by Vittorini and Calvino, see Silvia Cavalli, *Progetto 'Menabò' (1959–1967)* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2017).
- 3 Giovanna Gronda, 'Il non finito in Vittorini: Un eccesso di progettualità?', *L'asino d'oro* (May 1992), 76–89; Edoardo Esposito, *Elio Vittorini, scrittura e utopia* (Roma: Donzelli, 2011), pp. 185–87.

The ‘Non-*revue*’

In October 1961, when this international journal project had just begun, Leonetti wrote to Vittorini: ‘Einaudi and I have considered an extreme outcome: the journal won’t be done at all.’⁴ The possibility of giving up right from the start was not due to a lack of faith in the enterprise, but to the great effort required to keep a multitude of interests together, both cultural and economic, since publishing houses were also involved. Therefore, Leonetti made an astonishing proposal to Vittorini: ‘if you agree, my work could be the material for one issue of *Il Menabò*’.⁵ With these words, Leonetti anticipated the solution that would be found three years later, which was to collect creative and critical texts in preparation for a future issue of the journal edited by Vittorini and Calvino and abandon the idea of making an entirely new magazine.

One year later in 1962, Leonetti confirmed his initial suspicion: *Gulliver* was not going anywhere, and the effort to set up planning and structures for the journal was worthless. Nonetheless, there was no pessimism in his remarks. Indeed, he wrote to Vittorini that he had ‘so much work to do, feeling the “joy of working”, that [...] the temptation of a “non-journal” is compelling [...]. The odd thing is that *Gulliver* is already a non-journal: instead of making it we plan and convince ourselves to keep on planning’.⁶

The fascination for a ‘non-journal’ (a ‘non-*revue*’ in Leonetti’s words) is peculiar, and we may understand it only by thinking of the tension that was involved in the planning. It was similar to Penelope’s web: the aim was not to complete the work, but to turn it into an endless process. In the same way, Vittorini, Leonetti, and the other authors involved in *Gulliver* did not produce texts and did not make decisions about the journal’s structure. Instead, they continued to discuss possible solutions.

This is certainly not an isolated case in the history of the periodical press. In the same period and in the same circle, Calvino, who co-edited *Il Menabò* with Vittorini, devoted himself to a project that would never be completed. It was supposed to have been named *Alì Babà*, and be edited by Gianni Celati, Carlo Ginzburg, and Guido Neri, along with Calvino.⁷ Significantly, one of the texts conceived for *Alì Babà*, which remained unpublished until 1980, describes the periodical as ‘a new literary project — or a new atlas’, not implying a ‘foundation act’, but rather ‘the outcome of a collective work, of a mutual widening of horizons’.⁸ This also applies to *Gulliver*, to the extent that both the issue of *Il Menabò*, containing the journal and the subsequent critical and anthological volumes that study its vicissitudes (*Lignes*, no. 11; *Riga*, no. 21; *Atopia*, no.

4 ‘ho previsto con Einaudi la possibilità estrema che la rivista poi non si faccia’. Letter from Francesco Leonetti to Elio Vittorini, 8 October 1961, in Cavalli, ed., *Il Menabò*, p. 214. All translations into English are mine.

5 ‘il mio lavoro, essendo in accordo con te, potrà essere il materiale per un numero del *Menabò*’. Letter from Leonetti to Vittorini, 8 October 1961.

6 ‘ho tanto lavoro, da potersi fare con la “felicità da lavoro”, che [...] è una tentazione attraente la “non-*revue*” [...]. Il bello è che è già una non-*revue* così com’è: invece di fare, si progetta e ci si convince a progettare’. Letter from Leonetti to Vittorini, 12 November 1962, in Cavalli, ed., *Il Menabò*, p. 389.

7 Mario Barenghi and Marco Belpoliti, eds, *Alì Babà: Progetto di una rivista 1968–1972*, Special issue, *Riga*, no. 14 (1998); Marco Belpoliti, *Settanta* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 128–39; Mario Barenghi, *Italo Calvino, le linee e i margini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), pp. 175–88.

8 ‘un nuovo progetto — o un nuovo atlante — letterario, se verrà, non sarà il nostro atto di fondazione ma solo il risultato d’un lavoro compiuto insieme; d’un mutuo allargamento d’orizzonti’. Italo Calvino, *Saggi 1945–1985*, ed. by Mario Barenghi (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), p. 327. For a programme of *Alì Babà* and an outline, see Calvino, pp. 1710–17.

