

**Q**  
Quartet

# LETTERS FROM PRISON

BY

# ANTONIO GRAMSCI



INTRODUCED BY  
LYNNE LAWNER

'Imprisonment is a terrible thing, but for me dishonour on account of moral weakness or cowardice would be even worse'

'I've always refused to compromise my ideas and am ready to die for them, not just to be put in prison'

(Gramsci in letters to his mother)



Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was one of the founders of the Italian Communist party and a great Marxist thinker. Framed by Mussolini's Fascist courts after his activities in the workers' movements in Turin, he was kept mostly in solitary confinement and died in prison.

His letters are among the most important works of twentieth-century Italian literature; on first publication in 1947 they were awarded the Viareggio prize.

ISBN 0  
United



# LETTERS FROM PRISON

ANTONIO  
GRAMSCI

0 7043 3256 6



66

Lynne Lawner has written a detailed biographical and analytical introduction, which discusses Gramsci's political philosophy in his other writings as well as in the *Letters from Prison*. She holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University, has published two volumes of poetry, and has written essays on Provençal and Italian literature for scholarly journals. Dr. Lawner lives in Rome and has had the close collaboration of the Gramsci Institute in the preparation of this volume.



*Antonio Gramsci*

LETTERS FROM PRISON

*Selected, translated from the Italian  
and Introduced by* LYNNE LAWNER



QUARTET BOOKS  
LONDON MELBOURNE NEW YORK

Published by Quartet Books Limited 1979  
A member of the Namara Group  
27 Goodge Street, London W1P 1FD

First published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Limited, London, 1975

Copyright © 1973 by Lynne Lawner

ISBN 0 7043 3256 6

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Billings and Sons Ltd, Guildford and Worcester

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser. This book is published at a net price and is supplied subject to the Publishers Association Standard Conditions of Sale registered under the Restrictive Trades Practices Act, 1956.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the director and staff of the Gramsci Institute in Rome, above all Elsa Fubini, for helping me to prepare this first edition of Gramsci's *Lettere dal carcere* in English. I am grateful for the permission to publish the letters as well as to reproduce manuscript pages and photographs.

CONTENTS

I. <i>Introduction</i>	I
II. <i>The Letters</i>	57
APPENDIX: LETTER FROM TATIANA SCHUCHT	277
BIBLIOGRAPHY	283
INDEX	285

LETTERS FROM PRISON



## I

IN 1946, when a first edition of the *Letters* of Antonio Gramsci was issued by the Torinese firm Einaudi on cheap paper and in the form of a pamphlet, Italy was just emerging from the physical and moral devastation of the war. After having lain for twenty years under the weight of dictatorship and official rhetoric, the nation was suddenly inundated with newspaper articles, books, and other publications describing every kind of martyrdom under Fascism and Nazism. But Italy was used to prison literature. Many of its greatest intellectuals had been prisoners and exiles (Dante, Campanella, Pellico, in a special sense Leopardi). Yet Gramsci's *Letters* at once commanded the attention of the foremost members of the Italian intelligentsia. Benedetto Croce stayed awake a whole night to finish the book and knew that he had made a major literary discovery. In the following year, the *Letters* won the important Viareggio Prize. Until then, however, Gramsci's name had been almost unknown in Italy; people still found it awkward to pronounce. Some recalled that he had been a political figure who was thrown into prison by Mussolini twenty years earlier and who died a miserable death after years of hardship and illness. Others recalled that he had been a Communist, indeed one of the founders of the party in 1921. Yet Gramsci was an entirely new fact on the cultural scene; his *Letters* and what followed them had the effect of an electric shock, waking Italy out of the trauma of the war and setting its brain in motion.

It was as if this prose were a sudden stretch of land emerging from the sea, the remains of a sunken island, a self-contained region forming a little, lively world of its own. The subject matter was

original—a curious patchwork of discussions of Hegel, Salvemini, Croce, as well as historicism; ironic, irritated descriptions of illnesses; lists of books and magazines; requests for articles like woolen socks; and anecdotal memories of childhood in Sardinia. But what most struck the readers of that time was the style. Gramsci's language was as remote as possible from the usual baroque rhetoric, the prolix, emotionally emphatic style of the official Italian literature of the day. The writing was meticulous, dry, tight, often twisted in on itself and obscure, but always stubbornly clamped to the argument at hand, indeed relentlessly turned to ideas and objects, with no space left for sentimentality, self-pity, or the like. Again and again Gramsci would reduce the tale of his personal trials to a minimum in order to go on to general problems of history, economics, and art. The nervous energy and intense concentration of will and mind that marked these discussions were to provide a new example of intellectual rigor for Italian socialists.

When the *Prison Notebooks* began to appear in the bookshops in 1947, again under the Einaudi imprint, people realized that the *Letters* represented only a fraction of a whole continent of thought, that part of experience that can be communicated in casual conversations. The *Notebooks* soon revealed their twofold nature as a monument of resistance to Fascism and, at the same time, a major contribution to post-Leninist Marxist philosophy. The *Notebooks* (thirty in number, containing nearly three thousand pages) had a disorderly and unsystematic appearance; in addition, they were difficult to understand. But the theoretical material that they contained (on historical materialism, Croce, the Risorgimento, the history of Italian intellectuals, the political party, national culture—to name some of the principal themes) was to constitute the great heritage of Italian Marxism in the first half of this century. From 1947 on, in fact, Gramsci's importance was to grow progressively inside and outside Italy.

The first thing to strike the public was the dramatic background against which these writings were produced; for it soon emerged that these small squares of paper, every inch of which was crowded with a minute, perfect calligraphy, represented the efforts of a man

fighting from the beginning against an avalanche of devastating illnesses—vomiting, insomnia, arteriosclerosis, tuberculosis, Pott's disease, and numerous other ailments. Gramsci literally rotted away in prison, writing while his teeth fell out, his stomach was destroyed, and his nerves collapsed. But the most important fact was what Gramsci signified in the perspective of revolutionary action and thought in the twentieth century. Certainly, of all the members of the old revolutionary guard—the political personnel heading the proletarian struggle from World War I and the Russian Revolution to the Fascist reaction in Europe—Gramsci was the most coherent, which may explain why the reputations of so many other revolutionaries have been re-evaluated or destroyed while Gramsci's has remained intact, inspiring esteem among supporters and opponents alike. Of course, circumstances played an important part in this.

The decade 1927–1937, spanning Gramsci's sojourn in Mussolini's prisons, offered painful and crucial choices to revolutionaries in every part of the world. Essentially, intellectuals were asked to choose between unconditional approval of the Soviet Union's first five-year plans and the theory of socialism in a single country (with its frequently tragic results), and outright criticism of the fact that the first socialist nation was undergoing a process of moving toward party dictatorship, increased bureaucratization, and the predominance of *raison d'état* in international affairs. During all of this time, Gramsci was cut off from the immediate political battle and had to turn his attention to general questions of revolutionary theory and strategy in the modern world. Yet this detachment from political contingencies was only apparent. It could be argued that by the time of Gramsci's arrest in 1926, the basic decisions facing revolutionary socialists in Italy and elsewhere in Europe had already been made, in a sense had been made for them. An analysis of the reasons for the victory of reactionary forces in Europe and the temporary defeat of the proletariat (which both set back the proletarian garrisons outside of Russia and conditioned the Russian Revolution itself) led to recognition of what the great new problem of world socialism would be and the delineation of the long-term political struggle. More clearly than other intellectuals of the time, Gramsci realized

that the chief issue of future decades would be *revolution in countries of advanced capitalism*: he saw at once the complexity and urgency of the problem. It is this remarkable foresight and vision of Gramsci's, even more than his supreme example as opponent of, and martyr under, Fascism, which explains the prestige that Gramsci enjoys today in so many parts of the world.

Even though the previous generation of revolutionaries (Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky) had discussed the crucial problem of the transition to socialism in Europe, they had not gone very far theoretically. The Comintern itself had offered only a general stimulus toward revolution in Europe by outlining some tactical maneuvers. Naturally, the protagonists of 1917 were greatly limited by the angle from which they viewed the proletarian movement in Europe. Even if they realized that the final success and survival of the Russian Revolution depended on, at least was conditioned by, a proletarian victory in Germany and Italy—in short, in all of Europe—they could not but view the situation from the standpoint of Russian interests. On the other hand, the only compact group of revolutionary leaders with a theory and strategy of its own and close contact with the real problems of a nation was Russian. Groups of leaders in Europe were casually organized and loosely held together. This was certainly the case in Italy, where Socialist and Communist leaders suffered setbacks, first as a result of tactical errors and then as a consequence of the advent of Fascism and the imprisonment and emigration that followed. But in the Italian situation, a new vision was emerging which would find its highest expression in Gramsci, in the elaboration of a theory transcending the "here and now" of contemporary events. This new vision was eventually to modify the whole movement and to provide a new basis for revolutionary strategy within a specifically national context.

No more than those of Marx or Lenin can Gramsci's theories be reduced to convenient formulas, battle cries, or slogans. The enormous amount of criticism and interpretation of their work in itself reveals how impossible it is to turn these doctrines into a kind of catechism. This is especially true in Gramsci's case where theory of the most complex kind emerged from an original experience—that

is to say, an experience lived in an original way, where all of the elements constituting a particular experience were drawn upon and "syntheses" reached only occasionally and hesitantly. Gramsci's contribution to culture lies in this very theorization of experience, by which I mean above all *historical* experience, a direct participation in the problems posed by history. In the following section, we will briefly review Gramsci's life from the time of his birth and education in Sardinia to the period of his intellectual and political activities in Turin, especially in connection with the Ordine Nuovo group and the founding of the Communist Party in 1921, and finally his work for the party in 1922-1926 up to the time of his arrest and imprisonment. But biographical facts—the chronicle of day-to-day living—will concern us mainly as they help to clarify those historical problems and the angle from which Gramsci viewed them.

Gramsci's life and activities can be divided into three periods: from his birth in Sardinia (1891) through the years of university study in Turin up to the end of World War I; from 1918 to 1926, the year of his arrest by the Fascist police; and, finally, the decade spent in prison until his death in 1937. The first period is that of his intellectual and political development; the second includes his activities as a political leader, first as theorist of a new revolutionary strategy in Italy, and then as one of the founders of the Communist Party in Italy and as Italian delegate to the Comintern; the last, spent in forced isolation in Fascist prisons, is the period of his greatest intellectual and literary expression.

## II

GRAMSCI was born in Ales, a small town in Sardinia, on January 22, 1891, the fourth of seven children. His family was not poor, at least not in the early years. His father, Francesco, was descended from Albanians who had immigrated in 1820 to an area near Naples, part of the Kingdom of Naples under the rule of the Bourbons, and had established themselves comfortably there—so comfortably that



Gramsci's grandfather became a colonel in the Bourbon *gendarmerie*, maintaining his rank even after 1861, the year of the fall of the Kingdom of Naples and its incorporation into the new Kingdom of Italy. All of Francesco's brothers were able to complete their education and find good positions; only he was unlucky: at the death of his father he had to interrupt his studies and seek a job. He found work as director of the Office of Land Registry in Ghilarza, a small town in the middle of Sardinia. Shortly after this, and despite the objections of his family on the mainland, Francesco married a local girl from a well-off family. As time went on, seven children were born, four of them in Ales, where the family moved temporarily.

What was Sardinia like at that time? The island, known today almost exclusively for its seaside resorts and banditism, has changed, but perhaps not all that much, from the years of Gramsci's youth. Cut off for centuries from the rest of Italy, Sardinia was suffering from extreme poverty, due to a predominantly feudal structure and to the ruthless plunder by a few groups of French and Belgian entrepreneurs bent on exploiting Sardinia's mineral resources while offering no prospects of economic development for the region. In 1891, when Gramsci was born, Sardinia had already been for thirty years part of the Kingdom of Italy, and for a century and a half before that one of the territories of the House of Savoy, which had obtained Sardinia in exchange for Sicily in 1720 after the Treaty of London, thus ending the long Spanish dominion on the island. It was, indeed, as "Kings of Sardinia" that the Savoyes had gone on to unify the peninsula in 1859-1861, annexing the other Italian regions from Tuscany to The Marches, and finally those southern zones liberated by Garibaldi, from Sicily to the Abruzzi.

But this was a strictly nominal honor for Sardinia. The Sardinian soldiers who fought valiantly for their king had no idea that their island was in many ways more neglected than the most depressed regions of the South. The system of *latifundia* (the surviving economy of great manorial estates descended ultimately from Roman times) had, in fact, remained intact in this period. It was only during Gramsci's childhood that a census of property owners was taken for the first time, forcing the great propertied families to

return lands that had been absorbed over a period of centuries, and thus giving rise to a narrow, closed class of small property owners. Most of Sardinia was pasture land and most of it was untilled. There were practically no streets or roads or other means of communication with the interior of the island, where there was an economy of mere subsistence. Documents of the time reveal the miserable socio-economic conditions: for example, in Ghilarza, the home town of Gramsci's mother, only 200 out of 2,000 inhabitants could read and write (among these, Antonio's mother). The Kingdom of Italy had brought two innovations to the island. One, already mentioned, was the concession of coal mines to foreign financiers, which resulted in the exploitation of the rich mineral resources of Sardinia and created conditions as bad as those described by Engels in relation to working-class life in nineteenth-century England. The miners toiled from fourteen to sixteen hours a day. They were paid starvation wages and had to buy high-priced merchandise (sold by the mining companies themselves and even including State monopolies such as salt, tobacco, and stamps). They had no such guarantees as insurance or pensions, lived in expensive shacks without any sanitary facilities, and lastly were constantly threatened with unemployment because of the abundance of manpower on the island. The second innovation was an increased agricultural commerce with France that, on the one hand, aided the development of animal breeding and herding and generally transformed agriculture on the island, but on the other hand, threw Sardinia into the worst crisis in its history when the French market was closed to Sardinian exports.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while the new Kingdom of Italy injected new elements into the Sardinian economy, at the same time it aggravated a pre-existing state of crisis and sharpened internal contradictions, revealing the extreme backwardness of the island that made it inevitably part of the underdeveloped half of Italy. Certainly, from a political standpoint, Sardinia was much more backward than the South. In Sicily,

1. This embargo followed Italy's abrogation in 1887 of the trade agreement with France when the Crispi government introduced higher tariff barriers in order to protect the northern industrial bourgeoisie.

in 1870, for example, internationalist ideas had already taken hold in the cities; and in the region around Naples and in Apulia, where a peasants' movement was being organized under the guidance of Mikhail Bakunin, many sections of the International had already been formed. But it was only after the turn of the century that there were any signs of socialist organization in Sardinia. These were, in any case, no more than fragile beginnings, tentative efforts that collapsed at the very first reaction of the government, which took every possible advantage of the island's backward political life, dominated as it was by patronage and feuds, to implement its anti-proletarian policies.

It was, in fact, by falling into a trap set by one of the rival groups that Gramsci's father compromised his career. Francesco had made the "mistake" of defending a losing candidate in the elections of 1897. Soon after, he found himself under judicial investigation instigated by the winning party. Administrative "irregularities" were discovered in connection with his work, and the man was arrested and sentenced to six years in jail. If these events were disastrous for his large family, they were crucial for Antonio, who was in no physical condition to confront poverty and discomforts. From birth on, he had been frail, suffering from rickets and early developing a hunchbacked condition that probably was the result of rickets but which members of his family attributed to a fall from his nurse's arms. Now, suffering from malnutrition as well, the boy was sent to overcrowded elementary schools, where the few incompetent teachers rarely, if ever, showed up for the lessons. His mother did what she could in the way of sewing and other chores to make enough money for the family to live on, but as early as the summer of 1902 Gramsci had to go to work like his brother Gennaro at the registry office. His own account of this experience is eloquent testimony to both the physical and mental stress to which this work subjected him:

I had to take care of myself even as a child. I began to work when I was only eleven, earning nine lire a month (which meant, in any case, two pounds of bread a day) and working ten hours a day, including

Sunday morning. The work consisted of moving huge files that weighed more than I did. At night I wept secretly from the pains wracking my whole body.

After a brilliant showing in the last grades of elementary school, Antonio discovered that he would have to give up his studies altogether. He fell into a state of despondency and began to isolate himself from others. In the brief intervals between chores at the registry office, he studied Latin by himself and took lessons from a former high school student. Two years later, with the release of Antonio's father from prison, the family was able to send the boy to a gymnasium (junior high school) in Santu Lussurgiu, where he was given advanced standing but where he was once again subjected to inept teachers without diplomas, as well as to unhygienic surroundings. He lived in a miserable *pensione* and, when he could, sold whatever food the family sent him in order to buy books and newspapers. Just before he was eighteen, Antonio took a larger leap, leaving Ghilarza once more, but this time for Cagliari, the capital of the island, where he was to attend a lyceum (high school) and live with his brother Gennaro, at that time leader of a local Socialist section.

The years of growth and of adolescence had been hard ones and now life was a question of sheer physical survival for both brothers. Yet Antonio's character never turned sour on this account. Although local people still speak of a certain closed quality of his personality during this period, he is mostly remembered for his cheerfulness, taste for jest and horseplay, and expansive character. Significantly, in the *Letters* the painful memories of childhood are far outweighed by descriptions of joyful races through the fields or along rivers, hunts for different animals, encounters with local folk (whose habits of speech and sayings he remembered all his life), and songs and customs about which he queries his mother.

But Antonio was about to be exposed to a new set of experiences that would profoundly affect him and modify his whole vision of life:

the move to Cagliari was, in fact, Gramsci's introduction to politics. These years (1908-1910) were a time of great political fervor. A newspaper campaign was being waged for the autonomy of Sardinia from the central Italian government, and Antonio found himself being drawn into this movement—this awakening—which was overtaking the whole island. In his *Letters* he reminisces about this time, with which he associates the slogan, "Throw the mainlanders into the sea!" He relates how he let himself be convinced, along with other Sardinian intellectuals, that the maladies from which the island was suffering were due exclusively to the fact that Sardinia was ruled by the mainland (i.e., by Rome). He was not yet in a position to realize that since all elements of society—farmers, shepherds, miners, agrarians, and powerful landowners alike—were united on this issue, it would not be the real problem. Yet it was Gramsci's identification with this movement that was sweeping through the island around 1910 that forced him to come to terms for the first time with the sociohistorical realities of his own land. Until then Gramsci had noted only the particular characteristics of the Sardinian landscape, idiom, and mentality; now he began enthusiastically to read historical works and socialist pamphlets in order to gain a new perspective on the situation.

Gramsci's first real intellectual adventure began when he moved to Turin in 1911 to attend the university there. He had won a scholarship, but it was so limited that it did not even allow him to eat regularly or dress properly. All winter long, in Turin, he wore the same lightweight summer jacket; once, because of the freezing cold outside, he shut himself up inside a *pensione* room for two whole months. Poor health kept him from attending classes regularly and, finally, he was forced to suspend attendance altogether. Yet there were compensations for the hardships of these years at the university. Besides forming close friendships with professors such as Matteo Bartoli, the historical linguist, Luigi Einaudi, the celebrated economist, and Umberto Cosmo, the Dante scholar, Gramsci had the opportunity to open his eyes to the world around him and thus to assess the real conditions in Italy and the rest of Europe. Fellow students like An-

gelo Tasca, Umberto Terracini, and Palmiro Togliatti<sup>2</sup> were doing exactly the same thing.

Undoubtedly, the salient fact of these years was Gramsci's exposure to a large industrial working-class city after a phase of economic development and during a cultural crisis on the eve of World War I. Liberalism by then had reached the terminal point, and the symptoms of its decline were in evidence everywhere in Europe. In Italy in 1911-1912, universal male suffrage had been gained (achieved after fifty years in which the electorate had been restricted to a tiny minority) and this led directly to the rise of mass political parties: the mainly northern, working-class Socialist Party (first formed in 1892) and, by 1919, the Catholic Partito Popolare, with a mass base in the peasantry, especially in the South. The liberal State was doing what it could to suppress these developments: it managed to absorb widespread strikes and significant popular gains (such as the eight-hour workday and a national insurance and pension plan), while repulsing pressures toward authoritarianism from the other side. Insurrections throughout the countryside, where unemployment and famine were rampant, were to some extent held in check due to mass emigration (principally from Sicily, Sardinia, and the Neapolitan area to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina). But this equilibrium could not last long. There was hardly any home market for Italian products. Low salaries in the North, especially in the factories, and poverty in the South meant that the great industries were almost exclusively dependent on rigid protectionism and government contracts; soon they were to look uneasily toward the future, lacking, as they did, one or more political parties to compete with the two new mass parties.

Already in 1912-13 the situation was somewhat contradictory. The two mass movements—the Socialists and the Catholics—were split not only by basic social differences but also by contrasting aims

2. Tasca, Terracini, and Togliatti, together with Gramsci, were the founders of the *Ordine nuovo* movement and subsequently of the Italian Communist Party after the schism with the Socialists in 1921. Tasca became the leader of the right wing of the party. Togliatti became the leader of the party after Gramsci's arrest (1926) and was Secretary-General from 1945 until his death in 1964.

and by ideologies that were apparently irreconcilable. In Turin, one felt the reverberations of these conflicts. The Torinese workers themselves were divided into two fiercely opposed camps: pro- and anti-protectionists. For some, the abolition of protective tariffs signified the advent of a grave crisis in the industries in which they worked; others foresaw a decrease in prices and a consequent increase in consumer power. Meanwhile, the southern peasants were united in their conviction that the abolition of protective tariffs would bring about a crisis in the North, in the regions of industrial hegemony, that could have only positive results, and at the same time open up a European labor market much closer at hand than North and South America.

These contrasts were further sharpened by the kind of leaders who were coming to the fore at that time. Much of the old political leadership had been created through networks of patronage linked to the system of uninominal electoral colleges<sup>3</sup> and by the policy of blurring party divisions through transformism<sup>4</sup> in Rome. However, a new class of leaders was in the process of formation. These leaders, originating mainly in the cities and in contact with the urban proletariat and universities, were of a practical, scientific, and to a certain extent positivist formation; they were to animate the Socialist Party and relate it to important debates about theory and tactics going on in Germany and Austria under the guidance of Karl Kautsky and Viktor Adler. The Catholic leaders of that time were "confessional" (that is to say, they set Church doctrine before that of the State). This did not exclude liberal and modernist<sup>5</sup> colorations. Their aim was to insert Catholicism and Catholics into the modern State (from which they had been excluded for decades because of the "Roman question"—the absorption of the old Papal States into the United King-

3. A system based on electoral colleges in which each party presents a single candidate.

4. Transformism was a technique used by Italian governments of that period to form coalitions; it involved the shifting of alliances from Right to Left and from Left to Right usually on the basis of guaranteed offices. See Letter 70 and note 3.

5. Modernism was a vast movement among Catholic clergy and laymen at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century whose aim was the reformation of the basic doctrines of the Church in the light of scientific progress and new social needs. Modernism was condemned by Pius X in 1907.

dom of Italy), and to do this they strove to accentuate the traditional hostility of the countryside toward the city, of the exploited, deserted South toward the rich, powerful North. In these tendencies of the new leaders of the two mass movements, certain elements from the Risorgimento period clearly played an important part: old anticlerical and atheist traditions, in the case of socialism; old reactionary traditions, in the case of Catholicism. But in this already complicated situation, a new element was emerging in both large and small urban centers and among the petite bourgeoisie and professional and commercial classes. This was nationalism; it too contained elements left over from the time of the Risorgimento—old colonial ambitions, the desire to ape and rival the great world powers, which had already led Italy into its ill-starred adventures in Africa in the last decade of the preceding century. This new upsurge of nationalist feeling thus came at precisely the same moment that post-Risorgimento Italy (through universal suffrage and the creation of mass parties) seemed to be drawing new life into its tired lungs.

The battle at this time was primarily one of ideas. Gramsci participated in it with a clear awareness of the terms in which it was posed. Primarily, the battle had been inspired by a wave of anti-positivism sweeping over Europe that had significant political repercussions in Italy. Even though the various currents of thought composing positivism were heterogeneous in nature, they implied a set of political views that can be summarily defined as reformist or gradualist.<sup>6</sup> The cultural background of socialist leaders, as it emerged in journalism, publishing, education, and other areas, was positivist and economist.<sup>7</sup> Today, one understands just how much these leaders accomplished in the way of educating the working

6. Reformism was, historically, a policy of those within a Socialist Party whose single and unique objective was social and political reforms and who never clearly formulated the problem of power. Gradualism characterized those who imagined and advocated a gradual passage from capitalism to socialism, ignoring the class struggle and the struggle for power.

7. Economism is a current of socialist thought originating in the early period of the Russian workers' movement which holds that the revolutionary political battle is the task of the liberal bourgeoisie and not of the working class, which should, for its part, concern itself only with economic battles for wage increases and the betterment of working conditions. Class consciousness would be formed spontaneously in the course of these economic struggles.



masses and peasants to socialist ideals in central and northern Italy, the most striking example being the Emilian region, where the diffusion of socialist ideas and the establishment of popular institutions such as the *case del popolo*,<sup>8</sup> cooperatives, and first-aid stations built up a basic connective tissue which not even Fascism was able to destroy. However, one is forced, from a theoretical point of view, to judge the inadequacy of that culture, based as it was on the notion of "two cultures," one for the educated strata of the population and one for the masses. This was, in a way, no more than a perpetuation and aggravation of one of the gravest historical implications of the Italian bourgeoisie, for it had always encouraged the detachment of popular from official culture.

Another defect of positivist culture, from Gramsci's point of view, was the tendency to favor *ouvrièrisme*,<sup>9</sup> which was rapidly becoming the ideology of the labor aristocracy in industrial centers. This tendency naturally found an ally in the capitalist ruling class, which strove to strengthen the economically privileged sectors of society rather than to develop the whole economy. This scheme of increasing the power of the privileged classes of society was reinforced through a tacit alliance with the great southern agrarian landowners (an alliance in reality dating back almost to 1860) that guaranteed these landowners a continued maintenance of the status quo and protection from agrarian reforms. In this way, positivism had an apparently paradoxical effect, for it cemented together conflicting forces that in reality shared the same vision of political and social evolution in Italy. Of course for socialist intellectuals, positivism manifested itself as a particular interpretation of Marxism, an evolutionist one, which held that the transition to socialist, collective structures in Italy could (and would) come about only as the mechanical, ineluctable result of the development of economic forces.

8. The *case del popolo* were clubhouses serving as centers for political education and recreation.

9. *Ouvrièrisme* (*operasimo* in Italian) is the tendency to have a sectarian vision of the function of the working class, the insistence, for example, that the party be composed only of workers and that it work mainly toward the vindication of workers' rights and needs.

This interpretation of Marx, heavily influenced by German and Austrian Marxists, had by then already spread beyond party circles and had become part of academic historiography and science.

But there were contradictions within the anti-positivist movement as well. Inside the socialist movement itself, many workers in small-scale industry, along with farm laborers, artisans, and petit bourgeois insecure about their jobs and relegated to a marginal economic status, were manifesting their discontent. On the ideological level their opposition to gradualism and reformism took the form of "maximalism."<sup>10</sup> Mussolini, then a revolutionary socialist who was to become before long the editor of the official party organ, *Avanti!*, was a leader of this current in 1912-1914. He and others were greatly influenced by anarchosindicalism, a doctrine of French derivation which held the decisive revolutionary weapon to be the general strike and the perennial tactic for a socialist victory, action—insurrectional mobilization.

But the maximalists were not the only social force moving toward belief in direct action. There were Catholic groups (the modernist movement), as well as the nationalist petit bourgeois who proclaimed war to be the supreme expression of vitality and who were influenced by Bergson and the French avant-garde (influencing them in turn). This was the era of Futurism, of the exaltation of the machine and of violence. A typical F. T. Marinetti slogan was, "War, health of the world!" Giovanni Papini, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Ardengo Soffici,<sup>11</sup> and others were bent on de-provincializing Italian culture by importing current European ideas into Italy; and they used the Florentine literary-political journals to this purpose. Young

10. Maximalism was a current of the Italian Socialist Party, the final aim of which was the conquest of power; it thus opposed "maximal" goals to the "minimal" goals of the reformists. Maximalism was typically extremist in words and "opportunist" in actions.

11. Papini (1881-1956), a writer and a critic who founded the review *Leonardo* in 1903 along with Prezzolini and others, then edited *La Voce* from 1908 on, and founded *Lacerba* in 1913 together with Soffici, was a Futurist who moved from Bergsonianism to Catholicism. Prezzolini (b. 1882) backed up his nationalism with a mystical philosophy. Soffici (1879-1964), a writer and a painter, was an ardent Fascist who fought in the war and wrote for Mussolini's *Il popolo d'Italia*.

people were making it clear that they too had had enough of the liberal State and socialist gradualism.

Two distinguished intellectuals stood out among the many anti-positivists of the time: Gabriele d'Annunzio and Benedetto Croce. D'Annunzio offered the Italian bourgeoisie a veneer of formal elegance (even if somewhat false and second-hand) and a style corresponding to, and reflecting, the inherently reactionary, parasitic character of that class, whereas Croce united the ruling groups on the basis of a renewed platform much shrewder than positivism and aimed at keeping the nation steadily on its present course rather than sending it in pursuit of heroic dreams and adventures. Undoubtedly, it was Croce who gave the anti-positivist reaction its most coherent, elevated, and decisive leadership. It was no accident that he kept up his contacts with the young avant-garde intellectuals of *La Voce* in Florence and with Georges Sorel's anarchosyndicalism—indeed, this was the very basis for his hegemony. As we shall see in analyzing Gramsci's discussion of Croce in the *Letters and Notebooks*, Croce's earliest work was greatly influenced by Marxism and by Antonio Labriola, the Italian philosopher who had already interpreted Marx in a non-positivist way. Marx and Labriola were to form the point of departure for Gramsci and the Torinese intellectuals of his group.

Labriola had studied Marx directly from the original texts and in relation to the period of German culture, dominated by Hegel, from which Marx had emerged. But while, for Labriola, Hegel constituted a point of reference for understanding Marx and Marxism as a philosophy realizing dialectical thought through the historical nature of human processes, for Croce Hegel represented the premise for a rebirth of speculative thought and the autonomy of philosophy from science and practical life. Thus Croce's interpretation of Marx necessarily diverged more and more from Labriola's. Labriola viewed ideas, culture, philosophy itself as aspects or phases of work, of the practical transformation of nature; whereas Croce saw Marxism reducing thought to a mechanically conditioned product of economics considered as material fact. According to Labriola, the economic component in Marx is *history*, the synthesis of "praxis" and consciousness, a unified activity, culture, thought-in-act. For Croce,

the category of economics in Marx has a metaphysical significance, and constitutes a metaphysics of matter that thought must dissolve and "dialecticize." It is this metaphysical residue that invalidates Marx's work as philosophy. While recognizing its effectiveness on a practical-political level as a guide for action and its value for historical studies in that it emphasized the economic phase of history traditionally neglected by historiographers, he denied it any intellectual, theoretical dignity. In reality, Croce was interpreting Marx in the same economist way as the socialistically oriented positivists. For Croce, Marx was behind the positivism of Italian socialists: he was willing to allow him a place in cultural life and political ideology, but not in the realm of general theories of reality and knowledge.

After criticizing Marx, Croce went on to elaborate a theory of the spirit derived from Hegel, in which the spirit is the sole protagonist of history, "becoming itself" through infinite manifestations, none of which is definitive but all of which are necessary to the historical process. This was clearly a secular, an "immanentist"<sup>12</sup> vision, containing only those metaphysical elements that cannot finally be omitted from speculative thought, and a liberal view in which all forces are considered equally legitimate, none having the right to dominate, since the historical process (the historical life of the spirit), in its interminable self-creation, automatically kindles and extinguishes any single force that strives to be supreme. In the complex knot of problems characterizing Italian cultural and political life in the decade 1900-1910, Croce became simultaneously the theoretician of the liberal State (which, as noted earlier, was already in a grave crisis) and the chief antagonist not only of positivism but also of

12. Immanentism, a term that Gramsci often uses in philosophical discussions, signifies for him above all a particular kind of idealist philosophy stemming ultimately from Hegel and represented in Italy mainly by Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, whose work involved, among other things, a negation of transcendence as conceived by the Church. Immanentism is, in relation to history, a theory according to which no external forces operate on the historical process, the process itself containing the prime motor, causes, and end of its development.

At one point Gramsci goes so far as to call the philosophy of praxis "the only consistent 'immanentist' conception," but in another place he qualifies this by saying, "The philosophy of praxis continues the philosophy of immanence but purifies it of all its metaphysical apparatus and brings it onto the concrete terrain of history."

Marxist socialism. In spurring on the revival of idealism in Italy and giving his approval to those irrationalist currents discussed above, Croce offered to the Italian haute bourgeoisie, in a period of conflict and crisis, essential ideological tools for maintaining hegemony and a sense of the continuity of its historical mission.

These are the problems that lay at the heart of Gramsci's intellectual experiences during the years in Turin. Gramsci's meditation on these problems led him to see the great limitations of socialist theory as it was being expounded at the time. It is impossible, in fact, to understand Gramsci's intellectual development in Turin before and during World War I without taking into consideration these meditations on Croce and the anti-positivist polemic interpreted in a Hegelian-dialectical key, which remained a fundamental part of his thought all through his career. This is the cultural context in which Gramsci came to understand his own experiences as a Sardinian as well. It is significant, in this respect, that Gramsci became interested in 1914 in a campaign sponsored by the Torinese section of the Socialist Party to elect to Parliament an exponent of the struggle for more democracy in the South, Gaetano Salvemini, thus drawing attention to the need for Italian socialism to adopt a national, rather than a purely working-class character, to take up the deepest problems of Italian history. In 1913-1914 Gramsci was probably not yet a member of the party. He was caught up in his university studies. Bartoli, his professor of historical linguistics, predicted a great future for him in the field of linguistics. At the same time he was drawn to the electoral campaign and participated in it enthusiastically. But if Gramsci had already begun to confront the problems of Italian socialism, he still viewed them from the standpoint of a *meridionalista* (southerner) and anti-positivist.

Gramsci's definite entry into the socialist movement took place soon after this, with his gradual withdrawal from the university. In 1912 he had taken a trip home to Ghilarza (he was to return to Sardinia only two more times, in 1920 and 1924). Upon returning to Turin he attended classes again, but a nervous breakdown in his third year (1913-1914) and a series of other illnesses forced him to halt his university activities for a while and also prevented him from

receiving part of his scholarship. To make up for this, he gave private lessons, which only tired him more. Eventually he lost the scholarship entirely. Finally, in the spring of 1915, Gramsci gave up his academic career altogether. Meanwhile, Gramsci's older brother Gennaro had come to Turin. Gennaro was already a militant socialist, who was to direct various editorial programs under Antonio. Under his brother's influence, and in the time left free by his gradual detachment from the university, Gramsci began to participate closely in the work of the Torinese Socialist section and to write for their paper, *Il Grido del Popolo* ("The Cry of the People"). When the war broke out, many of the members of his group--most of them Torinese students--enlisted, leaving Gramsci to a great extent alone and with heavy political responsibilities on his shoulders. Gramsci then became a member of the executive committee of the section. When the editor of *Il Grido del Popolo* was arrested in connection with popular insurrections in the name of "Peace!" and "Bread!," he became the new editor of the weekly. At the same time, he wrote a regular column for *Avanti!* When, afterward, *Il Grido* was shut down and a Piedmontese edition of *Avanti!* began to be published, Gramsci became the editor of that paper, too.

If one wanted any proof of the oscillation of Gramsci in this period, and of his independent and, in some measure, contradictory approach to Marxism and the revolutionary movement, he need only examine Gramsci's attitude toward interventionism--the sanctioning of Italy's entry into World War I. Among the interventionists, there were nationalist and warmongering factions, which would gradually be absorbed by Fascism; southern socialists who considered the war an opportunity to vindicate the rights of the peasantry; and social democrats and radicals of Risorgimento derivation, who saw in the war a chance to defeat the Central Powers and autocratic forces in Europe in order to establish a democratic Europe. These last were costly illusions, but illusions that were part of the ferment of socialist thought in Italy at that time so that not even Gramsci was exempt from them. Yet he was not to hold to this position for long. The Torinese uprising of 1917, which coincided with the general crisis of the armed forces in Europe and the explosion of the Russian

Revolution, found Gramsci in a position to give an able interpretation of these events. Whoever today reads the column that he wrote for *Avanti!* cannot help noticing the striking difference between these writings and other socialist propaganda of the time: in Gramsci's columns there is a fresh outlook, a lucidity and bareness of style, and a lively argumentativeness, all of which point to the emergence of a new personality on the Italian socialist scene. One finds no set phrases or commonplaces; the mentality is analytical and critical, the substance undogmatic and factual, the facts always leading up to a general discussion of the Italian and world situation. But aside from a handful of young Torinese intellectuals, hardly anyone perceived these qualities at the time. Some groups of workers realized that these unrheterical writings represented an unusually disciplined mind with a grasp of essential facts and events, but Gramsci's contact with such groups was limited. The war had made any political activity whatsoever dangerous, and this was especially true after the disastrous reversals at Caporetto,<sup>13</sup> which marked an official change for socialism (the right wing, which dominated the Socialist group in Parliament) from neutralism to the defense of the national territory and an approval of the war. However, the limited contacts that were made through these articles and the small success that they afforded Gramsci at the time were to prove extremely important for him in the postwar period.

But even though Gramsci was by now a salaried functionary of the Socialist Party, he was not yet willing to ally himself definitely with any one tendency within the party rather than another. But there was one exception to this attitude and that was in regard to the October Revolution, which inspired a striking article entitled "The Revolution Against *Capital*." Still viewing events from the double vantage-point of *meridionalista* and anti-positivist, Gramsci maintained that the Revolution had been victorious by contradicting Marx's *Capital*, or, rather, the Marxian theory of socialism as something that can be

<sup>13</sup>. Caporetto, a small town in the Venetian Alps, was the site of a crushing military defeat in October 1917, which had grave psychological repercussions throughout Italy.

brought about only by, and in, an advanced industrial society. Instead, the Revolution had won in a backward country composed predominantly of illiterate masses of peasants of hardly any political experience; it had won because of Lenin's anti-positivist, nonevolutionist doctrines that proclaimed the fundamental instrument of revolution to be the party, the vanguard of the working class, whose duty is to grasp power (i.e., take over the State) and whose perspective is that of history seen as the struggle between imperialism and the exploited masses. No Italian socialist knew Lenin's work very well at the time, but Gramsci realized that, in Lenin's view, the essential thing was to gain power wherever and whenever possible, even in backward countries, since every socialist victory meant a penetration of the imperialist front. In this article by Gramsci, there are signs that he has shifted in favor of the "Theses of Zimmerwald" (a document of the European Socialist Left condemning the war), which the majority of Socialist parties approved.<sup>14</sup> There is also a marked emphasis on a *political* interpretation of Marx as the ideological foundation of a revolutionary party.

Still, this was only one phase of Gramsci's development, when his opposition to reformism took on voluntarist<sup>15</sup> colorings and when his thought was constituted primarily of intuitions drawn from texts and events known in only a fragmentary way. Only at the end of the war, with his friends back from the trenches, the proletariat and peasant movements making demands that wartime promises be fulfilled, and the great problem of reconverting war industries overtaking a devastated Europe, did Gramsci's thought finally mature; and even this later phase was not entirely free from doubts and contradictions.

This later stage of Gramsci's intellectual development took place

<sup>14</sup>. The Theses were drawn up at the Conference of Zimmerwald which was held in Switzerland September 5-8, 1915, and which brought together thirty delegates from European socialist parties with the aim of organizing an international action against the continuation of the war.

<sup>15</sup>. In the context of political ideology and action, voluntarism signifies an emphasis on the determination of situations by subjective forces (and hence the willed intervention of elites in the historic process) rather than by objective forces such as material, economic ones (the latter theory offering a relatively passive role to political leaders).



against a backdrop of practical politics. In the factories, especially in the industrial triangle of Turin-Milan-Genoa, unions were steeling themselves for the struggle in favor of workers' rights. Gramsci's group of young Torinese intellectuals was in close touch with factory life through the Socialist section and its daily newspaper. Before long, a project proposed just after the war, of founding a weekly dedicated to drawing the workers' attention to the problem of power, was realized: the review was to be called *Ordine nuovo* ("A New Order"); its program was clear from the title and from its main arguments. The driving notion behind *Ordine nuovo* was the necessity of creating an Italian equivalent of the Russian "soviets". This was a problem that faced socialists in various European countries, above all in Germany; in Italy, however, the soviets were conceived in a particularly new way. Long before the failure of the German, Hungarian, and Finnish soviets (set up in the Russian style), *Ordine nuovo* defined the soviet as a democratic mass organism in which all workers, whether union or party members or not, should participate, and which would provide democracy "from the ground up" inside the individual factory. These soviets, or factory councils, were conceived (and then realized in the Fiat workshops in Turin) as organisms of a direct workers' democracy, possessing revolutionary potential precisely because they had grown up in the very heart of the industrial productive process. The experiment grew out of libertarian ideas (direct democracy, maximum extension of representation, mass participation of workers in their own organizations, and so forth), as well as Marxist ones (for example, the conviction that the end of exploitation and the death of a society divided into classes could come about only through a revolution that takes place inside a highly industrialized society). But its true originality consisted in the fact that it did not result from a mechanical application of the Russian model, but rather from the first formulations of theories about how to achieve a socialist revolution in a Western European country.

These theories were put to a harsh test by events themselves. In 1919-1921, Italy was shaken by a series of internal crises, making

it more evident than ever that the liberal system, which excluded the great mass parties from governmental power, had already collapsed. But the Socialist Party, divided as it was by various currents, was itself unable to guide the masses. It also became evident that the socialist movement, precisely because it was predominantly working class and lacked solid links with the peasant masses, was extremely limited politically. These limits became evident when Fascist forces started to penetrate the agrarian South. In regions like Emilia, where socialism was by now deeply rooted in the populace and preserved in numerous institutions such as the *case del popolo* and cooperatives, there was to be a fierce anti-Fascist reaction; but this was the resistance of a few regions and not a general strategy in defense of Italian democracy.

From the end of the war to 1920 a series of problems suddenly surfaced on the political scene. For example, maximalist currents came to dominate the socialist movement. At the same time, because of its violent anticlerical attitude, socialism could not reach vast portions of the peasant population that were controlled by the Catholic Party. A growing hostility toward the memory of the war, which had benefited the powerful and the profiteering but had been only a tragic farce for the individual soldier, was now turned against the returning veterans. Through 1919 and 1920, soldiers were openly scorned, especially officers of petit bourgeois origin and officers of special corps such as the *arditi*.<sup>16</sup> These social elements—mainly urban or rural petite bourgeoisie—would soon after fill the ranks of the nationalist and Fascist movements. Meanwhile, the press unleashed its revanchist campaign of hysterical outcries against the "mutilated victory" and the menace of "Bolshevism at the door." As the socialist movement became increasingly lacerated, two other factors arose to accelerate the process. First, there was the hands-off policy of the General Confederation of Labor (the major Italian labor movement, founded in 1908), which refused to be drawn into the immediate political struggle, thus blocking the energies of the entire movement. But it was also true that the guidelines of the

16. The *arditi* were volunteer commando squads, shock troops.

movement were sectarian, its goals unreachable, its strategy lacking in concreteness in the decisive trade-union sector. It was mainly these two policies—the “opportunist,” passive tactics of the Confederation on the one hand and the extremist, avant-garde combativity of the factory councils on the other—which led to the collapse and ultimate failure of that experiment. The councils lasted longer in Turin than in other places, but a heavy blow had been struck at the entire revolutionary movement in Italy. As we shall see, this failure was to contribute heavily to a further splintering of the Italian socialist movement.

Significantly, by 1920, the Russians, under Lenin's guidance, were pressing for the creation of an Italian Communist Party based on the principles of the newborn Third International.<sup>17</sup> The policies of the Third International (seconded by Lenin) had wavered on this issue, although in general leaning toward moderation rather than a complete break. But within the Italian socialist movement, several groups were striving to split the party so as to give birth to a Communist Party. The most important and best known of these was the one led by Amedeo Bordiga, a Neapolitan who had formed his own socialist circle and ran a review dedicated to the aim of creating a revolutionary party rigorously bound to the Third International—a regiment of revolutionaries equipped to take over the country. Bordiga was sectarian, dogmatic. Lenin's chief objective was the defeat of all reformist and social democratic forces; hence while he had serious reservations about Bordiga (emerging already in the appendix to his treatise *Infantile Extremism*, written in May, 1920), he was obliged to support him in this period. It was in fact Bordiga's followers who, together with a part of the group of young Torinese associated with *Ordine nuovo*, brought about the split in the Socialist

<sup>17</sup> The Twenty-one Points, a document presented at the Second Congress of the Comintern in July 1920, called for a radical break with social democratic reformism. Membership in the Third International was made dependent on acceptance of the Points. In Italy, expulsion of the reformists, an issue that caused deep rifts in the party leadership and between some party leaders and the Comintern, signified an inevitable rupture with past traditions and the formation of a new “Communist Party of Italy” functioning in accordance with the policies of the International.

Party at Livorno in January 1921 and gave birth to the Communist Party of Italy.<sup>18</sup>

The failure of the occupation of the factories (organized by the metalworkers' union—FIOM—in September 1920), the isolation of the Torinese experiment of the factory councils, and the lessening of revolutionary tension in general all contributed to the crises that made that final split in the party possible. But there were other, positive factors in the factory councils' experience that had a profound influence on Gramsci. For one thing, it had led to the formation of a new class of socialist leaders attuned to the problems of contemporary culture and closely tied to the working class. Many of these leaders were themselves workers and later were to be found in Fascist prisons, at the head of the clandestine resistance movement, at the front lines in the Spanish Civil War and the War of Liberation of 1943, and, lastly, in the postwar socialist movement. A homogeneous group was being formed on the basis of common experiences in both the practical and theoretical spheres. This was, in fact, the only group of leaders of an Italian political party that was to achieve a real unity in the following decades. A second positive factor emerging from the factory councils was the partial confirmation of the theory that the party must emerge directly from an experience of the masses. This theory did not predominate at first in the Italian Communist Party, which grew out of Bordiga's notion of the party as a narrow, combative vanguard; it was to win out only in 1925–1926. But there was already a conception of the revolution-

<sup>18</sup> During the fall and winter of 1920, the “Communist” faction within the Socialist Party emerged, and sections were formed throughout Italy. Despite their differing views, Gramsci, Bordiga, Togliatti, and others found themselves united in their opposition to “maximalist centrism.” On October 15, 1920, a manifesto was signed in Milan stating the main principles of the faction and calling for the transformation of the PSI into a new party to be called the Communist Party of Italy, Section of the Communist International. This program was confirmed at the Congress of Imola in November. The Seventeenth Congress of the PSI at Livorno opened on January 15, 1921. On January 21, after days of stormy debate and a final vote on the Twenty-one Points, the “Communist” delegates retired to another seat to draw up the constitution of their new party. A Central Committee was set up, which included Gramsci, Terracini, and others. Bordiga was, in any case, to remain the strongest force in the party for the first two years or so, until Gramsci gradually assumed the leadership he was to hold from 1924 to 1926.

ary struggle (present in Lenin's writings of the same period) as a struggle of the masses, a struggle which is at the same time an expression of the growing consciousness of the masses and a stimulant for the development of that consciousness on ever higher and more complex levels. A third positive fruit of this experience was the realization that an alliance with the peasant movement was absolutely indispensable, that it constituted the *sine qua non* of an eventual victory. Lenin's theory had been that since the peasants made up the majority of the population, it was essential to secure their support, or at least their neutrality. But in Italy, it was clear that the working class would be in a position to realize its vision of the State and democracy only if it assumed the burden of the gravest problem in national history, a dilemma left unsolved for more than half a century after Unification: the "southern question." This problem, which until then had inspired only historiographical and cultural interest, or served as a motive for protest, now became a political *fact* in the midst of the events in Turin. In Turin it became clear for the first time that the workers stood alone, indeed were automatically defeated unless they could link their forces with those of the surrounding countryside, to which they were connected, in any case, by multiple family ties. Mobilization of the countryside also entailed penetrating the armed forces, made up, for the most part, of peasants—tenant farmers and day laborers.

Thus the factory councils' experiment, while a failure in itself, contributed richly to the experience and thought of intellectuals such as Gramsci and of the workers themselves. Gramsci was undoubtedly the foremost protagonist of the whole episode. Scanning the articles and essays that he published in the weekly founded and edited by him, one perceives immediately the originality of his interpretation of the facts, the central point of which was the following notion: a socialist revolution can be born in a Western European country only from deep inside that society, in its basic productive "cells"—that is to say, within the working class, whose aim must be to appropriate existing liberal, democratic institutions and turn them to the task of solving those basic historical problems with which the bourgeoisie has never been able to deal—in the case of Italy, the legacy of problems from the period following Unification.

It was Lenin, finally, who helped Gramsci to move out from the narrow circle in which he had been operating, thus heading him toward the leadership of the newly formed Communist Party. A closer knowledge of Italian political life in general and, in particular, the anti-working-class Fascist movement overtaking the country, as well as the revolutionary reflux in the rest of Europe, had led Lenin to reject Bordiga's position as incorrect from the tactical point of view. There was another important problem: the new Communist Party had been unable to attract to itself the majority of Italian socialists, and it continued to have a polemical relationship with a Third Internationalist group led by Giacinto Serrati (head of the maximalist faction and director of *Avanti!*), which was more flexible than Bordiga's group with regard to tactical necessities within Italy. But this situation was not an absolute impasse; indeed, at exactly the same moment as a new political economy (the NEP) was being instituted in Russia and Lenin was conducting a fierce battle against extremism, a less sectarian line came to prevail within the Italian Communist Party. The only problem was that the enemy was already at the door; events were not to favor the natural development of this movement. Less than two years after the formation of the Communist Party, Mussolini, with the March on Rome (October 1922), seized power in a "legalized" *coup d'état* that had the blessing of both the monarchy and the army and the full support of Italian capitalism and the middle classes. The violence unleashed on all popular institutions was to erase decades of proletarian effort; it was only a question of time before the last vestiges of mass organizations would also be swept away. Gramsci could not have taken over the leadership of the party at a more difficult time.

Before his successful campaign of opposition to the Bordiga line within the party, Gramsci had the opportunity to participate in political events of the highest order. In the spring of 1922, he was sent to the Comintern in Moscow as a member of the Italian delegation. In direct contact with Bukharin, Trotsky, and Zinoviev, he was able to observe the political scene there at a crucial moment for Russia and the rest of the world. In June 1922, after having participated along with Bordiga in the second plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, he was made a member of that same Commit-

tee. From this privileged position he was able to follow the strategic shift away from extremism (which in Italy signified Bordiga, theoretician of the necessity for Communist abstention from elections and bourgeois parliamentarianism, for which reason his followers were called "abstentionists") to the policy of supporting the formation of a united front together with those currents of the Socialist Party faithful to the theses of the International. But this change in tactics had come too late. Fascism had already won. Moreover, it was impossible to implement this plan, since the split in the Socialist Party had come about too recently and too far to the left. The masses would not have been able to understand either this radical break or the subsequent reunification of forces resulting in a new summit of leaders. It was impossible, in any case, since Communist and Socialist leaders were already being persecuted and arrested, and the wires connecting the various parts of their organizations fast being cut.

In the midst of these struggles and debates, demonstrating, among other things, to what extent Gramsci had been right, first in his prediction of the advent of a Fascist dictatorship in Italy (something no other socialist leader had foreseen, as Trotsky pointed out in 1932) and second in his adherence to a policy of *positive* action against Fascism, requiring the mobilization of the masses and political alliances with all other anti-Fascist, socialist forces, Gramsci became severely ill. Before leaving for Moscow, he had felt exhausted and depressed; now, in Russia, he began to suffer from a nervous breakdown, with convulsions, tremors, tics, fever, and insomnia. In the summer of 1922, he recovered his health in the Serebranyi Bor Sanatorium on the outskirts of Moscow. His sojourn there was to prove immensely significant for his personal life, for it was there that he met the woman who was to become his wife, Giulia (Julka or Iulka) Schucht, one of the daughters of a family of exiles who had been friendly with the Ulyanov family and had lived in Italy. But soon after, Gramsci was separated from his new love. After the arrests of numerous Italian Communist leaders, including Bordiga, in 1923, the party leadership changed to include both Gramsci and Togliatti, who had previously been excluded from the Central Com-

mittee. But Gramsci was almost immediately replaced by Terracini and sent, instead, to Vienna at the end of 1923 to open an information bureau there.