10), have been considered by some critics as 'avatars', or attempts to remedy the failure of the international magazine and build a plausible prototype for it.⁹

A few days before *Gulliver* was published as the seventh issue of *Il Menabò*, in an interview published in *Il Giorno* on 4 March 1964, Vittorini refers to this experiment as a 'numero-canguro' ['kangaroo-issue'].¹⁰ Reflecting the same zoological imagery featured on the journal's back cover, he adds, 'a kangaroo bringing a specimen, a sample of new literary and cultural relations'.¹¹ Alternatively, we could describe *Gulliver* with the Chinese box metaphor: we have two periodicals, one inside the other, with two different title pages. The first one is the familiar *Il Menabò*, followed by the leading article written by Vittorini and the title page of *Gulliver*.

This unusual layout can be explained by the words of Vittorini himself, who talks about a special issue of *Il Menabò* 'devoted to a specific matter: making an international journal'.¹² With the aim of pursuing this goal, the international issue upholds the original title of Einaudi's journal — 'menabò' — which means 'paper dummy, or draft'. The back cover states 'prova tecnica'; that is, an experimental model for an international magazine to be published later.¹³

In the 1960s, this formula was not so uncommon in Italy. *Quaderni Piacentini*, edited by Piergiorgio Bellocchio, Grazia Cherchi, and Goffredo Fofi and founded in Piacenza in March 1962,¹⁴ presented a similar format. Although this periodical generally favoured political and cultural themes over literary ones, its manifesto — meaningfully titled *Prova per una rivista da farsi* [*Test for a Magazine to be Made*] — shared similar intentions with the journal edited by Vittorini and Calvino: 'The authors of this issue wish to highlight the characteristic of a "test". We're not asking for indulgence — but criticism. We want readers, but above all collaborators'.¹⁵ One cannot but recall the invitation printed on the final page of the first issue of *Il Politecnico*: a text box urges the readers to express and submit their opinions, ideas and advice.¹⁶ This invitation would be repeated in the second issue, where the editors explicitly asked their readers for help in 'writing a magazine', where 'magazine' means a 'work field, a test field' where 'the writer and the reader will be able not only to exchange ideas, but also to carry out a

9 Céline Letawe and François Provenzano, 'La revue comme échec: Sur quelques avatars du projet de "Revue internationale" (1960–1964)', *Cahiers du GRM*, no. 12 (2017) [accessed 18 February 2018]. The paper presents an interesting example of a multilingual journal, significantly named *Atopia* (2002–08), which in no. 10 (2007) published a dossier about *Gulliver*.

10 Elio Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società: Articoli e interventi 1938–1965*, ed. by Raffaella Rodondi (Torino: Einaudi, 2008), p. 1035.

11 'un canguro che porta un campione, un esempio di un nuovo rapporto letterario-culturale'. *Il Menabò*, no. 7 (1964), back cover.

12 'si tratta di un *Menabò* dedicato a un problema: quello di fare una rivista internazionale'. Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 1035.

13 The leading article of the first issue explains the choice of the name *Il Menabò*: 'Everyone knows what a dummy is. [It's] a practical tool for the graphic design of any publication or newspaper. [Its] name [is] linked to an idea of functionality, [its] sound [is] quick and cheerful: that's why we liked it.' ['Tutti si sa che cosa sia un menabò, di pratico, di strumentale, nel corso della realizzazione grafica d'ogni lavoro editoriale o giornalistico. Un nome legato a un'idea di funzionalità, e rapido e allegro di suono: per questo ci è piaciuto.'] Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 868.

14 For a history of the journal, see Giacomo Pontremoli, *I Piacentini: Storia di una rivista (1962–1980)* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Asino, 2017).

15 'Gli autori di questo numero intendono sottolinearne il carattere di "prova". Non per chiedere indulgenza — ma critiche. Vogliamo dei lettori ma soprattutto dei collaboratori.' Giuseppe Lupo, ed., *Il secolo dei manifesti: Programmi delle riviste del Novecento*, 'Introduzione' by Giuseppe Langella (Torino: Arago, 2006), p. 512.

16 *Il Politecnico*, 1.1 (29 September 1945), p. 4.

complete and real collaboration'.¹⁷ In other words, all these magazines were conceived as laboratories, aimed at identifying lines of research through the joint efforts of writers, critics, and readers, according to a non-assertive, dialogic model.

For his part, Enzensberger chose a rather more pessimistic metaphor for the project. This was no kangaroo or dummy, but rather the remnants of a stricken vessel, 'a sign of the shipwreck', which 'will survive, at least, in the same way that the remains of ships in straits are warnings to sailors', as he wrote to Leonetti.¹⁸ Enzensberger clearly disagreed with Vittorini about the value of the experimental non-*revue*. He did not see *Gulliver* as the safe shore where the project would finally land. So, just how did we get to this point?

The Babel of *Gulliver*

Existing definitions can barely explain this unique experiment. In his editorial, Vittorini summed up the project by using the image of a 'vetrina' ['showcase'], something suitable for presenting the results of a two-year effort that, from 1961 to 1963, continued to produce creative and critical texts, documents, and letters.¹⁹ Despite linguistic and national barriers, intellectuals exchanged this material all over Europe by mail, in an attempt to build an ideal community under the sign of cultural freedom.

The project was born within the same context as the *Manifeste des 121* or the *Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie*, written by Mascolo, Blanchot, and Jean Schuster.²⁰ It circulated in September 1960, was signed by one hundred and twenty one French writers and artists (hence its name), and a month later it was welcomed in Italy by the magazine *Il Contemporaneo* which expressed its strong solidarity with the *Manifeste*.²¹ Following the call for insubordination and desertion from the French soldiers deployed in the Algerian War of Independence, a small group of intellectuals began to sketch out a project that soon took the shape of an international journal.²² Vittorini was one of the first intellectuals to be involved thanks to relationships he had established during the post-war years with some writers from the other side of the Alps.²³

In post-war France, Vittorini was indeed a reference point for the intellectuals who had taken a critical stance towards the orthodoxy of the French Communist Party (PCF), due to the vicissitudes of *Il Politecnico* and the translation of the novels *Uomini*

17 'Il Politecnico invita i suoi lettori a redigere una rivista [...]. Così Il Politecnico verrà ad essere quello che effettivamente vuol essere, un terreno di lavoro, un campo di prova [...]. Potrà in tal modo esservi non solo scambio di idee tra chi scrive e chi legge, ma collaborazione completa e concreta.' *Il Politecnico*, 1.2 (6 October 1945), p. 1.

18 'così rimarrà del naufragio almeno un "segno", come i rottami negli stretti servono da indicazione ai navigatori'. Letter from Hans Magnus Enzensberger to Leonetti, 27 July 1963, in Panicali, ed., 'Gulliver', p. 51.

19 Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 1039.

20 Catherine Brun, 'Genèse et postérité du "Manifeste des 121"', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 54.4 (2014), 78–89.

21 Massimo Depaoli, 'Il viaggio del "Gulliver": Appunti sulla genesi di una rivista internazionale', *Autografo*, 8.22 (1991), 45–60 (pp. 46–47); Anna Panicali, *Elio Vittorini: La narrativa, la saggistica, le traduzioni, le riviste, l'attività editoriale* (Milano: Mursia, 1994), p. 270; Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, pp. 913–15.

22 Panicali, ed., 'Gulliver', pp. 18–21.

23 Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, pp. 913–15. Previous connections between French and Italian intellectuals and publishing companies (also thanks to their friendships) are already known and have been explored by, for instance, Olivier Forlin in *Les intellectuels français et l'Italie, 1945–1955: Médiation culturelle, engagements et représentations* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006), and 'Intellectuels français et intellectuels italiens dans la transition du fascisme à la République (1945–1948)', *Laboratoire italien*, no. 12 (2012), 111–24.

e no and *Conversazione in Sicilia*, published by Gallimard in 1947 and 1948.²⁴ He soon became friends with Mascolo, Marguerite Duras, and Robert Antelme:²⁵ this was the beginning of a dialogue which would later result in the translation of foreign works that were published in the Einaudi series *I Gettoni*. It is no coincidence that the first of eight international titles in the series is Duras's *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1951), followed three years later by Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* (1954).²⁶

Vittorini reveals the interpretative key to his international initiatives with the publication of a novel by a political prisoner who was deported to Buchenwald in 1944. According to Vittorini, the fascination for the cross-border traits of culture lies in the possibility of searching for convergent interests and discovering solutions to common problems. Besides its unquestionable literary value, *L'Espèce humaine* demonstrates the need, on either side of the Alps, to remember history and face it, using literary tools. This aim is explicitly stated in the presentation of the three foreign titles that were published in 1954 (*Man and Boy* by Wright Morris and *The Neon Wilderness* by Nelson Algren, along with Antelme's book). In the flap copies, Vittorini writes that non-Italian works are offered to the public in order to give them the possibility to compare tendencies or aptitudes from other countries and to show 'in which ways, different from ours, people try and manage to be writers nowadays in France, America, and India'.²⁷ The operation carried out by Vittorini consisted of searching for a connection, building a nexus, and finding common ground among different expressions of literary phenomena. In the end, this had an intellectual purpose because the Italian scenario acquired new meaning only through a comparison with a foreign context.