In Vienna, Gramsci followed closely what was happening in Italy and within the Comintern, suffering greatly meanwhile because of the distance that had been put between him and Giulia, the sole source of tenderness and joy in his life at this time. He watched with alarm as everywhere the situation seemed to grow tenser and more potentially tragic: in Italy, the repression grew fiercer every day, and in Russia, a desperate struggle for the succession had followed the illness and death of Lenin. Through all of this, Gramsci continued to devise projects for new reviews, newspapers, and meetings in order to organize a common anti-Fascist front with other socialist currents. At Trotsky's request, he published a brief article on Italian Futurism in a Russian review. Now Gramsci went on to write a series of articles on the Italian political situation for the review *Correspondance Internationale*. This is also the moment when Gramsci created the new Italian Communist newspaper, *L'Unità*, and began making notes on the problem of an alliance between the lowest strata of the northern working class and the southern agrarian masses, notes which would later be turned into his famous essay, "Some Notes on the Southern Question." This essay, written in 1926 but interrupted by his arrest, undoubtedly represents the most advanced thought up to that date on how to achieve socialism in Italy.

In Vienna, Gramsci was in close contact with personalities of the Communist Left. This was an excellent vantage point from which to observe the increasingly dramatic turn of events in Russia. Gramsci judged the working-class opposition formed by Trotskyites and other anti-Stalinists as a symptom of a grave "involution" of Lenin's party and the sign of a crisis within the Soviet State. His own position was radically different from Trotsky's; however, in a series of far-sighted, monitory letters to various Italian political leaders, Gramsci made it clear that the point was not to defend Trotsky's position, but rather to defend an internal dialectic in the Russian Party that would, in turn, guarantee a democratic dialectic in Russian society itself. Gramsci reiterated this point of view in a series of letters to Togliatti,



when Togliatti, sent to Moscow in 1924 as the Italian delegate to the Comintern, adhered to Stalin's policy of condemning all opposition. Although he still controlled the majority in the Italian Communist Party, Bordiga's hold was weakening. Militant socialists loyal to the International were filling the ranks of the PCI, the official organ of which was now *L'Unità*. In one of its first issues, Gramsci published an article entitled "The Problem of Milan," in which he spoke of the necessity for the Milanese proletariat to win over to its side the social democratic masses. He defined this as a "national problem," since it was directly related to the important question of winning over the majority of the working class to revolutionary positions.

In the elections of April 1924, held in a climate of civil war and violence toward opponents of Fascism, Gramsci was elected deputy. In May he came back to Italy. He had been away for two years. From this moment on, up to the time of his arrest, Gramsci was dedicated to the task of giving a structure to the PCI and to fighting Fascism. He took part in the first national conference of the PCI, held clandestinely at Como, and there led a further attack on Bordiga's sectarian policies, without, however, winning over to his side those cadres educated and shaped by Bordiga himself (who had worked hard to build up a solid organization within the party). Soon after this, in June 1924, political life in Italy was radically upset by the assassination of the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti by a group of Fascists. It is generally assumed that the crime had been inspired by Mussolini himself, after Matteotti's parliamentary speech denouncing anti-democratic aspects of Fascist policy. This episode shook the Fascist government severely. The parliamentary opposition, made up of various elements, left Parliament and began to hold meetings outside the official assembly halls in the hope of thus forcing the king to eliminate Mussolini. Gramsci attended these meetings of the opposition (the so-called Aventine secession) and proposed an appeal to the nation and a general political strike, which, by mobilizing the masses, might provoke the fall of the dictatorship. But the other anti-Fascist parties were deceived into thinking that a moderate solution was possible. In any case, a margin for unitary action was still left, since Russia was supporting the theory of the "united front."

Although the revolutionary tide did not seem to be making much headway, reactionary forces were in retreat in many parts of the world. But in Italy, organization, power, strategy, even the will to change the course of events, were sadly lacking. Above all, among Italian political leaders, especially in liberal circles, the tragic illusion reigned that Fascism could be combated by considering it in a parliamentary context and by interpreting it as a traditional political party. The keenest analyses of this situation were made by Gramsci and by Piero Gobetti, who, in the columns of his review *La rivoluzione liberale*, was conducting a fierce campaign against the failure of the democratic spirit in Italy. Gramsci's views were reflected in a report to the Central Committee of the PCI in 1924, in articles in the new bimonthly *Ordine nuovo*, in his continued attacks on Bordiga's sectarianism, and in his attempts to construct a network of alliances with other socialist or democratic forces in the country. Most of these efforts were in vain, however, as was the attempt to transform the secession of the opposition into an antiparliament. Fascism had recovered rapidly from the Matteotti crisis, and its brutal methods were operating again in full force.

Events followed events in rapid succession. Intervals of domestic happiness were few and far between for Gramsci. In August 1924, his first son, Delio, was born in Moscow: he was able to take a look at him only the following April, when he went to Russia to take part in the meetings of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. Immediately afterward, he had to return to Italy. All his efforts now were bent on persuading the Communists to dissociate themselves from the liberal opposition's temporizing policy and to go back to Parliament. In Parliament, Gramsci gave a speech (the only one he ever delivered there) attacking Mussolini's proposed law abolishing secret associations, which was, in fact, a law directed against political parties. This law, as Gramsci immediately realized, constituted still another step leading to the liquidation of all political opposition. The leading organs of the PCI were forced to meet clandestinely. It was at one of these meetings that Gramsci declared the incompatibility of the Left faction, newly organized by Bordiga, with the character of the new PCI. (A few months later, this faction was to be dissolved

by the intervention of the representative of the Comintern, Jules Humbert-Droz.) Giulia and Delio came from Moscow for a visit, providing a serene, if brief, interlude in his life. The police were by now arresting other political figures and had searched Gramsci's house. The next party congress had to be held on foreign territory, at Lyons, with the help of the French Communist Party, in January 1926—a congress that marked a decisive turning point in the elaboration of a party strategy. Above all it was important because only then did Gramsci's policies become dominant, obtaining 90 percent of the vote. There was also the definite confirmation of the tactic of democratic alliances and of links with the basic forces of Italian society such as the peasant masses and middle classes. In addition, a plan began to be developed for the active intervention of the PCI in Italian political life, even in the event of an out-and-out dictatorship.

Giulia returned to Moscow in August 1926; a second son, Giuliano, was born a month later. Gramsci was never to see him. In Italy, the political situation was at a high point of tension. Gramsci worked feverishly to carry out the program that had emerged from the Third Party Congress at Lyons and to weld together the severed wires of the organization, particularly the clandestine ones. He spoke out one last time with regard to the Bolshevik Party crisis (the battle against Trotsky and the opposition, which was growing fiercer daily). In a letter dated October 14, 1926, which Togliatti showed only to Bukharin, Gramsci warned the Soviet Party Central Committee that "the role of leadership that the Soviet Communist Party had fought for and gained under the energetic direction of Lenin" was then in danger of being destroyed by these internal quarrels.

By this time, freedom of movement was almost totally circumscribed in Italy. There was the vague plan of sending Gramsci to Switzerland, but he himself was against it. He was busy writing his essay on the "southern question" and preparing for a clandestine meeting of the PCI Central Committee in November 1926, on which occasion Humbert-Droz was to speak out on the reasons for the conflict between the Stalinist majority and the groups led by Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev. But when Gramsci left for the

small town outside Genoa where the meeting was to have been held, a police officer in Milan warned him to return to Rome. An attempt to assassinate Mussolini (which had the appearance of being staged by the Fascists themselves) offered the final pretext for snuffing out the last vestiges of liberty in Italy. This was accomplished by the Exceptional Laws, legitimizing the arrest of all opponents of the regime, even deputies protected by parliamentary immunity. These laws were not supposed to apply to deputies who had returned to Parliament after the Aventine secession; but despite this fact, the Communists, the only ones who had returned to the Chamber of Deputies, were the first to be arrested.

November 8, 1926, the date of Gramsci's arrest, marks the beginning of the last period of his life. Gramsci was only thirty-five at the time, but he was literally consumed by his political activities. It was sheer willpower that had driven this frail body not quite five feet high, with its crooked spine, huge leonine head, and metallic blue eyes. Now the five years of political internship to which he was originally consigned and the twenty years of prison to which he was subsequently condemned would prove to be the same thing as a death sentence: in fact, Gramsci was to emerge from prison only to die.<sup>19</sup> The letters included in this collection document the various phases of these last ten years of Gramsci's life. Reading them, we are able to follow the course of his life in this period, from the tedious transfers from one prison to another and the physically intolerable

19. After Gramsci's arrest, he was sent to the island of Ustica off the Sicilian coast, where he remained in forced residence until January 20, 1927, when he was taken to San Vittore Prison in Milan. A judge of the Milanese Military Tribunal had in effect reopened the case against him. On May 12, 1928, he arrived at Regina Coeli Prison in Rome. The trial of Gramsci and twenty-one other political prisoners began in May and ended June 4. Gramsci was found guilty of conspiracy and of agitation provoking class hatred, civil war, insurrection, and alteration of the Constitution and the form of the State through violence; he was sentenced to twenty years, four months, and five days. After a medical examination, he was assigned to Turi penal colony near Bari for physically and psychologically unfit prisoners. He left Rome on July 8, 1928, arriving there on July 19. Gramsci remained at Turi until November 19, 1933, when he was transferred to a clinic in Formia halfway between Rome and Naples. At Formia, which he reached on December 7, 1933, he was kept under a heavy security guard. On August 24, 1935, he arrived at the Quisisana Clinic in Rome, where he died on April 27, 1937.

existence in his cell, where he was plagued by terrible ailments, to the haunting presence in him of "the great world beyond," where all of his affections and memories were confined, and the sturdy growth of intellectual plans and endeavors. These letters contain precious fragments and notes about Gramsci's plans for research and study. The Fascist public prosecutor requesting Gramsci's condemnation had repeated Mussolini's specific injunction, "We must prevent this brain from functioning for twenty years!" But even a brief glance at these pages shows that this did not happen. The last ten years were years of intense, almost uninterrupted mental activity pursued in complete—or nearly complete—isolation, with the aid of only a few books and despite great physical hardship and pain: years which, as has been said, produced the *Prison Notebooks*, a basic tool for understanding the problem of creating a socialist revolution in Italy and the rest of the modern world.

In the following pages, we will examine some of the main arguments and characteristics of Gramsci's prison writings, which mark the period of his true maturation and the culmination of his earlier experiences. Here, his own life and the events of the time become subsumed into something vaster and are absorbed into a general political theory.

### III

How did the world of politics appear to Gramsci when he entered prison in February 1927, never to emerge again? Gramsci was well aware that there was not even a slim chance of his ever being released, but he never says so explicitly and may not even have admitted it to himself. With his keen sense of history, he undoubtedly realized (as innumerable opponents of the regime did not) that Fascism was no momentary deviation, no artificial, improvised edifice which the iron laws of liberal economy would soon crush. He knew that Fascism was the product of deeply rooted, widespread forces present in Italian society during its formation in the nine-

teenth century but consolidated only in the postwar period with the defeat of the working-class parties. In part it rose from old, persistent authoritarian tendencies deriving from the weakness of Italian capitalism and its refusal or, better, incapacity to deal with the essential problems of the nation. Hence there was no possibility of its being a transitory phenomenon, a violent but rapid fever. Gramsci knew that Fascism would last at least as long as his own capacity to resist in prison, and this caused him to imagine for himself a future in which nothing would ever change. The period of active participation in the tragic struggles of "the great world beyond" was closed to him forever. He could no longer touch that world, he could only glimpse it from the windows of convoys bearing him on interminable, exhausting voyages from one prison to another up and down the peninsula, on the way to his various trials. The humid, opaque walls of a prison were to mark out the limits of another universe, a definitive one that Gramsci knew with almost mathematical certainty would terminate only with his death.

Not only is there, in the *Letters*, the lack of any direct evidence that Gramsci was conscious of being cut off forever from the world, but reading them, one has the impression that he operated on the basis of the contrary hypothesis—namely, that everything was still possible. Only at the end, in a letter of 1936 to his wife, did Gramsci say in reference to his prison life, "Liberty grew possible only for the inner life, and my will became solely the will to resist," thus giving an *a posteriori* definition to a mode of life which, for ten years, had appeared to be the opposite of what it was. For ten years Gramsci persisted in demanding and fighting for everything he had a right to have, whether paper and writing materials, books, or visits. Scrupulously, pedantically, he exploited every minimal occasion. Refusing to let himself be beaten down by his various illnesses, he continued to nag the authorities for doctors' visits, check-ups, and medicines. Only a few weeks after his confinement in Ustica, he wrote to his friend Piero Sraffa in Cambridge that he had devised a program of collective study together with other political prisoners—a veritable university with courses arranged according to the difficulty of the subject matter and the various cultural levels of the

students. Every new hardship or annoyance provoked a reaction from Gramsci, even if he realized that it was part of a deliberate plan of psychological and physical torture. He busied himself with memorandums and written appeals concerning his prison sentence, not because he had hopes of a new trial (he knew perfectly well that it had been a political trial) but because he thought it important to demonstrate how grotesque that trial had been from a juridic point of view. With similar energy he worked to foil all of the attempts—even those made in good faith—to force him to sign a request of pardon from Mussolini, who was using such means (sometimes successfully in the case of other political prisoners) to bolster his powerful position and to silence the few platonic protests of "democratic" Europe.

Thus Gramsci rebelled if his sister-in-law Tania sent him medicines that he had not requested and protested violently if she undertook anything on her own regarding his trial, fearful that this might cast an equivocal light on his firm moral position. Poor Tania's life was not an easy one as she traveled the length of Italy in order to be near her brother-in-law, suffering discomforts and illnesses as well as frequent rebukes, serving as a link—the only one—between Gramsci and his distant, psychologically unbalanced wife. But right up until his last breath, it was this Russian woman from a totally different world and of a totally different mentality who played the central role in his prison life, gathering together and guarding the *Prison Notebooks*, protesting against the outrageous behavior of the police, arranging for the death mask and the cremation, and finally, together with Gramsci's brother Carlo, accompanying the corpse to the English Cemetery through the deserted streets of Rome one rainy morning in the spring of 1937.

No matter how many disappointments and incomprehensible silences there were from that quarter, Gramsci never relinquished his contact with his wife and children—children whom he hardly knew but for whom he devised theories of child education, drew up reading lists, invented games, and told fantastical stories. He exhibited the same kind of patience in his letters to his mother in Sardinia, asking her innumerable questions about popular Sardinian expres-

sions and inquiring about relatives and events in Ghilarza. More than once he tried to explain to her why he was in prison: he was there, he pointed out, not because he was a criminal but rather because he had been "a warrior in a battle," imprisonment having been the least of the risks. In his own words, Gramsci refused to let go of the "threads of life." If life seemed distant and inaccessible, the slightest episode—the glimpse of a crack of sky, the arrival of a package of books—was enough to let him feel, for an instant, its nearness and palpability.

Night and day, because of chronic insomnia, Gramsci continued to fix his attention on the things that surrounded him (those few shabby objects that were not much worse than what he had ever known living in furnished rooms, squalid *pensionari*, obscure hotels) until he succeeded in giving a precious consistency to that tiny world, moving inside it as if it constituted an integral part of the world beyond. For him, it was as if those years were a time of waiting, a pause and a preparation; he surveyed them lucidly while witty phrases and ironic perceptions helped to prove to him that he was not only alive but active and present. Expressions of melancholy or of discouragement, as they appear in the letters, were only a means to an end, a way of penetrating to the heart of an idea or an emotion. Gramsci never let his deepest feelings rise to the surface, reluctant to admit what he knew to be true—namely, that life in the world was definitely over for him.

If it was over, then it was necessary to look at it in a different way. The final and conclusive proof that, after he was sentenced to twenty years of prison, the world appeared to Gramsci as something forever ended, the extreme limits of which he could almost reach out and touch, emerges from the general tenor of the *Notebooks*, the scheme according to which they were gradually composed, and the very philosophy which permeates them. For years Gramsci had observed the political scene, commenting on day-to-day events in a series of notes which, as he himself remarks in a letter, "could have filled the covers of twenty books." He had attempted to grasp the meaning of those events without ever subjecting them to a rigid schematization. Now, however, he was forced to gaze on that same world from



a different angle, a privileged position that was also, however, an immobile, fixed point in the universe, the dimensions and destiny of which he already knew. From there he maintained his polemical spirit, his antagonism toward figures and attitudes of the "mutable" world, but he began now to view these things from a new perspective, one which we can already define as *historical*.

In one of the first letters to his sister-in-law Tania after the prison doors have closed behind him, Gramsci announces that he wants to undertake some intellectual endeavors that will be *für ewig*, in the Goethean sense of something disinterested and eternal. But disinterested will mean for Gramsci historical, scientific (the two terms being almost synonymous for him since science always signified for him historical-materialist analysis).

In the following pages, we will examine some of the characteristic arguments and underlying notions of this work done *für ewig*, bearing in mind, however, that we are dealing with a body of work left in a fragmentary state. Here and there one finds entire essays, but most of these pages consist of notes, projects, and sketches of essays that remain to be written. Given the conditions of Gramsci's prison life and the fact that he was forced to work without the aid of a real library, such fragmentariness was inevitable. But it was also to some extent willed, an implicit aspect of his method. For one of Gramsci's firmest tenets was his conviction that the "philosophy of praxis" (the term he used for Marxism, partly in order to elude the censors) can never be systematic. Marxism is methodology constantly referred back to specific fixed principles, but never speculation (metaphysics). In other words, theoretical discussion must remain open to all new contributions and be constantly verified in relation to historical reality and the experiences of the masses.

The first problem with which Gramsci had to come to grips in prison was an eminently political one never explicitly formulated in his work: the reasons for the victory of Fascism and the defeat of the proletariat in Italy. Clearly Gramsci was no longer interested in the day-to-day progress of that victory and defeat, the behavior of the various parties, the immediate play of political forces. In the *Notebooks* and the *Letters* it is difficult to find references to current events;

even the word *fascism*, the few times that it appears, is used only to note a fact. Mussolini's name seldom appears, although Gramsci often refers to articles in the journals he directed. But fear that his other work—not only his letters—might be inspected was not the sole reason for this choice. The point is that Gramsci was now considering these matters from a new, original viewpoint, the perspective of the so-called "long period." For Gramsci considered it his task to delineate the conditions for a future victory on the part of the working class rather than to uncover the reasons for the immediate defeat; and he maintained that these conditions could be found only in the historical process—that is to say, through a Marxist analysis of the real forces operative in national and international life, an analysis made precisely with the idea of transforming capitalist society.

Thus the first aspect of this general problem with which Gramsci deals is that of intellectuals in Italian history. As early as March 1927, Gramsci wrote to Tania that he intended to undertake "a study of Italian intellectuals, their origins, cultural groupings, and modes of thought," in order to examine "the formation of the public spirit in Italy"—a theme that runs all through the *Letters* and probably occupies more space than any other in his manuscripts. In a letter of July 3, 1931, Gramsci states,

... one of the things that has interested me most in recent years is the history of Italian intellectuals. I want to examine the idea of the State, as well as to trace the historical development of the Italian people.

In a letter of September 7 of the same year, he explains:

I carry the notion of the intellectual much further, not limiting myself to the usual concept of the "great intellectuals." This research will also concern the concept of the State, which is usually thought of as political society—i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy—and not as an equilibrium between political society and civil society, by which I mean the hegemony of one social group over the whole nation exercised through so-called private organizations such as the Church, trade

unions, or schools. For the sphere in which intellectuals especially operate is that of civil society . . .

This passage points up the basic aims of Gramsci's studies of the intellectual and also indicates their general value and applicability to complex articulated societies possessing the highly evolved civil society of advanced capitalism. By civil society Gramsci indicates something much broader than what Hegel or Marx meant by it—namely, the entire complex of social, cultural, and political organizations and institutions in a particular society—everything, in other words, that is not strictly part of the State. Hegemony, the Gramscian concept *par excellence* and the very fulcrum of his thought, is pictured as an equilibrium between civil society and political society—more specifically still, as an equilibrium between “leadership” or “direction” (*direzione*) based on consent, and “domination” (*dominazione*) based on coercion in the broadest sense. A “historical bloc”—another key concept—is formed only when this equilibrium exists, that is to say, when a given class succeeds in maintaining hegemony over society through both direction and domination, persuasion and force. Whenever direction lags and the ideological grasp on the masses lessens, the State enters into a state of crisis, allowing other classes to penetrate the spaces it has failed to occupy, and to advance toward a hegemonic position. One main example of a state in crisis which Gramsci offers is that of Piedmont, which dominated the Italian peninsula in the period of Unification without ever being truly hegemonic. But Gramsci uses this term in a somewhat different way, associating it exclusively with civil society as opposed to political society, when he wants to emphasize above all the great task of cultural, “ideal” direction as something necessarily complementing and accompanying the seizure of State power in all of its phases. It is here that Gramsci shows himself to be most original, when he insists on the necessity of achieving hegemony through all of the organs of civil society *before* as well as after taking over the structures of the State. If “dominance plus direction” can be seen (as Togliatti, for example, saw it) as really no more than an extension of the notion of “dictatorship of the proletariat,” this new concept of hegemony

and the crucial role it gives to intellectuals on all levels of society is something quite unique in the history of Marxist thought. Thus we should not be surprised to see, throughout his work, Gramsci emphasizing the present need to study historically and to analyze the development of civil society (the means used to obtain consensus) rather than that of political society (the instruments of class dictatorship)—in short, the problem of culture as well as that of power.

Gramsci's first project, explicitly set forth, is a history of civil society based on an analysis of the behavior of intellectuals considered in a broad sense as “organic intellectuals” (this formulation from the *Notebooks* will be dealt with shortly). How did civil society acquire its present structure? Which ideas and intellectual currents guided and influenced this process, and through which channels and in relation to which historically determined social forces did they operate? The second project is expressed more cautiously: it is more important to make a historical study of the means for procuring consensus (either partial or general) than of the instruments used by the State (i.e., in order to effect dictatorship by one class). There is clearly a reference here to Fascism (the phase of pure repression) as well as to the proletarian and socialist movement victorious in the Soviet Union, defeated elsewhere. Referring specifically to passages in the later works of Lenin calling for a deeper analysis of the problem of consensus—and hence culture and hegemony—in the newly formed Soviet society, Gramsci maintains that it is precisely on this terrain that the socialist movement has failed and will necessarily be tested in the future. Thus for Gramsci the study of the role and function of the intellectual is intimately related to the core of revolutionary strategy since a working-class victory can be assured only when working-class hegemony has been achieved over the whole of society in the “long historical period.”

Gramsci's most original contribution to Marxist thought emerges from his study of these problems and branches out in two directions: the study of the history and ideologies of intellectual groups in Italy throughout the centuries (both “creators” and “distributors” of culture) and a critical confrontation with the so-called “great intellectuals” and great syntheses that exercised hegemony in more spe-

cific ways. Gramsci's work in this area is never merely descriptive. For example, he never limits himself to tracing back intellectual groups to their social base, to the classes from which they derive or whose interests they serve; he always goes on to view them in relation to the concrete historical problems of a given moment. There is never the reduction of a "superstructural" fact (elsewhere Gramsci analyzes the relationship between structure and superstructure, as they appear in Marx's work); rather, it is always considered a "moment" or phase of historical analysis, of that unitary process in which all of the elements usually distinguished abstractly operate dialectically.

Regarded from this point of view, Italian history is, for Gramsci, the history of an imperfect fusion between political society and civil society. Italian intellectuals were almost always active outside their own country—first, as functionaries of the Roman Empire and of the medieval Church, then later when they had to exercise their talents on foreign territory because of the political disintegration of Italy, the lack of religious reform, and the centuries-long separation of the intellectuals from the people, who were subjected to the hegemony of a largely religious culture bypassed by modern science. This general approach to the subject, together with related studies—the problem of the Italian language and dialects, the lack of a national-popular literature—led Gramsci to invent the categories of the "organic intellectual" and the even more important "collective intellectual," which linked his research more specifically to politics and the State. The "organic intellectual" is one who works consciously for his own social class, convinced that it has a historical "right" at a given moment. Intellectuals working on behalf of a given class to obtain the consensus of the masses for the State need not represent the most advanced and modern culture: they may well represent an intellectual system superseded by a more scientific one. All the more reason to dissect and criticize the dominant culture at each point.

It is criticism that constitutes for Gramsci the greatest achievement of modern philosophy from Kant to Marx, in whose work it reaches its greatest scientific validation. Criticism in this context means a confrontation of the real, practical (i.e., political) significance of a

given cultural attitude or philosophy with the way in which it is formulated. In other words, criticism involves testing the scientific coherence of a specific philosophy and isolating those aspects that reveal the presence and operation of particular ideologies.

These ideas are put to their greatest test in Gramsci's analyses of the work of Benedetto Croce. The acquisition of effective hegemony always demands a critical confrontation with the apex of a given culture and its leading personality (the "great intellectual"). In Gramsci's eyes, Croce represented the most advanced phase of modern thought. Marx had proceeded similarly when he combated Max Stirner, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, and others, leading his longest and most important attack against Hegel and classical German philosophy. Critical thought—specifically, Marxist critical thought, or what Gramsci terms "the philosophy of praxis"—is not a level of consciousness that can be immediately acquired. It depends on discussions, debates, historical analyses carried out by those who identify themselves with the working class and its history. This is the guiding principle of Gramsci's studies of Croce, which continue Marx's work by inserting the philosophy of praxis into concrete Italian reality.

Today Gramsci himself is accused by the Left in Italy and elsewhere of "Croceanism." His critics attack him on the grounds that he considers history from a "superstructural," cultural, and hence voluntarist perspective. But this is a superficial accusation. It is true that Gramsci's thought evolved from Croce's—this was perfectly natural. The point of departure for a Marxist thinker is always culture as a whole and not, as many people argue abstractly, a presumed set of Marxist doctrines torn from their original context. Indeed, Marxism demands a constant confrontation with a historically determined culture, together with the effort to supersede it—that is, to make that culture scientific by removing every trace of ideology. But Gramsci seems also to be implying that, over the centuries, when Marxism has succeeded in unifying knowledge, its destiny will be to disappear: Marxism as a separate ideology will be no more, having become one with man's various scientific and intellectual enterprises.

Thus the confrontation with Croce was a natural as well as a

significant phase in Gramsci's development of a scientifically based vision of history. At the center of Croce's thought lay the concept that history is an ethico-political manifestation, the realization on a political level of the strongly felt ideals of groups of leaders. Croce's criticism of positivism was based on this concept, as was his secular, immanentist doctrine of life as the history of the human spirit. Assuredly, the elaboration of this historical vision, together with the fact that he succeeded in attracting to him the foremost intellectuals on all levels of society, gave him a position of great eminence in the cultural world. Gramsci was convinced that the rational, valid parts of Croce's philosophy should be preserved, in particular his conviction that man must live without transcendent religions no matter how disguised. His religion—the "religion of liberty"—constituted the most advanced, modern religiosity of the day precisely because it was earthly, worldly. For Croce, history is, at every moment and in every phase of its development, liberty. No providential design, no finalism guides history, but rather the effective expression of man's inner life as it exists in the minds of the elite seeking to incarnate it.

But this is precisely where Gramsci's criticism begins. What he attacks is, briefly, Croce's neglect of the *Weltanschauung* of the masses, his ignoring of the State and the "moment of coercion," and finally, his omission of the real class forces that operate independently of the intellectual elite. Worst of all, in Gramsci's judgment, is the way in which Croce failed to distinguish between liberty as a method of political struggle—that is, as a means for *liberating* all of mankind—and liberty as the historical process itself. It is here that Croce's thought ceases to be rigorously rational and becomes both speculation and banal common sense. Croce, Gramsci points out, would have considered even the oriental satrapies of ancient times a phase of the history of liberty, but does this mean anything more than the obvious fact that history is an endless process? The identification of the concept of liberty as a method for political struggle—concretely embodied in a political party—with "history as liberty" actually allows the onlooker to cease fighting for liberty on a practical, political level. This implies a *de facto* conservative, even reaction-

ary position (despite any appearance to the contrary), involving the transformation of history into ideology. The limits of Croceanism emerged only when the general speculative commitment to liberty became transformed, unacknowledged, into the doctrine of a particular party with contingent class interests. Thus Gramsci describes the process that led Croce to provide, wittingly or not, the ideological "justification" of Fascism and, later, to intensify his attacks on Marxism in the 1930's.

But Gramsci is not content merely to point out the gaps between science and ideology in Croce's thought. He goes on to analyze the principal phases of development of this philosophy: first, a positivist Marxism modified by Labriola; thereafter, an initial revision of Marx (which Gramsci takes to task for the distortions of Marx's literal meaning contained therein); then Croce's influence on the entire revisionist movement (despite Bernstein's nominal prominence, Gramsci considers Croce the real leader); and finally, his recent work, in which history is considered as exclusively the history of philosophers and Marxism as a metaphysical concept in which economics plays the role of a hidden God.

Gramsci's criticism of Croce—in particular, his historiographical work and its practical, political significance—is flanked by two other battles in the realm of ideas. To begin with, Gramsci attacks the vestiges of positivism in Italian culture, coining the term "Lorianism" to describe it. Achille Loria (1857–1943) was a well-known Italian sociologist of positivist tendency whose ideas were, for Gramsci, a model of the pseudoscientific mentality based on a "vulgar-materialist" view of history that was widespread among Italian intellectuals at that time and characterized the culture of the nation as a whole. What Gramsci particularly objected to was the lack of a critical spirit, which when combined with lax moral standards, amounted to "a total irresponsibility toward the function of national culture." Likewise he attacked the schematic, mechanistic concepts of Bukharin's *Popular Essay on Sociology*, in which Marxism is reduced to a crude materialism lacking the essential component of history.

Other contemporary philosophies were no safer from his barbs—as, for example, American pragmatism, especially the thought of



William James, with which Gramsci was quite familiar. Indeed, a discourse on pragmatism offered him the opportunity to clarify his own concept of the *practical*. For the Marxist, *practical* means *political*—namely, the actions of organized masses. For the Jamesian-type pragmatist, it means the control that the individual exercises over theories by being able to check them against immediate experience.

The basic tenet of pragmatism, as James describes it (namely, that the best way to argue the different points of a particular theory is to begin by determining what practical difference it would make if one or the other of two alternatives were "true"), reveals that pragmatist philosophy is politically unmediated. The individual Italian or German philosopher relates to the practical sphere through mediations. . . . The pragmatist seeks an unmediated relationship; but in reality it is the Italian or German-type philosopher who is more practical than the pragmatist, who bases his judgments on immediate "raw" reality: the other's goal is a higher one, and he tends to raise the extant cultural level. Hegel is the theoretical forerunner of the liberal revolutions of the nineteenth century. But what have the pragmatists accomplished besides helping to create the Rotary Club and supporting every single backward, conservative movement? (*Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* ["Historical Materialism and the Philosophy of Benedetto Croce"], p. 45.)

If Gramsci was preoccupied on the one hand with the role and nature of the intellectual, the complement of that concern was his long consideration of the problem of power. The second important topic of Gramsci's prison writings thus centers upon the State—the nature, origin, and destiny of the modern State. In Gramsci's eyes, Marxian theory still needed a truly historical examination of the nature of the State and of civil society, which the State organizes, repressing or liberating its vitality, as the case may be. Finally, Marxism lacked a historical account of that instrument created by modern civil society for the formation of the State—the party.

It is this wide area of problems that Gramsci's *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo stato moderno* ("Notes on Machiavelli, Politics, and the Modern State") covers, after an initial consideration of Marx's and Lenin's theories of the State. Recognition and illumination of these problems was an essential step for revolutionary strategy in

view of the revolutionary retreat in Europe after 1919—that is to say, for the strategy of the "long period." Gramsci's ideas are truly unique here, for they reverse the usually conceived Marxist-Leninist sequence: the process of extinguishing the State (and hence its coercive institutions such as the police and armed forces) necessarily precedes, rather than follows, the seizure of power on the part of the proletariat, indeed is closely bound to that very seizure of power. The seizure of power and the extinction of the State—in other words, the formation of a new proletarian, classless State—are entirely dependent on the ability of the working-class party to interpret the will, and to organize the energies, of the majority of the laboring forces, hence of civil society. Success depends, in short, on the effectual hegemony that the proletarian party comes to exercise over the whole of society. The extension of this hegemony over the decisive strata of society during the progressive struggle for State power gradually dissolves the coercive elements of the State. As the State begins to be a State for all members of society, it "extinguishes" itself, the elements of force and coercion dying out in direct proportion to the increase of elements of hegemony and consensus.

This two-way theory of Gramsci's has nothing to do with social democracy, nor does it involve, in any way, the exclusion of armed struggle in a violent, coercive phase of the revolutionary battle. The recourse to arms is always present in Gramsci's mind, but as he explains in *Notes on Machiavelli* and elsewhere, he does not consider it the basic instrument of revolutionary action. The revolution is, for him, the intervention of the masses, conscious of their rights and of their own strength, in the sphere of the bourgeois State, which, purged of those coercive elements characteristic of a society divided into classes, is radically transformed into a classless society. Obviously, this is a long-range theory. But to his mind every other definition of the revolutionary theory was illusory. The danger, as I have suggested, is to identify this theory of Gramsci's with social democratic reformism, from which it is entirely distinct. For Gramsci, the basic problem is the State, the conquest and dissolution of the bourgeois classist State—a problem toward which social democrats have been traditionally indifferent. But the final proof of how different

Gramsci's vision is from both social democracy and extremism lies in his discussion of the *party*.

We have seen how Gramsci interprets the problem of the State and the formation of intellectuals in historical and theoretical terms: this is the same approach that he uses with regard to the question of the party. For Gramsci, "State" and "party" are two complementary terms. The modern State, first theorized by Machiavelli, is the creation of a party—that is to say, of a social class, a ruling class that is able to produce its own political personnel and a philosophy suited to its specific goals. The Prince is nothing more than the image of this new social entity, and the party becomes an even more "conscious" and essential part of civil society.

In Gramsci's work there are many pages dedicated to an analysis of the party, pages that are unique in Marxist literature and political philosophy in general. His notes and outlines for research touch on political organisms in Europe from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment; Catholic organizations (religious orders and political groups); the political party in the true sense of the word (as that instrument and means for the participation of civil society in the life of the State that came into being only after the French Revolution); and the "party" nature of phenomena in other parts of the world, such as the Rotary Club and new planned production techniques ("Fordism") in America. These analyses, or partial analyses, help to throw new light on the structure of civil society within which the revolutionary party must act and also help to define its task, a task that can be carried out only if there is a full consciousness of these complex problems and their historical character. This is the context in which Gramsci formulates the suggestive metaphor of the "new Prince" to describe that party which must organize a collective will bent on realizing hegemony over the whole of society, thus creating a new State.

The "new Prince," as Gramsci conceives it, must necessarily be a proletarian party of Marxist inspiration. This proposal has complex theoretical, historical, and political implications. The task of a Marxist party is to organize the mass of workers and other laborers in a permanent structure and to exercise hegemony over the great

majority of both the proletarian masses and the middle classes. In order to accomplish this, it must graft itself onto the history of a single nation, transcending the traditional party organization (i.e., the party that originated as a club, then evolved into the "party of opinion," in reality an electoral machine where decision-making power is held by elites and exercised in coalitions at the summit). Only a Marxist party, Gramsci maintained, could become that new organism of civil society—the party that is *part* of society, operating dialectically in relation to other parts and capable of founding a State for all members of society precisely because of its daily dependence on the active, conscious consensus of the great laboring masses. This is the core of Gramsci's conception of the party. It was with this kind of party in mind that he considered the conquest of the bourgeois State an action essentially based on consensus and the first stage in a radical transformation of the State in which the phase of hegemony would prevail over that of coercion. This was, admittedly, political strategy of the "long period," but a strategy that, Gramsci was convinced, would endure once it was victorious.

Certainly, now and then, there are "integralist" elements in Gramsci's discussion of the party—that is to say, a tendency to attribute to the workers' party all of those functions that usually belong to civil society in its multiple articulations and organisms. Yet the main inspiration (and the part of his discourse that in the future should have most influence on other Marxists) is *liberal*, indeed points to the creation of a new kind of party in relation to Lenin's party—a mass party based on consensus and on a winning over of the masses to revolutionary strategy, a party, in this case, profoundly rooted in the realities of Italy and capitalist Europe.

The third step which Gramsci takes, after studying the nature and role of the intellectuals and the party, involves an application of these general principles to a concrete national reality. Gramsci's writings on the Risorgimento deal with those forces and movements of the nineteenth century that formed the modern structure of the Italian State with which the proletariat now has to grapple. Gramsci's notes on the Risorgimento offer still another example of his method, deriving from—and at the same time constituting the point of depar-

ture for—the whole of his theoretical, historical work. The Risorgimento provides the concrete, immediate ground for construction of the theory of the “long period.” Gramsci considers it the task of every philosopher-politician (as well as of the “collective intellectual” that must become the new Prince, the revolutionary party) to interpret his (and its) own history in similar fashion, since this history inevitably converges with that of the nation. Only in this way can “thought” become “life,” and theory be transformed into the thought and actions of the masses, the nexus of theory and “praxis” finally grown conscious. Thus Gramsci’s study of the Risorgimento bears a more directly practical, political weight than his other studies. If Italian history is analyzed according to scientific (Marxist) principles, Gramsci maintains, it will of itself indicate the lines of future strategy, enabling the party to transform itself from a minority propagandistic outfit into the builder of a new State. But this transformation can take place only if the party is deeply rooted in the reality in which it operates, so that its strategy thus emerges from within as a superior consequence of the history that precedes it.

In this section of the *Notebooks*, Gramsci proceeds to destroy a double image of the nineteenth century produced by the rhetoric of intellectuals and politicians who participated in the creation of the united Italian State. This image was the representation of the Risorgimento as the climax and logical end of Italy’s entire history from the Roman Empire to the present day (this history being the realization of an ever-expanding, God-given plan) and, at the same time, the work of a narrow circle of people—a heroic, farsighted elite nourished by the idea of liberty, an elite that was to find its high priest in Croce. For Gramsci, this interpretation of the Risorgimento was merely a “historical novel,” a “fetishistic view of history” corresponding directly to practical, political interests, to the needs of a particular ideology. Gramsci thought that it was essential to examine this and other theories of the Risorgimento. However, his aim was not only to reveal the various mystifications—the class content—of these theories; it was, above all, to study the process by which a particular hegemony was achieved in relation to certain focal points of Italian history. Thus, for him, the Italian bourgeoisie was not *the*

bourgeoisie (an abstraction), but rather *that* particular class with *that* particular culture and structure, concentrated in certain large cities and called upon to act in a specific Italian and international situation. The very term “bourgeoisie” was too generic, since this phenomenon embraced various social strata and was characterized by different kinds of productive, cultural, and other activities, and by differences of region and environment.

An analysis of the political conflicts among these various elements, as well as of the behavior of the masses (especially the peasants, varying greatly from the “plebeian” southerners to the farmers of the North), and of the various States into which the peninsula was subdivided, showed that it was inevitable that the moderate current (which was to have Cavour at its head and the Savoy in its service) should emerge as hegemonic. Like other *meridionalisti* of democratic leanings, Gramsci defines the conclusive phase of the Risorgimento as a *conquista regia* (“royal conquest”), but qualifies this judgment in an important way. This conquest, which subordinated the South to a monarchic-moderate leadership with all of its consequences (the strict limitation of suffrage, the branding of insurrections of land-hungry peasants as brigandage and hence a problem for the police, and so forth) momentarily provided an effectual solution to the problem of national unification (for example, through the creation of an Italian home market) and, though to a limited extent, to the problem of spiritual unity in the nation. This double solution was responsible for the hegemony of the moderates, a hegemony that the democrats (Mazzini, Garibaldi *et al.*) were not able to attain.

Gramsci is able, through these analyses, to demolish an image of the Risorgimento created by left-wing rhetoric. The defeat of the Italian “revolution” interpreted and led by the democrats was no one’s fault, but rather the result of inadequate theory and strategy. It was due in turn to the subaltern petit bourgeois, artisan position they represented. On the other hand, the rare moments of insight into the real problems of the country (such as the crucial city-country nexus, which provided the basis for a federal-republican platform) were quickly submerged, failing to reach the vast sectors of the population directly affected. It is in this context that Gramsci outlines

first the formation of the Italian bourgeoisie, then the kind of State to which it gave rise, and finally the birth of an urban proletariat absent from political life during almost all of the nineteenth century. The great unresolved problem remained the countryside—the South, illiteracy, the surplus of manpower—a problem which, even though it provoked explosive protests and insurrections, never became the basis for a political strategy with the aim of renewing and expanding the State, so that Italy might become a truly national State for all of its citizens.

The problem of the South provides the link between Gramsci's work on the essay on the "southern question," interrupted by his arrest, and his elaboration in prison of a theory of history based on the perspective of the "long period." The lack of a political party invested with a historical vision (historical materialism, science rather than phraseology) had cleared the way for the heirs of the moderates, who could no longer, however, claim a historical justification on the basis of the relatively progressive program that had guaranteed the hegemony of their class in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the moderates were by now intent only on preserving those government institutions specifically tailored to their measure. But there was a significant new fact: the proletariat had become a class, so that the ruling class, in order to reign supreme, would have to become a dictatorship.

In the "long period," the dictatorial solution (in effect, dictatorship by the bourgeoisie) would necessarily be transitory: deep changes wrought in the composition of society and in the consciousness of the masses would make it impossible to obstruct a progressive democratization of the State. But one condition was essential if this process was to take place—namely, that the liberal concept of the inevitable progress of liberty in the course of history be replaced by the program of action of a political party set on attaining that very liberty for the majority of Italian citizens. Thus in Gramsci's eyes, the success of the Italian revolution depended above all on the immense task of educating and mobilizing the masses and on the development of a vast nonsectarian (non-Bordigan) party based on the working

class and aimed at gaining the majority of it, but at the same time allied with other social groups, such as the peasantry and the lower middle classes, that also had everything to gain from a further democratization of the post-Risorgimento Italian State.

One could go on to discuss numerous other problems treated by Gramsci in the *Notebooks*—philosophical ones (the philosophy of praxis, structure and superstructure, etc.) as well as historical, sociological, literary ones, and the question of the organization of culture: only the most salient points have been touched on in this essay. The important thing is to note how all of these discussions are illuminated by the same steady vision, a vision that Gramsci himself called "absolute historicism." This vision of history, free from any and every religious, metaphysical, or speculative transcendence, is a materialist theory that Gramsci strives to make ever less ideological and more scientific. Gramsci is well aware that this goal can be reached only when materialist theory penetrates the consciousness of the masses and thus becomes an active instrument for their liberation. He was convinced that no nation could avoid or eliminate this necessary phase of the revolutionary process—neither the Soviet Union nor any other country in which there was the seizure of State power. In a culture dominated by a bourgeois hegemony strong enough to repel almost automatically the operation of materialist, critical thought, this process was inevitable. It was inevitable precisely because the philosophy of praxis, was not, for him, a systematic set of doctrines, but rather the very life of thought itself and an experience that humanity must undergo. Gramsci was persuaded that, regardless of how long it took, this process would be realized in the world and that everywhere, at some point, this superior vision would be embodied in concrete reality.

Certainly one could go ahead to "historicize" Gramsci himself, examining to what extent he was conditioned by the cultural and historical problems of that time. There have already been efforts in that direction in Italy. But in order to carry out this criticism (which I believe would not undermine the general validity of his work), one must wait until the greater part of Gramsci's writings is directly



available in English and it becomes possible to study his work in relation not only to Italy and the rest of Europe but also to our own culture and the tasks that now face American intellectuals, philosophers, and politicians—tasks that Gramsci defines in a new and elevated way.

## II *The Letters*

## A NOTE ON THE LETTERS

THE letters in this collection represent only a small portion of the 450 or so letters by Antonio Gramsci published in *Lettere dal carcere*, edited by Sergio Caprioglio and Elsa Fubini, in Turin by Einaudi, 1965, and elsewhere. All of the letters included here can be found in the Einaudi edition except those indicated as having appeared in *L'Unità* in January 1969. In compiling the notes for this edition, I was aided by the notes in the Einaudi volume, but there are also many additional notes and explanations for the American reader, including frequent quotations from the *Quaderni del carcere*. Whenever I refer to a particular volume of the Notebooks, I use the English translation of the title, even though the complete Notebooks have not been translated yet into English;\* hence page numbers always refer to the Italian edition which is listed in the Bibliography.

The letters are addressed to Gramsci's wife, Giulia, his wife's sister, Tatiana, his brother Carlo, his mother, his sister, Teresina, his two sons, Delio and Giuliano, Giuseppe Berti, a friend who was, like Gramsci, confined on the island of Ustica in 1927, and the economist Piero Sraffa.

On Ustica Gramsci could write as many letters as he liked, but in Milan he was limited to two a week. At Turi Prison in Apulia he was allowed to write only to his family, for three years (from 1928 to 1931) only every fifteen days, but after that every week. His wife lived in Russia from 1926 on, whereas his sister-in-law lived in Italy.

\* A substantial volume of selected, translated passages from the Notebooks has recently appeared, however (see Bibliography).

This is one reason why Gramsci writes to Giulia mostly through Tania, either by having her convey the substance of his letters to her to Giulia, or by including letters to Giulia in his correspondence to Tania.

I

Ustica

December 9, 1926

Dear Tatiana,

I arrived at Ustica on the seventh. On the eighth I received your letter of the third. Gradually, from letter to letter, I'll bring you up to date on my trip. When I'm rested from all this exhaustion and insomnia, my impressions and feelings about what I've seen will be clearer. The particular character of this trip made it rather uncomfortable—even a robust person, traveling for hours and hours on slow trains and steamers, with irons around his wrists and a chain binding him to his companions, would have suffered. But the trip was extremely interesting and varied—sometimes Shakespearean, other times pure farce. It's almost impossible to tell you about one nighttime scene in the Naples transit depot: the phantasmagoric, zoological types made me think of the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*. The most difficult part was the crossing from Palermo to Ustica. We tried to cross four times and three times had to return to Palermo harbor because the ferryboat was driven back by a storm. Despite all this, I've been gaining weight. I'm amazed to find that I feel so well and have such a good appetite. In two weeks' time, after I've rested and slept enough, I shouldn't have any more migraine. It will be the start of a whole new period of molecular existence.

My impressions of Ustica are favorable in every sense. The island has an area of three square miles and contains a population of about thirteen hundred, of whom six hundred are ordinary convicts—i.e., hardened criminals. The people here are extremely hospitable. We're not all settled in yet. For two nights I slept in a large room together with friends of mine. Today, I have a small room in a hotel; perhaps tomorrow or the day after, I'll be staying in a cottage that's being furnished for us. Everyone treats us with respect and dignity.

We're completely separated from the ordinary convicts. It's hard to describe their life in a few words. Do you remember Kipling's story, "The Strange Ride," in the French volume, *The Man Who*

*Wanted to Be King*.<sup>21</sup> It came to mind suddenly, and it seems to me that I'm living it. Up to now, there are fifteen of us. Life is quite peaceful. We busy ourselves exploring the island, taking long walks for five to six miles, past lovely countryside, with views of the beach and striking dawns and sunsets. The ferryboat arrives every two days, bringing newspapers, messages, and new friends, one of whom is Ortensia's husband.<sup>2</sup> I was glad to see him. Ustica is much prettier than it looks on postcards. It's a picturesque Saracen kind of town. You can't imagine how happy I am to wander from one corner of the island to another and to breathe in the sea air after a whole month of being passed from one prison to another. Especially after sixteen days of solitary confinement in Regina Coeli.<sup>3</sup> It looks as though I'm becoming the champion long-distance rock-thrower of the island—so far, I've beat all my friends.

I'm writing you skipping from one thing to another because I'm still tired. Dear Tatiana, you'll never know how moved I was at Regina Coeli to see your handwriting on the first jar of coffee and to read the name "Marietta."<sup>4</sup> I literally became a child again. Knowing that my letters are going to be read by prison authorities, I have become somewhat cautious about what I say; but avoiding certain emotions, or even toning them down, I feel like a sacristan! For this reason, I'd best limit myself to describing my sojourn at R.C. and answering your questions about it. I did receive the wool jacket and socks, which I badly needed. The light overcoat I took with me when I left didn't protect me very much in that first freezing attempt at crossing over from Palermo to Ustica. Unfortunately, I had to leave the little plates behind, since everything had to fit into the hold-all (which has come in quite handy) and I was afraid I'd break them. On the other hand, I didn't receive the Cirio,<sup>5</sup> chocolate, or sponge cake, since they are not allowed: I saw them crossed out on the list. The small coffee glass never arrived either, but meanwhile I'd built a complete service of six out of eggshells mounted perfectly on pedestals of bread. It shocked you to hear that almost all the meals were served cold, but the fact is that I ate at least twice as much as I used to in the *trattoria* and felt much better for it. All the others were sick, however, and took too many laxatives. I'm beginning to

believe that I'm much stronger than I thought; unlike the others, the only reaction I've had is one of fatigue. And aside from a few hours of resentment one night when they turned the lights off in our cells, I've been in good spirits all along. The little sprite in my head who always manages to find the humorous side of things kept me in good spirits all along. I went on reading (mostly sports and other illustrated magazines) and had begun to set up a library for myself. Here on Ustica my plan is (1) to keep healthy, in fact, to improve my health; (2) to study German and Russian systematically; and (3) to study economics and history. Along with others, I'll also work out a rational method of physical exercise. Until I'm really settled here, I will have to give you some jobs to do. I'd like to have a traveling bag I can be sure locks securely—I prefer it to a suitcase or strong-box, since I may have to move to another island or perhaps the mainland. I'll need a safety-razor with extra blades, scissors for my nails, a small file, and other things like that you can't buy here. I also need a bottle of aspirin in case the strong winds give me inflammation of the gums. Do what you will with the suit, coat, and underwear I left. Send me, as soon as you can, a German grammar, a Russian grammar, the little Italian-German dictionary and a few books (*Max und Moritz*<sup>6</sup> and Vossler's<sup>7</sup> history of Italian literature if you're able to find it). I'd also like to have that large volume of essays on the Risorgimento, which I believe is called *Storia politica del secolo XIX* ["A Political History of the Nineteenth Century"] and R. Ciasca's *La formazione del programma dell'unità nazionale* ["The Development of a Plan for National Unity"]—is this the correct title? Use your best judgment. This time, please write Giulia, since I haven't been able to get over that shyness I wrote you about. The good news in regard to Delio and Giuliano was very welcome and I look forward to the photos. Did you notice how well the address you used functions? All I have to do is to go to the one post office here in Ustica, which holds my mail for me. As for the telegram I sent to Rome, I did want to announce my departure, even though I knew it would arrive late. There was still the possibility that the person receiving it might have come to visit up until 11:00 in the evening. Of the five who left, only Molinelli<sup>8</sup> (who traveled the

whole time with me) had a visit from his wife, who came at exactly 11:00. For the others—no visitors at all.

Dear Tatiana, my not writing until now shouldn't make you think I've forgotten you a single moment. Everything that arrives and that bears the trace of your hands is more than a greeting, it's an embrace. I would have appreciated having Marietta's address. Perhaps I ought to write Nilde<sup>9</sup>—what do you think? Writing letters and receiving them has become for me the most intense experience.

Dear Tatiana, what I've written may seem confused. Today, it looks as though the ferryboat won't be able to come, since last night there was a violent windstorm. The bed and pillows are softer than the ones I've become used to, so that I didn't sleep at all. The wind, which blew through every crack, past balcony, window, and door, sibilant or sounding trumpets, kept irritating me. Write Giulia that I feel perfectly well and that my stay here (which ought to be shorter than the time decreed by the court) is ridding me of all my old aches. I really needed to take a long rest.

The warm embrace I send with this letter is for you and all my dear ones.

Antonio

If Nilde would like to hear from me, send me her address.

---

1. The story referred to is Rudyard Kipling's "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," which appears in the collected edition of his works, *Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories*, originally published in March 1895. This story, which Gramsci had read in a French translation, describes how, in India, men who are burned at the stake but are still alive are thrown into a pit. Kipling speaks of a place where the dead who are not dead but who are no longer alive dwell.

2. The engineer Amadeo Bordiga (1889–1970), one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party. He was the leader of the "intransigent" current within the party, which held that members of a revolutionary working-class movement should abstain from participating in elections and parliamentary life in general, in order to avoid the dangers of integration, and should also refuse to collaborate with other anti-Fascist forces, meanwhile

organizing themselves for revolutionary insurrection. These principles, criticized by Lenin in *Extremism, Infantile Disease of Communism*, were refuted and defeated at the Communist Party Congress at Lyons in 1926. In that same year, Bordiga was arrested and banished to Ustica; he was later tried in Milan but was acquitted in 1928. (See Introduction, p. 26.)

3. A prison in Rome.

4. Marietta Bucciarelli was Gramsci's housekeeper before he was banished.

5. A brand of marmalade.

6. *Max und Moritz* is the masterpiece of Wilhelm Busch (1832–1908), a German humorist and satirist.