This quest for relations among people, books, and reality did not dwindle away in the 1950s. In 1961, Vittorini updated the 1954 formulation and in a preliminary text for the international journal *Contribution à un projet de préface pour une revue internationale* he reasserted that the intellectuals he had gathered around himself were interested 'above all in issues related to arts, sciences, society, and politics':

The development of communication opportunities and civilian unity depends on the solution to these issues, or on their transformation [...]. We share the same interest, which is to explore every specific issue and expose its main traits. The need for an international journal emerged from this interest.²⁸

The aim of *Gulliver* was the search for a specific set of cultural, civic, and broadly speaking political values which represented the essence of humanity and could be shared by all countries. In this context, literature acquires a special role, and its purpose becomes 'the recognition of the connections between cultures with different backgrounds', as

24 Virna Brigatti, 'Una sponda in Italia per la libertà della cultura', *Il Giannone*, 11.22 (2013), 115–36. For the vicissitudes of *Il Politecnico*, see Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, pp. 394–419.

25 Franco Fortini, *Disobbedienze, II: Gli anni della sconfitta: Scritti sul 'Manifesto' (1985–1994)* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1996), pp. 148–52.

26 Domenico Scarpa, 'Storie di libri necessari: Antelme, Duras, Vittorini', *Chroniques italiennes*, 23.79–80 (2007), 103–35; and *Storie avventurose di libri necessari* (Roma: Gaffi, 2010), pp. 165–202.

27 'per quali vie diverse dalle nostre si cerchi oggi di essere, e si riesca a essere, in Francia, in America o in India, scrittori'. Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 717.

28 'è rivolto piuttosto ai problemi delle arti, delle scienze, e ai sociali e ai politici, dalle soluzioni o trasformazioni dei quali dipende lo sviluppo delle possibilità di comunicazione e quello dell'unità del livello civile [...]. L'interesse che ci troviamo ad avere in comune è appunto un interesse ad entrare in ogni particolarità problematica e a metterne a nudo il lato generale. Da questo interesse nasce la necessità di una rivista che lo spieghi organicamente.' Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 950.

Leonetti wrote.²⁹ The choice of the journal's name, after the novel by Swift, reasserts this specific role, suggesting literature's cohesive function.³⁰

However, doing this requires cooperation, sharing the same intentions, and making a dialogic effort to overcome differences. This is reminiscent of the image of the 'successfully completed Tower of Babel' described by Vittorini in *Il Politecnico* in June 1946.³¹ The new Babel is New York, with its skyscrapers representing the victory of dialogic reason over the confusion of tongues, and it is the place where 'builders won't lose their faith, nor will they be divided due to their different languages [...]; they will learn to understand each other and will erect the tower, all the way to the top'.³²

Different Relations with the Past

Paradoxically, the divide among Italian, French, and German groups occurred in the field of words, which Vittorini celebrated as a tool for constructive reasoning. This happened during a meeting in Zurich on 19–20 January 1963, when the harshest divergences about the journal's structure arose.³³ In particular, an argument arose from *Cours des choses*, an overview proposed by the French group as a collection of fragmentary writings and short texts, a sort of hybrid between creative and argumentative articles. From their perspective, this could become a method of enquiry in touch with current reality, not too different from a chronicle.³⁴

The biggest difference between the French and German groups emerged around concepts of literariness and practices of political commitment. The Berlin Wall was built in August 1961. From that moment on, the urgency felt by German writers to reflect upon their historical condition collided with the will of French authors to represent contemporaneity. This intensified the correspondence between the groups and discussions about planning the journal to the extent that the discussion became more important than the journal itself. *Gulliver* would feature both short texts on current matters and long articles reflecting upon the German historical situation, in an attempt to mediate between different needs. It also shows that they never managed to reach agreement on the structure of the magazine. Nevertheless, according to the presentation of the international issue written by Leonetti, *Gulliver* was precisely to thrive in the dialectics between agreement and disagreement, 'in a working zone that is impossible-possible or, if you like, close to utopia'.³⁵

Compared with another international issue of *Il Menabò*, which was entirely devoted to German literature and edited by Enzensberger, the difference is obvious. The issue on German literature looks like a side project, a way to pay homage to the German concept of literature as a study on present history, in order to establish connections with the past and comprehend the reasons for today's deeds and facts. This project originated as a collaborative project, similar to *Gulliver*: Enzensberger accepted the invitation from Vittorini to edit a special issue featuring young German authors focusing on a monographic theme. Enzensberger immediately started to think 'about

29 'il riconoscimento di nessi fra le culture differentemente composte'. Francesco Leonetti, 'Una rivista internazionale', *Il Menabò*, no. 7 (1964), ix–xvi (p. xi).

30 Günter Grass and Martin Walser proposed the name, through a majority vote, during a meeting in Zurich on 19–20 January 1963 (Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 1040).

31 'Babele portata vittoriosamente a termine'. Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 301.

32 'i costruttori non si perderanno d'animo, non si divideranno, per il fatto di parlare linguaggi diversi [...]; impareranno a capirsi, e tireranno su fino all'ultimo suo piano la torre'. Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 301.

33 Temperini, ed., *Gulliver*, pp. 142–45, and Cavalli, ed., *Il Menabò*, pp. 422–27.

34 Panicali, ed., *Gulliver*, p. 25.

35 'in una zona di lavoro che è impossibile-possibile, o, se si vuole, vicino all'utopia'. Leonetti, 'Una rivista internazionale', p. xv.

something concrete, something that we can “touch”.³⁶ The pleasure in designing and realizing books and periodicals is something physical: there is a tangible happiness in handling the object and preserving it as a rampart against oblivion. A literary work can exist only through a printed publication, Enzensberger explained, and ‘this is why we love books, because they are as real as stones and it’s difficult to destroy them’.³⁷ In real books, that are as concrete as stones — this recalls the renowned 1955 essay by Carlo Levi, *Le parole sono pietre* — the German writer summarizes his expectations of a *non-extempore* literature, lasting more than the mere moment of reading. Enzensberger added humorously: ‘it is clear that this could be a flaw: if they are bad books, they last anyway’.³⁸ Literature’s persistence proved to be even stronger than the author’s will: in fact, a bad book remains to testify to his errors.

In reporting Enzensberger’s words to Calvino, Vittorini explained that the new issue of *Il Menabò* (no. 9) would be structured within the framework of the main journal as the first number of a foreign series aiming to provide an overview of European literature and to discuss specific problems, spurring the authors to find a common solution.³⁹ Vittorini was not new to this kind of initiative. He had proposed a similar goal by including foreign novels in the series *I Gettoni*. Moreover, his name appears among the contributors to another magazine, *Tempo presente* (1956–68), which was explicitly designed as an ‘international magazine’ dealing with the issues of the present time (hence its name) and meant as ‘a cultural enterprise founded on the observation that today’s world has no more borders’.⁴⁰

Vittorini took part in this project by answering two surveys: one on the intellectuals’ stance after the Hungarian uprising in 1956, and the other about realism in Italian post-war literature.⁴¹ Interviews and polls were effective tools for comparing key issues and themes in the transition between the 1950s and the 1960s. The manifesto published in the first issue of the magazine openly states its intent: ‘As for the contribution that *Tempo presente* may give to “solutions” to the intellectual, social, and political problems of the present time, we will limit ourselves to simply saying that we would be quite happy if we were able to clearly depict and describe the most important features of a few of these problems’.⁴²

36 ‘à quelque chose de concrète, à quelque chose qu’on puisse “toucher”’. Letter from Enzensberger to Vittorini, 22 November 1961, quoted in a letter from Vittorini to Italo Calvino, 28 November 1961, in Cavalli, ed., *Il Menabò*, p. 232.

37 ‘c’est pour cela que j’aime les livres, ils sont aussi réels que des pierres, c’est difficile de les détruire’. Letter from Enzensberger to Vittorini, 22 November 1961.

38 ‘cela peut-être une faute, évidemment, si les livres sont mauvaises: ils restent également’. Letter from Enzensberger to Vittorini, 22 November 1961.

39 Cavalli, ed., *Il Menabò*, pp. 232–33. See also the back cover of *Il Menabò*, no. 9 (1966), where the intent is stated to ‘alternate Italian and foreign issues, shun anthologies or mere reviews, and focus each issue on a problem felt and addressed by the literature of a country’ [‘alternare ai numeri italiani numeri stranieri, non antologici o di mera rassegna, bensì centrati ognuno su un problema sentito e affrontato dalla letteratura d’un paese’], and Italo Calvino, ‘Presentazione’, in Donatella Fiaccarini Marchi, ed., *Il Menabò (1959–1967)* (Roma: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1973), p. 12; according to him, if Vittorini had not died in February 1966, he would have liked to carry out ‘another issue [focused] on the new Soviet structural research which in those years revamped the legacy of Russian formalism’ [‘un altro numero sulle nuove ricerche strutturali sovietiche che in quegli anni riprendevano l’eredità del formalismo russo’].