7. Karl Vossler (1872–1949) was a famous German philologist who wrote, among many other things, important studies on Leopardi and French language and civilization. He was known in Italy through Croce.

8. Guido Molinelli (1894–1963) was a Socialist deputy who, in 1921, became a member of the Communist Party of Italy. Re-elected deputy in 1924, he was banished by the Fascist regime in 1926, along with Gramsci, and was then sentenced to fourteen years in prison.

9. A schoolmate of one of Gramsci's sisters-in-law at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

2

Ustica

January 2, 1927

Dear Friend,<sup>1</sup>

I received the books mentioned in your letter-before-last and the first lot of the ones that I ordered. Now I have plenty to read for quite a while. Thank you for doing me this great favor, though I certainly don't want to take advantage of you. I promise that if at any time I need something, I'll turn to you. As you can imagine, there is very little here to spend money on, and as a matter of fact, there is often no possibility at all of spending it, even if you really need something.

Life continues without any excitement. Our only preoccupation is with the arrival of the ferryboat, which doesn't always manage to

make it here the scheduled four times a week (Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays), to our great disappointment: we always wait anxiously for our mail. There are now about sixty of us, thirty-six of whom are friends from various places. On the whole, Romans predominate. We have started a school, dividing it into various courses: Course 1 (first and second grades), Course 2 (third grade), Course 3 (fourth and fifth grades), Extra Courses, two French Courses (elementary and intermediate), and a German Course.<sup>2</sup> The courses are designed to correspond to the background that the students have in those subjects, reducible to a certain basic set of concepts (for example, grammar and mathematics). Thus students in elementary courses attend the "extra" history and geography lessons. We have tried to respond to the need for a graduated scholastic level, keeping in mind the fact that although some of the students are almost illiterate, they are intellectually developed.

The courses are diligently followed. By forming this school, which is also attended by some of the officials and inhabitants of the island, we have avoided becoming demoralized, always a great danger in these circumstances. You can't imagine the physical and moral state of degradation to which the ordinary prisoners have been reduced. They would sell the shirts off their backs for a drink, and many have sold shoes and jackets for one. A considerable number no longer have their daily *mazzetta*<sup>3</sup> of four lire from the government, as it is all handed over to the moneylenders. Moneylending is frowned on, but there is really no way of avoiding it, since the prisoners themselves, while victims of the moneylenders, denounce them only in the most extreme circumstances. The weekly interest on ten lire is three lire. The interests are collected punctually because the moneylenders are surrounded by little groups of hangers-on, who would cut up their grandmothers for a glass of wine. The ordinary convicts, with a few rare exceptions, have a great respect for us. The islanders are extremely courteous. On the other hand, our arrival has brought about a radical change and will leave a definite mark. Electric light will be installed, since among those banished here there are technicians capable of doing it. The tower clock, which stopped about six months ago, has been repaired; and

it is possible that, before long, a landing platform for the ferryboat will be constructed. Our relationship with the authorities is quite good.

I'd like to describe some of my impressions during the voyage, especially in Palermo and Naples. I remained eight days in Palermo. We attempted the crossing four times, and three of those times--after more than an hour's sailing under stormy skies--we had to turn back. It was the worst part of the entire deportation and certainly what tired me most. We had to get up at four in the morning, go to the harbor with our wrists in irons, tied up and chained one to the next, then get into the tender, climb up and down the ferryboat ladders, and remain with one wrist still in the irons. We suffered seasickness, either because of the uncomfortable position (bound as we were to one another by half a yard of chain and therefore unable to lie down) or because the ferry, being very light and small, kept swaying up and down even on a calm surface. All this, only to have to go back and start over again the next morning. In Palermo we were placed in a clean little room, especially prepared for us because we were deputies, since the prison was overcrowded; and this way they kept us from coming into contact with members of the Mafia held there. During our voyage, we were at all times decently and even politely treated.

Thank you for your nice thought of wanting to send me eggs. Now that the holiday season is over, I'll find fresh ones here. I would like some Swiss condensed milk, however, if you can send me some. I really don't know what to ask you to send since we lack a little of everything, and it's difficult to obtain certain items. It takes a lot of looking around to find things. (There's no messenger service between here and Palermo!) I'd be very grateful if you could send me some toilet soap and medicines for everyday use, such as Bayer's aspirin (the aspirin here could drive a dog mad), and some tincture of iodine, as well as pills for my migraine. I promise again that when I really need something, I'll write to you. Did you notice how I didn't hesitate to take advantage of your offer to take care of the books? I must confess, however, that I'm still dazed and not yet accustomed to a number of things. Write often, since receiving



letters is the happiest experience one can have in these circumstances. If you find another interesting book like Lewinsohn's,<sup>4</sup> please send it on.

A brotherly hug.

Antonio

I'd like a bottle of eau de cologne to use as a disinfectant after shaving.

---

1. This letter is addressed to Piero Sraffa, a well-known Italian economist and friend of Gramsci's who emigrated to Cambridge, England, where he still teaches political economy. Besides helping Gramsci during his imprisonment by supplying him with books and various essentials, Sraffa also helped Gramsci's sister-in-law Tania to try to obtain a new trial, organized press campaigns in favor of Gramsci's release, and carried out his friend's wishes after his death.

2. This kind of "prison school," which was set up in Ustica by Gramsci and his fellow prisoners, then spread to all other places where political prisoners were detained or confined. Its program of courses, study, and reading earned for it the title of "prison university." Thousands of prisoners from all social levels participated, from half-illiterate workers and peasants to intellectuals and politicians.

3. This was a daily stipend paid to prisoners.

4. Richard Lewinsohn, *Histoire de l'inflation. Le déplacement de la richesse en Europe (1914-1925)* ("The History of Inflation: The Displacement of Wealth in Europe," Paris, 1926).

3

Milan

February 12, 1927<sup>1</sup>

My dear ones,

I am writing both of you at the same time to take advantage of the few letters allowed me. I left Ustica unexpectedly the morning

of the twentieth<sup>2</sup> and had just enough time to dictate a short letter and send a telegram to warn you. I thought I would be sent to Rome; instead, because it seems there was a mistaken interpretation of the telegram ordering my arrest, I was taken to Milan, the transfer being a regular, not a special one: this is why I had to travel nineteen days. At Isernia I was able to get a telegram off to warn you about the changed itinerary. This trip has been a triple, a quadruple, test, from a moral and, above all, from a physical point of view. For the moment, I don't want to describe it in detail; I don't want to frighten you. I feel worn out. During these nineteen days, I've "lived" in the following prisons: Palermo, Naples, Caianello, Isernia, Sulmona, Castellamare Adriatico, Ancona, Bologna; the night of the seventh I reached Milan. Since there are no prisons at Caianello and Castellamare, I "slept" in the security chamber of the *carabinieri* barracks. These were perhaps the two ugliest nights of my whole life. At Castellamare I caught a terrible cold, but now I'm nearly over it.

The sea was rough crossing from Ustica to Palermo and from Palermo to Naples; even so, I didn't get sick. I ought to describe the Palermo-Naples crossing and will in another letter, after I've considered all the details again and refreshed my memory.

In general, the trip was like an endless film: I came to know an infinite number of characters, some vulgar and repugnant, others extremely curious and interesting.

I realized how difficult it is to understand the true nature of men from outward signs. At Ancona, for example, a kind old man who seemed to be of humble, provincial origin asked me to let him have some soup I had decided not to eat. I gave it to him gladly, taken with the serenity in his eyes and his modest gestures. Immediately afterward, I learned that this repellent beast had raped his own daughter.

Let me give you an overall impression of the transfer. Imagine a huge worm creeping from Palermo to Milan, continuously putting together and taking apart its body, leaving one ring in each prison, reconstituting new ones and shaking right and left, incorporating the sloughed-off sections on the way back. In each station, this worm has pigsties called transits, where one remains from two to eight days,

and where the filthiness and poverty of generations are piled up. You arrive exhausted, dirty, bearded, your wrists stinging from long hours in chains, your hair ruffled, your sunken eyes glistening with insomnia and the strain of self-control. You throw yourself down on the floor onto a small ancient straw mattress, wrap your face and hands in your own towels so as not to touch the infected surroundings, and cover yourself with thin blankets that are no protection at all against the cold. When you leave, you feel dirtier and more tired than before and arrive at the next depot with wrists livid from the cold irons, the weight of the chains, and the wretched job of having to carry your own suitcases. But, *pazienza!* It's all over with now and I'm already rested.<sup>3</sup>

I am living in a good cell heated by the sun and wear a big sweater that I bought upon arriving. Finally, I've expelled the cold from my old bones.

In other letters I'll describe for you my chain companions on this trip: there were a number of them who were of considerable interest.

One life-prisoner particularly struck me. I met him during the exercise period at Naples and learned only that his name was Arturo, that he was forty-six years old and had already completed twenty-two years of his sentence, ten of which were spent in solitary confinement, and that he was an expert shoemaker.

A handsome tall man with fine elegant features, he spoke precisely and clearly, with amazing sureness. Although lacking in culture, he would cite Nietzsche, and I recall him pronouncing *Dies Irae*, separating the *a* from *e*. In Naples he was tranquil, serene, smiling; at the temples and around the ears, his skin was a yellowish parchment color, like cured leather. Though he left Naples two days before I did, I saw him again at Ancona, as I arrived at the station in a downpour. (I believe they made him take the Campobasso-Foggia route instead of Caianello-Castellamare because, as a convict, he might have tried to make a getaway from one of these depots, risking a shot in the back from a *carabiniere*.) He said hello, having recognized me immediately. Once again I caught sight of him—in the

registration office of the Ancona prison: the irons had been left on even though the path to his cell led through internal courtyards. He was a different man from the one I had seen in Naples. Truly, he made me think of Farinata:<sup>4</sup> the hard, angular face, the sharp, icy eyes, the blown-up chest, his whole body tense as a spring ready to snap. He shook his head two or three times, then disappeared, swallowed up in the penal institution.

Enough! I've been gossiping like a housewife. Know that for the moment I'm well and lack nothing, and tranquilly wait for news of the two of you and the children. Does Delio ever think about me? Please send me a photograph of Giuliano. I send all of you a tender hug.

Antonio

---

1. Probably the first letter written by Gramsci in Milan, it was addressed to Tania and Giulia, but it never reached its destination: it was retained by the prison authorities and then used as evidence in Gramsci's trial. At the bottom of the letter the following words appear, "The Crown Military Attorney requests the Examining Military Judge to order the sequestration of the letter dated 6/7/1927."

2. After Gramsci had been banished, the judge of the Military Tribunal of Milan, Enrico Macis, began to investigate Gramsci again in the name of the Special Tribunal. On January 14, 1927, he sent out an order for Gramsci's arrest. After Gramsci left Ustica on January 20 in "ordinary transfer," he arrived at the Judiciary Prison of Milan the evening of February 7, 1927. On February 9, March 20, and June 2, he was interrogated by Judge Macis.

3. The painful details of Gramsci's journey to Milan, which lasted more than two weeks, were brought to the attention of the public a few months later in a letter by Piero Sraffa published in the *Manchester Guardian*. October 24, 1927.

4. Gramsci refers to Farinata degli Uberti, famous thirteenth-century political leader of the Florentine Ghibellines who, driven into exile, took up arms and attempted to return to his native city in 1245 and again in 1266; he is described by Dante in Canto X of the *Inferno*:

*ed el s'ergea col petto e con la fronte,  
com'avesse l'inferno in gran dispetto.*

He raised himself, strong-breasted, stony-fronted,  
seeming to hold all Hell in deep despite.

While in prison, Gramsci dedicated a series of studies to this canto of the *Inferno*. (See Letters 57 and 58.)

4

Milan  
February 19, 1927

Dear Tania,

It's been a month and ten days since I heard from you and I can't understand why. As I wrote you a week ago, when I left Ustica the ferryboat hadn't come for nearly ten days: at least a couple of letters from you should have arrived at Ustica on the ferryboat that transported me to Palermo, and been sent on again to Milan. Instead, there's been nothing from you in the mail here since I got back from the island. Dearest, if you are at fault—and not, as it's likely, some administrative tie-up—please don't make me wait anxiously like this; isolated as I am, every out-of-the-ordinary event or interruption causes me worry and pain. Your own last letters to Ustica were full of worries; what's this concern on your part about my health that causes you to suffer physically? I can assure you that I've been well all along, and possess inexhaustible physical energies despite my fragile appearance. Do you think it means nothing to have lived such a rigorous, sober life? Now I understand the advantage of never having had serious illnesses or injuries. It's true that I get horribly tired, but a little sleep and nourishment put me back on my feet again immediately. Really, I don't know what to write to make you feel calm and well—do I have to threaten? I could stop writing you, you know, and then you'd learn what it feels like to be without any news at all.

I imagine you serious and frowning, with never even a fleeting

smile. I wish I could cheer you up in some way. What would you think if I told you some stories? For example, I'd like to tell you—as a kind of interlude in the story of my voyage through this great, terrible world—something amusing about myself and my fame. Only a small circle of persons recognize my name, and it's always twisted in unbelievable ways: Gramasci, Granusci, Grámisci, Granisci, Gramásci, even Garamáscion, with all kinds of bizarre variations. At Palermo, while I was waiting for my suitcases to be checked in the baggage room, I came upon a group of workers from Turin, on their way to the place of banishment. Along with them was a formidable, ultra-individualistic anarchist, known as "The Only One,"<sup>1</sup> who refused to give any information about himself to anyone, particularly the police and other authorities. "I'm 'The Only One'—that's all": this is how he answered them. In the crowd around him, I recognized ordinary criminals of the Mafia brand and a certain Sicilian ("The Only One" must be Neapolitan or from south of Naples) arrested for mixed criminal and political reasons. We introduced ourselves. The Sicilian stared at me for a while, then asked, "Gramsci, Antonio?" Yes, Antonio! I answered. "It can't be," he said, "Antonio Gramsci must be a giant, not a little squirt like you." He didn't say any more, just withdrew to a corner, sat down on an unmentionable object and, like Marius above the ruins of Carthage, meditated on lost illusions. During all the time we had to stay in the same room, he avoided speaking to me and didn't even say good-bye at the end.

Another episode similar to this occurred later, but it was more interesting and complex. We were about to leave, the *carabinieri* guards had already put us in irons and chains. Now I was bound in a new uncomfortable way since the irons clamped my wrists rigidly, the wristbone outside the irons knocking painfully against them. The head guard came in, a huge noncommissioned officer who, when he read the names off, stopped at mine and questioned whether I was a relative of "the famous deputy Gramsci." I answered that I was he, himself, whereupon he observed me with pitying eyes, and murmured something incomprehensible. At every station, I heard him

talking about me, always referring to me as "the famous deputy" when groups formed outside the jail. (I have to add that he arranged for the irons to be adjusted more comfortably.) The way the wind is blowing these days, I wondered whether I might not risk a beating from some overexcited individual. At a certain point the NCO, who was traveling in the second jail car, came into the one where I was and began to talk to me. He was extraordinary, bizarre, full of "metaphysical needs," as Schopenhauer would have said, which he succeeded in satisfying in the oddest, most disorderly ways you can imagine. He told me he had always pictured me as "cyclopic" and hence was quite disappointed to see me in the flesh. At that point he was reading a book by M. Mariani,<sup>2</sup> *Equilibrio degli egoismi* ["The Equilibrium of Egoism"], and a treatise by Paolo Gilles<sup>3</sup> confuting Marxism. I was careful not to tell him that Gilles is a French anarchist without any scientific background, since it was such a delight to hear him speak enthusiastically about so many disparate, unconnected ideas, like any intelligent self-taught man. At a certain point he started calling me *maestro*. This all amused me very much as you might imagine, and in this way I came to know more about my personal "fame." What do you think?

I've almost used up this paper but want to describe my life here in detail. Let me give you a rough idea. In the morning I get up at 6:30, a half hour before the alarm rings, make myself hot coffee, then clean my cell and toilet. At 7:30 I get a half-litre of warm milk and drink it right away. At 8:00 I go outside for the daily two-hour walk. I take a book, amble along, read, or smoke a cigarette. At noon, lunch from a restaurant is delivered and at night, dinner: I'm not able to eat all of this, though I do eat more than in Rome. At 7:00 in the evening I go to bed and read until about 11:00. During the day I receive five daily newspapers: *Corriere*, *Stampa*, *Popolo d'Italia*, *Giornale d'Italia*, *Secolo*.<sup>4</sup> I have subscribed to the library, in fact, have a double subscription that gives me the right to take out eight books a week. I buy a few magazines and *Il Sole*, a financial-economic newspaper from Milan. I always have something to read. Another time I'll tell you about Nansen's *Farthest North*<sup>5</sup> and other books. I haven't had any illnesses outside of the cold I felt the first days. Write

me, my dear, and send news of Giulia, Delio, Giuliano, Genia, and all the others—and *your* news, please. A fond hug.

Antonio

This letter and the preceding one have no stamps on them because I forgot to buy them in time.

---

1. From the title of a book by the anarchist-philosopher Max Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* ("The Only One and His Property"), translated into Italian at the beginning of the twentieth century and very popular then among wide sectors of Italian workers, artisans, and intellectuals.

2. Mario Mariani (1884–1951) was a writer who achieved some popularity in the early post-World War I years with short stories and novels that treated both eroticism and social problems. He also founded several periodicals. After the advent of Fascism, he emigrated to France and then to Latin America.

3. The treatise referred to is one by Paul Gille (not Gilles), a professor at the Institut des Hautes Etudes in Brussels. The title of the Italian translation is *Abbozzo di una filosofia della dignità umana* ("Sketch for a Philosophy of Human Dignity," 1926). In his Preface, "Il sofisma anti-idealista di Marx" ("The Anti-Idealist Sophism of Marx"), the Socialist writer Francesco Merlini attempted to "confute" Marx.

4. In February 1927, Gramsci received permission to read these newspapers. *Il Corriere della Sera* is a Milanese daily that had always held conservative views and by 1927 was, like the other papers, fully identified with Fascism. *La Stampa* was and still is the daily paper of the Fiat factory in Turin. *Il Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini's own newspaper, had become the official mouthpiece of the regime. The Roman *Il Giornale d'Italia* and the Milanese *Il Secolo* (which had formerly been Radical Democratic) were both equally conservative.

5. Fridtjof Nansen was a famous Norwegian explorer and scientist. One of his books had been published in Italy under the title, *La spedizione polare norvegese. Fraghiacci e tenebre* ("The Polar Expedition: Among Ice and Shadows," 1893–1896).



Milan  
February 26, 1927

Dearest Mamma,

I've been in Milan in the Judiciary Prisons since February 7. I left Ustica on the twentieth of January. Your undated letter was sent on to me here, but I imagine that it must have been written at the beginning of February. You mustn't worry about this change—it makes things worse only to a certain extent and mostly just causes new irritations and annoyances. I can't give you many details about the accusations against me, since up to now I haven't been able to understand exactly what they are. In any case, the issue is clearly a political one related to the reasons for which I was condemned to five years of banishment on Ustica. One simply has to have a great deal of patience. I have tons of it, wagonfuls, whole housefuls. Do you remember what Carlo<sup>1</sup> used to say when he was little and had eaten some special dessert?—"I want a hundred housefuls of it!" Today I can say that I have *kentu domus e prus*<sup>2</sup> of patience.

But you, too, must be good and patient. Your letter shows me that you are quite the opposite. You write that you feel old, etc. Well, I'm sure that you are still very strong and resilient despite your age, the sorrows that you have known, and the great efforts that you had to make.

Do you remember *Corrias, corriazzu*?<sup>3</sup> I'm sure that we shall be united again—children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—for a huge dinner of *kulurzones, pardulas, zippulas, pippias de zuccuru*, and *figu sigada*<sup>4</sup> (though not famous Aunt Maria of Tadasuni's dried figs). Do you think Delio will like the *pirichittos*<sup>5</sup> and *pippias de zuccuru*? I think that he will and that he, too, will say that he wants a hundred housefuls of them. You can't imagine how much he resembles Mario and Carlo when they were children, as far as I

remember—especially Carlo, except for the nose, which, in Carlo's case, was only a mere suggestion of a nose.

Sometimes I think about all these things and like to remember the events and scenes of childhood. It's true, I perceive in them much that is painful and sorrowful, but also something gay and beautiful. And then, of course, there's you, dear Mother, your hands always busy with work: you tried to save us hardships and to make every experience useful. Do you remember the tricks I used to play in order to drink good coffee without chicory or other rubbish in it? When I think about such things, I realize that Edmea<sup>6</sup> won't have memories like these when she grows up and that this will certainly influence her character, giving her a submissiveness and a kind of sentimentality that are not the best qualities to have in this age of iron and fire. And since Edmea, too, will have to make her own way in the world, one must think about fortifying her morally, to see that she doesn't grow up surrounded only by fossilized aspects of life in the provinces. All of you should explain as tactfully as possible why Nannaro<sup>7</sup> no longer looks after her and seems almost to be neglecting her. You must explain to her that her father can't return right now from abroad and that this is because Nannaro (like me and many others) was working toward the creation of a better childhood, for the millions of Edmeas in this world, than the one that we lived through and which she is now experiencing. And you must tell her without any subterfuges that I am in prison, in the same way that her father is abroad. Naturally, you must keep in mind her tender age and her particular temperament, to avoid upsetting the poor creature too much; but you must tell her the truth. In this way you will prepare her for the strength, courage, and resistance to pain that she must have and the difficulties that she is likely to face in life.

Dearest Mamma, you mustn't worry about me or think that I'm ill. I'm as well as is possible under the circumstances. I live in a rented cell, which means I have a fairly good bed. I even have a mirror to see myself in. I get two meals a day from a *trattoria*. For breakfast I drink a pint of milk. I have the use of a small apparatus to warm up meals or make coffee on. I read six newspapers each day



and eight books a week, as well as illustrated magazines and scholarly journals, and I smoke Macedonian cigarettes. On the whole, from a material point of view, I'm deprived of very little. It's true that I can't write as much as I'd like to, and my mail arrives very irregularly (a month and a half have gone by since I had news of Giulia and the babies, which prevents me from giving you any news about them); but I know that there is a certain material security and that Delio and Giuliano lack nothing.

By the way, did you receive a beautiful photograph of Delio that was supposed to have been sent to you? If you did, please let me know what you think.

Dearest Mamma, I promise to write at least every three weeks and to keep you cheerful. You, too, must write and get Carlo, Grazietta, and Teresina and Papa, Paolo<sup>8</sup> and even Edmea (who, I imagine, is now capable of composing a little letter) to write. Every letter is a great consolation and keeps my spirits up.

A tender hug for all, and for you, dearest, the tenderest.

Nino

My address is now: Judiciary Prisons, Milan.

1. Carlo and Mario (mentioned below) are Gramsci's younger brothers.

2. "A hundred houses and more," in Sardinian dialect.

3. *Corrias* is the surname of some of Gramsci's relatives, while *corriazzu* in Sardinian means "tough, leathery."

4. *Kurzulones* are ravioli with cheese, meat, and almond filling, a Sardinian specialty. *Pardulas* and *zippulas* are popular Sardinian cakes, and *pippias de zuccuru* also are cakes in the shape of a doll. *Figu sigada* are dried figs.

5. Iced round cakes.

6. Gramsci's niece (his brother Gennaro's daughter).

7. This was the family nickname for Gennaro, oldest of the Gramsci children. Gennaro, who had introduced Gramsci to socialism in Cagliari in 1910 (see Introduction, p. 11), was in 1919-20 on the administrative staff of the daily newspaper *Ordine nuovo* and also worked at the Turin Chamber of Labor. Gennaro Gramsci was helped by a Torinese Communist, Pia Carena, to emigrate to France and Belgium. He returned in June 1930, only

to visit his brother in prison. Gennaro subsequently fought on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. He died in Rome in 1968.

8. Grazietta and Teresina are Gramsci's sisters, Paolo is Teresina's husband.

## 6

Milan

March 19, 1927

Dear Tania,

... My life goes on always the same, monotonously. Even studying is more difficult than it might seem to be. Some books were delivered to me, and I do read a great deal (more than one book a day, in addition to newspapers); but I'm referring to another fact: it seems I'm plagued by a notion, common among prisoners, that one has to accomplish something *für ewig*,<sup>1</sup> to cite a complex idea of Goethe's that I remember used to torture Pascoli. I'd like to set up a plan for the intense systematic study of some subject that would absorb and concentrate my inner life. Four ideas have come to me so far, and this is a sure sign that I haven't been able to get started. One is research on the history of Italian intellectuals, their origins and groupings in relation to cultural currents, their various modes of thinking, and so on. Naturally, I could only sketch out the major lines of this highly appealing argument, given the impossibility of obtaining the immense amount of material necessary.<sup>2</sup> Do you remember that short, superficial essay of mine about southern Italy and the importance of B. Croce?<sup>3</sup> Well, I'd like to elaborate the thesis I only touched on then, from a "disinterested" point of view, *für ewig*. Second, a study of comparative linguistics, nothing less! What could be more "disinterested" and *für ewig* than that? Of course it would concern only the methodological and theoretical aspect of this subject, which has never been written about in a complete, systematic way, from the new viewpoint of the neo-lin-

guists opposed to the neo-grammarians. (Are you beginning to dread this letter?) One of the great intellectual "regrets" of my life is the deep wound I inflicted on my dear professor at the University of Turin, Bartoli,<sup>4</sup> who was convinced I was the archangel sent to destroy the neo-grammarians once and for all, since he, being of the same generation as they, was bound by thousands of academic strings to this infamous sect. In his pronouncements, he didn't dare go beyond certain limits of decorum and deference for old funerary monuments of erudition. Third, a study of Pirandello and the transformation of theatrical taste in Italy that he represented and helped determine. Did you know that long before Adriano Tilgher, I discovered and helped popularize Pirandello's work? I wrote enough about Pirandello from 1915 to 1920 to form a book 200 pages long, and at that time my comments on him were original and went against the tide: Pirandello was either good-naturedly tolerated or openly derided.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, an essay on *feuilletons* ["serials"] and popular taste in literature.<sup>6</sup> I got this idea when I read a notice about the death of Serafino Renzi, showman of an open-air theater company (a theatrical equivalent of *feuilletons*) I used to go to see with great enthusiasm because the anxieties and passions of the public provided just as much entertainment as the spectacle itself.

How does all this strike you? Really, if you look closely at these four arguments, a common thread runs through them: the popular creative spirit, in its diverse phases of development, is equally present in each.<sup>7</sup> Write me what you think: I have great faith in your good sense and judgment. But have I been boring you? You know, writing has to replace conversation for me, and I have the impression I'm actually speaking to you when I write. The only thing is that I'm reduced to a monologue when your letters don't come or when they seem not to answer the conversation I've begun. So please write me long letters in addition to the postcards. I'll send you a letter every Saturday (being allowed two a week) to get things out of my system. However, I won't take up the thread of my stories about impressions and sufferings during the trip here, since I don't know whether they interest you or not. For me, they have a certain personal value in that they're related to particular moods or to painful experiences that I've

undergone; to make them interesting for others, I'd have to cast them in literary form. But I dash everything down here with inkwell and pen in the short time given me. By the way—is the tiny lemon plant still growing? You forgot to write me about it. How is my landlady? Is she still alive? I always forget to ask you. Early in January I had a letter from S. Passarge—he was desperate and said he knew the woman was about to die; after that, I heard nothing more. Poor thing, I'm afraid the sight of my arrest helped accelerate her illness, since she was so fond of me. How pale she was when they took me away!

A hug for you, my dear, love me and write to me.

Antonio

---

1. *Für ewig*: for eternity, forever, and, by extension, in a disinterested way. A lyric poem by the Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli (1855–1912) is entitled "Per sempre" ("Forever").

2. The *Prison Notebooks* contain many notes and outlines for studies and research on this subject. This material is now included in the volume *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura* ("Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture"). Gramsci formulates the question in a general way in the following sentence from Notebook 29, which opens the volume mentioned above, "Are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or has every social group its own specialized category of intellectuals?" The research is therefore not confined to sociological problems, but covers, in general, history, political history, and the history of culture.

3. The reference is to the unfinished essay entitled "Alcuni temi della questione meridionale" ("Some Aspects of the Southern Question"), which Gramsci wrote in October 1926, a few weeks before his arrest. The manuscript, which escaped notice during the police search, was recovered by a militant Communist, Camilla Ravera, who took it to Switzerland. The essay was first published in *Stato operaio*, the Italian Communist Party periodical published in France and introduced clandestinely into Italy in 1930. Gramsci discusses Benedetto Croce at considerable length in the *Prison Notebooks*, where he is the subject of special study and of total critical revision. The notes on Croce are now incorporated in the volume *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* ("Historical Materialism and the Philosophy of Benedetto Croce").

4. See Introduction p. 12. Matteo Bartoli (1873-1946), who held the chair of linguistics at Turin University, was a historical linguist. Gramsci's linguistic interests did not produce any extensive research during his prison period, and the *Notebooks* contain only scattered notes on the subject. In this connection, however, see the chapter "Lingua nazionale e grammatica" in the volume of the *Notebooks* entitled *Letteratura e vita nazionale* ("Literature and National Life").

5. During the years 1916-1920, Gramsci was theater critic for, as well as editor of, *Avanti!* in Turin. This theater criticism, which includes some very important articles on Luigi Pirandello, has been published in the Appendix to the volume *Literature and National Life*, which also includes some notes on Pirandello written in prison. Adriano Tilgher (1887-1941) was a well-known Italian essayist and philosopher who was one of the first to recognize the dramatic and philosophical novelty of Pirandello's plays.

6. The notes on this subject, made while Gramsci was in prison, are almost all contained in the above-mentioned *Literature and National Life* in the chapter on popular literature, where Gramsci expounds his theory of the "national-popular character of literature." That Gramsci was interested in this subject even before his prison days is evident in a few articles in *Il Grido del Popolo*.

7. Gramsci's program, which is here divided into four parts, proved more ambitious than originally planned. Although he deleted or modified a number of projects, he also added other subjects of study. The Italian Risorgimento, Machiavelli and the Modern Prince, Benedetto Croce, a criticism of "vulgar-Marxism," and the whole problem of the renewal of Marxist thought in the light of new historical functions—these were some of the subjects of study that Gramsci undertook while he was in prison.

7

Milan

April 11, 1927

Dear Tania,

I received your postcards of March 31 and April 3—thank you for sending me some news. I am waiting for you to come to Milan, though I have to admit I don't want to count on it too much. I've begun to think that it might not be such a good idea to go on with

the description, begun in my last letter, of my life now. It's better that I write each time whatever comes to mind spontaneously, without any kind of pre-established plan. The very act of writing has become a physical torment. I am given horrible little scratchy pens that force me to pay obsessive attention to the mechanical aspects of writing. I believed that I was going to be allowed a fountain pen, and on this basis decided to write the studies already referred to. But I haven't obtained permission and hate to insist.<sup>1</sup> This is why I write only during the two and a half or three hours dedicated to my weekly correspondence (two letters). Naturally, I can't take notes, which means I can't study in an orderly, satisfactory fashion. I leaf through things, though, and in any case, time passes much more rapidly than I thought it would. Five months have gone by since my arrest on November 8, and two months since I arrived in Milan. It doesn't seem possible that so much time has passed. On the other hand, in these five months I have seen every kind of thing you can imagine and have carried away the strangest, most unusual impression of my life. Rome: November 8 to November 25: absolute, rigorous isolation. November 25: Naples, along with my four comrade-deputies, until the twenty-ninth (three, not four—one got off at Caserta headed for the Tremiti). I set sail for Palermo, reaching it the thirtieth. Eight days at Palermo: three unsuccessful attempts to reach Ustica as a result of stormy seas. First contact with Sicilians arrested because of Mafia activities—a new world I was familiar with only intellectually; I verified and tested my opinions about it, finding them pretty much correct. On December seventh I arrived at Ustica and came to know the fantastic, incredible world of the convicts here. I also came to know a colony of Bedouins banished from Cyrenaica for political reasons: an interesting glimpse of the East. Life at Ustica. On January 20, I crossed again, four days in Palermo. Ship passage to Naples along with common criminals. Naples: I began to recognize a series of highly interesting types, whereas before the only southerners I had known at close quarters were Sardinians. In Naples, among other things, I watched a scene of initiation into the *camorra*,<sup>2</sup> and met a life-term prisoner (a certain Arturo) who made an indelible impression on me. After four days,

I left Naples, stopped at Caianello in the *carabinieri* barracks. After that: two days with about sixty other prisoners. Entertainments were organized in my honor: Romans improvised a splendid actors' school. Pascarella<sup>3</sup> and popular sketches of Roman low life. Apulians, Calabrians, and Sicilians exchanging lessons on how to wield a knife according to the rules of four regions of southern Italian low life (Sicilian, Calabrian, Apulian, Neapolitan): Sicilians against Apulians, Apulians against Calabrians. There's no fighting between Sicilians and Calabrians, because there's so much enmity between the two—even a practice session turns into something serious and cruel. The Apulian is the master of all the rest: an invincible knife-wielder who uses a secret, deadly technique surpassing all others. One sixty-five-year-old Apulian the others looked up to, despite the fact that he claimed no "regional" honors, beat the champions of the other "regions"; afterward he battled with a young Apulian of excellent build and amazing agility, held in awe by the rest. For half an hour they went through all the moves there are, one after the other. Grandiose, unforgettable scene for everyone, actors and spectators alike; the revelation of an extremely complex underworld with its own passions, points of view, codes of honor, and cast-iron hierarchy. The weapons were simple ones: spoons rubbed against a wall in order to leave whitewash marks on clothing. After this, Bologna—two days with other scenes; then Milan. These five lively months offer me a wealth of impressions to mull over for a year or two. Now you know how I spend my time when I'm not reading. I ponder all these things, analyze them minutely, until my head spins with this Byzantine work. Everything that happens around me, everything that I'm able to see, becomes of exceptional interest. Naturally, I keep a check on myself, so that I don't succumb to the monomania that characterizes prison psychology. A little ironical sprite, brimming with humor, who follows me everywhere is an endless help.

Antonio

---

1. Gramsci had already submitted a request to the judge for a pen, inkwell, and paper in March 1927. Although the judge viewed the request favorably, authorization was not granted.

2. A criminal society that grew up in the Neapolitan region in the sixteenth century; it was repressed by the Italian government after Unification.

3. Cesare Pascarella (1858-1940) was a poet who wrote in *romanesco*, the Roman dialect. His most famous dialect poem is "La scoperta dell'America" ("The Discovery of America").

8

Milan

May 23, 1927

Dearest Tania,

Last week I received a card from you and a letter together with Giulia's letter.

I want to reassure you about my health; I'm quite well, really. This last week I've been eating with such diligence that I'm surprised myself. I've managed to have the food I like sent in most of the time and have even gained some weight. Moreover, I've been devoting a little time, in the morning and in the evening, to exercising. Even though I'm limited by having to exercise indoors, this seems to be doing me a lot of good. I make movements that exercise all the joints and muscles, systematically, and increase the number of movements gradually every week. Proof of the usefulness of this exercise is the fact that the first few days I felt stiff all over and could only repeat each movement a few times, whereas now I've tripled the number of movements without feeling any discomfort. This new activity has also helped me psychologically and has kept me from reading trash just to pass the time. Don't imagine that I'm studying too much. It's not possible to study properly for both psychological and practical reasons. It's extremely hard for me to achieve the complete and exclusive concentration on one subject necessary for serious study,



which would allow me to see all possible relationships in the material at hand and to set them in a harmonious order. Something of this sort seems to be happening to my language studies, which I'm trying to pursue systematically, without neglecting any aspect of grammar—a thing I've never done before, since I used to be satisfied with being able to speak and read a little. This is why I haven't asked you to send any dictionaries until now. The Kohler German dictionary that you sent me on Ustica was lost by my friends there. When I've finished studying the grammar, I'll ask you to send the other dictionary, the Langenscheidt. Then I'll also write for Goethe's *Gespräche mit Eckermann* ["Conversations with Eckermann"],<sup>1</sup> which I want not only to read but also to analyze grammatically and stylistically. At the moment, I'm reading the quite elementary tales of the Grimm Brothers.<sup>2</sup> I'm determined to make the study of languages my main occupation. After German and Russian, I want to start again systematically on English, Spanish, and Portuguese, which I studied a bit superficially in the past. Since I studied Rumanian only in its neo-Latin aspects when I was at the university, I would now like to go on to study those words of Slavic origin that constitute more than 50 percent of the language. As you can see, I'm perfectly calm these days and no longer suffer from nervous tension and fits of dull anger. I've grown acclimatized and time passes quite fast: I calculate it by weeks rather than by days, using Mondays as a basis for this calculation, because this is when I write and shave—two newsworthy events!

I want to make a catalogue of my permanent library for you, listing those books of mine that I'm always leafing through and trying to study. Einaudi's<sup>3</sup> *Corso di scienza delle finanze* ["Financial Science: A University Course"] is a solid book that needs to be digested systematically. On finance, I also have *Gli ordinamenti finanziari italiani* ["Public Finance in Italy"],<sup>4</sup> a collection of lectures given at Rome University by authorities on the techniques of government administration—an excellent and very interesting book; *History of Inflation* by Lewinsohn, which is of great interest, if rather journalistic; a book called *The Monetary Stabilization in Belgium* by the cabinet minister Frank. I've no work on economics. When I was on

Ustica, I had Marshall's excellent book,<sup>5</sup> but my friends kept it. On the other hand, I have Mortara's *Prospettive economiche* ["Economic Prospects"] for 1927; *Inchiesta agraria* ["Agrarian Inquiry"] by Stefano Jacini;<sup>6</sup> Ford's book *Today and Tomorrow*, which I find very amusing, because while Ford may be a great industrialist, as a theorizer he strikes a comic figure; Prato's book on the economic structure of Piedmont and Turin and an issue of the *Annali di Economia*, containing a very thorough study of the economic structure of the Vercelli region (the rice-growing zone of Italy); and a series of lectures on the English economic situation (including one by Loria).<sup>7</sup> I have extremely little in the way of history and literature: a book by Gioacchino Volpe<sup>8</sup> on the last fifty years of Italian history, of topical interest and rather polemical in character, *La storia della letteratura italiana* ["The History of Italian Literature"] and *Saggi critici* ["Critical Essays"] by De Sanctis.<sup>9</sup> I had to leave the books I had on Ustica with my friends there, since they had so few themselves.

I decided to write you all this because it seems the best way to give you and Giulia at least a rough idea of my present life and what is on my mind. I'm not completely alone and isolated, since every day there's some kind of activity. In the morning we go outside. When I happen to get a good position in the courtyard, I study the faces of those coming and going in the other courtyards. Then they sell newspapers that everyone is allowed to read. Back in my cell, I'm brought the political papers I'm permitted to see. After this, there's shopping to do; then they bring the things that were bought the day before, and after that, lunch, etc., etc. In other words, new faces are to be seen the whole time, each one hiding a personality that invites conjecture. Actually, if I gave up reading the political newspapers, I could be in the company of other prisoners for four or five hours a day. I debated the matter but decided to stay alone with my newspapers. Occasional company would amuse me for a few days, perhaps for a few weeks, but after a while it would probably not provide an adequate substitute for the newspapers. What do you think? Or maybe you consider company a more important psychological factor. As a doctor, you could give me some good technical



advice. I may not be able to judge the matter as objectively as I should.

So there you have the general structure of my life and thoughts. I don't want to talk about my thoughts about all of you and the children: this part you must imagine, and I believe you sense it.

Dear Tania, your card mentions again your proposed visit to Milan and the possibility of coming to see me. Will it really happen this time? You know, it's more than six months since I saw any member of the family. This time I'm counting on seeing you. A hug.

Antonio

---

1. J. W. Goethe, *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, edited by Franz Deibel (Leipzig, 1921). In prison Gramsci translated Deibel's Introduction and Eckermann's Prefaces to the first, second, and third parts of the conversations, as well as the first one hundred pages of the conversations themselves. Notebook 26 also contains translations of a number of Goethe's letters and poems.

2. Gramsci read the Grimms' fairy tales in an edition published in Leipzig. The *Notebooks* contain various passages that he translated.

3. Luigi Einaudi (1874-1961) taught financial science at Turin University. During World War II he emigrated to Switzerland; after the war, he held several ministerial posts, then was President of the Republic from 1948 to 1955.

4. By Alberto de Stefani, Minister of Finance from 1922 to 1925 in the first Mussolini government.

5. Alfred Marshall's work, *Principles of Economics*, had been translated into Italian in 1925.

6. Stefano Jacini: *Inchiesta agraria. Prefazione. Relazione finale. Conclusioni dell'inchiesta sulla Lombardia* ("Agrarian Inquiry. Introduction. Final Report. Conclusions of the Lombardy Inquiry," Piacenza, 1926).

7. See Introduction, p. 47.

8. An Italian writer and historian (1876-1971), Volpe was well known for his studies of the Middle Ages. He became a supporter of Fascism.

9. Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883) was one of the great Italian intellectuals of the nineteenth century and a literary critic famous throughout Europe. One of the most important documents of the last century, his *Storia della letteratura italiana*, was inspired by Hegel's philosophy and contains

considerable material on history and politics. De Sanctis was involved in politics and became a deputy and then minister. After the unification of Italy in 1861, he was also a journalist and a university professor. Gramsci discusses De Sanctis in a series of notes in the *Notebooks*, now included in *Literature and National Life*, where he augurs a "return to De Sanctis" in polemic with Benedetto Croce's cold, formalistic, uncommitted method of criticism.

9

June 6, 1927

Dear Mother,

I received your letter of May 23. Thank you for writing at such length and for sending so much interesting news. You should always write like this and send detailed accounts of local affairs even if they seem unimportant to you. For example, you write that eight other communes are going to be incorporated with Ghilarza<sup>1</sup> but which ones are they? What does this mean and what results will it have? Will there be a single municipal administration under one *podestà*?<sup>22</sup> How will the schools be organized? Will there continue to be elementary schools in the former communes, or will the children from Narbello or Domusnovas have to go to Ghilarza every day, even those in the first grade? Will there be a single levy for the whole commune? Will the taxes paid by the Ghilarza landowners who have property in all these communes be spent in the individual villages, or will they be used to improve Ghilarza?

This seems to me the chief problem. In the past, Ghilarza's municipal funds were very scanty, since its inhabitants owned land in the neighboring communes and paid the major part of the local taxes there. You should write about these things rather than harping all the time on my sad plight. I want to reassure you on this count. True, I don't think my position is very brilliant. But all things in life are colored by our attitude toward, and feelings about, them. I'm quite calm and view everything with great equanimity and confi-

dence. If the near future is dark, things will get better afterward. As I wrote to Teresina, I'm convinced that I won't lie rotting in prison forever. I have a hunch that I won't stay inside more than three years, even if I'm sentenced to, say, twenty. I'm writing to you with great frankness, trying not to create illusions, because I think that this is the only way to make you strong and patient. Please have no qualms about my attitudes or health. You know what moral fortitude I am capable of. Do you remember our childhood "dare" (did we ever tell you about it then?), when we hammered our fingers with stones until a drop of blood came out at the tips. I would flinch now under such barbaric tests, but I have certainly developed a greater resistance to the bludgeoning of events—those past and those to come. My militant life of the past ten years or so has sufficiently hardened me. I could have been killed a dozen times, yet am still alive: this is already an incalculable asset. Moreover, I was happy for a time; I have two fine children who are being reared as I would want them to be and who will grow up into two strong and vital men. So I'm quite at peace and need neither pity nor consolation. Also, I'm quite well physically. In these last six months, I've been through all manner of things and have discovered that I have a great deal more physical endurance than I thought. This force of resistance will certainly not abandon me, and I'm convinced that I will hug you once more and see you happy.

Sometimes I long to see Giulia and the children. I'm sure that they're well and that the children are being pampered if anything: their mother, grandparents, and aunts would starve rather than let them go without cookies and fine clothes. I never discovered exactly what Nannaro<sup>3</sup> was up to: I only knew he was living in Paris and working, nothing more. Nannaro is a strange character: I think that it was he who didn't want to get in touch with me, perhaps because he thought I was angry with him for drawing my salary for five or six months without letting me know, while I was ill in a sanatorium. At least this is what I imagine and what makes me think he's gone mad. I knew what kind of a state he was in and how he had been wounded because of me,<sup>4</sup> and would never have dreamt of reproaching him or asking him for a cent.

Dear Mother, be strong, don't worry, and don't be too hard on the people from Abbasanta.<sup>5</sup> An affectionate hug.

Antonio

1. Gramsci's mother's home town in Sardinia, where Gramsci grew up.
2. The chief executive of the commune, appointed by the central Fascist government to replace the popularly elected mayor.
3. See Letter 5, note 6.
4. Gennaro was beaten and seriously wounded by the Fascists in Turin on December 18, 1922.
5. The village directly next to Ghilarza. Gramsci alludes playfully to the fierce rivalry between the two towns.

IO

August 8, 1927

Dearest Tania,

I received your letter of July 28 and Giulia's letter. No letters had arrived since July 11, and this made me so sad that I did something that may seem very foolish: I'll tell you about it when you come to visit. I'm sorry you feel discouraged, the more so since I'm convinced that I contributed to your depression. Dear Tania, I'm always afraid that you may have worse troubles than you admit to in your letters, these being entirely my fault. Nothing can dispel this notion, which is deeply rooted in me. In the past, I always lived like a bear in a cave, hoping to avoid these things: I didn't want anybody to be involved in my adversities. I even tried to make my family forget me by writing home as little as possible. But enough of this! I want to find some way of making you smile. Let me tell you about my sparrows. Right now I have a sparrow, but I had another one that died, probably poisoned by a cockroach or a centipede.

The first sparrow was much more likable than the present one. He

was very proud and extremely lively. The one I have now is very unassuming, servile, and unenterprising. The first one immediately lorded it over the whole cell. I think his spirit must have been eminently Goethean (*Ueber allen Gipfeln*):<sup>1</sup> he would scale every peak in the cell, settling there awhile to savor a sublime peace of mind. His great aspiration was to perch on the cork of a tamarind bottle. Once, trying to do this, he fell into a basin full of coffee dregs and came within an inch of drowning. What I liked in this sparrow was his resistance to being handled. He would rebel fiercely, beating his wings and pecking my hand with great energy. He had grown tame, but still remained aloof. The strange thing is that I achieved a certain degree of familiarity with him, not gradually, but all of a sudden. He would move about in the cell, but always as far away from me as possible. I would lure him with a fly in a matchbox, but he never took it until I had moved away. Once I put five or six flies in the box instead of just one. Before eating them, he danced around in a frenzy for a second or two; afterward, he always did a dance like this for a handsome meal of flies. One morning, when I came in from exercising, the sparrow came right up to me; from then on he always stuck to me, looking at me closely and pecking my shoes from time to time to ask for food. But he never let me hold him without immediately struggling to escape. He died slowly, after a stroke one evening. While he was huddled under the table, he cried out like a child, but died only the following day: his right side was paralyzed and he had to drag himself painfully to eat and drink; then, suddenly, he died.

My present sparrow, on the other hand, is quite nauseating in his domesticity. He likes to be fed, although he can eat perfectly well by himself; he hops onto my shoes and nestles in the cuffs of my trousers; if his wings were unclipped, he would fly onto my knee; this is obvious from the way he stretches up tall, quivers, and then hops onto my shoe. I think he will die, too, because he insists on eating burned match heads, quite apart from the fact that a constant diet of soggy bread must be fatal to these birds. At the moment, he is quite healthy but sluggish, runs about very little and sticks close to me, in fact has already been the accidental victim of several kicks. So now you know all about my sparrows.

You'll write to Giulia for me too, won't you? I've thought about writing to her directly. What do you think? It would amount to the same thing, but how can I write to you and Giulia separately every week? I wouldn't be able to write any other letters; on the other hand, I do want to write to you every week. A fond hug, dear Tania,

Antonio

---

1. "Over all the peaks" is the first line of Goethe's famous lyric poem "Wanderer's Nachtlied" and also the title of an anthology of Goethe's poetic works. In a letter of September 11, 1928, to his brother Carlo, Gramsci wrote, "Of all the books of mine at Ghilarza, there is one that I would like to have—Goethe: *Ueber allen Gipfeln* (a bound copy in the original)."

I I

August 8, 1927

Dearest Berti,<sup>1</sup>

Your letter of July 15 has arrived. I assure you that my health is no worse than it has been in the last few years; in fact, I think that it is slightly better. On the other hand, I'm not working at all, because reading pure and simple can't be called work. I'm reading a lot, but unsystematically. A few books are sent to me from outside and I read whatever books I happen to get from the prison library every week. I'm blessed with the capacity for finding something of interest even in trash like *feuilletons*. If I could, I would start a file with hundreds and thousands of cards on various aspects of popular psychology. For example, what was the origin of the "Russian steam-roller" myth in 1914?<sup>2</sup> In these novels, there are hundreds of references to it, which shows how a whole set of beliefs and fears existed among the masses then, and that, in 1914, governments were launching what could be called their campaigns for "nationalistic

agitations." There are also numerous indications of the popular French hatred of the English, connected with the peasant tradition of the Hundred Years' War, the martyrdom of Joan of Arc, and the exile of Napoleon. Isn't it extremely interesting that the French peasants, under the Restoration, believed that Napoleon was a descendant of the Maid of Orleans? As you can see, I'm digging around in dunghills. Sometimes, though, I happen to come across an interesting book. At present, I'm reading *L'Eglise et la bourgeoisie* ["The Church and the Bourgeoisie"] (300 pages), which is the first volume of *Les Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France* ["Origins of the Bourgeois Spirit in France"] by a certain Groethuysen.<sup>3</sup> The author, whom I don't know, but who must be a disciple of the sociologist Paulhan,<sup>4</sup> has made a most painstaking analysis of the collections of sermons and devotional books that appeared before 1789 in order to reconstruct the points of view, attitudes, and beliefs of the new ruling class that was then emerging. On the other hand, I was very disappointed by the highly touted book by Henri Massis, *Défense de l'Occident* ["Defense of the West"].<sup>5</sup> I think that Filippo Crispolti or Egilberto Martire<sup>6</sup> would have written a livelier book had the subject occurred to them. What makes me laugh is the fact that this worthy Massis, who is terrified that the Asiatic ideology of Tagore<sup>7</sup> and Gandhi may destroy the Catholic rationalism of France, is quite unaware that Paris has been half colonized by Senegalese intellectuals and that the number of half-castes in France is increasing. It could be argued, as a joke, that, if Germany is the farthest outpost of Asiatic ideology, darkest Africa begins in France and the jazz band is the first molecule of a new Euro-African civilization.<sup>8</sup>

Thank you for trying to get me missing pages of my copy of Rosselli's book.<sup>9</sup> Have you read the book? I don't know Rosselli but would like to tell him that his acrimony is out of place in a historical work. This is my general impression. More specifically, the opening of his book is dramatic to the point of being histrionic. (Naturally, the reviewer in *Il Giornale d'Italia* jumped on this opening and recast it in the most boorish way.) Then Rosselli doesn't even mention the fact that the famous London meeting of 1864 for the independence of Poland had already been demanded by the Neapolitan societies

several years earlier and was called as a result of an explicit letter from a Neapolitan society. This fact seems to me of capital importance. There is a strange deformation in Rosselli's thinking. The moderates of the Risorgimento, who had sent respectful greetings to Francis Joseph<sup>10</sup> after the events of Milan of February 1853, and a few days after the hanging of Tito Speri, began at a certain point (after 1860, and even more so after the events of Paris of 1871)<sup>11</sup> to adopt Mazzini as a bulwark even against Garibaldi (see Tullio Martello's history).<sup>12</sup> This tendency still persists today and is represented by Luzio.<sup>13</sup> But why Rosselli as well? I thought that the historians of the younger generation had freed themselves of these acrimonious diatribes and had substituted historical criticism for the *gesta dei* [acts of God]. Aside from these things, Rosselli's book does fill a real gap. Amadeo sent me a card.<sup>14</sup> Give my fond regards to everybody, including Rosselli and Silvestri.<sup>15</sup>

A hug.

Antonio

---

1. Giuseppe Berti, a Communist friend of Gramsci's, was also banished to Ustica but remained there after Gramsci was transferred to Milan. Letter 21 is also addressed to him.

2. This was a myth based on the fear that the vast population of Russia pressing against its national boundaries would inevitably overrun Europe. The expression "Russian steam-roller" was first used by Colonel C. Repington in an article in the London *Times* of August 13, 1914.

3. Bernard Groethuysen, *Les Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France*. Paris, 1927. The work cited by Gramsci is the author's best-known book and served, to some extent, as a model for Gramsci's study of the formation of the public spirit in France and Italy.

4. Gramsci was probably thinking of a psychologist named F. Paulhan (1856-1931). Jean Paulhan was a famous French writer who directed the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1925 to 1940, and who died in 1968. Groethuysen begins his *Origines* with a letter to Jean Paulhan.