40 ‘La nostra vuole essere una rivista “internazionale”. Con questo intendiamo un’impresa culturale fondata sulla constatazione che il mondo d’oggi non ha più confini.’ Lupo, ed., *Il secolo dei manifesti*, p. 469.

41 Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, pp. 763–67, 775–80. The two interviews are published, respectively, in *Tempo presente*, 1.9 (1956), 708–09, and 2.7 (1957), 527–29.

42 ‘Quanto al contributo che *Tempo presente* potrà dare alla “soluzione” dei problemi intellettuali, sociali e politici del tempo presente, ci limiteremo a dire che noi saremo abbastanza contenti se, di tali problemi, riusciremo a mostrarne e descriverne chiaramente qualcuno nei suoi aspetti più significativi.’ Lupo, ed., *Il secolo dei manifesti*, p. 471.

At any rate, the preparation of *Il Menabò* no. 9 proceeded simultaneously with *Gulliver*. Then in June 1964 an unexpected event put an end to any possible decision about the issue's realization. Einaudi refused to acquire the translation rights for the drama *Der Stellvertreter* (1963) by Rolf Hochhuth, which would be published by Feltrinelli a few months later. The telegram sent by Vittorini to Einaudi sounds like a complaint: 'the publication of this book is an important chance to make overtures for *Menabò* and avoid the inevitable regression after the international issue, should we go back to our usual routine'.⁴³ *Der Stellvertreter* was indeed an unconventional drama. Its theme was shocking and controversial, dealing as it did with Pope Pious XII's complicity with Nazism. The purchase of the translation rights would allow Vittorini to include excerpts of the work in the German *Menabò*. Its planned theme was the relationship between literature and history, and this work would provide the chance to stir up a debate that could spread beyond the journal's pages.

Vittorini considered *Il Menabò* no. 9 as the fulfilment of a process started with *Gulliver*, an attempt to make up for the failed bid and to reconcile the plurality of voices in that magazine. In the international issue's editorial, he wrote that one literary tendency is distinguished from another by the kind of relations that a culture establishes with both past and present.⁴⁴ Following the construction of the Berlin Wall, Germany faced a difficult time; German authors were forced to obliterate the utopia of a cross-border community in order to redefine their own identity, which was tainted by Nazism and newly divided over the choice between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc.

History and Literature

According to Enzensberger's phrasing in *Il Menabò* no. 9, one may perceive literature either as a tool to probe contemporaneity or as historiography, a definition that Leonetti liked so much he adapted it in *Gulliver*.⁴⁵ However, the suggestion of a connection between history and literature had already been introduced in Martin Walser's 'Die Kreuzigung einer Katze', with the subtitle 'Herkunft der Geschichte' ['origins of history']. According to Walser, memory is the place where language resides. It is made up of the same substance as history, so that it is possible to draw a connection between history, memory, language, and the individual who keeps them together.⁴⁶ Literature is verbalized through language, written language in particular, yet the relationship between literature and language is unidirectional: literature is language, while the opposite is not necessarily true. This implies that if history is handed down using language, literature and history can meet in the shared space of individual and collective memory. As Edoardo Esposito explains:

Memory is the dimension shared by both literature and history, and [it is] the foundation of their operational method. Both of them write 'after' the facts; both of them select facts on the basis of a memory which documents can confirm, [a memory] that also took shape due to ignorance or forgetfulness of events (the substratum of 'events' is valid also for fiction); both of them propose the perspective

43 'per menabò occasione importante poter pubblicare questo libro onde ottenere aperture varie et evitare regressione in cui fatalmente cadremmo se dopo numero internazionale torniamo tran-tran consueto'. Telegram from Vittorini to Giulio Einaudi, 5 June 1964, Archivio Storico Giulio Einaudi Editore (Archivio di Stato, Torino), Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani, cart. 221/2, fasc. 3099/3, f. 1307.

44 Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 1038.

45 Francesco Leonetti, 'Questioni italiane', *Il Menabò*, no. 7 (1964), xxi-xxvi (p. xxv).

46 Martin Walser, 'La crocifissione di un gatto: Origine della storia' ['Die Kreuzigung einer Katze: Herkunft der Geschichte'], trans. by Lia Secci, *Il Menabò*, no. 7 (1964), 67-70 (p. 69).

of the 'after', which is inevitably altered compared to what they claim to register, sometimes even in live broadcasts.⁴⁷

In post-war Italy, the extensive production of memoirs and testimonies dealt with this problem. Vittorini himself contributed to making room for them with *Il Politecnico* and *I Gettoni*. The flap copy of *Il sergente nella neve* (1953) by Mario Rigoni Stern, for instance, sounds programmatic: 'He is not a writer by vocation [...], maybe he cannot even write about things which didn't happen to him. But he can relate what happened to him with immediacy and honesty', Vittorini wrote about Rigoni Stern as a sergeant in the Alpine Corp who took part in the Russian Campaign.⁴⁸

'Literatur als Geschichtsschreibung' ['Literature as History-Writing'], the leading article by Enzensberger in *Il Menabò* no. 9, discusses similar questions. After the Second World War, German literary production branched into two distinct tendencies: the first one eluded history, a victim of a kind of post-defeat paralysis; the other tendency tried to heal the wounds of history by writing about the past.⁴⁹ Literature always has a civic function, and authors inevitably offer testimonies. Vittorini wrote in the editorial to the first issue of *Il Politecnico* that 'if [...] culture has almost never affected human facts, that depends only on the way culture has showed itself', because 'it has preached, taught, elaborated principles and values [...], but has never identified itself with society, has never ruled with society, has never led armies for society'.⁵⁰ The only remedy for a culture unable to prevent suffering, war, and concentration camps does not lie in rejecting the guiding role it should take. Both Vittorini and Enzensberger have no doubts about the solution: literature has to become historiography.

Nonetheless there is a risk, as stressed by Enzensberger in *Il Menabò* no. 9: the convergence between literature and history may collapse when the author appropriates documents and transfers them into written, literary pages that pursue an impossible objectivity. Literature differs from history because of its faith in expressive instruments; it has to deal with historical documents, yet it must avoid being overwhelmed by the very same historical documents it probes.⁵¹ There is a clear connection between fictional writings and true stories, and if history can adopt narrative patterns, literature can claim an argumentative validity in the same hybrid zones that represent the foundation of the idea of culture proposed by *Il Menabò*.⁵² We can find evidence of this assumption in the answer Vittorini gave to Roberto De Monticelli, in an interview published in *Il Giorno* (24 February 1959):

47 'Una dimensione che letteratura e storia hanno in comune e in base alla quale entrambe operano: la memoria. L'una e l'altra scrivono "dopo" i fatti; l'una e l'altra selezionano i fatti sulla base di una memoria che i documenti potranno sostenere ma che si è andata formando anche grazie all'ignoranza o alla dimenticanza delle cose successe (un sottofondo, quello delle "cose successe", che vale naturalmente anche per la letteratura d'invenzione); propongono una prospettiva che è appunto quella del "dopo", inevitabilmente mutata rispetto a ciò che pure pretendono, magari in presa diretta, di registrare.' Edoardo Esposito, 'Alla ricerca della verità (storica)', in *Il letterato e lo storico: La letteratura creativa come storia*, ed. by Paolo Favilli (Milano: Angeli, 2013), 45–49 (p. 48).

48 'Non è scrittore di vocazione [...], forse non sarebbe mai capace di scrivere di cose che non gli fossero accadute. Ma può riferire con immediatezza e sincerità di quello che gli accade.' Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 686.

49 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Letteratura come storiografia' ['Literatur als Geschichtsschreibung'], trans. by Bruna Bianchi, *Il Menabò*, no. 9 (1966), 7–22 (p. 16).

50 'se quasi mai [...] la cultura ha potuto influire sui fatti degli uomini dipende solo dal modo in cui la cultura si è manifestata. Essa ha predicato, ha insegnato, ha elaborato principii e valori [...], ma non si è identificata con la società, non ha governato con la società, non ha condotto eserciti per la società.' Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 235.

51 Enzensberger, 'Letteratura come storiografia', p. 21.

52 Emanuele Zinato, *Letteratura come storiografia? Mappe e figure della mutazione italiana* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015), p. 15.