5. Henri Massis (b. 1886) was a French critic of marked nationalist and right-wing tendencies who wrote essays on Barrès, Zola, and Proust.

6. Filippo Crispolti (1857-1942) and Egilberto Martire (1887-1952)



were journalists and parliamentarians, exponents of the Italian Catholic movement who subsequently became supporters of Fascism.

7. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was an Indian poet, musician, and philosopher. Together with Gandhi, he was one of the promoters of the religious and moral rebirth of India.

8. Gramsci is undoubtedly referring to the fact that there was a lively interest in African and Asiatic culture in France in the 1920's, particularly among the avant-garde.

9. Nello Rosselli (1900-1937), an Italian scholar, a politician, and a pupil of Gaetano Salvemini, was, together with his brother Carlo, one of the promoters of the anti-Fascist movement in exile and one of the founders of the Justice and Freedom Party, largely inspired by Carlo's book *Socialismo liberale* ("Liberal Socialism"). Rosselli was sentenced by a Fascist tribunal to confinement on the island of Ustica in 1927, after Gramsci's transferral. In 1928, he succeeded in making a daring escape from the island. He and his brother Carlo died at the hands of hired assassins in 1937.

The study to which Gramsci refers is entitled *Mazzini e Bakunin. Dodici anni di movimento operaio in Italia 1860-1872*. ("Mazzini and Bakunin: Twelve Years of the Workers' Movement in Italy 1860-1872," Turin, 1927.) Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) was a Russian nobleman, a revolutionary of Hegelian formation who lived in exile for many years in France, Switzerland, and Italy. He was one of the founders of the anarchist movement in Europe. Bitterly opposed to Mazzini's petit bourgeois ideas, Bakunin promoted and organized anarchist movements, especially among the peasant masses of southern Italy.

The "acrimony" that Gramsci mentions is an allusion to Rosselli's anti-Marxist, anti-Bakunin polemic, which in effect treated questions that were current in the 1870's as if they were still relevant in 1927. The Fascist press took advantage of these violent attacks on Marx, as Gramsci points out in citing the Roman newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, in which Rosselli's book was reviewed by a certain Ugo d'Andrea, a well-known propagandist for Mussolini at that time.

10. Franz Joseph was the Austrian emperor who held the Veneto until 1860 and Lombardy until 1866. The events of Milan of 1853 constitute one of the episodes of the Risorgimento. In the town of Brescia, which had carried on a bitter, unsuccessful struggle against the Austrians in 1848, a Mazzinian committee was arrested and one of its members, the Brescian patriot Tito Speri, was executed along with other patriots, one of whom was a priest. The moderates, who were advocating a monarchist-diplomatic solution to the Italian problem, did not look favorably upon Mazzini's initiatives, both because these hindered their own diplomatic line of action

and because they feared a "revolutionary" (i.e., republican-democratic) solution.

11. Gramsci is referring to the revolutionary uprising at the end of the Franco-Prussian War that led to the so-called Commune of Paris (1871), the first workers' government, set up in opposition to the Versailles government, whose troops laid siege to the city. The end of the Commune, which Garibaldi had supported, was marked by a fearful massacre of Communards. In Gramsci's eyes, the support that Italian "moderates" gave to Mazzini (whom they had opposed during the Risorgimento period) revealed the hatred that the Italian ruling classes bore toward the masses and betrayed their capacity to exploit someone like Mazzini who, through blindness or sectarianism, had taken an antirevolutionary stand.

12. *Storia della Internazionale dalla sua origine al Congresso dell'Aja* ("A History of the International from Its Origin to the Congress of The Hague," Padua, 1873), by Tullio Martello, Italian historian and economist.

13. Alessandro Luzio was a conservative historian and the author of a study on *Carlo Alberto e Mazzini* ("Charles Albert and Mazzini"), in which he contrasted the conduct of Mazzini and Garibaldi at the time of the Paris Commune in order to support his own antirevolutionary views.

14. Amadeo Bordiga (see Introduction, p. 26) was sentenced to confinement in the same year.

15. Carlo Silvestri, a liberal journalist who later became pro-Fascist, was confined to Ustica for having tried to emigrate clandestinely.

I 2

Milan

September 12, 1927

Dear Tania,

I received your two letters, and every day receive the fruit you send. It was wonderful to see you and to talk with you. Truly, it was a great help to be together after four months of anxiety and dark thoughts. Why did you say I seem different? I'm not aware of it, although living here effects changes in one so slowly that the "patient" might not notice them at all. You didn't seem different; maybe



you were too frightened by the thought of seeing me. Were you? For my part, I believe I have been "developing" and have taken on a coldness and an external indifference in exchange for much of my "southernness." I don't think I've grown insensitive—quite the opposite. Perhaps I have acquired a certain morbid, nervous sensitivity. What I lost was the outward habit of sensitivity. It's true that you reminded me of Giulia. You resemble her in striking ways, despite a few strong unmistakable traits of your own. Remember that afternoon in Rome when I called you, thinking you were Giulia? I don't know when a second conversation can take place. I want to impress on you, more emphatically than last time, that you shouldn't worry too much about me. Just think—ten months have already gone by since I was arrested. Time does pass swiftly, but it also stretches out. I think I have exacted too many sacrifices already from my brother and from you.

As for Mario, I don't believe I can count on him any more. This became clear to me a month ago when I received a letter from my mother, in which she explained that she had received a letter from Mario's wife full of lamentations. I wrote Mario to come and see me, and when he did, he seemed quite embarrassed. After our conversation, he wrote—from what I gather—an extremely alarmed letter to my brother Carlo at home. Then Carlo wrote me as if I already had one foot in the grave: he spoke of coming to Milan and even of bringing Mother with him, a woman seventy years old who has never left her native town and who has never traveled on a train for more than forty kilometers. He must be out of his mind. I must say that I was distressed and somewhat irritated with Mario, who could be more frank with me and refrain from terrorizing our aged mother. Enough. In the meantime, I've decided to put an end to the situation by limiting myself, if necessary, only to prison fare. But there are some other matters to settle that keep concerning me. Excuse my letting off steam, dear Tania, and don't feel sad. I write you as I would a sister. During all this time, you've been more to me than a sister, and this is why I may have tormented you sometimes. People always torment those whom they love most. I hope you will do everything you can to get well and stay healthy—so you

can write me about Giulia and the babies and comfort me with your affection.

I received the three hundred lire you sent in June, but perhaps I already told you. They haven't yet delivered the German dictionary to me, but why did you send it? I could have gotten along without it until my own came. As a rule, you shouldn't send me anything I don't ask for, unless I've agreed that it be sent. Please believe that this is the most rational approach, aside from the fact that, as you say, I never ask for anything. And that's not true anyway. When I need something, I ask for it; but I try to be reasonable and to avoid creating habits hard to break afterward. To live tranquilly in prison, you must get used to having only what is absolutely necessary. Every tiny convenience, in this setting, grows to be a kind of vice difficult to extirpate, since there are no distractions around. To keep up your strength of resistance, you have to impose a strict discipline on yourself. For example: why did your silence make me suffer so? Because I was used to a certain regularity of letters. Any irregularity immediately took on a sinister aspect. I hope you realize that you should get into the habit of corresponding regularly. I don't want you to think you're authorized not to write to me with the excuse of the theory of nonhabits! Dearest, I look forward to our next encounter, although I'm not allowed even to shake your hand. By the way, for a long time I had planned to offer you some flowers grown here in my cell (what prison romanticism!). But the plants dried up, and I was unable to keep alive the five or six little flowers that budded, homely as they were.

A tender hug.

Antonio

Milan  
September 12, 1927

Dear Carlo,

I received both your letter of August 30 and the registered letter of September 2, and thank you with all my heart. I don't know what Mario wrote you, but I have the impression he alarmed you too much. I believed that his visit would help calm Mother down, but I was wrong.

Your August 30 letter is certainly dramatic. I've decided that from now on I am going to write more often in order to convince you that your present mood isn't worthy of a grown man (and by now, you're no longer so young). You seem to be seized by panic and to see dangers and menaces on every side. This hinders you from functioning seriously and from overcoming real difficulties, since you can't separate them from imaginary or fantastic ones.

First of all, you and others in the family hardly know me and have a wholly erroneous notion of my powers of resistance. In the twenty-two years that have passed since I left home at fourteen, I've returned only twice—in 1920 and 1924. Well, in all this time I never pretended to be somebody; on the contrary, I lived through many rotten times and literally went hungry. Sometimes it's necessary to come out and say these things, since (. . .)<sup>1</sup> it can be encouraging. You've undoubtedly envied me at various moments because I had the chance to study. But you have no idea what I went through in order to do so. I'd like to remind you just what happened to me from 1910 to 1912. In 1910, since Nannaro had a job in Cagliari, I went to live with him. I received the first month's allowance but then nothing after that—I had to depend entirely on Nannaro who earned no more than one hundred lire a month. We changed *pen-*

*sione*, and I had to live in a small room where all the plaster was worn off by humidity and where the sole window looked onto a kind of well, more like a latrine than a courtyard. I realized at once that the situation couldn't continue, especially because of Nannaro's ill humor—he was always fighting with me. At the beginning, I stopped drinking my small portion of coffee in the morning, then I postponed lunch so long that I was able to skip dinner. For eight months or so, I managed to eat once a day, and thus reached the third year of high school in a state of grave malnutrition. Only at the end of the scholastic year did I learn that there was such a thing as a scholarship to Charles Albert College.<sup>2</sup> However, to compete for it you had to take an exam on everything studied during three years of high school; that meant I had to exhaust myself in the three months of vacation.

Uncle Serafino was the only person who noticed the distressing weakness that had overcome me. He invited me to come stay with him at Oristano to tutor Delio.<sup>3</sup> In the month and a half I lived there, I almost went out of my mind. It was impossible to study for the scholarship exam since Delio took up all my time. This anxiety, added to my weak state, shattered me. I secretly ran away. There was only one month left to study. I left for Turin almost like a sleep-walker, with fifty-five lire in my pocket, having spent forty-five of the one hundred lire from home for the third-class train fare. Because the Exhibition<sup>4</sup> was going on, I had to pay three lire a day just for a room. They reimbursed me the sum of a second-class trip, eighty lire or so, but I couldn't go very far with it because the exam lasted fifteen days and I was forced to spend at least fifty lire for rent. I can't imagine how I managed to take the exams since I fainted two or three times. I won the award, but that's when the trouble started. At home, they stalled two months before sending me the application papers for the university. Since my enrollment was suspended, I couldn't yet receive the seventy-lire monthly installment of the scholarship. One of the school attendants saved me by finding me a *pensione* costing seventy lire where my credit was good. I was reduced to such a point that I had considered going to the police to

ask them to send me home. When I received the seventy lire, I spent it all on a lousy *pensione*. That winter I went around without an overcoat, wearing a light suit more appropriate for Cagliari. In March 1912, I was so depressed that I stopped speaking for some months: whenever I spoke, the words got mixed up. Furthermore, I was living directly on the bank of the Dora, where the freezing-cold fog went right through me.

Why am I writing you all this? In order to convince you that I've found myself in terrible situations without ever having despaired. Such an existence has served instead to strengthen my character. I believe that when all is lost or seems to be, you have to go back to work, starting from scratch with a cheerful outlook. I believe that you always have to depend on yourself and your own energies, without expecting anything from anyone, in order to avoid being disappointed. You must set out to do only what you know how to do and are capable of doing, seeking your individual way. Morally, my position is excellent. Some call me satanic, some saintly, but I have no intention of appearing a martyr or a hero. I think of myself as an ordinary man who refuses to barter his deep convictions for anything in the world. I could recount some amusing anecdotes. During the first months in Milan, one of the guards asked me naïvely whether, if I switched sides, I could become a cabinet minister. I answered that cabinet minister would be too much to hope for and that I could, rather, be something like Undersecretary of the Post Office or of Public Works, since these are jobs the government usually offers to Sardinian deputies. He shrugged his shoulders, asked why in that case I wouldn't switch sides, and tapped his forehead. He had taken my answer seriously and thought I was completely out of my mind.

So cheer up and don't let yourself get carried away by the Sardinian village atmosphere. It's important to be superior to your surroundings, while not looking down on them or actually believing that you're superior. Try to reason and to understand; don't whimper like a girl. Do I make sense? And is it possible that I, who am in prison, with the ugliest of prospects before me have to encourage a young man who is free to do as he likes and who can apply his mind

to some useful activity every day? I send you and everyone at home an affectionate hug.

Nino

- 
1. Illegible words.
  2. See Introduction, pp. 12-13.
  3. Uncle Serafino's son.
  4. The Industrial Exhibition held in Turin in 1911.

14

Milan

September 19, 1927

Dearest Tania,

Did Wednesday's conversation cheer you up? It was picturesque, wasn't it? I noticed that you were laughing, too, at all that deafening noise, but I hope you didn't cry afterward. I was very happy to see you looking a little better.

Thank you for the daily supplies. I try to eat everything you send, but sometimes it's impossible. How could I eat so many nuts, for instance? On the other hand, I ate the good ham and fresh cheese I like so much and the grapes and figs, etc., with great relish. But don't send me any more bread: here I have to buy at least a pound every time and so I always have too much—it's as fresh and as good as any that can be bought outside. Yesterday I started to have my lunch sent in from the *trattoria* again. (Today's hasn't yet arrived, but it's still early.) For the last few days, I've given up reading the political dailies in favor of company. Another prisoner comes to my cell from one o'clock until about five. He is from a village near Monza and is awaiting trial on a charge of theft and damages to a brothel because of an overzealous raid for cocaine on the part of a

self-appointed vice squad. This prisoner's company has entertained me greatly these last few days. He's a rather alert and lively young man, and I'm always quick at making friends. For the moment, at least, there's no lack of topics of conversation.

Have you read Margaret Kennedy's book?<sup>1</sup> Another quite interesting novel is the one by Henri Beraud;<sup>2</sup> if you've read it, do you agree that it reproduces rather well the dry, terse style of the old French chroniclers? You should also read the memoirs of André Gide,<sup>3</sup> whose other poetic and fictional works you may know. R. Bacchelli's novel—*Il diavolo a Pontelungo* ["The Devil at Pontelungo"]<sup>4</sup>—has been very well received, judging by the reviews I've read. Bacchelli belongs to a school that attracted much attention after the war, the so-called *rondisti* (from the name of their periodical, *La Ronda*). They "discovered" that Leopardi is the greatest Italian writer and that Leopardi's prose is the best model for modern literature. They published a very fine anthology of Leopardi's prose, but I believe that their energies were completely exhausted by the publication of this anthology. It's hardly clear from this novel what significant innovations Bacchelli has introduced into modern Italian literature. It certainly reveals none of the harmonious structure and the perfect fusion between expressive form and conception that characterize Leopardi.

I hope you'll soon be well again. I count on seeing you still happier and stronger at our next meeting.

Affectionately,  
Antonio

1. *The Constant Nymph* (London, 1924), translated into Italian in 1927. Gramsci had recommended it to Tania in a letter of August 29, 1927, "The title *The Constant Nymph* is somewhat foolish, but the book is interesting: I don't know why, but it reminds me of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. However, don't expect the same intensity. It's certainly remarkable, both because it's written by a woman and because of the psychological atmosphere and the world that it describes. . . . I'd like you to send this novel to Giulia when you've finished reading it."

2. *Mon ami Robespierre* ("My Friend Robespierre," Paris, 1927).  
3. *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* ("Memories of Childhood and Adolescence," Paris, 1927).

4. Riccardo Bacchelli (b. 1891) is a prolific Italian novelist and essayist, one of the founders and directors of the periodical *La Ronda*, which became famous immediately after World War I for its opposition to avant-garde ideas.

15

Milan  
October 3, 1927

Dearest Mother,

I've received your registered letter of September 26. Please thank Carlo very much. I've also received Father Poddighi's sermon, but it's not very amusing—it certainly has none of the fresh peasant humor of the one addressed to the *populu de Masuddas*. Despite the fact that I'd only heard it a few times, I managed to remember whole passages, which is why I asked you to send it. *E ite cou no mais bogau—chi si nci boghint is ogus—e un arrogu e figau—etc.*, etc.<sup>1</sup> I like it very much. I think that some of my letters must have gone astray: otherwise there is no way to account for the lack of news. I haven't been ill and I feel fine. Lately, I've been spending a few hours a day with other prisoners instead of reading the daily papers. The company, as you can imagine, is such as a prison offers, especially since I'm not allowed to see other political prisoners, only common criminals. But this distracts me and makes the time pass more quickly.

My sister-in-law is out of the hospital and comes to visit me from time to time. Even though she's still convalescing, she goes to a great deal of trouble for me. Every day she comes to the prison and sends me some delicacy to eat: fruit, chocolate, or fresh dairy products. Poor thing, I can't persuade her to tire herself less and to consider her health a little more. I'm somewhat embarrassed by so much self-sacrifice, which is more than one can sometimes expect from a sister.



I wanted to ask you something. I can't remember which of my books are still at Ghilarza. I remember that in Turin in 1913, I bought a collection of books on Sardinia from the library of a Marquis of Boyd,<sup>2</sup> whose heirs had eliminated books on Sardinian subjects. I seem to recall that I took some of them to Ghilarza during the holidays. If they're still there, I would like to have General Lamarmora's<sup>3</sup> book on his journeys in Sardinia (in French) and the histories by Baron Manno.<sup>4</sup> I believe that both of these are in fact at Ghilarza. I had a large bound volume (a big one weighing at least ten kilos) containing all of the Arborea papers,<sup>5</sup> but forget whether I brought it home. There should be a small book by the civil engineer Marchese: *Con Quintino Sella in Sardegna* ["With Quintino Sella in Sardinia"].<sup>6</sup> If you find any of these in the house, please see that they are sent to me. Tell Carlo that if he happens to buy any issues of *Il Nuraghe*,<sup>7</sup> he should send them to me when he is through with them. When you can, would you send me some of the Sardinian songs that the descendants of Pirise Pirione of Bolotana sing in the streets; and if they have poetry competitions for some festivity, could you write me what themes are sung? Do they still celebrate the feast of St. Constantine at Sedilo and the feast of St. Palmerius, and if so, what are they like? Is the feast of St. Isidore still a spectacular one? Do they parade the banner of the four seas, and are there still captains dressed as old militiamen? As you know, these things have always fascinated me, so please write me about them and don't consider them silly and without rhyme or reason.

I haven't had any news of the children for some time, but trust they're well. Tender hugs to you and all those at home.

Nino

1. "What slander have you not invented against me? May they tear out your eyes and liver!" Gramsci refers to a kind of popular pamphlet containing versified sermons, a characteristic form of Sardinian folk culture.

2. A Sardinian nobleman.

3. Alberto Lamarmora (1789-1863) was an officer in the Napoleonic

army and later in that of Piedmont, his native land. He had much sympathy for the liberal cause. After 1848, Lamarmora was a military commander in Sardinia. His monumental *Voyage en Sardaigne de 1819 à 1825* ("Journey in Sardinia from 1819 to 1825," Paris, 1826) contains a minute description of the physical and economic conditions of the island.

4. Giuseppe Manno: *Storia della Sardegna* ("A History of Sardinia," 4 vols., Turin, 1825-1827) and *Storia moderna della Sardegna dall'anno 1773 al 1799* ("A History of Modern Sardinia from the Year 1773 to 1799," 2 vols., Turin, 1842).

5. These documents on the history and literature of Sardinia from ancient times to the Middle Ages were discovered in 1845 by a Cagliari monk, who published them as papers from the archives of the Judges of Arborea. Arborea was one of the four zones into which Sardinia was divided in A.D. 1000. It became a dominion of the Aragonese dynasty in 1417. These documents gave rise to the myth of the primacy of Sardinian culture, which inspired Sardinian separatist currents after the unification of Italy. Gramsci wrote to Giulia about "Sardinianism" in a letter of 1924, "The spirit of rebellion . . . spread even to the rich oppressors of the Sardinian peasants. I became convinced of the need to fight for the region's independence. How many times did I repeat the slogan 'Throw the mainlanders into the sea!'" (See Introduction, p. 12.)

6. (Turin, 1893). These memoirs of political life were written by Eugenio Marchese. Quintino Sella (1827-1884), mathematician, economist, and politician of moderate and conservative leanings, was Minister of Finance in the Italian government at various times after the unification of Italy.

7. A cultural review that appeared in Cagliari from 1923 to 1930. *Nuraghi* are megalithic structures found throughout Sardinia whose origin and function are unknown.

16

Milan

October 3, 1927

Dearest Tania,

Your two cards of September 21 and 23 arrived. You mustn't spend your time thinking about what I want. I promise that if I have any real needs, I won't hesitate to let you know. As regards books,



just to satisfy you, I should like to have the recent publication by Daudet and Maurras, *L' "Action Française" et le Vatican*,<sup>1</sup> which is also available in Milan. Moreover, I should like the *Short Handbook of Linguistics* by Giulio Bertoni and Matteo Giulio Bartoli, published in Modena in 1925 or 1926. I had ordered a book by Finck from the Sperling bookshop (23 Via Larga). As I couldn't remember the title, instead of the book I wanted, they sent me a work that would be quite interesting for a would-be student of Chinese, Lappish, Turkish, Georgian, Samoan, and the dialect of the Zambezi Negroes, but which does not interest me now, since I am not ready for such arduous studies. The exact title of the book I want is: F. N. Finck, *World Language Groups*, published by Teubner in Leipzig, in the "From Nature and the Spiritual World" collection. The object of the book is to classify all the languages of the world, but without studying them individually. The book I was sent deals, on the other hand, with the basic grammatical elements of the languages I mentioned (as well as those of Arabic and Modern Greek) and includes an anthology of texts. Let me tell you a little story of the Zambezi Negroes about some girls playing in the forest with snakes, entitled: *Za bakazana n in-zoca* (literally, "concerning certain organisms-persons-girls with organisms-snakes"), but this would be too complicated. However, you can admire the conciseness of the Negroes compared with European verbosity. What's more, I believe that some of the sounds are produced by a click of the tongue and not by vocal articulation. I want to keep this book: just to rile her, I'll send it to Giulia with the recommendation that she study the Lappish, Samoan, and African languages; this could complement her geography studies, which I had to work so hard to persuade her to undertake in the first place. How does the idea strike you? Don't go to undue trouble over these books. You can go to Sperling's in my name and get them sent to me. If possible, I would like the single issue of *Europe Nouvelle*, dealing with the Vatican and France, which appeared last February or March. You could also send me a few numbers of the *Die literaris-*

*che Welt*, which you can probably find somewhere, since it's on sale at the Modernissima bookshop in Rome.

A hug.

Antonio

---

1. Léon Daudet (1867-1942), son of the well-known author of *Tartarin de Tarascon* and of *Lettres de mon moulin* ("Letters from My Windmill") and a novelist in his own right, and Charles Maurras (1868-1952) directed the nationalist Catholic-Monarchist newspaper *Action Française*. From 1932 on, they supported Fascism and collaborated with the Nazis during the occupation of France by the Third Reich. For this reason, Maurras was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1945. In his letter of January 30, 1928 (Letter 21 in this volume), Gramsci speaks of this work at greater length. His interest in it goes back to his research on the formation of modern parties and States, later collected in the volume *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo stato moderno* ("Notes on Machiavelli, Politics, and the Modern State"). He considers it particularly with regard to the relations between politics, the Church, and Catholic ideology. But the passages in the *Notebooks* discussing this question were written several years after this letter (in 1933-1934). Gramsci's general intention was to examine the way in which ideologies are concretely linked to political forces; it was important, in this respect, to study the role of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century and that of such organizations as Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action). (See Letter 21, n. 4.)

17

Milan

November 14, 1927

Dearest Tania,

A few books have already arrived. *Quintino Sella in Sardinia* and the Mondadori catalogue are already here in my cell. The books by Finck and Maurras<sup>1</sup> have arrived but have not yet been delivered to

me. It's strange that I should have asked my mother for the book on Quintino Sella.<sup>2</sup> I think it was one of the first books I ever read, because it was among the books at home, but it didn't bring back any memories. I should also like to have the following publications:

1. Benedetto Croce, *The Theory and History of Historiography* (published by Laterza, Bari).

2. *Selected Works of Machiavelli*, edited by G. Prezzolini (published by Treves).

3. Mario Sobrero, *Peter and Paul* (published by Treves).

4. The De Agostini Calendar-Atlas for 1927.

5. The catalogue of the Florentine publisher Vallecchi, which you can get from the Sperling bookshop. Inquire whether the *Complete Machiavelli*<sup>3</sup> has appeared in the *Complete Works* collection published by Barbera in Florence, and if so, find out the price. I'm afraid that it will cost too much, at least a hundred lire or thereabouts, so I'll make do with the *Selected Works* in the Treves edition. At the time of Machiavelli's fifth centennial, I read all the articles published by the five daily papers that I was currently reading. Later, I received the single issue of *Marzocco*<sup>4</sup> on Machiavelli. I was struck by the fact that none of the authors writing for the centennial established any connection between Machiavelli's books and the development of all the European countries in the same historical period. Led astray by the purely moralistic problem of so-called Machiavellianism, they were unaware that Machiavelli was the theorist of the national State governed by an absolute monarchy—in other words, in Italy he was theorizing about what was being energetically accomplished by Elizabeth in England, by Ferdinand the Catholic in Spain, by Louis XI in France, and by Ivan the Terrible in Russia. Even if he did not, and could not, know about any of these national developments, they represented the historical problem of the period, which Machiavelli had the genius to understand intuitively and expound systematically.<sup>5</sup>

A hug, dear Tania, after this digression, which will probably interest you only in a very mild way.

Antonio

1. See Letter 16.

2. See Letter 15, n. 6.

3. An anthology edited by Giuseppe Prezzolini. (See Introduction, n. 11, and Letter 57, n. 4.)

4. A cultural review published in Florence.

5. This letter anticipates some of the arguments with which Gramsci deals in the ample sections of the *Notebooks* dedicated to Machiavelli and collected in the volume *Notes on Machiavelli* (see Letter 16, n. 1). Obviously, Gramsci rejects the traditional concept of Machiavellianism and turns his attention to the concrete historical situation of which Machiavelli's ideas are the product and consciousness.

18

Milan

November 21, 1927

Dearest Tania,

I've received the following books: Francesco Crispi, *I Mille* ["The Thousand"]; Boccardo, Gentile, etc., *Goffredo Mameli e i suoi tempi* ["Goffredo Mameli and His Times"]; C. Maurras, *L' "Action Française" et le Vatican* ["The 'Action Française' and the Vatican"].<sup>1</sup>

I forgot, at our last meeting, to thank you for the handkerchief and to congratulate you as you deserve. The little geese seem to have come out beautifully. I don't remember whether I've ever told you the story of the handkerchiefs embroidered by Genia.<sup>2</sup> I used to love to make fun of her, insisting that the swallows or the other embroidered ornaments were always lizards. And, in fact, both the ornaments and the monograms of those handkerchiefs showed a distinct tendency to take on saurian characteristics. Genia really got angry at seeing the merits of her feminine handiwork so slighted. On the other hand, I have to admit, for loyalty's sake, that your efforts are very fine—let me congratulate you again.

I want to write to you at length about the new suit, since I consider it a completely futile question. You have to bear in mind that the

trial will be held quite soon now and that once I've been sentenced and sent to a penitentiary, the prison administration will provide the regular prisoner's outfit. It's true that the regulations are very vaguely formulated in this respect, stipulating roughly that "The prisoner's head is to be shaved and he must wear a tunic, in all relevant cases." It would appear that there can be exceptions. But I've no specific objection to wearing the tunic and won't take special measures to be made an "exception." So what's the point of having a new suit made? For the trial, since people might say that my old jacket was for "demagogic" show, I'll wear the suit I have put away, which is in a reasonably decent state. Naturally, I don't want to argue with you about this or upset you. My reasons are utilitarian ones and can be changed only by the wish not to make you unhappy.

Affectionately,  
Antonio

---

1. Francesco Crispi (1818-1901) was an Italian politician, one of the leaders in the unification of Italy, who took part, under Garibaldi, in the liberation of Sicily and the South of Italy in 1860. His book *I Mille* ("The Thousand") is an account of Garibaldi's Sicilian expedition.

Goffredo Mameli (1827-1849) was a poet and patriot in the Italian struggle for independence and was closely linked with Garibaldi. He died during the defense of the Roman Republic in 1849, fighting against the French, the papal forces, and the Neapolitans. He was the author of the national anthem.

The book by Maurras on Action Française is discussed in Letter 16, n. 1.  
2. Genia is Tatiana's and Giulia's sister.

Milan  
January 2, 1928

Dear Mother,

How did you pass the holidays there? I hope everything went smoothly and that you felt well and had no worries. I spent mine quite simply as you can imagine. When one's in good health. . . !

I wanted to send you a telegram to arrive exactly on Christmas morning, but wasn't allowed to. It seems that the prisoners here don't even have the right to send greetings on the one day in the year dedicated to the family. Mother dear, I wish you could have heard from me that day, you might have felt less melancholy.

In any case, another year has gone by more quickly than I thought it would. It hasn't been entirely useless. I've learned a number of things I would have gone on not knowing about otherwise. I saw one scene after another that I would have had no other occasion to see. In short, I'm not entirely unhappy about 1927. For a prisoner, this is already something, don't you think? I must be an exceptional one: I hope I stay this way the whole time that I'm forced to live in this condition.

A loving hug for everyone at home.

Nino

Milan  
January 2, 1928

Dear Tania,

And thus a new year begins. One should draw up resolutions for a new life, according to the custom; but despite the time I've dedicated to thinking about them, I haven't been able to. This was always one of my great problems, even in those first years when I began to reason. In elementary school, we were always assigned a composition on the following theme at this time of year: "What I Want to Be When I Grow Up." This was a thorny question, but when I was eight, I answered it for the first time, saying I had chosen the profession of teamster. I believed that the job of teamster combined utility with pleasure: cracking a whip and leading horses around, you could engage in a noble activity that also earned your daily bread. I remained faithful to this idea the following year, but for extrinsic reasons. The truth of the matter was that, by then, my most ardent aspiration was to become a bailiff. Why? That same year, an old man with an adorable black puppy had come to our town to serve as bailiff. I simply wasn't able to separate the image of that puppy—with a red bow around the neck, a little caparison on his back, a varnished collar, and ornaments fit for a pony on his head—from that of his master and his master's profession. Even so, I gave up this seductive idea, though with great regret. I was incredibly logical and my moral integrity could have made even great heroes of duty blush. Yes, I considered myself unworthy of becoming bailiff and of owning such a marvelous puppy: I didn't know the eighty-four articles of the Statute of the Realm<sup>1</sup> by heart. It was a fact. I had already passed through the second grade (when the civic virtues of the teamster were revealed to me) and planned to take tests in November in order to be admitted directly to the fourth grade. I was sure

of succeeding; but when the principal, as soon as I appeared before him to make a formal request to that effect, asked me point-blank, "Are you familiar with the eighty-four articles of the Statute?" I realized I hadn't even thought of these articles, having studied only the "rights and duties of a citizen" included in the textbook. This was a terrible blow, especially since I had taken part, for the first time, on September 20, in a commemorative parade, and had carried a Chinese lantern and shouted with the rest: "Long live the Lion of Caprera! Long live the Dead Man of Staglieno!"<sup>2</sup> (I don't remember whether we yelled "the Dead Man" or "the Prophet" of Staglieno—perhaps both.) I had been certain to be promoted and to earn the juridical qualifications to vote, thus becoming a perfect and active citizen. Instead, I didn't know the eighty-four articles of the Statute. What kind of a citizen was I anyway? What right did I have to dream ambitiously of being bailiff and of owning a dog with a bow and caparison? A bailiff is one wheel of the government (a big wheel, I believed then), a custodian of the law, protecting it from tyrants who try to crush it. And I was ignorant of the eighty-four articles! Preconstituted, schematic plans necessarily collide with and shatter against hard realities, when one has such a strict sense of duty.<sup>3</sup>

Dear Tania, do you think I've been beating about the bush? Do laugh and forgive me. A hug.

Antonio

1. The Statute of the Kingdom of Italy is the constitutional document issued by King Charles Albert on April 4, 1848 for the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, which subsequently provided the constitutional basis for the Kingdom of Italy upon its unification in 1861. It remained valid until the fall of the monarchy in 1946.

2. Garibaldi was called "the Lion of Caprera" because he was interned by Cavour on the island of Caprera, off the Sardinian coast, after the victorious Sicilian expedition of 1860. "The Dead Man of Staglieno" is Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), one of the leaders of the republican movement during the Risorgimento, who was buried in Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa.

3. A first allusion to this autobiographical episode occurs in an article in



*Il Grido del Popolo* of November 20, 1915: "I remember a poor boy who had not been able to make his place on the learned benches of the village schools because of his precarious health and who had studied on his own (unfortunately, not enough) for the exam for the elementary school diploma. But when, all haggard, he appeared before the teacher, the representative of official learning, to present his written application penned in his best hand, the man stared at him through his learned glasses and asked gruffly, 'Yes, all right, but do you think the exam is that easy? Do you know, for example, the eighty-four articles of the Statute?' Whereat the poor boy started to tremble, returned home crying disconsolately, and for the time being refused to take the exam." (In *Scritti giovanili* ["Early writings."])

2 I

January 30, 1928

Dearest Berti,<sup>1</sup>

Your letter of the thirteenth arrived a week ago, when I had already had my quota of two letters. No news here: the usual squalor and tedium. Even reading is losing its attractions. Of course, I still read a great deal, but mechanically and without interest. Although I'm in company, I read a minimum of one book a day—all manner of books, as you can imagine (I even reread Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*), depending on how the prison rental library sees fit to distribute them. These last few weeks I've also read several books sent to me by my family, but nothing of any great interest. I'll tell you what they are, to help you while away the time.

L' "*Action Française*" et le Vatican.<sup>2</sup> This is the so-called "yellow book" of the Action Française: a collection of articles, speeches, and circulars, many of which I already knew because they appeared in the *Act. Franç.* of 1926. The political substance of the conflict is heavily veiled in the book. It contains only the "canonical" discussion of the so-called "mixed matter" and the "rightful freedom" of the faithful.<sup>3</sup> You know the facts of the matter: in France there is a mass Catholic organization, similar to our own Azione Cattolica, under the presidency of General de Castelnau.<sup>4</sup> Until the French

political crisis of 1926, the Nationalists were, in fact, the only political party that grafted itself onto this organization and exploited its possibilities (four to five million subscriptions a year, for example). In other words, the Catholic forces were all affected by the consequences of the political adventures of Maurras and Daudet, who in 1926 had a provisional government all ready to assume power in case of collapse. The Vat., fearing a new wave of anticlerical laws of the Combes type,<sup>5</sup> decided to break completely with the *Act. Franç.* and to organize a popular democratic party that would serve as a parliamentary Center, following the Briand-Poincaré policy. For obvious reasons, the *Act. Franç.* published only half-obsequious and moderate articles: the attacks of a violent and personal nature were reserved for the *Charivari*,<sup>6</sup> a weekly publication that has no Italian equivalent and that was not an official party organ; but these are not reported in the book. I see that the orthodox camp has published a reply to the "yellow book," compiled by Jacques Maritain,<sup>7</sup> a professor at the Catholic Institute in Paris and the acknowledged leader of the orthodox intellectuals. This represents a considerable victory for the Vatican, because in '26 Maritain wrote a book in defense of Maurras and had previously signed a declaration to the same effect. Now that these intellectuals have broken away, the monarchists must be growing increasingly isolated.

A book by Alessandro Zévaés, *Storia della terza repubblica—La Francia dal settembre 1870 al 1926* ["History of the Third Republic—France from September 1870 to 1926"]—very superficial, but amusing. Anecdotes, ample quotations, etc. It serves as a reminder of the principal events in French parliamentary and journalistic life.

R. Michels, *La Francia contemporanea* ["Contemporary France"]. This book is a fraud. It is a collection of disconnected articles on certain extremely bigoted aspects of French life. Because he was born in the Rhine district of Prussia, where Roman and Teutonic traditions converge, Michels takes it upon himself to cement the friendship between Germans and neo-Latins. He embodies the worst characteristics of both cultures: the effrontery of the Teutonic philistine and the miserable fatuousness of the southerner. This man, who flaunts his disavowal of the German race like a cockade and



boasts about having called one of his sons "Marius" to commemorate the defeat of the Cimbri and the Teutons, seems to me guilty of the utmost hypocrisy for the purpose of academic advancement.<sup>9</sup>

A collection of writings for the centenary of Goffredo Mameli (Gentile, etc.). The second edition of Francesco Crispi's *I Mille* ["The Thousand"] is the most interesting of these. And this is all, because I don't want to mention other less important works of a romantic nature. Write to me when you can, but I imagine that this is even harder for you than it is for me.

Cordial regards,

Antonio

---

1. See Letter 11, n. 1

2. This volume (see Letter 16, n. 1) derives from the controversy between the political group Action Française and the Vatican at the time of the political crisis of 1926 in France. In 1924, a left-wing government, the so-called Cartel of the Left, had been set up in Paris. Laws were passed to undermine the authority of the armed forces and to block the process of "involution" then under way. But soon after, there was a reaction from the Right that produced a grave crisis early in 1926, resulting in the government of the "Union Sacrée" (Sacred Union) headed by Raymond Poincaré. Action Française had conducted a campaign to push the political situation further to the right, with the aim of restoring the monarchy, but it did not have the support of the Vatican and, hence, of French Catholics in this attempt. Catholic organizations in France, including Action Catholique, were aiming at Parliament instead, particularly, as Gramsci points out below, since they "interpreted" the needs of the peasants, who required parliamentary representation. It must also be borne in mind that the extremely anti-Semitic Action Française had rapidly grown in strength when it received the support and approval of right-wing and racialist groups defeated at the time of the Dreyfus affair.

3. "Mixed matter" and "rightful freedom" were the formal terms of the controversy between the Vatican and Action Française. The latter held that religious authorities should not intervene in political matters and that the faithful must vote "according to their own political conscience". Gramsci's term "canonical discussion" refers to the fact that the formulas used in this

controversy were technical ones based on the canon law of the Church of Rome.

4. Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action) is an organization of Italian Catholic laymen directly dependent on the Roman Curia, to which Gramsci dedicates a short chapter in *Notes on Machiavelli*. It was founded in 1848. Edouard de Curières de Castelnau (1851-1944) was a French general who had taken part in both the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and World War I. In 1919 he was elected deputy and, as president of the Army Commission of the National Assembly, supported the application of the military laws of 1923, later abolished by the Cartel of the Left. He subsequently became the head of all of the Catholic organizations in France.

5. Emile Combes (1835-1921) was a French politician of the Radical Party, president of the Cabinet from 1902 to 1905. He became famous for his anticlerical policies and for his program of suppressing religious assemblies and religious instruction in the schools, which ultimately amounted to the total separation of State from Church. Under Combes' government, France broke off relations with the Holy See.

6. *Charivari* was a well-known French satirical newspaper of democratic views, founded in 1832 and employing artists such as Daumier, Grandville, and Gavarni. The name is derived from a word meaning a great shout of disapproval.

7. Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a French writer and philosopher of Protestant origin who converted to Catholicism in 1906. He was one of the principal exponents of neo-Thomism—that is, of the revival of the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas as the official philosophy of the Church. (See Letter 66, n. 4.) The first book to which Gramsci refers is *Primauté du spirituel* ("Priority of the Spiritual," Paris, 1927). The second, a defense of Maurras, is *Une opinion sur Charles Maurras et le devoir des catholiques* ("A View of Charles Maurras and Catholic Duty," Paris, 1926).

Gramsci later returns to this question in a letter of April 7, 1930, "The book on Action Française and the Vatican is out of date by now: it is only the first volume of a series that may still continue, since Daudet and Maurras are tireless in their efforts to dish up the same things with different sauces. But it is precisely for this reason that this volume may still offer interest as a definition of principles. I don't know if you [Gramsci is here addressing his sister-in-law Tania] have grasped the significance of the conflict between the Vatican and the Monarchists for French history. . . . It is the French version of a profound reconciliation between State and Church. French Catholics as a mass, organized as the French Catholic Action, are cutting themselves off from the Monarchist minority, thus ceasing to be the potential popular reserve for a legitimist *coup d'état*, and are attempting to form a vast Catholic-Republican party, which ought to absorb a considerable

portion of the present Radical Party. . . ." But the most extensive treatment of this problem appears in Notebook 30 of 1933-1934 (see Letter 16, n. 1), now included in *Notes on Machiavelli*, where it provides the theme for the outline of an essay entitled "Notes on French National Life." A separate chapter is dedicated to the French crisis of 1926. It is essential to note that this study was important to Gramsci not only for his analysis of the formation of political parties and ideologies, but also because it was linked to the capital problem of the relations between the Catholic Church and the Italian State; for it was precisely in those years that a Concordat, which was finally signed in 1929, was being arranged between the Fascist government and the Church.

8. The Roman general Caius Marius defeated the Germanic tribes, the Cimbri and the Teutons, in 102 and 101 B.C.

22

Milan

February 20, 1928

Dear Teresina,

I received your January thirtieth letter and the photograph of the babies, for which I thank you. I'd be delighted to hear from you again.

The worst problem I have now is boredom. The days go by all alike, the hours and minutes follow one after the other monotonously, drop by drop, completely undermining my nervous system.<sup>1</sup> The first three months after my arrest were at least full of action. Bounced around from one end of the peninsula to the other, admittedly with great physical discomfort, I never had time to get bored. Ever-new spectacles to gaze on, and curious characters to try to place in my mind, made me feel I was living a fantastic novel. But now, for more than a year, I've been made to stay here in Milan in forced leisure. I can read, but I'm not able to study because they won't let me have any writing materials, not even with all the surveillance ordered by the chief.<sup>2</sup> It seems I'm considered a terrifying individual capable of setting the four corners of the country on fire, or the like.

My only distraction is the letters I get, but hardly anyone writes to me. For a month now, my sister-in-law has been ill, and I've been denied even the weekly conversation with her.

Mamma's state of mind worries me, and I wish I knew how to reassure and console her. If I only could convince her how extremely calm I am, as in fact is the case; but I don't seem able to. There is a kind of abyss between us, formed by certain feelings and ways of thinking. For her, my being in prison represents a terrible disaster, one link in a chain of mysterious causes and effects. For me, it represents one episode of a political battle that was being fought and will continue to be fought, not only in Italy but in the whole world, for who knows how long a time. I was captured just as one is captured in wartime; I knew that this or even worse things could happen. But I'm afraid you think along the same lines as Mamma and that this explanation will strike you as a riddle or seem written in a foreign language.

I stared at the photograph for a long time, comparing it to others you sent me earlier.

(I had to interrupt this letter to be shaved, and now don't recall what I wanted to say. It's too much trouble to start again, so I'll leave it for next time.)

Affectionate greetings for everyone. A hug.

Nino

1. For the description of a similar state of mind, see Letter 24 of February 27, 1928.

2. Mussolini.

Milan

February 27, 1928

Dearest Tania,

. . . Giulia's letter had a calming effect on my state of mind. I'll write to her separately, at some length, if I can, because I don't want to reproach her and I don't yet see how I can write her a long letter without doing so. Does it seem right to you, really, that she should not correspond when she's unwell or distressed? I think that in these very circumstances she ought to write to me more often and at greater length. But I don't want to turn this letter into a string of reproaches.

To help you pass the time, I'll tell you about a little "prison" discussion carried out in fits and starts. One of the company, who I think is an Evangelist or a Methodist or a Presbyterian,<sup>1</sup> was highly indignant because there is no ban in our cities against those poor Chinese hawkers of knick-knacks that are undoubtedly mass-produced in Germany, but which seem to our compatriots to embody at least a small element of Chinese folklore. According to our Evangelist, this trade constituted a serious threat to the homogeneity of Western beliefs and ways of thought. He saw it as a grafting of Asiatic idolatry onto the stock of European Christianity. The little Buddha images might have a special fascination that could well affect European psychology and promote new ideologies totally different from the traditional one. It was certainly very interesting that such a person as this Evangelist should worry about things like this, even if the worries sprang from a remote set of problems. It was easy to drive him into a labyrinth of ideas from which he could not escape, by pointing out to him that:

1. The influence of Buddhism on Western civilization has much deeper roots than appears, because throughout the Middle Ages,

from the Arab invasion until about 1200, the life of Buddha was widely known in Europe as the life of a Christian martyr, canonized by the Church, which realized its error only after several centuries and duly deconsecrated the pseudo-saint. In those times, when religion had great vitality and constituted the only ideology of the masses, this episode must have had an incalculable influence.<sup>2</sup>

2. Buddhism is not a form of idolatry.<sup>3</sup> If there is a danger in this respect, it lies more in the Negro music and dancing that has been imported into Europe. This music has completely won over a whole section of the cultured population of Europe, to the point of real fanaticism. It is inconceivable that the incessant repetition of the Negroes' physical gestures as they dance around their fetishes or that the constant sound of the syncopated rhythm of jazz bands should have no ideological effects. This is an extremely widespread phenomenon, affecting millions and millions of people, especially the young. It creates very strong and violent impressions that have a deep and lasting influence. Moreover, it is expressed through music, the most universal language existing today—a language rapidly communicating the images and general impressions of a culture not only alien to ours but certainly less complex than that of Asia, a primitive and rudimentary culture, and therefore one that can be readily diffused and assimilated throughout the psychic world by means of music and dancing. The poor Evangelist was left convinced that, while assailed by the fear of becoming an Asiatic, he was in fact unwittingly becoming a Negro and that this process was already in an advanced stage, that of the half-breed at least. I don't know what's happened to him, but I imagine that he's no longer capable of giving up his coffee with jazz accompaniment and that from now on he'll look at himself more closely in the mirror to catch the colored pigments in his blood.

Dear Tania, I wish you a quick and complete recovery.

Affectionately,

Antonio

1. In an earlier letter he wrote, "You should check, for me, the exact meaning that Tolstoy gives to the evangelical notion of one's neighbor. It seems to me that he abides by the literal, etymological meaning of the word: 'he who is closest to you'—in other words, the members of your family, and, at the most, the members of your village."

2. For further observations on Buddhism, see the *Notebooks* that are now included in *Intellectuals* under the paragraphs "Brief Notes on Chinese Culture" and "Brief Notes on Japanese Culture." These notes, which form sections in the study of the formation of intellectuals, deal with the influence of Catholicism in the East and that of Buddhism and other Eastern religions in the West. "At first," Gramsci writes, "Buddhism, together with Chinese culture, was adopted in Japan by the cultured classes. A religious synthesis resulted: Buddhism-Shintoism-elements of Confucianism." But he also emphasizes the connections between religious reform in the East and the development of democracy, and compares this with European Christianity: "Unlike Christianity, Buddhism did not try to eradicate the pre-existent national religions (in Europe, the national tendencies manifested themselves within the ambit of Christianity)."

3. In the "Brief Notes" mentioned above, Gramsci insists that Buddhism is not idolatrous; with regard to Buddhism in Japan, he distinguishes between "religion" and "mythology": the latter he considers "a permanent 'artistic' or 'folkloristic' element"; the former is "a valuable conception of the world that is still alive and operative." The *Notebook* containing these notes dates from 1929.

24

Milan

February 27, 1928

Dear Giulia,

I received your letter of December 26, 1927, with the part added January 24 and an enclosed note. I was truly relieved to have the letters, although I've been much calmer now for a while. I've changed a great deal in all this time. Certain days I thought I had become apathetic and inert, but now I see I made an inaccurate

analysis. I was undergoing a series of crises of resistance toward the new way of life a prison environment implacably forces on you—the routine, the privations and necessities, the enormous number of minute events that occur day after day, month after month; year after year, with the same mechanical rhythm of sand in an hourglass. Every molecule of me—my whole body, my psyche—was tenaciously opposed to absorbing the external environment. But, despite this, a certain amount of pressure succeeded in overcoming my resistance and modified a certain zone of my being. Each time this happened, I underwent a rapid agitation of my entire being in an attempt to ward off the invader. By now, I have experienced an entire cycle of changes and have arrived at the serene decision not to struggle any longer with the ineluctable in such an inefficacious, inept way, but, instead, to try to control a process already in motion, by using a little irony. I'm sure I will never become a complete philistine, though, since I'm ready at any time to toss off the brute second skin (half donkey, half sheep) that the surroundings grow over your own skin. There is one thing I'll never be able to do, however—give my natural skin the smoky color it once had. Valia<sup>1</sup> won't be able to call me her smoky companion any more. I fear that Delio, despite your contribution, by now must be much smokier than I ever was! You don't believe me? This winter I lived three months without seeing anything but a few remote reflections of the sun. Here in my cell the light that filters in is somewhere between that of a cellar and that of an aquarium.

You shouldn't imagine, though, that my life continues to be as monotonous as it seems. Once you get used to living in an aquarium and adapt your sensory apparatus to the crepuscular, toned-down impressions flowing toward you (always keeping your attitude ironic), a whole world begins to swarm around you, a lively world obeying its own laws and following its own course. It is something like glancing down on an ancient tree trunk that weather has gradually worn away: the closer you look, the more you begin to see. First, only a humid mushroomlike growth, or a snail dripping a trail behind as it slowly drags along; then, a little at a time, you begin to pick out colonies of tiny insects running about industriously, repeat-



ing the same actions, taking the same paths over and over. If you succeed in holding to your original position, there's no danger of turning into a snail or an ant, and it all becomes an interesting way of passing the time.

Every detail of your and the children's lives that I gather from letters helps me form a general idea, but I have too few elements to work with, and my own experience is limited. Also, the children are undoubtedly changing too rapidly for me to follow and to imagine their development. Probably I am way off track on this subject, although this is inevitable. A tender hug.

Antonio

---

1. A niece of Tatiana's.

25

Milan  
March 5, 1928

Dear Tania,

Your letter of February 28 came miraculously fast, arriving on March 3 after only four days. I hope that all my correspondence is as rapid. Mother, poor thing, is desperate because she hasn't had anything from me for two months. On February 27, she still hadn't received my letter of January 9, which I remember perfectly well writing. She must think I'm ill or in some way unable to write.

Congratulations on recovering so completely that you can now get out of bed and walk around. But you're always overoptimistic on principle and have too much faith in a sort of cosmic justice. It would be better to be patient and wait until you're completely well, instead of risking a relapse. You must be out of your mind! If you

don't listen to me, I will resort to drastic measures and yank you by the hair, even if you accuse me of being barbarian, or try to make me feel sorry for you.

I was interested to read about your new experiences and observations. It's probably not necessary to tell you to be indulgent, in both a practical and a spiritual sense. I've always believed that there is an Italy we don't know about because we never see it and which is quite different from the apparent and visible one. In most countries, an abyss separates what you see and what you don't see, but the abyss here is deeper than in any other civilized country. In Italy, the noisy *piazze*, the enthusiastic shouting, the verboseness and ostentation, all cover over the realities of private life more than anywhere else. This is why so many prejudices about the Italians have sprung up, so many gratuitous notions about the solidity of the family unit, the genius that Providence is supposed to have given to us, and so on. Even Michels, in a new book, tells us once again that the average Calabrian peasant, even if illiterate, is more intelligent than the average German university professor;<sup>1</sup> similar notions exonerate people from trying to snuff out illiteracy in Calabria. The behavior of city dwellers—given the fact that urban centers have sprung up here only recently—must be considered together with customs all over the country, which are still on a very low level. One thing stands out: an extreme egoism among the generations from twenty to fifty years old, which harms the children and old people. Naturally, there is no question of permanent "stigmata" of social inferiority. This is a fact that can be explained by history and it will be wiped out as the standard of living rises. The answer lies in the demographic structure of the country: before the war, there were eighty-three "passive" persons for every one hundred with jobs, while in France—a country far richer—only fifty-two weighed on one hundred workers. Too many old people and too many babies compared with the middle generations impoverished by emigration<sup>2</sup>—this is the reason for that egoism of generations that sometimes results in horrifying cruelties. Seven or eight months ago, the newspapers carried the frightening story of a father who massacred his entire family (wife and three children) because when he returned home from the fields, he found



that his meager dinner had already been devoured by the others. About the same time, in Milan, a husband and wife were tried for the murder of their four-year-old son; they had tied him for months to one leg of a table with wire. It came out, as they spoke, that the husband had suspected the wife of infidelity and that she, afraid of losing him if she defended the child against his beatings, gave in to his will to murder him. They were condemned to eight years in prison. At one time, this kind of crime had a special name in the annual records of criminality. Senator Garofalo<sup>3</sup> considered the average of fifty sentences a year for similar crimes as a mere indication of what really went on, since guilty parents often succeeded in eluding the law, following the common custom of ignoring children's health and hygiene and believing, according to a widespread religious fatalism, that it was a blessing to be able to offer new angels to the heavenly court. It is no wonder that this ideology exists even in the most progressive modern cities, attenuated or softened as it may be. Indulgence is called for, especially if you believe, as I do, that these social conditions will change and progress along with all of the other aspects of life and that no "principle" is ever absolute. Many regards and a hug.

Antonio

---

1. This statement was made by an Italian sociologist, Enrico Ferri (1856-1929), who was a Socialist deputy and later a supporter of Fascism; the idea was taken up again by the historian Roberto Michels in his book *La Francia contemporanea* ("Contemporary France"). Gramsci returned to this problem a number of times, both before his imprisonment (in the essay "Some Aspects of the Southern Question") and in prison, especially in the notes now included in the volume of the Notebooks called *Il Risorgimento*, examining it in the light of the relationship of the southern peasantry and the industrial North, and of the cities and the countryside, and in connection with the formation of intellectuals. On the relationship between North and South, maintained by the hegemony of the North, whose interest it was to keep the southern peasant in a state of inferiority, even culturally, see the following passage in *The Risorgimento*, "The hegemony of the North would

have been 'normal' and historically beneficial if industrialism had succeeded in enlarging its compass with a certain rhythm so as steadily to incorporate new economic zones. Then this hegemony would have been the expression of a struggle between the old and the new, between progress and backwardness, between greater and lesser productivity; there would have been an economic revolution of a national character (and on a national scale) even if the motivating force was still temporarily regional. . . . But this was not what happened. The hegemony assumed permanence, the contrast took the form of a historical condition that was necessary for an undetermined length of time and therefore apparently 'in perpetuity' for the existence of northern industry."

This argument is applicable not only to the relationship between North and South in a country like Italy, but also to colonial and underdeveloped countries and to ethnically and socially subordinate minorities. In the above-mentioned essay on the "southern question," Gramsci says that from the rural bourgeois classes of the South, "the intellectuals derived a strong aversion to the laboring peasant, considered a work machine to be worn down to the bone and one that is easily replaceable because of the overlarge laboring population."

2. On the emigration of the peasant population in Italy in general and in the South in particular, as an effect of the permanent depression of the peasant world and hence a cause of further decadence, see *The Risorgimento*, "In Italy [unlike Germany during the phase of industrialization], emigration was confined to the laboring population, which was predominantly undeveloped both industrially and intellectually. The corresponding intellectual elements remained undeveloped, as well—in other words unmodified by industrialism and culture. This gave rise to a widespread unemployment among intellectuals, which caused a whole series of phenomena involving corruption and political and moral disintegration. . . ."

3. Raffaele Garofalo (1851-1934) was a jurist and one of the founders of the positivist school of criminal law. Gramsci had already discussed his ideas in an article in *Avanti!* in 1916. During his university days, Gramsci had already started to examine the connection between capitalist exploitation and the index of criminality. Togliatti, in his essay "Gramsci sardo" ("Gramsci the Sardinian"), recalls these studies as follows: "In order to gain some understanding of the state of affairs of Sardinia, it was necessary to reject the explanations commonly put forward by publicists and sociologists. . . . Gramsci made me undertake a minute investigation of the facts of Sardinian social life. He encouraged me to collect the statistics for delinquency, and together we plotted the curve for different crimes—against persons, against property, brigandage, cattle stealing, etc. Then we established the principal dates when 'continental' capitalism penetrated into Sar-

dinia, and when the island was subjected to the requirements and laws of this capitalism, to its customs duties, to its particular way of using natural and human resources. The result was striking. The very crimes that were commonly considered to be the manifestations of a fatal social backwardness showed a frightening increase with the development of capitalist exploitation in Sardinia. This increase was therefore due to the more advanced economic order. It was due to the way in which the Sardinian economy was organized, not for the benefit of Sardinia but for that of others within the national framework . . . This research contained, in embryonic form, a new analysis of the whole of Italian society and therefore a new political approach. . . ."

26

Milan  
March 26, 1928

Dear Mother,

I received your registered letter of March 12 three days later (the fourteenth). I could have informed you about this at once last Monday, but had already used up my letters for the week and didn't want to break the rule. Thank you, and warmest thanks to Carlo.

As you see, I haven't left for Rome yet, although the time draws near. It's a question of days, no longer of months as in the past. Already, I have in my hands an order to appear before the judges, prepared by the Examining Commission of the Special Tribunal. There's nothing new in it. I'm not accused of anything concrete, nor are there witnesses or evidence against me.<sup>1</sup> However, four employees of the police claim I'm personally responsible for all the disasters in Italy during the year 1926, including the bad harvest. Even the trip I took to Ghilarza in October 1924 is cited! Can you imagine? And you always complained how rarely I came to visit! It's a good thing I don't travel much. Of course, you mustn't begin to think I will be acquitted. It would be better to get accustomed to the idea that I will inevitably be sentenced to a number of years in jail. I hope only a few years; but by now, I'm more than ready to learn

my fate and, instead of having to wait, wish I were already inside with my hair shaved off and my uniform on. That way, at least my sister-in-law would stop being tortured: to stay near me and take my mind off things a little, she's ended by passing six months of this year in the hospital and still has to recover from a state of appalling weakness.

A few days ago, I had news—good news—about Giulia and the children. Please believe me that I'm serene whenever I think about them. Each day I grow stronger and more resistant to inner agitations. As you know, I've never been excessively sentimental. This apparent insensibility of mine must have sometimes caused you pain. Today, I hope I have lost even the remnant of sentimentality left in me. Like flint, I need to be struck by steel in order for sparks to fly out from me. Only you and a handful of other persons possess this steel-like quality. The tightest of hugs.

Nino

---

1. The vague and inconsistent nature of the "evidence" was subsequently confirmed by the sentence, which was passed on June 4, 1928, and which declared with regard to Gramsci (the number of the accused was twenty-two in all): "Gramsci is one of the chief exponents and one of the most active and influential elements of the Communist Party, especially in his capacity as deputy. And the fact that he is a member of the Central Committee makes him, as well as all the other members of this body, directly and primarily responsible for all the illegal and criminal activities of the Communist organization as sponsored by the organs and general policy of the party itself." Clearly, the "evidence" involved was purely political.

The Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State was a judicial body created *ad hoc* by Fascism by the Exceptional Laws of 1926, with a view to prosecuting the political opponents of the regime and removing them from the jurisdiction of the ordinary magistracy, which had more respect for legality. The Special Tribunal was therefore by its very nature an extra-legal judicial body, which often made no effort to give a coherent juridical basis to its sentences or to conceal the political persecution that was its function.

Between 1927 and 1943, the Special Tribunal passed 4,596 sentences,

for a total of 27,735 years of imprisonment. The death sentences numbered forty-two, of which thirty-one were executed. Those sentenced were members of every social class and of various anti-Fascist parties.

27<sup>1</sup>

Milan  
April 23, 1928

Dearest Mother,

Your registered letter of April 12 has arrived. As you can see, I'm still in Milan and I may well stay here for several weeks yet. The trial appears to have been fixed for June 12.

There's no news. I'm quite well physically, and nothing has happened to shake my mental calm. I've decided to send you my copy of the photograph of Delio, taken in June 1926: I'll find out today if I can send it and how to do this so that it won't get damaged in the mail. Then you must let me know your impressions. I particularly want to know whether he looks like us when we were children. You'll see how handsome your grandson is; you'll be really proud of him. I want you to leave the prison stamp on the back. The photograph should remain just as it is, with the signs of its passage through the prison where I've been immured for so long. Far from feeling ashamed of my imprisonment, I consider it an extreme honor; this will certainly be the child's feeling, too, when he is of an age to understand these things.

I'm waiting for the long letter that you promised me. An affectionate hug.

Nino

1. This letter was first published in *L'Unità*, January 26, 1969.

28

Milan  
May 10, 1928

Dear Mother,

I'm about to leave for Rome.<sup>1</sup> It's decided. They are letting me write now in order to warn you about the change. From now on, unless I inform you that I have moved elsewhere, send your letters to Rome.

Yesterday, I received a registered letter from Carlo, dated May 5. He says he is going to send me a photo of you, which I'd be very glad to have. By now, you should have received Delio's photo, since I sent it over ten days ago by registered mail.

Mother dear, I hate to repeat the things I've written so often, to tell you not to worry about my physical and moral health. For my own peace of mind, I need to feel that you won't be agitated or upset by whatever sentence they give me, and that you understand, even in your heart, that I am presently under political arrest and will be a political prisoner. I'm not ashamed, nor will I ever be ashamed of this fact. Basically, I myself willed this arrest and condemnation. I've always refused to compromise my ideas and am ready to die for them, not just to be put in prison. For this reason, I feel serene and satisfied with myself.<sup>2</sup> Mother dear, how I'd like to hold you close, very close, so that you'd know how much I love you and regret the unhappiness all this causes you. There was no other way to act. Yes, life is difficult, and sometimes sons, for the sake of their own honor and dignity, have to make their mothers suffer.

A tender hug.

Nino

I'll write from Rome as soon as I arrive. Tell Carlo to keep cheerful—I send him infinite thanks. A kiss for everyone.

1. Gramsci left the Milan prison for Rome on the evening of May 11, 1928, to take part in the proceedings that had been instituted against him and twenty-one other Communist leaders. He arrived in Rome on May 12 and was confined in the Regina Coeli prison. The trial took place between May 28 and June 4. The international press was represented by the Rome correspondents of the *Manchester Guardian* and by the Soviet agency *Rosta*. Gramsci's brother Carlo was also present. Gramsci was sentenced to twenty years, four months, and five days in prison. At the same trial, Umberto Terracini (see Introduction, p. 13, n. 2) was sentenced to a total of twenty-six years, eight months—a sentence that was subsequently reduced to twenty-two years, nine months, and five days. Later, in the name of all those convicted, Terracini presented an appeal, which Gramsci mentions in subsequent letters. The appeal was formally rejected.

2. See Letter 26. He also wrote, in an earlier letter to his mother, "Now I shall certainly be given many years, despite the fact that the charge against me is based only on police information and on vague and unverifiable impressions . . . You think that what counts . . . is the real fact of the sentence and the imprisonment that I have to undergo. But surely you must also consider the moral question . . . Imprisonment is a terrible thing, but for me dishonor on account of moral weakness or cowardice would be even worse." Like all other prisoners sentenced by Fascism, Gramsci would have been able to obtain his freedom only by signing a petition to Mussolini for a reprieve, and like the others, he was frequently subjected to this kind of moral pressure.

29<sup>1</sup>

Rome  
May 15, 1928

Dearest Mother,

I arrived in Rome two days ago. I've already sent you a telegram. I'm not going to write to you about the journey from Milan to Rome or about my state of health. I simply want to tell you about a certain set of circumstances, because this is the only way of bringing them to the notice of those who censor our letters.

A few months ago, in the Milan prison, the authorities ordered

that a kind of inquiry be conducted on my state of health. I was practically reproved for not having complained. Both the examining magistrate and the prison director were inclined to hold me responsible for a number of rather alarmist articles published abroad on my health. They intimated that I deliberately wanted to be ill so that it could be broadcast that I was ill.

Here in Rome the situation is almost the opposite. I have no idea how to obtain permission to be served food—naturally at my own expense—that I can digest. There is no possibility of seeing the director. We're limited to one request a week, and for one thing only. Before the first request has been granted, it is already too late to present the second, and so they say that it's quite useless to make requests. This won't prevent me from doing everything possible to safeguard my health. At least they won't be able to hold inquiries then to ascertain whether I deliberately want to be ill. Only today can I ask for authorization to have special food, that is, to feed myself at my own expense, and to eat only things that I can digest: I'll make the request and wait for the results. I want at least to be well enough to stand the strain of the journey to and from the trial.

Dearest Mother, you mustn't be alarmed by all this. I have too much strength of will to be dismayed by such trials. A tender hug.

Antonio

1. This letter was first published in *L'Unità*, January 26, 1969.



Turi<sup>1</sup>

November 19, 1928

Dear Giulia,

I've been treating you badly, despite the fact that there are no good reasons for it. I was exhausted after I left Milan. All the circumstances of my life got worse, and the fact of being in prison began to weigh on me heavily. Now I feel better. The very fact that my life is stabilized now and regulated with some normality has helped me get my thoughts in order.

I was glad to have photographs of you and the children. When too much time intervenes between one visual impression and the next, ugly thoughts fill up the interim. Particularly in the case of Giuliano, I wasn't sure what to think; I didn't have a single picture to keep my memory of him alive. Now I am truly happy. For some months now, I've been feeling more and more isolated and cut off from what is going on in the world. I read many books and magazines, and if you consider the limits imposed on the intellectual life by imprisonment, I do a great deal of reading. But I enjoy it much less than I used to. Books and magazines contain generalized notions and only sketch the course of events in the world as best they can; they never let you have an immediate, direct, animated sense of the lives of Tom, Dick, and Harry. If you're not able to understand real individuals, you can't understand what is universal and general. Many years ago, in 1919 or 1920, I knew a charming young worker who, every Saturday night after work, would come to see me in my office to take a look at the magazine I edited before anyone else.<sup>2</sup> He would often say, "I wasn't able to sleep last night. I kept on thinking, 'What's Japan going to do?'" Japan obsessed him because Italian newspapers mention Japan only when the Mikado dies or an earthquake kills off 10,000 people. Japan eluded him. Since he wasn't able to imagine

what relationship the various world powers had to one another at that time, he believed that he was totally ignorant. I used to laugh at this attitude of his and tease him, but now I realize just how he felt.

I, too, have a Japan, which consists of the lives of Tom, Dick, and Harry, but also of Giulia, Delio, and Giuliano. What is lacking is precisely this molecular sensation. How can I perceive life and have a sense of its complex totality? I feel numb and paralyzed even in my own life because I am deprived of knowing what your life and the children's lives are like now. Another thing disturbs me, since I live in continuous fear of being overrun by the prison routine. This is a monstrous mechanism that crushes and levels everything. When I observe men who have been in prison for five, eight, or ten years and observe how their minds have become warped, I shudder to think what will become of me. At least some of them must have been convinced at the start that they would never give in. Instead, without even being aware of it, so slow and molecular is the process, they find themselves utterly changed today; and this change in them prevents them from realizing exactly what has happened. Of course I intend to resist; but, you know, I'm not able to laugh at myself as I used to, and this is a bad sign. Giulia dear, does all this chatter really interest you, and does it give you any idea of what my life is like now? In fact, I'm not completely cut off from what is going on in the world. Lately, I've been reading a number of books on Catholicism, which strikes me as being a new "Japan." I ask myself which phases French radicalism will have to pass through in order to split into two parts and give birth to a French Catholic Party. This problem keeps me from sleeping, like my young friend. Did you enjoy the paper-knife? It cost me a month's work and some very sore fingertips.

Please write me a long letter about yourself and the babies and send me a photograph at least every six months, so that I can watch them develop and see your smile more often. A tender hug.

Antonio



1. After the sentence, Gramsci was transferred from Rome, which he left on July 8, 1928, to Turi, in Apulia, where he arrived on July 19. He had stopped at Caserta, where he had consulted a doctor about a herpes "that has caused a temporary inflammation, which, although not serious, is very painful." The trial, the imprisonment, the long and taxing journeys, his precarious state of health had all induced in him a psychological tension that is reflected in his correspondence with his relatives, even with his sister-in-law Tania. He wrote to her from Caserta, "You must appreciate that since I've been in prison, I've had to make a deliberate effort to control my feelings and affections and to repress them as far as possible: this is a form of self-defense. So . . . my letters may often have seemed a little arid, dry, a trifle selfish, etc."

On July 20, from the penitentiary in Turi (a penitentiary for sick prisoners to which he had been sent after a special medical examination), he wrote again to his sister-in-law, "The journey from Rome to Turi was a nightmare . . . I felt incredibly ill. In Benevento, I spent two hellish days and nights; I was twisting about like a worm, I couldn't stay sitting, standing, or lying down . . . During the journey from Benevento to Foggia, the pain subsided . . . I stayed in Foggia for five days and in the last three days I was already better, I was able to sleep for a few hours and to lie down without stabbing pains."

On July 30 he wrote, "It's too soon to write to you about my life in this prison . . . I haven't got used to the communal dormitory existence yet (there are six of us together); and I'm suffering a lot from insomnia." On August 13 he continued, "Now I'm in a room with four others who also are political prisoners, but who have bronchial and lung complaints. Although I do not at present suffer from such things, prolonged contact with them . . . might have . . . serious consequences. I imagine that it should not be difficult to obtain it [i.e., a transfer to a separate cell], since the Special Tribunal sentenced me to imprisonment but did not specify what this should be aggravated by tuberculosis . . . I'm also suffering from acute nervous depression and from insomnia . . ." Later Gramsci was authorized to be alone, but he was allotted a cell near the sentry post, where it was even more difficult for him to sleep.

2. At that time, Gramsci was the editor of *Ordine nuovo*, a weekly that was published in Turin from May 1919 to December 1920. Gramsci writes (in an issue of August 14, 1920): "I, Togliatti, and Terracini were invited to hold debates in educational institutes and factory assemblies; the shop committees invited us to small group discussions . . . The development of the shop committees became the central problem, indeed the *idea* behind *Ordine nuovo*: the fundamental problem of a working-class revolution, the problem

of 'liberty' for workers. *Ordine nuovo* became for us and for our supporters the 'newspaper of the factory councils.'" The weekly paper, which soon grew popular among the Turin workers, served as a workers' organizational center as well as a theoretical organ for the factory councils. These were to be a "network of proletarian institutions rooted in the consciousness of the broad masses" and supporting the party and the Confederation of Labor. On this subject, the paper published writings by John Reed, Joseph-Eugène Fournière, Gramsci, and Lenin; it studied the revolutionary syndicalist association of the Industrial Workers of the World and the English shop-steward movement. When the first councils were set up in the factories, Georges Sorel wrote that the experiment being carried out in the FIAT workshops was more important than all of the articles published in the Social Democratic papers. When the factory council movement expanded and the Communist Party was formed, *Ordine nuovo* became a daily paper under Gramsci's direction. On *Ordine nuovo*, see the statement in *Observations on the Basic Functions of the Second Congress of the Communist International* edited by Lenin: "With regard to the PSI, the Second Congress of the Third International considers essentially well-founded the criticisms of the Party and the practical proposals that were published as proposals to the National Council of the PSI in the name of the Turin section of the party in the periodical *Ordine nuovo* of May 8, 1920, and which are in complete conformity with all of the fundamental principles of the Third International." This statement was repeated by Lenin in his speech to the meeting of the Communist International of July 30, 1920.

31

Turi

January 14, 1929

Dearest Giulia,

I'm still waiting for your answer to my last letter. When we start to correspond regularly again (even if at long intervals), I'll tell you all about my life, impressions, etc., etc. In the meantime, you must tell me how Delio uses his construction set. This interests me greatly because I have never been able to decide whether construction sets, which give no scope to the child's inventive spirit, are a really desirable modern game. What do both you and your father think

about this? In general, I think that modern American-style civilization, of which construction sets are a typical product, makes people rather desiccated, mechanical, and bureaucratic and creates an abstract mentality. By this I do not mean "abstract" in the nineteenth-century sense. That was abstractness determined by a metaphysical intoxication, whereas now there is an abstractness determined by a mathematical intoxication. How interesting it must be to observe these educational methods affecting the mind of a small child, a child who is your own and to whom you are bound by feelings far stronger than mere "scientific interest." Dearest, write me a long letter. A big, big hug.

Antonio

32<sup>1</sup>

Turi  
January 28, 1929

Dearest Mother,

Your letter and Grazietta's have both arrived, as well as the packet of cigarettes. Thank Grazietta very much for the news of Teresina's children and of Edmea. I'm sure that Delio and Giuliano would be very fond of her if they knew her. Children immediately grow attached to somebody who loves them and who takes their affairs and also their whims seriously. And after all, what are their whims if not their will and their feelings, trying to assert themselves and develop in conflict with the will and feelings of adults? And if the adults fail to understand this and resort too often to beatings and authoritarian intimidation, they merely make the children hypocritical and unnecessarily bitter.

Dear Mother, I think that you really should follow the doctor's advice and leave Ghilarza for a while; this is the only way for you to get better. I wanted to give you this advice myself. Why don't you go to Macomer with Carlo? Or perhaps to Boroneddu with Antioga

Putzola if she's still alive. Has Tatiana written to you about her journey to Turi? Has she sent you the photographs of the children? Please send her the page that I've enclosed for her. Tell Carlo that I'd be very grateful if he could get me the following publication: Raffaele Ciasca, *Momenti della colonizzazione in Sardegna nel secolo XVIII* ["Phases of Colonization in Sardinia in the Eighteenth Century"]. It's not on sale in the bookshops. It appeared in the *Annali della facoltà di lettere* ["Annals of the Faculty of Letters"] of the University of Cagliari, where Ciasca teaches modern history, and was published also as an offprint. Carlo could get hold of it through his friends; somebody may know the author personally. He could also get hold of it through the editorial staff of the *Mediterranea* if he knows anybody there. Tell Carlo, too, that I've been authorized to write in my cell and that I'm very grateful to him for the steps he took. Kiss everybody affectionately for me. And to you, all my tender good wishes.

Antonio

Please thank Teresina for her card.

---

1. This letter was first published in *L'Unità*, January 26, 1969.

33<sup>1</sup>

Turi  
February 24, 1929

Dearest Mother,

I received your letter of the first after hearing nothing for about a month from you or the rest of the family. I'm very glad about the improvement in your health and hope that by the spring you will have recovered completely. Well done! You wrote me a very long

letter and the news you sent was of the greatest interest to me: thank you. You as well as the others who sometimes write to me, for instance Carlo and Grazietta, should always remember that I'm almost completely in the dark about what is happening in the world. When I read periodicals, I have to strain my imagination to the utmost to try to reconstruct even the simplest panorama of life. I'm like a naturalist who finds a tooth or a small tail bone in some prehistoric cave and from it tries to reconstruct an extinct animal, one perhaps larger than a whale. This is why I particularly like details that are drawn straight from the life of a village that I know and which I am able to assess in their scope and repercussions. For example, Carlo should tell me something about the cooperative dairies for which he works. I imagine that their development must be beset by great difficulties. Sometimes I wonder how it is that the old milk profiteers have not yet managed to have the head of the Hon. Pili.<sup>2</sup> He seems to me oversure of the effectiveness of the forces that he has lined up against the financial organization of the racketeers who formerly had the monopoly of the pastures and dairies. Carlo would be doing me a real favor if he could send me some publications on the financial and commercial situation of the Fascist Dairy Federation. And if possible, I should also like something on the competition that the Federation has to face from the old dairy speculators. It would interest me to know what celebrations and ceremonies were held in Ghilarza for the recent reconciliation between the Vatican and the State: who spoke, if there were speeches, and so on.

I'm in much better health: the tonics that I've been taking have helped me enormously. Here the weather has been less horrible, relatively speaking, than elsewhere: it has rained and snowed, but there have also been intervals of spring sunshine. On the whole, in spite of the uric acid attack that I had at the end of last year, I've suffered much less this winter than in Milan, let alone during the winter 1926-1927, which I spent traveling, lightly clad, in prison vans that had stood the whole night under a covering of snow. This

was when my health was really undermined. The cigarettes have arrived. A tender hug.

Antonio

Please send Tatiana the half sheet that I've written for her.

---

1. This letter was first published in *L'Unità*, January 26, 1969.

2. Paolo Pili, an exponent of the Sardinian Action Party, became a Fascist deputy in 1923; one of his chief aims was the creation of a federation of cheese-manufacturers' cooperatives and community dairies. The cheese-producing industry opposed this plan, and at the end of 1927 Pili was relieved of his office by the Fascist Party.

### 34

Turi

April 22, 1929

Dear Tania,

I received your cards of April 13 and 19, and now am waiting patiently for some news from home. You must have noticed during those few moments we spent together how patient I've become. In the past, I always had to force myself to be patient in order to get along with imbeciles and bores (there's no way of avoiding them). Now I no longer feel any strain—the prison routine and the instinct for self-defense have developed in me the habit of being patient. Sometimes I become apathetic or indifferent and these moods linger with me. It must have saddened you to see me like that. The fact is that this state of mind is not a recent one. Giulia told me that your mother sensed it already in 1925. Even then I was like Kipling's one-eyed goat who goes around in a circle, always at the same distance from the center. But let's talk about more cheerful things.

The rose has had a sunstroke: all the leaves and delicate parts are

burned up, but despite the disastrous outward aspect, it's budding again. No, it's not dead yet. The solar catastrophe had to happen, since the wind blew away the only piece of paper I had to cover it with. A handful of straw would have been ideal, since straw hardly conducts heat and could have shielded the rose from the sun's rays. All in all, the prognosis is a favorable one though, if there are no unusual developments. The seeds took a long time to become plants: a whole set of them put off starting their *podpolie*<sup>1</sup> existence. Of course, the seeds were old and worm-eaten. Those that manage to come up into the light grow slowly and produce something unrecognizable. Perhaps the gardener who told you that they were good seeds meant that you could eat them. In fact, what comes up has a curious resemblance to parsley and tiny onions—they're certainly not flowers. Every day I'm tempted to draw them up a bit to help them grow, but oscillate between two ideas about education and the world. Should I be Rousseauian and let Nature, which never errs and is basically good, do what she wants to do, or should I willfully violate the natural process of evolution with an expert human hand and the law of authority? Up to now, the two ideologies have battled in my head. Meanwhile, six chicory plants, feeling themselves at home and having no fear of the sun, have already stuck out stems that will render seeds for future harvests. Dahlia and bamboo are sleeping beneath the earth and haven't yet shown a sign of life. The dahlias in particular seem to have given up. Before I forget, let me ask you to send four other kinds of seeds—(1) *pastinaca* carrots (a nostalgic remembrance of childhood: at Sassari, before the war, carrots sometimes weighing half a kilo cost one *soldo*<sup>2</sup> each and competed with the sale of licorice); (2) peas; (3) spinach; and (4) celery. I want to plant four or five seeds of different kinds in the space of three square feet, to see how they do. Buy them at Ingegneroli's in Piazza del Duomo or Via Buenos Aires and ask him to give you a catalogue indicating which months are best for planting.

I received another note from Signora Malvina Sanna, 23 Corso Indipendenza.<sup>3</sup> send her this message:

"I understand how costly it would be to acquire the book I listed. I had already considered that problem, but felt it my duty to answer the questions as they were put to me. Now I am going to speak of

something that was implicit in the questions and which concerns every man in prison: how is it possible to avoid wasting time and to continue studying? First, you have to get rid of every 'scholastic' attitude and not dream of attending regular, systematic classes. This is out of the question even in the best circumstances. One of the most rewarding things to study is modern languages—you need only a grammar, which you can find for very little at a second-hand book-stall. Even though you don't learn to speak the language correctly, you can learn to read it, and this is important.

"Furthermore, many prisoners underestimate their prison library. No doubt all prison libraries are inconsistent: books are thrown together haphazardly, whether gifts from ex-prisoners or from patrons who have their hands on publishers' remainders. And there is always a quantity of prayer books and bad novels. But despite this, I believe that a political prisoner ought to be capable of drawing blood from a stone. The trick is to have some aim in mind while you're reading and to take notes (that is, if you have permission to write). Let me give you a couple of examples. In Milan, I read a series of different kinds of books—above all, popular novels—until the director of the library allowed me to go inside to select what I wanted from among the books not given out yet and others which, because of their political or moral tendencies, were not available to everybody. Well, I found Sue, Montépin, Ponson du Terrail, etc., which sufficed if one looked at them from the following angle: why are these books always the most read and the most frequently published? What needs do they satisfy, and what aspirations do they fulfill? What emotions and attitudes emerge in this squalid literature, to have such wide appeal? In what way is Eugène Sue different from Montépin, and doesn't Victor Hugo, from the point of view of content, belong in this group? Aren't Dario Niccodemi's<sup>4</sup> *Scampolo* ["Remnant"], *Aigrette* ["Egret"], and *Volata* ["The Flight"] also direct descendants of the degenerate Romanticism of 1848?

"This is the second example: a German historian, Groethuysen,<sup>5</sup> recently published a large volume studying the links between French Catholicism and the bourgeois class for two centuries before 1889. Investigating all the devotional literature of this period—collections of sermons, catechisms of various dioceses, and so on—he put to-



gether a splendid book. This strikes me as sufficient proof that you can draw blood out of a stone—in this case, there weren't even stones around! Every book, especially if it's about history, is useful. Whatever comes into your hands in prison has an interest, since here time can never be calculated in ordinary terms."

Dear Tatiana, I've gone on too long and fear you'll tire yourself deciphering my handwriting. By the way, remember to insist that no books be sent to me unless I ask for them. If any appear you think I should read, have them put them aside for me for eventual mailing. Dearest, I hope the trip didn't wear you out. An affectionate hug.

Antonio

1. *Podpolie*, a Russian word meaning "underground" and, in the figurative sense, "clandestine."

2. Up to the time of World War I, the soldo represented the twentieth part of a lira and hence a very small amount of money.

3. In a letter of March 25, 1929 to Tania, Gramsci had recommended various readings in philosophy to Antonio Sanna, a political prisoner in another part of Italy.

4. Dario Niccodemi (1874–1934) was the author of popular comedies in the tradition of the *pochade* (amusing short sketch) and sentimental French comedy. This subject forms part of Gramsci's research on national-popular literature, which constitutes an important section of the *Notebooks*. These notes are now incorporated in *Literature and National Life*, where Gramsci expresses a similar opinion: "In the theater, the considerable success of Dario Niccodemi is certainly due to the fact that he dramatized themes that are closely connected with popular ideology; this is the case in *Scampolo*, *Aigrette*, *Volata*, etc." On the more general question of the association between national and popular literature, Gramsci says, "It should be noted that in many languages, 'national' and 'popular' are synonymous or almost so (for example, in Russian, German . . . and French . . .). In Italy the term 'national' has a very restricted meaning ideologically and in any case does not coincide with 'popular,' because in Italy the intellectuals are quite divorced from the people, in other words, from the 'nation,' and are bound to a traditional caste system that has never been broken by a strong popular and national political movement from below."

5. See Letter 11, n. 3.

Turi  
May 20, 1929

Dear Giulia,

Who told you that I can write more often? That's not true. Only two letters a month are allowed me, with extra ones at Christmas and Easter. Remember what Bianco<sup>1</sup> said in 1923 when I left? He had a right to complain about me then. I always had a deep aversion to letter writing. But now, in prison, I've written at least twice as many letters as I did before. I must have written two hundred letters—it's a terrifying thought.

It would be inexact to say that I'm not calm: I'm more than calm, even passive and apathetic. This hardly surprises me and I make no move whatsoever to avoid my own progressive atrophy. But perhaps it isn't atrophy I'm experiencing; rather, a kind of strength. There have been long periods in which I felt completely isolated and cut off from every existence except my own, and suffered atrociously. If letters failed to arrive on time or to contain the particular answers I awaited, I felt exasperated. But as time went by, and my previous existence grew more and more distant in perspective, all casual or transitory passions disappeared, and only those desires and feelings that are a permanent feature of my life remained. Doesn't this seem perfectly natural to you? For a while, the past, and images from the past, inevitably reign; but ultimately such an obsession with the past grows futile. I believe I have overcome the crisis that the first years of prison life create and which many times causes a man to break sharply and decisively with his past. Frankly, I observed the crisis more in others than in myself, and came to smile at it: this meant I was already past it. Never would I have believed that so many people are so terrified of death. But it is precisely this terror that produces all psychological phenomena in prison. In Italy, we say a man has



grown old at the time he starts to brood about death, and there is wisdom in this. Here, the mind takes this turn as soon as the prisoner begins to feel trapped forever. The violence of the rapid, radical change he undergoes is determined by how seriously he had taken his own life and earlier ideas and beliefs. Many have sunken incredibly before my eyes. This experience is just as useful as that of Spartan boys observing the depravation of the Helots.

I feel an utter calm now and not even the prolonged lack of news causes me anxiety, although I know that the situation would change with a little effort on your part. Meanwhile, Tania sends me whatever news she gets. She passed on to me your father's characterizations of the children, which gave me food for thought. She also writes with charm about other things. I don't want to scold you though! Recently, I reread your letters of a year ago, and this made me feel your tenderness all over again. You know, sometimes I think I'm too sharp or surly when I write you—you're so natural. I think of the times I made you cry, especially the first time. Do you remember? I was severe on purpose. What did Tania write about her trip to Turi? She has a much too idyllic and Arcadian vision of my life, and this continues to bother me. She can't seem to get it into her head that I have to stay within certain limits and that she must send me only what I tell her to, since I don't have a warehouse here to store things. She announces she is sending a series of items I have no use for, instead of listening to my instructions.

I am including two photos: the big one is of my sister Teresina's children, Franco and Maria; the other is of my mother holding the little girl, somewhat older, in her arms. My father is convinced that the girl looks like Giuliano; it would be impossible for me to tell. What's certain is that the boy doesn't resemble anyone in the family—he's the picture of his father, an authentic Sardinian, whereas we're only half Sardinian. The little girl seems to belong more to the family. What do you think?

...

A tender hug.

Antonio

---

1. Vincenzo Bianco was a Torinese worker who became acquainted with Gramsci during the *Ordine nuovo* period and took part in the Communist Education group that Gramsci organized in 1920 in Turin. When he emigrated to Moscow in April 1923, he kept up a correspondence with Gramsci and also became a close friend of the Schucht family. Bianco had complained that Gramsci was a poor correspondent.

36

Turi  
July 1, 1929

Dear Tania,

I received the lovely Bedouin oversocks together with the other things: they fit very well and even seem to be made for me. As for the rest of the package, I can't tell yet whether it will be of any use since I haven't needed any of it yet and left everything in the store-room. I seem to have overcome my illness of the past month, although it left behind a great listlessness, which I understand from other prisoners is one of the commonest symptoms of prison life. In the strongest persons, it sets in after the third year, giving them a kind of psychic atony. In the third year, the mass of latent stimuli that each man carries away from his former activities begins to be snuffed out, and there remains only a gleam of the old will, which exhausts itself in grandiose plans and fantasies that will never be realized. The prisoner stretches out on his cot and passes his time spitting at the ceiling and dreaming impossible dreams. Surely this won't happen to me since I almost never spit; also, the ceiling here is too high!

By the way, the rose has completely recovered. (I say "by the way" since, recently, rose-watching has replaced spitting at the ceiling for me). From June third to the fifteenth, it started putting out leaves until it became green again. Now its branches are six inches long. It even tried to put out a tiny bud, but at a certain point the

bud started to languish and turned yellow. Anyway, the plant has taken root and next year will surely flower.

I wouldn't be surprised if a tiny, timid little rose were to come out at the end of this year. The thought gives me pleasure, since for the past year I have been interested in cosmic phenomena. Perhaps, as they say in my native region, the bed is placed in line with terrestrial fluids; and when I am resting, the cells of my body rotate in unison with the whole universe. I've been anxiously awaiting the summer solstice, and now that the earth is bending toward the sun (actually, it straightens up after bending down), I feel much better. (This may be connected with the lamp that I'm brought in the evening: earthly fluids come back!) I feel the cycle of the seasons, linked with solstices and equinoxes, as if they were flesh of my flesh. The rose is alive and will surely flower since the heat is melting the frost and the first violets are already stirring under the snow. The weather seems to have a body ever since the dimension of space was denied me. Tania dear, my ramblings have come to an end. I send a hug.

Antonio

37

Turi  
July 1, 1929

Dear Giulia,

You can tell Delio that I was extremely interested in the news he sent me, because it was important and very serious. However, I hope that somebody, with the help of a little glue, repaired the damage caused by Giuliano and saved the hat from the wastepaper basket. Do you remember how in Rome Delio believed I could mend everything that was broken? Does he tend to repair things himself? I believe that this is more of an indication of a positive, constructive nature than the building set. You're wrong if you think that as a child

I had leanings toward literature and philosophy. On the contrary, I was an intrepid explorer and never left the house without stuffing my pockets with grains of wheat and matches wrapped in oilskin, in case I found myself cast onto a desert island and totally dependent upon my own resources. I was also an enterprising builder of boats and carts and was perfectly versed in nautical terminology. My moment of glory came when a tin worker in the village asked me for a paper model of a superb double-decked schooner in order to reproduce it in tinfoil. I was really obsessed by these things because at the age of seven I had read *Robinson Crusoe* and *Treasure Island*. I think a childhood like that of thirty years ago is impossible today. Nowadays children, when they are born, are already eighty years old, like the Chinese Lao-tse.<sup>1</sup> The radio and the airplane have irrevocably destroyed Robinsonism, which provided an imaginary world for so many generations. The very invention of construction sets indicates the speed of children's intellectual development; their hero is no longer Robinson, but the policeman or the accomplished thief, in the West anyway. So the exact reverse of your opinion is correct. Do you agree?

You wrote me Giuliano's weight but not his height. Tatiana told me that Delio weighed forty pounds when he was three feet, six inches tall. This information interests me very much, because it gives me a concrete impression; but you send too little of it. I hope that Tatiana will continue to be much better at this than you, and will send me, when she's with you, a mass of news of every kind, about the children and also about you. Do you know that she's going to bring you a camera? I remembered promising you one in 1926 and so asked Tania to find one for you. Since chestnuts aren't in season (in 1925 your mother was disappointed because I didn't bring her chestnuts), I'll tell Tatiana to make a collection of cigarettes from different countries to take to your mother in my name. Will she like that? I'm sure she will. A hug for you and the children.

Antonio

1. Lao-tse (c. 604-531 B.C.), a Chinese philosopher, considered to be the founder of Taoism. According to legend, he remained seventy years in his mother's womb and was white-haired at birth.

38<sup>1</sup>

Turi

September 23, 1929

Dearest Mother,

I've received your letter of September 18. Your handwriting looks firmer than in the preceding letters and you also wrote at greater length without any detectable sign of tiredness. I was very glad to see this, because I was afraid that you might have had a fresh bout of malarial fever. Thank you for the news. As I've already told you, every detail of outside life interests me, especially if it can help me to reconstruct and imagine your everyday life, which, however uniform and monotonous it may be, is nonetheless more varied and infinitely more eventful than mine. I wonder what Giulia and Lia are like with the passing years. Giulia must be more *scarrabudada*<sup>2</sup> than ever; but she must be close on sixty if not older. Lia, on the other hand, must still have "youthful" aspirations and is perhaps still thinking of finding herself a husband; but I imagine she must have a rather conspicuous mustache. Why don't you arrange for the Terrasanta brothers<sup>3</sup> to visit her when they come begging? You've never sent me any news of Uncle Achille; is he still working for Uncle Luigi? Of the whole family, I liked Uncle Achille best, even more than Uncle Serafino, who was also very nice. I'd like to know what he's doing now.

Do you know what you should do? In your letters, you should go through all the people I used to know and give me news of them, especially of those who have contrived to change their position in life in the last few years, whether for better or for worse. I would

like to know whether Ghilarza, with its new administration and its proximity to the Tirso basin,<sup>4</sup> is showing signs of expanding into a town; whether there's more trade, any industry, whether a part of the population has switched from the traditional rural occupations to employment of another kind, whether there's any building development, or whether there's merely an increase in the number of people living on private incomes. You see, I don't think that Oristano is a town or will ever become one; it's simply a large rural center (relatively large, that is), where the owners of the neighboring land and fish ponds live, and where there is a market of hand-manufactured goods for the peasants who bring in their agricultural produce. A center made up of shopkeepers and idle landowners, in other words of usurers, cannot rank as a town, because it produces nothing of importance. Is Ghilarza tending to become like Oristano, or is the hydroelectricity of the Tirso basin providing the basis for industrial development, however modest? These matters interest me and I'd be very glad if you could tell me something about them.

Boredom is my worst enemy, although I read or write all day long; it's a special kind of boredom, which doesn't spring from idleness (because I keep myself occupied) but from the lack of contact with the outside world. I don't know whether you've read many lives of saints and hermits; they were tormented by this special boredom, which they called the "noonday devil" because toward midday, they were seized, in their solitude, by a longing to change, to return to the world, to see people. They thought that it was the devil tempting them, whereas it was simply boredom, the terrible boredom that comes from solitude and from seeing always the same sights and doing always the same things. Any day now I hope to see Tatiana, who must be on her way to Turi. Then I'll finally be able to send Carlo the box as well as a few other parcels of books, with the dictionary for Mea. Thank you very much for the cigarettes. Greetings and kisses to all at home and to you, dearest Mother, an affectionate hug.

Antonio

1. This letter was first published in *L'Unità*, January 26, 1969.
2. Sardinian word meaning "in a bad way" or "battered."
3. Evidently a reference to mendicant friars of the area.
4. Basin produced by damming of the river Tirso.

39

Turi  
November 4, 1929

Dear Tatiana,

At last, after two months, it's time to write to you again. I reread the cards that you sent me in the meantime, but was unable to feel the terrible agitation that I felt upon first reading them. I'm becoming a true fakir; soon I'll be swallowing daggers and walking barefoot on Gillette blades. Perhaps this melodramatic opening will dismay you. I'm very sorry to have to scold you, but it's necessary; otherwise I might have to take drastic measures with you again, such as completely breaking off our correspondence and all other relations with you. I had warned you more than once not to set anything in motion with regard to either my general condition or my present position without first consulting me. I can't understand why you insist on not taking this warning seriously. You must have thought that it was some kind of whim or childish obstinacy. But in fact, had you given the matter a moment's thought, what conclusions would you have reached? The answer is simple. You need only consider the following factors:

What concrete information do you have about my daily life? None or almost none at all. How can you assess the practical results of your activities on my behalf, even those that strike you as banal and unimportant? Such an assessment is absolutely impossible. The whole concatenation of cause and effect in prison life is fundamentally different from that of ordinary life, because all feelings, actions

and reactions lack one basic element—the freedom of ordinary existence, no matter how relative that freedom may be. In these circumstances, shouldn't I have the right to decide whether a certain thing is to be done or not, since it is I and I alone who am in prison, and who am deprived of every liberty, and it is I who must suffer the consequences of every act that risks making the conditions of my daily life even more difficult? Even supposing it was mere obstinacy on my part (and you may be sure that this is not the case), even if it were pure childishness, this wish should be respected, because one's nerves grow so sensitive in this state that it is only natural that they should be treated with a certain consideration.

What made me wild (absolutely wild) was the way you approached the lawyer Niccolai about the review board in charge of my case. Why didn't you ask me about this first? All your efforts will be completely wasted because I personally have no intention of appealing, and if the lawyer writes to me, I shall probably not even answer. The appeal was legally lodged, as authorized by law, in June 1928. Niccolai was commissioned to present it and proceeded to do so. This was quite sufficient, for in reality it is simply a question of the exercise of a formal right, which cannot be expected to have any effect outside that of a mere protest. Any interference on your part only serves to obscure the crystalline clarity of my position and that of others, but especially of mine. Why won't you understand that you are incapable, totally incapable, of considering my honor and my dignity in these matters because they are absolutely beyond your comprehension? I don't want to offend you in any way, nor do I want to cast doubt on your sensitiveness in such matters, particularly the personal, human side of them: I only want to establish that it is objectively impossible for you, as an outsider, to recreate the harrowing atmosphere in which I have lived for the last few years. Nonetheless, I want to convince you that this is a matter of utmost importance to me, in which nobody must interfere. I am at the point of making the most dramatic decisions, even if this means completely breaking off relations. Please give the most serious consideration to what I'm saying—I've spent several sleepless nights thinking about it, under the goading influence of your cards, which I couldn't yet



answer. You had already upset me greatly by your mention of the proposal that you had made to Giulia some time back. It was a great mistake not to express my disapproval more forcibly then. I let myself be softened by your solicitude for me, not wanting to pain you. But now I've turned fakir in this respect, and there's even the risk that I may turn stevedore and end up swearing. But I think you'll be very circumspect in the future. I'm convinced of your affection and of your regret at having pained me so deeply. Don't be too pained yourself by what I've written. Break off all your negotiations with Niccolai and, if you want, show him the part of this letter that concerns him. Don't send me anything that I haven't asked for, whether books or anything else. Stick closely to this rule, and don't let any factors such as time, or place, or some particular opportunity influence you.

I'm sorry that my whole letter should have been taken up with this matter. I hope that this time you'll really look after yourself and won't do so many extravagant things to the detriment of your health. I've already grown used to the idea that this time you won't come to Turi but will be swayed by health considerations. Dear Tatiana, you must believe that I've been so outspoken and sharp only because I'm very fond of you and would be extremely sorry to break with you completely. A tender hug.

Antonio

40

Turi

December 16, 1929

Dearest Tatiana,

This month you've hardly written to me at all: a card on November twenty-eighth and then a note on the twenty-ninth along with Giulia's letter. But I also have very little desire to write now. All my links with the outside world seem to be breaking, one by one. When

I was in prison in Milan, two letters a week were never enough: I had a mania for being chatty by letter. Do you remember how crammed my letters were? During the week, all my thoughts were aimed toward Monday: what would I be able to write? How could I phrase something in such a way that the letter got through? Now I no longer know what to write or how to begin. It's as if I were wrapped in a cocoon. I concentrate on reading and translating. When I think about myself, I get the impression that I have relapsed into the obsessive state of my student days, when I concentrated on one subject and it absorbed me so completely that I no longer paid any attention to anything else and was sometimes in danger of walking in front of a streetcar.

You tell me to write to Giulia about small things—the details of my life. But the fact is that there are no small things or details in my life, no chiaroscuro. This is just as well. It's a very bad sign when prison life is eventful. The only bright spot in all this darkness is an intellectual one; but even this has real and "official" limits. Official, because I'm in prison and therefore bound by regulations. Real, because what interests me often has a very relative value. At the moment, I'm concerned with the question of whether the language of the Niam Niam, who call themselves the Sandeh people, while the name Niam Niam is attributed to them by the neighboring Dinkas, belongs to the western Sudanese group, although the region where the language is spoken lies in the eastern Sudan, between 22° and 28° longitude East—in other words, whether the classification of languages should be based on geographical distribution or on a historical process of filiation. Etc., etc. This is also why I'm not writing to Giulia this time either. I don't know what to write, and I don't want to write just to be polite. I still have to think about several problems and until I have solved them will not feel like writing. (I don't even know whether I'll manage to solve them.) The basic problem is this: must I think of Giulia and deal with her in terms of the banal psychology usually attributed to women? I'm extremely reluctant to do so. And yet . . . how do you think I should interpret the fact that even though, in one letter, she says that after my letter of July 30 she felt much closer to me, she waited for four

months before writing again? So far I've been unable to resolve this contradiction and don't know whether I'll ever be able to do so. This is why I'm abandoning the attempt. You write that you can't bring yourself to send Giulia my last letter because it might hurt her.<sup>1</sup> Of course it will hurt her, but I don't think that this is an adequate reason. In fact, I'm sure that she herself would rather know exactly what my state of mind is. Do you think that I enjoy writing this kind of thing? But I've got to the point that I reached at the university, when I wrote no letters at all. If I'm confronted by a problem that I can't solve and am convinced of its insolubility, I abandon it and don't think about it any more. This I do out of self-respect and, even more, out of respect for others: I have too much esteem for Giulia to consider her full of petit bourgeois sentimentality, like the heroine of *Eugene Oregan*. Don't you agree, dear Tatiana? But send this letter to Giulia; after all, it's addressed to her, even if indirectly. Dearest Tatiana, what a lot of unpleasantness I've been causing you lately! I'm deeply sorry, believe me. A tender hug.

Antonio

---

1. Gramsci probably refers to a letter of November 18, 1929, in which he complains to Tania that he has not heard from Giulia for four months, even though he has written her twice in the meantime, and in which he states that he will not write to his wife again unless he hears from her directly.

4 I

Turi

December 19, 1929

Dear Carlo,

... What did you tell her anyway?<sup>1</sup> I hope you didn't exaggerate. On the other hand, you must have realized that I am far from being

discouraged or feeling beaten. Even if I were condemned to die, I think that I would be serene. The night before the execution I might even study a bit of Chinese! Your letter and what you write about Nannaro are interesting but also disturbing. Both of you were in the war. Nannaro in particular fought the war under exceptional conditions. As a miner underground, with only a thin partition separating his tunnel from the Austrian one, he could hear the enemy trying to set off a mine to blow him to pieces. It seems to me that in similar circumstances, a man ought to be so deeply convinced that the source of his own moral forces is in himself—his own energy and will, the iron coherence of ends and means—that he never despairs and never falls into those vulgar, banal moods, pessimism and optimism. My own state of mind synthesizes these two feelings and transcends them: my mind is pessimistic, but my will is optimistic.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the situation, I imagine the worst that could happen in order to summon up all my reserves of willpower to overcome each and every obstacle. Since I never build up illusions, I am seldom disappointed. I've always been armed with unlimited patience—not a passive, inert kind, but a patience allied with perseverance. Today there is an extremely grave moral crisis, but there have been other, graver ones in the past; and there is a difference between this time and that former one. . . .<sup>3</sup> This is why I am somewhat indulgent and beg you to be, as well, with Nannaro. With my own eyes I've seen how capable he is of being strong. It's only when he's isolated that he loses his head and grows utterly discouraged. Perhaps I'll write him next time.

My dear Carlo, I've preached a perfect sermon for you, and meanwhile forgot to insist that you convey many congratulations and good wishes on my part to Teresina and also, naturally, to Paolo, for their new daughter. I also want to send the usual greetings for Christmas and the other holidays that follow. I'll be spending Christmas as best I can, a little like the renowned Mr. Chiu<sup>4</sup> Mother used to tell us about when we were children.

Give everyone an affectionate hug for me, especially Mother.

Your Antonio

1. Gramsci is concerned with what his brother Carlo may have told their mother after a visit to Turi.

2. Romain Rolland (1866–1944), French poet, novelist, and dramatist, is the author of this famous phrase, which was quoted many times by Gramsci. Rolland played an important part in the campaign for Gramsci's liberation conducted by the Italian PC and other democratic parties in 1933 and 1934. At that time, Rolland published a pamphlet entitled "Antonio Gramsci: Those Who Are Dying in Mussolini's Prisons," which was printed in several languages. Gramsci used Rolland's phrase, for example, in an article that appeared in *Ordine nuovo* on April 30, 1920, "The socialist conception of the revolutionary process is characterized by two fundamental factors that Romain Rolland has epitomized in his phrase 'pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will.'" The whole of this article, entitled "Discorso agli anarchici" ("Address to the Anarchists"), is extremely interesting. Among other things, it develops the thesis that true revolutionaries and the creation of a revolutionary party require more than mere possession of a revolutionary "truth." Such a truth must be capable of inspiring large-scale popular action. Since the triumph of the Russian Revolution, writes Gramsci, the anarchists have affirmed that they have always been right; but they are unable to explain why it was the socialists who carried out that revolution, and not the anarchists; nor are they able to explain why the Italian proletariat follows the Socialist Party and not the anarchists. "Only when they have realized that absolute truth is not enough to move the masses to action, to inspire the masses with the revolutionary spirit, but that a *specific* truth is necessary; when they have realized that for the purposes of human history the only 'truth' is that which is embodied in action, which infuses passion and impulses into the spirit of the times and is expressed in deep movements and in *real* achievements on the part of the masses themselves," only then will the anarchists be able to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught, lay aside their "presumptuous" guise, and become true revolutionaries.

3. Here six lines have been blocked out by the censor. Gramsci was referring to the economic crisis of 1929 in the United States.

4. Mr. Chiu was evidently a character in a children's story.

Turi

December 30, 1929

Dear Giulia,

I forgot to ask Tatiana, with whom I spoke a few days ago, whether she passed on my last two letters to you. Probably she did since I asked her to. I wanted you to know what my present mood is (it's brighter now, although it hasn't completely dissolved), even if it distresses you to hear this.

I was very interested to read your impressions of Delio's levels of development. Judge the following observations with these two qualifications in mind: (1) I know hardly anything about the development of children during the period in which intellectual and moral characteristics begin to show up (after they are two and begin to master speech and to form logical nexus, as well as images and representations). (2) Only persons who know children firsthand and watch the whole process of change are fit to judge how to educate them, as long as they aren't blinded by emotions and don't abandon every standard in the purely aesthetic contemplation of the child reduced almost to a work of art.

Bearing in mind these two points, which are pretty much the same thing, I can say that Delio's intellectual development, from what you write, is extremely backward for his age, too childish. When he was two years old, in Rome, he played the piano—that is, he came to understand the various positions of pitch on the keyboard from animal sounds: chicks to the right, bears to the left, with intermediate places for other animals. This was a normal, acceptable procedure for a baby not yet two years old. But when, at five years and a few months, you apply the same method to spatial orientation, even in a much larger space (not as large as it seems, though, since the four

walls of a room delimit and concretize the space), this is backward and infantile.