We would like to find (or elicit) texts that might renew the relationship with history [...]: texts that are capable of remembering that the first right of humankind is to be happy. (Not each for his own sake only, obviously. But for the sake of history and the humankind we belong to [...]). If we do not find such texts, we will at least record that it is impossible to find them.⁵³

According to Vittorini, history means not only the past, but also and above all the present, seen as an inevitable term of comparison and as the context in which mankind has to act. The same call to happiness was also asserted in the second issue of *Il Politecnico*, where Vittorini invited Italian intellectuals of every political affiliation, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to collaborate 'in pursuing human happiness on earth and civil advancement'.⁵⁴ In other words, literature must return to serving as a critical conscience for history.

Conclusion

The debate over *Gulliver* among the Italian, French, and German groups inevitably led to failure, due to the difficulties in co-ordinating intellectuals with different cultural backgrounds, different visions, and different literary perspectives. Nevertheless, what stands out is the fact that the failure seems somehow foreseen, somehow inherent in the project itself. It can already be surmised in Leonetti's thoughts between 1961 and 1962 about the chance of a negative outcome. There is a typical trait of Vittorini's method in this whole process. Calvino sums up his late colleague's conception of literature as a project when he writes, after Vittorini's death in February 1966, that 'Vittorini's general discourse is a project — or better — the project of a project'. This was in 'Progettazione e letteratura' in *Il Menabò* no. 10 (1967). Calvino continues: 'and in turn literature itself is a project'.⁵⁵ Like literature, journals discussing literature are bound to remain a mere draft; a surplus of planning resides in the works by Vittorini, and *Gulliver* does not elude this pattern.

What seems strange then is that Vittorini's previous attempts at an international publishing project had not been unsuccessful. The publication of foreign authors in *I Gettoni* was meant to broaden the discussion on the collaboration between intellectuals from different geographical areas, which he had already started with *Il Politecnico*. The aim was to overcome a 'small-town', narrow-minded trait of Italian culture — a process he had led since the 1930s through translations from English and the compilation of the *Americana* anthology (1941). Considering the fascist regime of those years, these projects added a political nuance to culture and literature.⁵⁶ Since the outcome of these cases had been positive, it is worth looking elsewhere for the cause of the *Gulliver* 'shipwreck'.

53 'Vorremmo riuscire a trovare (o a provocare) dei testi che sapessero rinnovare il rapporto con la storia [...]: dei testi capaci anche di ricordare che il primo dovere degli uomini è di essere felici. (Questo non per se stessi, naturalmente. Ma nella storia e di fronte ad essa, di fronte al genere cui apparteniamo [...]). Se poi non riusciremo a trovarne, di testi in questo senso, avremo almeno documentato l'impossibilità attuale di averne.' Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 847.

54 'nella ricerca dell'umana felicità su questa terra e nel progresso civile'. Vittorini, *Letteratura arte società*, p. 246.

55 'il discorso generale di Vittorini è progetto, o meglio progetto di progetto. E d'una letteratura che è a sua volta progetto'. Calvino, p. 162.

56 Gian Carlo Ferretti, *L'editore Vittorini* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), pp. 64–68; Martino Marazzi, 'La crisi americana di Pavese e Vittorini', in *Il demone dell'anticipazione: Cultura, letteratura, editoria in Elio Vittorini*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito (Milano: Il Saggiatore/Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2009), 45–60; Nicola Turi, *Declinazioni del canone americano in Italia tra gli anni Quaranta e Sessanta* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2011), pp. 23–32, 53–70.

In the publishing projects led by Vittorini, the search for an internationalization of literature is successful as long as it is inserted into a comparative framework within an Italian context, because Vittorini's strongly authoritarian managerial style allowed for the inclusion of different voices only in a unitary design.⁵⁷ By contrast, where the prevailing point of view is no longer Italian, the balance between Vittorini's tendency towards centralization and the need for mediation between plural visions begins to fail, unless that plurality is reduced to a duality in which the two poles are homogeneous. For this reason, while *Gulliver* comes to a standstill in the shallow banks of formal and methodological discussions that do not lead to any solutions, *Il Menabò* no. 9 represents, on the contrary, a success. Enzensberger's vision of literature as the main tool for elaborating history, meaning both the distant and near past, fits with Vittorini's request to recount the present. However, in the case of the international journal, the need for mediation between two highly polarized positions, the French and the German, was detrimental to the whole project, and the Italian group led by Vittorini found it difficult to suggest a sensible middle ground, at an equal distance from both. In the Italian context of that time, *Gulliver* was one of the most important attempts to build a cross-border intellectual community, to broaden national concerns, and gain a transnational European dimension. However, *Gulliver* would remain only a utopia or a 'non-revue', to use Leonetti's designation, a telling example of the failure of cultural mediation.

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⁵⁷ Ferretti, p. 213.

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