I remember well how at five, without ever having left my native village and thus with an extremely limited notion of extension, I was able to point out where I lived, explain what an island is, and locate the chief cities of Italy on a large wall map: in other words, I had a concept of perspective; of a space more complex than abstract directional lines; of a coherent system of measurement, and of how to orient myself according to it, high-and-low and right-to-left being absolute spatial values beyond the accidental position of my own outstretched arms. I don't believe I was exceptionally precocious. It is common for "adults" to forget their early impressions; at a certain age, these are replaced by a complex of feelings and regrets, or by a sense of the comic or the like. Thus we tend to forget that a baby grows intellectually with great rapidity, absorbing, from birth on, an extraordinary quantity of images, which he remembers after his first years and uses to guide him through that first period of rational judgment that follows his learning to speak. Naturally, I can't judge or form an adequate notion of the situation, when numerous facts are lacking and when the impressions you communicate to me seem unrelated, hardly illustrative of a development. But I can say that I feel the conception you and others in the family have is far too metaphysical. You imagine that a baby contains the whole man potentially and that he must be helped to develop an already latent content, without using coercion, by turning him over to Nature's spontaneous action or the like. I believe, on the contrary, that man is an entirely historical formation obtained through coercion (not just in the brutal sense of external violence). Any other line of thought collapses into a form of transcendence or immanence. What is believed to be latent force is simply the unformed, indistinct complex of images and sensations of those first days, months, and years of life, which are often very negative. This way of conceiving child-education as the unraveling of a pre-existent thread had its importance when it was necessary to oppose the Jesuitic schools—i.e., when it negated a worse philosophy. But today this is no longer a problem. If you refuse to form a child, this means that his personal-

ity will gradually and chaotically incorporate impulses and reasons for living from his general surroundings. It's curious that, as I gather from certain reviews, Freud's psychoanalysis is creating tendencies, especially in Germany, similar to those existing in eighteenth-century France.<sup>1</sup> He seems to be forging a new species of "noble savage" corrupted by society, that is, by history. This is giving birth to a new, interesting form of intellectual disorder.

Your letter made these things come to mind. It's quite possible that some of my opinions are exaggerated or unjust. Only Cuvier was capable of reconstructing a mastodon or a megatherian from a tiny bone, and there's always the risk of reconstructing a sea serpent from a rat's tail.

An affectionate hug.

Antonio

---

1. In his work *Intellectuals*, Gramsci writes, "Freud's influence on German literature is incalculable: it provides the basis for a new form of revolutionary ethics (!). Freud has given a new aspect to the eternal conflict between father and son." This remark, made about a novel by Franz Werfel, probably dates from the years 1929-1930. The volume *Passato e presente* ("Past and Present"), which incorporates scattered notes from the *Notebooks*, contains the following passage: "The diffusion of Freudian psychology seems to give rise to an eighteenth-century style of literature; the 'savage,' in modern form, is replaced by the Freudian type. The struggle against the established order is carried out through Freudian psychoanalysis . . . I have not been able to study F.'s theories and the only so-called 'Freudian' writers I know are Proust, Svevo, Joyce." Italo Svevo (1861-1928) was one of the foremost Italian novelists of the twentieth century. After writing two novels at the end of the nineteenth century, *Una vita* ("A Life") and *Senilità* ("Senility"), which passed almost unnoticed, he became famous, particularly in France, through a novel based on psychoanalysis, *La coscienza di Zeno* (*The Confessions of Zeno*), which was published in 1923.



Turi

January 13, 1930

Dearest Tania,

Your letter arrived after a delay of several days because there was excess postage to pay on it. This was certainly a mistake. You must have sent it from Turi, and so the twenty-five centesimi postage was correct. We'll have to lodge a complaint. But although the post office was wrong in this case, you should know that in other cases it has been right: you overfill your postcards on the address side, and you should never write over the word "Postcard" and perhaps not over the state emblem either. I have to pay forty centesimi of excess postage, and the card is sometimes delayed three days by the necessary formalities.

Thank you for the family news. As for my state of mind, I don't think you've fully understood it. But then it's difficult for anybody to understand these things perfectly because they're made up of so many elements, many of which it's almost impossible to imagine; and therefore, it's all the more impossible to imagine the general state that is a combination of these elements. These last few days I've been reading a book, *Dal 1848 al 1861* ["From 1848 to 1861"], which contains a collection of letters, writings, and documents concerning Silvio Spaventa,<sup>1</sup> a patriot from the Abruzzi and a member of the 1848 Neapolitan Parliament, who was arrested after the failure of the national uprising, imprisoned, and liberated in 1859 at the instance of France and England. He subsequently became a minister and one of the most prominent personalities of the right-wing<sup>2</sup> Liberal Party until 1876. It seemed to me that in many of his letters, in the language of the times—in other words, rather romantically and sentimentally—he perfectly expresses states of mind similar to those through which I often pass. For example, in a letter to his

father, dated July 17, 1853, he writes, "I haven't heard from you for two months now; no news from my sisters for at least four months; and nothing from Bertrando [his brother] for some time. Surely you realize that for a man like me, blessed with a warm and youthful heart, this privation is a source of extreme pain. I don't think that I am any less loved now than I always have been by my family; but adversity usually has two effects: it often kills all affection for its victims and no less often leaves these victims devoid of all affection for others. I fear the first of these two effects in you less than the second in myself. Cut off as I am here from all human contacts and affections, the great tedium, the long confinement, the suspicion of being generally forgotten are embittering me and gradually deadening my emotions."

As I was saying, despite the language, which is in keeping with the sentimental climate of the time, the writer's state of mind is vividly reflected. And what comforts me is that Spaventa was no weakling or common whimperer. He was one of the few prisoners (sixty or so in number) from among the six hundred and more sentenced in 1848 who consistently refused to ask for a reprieve from the King of Naples. Nor did he turn to religion, but frequently wrote that he was growing ever more convinced that only Hegel's philosophy afforded a system and a conception of the world that were truly rational and worthy of the thought of the time.

Do you know what the practical effect of this similarity between my states of mind and those of a political prisoner of 1848 will be? That from now on these moods will strike me as rather comic, laughably anachronistic. Three generations have passed and progress has been made in every field. What was possible then for grandfathers is no longer possible for their grandchildren (I won't cite our grandfathers, because my grandfather—I've never told you this—was, in fact, a colonel in the Bourbon *gendarmarie* and was probably one of those who arrested Spaventa, an anti-Bourbon supporter of Charles Albert). This is meant objectively, because subjectively—that is, individual by individual—things may be different.

Dear Tania, yesterday was your name day. I thought that I would be able to convey my good wishes to you by word of mouth, but

instead I can only send them to you in writing a day late, and you'll read them in only a few days' time. I hope that you'll be better by then and will be able to go out, if today's weather continues. You know how sorry I am that your journeys to Turi for half an hour or so of conversation tire you so much that they make you positively ill. I'm convinced that you don't look after yourself enough: I remember that Genia was much the same when I met her in the sanatorium, and later, when we got to know each other better, I had to threaten to beat her if she didn't eat. Among other things, she had hidden hundreds of eggs from the doctor instead of eating them as she was supposed to do. Your mother laughed heartily when she was told of my intimidations, but she considered them justified. You also need to be gently coerced. I think you've lost the desire to live for yourself and live only for others. Isn't this a mistake? And living for yourself as well, improving your health, wouldn't you also live better for others, if this is what you want and really appreciate in life? I'm very fond of you and would like to see you always strong and healthy. It saddens me to think of you here in Turi, in this weak, sickly state, merely to give me a little solace and to break my solitude. But enough of this. This letter was to have been for my mother. Please write to her instead, so that she won't be alarmed at not hearing from me.

A hug, my dear.

Antonio

---

1. Silvio Spaventa (1822-1893), a southern political figure, one of the leaders of the Italian liberal movement and the founder of a secret society, *Unità Italiana* (Italian Unity), in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. He was arrested by the Bourbon police in March 1849, and condemned to death, a sentence that was then changed to life imprisonment. In 1859 the penalty was commuted to exile, and for a short time Spaventa was in London. But in 1860 Naples was liberated by Garibaldi, and he was able to return to Italy. He subsequently became Minister of Public Works. With his brother Bertrando, he played a leading role in the revival of Italian philosophical

studies and was one of the first to promote the study of Hegel's works in Italy. The work mentioned by Gramsci goes from the 1848 revolution, which involved a large part of the Italian peninsula, to the Proclamation of Unity.

2. The Right, at the time of the Risorgimento, included both Count Cavour's political supporters, who were inspired by English liberalism and maintained that the only solution of the "Italian problem" lay in the use of diplomacy, and the true moderates, who considered that unification should be brought about under a regime of constitutional monarchy, with a very limited suffrage. The government of the Historical Right (as Cavour's party was called after his death) lasted from the Proclamation of Unity (1861) to 1876, when it fell after the vote on a bill for the nationalization of the railroads promoted by Silvio Spaventa, then Minister of Public Works.

44

Turi  
February 10, 1930

Dearest Giulia,

While reminiscing about various things, I remembered that you once said that the State Bookshop<sup>1</sup> not only remunerates the translators of foreign books, as is only natural, but also remunerates anybody who suggests books for translation, if the suggestion is accepted. It therefore occurred to me to suggest a few such books to you, with the information—inevitably rough and incomplete—that is available to me in my present circumstances. This will make it easier for me to find material for my letters because I dislike writing the usual banalities, and my life doesn't offer many topics for discussion that are both pleasant and interesting; and, incidentally, I'll treat you to a few observations on the most fundamental and well-established trends of Italian intellectual life.

Last year, there appeared a new edition of a book that now has a place in European culture: *Il capitalismo antico. Storia dell'economia romana* ["Capitalism in the Ancient World: An Economic History of Rome"], 204 pages, published by Laterza, Bari.<sup>2</sup> The first edition

was published in 1906, in French, translated from the Italian manuscript, and was widely acclaimed; it was immediately translated into German by Karl Kautsky<sup>3</sup> and I think also into Russian and other languages. The book was directed against the trend initiated by Mommsen,<sup>4</sup> whereby any "monetary" economy is judged to be "capitalist."<sup>5</sup> Salvioli subjects Marx's objection to Mommsen on this point to critical demonstration. This is a trend that has now assumed morbid proportions through the influence of Professor Rostovtzeff,<sup>6</sup> a Russian historian who teaches in England, and in Italy through that of Professor Barbagnolo,<sup>7</sup> a follower of Guglielmo Ferrero.<sup>8</sup> Salvioli was a distinguished scholar (he died last year, during a lecture at Naples University) who accepted the theories of historical materialism, in the modified form given to them in Italy by Benedetto Croce, in other words, as a practical criterion for historical research and not as a total conception of the world.<sup>9</sup> The present Italian edition completely revises the preceding one, bringing it up to date from the point of view of scholarship and stripping it of the polemical elements that were topical in 1906: it is almost a completely new book, since the author died before its completion. It calls for a translator with an excellent knowledge of Italian who is capable of understanding the syntactical irregularities and the rather cumbersome sentences.

Another recent book is one by Francesco Ercole, a deputy in the present Parliament: *Dal comune al principato* ["From the Commune to the Despotic State"], essays on the public law of the Italian Renaissance, published by Vallecchi, Florence, 1929, 381 pages.<sup>10</sup> It consists of four studies, of varying interest from the point of view of non-Italian culture. The first, "The Class Struggle at the End of the Middle Ages," is certainly of interest outside Italy and would make an excellent short book in its own right or an article for a leading periodical. It contains a few patent examples of historical ingenuousness, such as the opinion that the failure of the Ciompi<sup>11</sup> movement in Florence was a fortunate event, since it allowed the cultural flowering of the Renaissance. But it also contains some very interesting and out-of-the-way information (the archive documents appeared during the war in periodicals whose publication was virtu-

ally a secret for the noninitiated) on a number of attempts made in Florence between 1340 and 1350 to organize the workers of the manufactories, who were excluded from the artisans' guilds, with significant political repercussions, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Ercole adheres to the same historiographical tendency as Salvioli—the so-called economic-juridical school, which has partially renewed a historical approach that was traditionally academic and rhetorical, or at best purely erudite and philological.

I don't know whether this information will be of any use to you and whether you'll have the desire and the opportunity to turn it to some purpose. In any case, it has given me an incentive to write to you about a subject other than the weather and the state of my nervous system: these studies are the only things that interest me and help me to pass the time as best I can. Why don't you write to me about Giuliano's mental development as well as about Delio's? Loving kisses.

Antonio

1. Gramsci is probably referring to the Soviet State publishing house.

2. *Le capitalisme dans le monde ancien* by Giuseppe Salvioli, published, as Gramsci indicates, in 1906 in Paris, had been proposed by Georges Sorel to the director of the "Bibliothèque internationale d'économie politique."

3. Karl Kautsky reviewed Salvioli's book and afterward had it translated into German and published with a long introduction by himself (Stuttgart, 1912). Kautsky (1854-1938), a German politician, at one time secretary to Friedrich Engels and leader of the Second International, was the founder of the Social Democratic periodical *Die Neue Zeit* and the author of works on political economy of Marxist inspiration. He gradually abandoned his leftist position for more centrist views, finally becoming nationalist and, after 1917, anti-Russian in his persuasion.

4. Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), a foremost nineteenth-century historian of ancient Rome, was also a political figure and deputy in Germany.

5. In *Capital* (Book I, part 2 ["The Conversion of Money into Capital"], chapter 6) Marx writes in a footnote: "Encyclopedic dictionaries of classical antiquity maintain quite absurdly that in the ancient world capital was fully developed, except that the free laborer and the credit system did not exist.



Even Mommsen's *Roman History* is full of *quid pro quo*." The passage in Marx to which the above note is appended runs as follows: "Various conditions must be met before labor power can become available as a market commodity to those possessing money. The exchange of commodities as such involves no relations of dependence other than those which spring from its own nature. Starting from this premise, labor power as a commodity can appear on the market only insofar as and because it is offered and sold as a commodity by the owner—in other words, by the person whose labor power it is. . . ."

6. Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff (1870–1952) was a famous Russian historian who emigrated to the United States. His chief work is the *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1926), which is based on an "economist" approach to history. (See note 7 to Introduction.)

7. Corrado Barbagallo (1877–1952) was an Italian historian of the positivist school who wrote *Storia universale* ("Universal History") in many volumes, in which the economist view of history, criticized by both Marx and Gramsci, prevails.

8. Guglielmo Ferrero (1871–1942) was a positivist sociologist and the author of studies on ancient Rome. Both Barbagallo and Ferrero are discussed by Gramsci under the heading "Lorianism" (see Introduction, p. 47) in *Intellectuals*.

9. Benedetto Croce accepted Marxism only as a historiographical method. He conceded that it had shown the importance of the economic factor in history but denied it full philosophical significance. Croce's criticism of Marx is naturally based on Croce's concept of philosophy and of idealism in general. Marx's concept of the dialectic relationship between theory and practice had undermined idealism.

10. The reference is to studies that range from the cultural formation of the Italian communes (from the eleventh to the fourteenth century) to their transformation into oligarchic states (*signorie* and *principati*), which characterize the history of Italy from the fifteenth century on.

11. This was the name given to the members of the wool workers' guild in Florence, which in 1378 had successfully rebelled against the oligarchic decrees. Their subsequent defeat made it possible for the *signoria* to establish its supremacy.

12. One of the chief problems in Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries lay in the fact that many artisans who were excluded from the guilds demanded to have their own organizations. At least as long as the Commune of Florence was controlled by the wealthiest strata, partly created by the guilds themselves, both the more closed ones (the Greater Arts) and the more populous ones (the Lesser Arts), it resisted this demand.

Turi  
March 10, 1930

Dearest Tania,

I received your letter of February 26 and two cards dated March 3 and 7. You seem quite chagrined that I spoke of you and everything having to do with you so negatively in my last letter, referring to "an intellectual miasma." As unpleasant as it may be for both of us, I find that I have to express myself in these dramatic terms. I want to be absolutely candid with you at all times. You know, you drive me mad when you describe those harebrained plans for voyages here and there. Last year, when you wrote me that you wanted to go to Sardinia and Calabria and I don't know where else, I imagined that you wouldn't even make it to Turi, and I was right. Now when you begin to fantasize about Bari and Taranto, I start worrying about you. Probably you don't quite realize how weak you are, since you don't seem to be dedicating yourself to regaining a certain equilibrium and strength.

Frankly, nothing irritates me more than when I see wishful thinking take the place of concrete willpower. When this happens to people I don't care much about or who seem "useless," I feel annoyed, but when I observe this phenomenon in someone close to me, whose "use" I can hardly be objective about and whom I'd like to encourage, then I suffer. At the university I used to observe the tragicomic existence of wishful thinkers. I still remember some of them, and if something brings one of them to mind, I feel the same anger that I felt then. You can see why a similar tendency in you makes me react so violently. But believe me, it's my affection for you that makes me scold you like a child. (You must admit that this psychological attitude is childish.) Instead of dreaming with our eyes open, we should be practical and concrete, setting for ourselves only



those goals that we can actually attain, and concentrating on the best means of attaining them. I feel like a village priest when I have to preach to you about things as obvious as these. Part of the trouble is that you're too earnest, too zealous with regard to me; sometimes this produces the opposite effect from the one you want. And many of your actions reveal a transcendent naïveté. When I tell you to go back to Milan and not to fantasize about Bari and Taranto, believe me, I know what I'm talking about, and what I'm saying makes good sense. You should never think that I intentionally set out to wound you. Harsh words on my part inevitably stem from something you yourself have said, which hurt or ruffled me. Try to remember this.

I received the five Berlitz books, but why did you send them? Let me illustrate for you one of those psychological mechanisms I was trying to describe above, even though it is only the trifling matter of throwing away a few ten lire coins. In another letter I asked you to look for the Russian and German Berlitz manuals among my books in Rome. You write now that you failed to find them and that you therefore told the bookshop to send new ones on to me. However, you didn't ask me whether I wanted them first. Berlitz manuals cost twenty-five lire apiece, which means you spent 125 lire. Was it worth it? Certainly not. First of all, I've gone beyond the level of the Berlitz manuals in all three languages. And as for the selected readings, I find them quite elementary. It would have been convenient to have had my books here, but it was certainly a complete waste—and a luxury—to buy them again. This somewhat simple example demonstrates how dangerous an excess of zeal can be. I wonder if I've been clear. Please try to avoid useless gestures like this one in the future.

Dearest, don't be upset by what I say. Your remark about St. Francis on your postcard of the seventh was not at all clear. The *Fioretti*<sup>1</sup> are extremely interesting to read if one is familiar with the culture of that era. As a work of art, they are lovely, fresh, and direct; and they express a sincere faith in, and love of, Francis, who was considered by many to be a new incarnation of God, a kind of Christ come-back-again. For this reason, the *Fioretti* are more popular in Protestant countries than in Catholic ones. Historically, they show how powerful an organism the Catholic Church was then and is now.

Francis' setting himself up as the apostle of a new Christianity stirred up an enthusiasm equal only to that of the first Christian centuries. Although the Church could not persecute him officially (that would have anticipated the Reformation by two centuries), it neutralized him, scattering his disciples and reducing the new religion to a simple monastic order serving the Church.<sup>2</sup> If you read the *Fioretti* as a moral lesson, you won't get anything out of them. Before the war, Luigi Luzzatti<sup>3</sup> published a newly discovered *fioretto* in *Corriere della Sera*, together with a ridiculous, long socioeconomical confutation. Today, no one would dream of doing such a thing, not even Franciscan monks. The order has been completely transformed and has fallen behind the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Augustinians—religious groups specializing in politics and culture. Francis was a comet in the Catholic firmament, while Dominic (who led to Savonarola) and Augustine (represented by the order that produced the Reformation and, later, Jansenism) contained seeds that could develop afterwards. Francis was no theologian; he tried to put the Gospels into practice. As long as memory of its founder endured, the movement was popular; but already in Fra Salimbene of Parma,<sup>4</sup> in the next generation, Franciscans are portrayed as pleasure-loving *gaudenti*.<sup>5</sup> I hardly need to remind you how they are treated in Italian literature. All of Boccaccio's monks are Franciscans, and one need only point to his works to prove how low the order had fallen in the eyes of the public.

My dear, I've ended by teaching you a little bit about the history of religion. But maybe it will help you enjoy the *Fioretti* more. I sincerely hope you will settle down now and feel more determined. A tender hug.

Antonio

1. A prose work by an anonymous fourteenth-century writer that relates the sayings and deeds of St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order.

2. On the subject of St. Francis, Gramsci writes in the *Notebooks* that the Franciscan movement, like the other popular religious movements of the

Middle Ages, expresses "the political impotence of the broad masses in the face of a limited number of hardened and centralized oppressors: the 'injured and the injured' entrench themselves in primitive evangelical pacifism, in the bare 'exposition' of their despised and downtrodden human nature, despite the affirmations of fraternity and equality before God the Father." (The passage is now included in *The Risorgimento*.)

3. Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927), an expert on financial problems, was Minister of Finance at various times and also President of the Council of the Kingdom of Italy in 1910-11.

4. Salimbene da Parma (1221-1287), a Franciscan friar, author of a *Chronicle* that describes the life of the times.

5. The *gaudenti* were members of a medieval confraternity the name of which derives from an adjective which at that time meant more or less "blessedly joyous." However, the term came to be used ironically in reference to them and, later, to anyone who overindulged in pleasurable activities.

46

Turi  
May 19, 1930

Dear Tatiana,

I received your letters and cards and had to smile again at the curious notion you have of my situation here in prison. I don't know whether you're familiar with the works of Hegel or not: he says that "a criminal has a *right* to be punished."<sup>1</sup> You imagine that I am someone who keeps on defending his right to suffer and to be martyred and who fights to be given every inch of allotted punishment. In your eyes I am a kind of new Gandhi, impelled to testify before heaven and hell to the sufferings of the Indian people, a new Jeremiah or Elijah or some other Israelite prophet, eating unclean foods in the public squares and sacrificing himself in a holocaust to his vindictive God. I don't know how you formed this idea. It shows you ingenuous in your relationships and unjust toward me—unjust and thoughtless, too. I've told you that I'm fundamentally a practical

person, but you don't seem to understand what that means nor are you able to put yourself in my place. As a result, I must look like a comedian to you. My practicality comes down to the following: when I beat my head against the wall, I know that my head's going to break, not the wall. Elementary perhaps, but not for someone who's never imagined having to beat his head against a wall and who has been told that all you have to do is say, "Open sesame," in order that the wall open up. You don't know how cruel your attitude is. You see a man bound and fettered to something, who won't move because he *can't* move. (The truth is that you don't even see him bound, nor can you imagine what it is he is bound to.) You think he doesn't move because he doesn't want to. (Don't you see that he has torn his very flesh trying to move?) So you descend on him with tips of fire to provoke him. The result? He squirms; then you add burning tortures to the chains already sapping his life's blood.

Undoubtedly this hideous picture of the Spanish Inquisition, like the ones in *feuilletons*, won't make you change your ways. And since the points of fire applied to me are metaphorical, I will have to continue my usual practice of *not* bashing my head against the wall, a sport that's already taken its toll, while setting aside all those problems that I haven't the equipment here to solve. This is my sole strength and is exactly what you'd like to deprive me of. Unfortunately, this kind of strength can't be transferred from one person to another, although it can be lost. You haven't thought enough about my situation, you don't know how to analyze it. I've been subjected to more than one prison regime. The prison regime and its four walls, iron bars, and the rest, was something I saw coming; in fact, considering what I might have expected then, in the period from 1921 to November 1926, it took second place: I was actually prepared to die. What I couldn't have imagined then, however, and what has added a second prison to my life, is the fact of being completely cut off, not only from life in society, but also from family life.

I was prepared for the blows of my adversaries, but I wasn't prepared for the fact that blows would also be dealt me from other completely unsuspected quarters. (These were metaphorical blows,

it's true, but the code divides offenses into acts and omissions; in other words, omissions are also a kind of crime.) But you say you're there. That's true, you're very good to me, and I'm very fond of you. But these are not problems that can be solved by substituting one person for another; and, besides, the situation is extremely involved and difficult. There are walls in question that are not at all metaphorical! I'm really not very sentimental and it's not sentimental matters that torment me. This doesn't mean that I'm unfeeling (I don't want to pretend to be cynical or blasé). It's rather that I consider—and experience—sentimental questions in combination with ideological, philosophical, political, and other elements in such a way that I'm unable to tell where sentiment ends and one of the other elements begins. Indeed, because they are so closely knit in an organic, indivisible whole, it is impossible to know exactly which one of these elements is involved at a particular moment. This may be a source of strength, but it may also be a weakness, since it leads me to analyze others in the same way and perhaps to judge them wrongly. But I won't go on, because this has become a kind of lecture and it strikes me that it's better not to write at all than to lecture.

Dear Tatiana, don't worry so much about the undershirts. I have quite enough to last me until you can send me others. Don't send me the Thermos unless you're sure that the prison authorities will allow it to be delivered to me; it's better not to have it at all than to have it impounded. Signora Pina<sup>2</sup> lives at 7 Via Montebello; I don't think she should come at this time. I'll send you a few more books and two torn shirts. Send my mother my love and assure her that I'm quite well.

A tender hug.

Antonio

1. Gramsci refers to a passage in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1821), in which the author affirms that the penalty "is not only just in itself," but is just for the criminal, too, "a right to which his liberty entitles him."

2. Pina was the wife of Enrico Tulli, a journalist who worked on *L'Unità* and who shared a cell with Gramsci in Milan. Tulli and Gramsci saw each other again in the Turi prison in Bari.

47

Turi

June 2, 1930

Dearest Tatiana,

Thank you for sending the undershirts. I have nothing to be mended besides the two shirts that I already sent you. They ripped these last few weeks, but although they're worn, they're not rags yet, as you'll see. So don't expect to have the chance to show how good you are at mending, at least this time. I also received your letters of May 24 and 31. You're making a mistake when you say, "You should feel sorry for me since I decided not to hide anything from you," or when you write, "Sincerity compels me to be cruel by not concealing the truth from you."<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, it seems to me that your real cruelty consists in having waited three years to write me certain things. But I don't want to scold you. I've given up trying to understand, because I've reached the conclusion that for one reason or another, I'll never manage to assemble enough facts to understand any of this. Your father's cards, which you copy for me, persuaded me of this fact.

My dear, I want to write to you about a matter that may irritate or amuse you. While I was leafing through the small *Larousse*, I was reminded of a rather curious problem. As a child, I was an indefatigable hunter of lizards and snakes, which I fed to a beautiful hawk that I had named. Three or four times in the course of these hunts in the countryside near my village (Ghilarza), I came across a creature very similar to the common grass snake, except that it had four small feet, two close to its head and two a long way from the others, close to the tail (if you can call it that): the animal was twenty-five

to thirty inches long, very fat in relation to its length, its girth corresponding to that of a grass snake four or five feet long. Its legs serve no great purpose, and in fact it slithered away very slowly. In my village this reptile is called *scurzone*, which apparently means "foreshortened" (remember that there's also the slow-worm, which is just as slender as it is short). At Santu Lussurgiu, where I attended the last three classes of high school, I asked the natural history teacher (who was actually an aging local engineer) what the *scurzone* was called in Italian. He laughed and told me that it was an imaginary animal, the asp or basilisk, and that he knew of no animal like the one I had described. The boys of Santu Lussurgiu explained that in their village the *scurzone* was in fact the basilisk and that the animal I had described was called *coloru* (Latin *coluber*), while the grass snake was called *colora* (in the feminine gender); but the teacher insisted that these were all country superstitions and that grass snakes with feet didn't exist. You know how angry a boy gets when he's told that he's wrong although he knows he's right, or when he is laughed at for being superstitious and something real is actually at stake. If I still remember the incident, it is probably because of this reaction against authority bolstered with smugness and stupidity. In my village I had never heard of the malignant characteristics of the basilisk-*scurzone*, although in other villages the creature was feared and surrounded by legends. Now in the *Larousse* table of reptiles I saw a saurian, the *seps*, which is in fact a grass snake with four feet. The *Larousse* says that it is found in Spain and the south of France and belongs to the *scincidés* family, typified by the *scinque* (the green lizard, perhaps?). The illustration of the *seps* doesn't correspond very well to the *scurzone* of my village: the *seps* is a regular grass snake, slim, long and normally proportioned, and the feet are well set in relation to the body; the *scurzone*, on the other hand, is a repellent animal. Its head is very large, not small like that of the grass snake; the "tail" is conical; the two front legs are too close to the head and too far from the back legs; the feet are whitish, sickly, like those of the proteus [type of amphibian], and give an impression of monstrosity and abnormality. This creature, which lives in damp places (I always saw it after rolling aside large stones), has an ungainly

appearance as a whole, unlike the lizard and the grass snake, which, aside from the repulsion that men naturally have toward reptiles, are basically elegant and graceful. At this point, can you tell me, on the basis of your knowledge of natural history, whether this animal has an Italian name and whether this species, which must belong to the same family as the French *seps*, is known to exist in Sardinia? It may be that the basilisk legend has prevented a search for the animal in Sardinia. The teacher at Santu Lussurgiu was not stupid—he did a good deal of research and had a collection of minerals as well—yet he didn't believe that the *scurzone* could be part of everyday life and not have poisonous breath and burning eyes. It's true that this animal is rather rare—I've seen it only half a dozen times and always under rocks, whereas I've seen thousands of grass snakes without having to move any stones.

Dear Tania, don't be too annoyed at these digressions.

A tender hug.

Antonio

---

t. Gramsci is probably referring here to the fact that no one had until then spoken openly of Giulia's real mental condition. It seems that she suffered from severe nervous breakdowns and other disorders, which are reflected in her dissociated letters to Gramsci.

48

Turi

October 6, 1930

Dearest Tatiana,

I was glad that Carlo came. He told me that you have made a pretty good recovery, but I would like to have a more detailed report about your health. Thank you for everything you sent me.



Two things haven't been given to me yet—*Bibliografia fascista* and Chesterton's short stories. I'm looking forward to reading the latter for two reasons—firstly, because I'm sure that they will be as interesting as the earlier series, and secondly, because I will try to imagine what kind of impression they must have made on you. The second will undoubtedly give the most pleasure. I distinctly remember your reaction to the first series. You were completely open to what you were reading and did not notice the residual cultural elements. You were not even aware that Chesterton had written an extremely subtle caricature of detective stories rather than straight detective stories. Father Brown is a Catholic who mocks the mechanical habits of thought of Protestants, and the book is basically a defense of the Roman Church against the Anglican Church. Sherlock Holmes is the Protestant detective who unravels the tangled skein of a crime starting from the outside, using scientific and experimental methods and induction. Father Brown is the Catholic priest who uses the subtle psychological experience gained from the confessional and from the vigorous moral casuistry of the fathers, depending particularly on deduction and introspection while not totally ignoring science and experiment. In this way he completely outshines Sherlock Holmes and makes him look like a pretentious schoolboy with a mean and narrow view of things. Moreover, Chesterton is a great artist, whereas Conan Doyle was a second-rate writer, even though he was made a baronet for his supposed literary merits. In Chesterton the stylistic divergence between the content, the plot of the detective story, and the form results in a subtly ironical treatment of the material that makes the stories more amusing. Do you agree? I remember that you read these stories as though they were a chronicle of real events and became so involved in them that you openly declared your admiration for Father Brown's marvelous acumen, with an ingenuousness that amused me enormously. You mustn't be offended though, because this amusement was tinged with envy for your fresh, unabashed impressionability. To tell you the truth, I've no great desire to write: my brain is tired.

An affectionate hug.

Antonio

Turi

October 20, 1930

Dearest Tania,

The photographs have arrived and not all your comments and remarks could make them any better: they're very bad and seem to me to put everything in a false light. I believe that what you write to me about Giulia's state of health is inexact and that it's dangerous, or anyway inadvisable, to raise the question in this way. I think the conversations with Signorina Nilde have helped to lead you astray. It's obvious that Giulia is suffering from nervous strain and cerebral anemia that threaten to become chronic because she's unwilling and unable to look after herself. Giulia is gradually approaching the state that Genia had reached in 1919—in other words, she refuses to believe that you can force yourself to work under great pressure only if you "put in" as much as you "take out" of your system and adopt a regular rhythm of living. What was understandable in 1919 is nothing but absurd romanticism in 1930. The question is a grave one because it seems to me insoluble. In fact, what can you and I do about it? Sermons and admonitions would have no effect. I believe that in situations of this kind, the only thing is to fuse persuasion and coercion, but this immediately raises a problem: who can exercise the necessary coercion?

In any case, I think that your point of view is wrong and that if you want to help, you must change it. I'm saying this seriously, because I know the state of affairs very well, from careful observation. I'll write Giulia a long letter, which will take the form of a "lecture," though that is very unpleasant. I don't see any other solution. This is no isolated phenomenon; unfortunately it's growing increasingly common, as can be seen from the scientific publications concerning the new work systems introduced from America. I don't

know whether you read this literature. It's interesting also from a psychological point of view and so are the measures taken by American industrialists such as Ford.<sup>1</sup> He has a body of inspectors who supervise and regulate the private life of his employees: they superintend the food, the beds, the cubic capacity of the rooms, the rest hours, and even more intimate matters. Whoever does not conform is dismissed and loses his minimum salary of six dollars a day. Ford pays this minimum, but wants people who know how to work and who are always fit for work, in other words, who know how to coordinate their work with their way of life. We Europeans are still too Bohemian; we think we can do a certain job and live as we please, in Bohemian fashion. Naturally, mechanization crushes us, and I'm taking mechanization in the broad sense, to include the scientific organization of brainwork. We're absurdly romantic, and in our efforts not to be bourgeois, we fall into Bohemianism, which is in fact the most typical form of bourgeois behavior. I've already started to lecture you.

Affectionately,  
Antonio

---

1. A chapter in the *Notebooks* is devoted to "Fordism" (planned production techniques in America in the 1920's). These notes are now gathered together in the volume *Notes on Machiavelli* under the general heading of "Americanism and Fordism." This section opens as follows, "Americanism [programs such as Taylorism] and Fordism can be generally said to result from an inherent need to achieve a planned economy. The problems discussed below should be the links of the chain marking the passage from the old economic individualism to the planned economy." Some of the most important links are, according to Gramsci: "(1) the replacement of the present plutocratic stratum by a new mechanism of accumulation and distribution of finance capital based directly on industrial production; (2) the sexual question; (3) the question of whether Americanism can constitute a historical 'era' by leading to a gradual evolution . . . or whether it represents rather the accumulation of elements eventually producing an explo-

sion . . . ; (6) the question of the so-called 'high salaries' paid by Fordized and rationalized industry; (7) Fordism as the last stage in the process of industry's progressive attempts to overcome the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; (8) psychoanalysis . . . as the expression of the growing moral pressure exerted on individuals by the apparatus of the State and society and of the unhealthy mental states that this pressure produces."

50

Turi  
November 17, 1930

Dearest Tatiana,

Your card of November tenth and your letter of the thirteenth have both reached me. I'll try to answer your queries in order.

(1) For the time being, I don't want you to send me any books. Put aside those you have and wait until I ask you to send them. First, I want to get rid of all the old periodicals that I've accumulated in the last four years. Before sending them off, I'm going through them again, taking notes on the subjects that interest me most, and naturally this takes up a good part of the day because the critical notes include references, comments, etc. I've concentrated on three or four main subjects, one of these being the cosmopolitan role played by Italian intellectuals until the eighteenth century, a subject that can be broken up into a number of sections: the Renaissance and Machiavelli, etc.<sup>1</sup> If I could consult the necessary material, I think it would be possible to produce a really interesting and original book. This work would merely be the introduction to a certain number of monographs because the subject has different aspects in the different periods, and I think it would be necessary to go back as far as the Roman Empire.

In the meantime I'm making notes, partly because reading the relatively little material I have reminds me of things I have read in the past. Moreover, the subject is not entirely new to me because ten

years ago I wrote an essay on Manzoni's treatment of language<sup>2</sup> that required a certain amount of research on the development of Italian culture, from the time when the written language (so-called Middle Latin, in other words, the Latin written from A.D. 400 to 1300) became completely divorced from the language spoken by the people, which, with the end of Roman centralization, split up into countless dialects. This Middle Latin was succeeded by the vulgar tongue, which was in its turn submerged in humanistic Latin. This gave rise to a learned language, vulgar in its vocabulary but not in its phonology and still less in its syntax, which was reproduced from Latin. In this way two languages persisted, one of them popular or dialectal and the other the learned language of the intellectuals and cultured classes. Manzoni himself, in his reworking of *I Promessi Sposi* ["The Betrothed"] and in his discussions of the Italian language, in reality considered only one linguistic aspect, vocabulary, and disregarded syntax, which is an essential part of any language. The proof is that English, although more than 60 percent of its words are Latin or neo-Latin, is a Germanic language, while Rumanian, although over 60 percent of its words are Slav, is a neo-Latin language, etc. As you can see, the subject interests me so much that I've let myself be carried away.<sup>3</sup>

(2) With regard to the periodicals: the *Bibliografia fascista* is of no great use to me because the bibliographical periodicals I get are compiled by the same authors and the books reviewed are the same. You mention an English periodical: it would be a good idea to send me a trial copy through the bookshop. You could also order a sample copy of the weekly supplement of the *Manchester Guardian* and of the *Times*, which I saw in the Rome prison. I think, though, that the literary prose of these periodicals is still too hard for me. And I've no great wish to study languages.

(3) I didn't understand what you wrote about a "jacket" that Carlo mentioned to me. From what I remember of what Carlo said, this is a woolen sweater or winter vest. You call it a "jacket" and in prison only the regulation jacket is allowed. I've already told Carlo that I have enough sweaters to last me several years, and not

only sweaters: I have four pullovers, if not five, and two of them I haven't even touched yet. What's the point of sending me garments of the same sort even if the style is better, or simply different? To let them get moth-eaten? You wrote too soon to the bookshop for the renewal of the subscriptions for the periodicals: overeagerness on your part, because in two months they have ample time to forget all about the request. I get the *Secolo Illustrato* regularly. I've absolutely no use for the *Emporium*. I already have enough slippers. Don't be angry.

Loving kisses,

Antonio

I've received the Sedobrol and the oversocks. Thank you. Send the other half page to my sister Teresina Gramsci-Paulesu.

---

1. See Introduction, pp. 41 ff and Letter 55. This is a reference to one of the major themes of Gramsci's studies, and perhaps his most original contribution to Marxist thought. The pages of the *Notebooks* dealing with this question date from 1930 and are collected in the volume called *Intellectuals*. Gramsci himself had put them together under the general title "Notes and Scattered Observations for a Group of Essays on the History of Intellectuals and Culture in Italy." This was a model study (in the sense that its general methodology was applicable to all societies and countries) closely linked to the concept of the "party" as the protagonist of modern history. The idea outlined in this letter is taken up again in Gramsci's writings dedicated to "Machiavelli and the New Prince," collected in *Notes on Machiavelli* and referred to in Letter 17 and in note 5. In the very first chapter of *Intellectuals*, Gramsci arrives at the core of the problem, which involves not so much intellectuals in the traditional sense of the term (men of letters, philosophers, artists, and so forth) as all of "the professional functionaries" of the "complex of superstructures" whom Gramsci defines as "organic"—that is to say, "linked more or less closely to basic social groups, to classes." The essential "superstructural" levels on which men function as intellectuals are "civil society" and "political society or the State." The former corresponds to the function of "hegemony," which the "ruling class exercises over the whole of society," and the latter to the function of "direct control or



command expressed in the State and in 'juridic' government." (See Introduction, p. 42, for a slightly different interpretation of the important concept of hegemony.) This way of posing the problem, giving "the concept of the intellectual" an "extremely broad interpretation," which is, nevertheless, the only one that guarantees "access to a concrete approximation of reality" (in vivid contrast to the concept of history as the work of elite groups), determined the particular direction that Gramsci's historical and theoretical research took.

Here are a few titles from the *Notebooks* to illustrate these lines of research: "Various Attitudes of Urban and Rural Intellectuals," "The Cosmopolitan Function of Italian Intellectuals" (which is related to the "language question" mentioned later in this letter), "The Formation of Classes of Italian Intellectuals in the early Middle Ages," "The Development of the Bourgeois Spirit in Italy," "The Renaissance," "The Counter-Reformation and Science," "The Clergy and Intellectuals," "The Risorgimento."

Although these studies provided an essential tool for tracing the development of the socialist revolution on the Italian peninsula, they were not limited to Italy but rather extended to the history of the whole world as well. Gramsci's rough notes contain mainly bibliographical information, but there is nevertheless a wide range of subjects: from the United States and Europe to Asia and the Arabian countries. Gramsci discusses intellectuals in relation to many different subjects such as nationalism, Protestantism, schools, and language. Another related line of research concerns journalism: on the basis of his past journalistic experiences, Gramsci drew up a plan for a new kind of newspaper using *Ordine nuovo* as his model. Still another deals with the mentality of certain groups of Italian intellectuals that he felt, to some extent, characterized the culture of the nation as a whole at that time, and which he calls "Lorianism" (see Introduction, p. 47).

The chapter on Lorianism is more directly "critical," since it aims at showing how Marxism is not born from a body of abstractly formulated doctrines, but rather from criticism of the real culture of a particular nation. The party as the new protagonist of modern history in the measure in which it provides an ever-increasing consciousness of the problems and needs of the working classes and other laboring classes, is the recurrent theme of all this research. According to Gramsci, the party (in the Marxist sense of the word) must necessarily be the "collective intellectual," elaborating its theories together with the masses and testing and verifying them through the actions of the masses in a concrete unity of theory and praxis. Such then is the "New Prince," the new personification of collective will in the contemporary world, subject of the essays by Gramsci collected in the aforementioned volume, *Notes on Machiavelli*.

2. Gramsci was a former student of Matteo Bartoli (see Introduction, p. 20 and Letter 6, n. 4). Gramsci had already in 1918 written an article entitled "La lingua unica e l'esperanto" ("One Language and Esperanto"). In this article he presented the problem as follows: "Manzoni asked himself how an Italian language was to be created now that 'Italy' existed, and he answered, all Italians will have to speak Tuscan; the Italian State will have to send its elementary teachers to school in Tuscany; Tuscan will replace the numerous dialects spoken in the various regions; and now that Italy has been created, the Italian language will be created, too." Despite the support of the Italian government, Manzoni's initiative failed because of its abstract nature. As Gramsci says, "A national language cannot be created artificially by the State . . . The Italian language creates itself and will continue doing so only if numerous, lasting contacts are made among the various parts of the nation. . . ."

The problem has a wider dimension, embracing the whole history of the nation, since the history of a language is, for Gramsci, *tout court*, the history of social and political formations. The characteristic feature of the linguistic situation in Italy was the wide gap between the popular language, broken up into an infinite number of dialects, and the cultured language, a gap corresponding to the detachment of intellectuals (in the broad sense of the word) from the people, from society. Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) was the most important Italian novelist of the nineteenth century, the leader of a Romantic current of historicist and Catholic-liberal inspiration, who also had considerable influence on the politics of the Italian school system immediately after 1861—that is to say, after the unification of Italy. In elementary school in Sardinia, Gramsci himself had had first-hand experience of these Tuscan schoolteachers, who were sent all around the country and who arrived in some remote town only to abandon it a few days later, leaving classrooms and pupils behind.

3. In various places in the *Notebooks*, Gramsci returns to these arguments and to the role of Manzoni (the intellectual who is "organic" [see Introduction, p. 44], to the bourgeoisie, the ideologically bourgeois intellectual). See especially *Intellectuals*, pp. 25-28, for the problem of language and the organization of schools in the Italian Middle Ages, and *Literature and National Life*, pp. 167 ff., on Manzoni's concept of language as lexicon rather than syntax.



Turi  
December 1, 1930

Dear Tatiana,

I received the parcels of medicine together with the other things that you sent me. The oversocks are fine, but I'm afraid that my shoes will get the better of them. In any case, I won't wear out more than a pair of socks a week. There's no point in sending me tonics such as "Benzofosfan" or tranquilizers like the ones you sent last time: I'm sure that they have no effect on me. I'll write you when I need something.

I don't know why Carlo hasn't written since his trip to Turi, although I can well imagine why. At this moment I don't need any money—I still have 870 lire, which should suffice for a good while. For some months now, we have not been allowed to receive cigarettes, although we can have loose tobacco. I reminded Carlo that when I was in prison in Rome, I received, either from him or from you, a package of Turkish tobacco that I appreciated very much, since it resembled Italian Macedonian tobacco before they started mixing it with American tobacco. I remember that it cost 4.20 a packet then; it shouldn't be much more now, since the rise in cost of foreign tobacco has been very slight. If you want to take care of this, you might see if you can find it again; but send me only a little, so that in case it isn't the right kind, we won't be throwing any money away. I can only smoke a light tobacco such as the Macedonian kind.

I would be very glad if you could find, in some Roman bookshop, the October issue of the review *La Nuova Italia*, edited by Professor Luigi Russo,<sup>1</sup> and send it on to Giulia. It contains a letter that deals with the polite argument that took place during the International Congress of Philosophers held recently at Oxford, between Bene-

detto Croce and Lunacharsky,<sup>2</sup> concerning whether or not there exists—or can exist—an aesthetics based on historical materialism. The letter is probably by Croce himself, or at least by one of his disciples, and is very curious.

It seems that Croce replied to a comment by Lunacharsky with a patronizing, protective, humorous tone, to the great amusement of the Congress. From the letter it would seem that Lunacharsky didn't know that Croce had dealt extensively with historical materialism and had written a great deal about it, and in any case was extremely informed on the topic. This seems very odd to me since Croce's works are translated into Russian, and Lunacharsky knows Italian very well.

It also appears from this letter that the position Croce held a few years ago on the subject of historical materialism has completely changed. Now Croce dares to maintain that historical materialism marks a return to a kind of medieval theology and to pre-Kantian and pre-Cartesian philosophy.<sup>3</sup> This is really astonishing and makes one wonder whether he is not perhaps, in spite of his Olympian serenity, dozing off a little too often, more often than Homer did. I don't know whether he will write a series of notes on this subject. It would be extremely interesting if he did, and I believe that one could easily answer him by referring to certain passages in his own works. I think that Croce is using a very flimsy forensic trick and that his judgment, more than a historical-philosophical judgment, is nothing else but willfulness with a practical end in view. That many of the so-called theoreticians of historical materialism have fallen into a philosophical position similar to medieval theology and have turned "economic structure" into a kind of hidden god is probably demonstrable, but what does that signify? It's as if one wanted to judge the religion of the Pope and the Jesuits by talking about the superstitions of Bergamo peasants. Croce's position in relation to historical materialism is similar to that of men of the Renaissance toward the Lutheran Reformation. "When Luther enters, civilization disappears," said Erasmus;<sup>4</sup> and yet, today, historians, even Croce himself, recognize that Luther and the Reformation were the beginning of all modern philosophy and civilization, including Cro-

ce's own philosophy. Renaissance man could not imagine that a great period of moral and intellectual rebirth, because it was incarnated in huge sectors of the masses, as was the case with Lutheranism, should immediately take on the form of barbarity and superstition, and that this was inevitable since the German people themselves—and not just a small elite of intellectuals—were the protagonists and standard-bearers of reform. I wonder whether Giulia could find out whether the Croce-Lunacharsky debate will be carried on anywhere else by intellectuals.

As you may recall, some time ago I applied to the Head of the Government<sup>5</sup> for permission to read certain books that had been withheld from me, in addition to two others that I had not yet obtained and which I asked to be purchased: Fülöp-Miller, *Il Volto del bolscevismo* ["The Face of Bolshevism"], with a Preface by Curzio Malaparte,<sup>6</sup> published by Bompiani, Milan, and Leon Trotsky's *La Mia Vita* ["My Life"], published by Mondadori, Milan. (I'm not sure whether this is the exact title of Trotsky's book.) I received a favorable reply and therefore ask you to write to the bookshop and have them send them to me. I would also like to have the following books: (1) Benedetto Croce, *Eternità e storicità della filosofia* ["The Eternity and Historicity of Philosophy"], Biblioteca, Rieti; (2) Henri De Man, *La Gioia nel lavoro* ["The Joy of Work"], Laterza, Bari; (3) Biagio Riguzzi, *Sindacalismo e riformismo nel Parmense* ["Syndicalism and Reformism in the Region of Parma"], Laterza, Bari. By the way, with reference to my request to the Head of the Government, perhaps it would be well if you advised Carlo not to make any further requests should he have any intention of doing so, since I think that everything is proceeding well enough as it is.

Dearest, I have to send this off now. A tender hug.

Antonio

I erased certain lines myself: the last ones on the page before last and the first one on this page. If you write Carlo, tell him that I'm sorry that he hasn't written to me for so long and that I've had no news about Mamma's health.

May I compliment you on the beautiful oversocks? They're lovely, although they must have been extremely difficult to make out

of that thick, tough material. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

---

1. Luigi Russo (1892–1961), democratic man of letters and literary historian, was the director of various cultural reviews, among which were *La Nuova Italia* and *Belfagor*, which was begun in 1945 and is still published today.

2. Anatole Lunacharsky (1875–1933) was a Russian writer, politician, literary critic, and dramatist who lived for many years in exile after the Russian Revolution of 1905. He was one of Lenin's collaborators and the People's Commissar in the Ministry of Education from 1917 to 1927. Lunacharsky was a man of wide European culture and a friend and critic of many exponents of the avant-garde, whose ideas and motives he defended in the USSR, together with Trotsky and Gorky, up to the time when he became Minister of Education. The Congress to which Gramsci refers is the VII Congress on Philosophy held at Oxford, September 1–5, 1930. In the letter he mentions, which appeared in Luigi Russo's article "The Oxford Congress" in *La Nuova Italia* (October 10–20, 1930), Croce writes, "I must point out to Mr. Lunacharsky that, contrary to his belief that historical materialism is based on a definitely antimetaphysical and extremely realistic conception, that doctrine is, in fact, worse than metaphysical: it is theological, dividing, as it does, the single process of reality into structure and superstructure, noumenon and phenomenon, and setting at the base of reality, as noumenon, a hidden god—Economics. Economics rules everything and is considered the sole reality amidst the phenomena of morality, religion, philosophy, art, and so forth. For this reason historical materialism is of no use whatsoever in formulating a theory of poetry or art, since no materialist concept can ever be aesthetic but is always necessarily economic. . . ."

3. Evidence of the limitations in Croce's attitude toward Marxism (largely due, as Gramsci points out [see introduction, p. 45], to his philologically slanted readings of works by Marx that he viewed, for the most part, from a positivist angle, but also to his own political biases) appears in a note written by Croce himself and published in 1928 in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* in a special fiftieth anniversary issue dedicated to "Currents in the Modern World." Croce contributed an article entitled *Against the Survival of Historical Materialism*, which, in that period of great social and political unrest, only lent support to the wave of anti-working-class feeling in the US (these were

the years of Sacco and Vanzetti, when there were the first warning signals of the Depression) and to the ideology of the ruling elites of the time. The theory contained in the letter cited here was upheld in this article (later collected together with other essays in the volume *The Drift of Civilization*, by the Contributors to the Fiftieth Anniversary Issue of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, New York, 1929).

4. It was indeed in one of Croce's books that Gramsci had found the sentence by Erasmus, "Ubi cumque regnat lutheranesimus, ibi literarum est interitus" ("Literature dies wherever Lutheranism holds sway"), contained in a letter of June 20, 1528 to Pirkheimer. Gramsci refers to this in *Historical Materialism*, p. 85. On pp. 222-224, he discusses the letter by Croce quoted above:

In his speech made to the section of aesthetics at the Oxford Congress, Croce carries his theory of the philosophy of praxis [i.e., Marxism; see Introduction, p. 45] contained in the *Storia della storiografia nel secolo XIX* ["A History of Historiography in the Nineteenth Century"] to an extreme point. How can we make a critical judgment of Croce's newest attitude to the philosophy of praxis? . . . We must regard it not as a philosophical judgment, but rather as a political act of immediate practical significance. It is clear that a "deteriorated" current of the philosophy of praxis has come into being that stands in relation to the doctrine as conceived by its founders [i.e., Marx and Engels] in much the same way as popular Catholicism stands in relation to theology or the thought of Catholic intellectuals. Just as popular Catholicism can be interpreted in terms of paganism or religions inferior to Catholicism in that they contain elements of superstition and witchcraft, so this second-rate philosophy of praxis can be interpreted in "theological" or transcendental terms proper to pre-Kantian and pre-Cartesian philosophy. Croce is thus behaving like the anticlerical Freemasons and "vulgar" rationalists who use these parallels to contest Catholicism . . .

Gramsci then asks himself whether

it is a sign of strength or weakness when a philosophy moves out from the customary limits of narrow intellectual groups and is diffused among the masses, becoming adapted to their mentality and necessarily losing some of its vital fiber. And what does it mean when a conception of the world is so widespread and rooted in the masses and is constantly revived with renewed intellectual splendor? Only antiquated intellectuals believe that a conception of the world can be destroyed by rational criticism.

Gramsci's provisory conclusion on this subject is as follows,

It is often said that the lack of religious reform in certain countries is the cause of regression in all areas of civil life, but it is never pointed out that the diffusion of the philosophy of praxis and the great reforms of modern times constitute a moral and intellectual reform achieving, on a national scale, what liberalism was able to achieve only for a limited sector of the population.

What Gramsci is trying to demonstrate here is the fact that Croce contradicts his own historiographical viewpoint and general methodology and that these contradictions are ideological in origin—that is to say, of immediate political nature.

5. Mussolini.

6. Curzio Malaparte (pseudonym of Kurt E. von Suckert, 1898-1957) was an Italian journalist and author. He was a Fascist supporter from the beginning, although his was an entirely cynical position.

52

Turi

December 15, 1930

Dearest Tatiana,

. . . Before writing Giulia, I'd like to hear from her and to know more from her about her health. Besides, I'm convinced you forward all my letters to her, even personal ones. If you send this one, she'll realize how I can't eliminate this need of mine, it's a psychological necessity. My entire intellectual formation was of a polemical nature, so that it's impossible for me to think "disinterestedly" or to study for the sake of studying. Only rarely do I lose myself in a particular train of thought and analyze something for its inherent interest. Usually I have to engage in a dialogue, be dialectical, to arrive at some intellectual stimulation. I once told you how I hate tossing stones into the dark. I need an interlocutor, a concrete adversary; even in a family situation, I have to create a dialogue. Other-

wise, I would have the sense of writing a novel in epistolary form and that would be "bad" literature, indeed.

Naturally, I want to know what Delio thinks, especially about his trip. But I don't feel like asking Giulia any more to encourage him to write. I gave in once and wrote directly to Delio—perhaps you remember, but it led to nothing. I can't figure out why my being in prison has been hidden from Delio. No one seems to realize that he could learn about it indirectly. That would be very wrong for a child who already questions what his teachers say and wants to think for himself and exist in his own right. Since I remember quite well how I felt about such things as a child, I hesitate to write Delio directly. Whenever a particular educational method is employed, even an inadequate one, it shouldn't meet opposition. Because I know about Delio's sensitive nervous system, though little about his present activities and mental development (has he learned to read and write?), I'm afraid to interfere and perhaps stir up contradictory, even dangerous, emotions in him. What do you think? Giulia ought to write with a greater love of system in her letters, to let me know what kind of answer she wants. Someone has to convince her that it's unfair and unjust to hide from the children the fact that I'm in prison. They might react negatively at first, but this depends on how it's done. Children should be treated rationally. If you talk about serious matters with them, they are deeply impressed. This strengthens the character of the child and also guarantees that the education of the child is not left only to chance impressions of a particular environment or to the mechanical occurrences of everyday life. Strangely enough, grownups forget that they were children once. Every subterfuge used to hide things from me, even harmful ones, offended me and made me crawl even more into my solitary shell. By the age of ten, I had become a real torment to my mother. Fanatical about truth and falsehood, I caused "scenes" and brought on tantrums if anyone lied.

Thank you for the two packs of tobacco. I like it, but it's too strong for me to smoke.

Please see if the recent speech by Senator Giovanni Gentile<sup>1</sup> at the Institute of Fascist Culture was published in *Educazione fascista*.

You can find the magazine at the Bookshop del Littorio. Maybe the clerk knows if it came out elsewhere, for example, in the *Bibliografia fascista*, also edited by Gentile. In any case, let me have a copy of *Educazione fascista* to read, so that I can see how it's put together and decide whether it's worth subscribing to. Perhaps the best number would be the December one, since it includes an index for the whole year. My dear, best wishes for the holidays. A tender hug.

Antonio

---

1. Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) was an Italian philosopher and a collaborator of Croce, with whom he directed the periodical *La Critica*. When he became Minister of Education in Mussolini's first government, Gentile broke with Croce; subsequently he became the chief theoretician and ideologue of Fascism. He was executed in 1944, by order of the Italian Resistance, as a supporter of Mussolini's Salò Republic.

53

Turi  
June 1, 1931

Dear Giulia,

Tania sent me Delio's epistle (I use the literary term deliberately) in which he speaks of his love for Pushkin's stories, especially ones about his early life. I was delighted to hear about this and would like to know whether Delio thought of this phrase himself or whether he remembered it from something he had read. I was surprised to learn that you are no longer horrified by Delio's literary leanings. At one time you believed that he had the stuff more of an engineer than a poet, whereas now you predict that he'll love reading Dante. I hope that he won't, even though I'm delighted that Delio likes Pushkin and other forms of creative expression. On the other hand,



who actually reads Dante "with love"? Harebrained professors who make religious cults around some poet or writer and celebrate strange philological rites. I think that a modern, intelligent person should read the classics with a certain detachment—that is, for their aesthetic value; "love" implies adherence to the ideological content of the poetry. One can love "his very own poet" while "admiring" the artist in general. Aesthetic admiration can even be accompanied by a certain "civil" scorn, as in the case of Marx's attitude toward Goethe.<sup>1</sup> Well, I'm glad that Delio likes works of the imagination. This doesn't mean he won't turn into a great engineer someday and construct skyscrapers or power plants—quite the contrary. Ask Delio which stories by Pushkin he likes best. To tell the truth, I'm familiar with only two of them: "The Golden Cockerel" and "The Fisherman." I also remember the story of the "basin" with the pillow that jumps like a frog, the sheet that flies away, and the candle that hops down suddenly to hide under the stove; but it's not by Pushkin. Do you remember it? You know what? I still know hundreds of lines of it by heart. I'd like to tell Delio a story of my home town that will interest him. I'll tell it to you briefly and you can recount it to him and Giuliano.

A baby is sleeping. Nearby there's a big cup of milk ready for when he wakes up. A rat drinks the milk. The baby, waking up and not finding the milk, screams; his mother screams. The rat bats his head desperately against the wall but realizes that doesn't accomplish anything, so he rushes to a goat to get some milk. The goat says she'll give him milk if she can have some grass to eat. The rat goes to the countryside for grass, but the dry countryside begs water. The rat goes to the fountain. The water in the fountain, which was ruined during the war, leaks away—it needs a master mason.

The rat goes to the master mason; he needs stones. The rat runs to the mountain, and at this point there's a sublime dialogue between the rat and the mountain, which has been so devastated by deforestation on the part of speculators that all its ridges and humps show. The rat tells his whole story and promises that the baby, when he grows up, will replant the pines, oaks, chestnuts, and other trees. Convinced, the mountain donates the stones, and so on, and the baby has

so much milk he can even wash himself in it. He grows up, plants the trees; then everything changes. The skeleton of the mountain disappears beneath new soil, the atmospheric precipitation becomes regular once again and the trees hold on to their moisture and prevent torrents from devastating the plains. In other words, the rat conceives nothing less than a genuine five-year-plan! This is truly a story of a country ruined by deforestation. My darling Giulia, please tell the story to the children and then let me know what impression it makes on them. A tender hug.

Antonio

1. Here Gramsci is alluding to the article by Engels, not by Marx, "Deutscher Sozialismus in Versen und Prosa" ("German Socialism in Verse and Prose"), which first appeared in the *Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung* in November 1847. In prison, Gramsci had translated part of this article from a German edition that made it appear to have been written by Marx. It contains the following passage.

... There is, in Goethe, a continual struggle between the brilliant poet nauseated by the pertiness of his environment and the son of the prudent Frankfurt counsellor (also Privy Counsellor in Weimar) who is forced to come to terms with the poet and live with him. So it is that Goethe is now a giant and now a dwarf, now a proud, haughty genius scoffing at the world and now a careful, temperate and easily pleased philistine.

54

Turi

June 15, 1931

Dearest Tatiana,

So far there's no sign of the package that you mentioned in your last letters. Various explanations are possible: (1) the package went

astray; (2) the package arrived but was returned to the sender. This second explanation is quite plausible. It's true that a long time back you were told that packages could be sent for Easter, Constitution Day, and Christmas. I believe that this possibility still exists in theory, but in actual practice the privilege can be withdrawn at any moment. If the package was returned, it should have reached you by the time you get this letter; if you haven't received anything, you should complain to the post office, because this would mean that the package has been lost in the mail.

You also wrote that you intended to send me *Oblomov*—the original text and translation, the original text of Tolstoy's *Childhood* and *Adolescence*, and Machiavelli's *The Prince* in the Casella edition. You must not send these or any other books, because books are accepted now only if they are sent directly from the bookshops. You should, however, hold onto the Russian texts of Goncharov and Tolstoy, together with the translation of *Oblomov*. I already have the Tolstoy translation. I may tell you what to do with them later.

Your mention of old Isaac<sup>1</sup> reminded me that for some time now I have wanted to ask you something that has always slipped my mind at the time of writing. Two months back, I was told that Lydia had committed suicide in the Tiber a long time ago. Is this true? If it is, no wonder old Isaac has gone completely mad. One feels very sorry for him. I hesitated to believe it when I heard about it, wary as I am of most of the news that circulates in prison, because I remembered Lydia as a serious, studious, and modest young girl. Dear Tatiana, I never told you that Margherita's husband had any cause for jealousy: I only said that he was jealous and that this seemed to me to detract from his strength of character and capacity for work, nothing else. As far as I know, he never had any cause for being jealous. I suppose such causes do exist but imagine them to be reasons for separation more than causes for jealousy. Here is a fact that shows how little the people of a country are bound by national characteristics: the Sardinians, who are considered southerners, are not "jealous" in the way that Sicilians or Calabrians are noted to be. Homicides motivated by jealousy are extremely rare, whereas criminal revenge against seducers of young girls is common. The peasants

separate quite amicably if the marriage is a failure, and an unfaithful wife is simply turned out of the house. It is common for a husband and wife who have separated to pair up again with another man or woman from the same village. It's true that before the war (I don't know whether this is still the case), in many Sardinian villages, trial unions were a current practice. In other words, the couple got married only after the birth of a child, and in the case of barrenness both parties were considered free once more. (This was tolerated by the Church.) So you see what great diversity exists in sexual habits, which constitute one of the main ingredients going to make up the so-called "spirit of a nation." A tender hug.

Antonio

1. Isaac Schreider was a Russian revolutionary socialist, a friend of the Schucht family. His son was arrested in April 1927, along with a group of Roman Communists, and sentenced to five years in prison. The Lydia of whom Gramsci speaks here was his daughter.

55

Turi  
July 3,<sup>1</sup> 1931

Dear Tatiana,

I think you have overdramatized my phrase, "broken threads,"<sup>2</sup> so let me tell you more about my present state of mind. I'm beginning to think—in fact, I'm by now quite convinced—that the people I love have grown used to the idea of my being in prison. This is something that has two sides to it, since I have become used to the idea that others are used to the idea, and so on. This should give you an idea of my present mood. I wrote you that I have had similar experiences before, outside of a prison context. But I once had a

kind of pride about "broken threads": not only did I not try to avoid them, I also encouraged them. I wanted threads to break and knew that they had to in order for my personality to develop and for me to gain a degree of independence. There was a total shifting of the terrain on which my later life would be built. Today, the situation is different since something more vital is at stake. My intellectual standpoint has never wavered, so that the isolation I feel seems to derive from life itself—life, which usually produces bonds of love. Don't think for a moment that this sense of isolation makes me despair or feel tragic. I've never needed moral support from outside in order to live courageously, even in the most unhappy conditions. Now I need it less than ever, since my willpower has acquired greater concreteness and validity. But while in the past, as I said, I was almost proud to be isolated, today I realize the squalor, aridity, and coarseness of a life exclusively controlled by the will. This is my present mood.

I no longer have a real program of study and work. This was inevitable. I wanted to think about a particular set of problems, but at some point, research would have had to be done in important libraries. Without this, it was impossible to revise my ideas and expand on them. It's not that I'm wasting my time; however, I've stopped being curious about anything. For example, one of the things that has interested me most in recent years is the history of Italian intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> I want to examine the idea of the State, as well as to trace the historical development of the Italian people. Even if I limit the scope of this work, the task is a formidable one. It is necessary to start with the Roman Empire, which produced the first concentration of "cosmopolitan"—that is to say, "imperial"—intellectuals, then move on to Christian times, when the organization of the clergy under the Popes gave to the heredity of imperial intellectual cosmopolitanism the form of a European caste system. Only in this way can one explain how only after the eighteenth century—that is, after the first jurisdictional struggles between State and Church<sup>4</sup> began—can one speak of Italian intellectuals as "national." Until then, Italian intellectuals were cosmopolitan, and their function had been to give the culture of both Church and Empire a universal

character. Fundamentally a-national, they helped to organize other nations by serving as technicians and specialists. Thus, instead of forming a category within the framework of a single nation, or becoming a specialized group interpreting the interests of national classes, they performed the role of "managers" for the leaders of Europe.

As you can see, a series of essays could be written on this subject, but they would require some quite advanced research. This is true of my other studies as well. Besides, the habit of severe philological discipline that I acquired during my years at the university has made me extremely scrupulous with regard to research methods. These are some of the reasons why it is difficult for me to compile lists of specialized books that I need.

Antonio

1. Gramsci's mistake. The date was August 3, not July 3.
2. Gramsci had written to Tania in a letter of July 13, 1931:

I honestly don't know how to use this privilege [to write letters every week instead of every fifteen days] to best advantage, since every day I seem to feel less desire to write letters. It is as if, every day, another thread tying me to the past breaks, and it becomes ever more impossible to knot these threads together again. I believe that my character, my reactions to my surroundings, have changed a great deal. This has happened so gradually that I'm not even aware of the extent to which I've changed. On the other hand, this process was in motion in the period preceding my imprisonment.

3. See Introduction, pp. 41 ff. and Letter 50, n. 1.
4. The "first jurisdictional struggles between State and Church" were the jurisdictional conflicts between the eighteenth-century national States—absolutist States which were capable of carrying out economic and social reforms and which claimed the right to a part of the domain previously reserved to the Catholic Church—and the Church itself, which defended its own jurisdictional authority on economic, territorial, tributary, and legal grounds.

Turi

August 24, 1931

Dear Mother,

I received letters from Mea, Franco, and Teresina telling me how everyone is. But why did you let so much time go by? Even with malaria, it's possible to write, and I'm satisfied to have a few picture postcards. I'm getting old myself, you see, and more and more irritable and impatient. It seems to me that a person stops writing to a prisoner because of indifference or a lack of imagination. In your case and that of the rest of the family, I can't believe it's a question of indifference, but rather of lack of imagination. You're not able to picture life in prison or to realize just what importance keeping up a correspondence can have, to occupy time and lend some flavor to life. I never speak of the negative side of existence, mainly because I don't want to be pitied. I was a soldier who had bad luck in the immediate battle, and soldiers can't (at least they shouldn't) be pitied when they fight of their own free will. But this doesn't mean that the negative aspect of my life in prison is absent. Since it not only exists but also weighs heavily on me, at least it ought not be aggravated by the persons who are closest. In any case, what I'm writing is directed more at Teresina, Grazietta, and Mea, than you—it would be easy for them to write me a few cards.

I enjoyed Franco's letter very much describing his toy ponies, cars, and bicycles. As soon as I can, I'll send him a present, too, so he'll know I love him and realize what a good, kind little boy he is, despite the pranks he plays. To Mea I'll be sending a box of pastels when I can, but tell her not to expect anything out of the ordinary. Teresina never answered my question about whether the parcel of books and magazines Carlo sent from Turi last March arrived. Let me know whether they're in the way, since I still have half a ton to

send you. If my books are going to be scattered, at least a part of them ought to be donated to the prison library. But in any case, even if they crowd you there in the small living space you have, I believe that the books will be useful for the children when they grow up: I take this matter of building up a family library very seriously. Teresina surely must remember how we devoured book after book when we were young and complained bitterly about never having enough to read.

But how is it that malaria is ravaging the heart of town? Or is it affecting you only? The town council ought to build sewers in the same way that their predecessors built the aqueduct. An aqueduct without sewers guarantees the diffusion of malaria wherever the disease is already sporadic. Once the women of Ghilarza were ugly and had swollen bellies from the rotten water, now they'll be even uglier on account of malaria. I suspect that the men treat themselves with large doses of wine. Many affectionate hugs.

Antonio

Turi

September 7, 1931

Dear Tatiana,

... I want to answer your letter of August 28 in which you refer to my study of "Italian intellectuals." It's clear that you spoke with Piero because only he could have told you certain things.<sup>1</sup> The situation's quite different from how it appears though. In ten years of journalism, I've produced enough material to fill fifteen to twenty volumes of four hundred pages each; but these pages were turned out every day and should have, I believe, been forgotten immediately afterwards. I've always refused to make even brief collections of my work. In 1918 Professor Cosmo<sup>2</sup> asked whether he might be permitted to select some articles I was publishing each day in a



Torinese newspaper,<sup>3</sup> offering to publish them with an extremely favorable, dignified preface, but I refused to let him. In November 1920 Giuseppe Prezzolini<sup>4</sup> persuaded me to let his publishing house print a collection of articles actually written as a single work. In January 1921 I chose to pay the cost of the part already printed in order to get back the manuscript. Again, in 1924, Franco Ciarlantini suggested that I write a book about the Ordine Nuovo movement, which he hoped to publish in a series that already included books by MacDonald, Gompers,<sup>5</sup> and others. He promised not to change a comma of what I had written or to add a preface or notes. It was a great temptation to publish with a Fascist publisher under these conditions, yet I turned him down: I wonder now whether it might not have been wiser to accept the offer. Piero's situation was different—everything he wrote about economics was well received and inspired lengthy debates in specialized reviews. An article by Senator Einaudi<sup>6</sup> announces that Piero is putting together a critical edition of the English economist David Ricardo; Einaudi welcomes the idea as I do. I only hope that my English is good enough so that when the book comes out I can read Ricardo in the original. The plans for research I've made concerning Italian intellectuals cover a very wide field, since I don't believe there are any books in Italy on this subject. A good deal of erudite material does exist but is scattered through an infinite number of reviews and local historical archives. In any case, my concept of the intellectual is much broader than the usual concept of "the great intellectuals."

This research will also concern the concept of the State, which is usually thought of as political society—i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy—and not as a balance between political society and civil society, by which I mean the hegemony of one social group over the entire nation, exercised through so-called private organizations like the Church, trade unions, or schools. For it is above all in civil society that intellectuals exert their influence. Benedetto Croce, for example, is a kind of lay Pope and an extremely efficient instrument of hegemony, even if sometimes he seems to come up against the government in power. I believe that this concept of the function of intellectuals sheds light

on the reason, or one of the reasons, for the fall of the medieval communes. The communes were governed by an economic class that did not know how to create its own category of intellectuals, in order to exercise a hegemony beyond dictatorship. Italian intellectuals had a cosmopolitan character modeled on the Church, rather than a national-popular one. This explains why Leonardo could sell his plans for the Florentine fortifications to Duke Valentino. The communes formed a syndicalist State that never succeeded in evolving beyond this phase into a unified State—as Machiavelli kept pointing out in vain. Machiavelli had hoped that by increasing and developing military organization, the hegemony of the city over the countryside could be created, and for this reason can be called the first Italian Jacobin. (The second was Carlo Cattaneo,<sup>7</sup> but he was too full of chimeras.) The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that the Renaissance, compared with the development of the communes, was a reactionary, repressive movement.<sup>8</sup>

I make these points in order to convince you that every period in Italian history, from the time of the Roman Empire to the *Risorgimento*, must be examined as a possible subject for a monograph. If I feel up to it and if the authorities allow me to, I'll make a prospectus of at least fifty pages of this material and send it to you. Naturally, I'd be glad to have books that I need and which would stimulate me to meditate on these problems. In one of my next letters, I'll summarize a few points that could be used for an essay on Canto X of Dante's *Inferno*.<sup>9</sup> so that you can send them to Professor Cosmo. As a Dante specialist, he'll be able to tell me whether I've hit on something or not and whether it is worthwhile to make a contribution, even a tiny one, to the millions of commentaries already written.

Antonio

1. Gramsci is referring to a passage in a letter from Tania of August 28, 1931, in which his sister-in-law writes, "Certainly you need to have a huge library at your disposal in order to write a *perfect* history of intellectuals. But,

for the moment, why not write a rough history, provided that you perfect it when you have free access to libraries? You used to rebuke Piero constantly for his excessive scientific scruples that prevented him from writing anything; it seems that he has never cured himself of this illness, but is it possible that ten years of journalism have not cured you?" The Piero to whom they refer was the economist Sraffa (see Letter 2, n. 1).

2. Professor Umberto Cosmo, whose lectures Gramsci attended at the University of Turin, was a noted Dante scholar.

3. Gramsci published notes almost every day in the Turin edition of *Avanti!* in the column "Sotto la mole" ("Under the Dome" after a large domed building in Turin called "Mole Antonelliana"), now collected in the volume of the same title, and he also wrote newspaper articles for *Il Grido del Popolo*. Gramsci's output was truly remarkable, and even today these pieces have great vitality.

4. See Introduction, p. 17, and note 11. Gramsci came into contact with Prezzolini (an ardent interventist and supporter of Mussolini) in Turin in 1921, at a series of lectures on the subject of "Intellectuals and Workers," given by Prezzolini at the Casa del Popolo. Prezzolini speaks favorably of *Ordine nuovo* in *La Cultura italiana* ("Italian Culture," 1923) and mentions his encounters with Gramsci in *L'Italiano inutile* ("The Useless Italian," 1964):

I am not a very good lecturer. However, discussions with workers and conversations with Gramsci made a certain impression on me. Gramsci is one of the most remarkable men in Italy. His *Ordine nuovo* is original in its ideas, and he himself has faith and energy and does not work for the immediate present.

5. J. Ramsay MacDonald was the English politician who headed the first Labor government in 1924. Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) was a right-wing American trade unionist and president of the American Federation of Labor from 1886 on. The collection edited by Franco Ciarlantini was entitled "A Library of Political Culture" and was published in Milan.

6. The liberal economist Luigi Einaudi (see Letter 8, n. 3), a professor at Turin University during Gramsci's youth, referred to the edition of David Ricardo's articles edited by Piero Sraffa in his review of "A New Series of Economists" (volumes published by the Utet publishing house in Milan), which appeared in *La riforma sociale* in July-August 1931. David Ricardo had set in motion a revision of economic theory based on the laws of the market with his essay "The Laws of Returns under Competitive Conditions" (published in the *Economic Journal* of December 1926). The critical edition of Ricardo's works, edited by Sraffa in collaboration with M. H. Dobb, is

still being published and is entitled: *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*. Cambridge University Press, 1951-.

7. Carlo Cattaneo (1807-69) was one of the greatest exponents of democratic thought in 19th-century Italy. He headed the War Committee during the Five Days of Milan in 1848, then lived in exile in France and Switzerland, returning to Italy in 1859. He was elected deputy several times, but never entered parliament in order not to have to swear anything contrary to his republican ideals.

8. In *The Risorgimento*, p. 13, Gramsci says, "The most vital center of humanism and the Renaissance, as the literary manifestation of a historical movement in Europe, was Italy; but after the year 1000, despite the fact that there was considerable progress at the time of the communes, humanism and the Renaissance slowed this process down in Italy. While in the case of Spain, France, England, and Portugal this historical movement culminated in the formation of national States and their expansion, humanism and the Renaissance proved regressive in Italy. In Italy, the organization of the papacy as an absolutist State initiated by Alexander VI corresponded to the creation of national States in the other countries; but at the same time, it produced a disaggregation of the rest of Italy. Among Italians, Machiavelli was the man most conscious of the fact that the Renaissance was not truly such if it did not result in a national State; but his thought is primarily directed to events outside of, rather than inside of, Italy."

9. See the following letter. Gramsci had already spoken about this in a letter of August 26, 1929 to his sister-in-law: "I have made a small discovery about Canto X of the *Inferno*, which I believe could partly correct B. Croce's much too absolute theory about the *Divina commedia*." Later in this letter, it becomes clear that Gramsci was concerned less about hermeneutics and Dante criticism than about the methods of literary and art criticism in general.

Turi  
September 20, 1931

Dear Tatiana,

... Now let me sketch out that "famous" idea of mine. Cavalcanti and Farinata.<sup>1</sup>

1. De Sanctis, in his essay on Farinata, commenting on the harshness of the tenth canto of Dante's *Inferno*, attributes it to the fact that Farinata, after having been depicted as heroic in the first part of the episode, becomes in the last half a pedagogue. Using Croce's scheme, Farinata changes from poetry to structure. Canto X has always seemed to belong to Farinata, while the harshness De Sanctis comments on has never been questioned. I maintain that two dramas are represented in this canto—Farinata's and Cavalcanti's, not just Farinata's.

2. It's curious that Dante criticism, Byzantine and pedantically detailed as it is, has never called to our attention the fact that Cavalcanti is the person truly punished among the epicureans in their burning sarcophagi. I mean that he suffers an immediate, personal punishment. Farinata certainly shares this fate, but "*avendo il cielo in gran dispetto*" ("Seeming to hold all heaven<sup>2</sup> in deep despite") as before. Here is how the law of retaliation functions in the case of Cavalcanti and Farinata: because they desired to see into the future, theoretically they are denied knowledge of worldly matters for a determined period of time; that is, they live in a cone-shaped shadow from the center of which they can see into the past beyond a certain limit or into the future beyond a certain limit. At the time when Dante comes upon them, the situation is the following: in the past they see Guido alive, in the future they see him dead, but in that very same moment, is Guido dead or alive? Here the difference between the two emerges. Farinata, upon hearing Florentine spoken,

becomes once more a man of politics, the Ghibelline hero. Cavalcanti's thoughts, instead, are directed toward Guido; he rises up at the sound of the Florentine tongue to learn whether Guido is dead or alive in that moment (since persons newly arrived can inform them). Cavalcanti's drama passes swiftly, but is marked by an unutterable intensity. He asks about Guido immediately, hoping that he is with Dante; but when he hears from the mouth of the poet, who does not yet know the exact punishment of that circle of hell, the word *ebbe*, a verb in the past tense, "*supin ricadde e più non parve fuori*" ["he let himself suddenly fall/ Backward again, and showed his face no more"].

3. While in the first half of the episode "Guido's scorn" is what the critics' hypotheses and researches center on, in the second half it is Dante's exile that draws all the attention. But for me the significance of the second half is due to the illumination of Cavalcanti's drama. The reader is offered every essential element to make him participate in it. However, is this poetry of the ineffable or inexpressible? I don't think so. Dante did not refuse to represent the situation directly; rather, he chose this way to represent it. He uses an expressive technique, and expressive techniques change throughout the ages just as language does. (Bertoni imagines he follows Croce when he comes up with the old theory of beautiful *versus* ugly words, considering it a linguistic novelty deduced from Croce's aesthetics.)

I recall a history of art course in 1912 given by Professor Toesca<sup>3</sup> that introduced me to a reproduction of the Pompeian painting in which Medea watches the murder of the children Jason had given her. She looks on blindfolded; and I seem to remember Toesca calling this an "expressive technique" of ancient times that Lessing in *The Laocöon* (I quote from memory) considers a powerful device—in fact, the finest way to express the inconsolable pain of a parent. If pain had been represented as it actually appears on the human face, the expression would have frozen into a grimace. Ugolino's very expression, "*Poscia più che 'l dolor poté 'l digiuno*" ["Then famine did what sorrow could not do"] is an example of this kind of technique. The popular imagination understands it as a veil thrown over the image of father devouring son.<sup>4</sup> Dante's "expressive technique"



couldn't be further from Manzoni's. When Renzo, after having crossed the Venetian frontier, thinks about Lucia, Manzoni writes, "I won't attempt to tell you what he felt: the reader is familiar with the circumstances—he can well imagine." Indeed, Manzoni had already declared that, in representing the sacred species, man, there was enough love in the world without having to describe it in books. In reality, he refused to represent love for practical and ideological reasons.<sup>5</sup> Dante shows us that Farinata's explanation is intimately tied to Cavalcanti's situation, when he says at the end, ". . . Or direte dunque a quel caduto, / che 'l suo nato è co' vivi ancor congiunto" [" . . . Tell that fallen shade, I pray, / his son is still alive and with the living" ] (hence with Farinata's daughter, too [his wife—ed. note]). But Farinata was so involved in his partisan struggles, he had shown no sign of agitation at the implication of the word *ebbe* that Guido was dead. The more intense punishment was Cavalcanti's; for the word *ebbe* marked the end of his anguish and doubt about whether Guido was alive or dead in that moment.<sup>6</sup>

4. This interpretation should completely undermine Croce's thesis about poetry *versus* structure in the *Divina commedia*. Without structure there would be no poetry, thus structure itself has a poetic value.<sup>7</sup>

Antonio

1. See Letter 57. The protagonists of Canto X of the *Inferno* are Cavalcanti (father of the poet Guido, friend and opponent of Dante) and Farinata degli Uberti, leader of the Florentine Ghibellines, who died in 1264. In this Canto, heretics are condemned to dwell in flaming tombs and never see the present, but only the past and the future. Farinata appears among the heretics for being an "epicurean," which in the medieval period signified a follower of the materialist doctrine of Epicurus according to which the soul is not immortal. The poet's father, exiled because he was a Ghibelline (Dante may be partly responsible for this exile since he fought on the opposite side), died in August 1300. In opposition to traditional Dante criticism, Gramsci believes that Cavalcanti lives his own private drama in this

Canto. Indeed, it is Farinata who explains their tragic situation, which is difficult to understand since it depends entirely on the mechanism of punishment in this circle of the *Inferno*. While Dante is speaking to him, Cavalcanti comes forward and asks about his son. Since Dante's journey to the netherworld takes place in 1300, Cavalcanti does not know whether his son is alive or dead. But when Dante answers, using the verb *ebbe* ("had"), a verb in the "remote-past" tense, in reference to Guido, Cavalcanti, believing that his son is dead, cries out,

". . . Come  
dicesti? elli ebbe? non viv'elli ancora?"

". . . What, what dost thou say?  
He felt? Why felt? Are life and feeling o'er?"

Thus this private drama (which provides a stylistic counterpoint to Farinata's political drama) arises from the mechanism of punishment—the fact that the damned in this circle cannot see the present. Critics from De Sanctis to Croce had interpreted the passage in which Farinata explains this mechanism to Dante as didactic and thus as "nonpoet"; and Croce had deduced from this yet another "proof" that a literary text is never all "poetry," i.e., the representation and expression of "feeling," but rather a totality of poetic and nonpoetic moments, which it is the critic's duty to distinguish. Crocean criticism led to the disintegration of literary works and a consequent distortion of their true sense. Croce calls these "didactic" (i.e., philosophical, explicative) parts "structure" to distinguish them from the moments of "poetry." What Gramsci is trying to show through this concrete example is that "structure" is necessary for the dramas evoked by Cavalcanti and by Farinata. For Gramsci, a scientific critical method implies a consideration of the text *as a whole* and an analysis of its formal and stylistic integrity.

2. Working from memory, Gramsci misquoted "heaven" for "hell" in this citation. All translations of Dante in this letter and elsewhere are by Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (*The Divine Comedy*, Baltimore 1962). I have altered several lines in order to be closer to the literal meaning.

3. Pietro Toesca (1877–1962) was professor of medieval and modern art at Turin University from 1907 to 1924. Gramsci studied under him when he was there. Gramsci takes up this remark about Toesca's lectures and the whole problem of Canto X of the *Inferno* again in the *Notebooks*, in passages now found in *Literature and National Life*. Lessing in *The Laocöon* had attempted to set up a distinction between poetry and painting that took issue with the classicist theory of *ut pictura poesis* ("poetry is like painting").

4. Gramsci is referring to the famous Canto XXXIII of the *Inferno* and



the episode regarding Count Ugolino della Gherardesca. (The Count was imprisoned as a traitor, together with his sons, in a tower in Pisa and there allowed to die from hunger.) These words of Ugolino's, which end his tale of the last hours in his death cell, provide, in Gramsci's opinion, an example of a *topos* expressing "the ineffable" that was part of the "historically given language" of literature even in Dante's time.

5. Gramsci uses this reference to Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* ("The Betrothed") as an example of another *topos* of incommunicability: the "silences" introduced by the author (in this case, a Catholic writer) for ideological and moral reasons. In Dante's work, we are in the realm of literary speech; in Manzoni's, we are dealing with motives not only of artistic but also of practical and moral relevance. (For Manzoni and the "language" problem, see Letter 50, n. 2.)

6. The section of Canto X of the *Inferno* to which Gramsci refers here is ll. 52-72, where Cavalcanti asks Dante,

"... *Se per questo cieco  
carcere vai per altezza d'ingegno,  
mio figlio ov'è? Perché non è ei teo?*"

"... If thy grand art has made thee free  
To walk at large in this blind prison of pain,  
Where is my son? Why comes he not with thee?"

Dante answers,

"... *Da me stesso non vegno:  
colui ch'attende la, per qui me mena,  
forse cui Guido ebbe a disdegno.*"

"I come not of myself," I answered plain,  
"He that waits yonder leads me on this road,  
For whom, perhaps, your Guido felt disdain."

"He that waits yonder" is Vergil, Dante's guide in his journey to the netherworld. As noted earlier, Guido is the poet, son of Cavalcanti, whose philosophical views were contrary to the spiritualism that, according to a medieval tradition accepted by Dante, was personified by Vergil.

7. Gramsci draws a hasty conclusion here, as can be seen by his use of Croce's terms "structure" and "poetry," which imply an *a priori* distinction at the very core of a literary work. In any case, Gramsci establishes the need for a comprehensive reading of the text and the consideration of it in its historical context.

Turi

October 5, 1931

Dear Tania,

... Even though you've modified your approach to the problem of the "two worlds,"<sup>1</sup> the fact is that your point of view is still fundamentally wrong. You seem to be influenced by the same kind of ideology that influences the *Centoneri*.<sup>2</sup> I know perfectly well that you would never take part in a pogrom; even so, the diffusion of the ideology of two impenetrable worlds, i.e., of races, is one of the steps necessary in making a pogrom possible, and creates the kind of imponderable atmosphere that the *Centoneri* exploit when, for example, they "plant" a baby bleeding to death somewhere in order to accuse the Jews of having killed him in ritual sacrifice. When World War I broke out, the ruling classes showed how easy it was to manipulate these seemingly harmless ideologies in order to create waves of public opinion. I am so surprised to find you involved in all this, that I feel I almost will stop loving you unless you put the whole question out of your mind.

What do you mean by the expression "two worlds"? Are you referring to two countries that never can get together to communicate with each other? If you don't mean this, then you must be using a metaphorical expression that hardly makes sense, since multiple worlds exist outside of that small one in the farmers' proverb, "Stück to wife and cattle of your own village." How many social worlds does each individual belong to? Doesn't everyone strive to unify his own concept of the world, which is composed of heterogeneous fragments of fossilized cultures? And isn't there a constant historical process that tends to unify all mankind? When the two of us write to each other, don't we often tend to get irritated? Yet, in the end, we manage to settle many of our differences. Doesn't each group,

party, sect, and religion tend to create its own "conformity," which is more than the passive conformity of the "herd"?

You must realize that the Jews were liberated from the ghetto only in 1848, whereas they had been forced to remain in the ghetto, or in any case segregated from European society, for almost two millennia, not because they willed it but because it was imposed on them from outside. Since the process of assimilation in Western countries after 1848 was so rapid and thorough, it must have been compulsory segregation that kept the Jews from being assimilated in these various places. Up until the French Revolution, Christianity, since it was "State culture," demanded the segregation of all Jews who would not deny their religious beliefs. That was true then; today they have simply become deists or atheists. The fact is that many characteristics that pass for racial ones are due, instead, to forms of ghetto life that various countries imposed on the Jews. An English Jew has little in common with a Jew from Galicia. Today, Gandhi would seem to represent Hindu ideology, but the Hindus were the people who reduced the Dravidians, who first inhabited India, to the status of pariahs. The Hindus were a bellicose people. Only after the Mongol invasion and the English conquest were they able to produce a man like Gandhi. The Jews have no territorial state and have had no unity of language, culture, or economic life for two thousand years: how can one accuse them of aggressiveness and similar things? But the Arabs are also Semitic, blood-brothers of the Jews, and passed through a phase of aggressiveness when they attempted to found a world empire. To the extent to which Jews are bankers and accumulators of capital, how is it possible to deny their participation in the aggressiveness of imperialist States?

Antonio

1. This is a continuation of a discussion begun in another letter (of September 13, 1931), which was essentially an attack on some notions of

Tania's regarding Jews. The expression "two worlds" refers to the title of a film by the German director E. A. Dupont, made in 1930 and shown in Italy in 1931, which represented certain aspects of anti-Semitism in Poland during World War I. In this letter, Gramsci compares this racist mentality not only to the *Centoneri* (see note 2 below), but also to that of the American Ku Klux Klan and Nazism. Gramsci is amazed to see Tania reveal attitudes like these (which may not have been entirely conscious) in her various letters on the subject, particularly since her mother was Jewish. He recounts his experience of housing discrimination against Jews in Vienna, when he helped a Jewish woman from the Ukraine overcome a landlady's prejudices. This discussion is continued in Letter 60.

2. This is a reference to the "Black Centurions," a terrorist gang hired by the Czars at the beginning of the century to suppress the revolutionary movement with the help of the police and to carry out pogroms against the Jews.

60

Turi

October 12, 1931

Dear Tania,

I received your card of October 10, which didn't make your letter of the second any more palatable.<sup>1</sup> The letter, even though it wasn't a particularly harsh one, offended me. What do you mean by saying that I am playing blindman's buff and trying to "corner" you? I ought to give you a good talking-to, but have decided that it would be better to avoid all such unpleasant episodes in the future. (I hesitate to use a stronger word.) A remark of yours earlier about my being an ex-journalist is nothing but *imbelle telum sine ictu*,<sup>2</sup> to use a Pompous expression. I've never been the kind of professional journalist who sells himself to whoever pays him the most and who does nothing but lie, since lying is part of the trade. As a journalist, I was extremely independent and stuck to my own ideas. I never had to conceal my deepest convictions in order to please newspaper owners and their hirelings.

I see that I upset you by saying that you had changed your attitude about the Jews. In fact, you haven't changed at all, since your letter expresses such confusion. Your first conclusions led directly to anti-Semitism. Then you spoke like a Jewish nationalist and Zionist. After that, you even started sounding like those old rabbis who opposed the destruction of the ghettos, because they were afraid that the elimination of these segregated community areas would alter the "race" and loosen the religious ties binding it together and giving it a single personality. It was a mistake to try to discuss these things with you. It would have been better to joke about British "phlegm," French "fury," German "loyalty," Spanish "grandeur," the Italian "art of working things out," and Slav "fascination"—perfectly good ingredients for best-sellers and Grade-B movies. Better still, I should have questioned you and tried to discover who the "real" Jew or "average" Jew is, or for that matter the "average" man. I doubt whether he is to be found in any anthropological or sociological museum. Also, what significance does the concept of a "militant" God have for Jews today, or the biblical expressions about the "chosen people" and their mission, which remind one of Wilhelm's prewar speeches? Marx said that the Jewish question ceased to exist when Christians became Jews and assimilated the essence of Judaism—namely, speculation—or, rather, that the solution to the Jewish question will come about when the whole of Europe is freed from speculation—that is to say Judaism in general.<sup>3</sup> This seems to me the only way that one can talk about these things, aside from recognizing the right of Jewish communities to their own cultural autonomy (language, schools, etc.) or to a national autonomy, if certain Jewish communities succeed, in some way or another, in establishing a territory of their own with definite boundaries. All the rest strikes me as a mediocre brand of mysticism worthy of petty Zionist intellectuals. The racial question has no sense other than an anthropological one. Already at the time of Christ, Jews had ceased speaking their own language, which was used only for the liturgy: they spoke Aramaic. This is a "race" that has forgotten its ancient language and thus lost the most important part of its heredity of the past—its

primitive concept of the world—and that has absorbed the culture and language of its conquerors. What does "race" mean, then? Evidently, you have in mind a new, modern community that, while it bears signs of the passivity and negativity of ghetto life, is able to refashion a new "nature" for itself to fit into a changed social situation.

I find it very strange that you don't use a historical method in dealing with these problems and demand historical explanations only when you want to know why certain Cossack groups believed that Jews have tails. This was a kind of joke told to me by a Jew who was political commissar of one of the assault troops of Cossacks from Orenburg during the Russian-Polish War of 1920.<sup>4</sup> These Cossacks had never had Jews within their territory and, influenced by official clerical propaganda, imagined the Jews as monstrous assassins of God. These men couldn't believe that the political commissar was Jewish. "You're one of us," they would say, "you're no Jew. How can you be Jewish when you're covered with Polish saber scars from fighting alongside of us? Jews are something else." There are many different notions about Jews in Sardinia. First, there is the expression *arbeu*, which refers to a hideous, wicked monster of legend; then there is the "Jew who killed Christ"; but then there is also the "good Jew," such as Nicodemus who helped Mary take Christ down from the cross. However, for the Sardinian, the Jews are never bound to the present. If someone is singled out as a Jew, they ask whether he is like Nicodemus, although they usually think of a Jew as a bad Christian who favored Christ's being killed. There is also the term *marranu*, deriving from the Spanish expression *marrano*, used to describe Jews who pretended to be converted; although to call someone by this name in Sardinia is a common insult. Sardinians were never subjected to propaganda like the Cossacks and therefore do not distinguish Jews from other people.

As far as I am concerned, the matter is closed, and I don't intend to let myself be dragged into further discussions on this subject. The racial question has no interest for me outside of anthropology and the study of prehistoric civilizations. Your comment about the sig-

nificance of tombs in various civilizations is just as meaningless. This is valid for ancient times when tombs were the only monuments that survived and when they contained objects of everyday life, placed next to the persons buried. But in any case, such tombs give us an extremely limited notion of the era in which they were constructed and can only tell us about customs and a handful of religious rites. In addition, the tombs represent only the ruling and wealthy classes and, in many cases, foreign conquerors, but never the people themselves. I myself am of no one race: my father was of recent Albanian origin<sup>5</sup>—the family escaped from Epirus during the wars of 1821 and became Italianized soon after. My grandmother was a Gonzalez, descended from an Italo-Spanish family in the south of Italy (after the cessation of the Spanish domination, many Spaniards remained there). My mother is Sardinian on both sides, but Sardinia was united with Piedmont only in 1847; formerly, the princes of Piedmont had held it as a feudal estate of their own, after having acquired Sardinia in exchange for Sicily, which was too far away and more difficult to defend. Despite these things, my cultural formation is basically Italian and this is my world here. I never felt torn between two worlds, although someone wrote this about me in the *Giornale d'Italia* in March 1929, devoting two columns to an explanation of why my political activity in Turin was, among other things, connected with my being from Sardinia rather than from Piedmont or Sicily. The fact that I was of Albanian origin never came up, because Crispi<sup>6</sup> was Albanian and had gone to school there and had spoken the language. On the other hand, racial questions are not very important in Italy. No one in Liguria is surprised if a sailor brings back a Negro wife. No one would think of going over to touch her with a wet finger to see if the black comes off. No one wonders whether the color will stain the bed linen or not.

You write that you want to send me some medicine. Please don't send any more Mugolio or Abyssinian powder. The only thing that really does me good is yeast, but I've eaten most of it and will finish the rest in the next four days. Please do what I tell you. A tender hug.

Antonio

1. Gramsci is referring to a letter from Tania in which she expresses her attitude toward Jews and the Jewish question (see Letter 59 and notes).

2. A Latin saying, "The arrow wounds only if it is shot energetically from the bow."

3. Gramsci refers to an article of Marx's entitled "Zur Judenfrage" ("On the Jewish Question"), published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in 1843 when Marx was still collaborating with the democratic radicals of the Hegelian Left. Gramsci translated a part of this text in prison. Marx's basic theory was the following: The first consequence of the democratic-bourgeois revolution was the separation between civil society and political society. Now it is necessary to demonstrate that the cause of the lacerating separation of "man as man" from "man as citizen" is *private property*. (Marx had not yet arrived at his historical conception of capitalist property.) Only by eliminating private property will it be possible to heal this separation and also, incidentally, to resolve "the Jewish question." Marx's article is a long review in essay form of the book *Die Judenfrage* (Bunnschweig, 1842) by Bruno Bauer, Marx's friend until 1842 and a representative of the Hegelian Left. In the 1840's, German-Jewish groups were fighting for their emancipation, which is why Marx's article begins, "German Jews are demanding emancipation. What kind of emancipation? Civil and political emancipation."

4. Orenburg was an ancient prison fortress besieged by the Cossacks under Emilian Pugaciev in 1773-1774. From 1918 to 1925, it was the capital of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic.

5. Gramsci's name is Albanian. In eastern Albania there is still a village called "Gramshi."

6. See Letter 18, n. 1.

61

Turi  
December 7, 1931

Dear Iulca,<sup>1</sup>

A few days after I wrote my last letter to you, Tania mailed me a translation of a letter of yours to her. When I began to read this letter, I started to be sorry for having written you the way that I did.



But thinking it over, I decided I was more than right to have done so. Why don't you tell me, as well as her, what your state of health is? In any case, this situation can't explain or justify the fact that you write so little and that your letters to me are so vague and abstract. Besides, what you write about your doctor can be broadly interpreted. If she is happy when you tell her about moments of rage, in which you let off steam and use harsh language, it seems useful to provoke such moments and to torment you without pause. Personality and will are dialectical products of an inner battle that must and can be externalized, when the antagonist is suffocated inside because of a morbid process. The important thing should be to make this "torment" a rationally applied concrete spur for conscience, rather than something abstract. The rational basis seems to me to be the following: we two are united by bonds not only of affection but also of solidarity. Which, from time to time, are the strongest and most responsive? Affection is a spontaneous feeling that creates no obligations since it is outside of the moral sphere. It can be inspired irrationally, and this would be the case if, for example, I wrote you impassioned letters. I could write them, of course, with utter sincerity, but I don't want to; my letters are "public" and not reserved for the two of us alone. This realization obliges me to hold back any explosive feelings, to the extent that they might be expressed in writing, in these letters. Then there are the bonds of solidarity that one can and must use to put pressure on another person; and it seems to me now that I should never have ceased torturing you in this sense. I should have continued forcing you to confront an objective duty, objective precisely because dependent uniquely on the bonds of solidarity.

Take, for instance, the Church and religion. For the Church, a belief in God ought to constitute in every man a great source of consolation and an unshakable basis for moral life; however, it seems that the Church has little confidence in this unshakability or in the solidity of such consolation, since it forces the faithful to create human institutions that relieve sufferers with human means, thus preventing them from doubting or reneging their faith. The Church implicitly admits that God is merely a metaphor to represent the

totality of men organized for mutual benefit. But if the Church, supposedly *the* spiritual organism, has to use human means to keep a faith in the supernatural alive, what is one to think of lay organisms, supposedly *the* realistic bodies, when they fail to have recourse to human means to keep them going? This is what in fact happens: single persons belonging to such organisms neglect their prescribed duties even when, as is often the case, they are members of institutions that specialize in helping the afflicted. These persons excuse themselves pharisaically, imagining that the afflicted are strong enough to keep up their moral energies with their own means. But even if this occurs, and it often does, duty is accomplished on one side only; an appeal to the other side is necessary. Of course, I want to help you get over your momentary rage and have you praised by your doctor. My dear Iulca, I hug you close.

Antonio

---

1. This is another form of *Giulia*.

62

Turi  
February 15, 1932

Dear Tania,

I received your card of the twelfth but not the other one you mentioned. This week I won't be writing Giulia for several reasons. First, I don't feel well and it's hard to collect my thoughts as I'd like to; second, I can't seem to find the right attitude toward her situation and psychological state. It all seems terribly complicated and difficult. I try to find the thread that could untangle all of this but am not sure that I can. Perhaps if I talk some of these things over with

you, you'll help me. In reality I should write a whole book to give you the necessary facts, gathered only from impressions of mine and partial experiences, but we'll do the best we can.

My chief impression is the following: the gravest symptom of Giulia's psychological imbalance is not the vague material she refers to, trying to justify her recourse to psychoanalysis, as much as the very fact that she has turned to this kind of therapy with full faith in its efficacy. My knowledge of psychoanalysis is not especially precise or wide, but I can draw some conclusions about psychoanalytic theory after first divesting it of every phantasmagoric and witchcraftlike element. The important point is that psychoanalysis is effective for only that sector of society that romantic literature termed "insulted and injured"—a more numerous, various cross section than tradition makes it out to be. Such persons, trapped in the iron-tight conflicts of modern life (and every age has its modernity in contrast with the past), are not able with their own means to find reasons for these conflicts and thus to go beyond them toward new serenity and moral tranquility, balancing impulses of the will with goals that must be reached. In particular historical moments and *milieux*, when the environment is heated to a point of extreme tension and when gigantic collective forces, unleashed, press single individuals painfully to obtain the maximum creative response from their will, the situation becomes dramatic.

Such situations can prove disastrous for extremely sensitive or refined natures, whereas they are indispensable for backward elements of society—peasants, for instance, whose robust nerves can stretch and vibrate to a higher diapason without tiring. Perhaps I told you how surprising it was sometimes at Serebranyi Bor Sanatorium,<sup>1</sup> where I met Genia and Giulia, to see sick men literally wasted away who, after three to four months of sleep and mediocre nourishment, better in any case than they were used to, gained thirty-five to forty pounds, completely recovered, and became capable once more of a new, high vital tension. These persons were utterly untouched by romantic fanaticism of any kind, however; morally healthy and balanced, they never created insoluble problems and hence couldn't despair about not being able to resolve

them. Nor did they see themselves as inept or lacking in willpower and personality. They didn't "spit on themselves," as we say in Italy. It strikes me that Giulia is suffering from just such unreal "unsolvable problems" and struggling against phantasms created by her own feverish, disordered fantasy. Since obviously she can't resolve by herself what can't be resolved by anyone, she has to turn to an external authority, witch doctor or psychoanalyst. I believe that a cultured person (in the German sense of the word), someone like Giulia, active in society not only officially, that is, because a card in her wallet says she is,<sup>2</sup> must be and can be the sole and best psychoanalytic therapist for herself. What is the meaning of her statements about needing to study, etc.? Each of us must continue to study, to better himself theoretically and professionally for his own productive activity. Why believe that this is a personal problem, an index of one's own inferiority? Each of us elaborates and unwinds his own personality and character every day, fighting instincts, impulses, and increasingly antisocial tendencies, to adapt to an always higher level of collective life. There's nothing exceptional or individually tragic about this. Each one of us learns from his neighbors, gives and takes, loses and acquires, forgets and accumulates notions, traits, habits.

Giulia writes that today she would no longer defend herself against a possible intellectual and moral influence on my part, and for that reason feels closer to me. But I don't believe she ever defended herself to the extent that she thinks, or in as dramatic a manner. Besides, does she imagine that I didn't need to defend myself from her influence, at the same time acquiring and modifying myself in contact with her personality? I never theorized or fretted about this process in myself, but this doesn't mean the process hasn't gone on all the same and to my benefit. In any case, I hope I've given you some basis for writing and helping me to find a thread. If you think it's a good idea, send this on to Giulia—in its indirect form, it might constitute a first answer for her. A little while ago, I received your letter of the twelfth with the translation of Delio's letter. I'll answer next Monday. I like the letter.

A hug.

Antonio

1. The sanatorium near Moscow where Gramsci was a patient at the time of his first mission to the Soviet capital in June 1922. (See Introduction, p. 30.)

2. This obviously refers to the membership card of the Soviet Communist Party.

63

Turi  
February 22, 1932

Dear Delio,

I was delighted to hear about your "little live corner,"<sup>1</sup> with its bullfinches and fish. If the bullfinches escape from their cage from time to time, don't grab them by the wings or the legs—these delicate parts might break or get dislocated. You have to take them in one handful—the whole body—without squeezing it. When I was young I raised birds and animals, such as falcons, owls, cuckoos, magpies, rooks, goldfinches, canaries, bullfinches and larks, a small snake, a weasel, porcupines and turtles. This is how I saw porcupines harvest apples: one autumn evening after dark, under a splendid bright moon, a friend of mine and I went into an orchard in which there were many apple trees, and hid behind a bush against the wind. All of a sudden the porcupines came out—five of them, two big ones and three small ones, and in Indian file moved toward the apples. They strolled about a bit first in the grass and then started working. Using their pretty little faces and legs, they rolled the apples the wind had shaken down into a small clearing and packed them close.

But it was clear that the apples lying around weren't enough for them: the largest porcupine looked around, his nose in the air and, choosing a tree that bent low, climbed upward and was followed by his wife. They sat down on a heavily loaded branch and began to swing rhythmically. The branch began to sway ever more violently, as apple after apple fell to the ground. When they had pushed these

others into the pile, all of the porcupines, big and little, rolled over and, stretching out over the fruit, impaled it on their rigid needles. The baby porcupines carried off only a few, while the mother and father succeeded in fastening on seven or eight each. As they were returning to their hole, we came out of our hiding place, caught them with a bag and took them home. I kept the father and the two baby porcupines many months, letting them run free in the courtyard. They used to hunt down all the tiny animals—cockroaches, cockchafers, and so on—and eat fruit and lettuce leaves. Fresh salad greens were their favorite dish. This enabled me to train them a little, so they stopped rolling up into balls when they spied people coming. But they were terribly afraid of dogs. I used to amuse myself by bringing live grass snakes to the courtyard to see the porcupines run them down. As soon as a porcupine caught sight of the snake, he'd hop up quickly on all four legs and get ready to attack. The snake would lift up its head, stick its tongue out, and hiss. The porcupine, after a faint yelp, would hold onto the snake with his front legs, bite the neck, then eat it piece by piece. One day the porcupines disappeared, and I suspect someone ate them in turn.

Tatianushka<sup>2</sup> bought a handsome large teapot of white porcelain and settled the doll on it. These days she has to wear a warm scarf around her neck because it is very cold: even here in Italy there's been heavy snow. It would be a good idea to write her that she should eat more, since she won't listen to me. Your bullfinches probably eat more than Tatianushka does. I'm glad you liked the postcards and will write sometime about how hares dance and about other animals. I'd like to tell you many things that I observed or heard of when I was a boy: the stories of the little colt, the fox, and the horse that had a nail only on holidays; then there were stories of a sparrow and a kulak,<sup>3</sup> and a small ass, a bird that wove cloth, a bear, etc. I have the impression that you already know the story of Kim. Have you also read *The Jungle Books*, particularly the story about a white seal and Rikki-Tikki-Tavi? Is Giuliano an *udarnik*,<sup>4</sup> too? In what field? A kiss 110M

Daddy

Give Giuliano and Mommy a kiss for me.

1. "Live comer" is the literal translation of a Russian expression, *zivoj ugolok*, which refers to a room or a corner of a room reserved for such animals as birds, fish, and tortoises.

2. Diminutive of Tariana in Russian.

3. "A wealthy Russian peasant" in Russian.

4. "Select worker, avant-garde worker" in Russian.

64

Turi

March 7, 1932

Dearest Tania,

. . . I want to clarify a statement I made about psychoanalysis, which I can't have explained sufficiently, since it's obvious from your letter of February 23 that it led to a misunderstanding. I didn't say *it has been proved* that psychoanalytical treatment is effective only in the case of so-called insulted and injured subjects; I know nothing about this and can't say whether anybody has so far raised the question in these terms. I was merely making a few personal observations (without bringing myself up to date on the most solid scientific criticism of psychoanalysis) in order to explain my attitude toward Giulia's illness. This attitude is not so pessimistic as it appeared to you and is not directed at primitive and low-ranking phenomena as you were led to believe by the phrase "insulted and injured," which I used only generically and for the sake of brevity.

Here is my point of view: the only real, concrete thing that emerges from the constructions of psychoanalysis is a sense of the ravages caused in many minds by the contradiction between what seems categorically right and actual tendencies based on old habits and old ways of thinking. This contradiction reveals itself in countless ways and assumes distinct characteristics in every individual. Throughout history, the average members of any given State have always fallen below not only the moral ideal but also the "type" of

citizen prescribed by public law. This discrepancy grows much more marked in moments of crisis, as in this postwar period, either because the level of "morality" drops or because the aims set are higher and find expression in new laws and in a new morality. In both cases, State coercion of individuals increases; the pressure and controlling influence exercised by a part on the whole and by the whole on all its component elements are intensified. Many people find an easy solution to the problem: they overcome the contradiction with common skepticism. Others abide by the letter of the law. But for many, the problem can have only a catastrophic outcome, because it causes morbid outbursts of repressed feeling, which necessary social "hypocrisy" (in other words, an abiding by the letter of the law) only serves to augment and complicate.

This is the nucleus of my thoughts, which I realize to be extremely abstract and imprecise if taken literally; but it is merely an outline, a general indication, and in this sense should be reasonably clear. As I said, in each individual and in various cultural strata, many extremely complex levels must be distinguished. Those who are termed "the insulted and injured" in Dostoevsky's novels represent the lowest level, characteristic of a society in which State and social pressures are mechanical and external and in which the contrast between State law and "natural" law (to use an ambiguous expression) is accentuated by the absence of any mediation such as that provided in the West by intellectuals in the service of the State. Dostoevsky, far from acting as a mediator for State law, was himself "insulted and injured" by it. Now you must understand what I meant when I referred to "false problems," etc. I think that without falling into common skepticism or indulging in comfortable "hypocrisy," in the proverbial sense of "a tribute paid to virtue," it is possible to find serenity even in the face of the most absurd contradictions and under the pressure of the most implacable necessity, if one succeeds in thinking "historically" and dialectically and in identifying one's own defined and limited task with intellectual sobriety. In the case of this kind of psychic illness, one can and must be "one's own physician." I don't know whether I've explained this well. For me, the thing is extremely clear. I agree that a more minute and



analytical exposition would be needed to communicate this clarity, but lack of writing time and space makes this impossible every time. In any case, you must guard against overliteral interpretations.

As for the concept of science in relation to this order of phenomena, I also want to caution you against an overrigid definition of the natural and experimental sciences. You should not give very much importance to so-called atavism, to *mneme* as the memory of organic matter, etc. I think that a great deal of what is attributed to atavism and *mneme* is simply historical and already acquired in social life, which, it must be remembered, begins immediately at birth, as soon as the child's eyes are open and its senses start to perceive. How will it ever be possible to determine where the psychic activity connected with the first perceptions begins in the consciousness or the subconscious of the man-child, who is already equipped to remember what he sees and feels? And then how is it possible to distinguish and specify what should be attributed to atavism and to *mneme*? My dear, you mustn't think that I felt or still feel very ill; in actual fact, I got through this winter quite well—for instance, I didn't have any kidney trouble, which in previous winters made me suffer a great deal.

A tender hug.

Antonio

65

Turi

April 18, 1932

Dear Tania,

Thank you for transcribing Giulia's detailed letter about Delio's health.

I am going to take the "Somatose" pills, as I told you. You don't need to insist since I'm prepared to try them.

As soon as I finish Croce's book, I will write a critical note on it

to help you, but not the finished article you wanted, because that would be difficult to turn out on such short notice. On the other hand, I have read the first chapters, which were printed separately a few months ago, and already have in mind some suggestions of how you might go about doing research to give your work scope and unity.<sup>1</sup> The first question to ask is: what cultural problems dominate Croce's literary and philosophical work today? Are these problems of an immediate nature and are they the result of momentary enthusiasms, or do they have a more general, profound significance? The answer is clear. Croce's activities began a long time ago, during the war, to be exact. To understand his recent work, you have to re-examine the two-volume collection of his wartime writings, *Pagine sulla guerra* ["Pages on the War"], second expanded edition. Although I don't own these books, I read them when they first appeared in print.<sup>2</sup>

Let me summarize his main points for you: we must fight the notion, spread by French and Masonic propaganda, that the war is a war of civilization like the Crusades, unleashing raw passions and religious fanaticism. After war comes peace—that is to say, that when the battle ceases, nations must begin to collaborate with one another again; above all, war alliances are followed by peace alliances and the two need not necessarily coincide. How can these new alliances on various levels be formed if utilitarian policies of the immediate situation are raised to universal categories and principles? It is up to intellectuals to resist these irrational forms of propaganda and, without undermining their country's strength in wartime, fight all forms of demagoguery in order to salvage the future. Croce always discerns the moment of war in the moment of peace, the moment of peace in the moment of war; and he does everything he can to render a mediation between the two possible.

What it really comes down to is that Croce's standpoint has permitted Italian intellectuals to renew their contacts with German intellectuals, something that was not, and is not, easy for the French and Germans. As a result, Croce's influence was useful to the Italian government in the immediate postwar period, when the deepest needs of the nation at that moment in its history demanded the

cessation of the French-Italian military alliance in favor of a move away from France once more toward Germany. In this way, Croce, who until then had not been active in politics—by that I mean political parties—became Minister of Public Education in Giolitti's 1920-1921 government.<sup>3</sup>

But is the war really over? And have we stopped using political judgments of a merely strategic nature as if they were absolute principles, and dilating ideologies until they become philosophies and religions? Certainly not. Therefore, the moral and intellectual battle must go on; the issue is just as alive now as it was then, we should not give up the struggle.

The second problem is Croce's position in world culture. Even before the war, Croce was universally esteemed by intellectuals. Strangely enough and contrary to what is generally believed, he was far better known in Anglo-Saxon countries than in German-speaking ones. Many more editions of his work have come out in English than in German or Italian. It is evident from his writings that Croce is justly proud of his position as leader of world culture and acknowledges the responsibility that it entails. His work is clearly directed toward an international elite.

Remember that during the last years of the nineteenth century, Croce's writings on the theory of history provided intellectual weapons for the two chief movements of "revisionism" of that period—Eduard Bernstein's in Germany and Sorel's in France.<sup>4</sup> Bernstein himself admits that Croce's essays made him recast all of his thoughts about politics and economics. Sorel's close connection with Croce was already an established fact, but only now do the depth and tenacity of it emerge from his published letters. These show to what a surprising degree he was intellectually subordinated to Croce.

Croce carried his work of revisionism much further during the war and especially after 1917. The new series of essays on the theory of history begins after 1910 with *Cronache, storie e false storie* ["Chronicles, Stories, and False Stories"] and extends through the last chapters of *Storia della storiografia italiana nel secolo XIX* ["History of Italian Historiography in the Nineteenth Century"], and the essays on political science, up to his most recent writings, including *Storia*

*d'Europa* ["History of Europe"], at least as it appears in the chapters I read. What matters most to Croce is his position as leader of revisionism, and he dedicates the best of himself to it. In a short letter to Professor Corrado Barbagallo published in *Nuova rivista storica* in 1928 or 1929 (I don't remember exactly when), he explicitly says that the elaboration of his theory of history as ethical-political (and this refers to twenty years of thought) is aimed at giving his revisionism of forty years ago an even deeper significance.

Dear Tania, if these notes prove useful for your work, let me know and I will try to write you some more.

A tender hug.

Antonio

1. This refers to the first chapters of Croce's *Storia d'Europa* ("History of Europe"), published in 1932, the substance of which had already appeared the preceding year in an extract accompanied by a letter written by Croce, published by the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in Naples as "Introductory Chapters to a History of Nineteenth-Century Europe."

2. Croce's articles on World War I were published in Italian newspapers and reviews. Gramsci had summarized one of these dedicated to Maurice Barrès (published in *La Critica*, January 20, 1918) in articles in *Il Grido del Popolo* and *Avanti!* in March 1918.

3. Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928) was an Italian statesman and politician who was several times Minister of Finance before becoming Prime Minister in 1892, and then served as Minister of the Interior prior to becoming Prime Minister again in 1904, a post he held almost uninterruptedly until 1914, just before Italy entered World War I. Giolitti was a man of liberal convictions: during the ten years prior to the war, he established a broader democratic basis in Italy, with universal suffrage, recognition of trade unions, nonintervention in labor conflicts, and so on, and he encouraged an expansion of the Italian economy and of civil life. Because he was against Italy's intervention in the war and favored neutrality, Giolitti withdrew from public affairs until the war was over. He returned to power in 1920 in order to try to hold back the masses and the Fascist advance, but failed. He did not actively oppose Fascism, however, and remained in the Senate until his death.

4. Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), a German socialist and the director

of the official organ of the German Social Democrats (*Sozialdemokrat*) from 1880 to 1890, was best known as the author of a series of articles published in 1897–1898 in the Social Democratic review *Die Neue Zeit*, later collected in a volume entitled *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* ("The Premises of Socialism and the Problems of Social Democracy"). These articles mark the beginning of the reformist, gradualist "revision" of Marxism. Bernstein was elected deputy to the Reichstag several times. He was a pacifist who worked actively at the time of the crisis of European socialism during World War I.

Georges Sorel (1847–1922), a French writer, author of the theory of "revolutionary syndicalism," maintained that it was necessary to prepare select proletarian groups, or elites, for the destruction of bourgeois civilization by use of violence. Influenced in various confused ways by Marx and Proudhon and by a kind of degenerate Nietzscheanism, he himself influenced Mussolini when the latter was leader of Italian socialist maximalism (see Introduction, pp. 18 ff).

66

Turi  
April 25, 1932

Dear Tania,

I received your cards of April 17 and 22. I also received the books you told me about. How did you get your bad cough? Here, the weather continues to be variable; probably it's like that, too, in Rome, and you don't bother to look after yourself. I'm glad my letter to Delio arrived. Now we'll see whether he answers and if it is possible to correspond with him despite these complications.<sup>1</sup>

You haven't yet told me whether my notes on Croce interested you and are the kind of thing you need for your work. Tell me, so that I will know how to go about it the next time. Remember that these brief impressions would have to be developed further. Let me write you another paragraph on this subject. Afterwards, you can put it in any order that you like.

One interesting problem is why Croce's work has been so very

successful. Usually this doesn't happen to a philosopher in his lifetime outside of academic circles. One of the reasons for this success is Croce's style, which has prompted someone to say that he is Italy's greatest prose writer after Manzoni.<sup>2</sup> This may be true, but it is important to realize that Croce's prose doesn't so much derive from Manzoni as from great writers of scientific prose, above all, Galileo. What Croce contributes to the art of scientific prose is the simplicity and vigor of his style in rendering cumbersome, obscure, and wordy material comprehensible. His literary style corresponds to his moral life and has an almost Goethean serenity and composure. Amid the apocalyptic fears and intellectual panic of so many others, groping to find their way in the dark, Croce becomes a point of reference and a source of inner strength because of his unshakable belief that, metaphysically, evil cannot prevail and that history is rational. Furthermore, one must remember that Croce's thought does not always appear as a massive, indigestible system. His greatest quality has always been the ability to disseminate his ideas about the world in a series of brief, unpedantic writings, which the public readily absorbs as "good sense" and "common sense."<sup>3</sup> Since the solutions offered by Croce to so many problems have been repeated over and over, without necessarily being ascribed to him, appearing in newspapers and in many other places, there are numerous disciples of Croce who are not even aware of being that and many who may never even have heard of him. Similarly, a good many idealistic notions have penetrated Catholic thought, and today writers are struggling unsuccessfully to rid themselves of these notions by presenting Thomism<sup>4</sup> as a self-sufficient philosophy serving every intellectual need of the modern world.

A tender hug.

Antonio

1. The children's letters were sent to their aunt or to other relatives to be translated from the Russian and then sent on to Gramsci.

2. The author of this statement, which appeared in *Panorama de la littérature italienne contemporaine* ("A Panorama of Contemporary Italian Literature," Paris, 1928), was Benjamin Crémieux.

3. Some interesting passages in the section "Critical Notes on an Attempt at a Popular Representation of Marxism by Bukharin" in *Historical Materialism* are dedicated to the philosophy of "common sense," which Gramsci calls "the philosophy of the nonphilosopher." "Common sense" represents, for him, the uncritical absorption of a particular conception of the world by the popular masses, the diffusion of certain truths beyond intellectual circles. He also calls it "the folklore of philosophy." As for Croce's attitude toward common sense, Gramsci says, "Croce's attitude toward common sense is not clear. His proposition that every man is a philosopher leans too heavily on his notion of common sense. Croce seems to take pleasure in the fact that determined philosophical propositions are shared or upheld by common sense, but what does this mean in concrete terms? Since common sense is a chaotic conglomeration of disparate conceptions, one can find in it whatever he wants. Significantly, Croce's attitude toward common sense failed to produce a fertile concept of national-popular culture—that is to say, a concretely historicist concept of philosophy. Only the philosophy of praxis will be able to produce that. . . ."

4. Thomism (or neo-Thomism) is a current of contemporary Catholic philosophy drawing on the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, the great exponent of Aristotelian philosophy and medieval scholasticism. Some of its chief exponents have been Désiré Joseph Mercier, Maurice De Wulf, and Jacques Maritain.

67

Turi  
May 2, 1932

Dear Tania,

. . . Let me suggest how you might deal with Croce's new work, which I haven't yet seen in book form. Even if my notes are disjointed, they might be of use to you. It would be up to you to put them in order.

I pointed out before the importance Croce gives to his theoretical work as revisionist and noted that he himself acknowledges the

purpose of twenty years of thought to be the evolution of revisionism into liquidation of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>1</sup> As revisionist, he contributed to the formation of the school of economical-juridical history, a modified form of which is represented today by a member of the Academy, Gioacchino Volpe.<sup>2</sup> Croce has given literary form to the kind of history he calls ethical-political. His own *Storia d'Europa* ["History of Europe"] is meant to be a supreme example of this. What is Croce's innovation, and is it as significant as he believes it to be? Above all, will his theory be strong enough to liquidate the philosophy of praxis? In concrete terms, Croce's historical-political work stresses only what in politics is defined as the phase of "hegemony," of consensus and cultural leadership, as distinct from the phase of coercion, whether exercised by legislative or executive powers, or expressed through police intervention. Frankly, it is hard to see why Croce is so convinced that this way of envisaging history must necessarily result in a total liquidation of the philosophy of praxis.

At exactly the same time when Croce was forging this would-be weapon, the great modern theoreticians of the philosophy of praxis were elaborating their theories along similar lines, systematically reevaluating the moment of "hegemony" and cultural leadership in order to eliminate mechanistic, fatalistic conceptions of "economic determinism." Indeed, the essential ingredient of the most modern philosophy of praxis is the historical-political concept of "hegemony." This is why I believe that Croce may not be up to date on what has been done and which books have been published in his field, or may have altogether lost his capacity of making critical judgments. His information seems to derive from a notorious book by a Viennese journalist, Filop-Miller.<sup>3</sup> This point ought to be analyzed and further developed, but in order to do this you would need to write a long essay. For your purposes, these remarks of mine should be sufficient. It would be difficult for me to say anything more at this point.

A tender hug, my dear.

Antonio



1. For a fuller understanding of this letter and the following ones (68, 69) dedicated to Benedetto Croce, the reader should consult *Historical Materialism*, which contains all of the passages on Croce in the *Notebooks*. By "theoretical revisionism," Gramsci means the revision of Marxism begun by Croce early in his career, when he deduced from historical materialism the necessity for emphasizing the phase of economics in history, but interpreted "economics" in such a broad sense, so remote from the Marxian use of the term, that he ultimately arrived at a veritable "liquidation" of historical materialism itself. In fact, Croce moved on from an economical-juridical vision of historiography to an "ethical-political" one.

2. See Letter 8, n. 8.

3. This is a reference to *Geist und Gesicht des Bolshevismus* ("The Spirit and Face of Bolshevism," Vienna, 1926) by R. Filop-Miller, which Croce reviewed in the same year, published in Italy as *Il volto del bolscevismo* ("The Face of Bolshevism").

68

Turi  
May 9, 1932

Dear Tania,

. . . Since I haven't yet read the *Storia d'Europa* ["History of Europe"], I can't discuss the actual contents with you. On the other hand, I can make some observations that will not be entirely irrelevant. I have already written to you about how Croce, in his historiographical work of the past twenty years, has been aiming at developing an ethical-political, rather than economical-juridical, theory of history. (Croce originally arrived at the economical-juridical theory by subjecting dialectical materialism to the process of revisionism.) But is Croce's view of history really ethical-political? It seems to me that Croce's view of history must be defined as "speculative" and "philosophical," rather than ethical-political. This view is the opposite of historical materialism because it is "speculative," not because it is ethical-political. Historical materialism does not exclude ethical-political history, since the latter is the history of the moment of

hegemony; but "speculative" history is excluded like all other "speculative" philosophies.

In the elaboration of his philosophy, Croce states that he wanted to free modern thought from every trace of transcendentalism and theology—in other words, metaphysics in the traditional sense. Working along these lines, he arrived at the point of negating philosophy as a system, precisely because the very notion of a system contains vestiges of theology. But since his own philosophy is in fact "speculative" philosophy, he advances the cause of transcendentalism and theology, giving them the advantage of a historicizing language. Croce is so involved in his own method and speculative language, that these are the only standards he can use. When he writes that in the philosophy of praxis the structure is like a hidden God, this would hold good if the philosophy of praxis were speculative philosophy and not absolute historicism—a historicism that is completely free from all transcendental and theological vestiges.<sup>1</sup>

I'd like to make one other observation about the conception and composition of the *Storia d'Europa*. Is it legitimate to begin a unified history of Europe in 1815, that is to say, at the time of the Restoration?<sup>2</sup> A history of Europe that treats the formation of a historical "bloc" can hardly exclude the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, which form the "economical-juridical" premise and represent the phase of force and struggle in the formation of that "bloc." Croce considers only the subsequent phase, the one in which forces unleashed in the preceding stage reach a new equilibrium, having undergone what might be called a "catharsis." Croce considers this moment an isolated fact, then bases his entire interpretation of history on it. The same is true of his *Storia d'Italia*. By beginning with the year 1870, Croce thus overlooks the moment of struggle, the economic phase, in order to justify the purely ethical-political one, as if it had just appeared from the blue. Croce, using all the cunning and craftiness of contemporary critical terminology, has given birth to a new form of rhetorical history, and its present form is "speculative history."

This becomes clearer if one examines the concept of history around which the book centers, that is, the concept of "liberty." Croce, contradicting himself, confuses liberty as a philosophical prin-

principle, or speculative concept, with liberty as ideology, a practical instrument for governing and an element of moral, hegemonic unity. If all history is the history of liberty, in other words, of the self-creating spirit (note that in this context, liberty is the equivalent of spirit, spirit the equivalent of history, and therefore history "equals" liberty), why should European history of the nineteenth century be the sole history of liberty? European history of this period is not the history of liberty in a philosophical sense, but rather the history of liberty becoming aware of itself and turning into a religion for the intellectuals and a superstition for those among the people who identify themselves with the intellectuals and feel themselves to be part of a political "bloc," having the intellectuals as standard-bearers and high priests. In this context, then, liberty is an ideology, i.e., a practical instrument of government. Let us examine the practical reasons why it came into existence. "Liberty" as a historical concept is the dialectical process of history itself and can have no distinct, identifiable "representatives." History was liberty even in the oriental satrapies. In fact, there were historical movements then; otherwise, the satrapies would not have broken down. In short, the words may be different, they may be extremely well chosen, but reality remains untouched by them.

Someone in an article in *Critica fascista* made the astute, if veiled, observation that when Croce sees the last twenty years in perspective, he will find a historical justification for the present in the process of liberty.<sup>3</sup> If you keep in mind what I wrote you earlier about Croce's position in wartime, his standpoint will be clearer to you. As the high priest of contemporary historicist religion, Croce lives the thesis and antithesis of the historical process, emphasizing now one, now the other, for "practical reasons," since he sees the future in the present and is just as concerned with it. Everyone must play his part: the high priests' duty is to safeguard the future. Truly, a strong dose of moral cynicism goes to make up this "ethical-political" conception, today's version of Machiavellianism.

A tender hug.

Antonio

1. This important passage illustrates Gramsci's concept of historicism. For Gramsci, historical materialism is "absolute" because it is comprehensive and scientific—free, that is, of all traces of speculative thought. Gramsci deals with Croce's attitude toward Marxism in a section of the *Notebooks* contemporaneous with these letters: "It is easy to demonstrate that Croce has always been obsessed with Marxism and suffers from this more than ever today. That this obsession has become spasmodic in the past few years can be shown by examining some passages of his *Elementi di politica* ['Elements of Politics']. If it is true that, in the endless succession of events, it is necessary to establish concepts without which reality cannot be understood [this is Croce's general thesis], it is equally necessary to remember that reality-in-flux and the concept of reality must be conceived historically as an inseparable whole, even if they can be distinguished logically. Otherwise, as in Croce's work, history becomes a formal history, a history of concepts, and, finally, a history of intellectuals—indeed, the autobiographical history of Croce's own thought. Croce falls into a new and bizarre form of 'idealist' sociology no less ludicrous and inconclusive than 'positivist' sociology."

2. The Restoration was the period immediately following Bonaparte's abdication and the Congress of Vienna (1815). This was an attempt to re-establish monarchical rule and conservative government on the Continent under Austrian hegemony.

3. The article in the Fascist journal cited here was published in May 1932. See Introduction, p. 46, on Gramsci's criticism of Croce's theory of history as the history of liberty.

69

Turi  
May 30, 1932

Dear Tania,

... I would like to know whether any special studies have come out, even in English, on Ricardo's<sup>1</sup> methods of research in economics and the innovations he has made in methodological criticism. On the occasion of the centenary of his death ten years ago, a great many things were written on this subject, so that I might be able to find what I'm looking for. Here is what I have in mind: should Ricardo

be given a place in the history of philosophy, as well as in the history of economics, where his work is obviously first-rate? And did he encourage the first theoreticians of the philosophy of praxis to go beyond Hegel's philosophy in order to construct a new historicism uncontaminated by vestiges of speculative logic?<sup>2</sup> I think that it would be worthwhile trying to show the validity of this theory. Beginning with two concepts that are fundamental to economics—"determined market" and "law of tendency," both of which we owe to Ricardo—the question to ask is whether these two ideas were what made it possible to reduce the "immanentist" concept of history (to use the idealistic, speculative terminology of classical German philosophy) to a realist, immediate historical "immanence," thus eliminating the mechanical aspect of the law of causality of the natural sciences and identifying it synthetically with Hegelian dialectical reasoning?

What I have just said may seem a bit confused, but it is important that I give you an approximate idea of what I am after so that you can find out whether anyone studying Ricardo has hit on the same problem and gone ahead to do research on it. Hegel himself, from time to time, noted essential connections among different scientific endeavors and also between science and practical affairs. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he illustrates the connection between the French Revolution and the philosophy of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, pointing out that "only two peoples, the German and the French, despite, or precisely because of, the differences between them, took part in the great era of universal history" at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whereas in Germany the new principle "erupted as spirit and concept," in France it manifested itself as "effectual reality."<sup>3</sup> From the *Holy Family*, it is evident how Hegel's assumption that there are connections between French political life and German philosophy was taken up by the first theoreticians of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>4</sup> In what way, and to what extent, did classical English economics, in the methodological form elaborated by Ricardo, contribute to the further development of this new theory? People usually concede that classical English economics contributed to the development of

it, but what they chiefly have in mind is Ricardo's theory of value. I believe that one can go much further and see his contribution as a synthesis, an intuition of the world and a whole way of thinking, not just an analysis of one problem, even if that analysis results in a fundamental doctrine. While Piero works on his critical edition of Ricardo, he could collect some precious material on this subject. Meanwhile, do look around and see whether anything has been published on it, since here, under the present circumstances, I can't do the kind of orderly research I could do in the library.

A tender hug for you, my dear.

Antonio

---

1. David Ricardo (1772–1823), the founder of classical economics (see Letter 57). In Marx's opinion, his work represents, on a scientific plane, the highest point reached by bourgeois economics and already contains hints that the concept of economic liberalism was no longer holding up.

2. The "first theoreticians of the philosophy of praxis" naturally refers to Marx and Engels. In effect, Marx adopted Ricardo's criticism of land revenue and, above all, his theory of work-value, which served to define, in a new, systematic way, the theory of prices, the division of home produce among different classes, and the theory of the relationship between profits and wages. This enabled him to go beyond Hegelianism and a speculative vision of historical processes in his *A Criticism of Political Economy*. Speculative logic means, in this case, the view of history as the realization of the life of the Spirit (or the Idea) according to Hegel's logical scheme (i.e., the three-fold dialectic).

3. The passage by Hegel, part of which is quoted by Gramsci, can be found in *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* ("Lectures on the History of Philosophy") III, Berlin, 1844. Gramsci quotes these remarks in *Historical Materialism*. The Hegelian terms refer to the fact that the new historical era remained merely intellectual and speculative in Germany, whereas it assumed a historical-political form in France.

4. The exact title of the work by Marx and Engels is *Die heilige Familie oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik. Gegen Bruno Bauer und Consorten* ("The Holy Family, or A Criticism of Critical Criticism: An Attack on Bruno Bauer and Associates") Frankfurt, 1845. The passage that Gramsci refers to reads as follows, "If Mr. Edgar [Bruno Bauer; see Letter 60, n. 3] would compare,

for a moment, French egalitarianism with German self-consciousness, he would find that the latter principle expresses *in German*—i.e., in terms of abstract thought—what the former expresses *in French*—i.e., in the language of politics and intuitive thought. Self-consciousness is man's equality with himself on the plane of pure thought. Equality is the consciousness that man has of himself on the level of praxis—that is to say, his consciousness of the fact that other men are his equals—and his behavior toward these others considered as equals."

70

Turi  
June 6, 1932

Dear Tania,

... I intend to answer your questions about Croce even if I don't understand why they're important and have the impression that I already dealt with them earlier. Reread what I wrote about Croce's position during the war and see if it doesn't settle some of your present doubts. In the break with Gentile<sup>1</sup> in 1912, it was Gentile who broke away from Croce, in an effort to become more independent as a philosopher. From that time on, Croce's position remained the same even though his doctrines became more clearly defined. The most significant change had already taken place from 1900 to 1910. The so-called "religion of liberty" is not a recent formula, but rather an extreme summing-up of his thinking over the years, starting with the time when he abandoned Catholicism, which is described in his intellectual autobiography, *Contributo alla critica di me stesso* ["Contribution to Self-Criticism"]. This is not one of the points that Gentile disagreed about. Your interpretation of the expression "religion of liberty" strikes me as inexact. You seem to give it a mystical sense, saying that one can "take refuge" in it, thus implying some kind of escape from reality. Nothing could be further from the truth. "Religion of liberty" simply means faith in modern civilization, which has no need of transcendentalism or revelation and finds

within itself its own *raison d'être*. Therefore, it is a formula that is hostile to both mysticism and religion. For Croce, every concept of the world and every philosophy, to the extent that it becomes a norm for living and a morality, constitutes "religion." Religions of a confessional nature are also religions but are "mythological" and therefore somewhat inferior, primitive ones, corresponding to the historical infancy of mankind. These notions, derived from Hegel and Vico, are the heritage of philosophical idealism in Italy, whether Croce's or Gentile's. Gentile's scholastic reform regarding religious teaching in the school system is founded on this doctrine. Even Gentile limited religious teaching to the elementary schools—that is, to the actual period of childhood. In any case, not even the government wanted to include it in the high school and university curriculum.

I believe that you are exaggerating when you picture Croce as being more isolated than he really is today. Don't be deceived by the present ferment among dilettantes and irresponsible writers. Croce gave us a generous sample of what he is thinking now in the magazine *Politica*, edited by Coppola and Rocco, a cabinet minister.<sup>2</sup> Coppola is only one of many who are convinced of the usefulness of Croce's position in making it possible to offer a proper education in government to new groups of leaders who have come up in the postwar period. An examination of Italian history from 1815 on reveals how a small ruling group has succeeded in systematically absorbing the political leaders of all mass movements of subversive origin. Between 1860 and 1876, Mazzini's and Garibaldi's Action Party was absorbed by the monarchy, leaving an insignificant remnant that survived in the form of the Republican Party, more a phenomenon of folklore than of history or politics. This was called "transformism," but it was not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it was an organic process in the formation of a ruling class, which corresponded to what in France had come about with the Revolution and Napoleon and in England with Cromwell. In fact, even after 1876<sup>3</sup> the process continued in "molecular" fashion, gathering momentum at the end of the war, when it looked as though the traditional group of leaders would not be able to assimilate and



digest the new forces that events had brought into play. But this group, more malicious and capable than it seemed, managed to do it, even though the task was extremely difficult. One of the many ways of going about this was to use Croce. His teachings probably produced the greatest quantity of "gastric juices" for a good digestion. Seen in the perspective of Italian history, Croce's industriousness emerges as the most potent mechanism that the group in power now possesses for bending new forces to serve its own vital interests, both immediate and future ones. I believe that the leaders in question are rightly appreciative of this fact, despite signs to the contrary.<sup>4</sup> When you fuse different bodies to produce an alloy, the superficial effervescence only proves that the fusion is taking place. Besides, in human situations like this one, concord always appears to be discord, a struggle rather than a theatrical embrace. But when you come down to facts, there is always a deep and basic harmony underneath.

A very tender hug.

Antonio

1. Giovanni Gentile; see Letter 52, n. 1. Minister of Education in Mussolini's first government (1922), Gentile introduced religious instruction into elementary schools as part of his reform of the school system.

2. Alfredo Rocco (1875-1935) was a jurist and Fascist politician, president of the Chamber of Deputies from 1924 to 1925 and Minister of Justice from 1925 to 1932. As Minister of Justice, he reformed the penal code and penal procedure, introducing laws explicitly intended to snuff out all traces of liberty (freedom of speech, of expression, of political propaganda). The periodical *Politica* was published in Italy immediately after World War I.

3. In 1876, after the fall of the Right, the Left was voted into power by Parliament. The coalition was made up of parties representing the Risorgimento Left (inspired by Mazzini and, to some extent, Garibaldi), with the gradual adherence of former exponents of the Right. This shift from one political grouping to another (e.g., in this case, from Right to Left) was called "transformism" and corresponds to similar processes in France and Great Britain. "Transformism" is a result of the fact that traditional political parties (such as the Italian Right and Left of the nineteenth century, the

English Tories and Whigs, as well as the American Democrats and Republicans) do not represent fundamental class differences but, rather, different groupings of social strata around the interests of the same ruling class; as such, they do not have contrasting, autonomous ideologies and organizational structures.

4. Gramsci's criticism of Croce's role of "mediator" during the Fascist period helped him to define more clearly the nature of the mass political party to be formed around the working class and to be organized ideally on the basis of historical materialism. Only a party of this kind, he judged, would be able to avoid the mechanism of transformism; its leaders would be able to defend themselves from sectarianism and immobilism, on the one hand, and reformism (always ready to be assimilated and "transformed"), on the other.

7 I

Turi

September 5, 1932

Dearest Iulka,

Rereading your letter of August 4, it strikes me that what you write about Leonardo da Vinci is inexact. You are probably not acquainted with him as an artist and know even less about him as a writer and scientist. But the statement that you ascribe to me, "To love a writer or an artist is not the same thing as to have respect for him," is certainly incorrect. Could I ever have written something so . . . banal? I would certainly have thought twice about making a similar remark. The thought of those plays inspired by universal philistinism in which themes such as "love without respect" and "respect without love" are treated in relation to marriage would surely have been enough to inhibit me. Perhaps I made a distinction between aesthetic enjoyment and a positive value judgment of artistic beauty, i.e., between enthusiasm for a work of art in itself and moral enthusiasm, by which I mean a willing participation in the artist's ideological world—a distinction which seems to me just and necessary. I can admire Tolstoy's *War and Peace* from an aesthetic

point of view without agreeing with the ideological contents of the book. If both factors coincided, Tolstoy would be my *vade mecum*, my *livre de chevet*. This holds also for Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dante. It would not be right to say the same of Leopardi despite his pessimism. In Leopardi, we find the crisis marking the transition to modern man in a very dramatic form: old transcendental concepts are being criticized and discarded, while a new, secure, moral and intellectual *ubi consistam* has not yet been found.

As for your going back to work again, I can give you only very general, but perhaps useful, advice. It is not so much a question of reading this or that book as giving your work a direction and definite aim. In order to take advantage of past experience, you ought to try to become an excellent translator from the Italian. What do I mean by that? Someone who has not only the elementary and primitive ability to translate commercial letters and journalistic prose, but also the capacity to translate every type of writing, whether literary, political, historical, or philosophical, from early times to today. This presupposes a knowledge of specialized and scientific vocabularies, as well as a knowledge of the significance of technical words in relation to their epoch. But even this is not enough. A qualified translator should be able to do a literal translation, but he should also be able to render the conceptual terms of the culture of a particular country into those of another country. Such a translator must have a critical knowledge of both civilizations and be in a position to introduce one to the other by using the historically determined language of that civilization to which the material is directed. I don't know whether I have made myself sufficiently clear. I do think, in any case, that this work would be a very worthwhile undertaking for you and that you should try to give the best of yourself to it. It would make me extremely happy to see you apply yourself in a systematic, continuous way and reach a high level of specialization. Dearest Iulka, a tender hug.

Antonio

Turi

October 10, 1932

Dearest Delio,

I heard you went to the sea and saw some very beautiful things. I'd like you to write me a letter describing these beauties. Did you discover some new living creature? There's so much teeming life near the sea: little crabs, medusas, starfish, etc. A long time ago, I promised to write you some stories about the animals I used to know as a boy, but then I wasn't able to do so. Now I'll try to tell you one or two:

(1) For example, the story of the fox and the foal. It seems that the fox knows when a foal is about to be born and lies in wait. And the mare knows that the fox is lying in wait. Therefore, no sooner has the mare given birth than she starts cantering in circles around the foal, to prevent it from running off if some wild animal attacks it. Yet sometimes one sees tailless and earless horses on the Sardinian roads. Why is this? Because as soon as they were born, the fox found some stratagem for getting close to them and ate their tails and ears while they were still extremely young. When I was a boy, one of these horses was used by an old seller of oil, candles, and kerosene, who went from village to village hawking his wares (there were no cooperatives or other facilities for distributing goods in those days), but on Sundays, to avoid being mocked by the street urchins, the seller put a false tail and ears on his horse.

(2) Now I'll tell you how I saw a fox for the first time. One day I went with my small brothers into an aunt's field, where there were two enormous oaks and a few fruit trees. We were supposed to collect acorns to feed a young pig. The field wasn't far from the village, but there were no houses thereabouts and one had to go

down into a valley. As soon as we entered the field, we caught sight of a large fox sitting quietly under a tree, its fine tail sticking up like a flag. It wasn't in the least scared; it bared its teeth at us, but seemed to be laughing rather than threatening us. We children were vexed that the fox wasn't frightened of us—it simply wasn't frightened. We threw stones at it, but it hardly moved and then started to stare at us again with sly mockery. We put sticks up to our shoulders and went "Bang!" in chorus, in imitation of a shot, but the fox showed us its teeth without undue concern. Suddenly a real shot echoed out from somewhere in the vicinity. Only then did the fox give a start and dash away. I can see it now, all yellow, its tail still erect, streaking along a low wall and disappearing into a thicket. Dear Delio, now you must tell me about your journeys and the new things you saw. Kisses to you as well as to Giuliano and Mamma Iulca.

Antonio

73

Turi  
February 26, 1933

Dear Teresina,

I received your long letter of the sixth and must say you exaggerated, blowing up the question of Carlo and me so dramatically. Believe me, I harbor no ill will in his regard. It's a mistake even to say we quarreled. He doesn't have to ask me to forgive him for anything: I don't expect him to come to terms with me, nor do I owe him any explanations. I hope you realize that the telegram he sent me early in November didn't make me so angry that I couldn't get over it. The question is another: can there still be a relationship now between the two of us? I think it's impossible. Probably it's my fault, but there's no point in determining what caused the break—the essential thing is to figure out how to live

now and in the future. I want you to see how calm I am and how little I let base feelings like rancor or furious anger influence the decisions I make. On the other hand, so as not to be hypocritical, I have to say what I think, otherwise, I prefer to keep still. There's no denying that prison life sours you and makes you irritable. I haven't yet written you how my health is deteriorating. A year and a half ago (August 3, 1931), I had a grave crisis, and after that was unable to get back into shape again. Whereas, before then, time went by without my thinking about it too much; now the weeks, the hours, even minutes weigh on me—it's as if someone were filing away my nerves. I say this so that you'll know what my life is like. I'm a kind of broken mechanism: I react out of all proportion to the smallest things, whereas the really serious ones often have no effect on me at all. For a number of reasons, I've grown insensitive, yet sometimes I have the impression that I'm being skinned alive. The ideal thing would be not to have to see anyone—that is, to be left alone, to forget the world and live like a beast in a den. But that might not be so satisfactory after all.

Dear Teresina, thank you for the nice things you write. Please don't worry about what I tell you. The best thing is to let time flow by as it will: whatever happens, time does continue to pass. Carlo sent me two picture postcards. I dislike telling him not to write, but on the other hand, I won't be answering him. As a matter of fact, I don't even know where he's living. When he left Milan for Cesano Maderno, he didn't tell me. These cards are from Milan, but I don't know if he's actually living there. Give everyone at home a hug from me.

Your brother,  
Antonio

Turi  
May 29, 1933

Dear Tatiana,

So far I've received three cards from you. Several others must still be in the office and will probably be delivered to me today. I had been quite anxious to see you and to talk to you, so that you can imagine how sorry I was to hear that you were ill. It struck me that maybe the distress I had caused you helped to undermine your physical resistance to illness. I must explain to you my present state of mind and the way in which my immediate reactions are formed. My thoughts are no longer normally controlled by critical criteria but proceed through emotional blockages that keep me in a state of insuperable mental obsession for days on end. Any attempt to overcome this obsession (for apparently I haven't yet become completely unbalanced) merely aggravates it to the point of frenzy. It is as though an inexperienced hand were trying to stem a hemorrhage, only to intensify it by its confused and groping efforts. This is a source of ever greater discouragement. It means that I have lost all capacity for rational reaction and am approaching a phase in which everything I do will be fatuous (in fact, I'm not sure that this phase has not already begun).

I was dismayed by the sense of optimism that pervades Giulia's letter, particularly toward the end. It was difficult for me to write to Giulia before; now it's become almost impossible. I hate to have to play games with her and to pretend. This is why I asked you from the bottom of my heart not to involve Giulia in any attempts to improve my situation, and not even to let her know about them. You didn't understand that this was a way of defending Giulia, of protecting her, in her precarious state of health, from any possible excitement and from any acute disappointment. It was also very important

for me because it did not complicate my correspondence with her, which now has become almost impossible. This total preoccupation with the present moment, instead of the future, and this creation of a short-lived optimism regardless of the likelihood that it will be destroyed by hard reality, seem to me hateful and extremely dangerous. Moreover, I believe that they denote a careless superficiality that is in itself a symptom of a chaotic and disordered will, indicating that the real difficulties of an undertaking are neither recognized nor considered: since no steps are taken to remove them, everything goes awry. Goodness if it is disarmed, inexperienced, and rash can no longer be accounted goodness; it is foolish ingenuousness and can only cause disasters.

Until recently I was, in a manner of speaking, rationally pessimistic and willfully optimistic. In other words, although I clearly saw all the conditions that strongly prejudiced any chance of improvement in my situation (both generally, with regard to my legal position, and in particular, with regard to my present physical state), yet I believed that if efforts were rationally made, using patience and shrewdness and meticulously organizing the few favorable elements and counteracting the many unfavorable ones, there would be a chance of achieving appreciable results, if only the possibility of my staying alive, by stopping the terrible drain on my vital energies that is gradually prostrating me. Today I no longer believe this. Not that I have decided to admit defeat. But I no longer see any definite solution and no longer have untapped reserves of strength to fall back on.

This is how I see things: Suppose that I started out from a position of 100, with strength at 100 and a load to bear of 100. At the first crisis, I fall from 100 to 70, with my strength reduced to 70 and my load remaining at 100. A reaction sets in; I go up again but no longer to 100, only as far as 90, with my strength at 90. And so on, from crisis to crisis, with increasingly difficult reactions because the load grows heavier, both absolutely and relatively, and the strength that has been used up cannot be recovered. At present I think I have painfully regained a position of 60 (after March 7), and even this



may be too optimistic an estimate. I'm convinced that next time, which I think must be imminent (because the summer has always prostrated me, even when there were no other unfavorable circumstances), my collapse will be so complete that I will be left a permanent invalid (even now I haven't recovered full control of my hands).

Believe me, none of this talk about ideal solutions can change my situation or the feeling that I have about it. I can think up these solutions by myself and have in fact thought them up and repeated them to myself for two years now. But I have no idea whether, beyond these general hopes, there is the possibility of realizing something concrete. I don't believe there's much to be done at this stage. What could be done has been done, but ineptly, without the necessary discernment and precision. Of this I'm convinced. How can I write to Giulia? What can I write to her? I've thought about this a great deal but without managing to find a solution. My chief regret is that a situation has been created in which correspondence becomes difficult and absurd, when letters were one of the few things that still kept me in touch with life. I have received the petition<sup>1</sup> and read it with great interest, even though I'm not very good at grasping legal arguments. I'm incapable of making any suggestions, whether legal or of any other nature. I only remember that in his speech to the Senate on the law of the Special Tribunal, Minister Rocco specifically stated that the law had no retroactive power; therefore, the Attorney General's objection seems strange. I also seem to remember that, in his speech on the code or in his report to the king, Rocco himself maintained that one of the merits of the new draft lay in the fact that Article 305 introduced a form of offense that did not exist in the code of 1889 (he was certainly referring to the General Report) and so provided a new arm for protecting the personality of the State (the relevant passage may be on page 98 of the State Bookshop edition of the code).

I've received the text of Delio's note and the drawing, which I don't think reveals any great aptitude. An affectionate hug,

Antonio

---

1. The petition drawn up for the review of the trial of 1928, at which Gramsci was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment.

75

Turi  
July 2, 1933

Dear Tania,

I have just received the postcard you wrote yesterday, also the two hundred lire and two tubes of Elastina. I must tell you that I don't intend to be a guinea pig any more or to experiment with new medicines. These things may amuse you, but I've arrived at the end of my patience. You don't yet realize how radically I have changed. My greatest mistake was to let everything drag on so long. Now I am approaching a time of maturity sufficient to put an end to this whole pointless, senseless rigmarole. I urge you to bear in mind what I said when we met in January, and to reread the letters I wrote afterward, if they're still around. I wish you'd see how none of this is caprice, but rather the last necessary phase of a long process. An incredible blindness kept you from seeing it coming or from correctly evaluating it.

I'm terribly tired and feel cut off from everything and everyone. Yesterday's conversation was the perfect proof of it, weighing me down, torturing me—I couldn't wait for it to be over. I must speak the truth, be frank, even brutal. Nothing is left to say to you or to anyone. I'm completely empty. In January I experienced the last efforts to live, felt the last leap of existence within me. You didn't understand. Or perhaps I was unable to communicate it under the circumstances. Now nothing can be done. If another time in your life you run up against this kind of situation, know that time is

the most important thing. Time is but a pseudonym for life itself.

A hug.

Antonio

76

Turi

July 6, 1933

Dear Tania,

I've asked permission to write you an extra letter. By now you will have received—and felt bad about—a letter I wrote Sunday. I'm half-crazy and afraid I might go completely mad. Please listen carefully to what I'm going to say—it may be the only way I can avoid utter madness. (1) See if they will allow you to speak with me as soon as you get this. Since I am going to ask you to leave right away for Rome and since they usually permit a last encounter, it may be possible to meet. (2) If they refuse, please leave at once for Rome; don't let anything dissuade or distract you from doing it. You must make an urgent appeal that I be transferred as quickly as possible from the prison of Turi to another prison, where specialists in the prison hospital can diagnose me accurately and where X rays can be made of my lungs, to see whether Professor Arcangeli and the prison inspector, Dr. Saporito, are right. Please believe me: I can't hold out any longer. The pain at the base of my neck and around the skull is driving me wild. Also, my hands are less and less able to move normally. Arteriosclerosis alone couldn't be causing this.

Today an inspector of prison administration came to see me. He promised me that from now on I would be taken better care of and that the conditions here aggravating my nervous state would be changed. I'm sure that he wanted to help, but two years of experience have taught me that nothing can help until I've undergone a serious medical examination to see what is causing this intolerable torture and then follow the orders of a competent, conscientious

doctor. If the inspector hadn't come, I would have asked to send a report to the Head of the Government myself, since you let more than four months go by before deciding to do what I had already told you to do. By waiting, you've prolonged a period of atrocious agony. The inspector assures me that the Minister is concerned about my case. I only hope that such a simple matter as being sent to a modern prison hospital won't be difficult to arrange. I'm certainly not the first person to ask. I can't tell you any exact details. There are hospitals in Rome and in Civitavecchia, but which place makes no difference to me. What I'm concerned about is getting out of this hell in which I'm slowly dying. If they ask you whether my transfer from Turi would be a final one, don't answer anything definite. The important thing is to get me out of here as fast as possible and examined in a serious, methodical way, so that I can get over this anemia of the brain and rest. Afterwards, they can decide on the basis of a medical certificate where to send me. Now that I've explained what you must do, please proceed at once, without hesitating or doing things halfway.

Let me explain why I wrote the way I did last time. I was extremely moody waiting for you to leave Turi. If I had guessed when you arrived that you were going to stay so long, I would have made up my mind right away and not wasted so much time. But what really upset me was your reference to Professor Fumarola and the sleeping pills. I had already told you what it was about; you had even admitted being "stupid" when you didn't understand. Then you started chatting all over again about Quadro Nox and other pills that are of no use at all, in fact probably would make me feel worse by forcing me to wake up abruptly and unpleasantly. Yesterday I received your card repeating what the lawyer wrote you, but what are you talking about? I'm completely indifferent as to whether the Special Tribunal is able to reduce my sentence by a few years or not. You strike me as someone witnessing a drowning who, instead of rescuing the person from the water, busies himself with buying a new set of clothes and finding a new job for him where he won't risk the danger of falling into water. Meanwhile, the person drowns. If after you receive this letter, you're not permitted to see me, send me a tele-

gram saying whether you are willing to do what I just wrote. If you're not, I will do it myself as soon as I can, using the regular procedure. If I hadn't fallen into this idiotic state during the past months, I would have done it myself as best I could—and that would have been best. I've learned a lesson for the future. And to think that I sent Giulia the story of the man who fell into a ditch!<sup>1</sup> I look forward to your answer. A hug.

Antonio

---

1. In a letter of June 27, 1932, to Giulia, Gramsci had discussed in detail the plot of a short story by Lucien Jean (1870–1908), the moral of which is absolute self-reliance. Various representatives of society pass by the man fallen in the ditch without lending a hand: he has to pull himself up and out by means of his own strength.

77

Turi

July 24, 1933

Dear Tania,

. . . In a few days I will be getting shots of strychnine and phosphorus. The new doctor says that they are good for me. According to him, my illness is based on nervous exhaustion, and the disorders are functional rather than organic ones. It looks as though it is my mind that has to heal—that's possible. I don't know whether arteriosclerosis can be called a functional, rather than an organic, disturbance, but in any case I feel less pressure—either because of the Elastina or because I slept for four or five nights. The palpitation and pain around my heart have lessened. Only my hands continue to hurt, and I find that I am unable to lift things or to hold onto them rightly.

256

As far as my psychological state is concerned, I have nothing specific to tell you. I lived with no prospects at all for months, since I could see no way out of a situation in which my physical energies kept on being sapped away while no one looked after me. This state of mind still haunts me, and no one can convince me that I'm out of danger. I must admit that I am less obsessed by these things now than I was. However, I can't get rid of the obsession merely because I want to. I would have to have the willpower to will the willing of it, ad infinitum. Talking about it is easier, but each time I try to do something to curb the obsession, it grows more and more violent.

Now that I'm better, persons who were with me during the most critical moments tell me that my ranting and raving (which was spiced with long tirades in Sardinian) revealed a kind of lucidity. Since I was convinced that I was about to die, I tried to demonstrate the futility of religion. I seemed to be afraid that a priest might take advantage of my weakness in order to perform some disgusting rite over me, and that I would be powerless to stop him. Apparently, I talked for one whole night about the immortality of the soul in a realistic and historical sense, claiming that immortality is a necessary survival after death of man's noblest actions and the incorporation of them, beyond human will, into the universal process of history. The worker from Grosseto who kept falling asleep listening to me thought that I was out of my mind, according to the guard on duty. Even so, he recalled the high points of my ravings. Evidently, I said things then that I often say. The very fact that I write you about these experiences ought to convince you that I'm better.

I hope that I won't bother you by asking for some Quadro Nox since I can't find any here. A tender hug.

Antonio

257

Turi  
August 8, 1933

Dearest Iulca,

I should write to Delio in reply to one of his notes of some time ago, but don't feel like it. Would you please tell him that I am sending two books: the *Jungle Books*, including the stories of the White Seal and Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I am curious to learn how Delio came to want to read this last book and whether, when he receives it, someone will be able to historicize it for him, placing the emotions and religious feelings in which the book is steeped in time and space. This is a difficult thing to do with a young boy, if it is done seriously, without using the usual clichés. In fact, from what you write about Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Leonardo's "Last Supper," I really doubt whether you are the person to do it. It's not easy to write coherently and logically about such things; but I think that, generally speaking, you place yourself in the position of an underling rather than a leader—that is, of someone incapable of criticizing ideologies from a historical standpoint, of getting on top of them and explaining them in the light of historical needs of the past. Instead, when encountering a given world of emotions, you feel yourself alternately drawn and repelled and continue to remain within the immediate sphere of passions. Perhaps this is why you are no longer attracted to music. It seems to me that there must be a catharsis (as the Greeks would say), when our sentiments are reborn artistically as beauty and no longer as shared passion still in motion within us. I ought to explain this at length, but perhaps you'll be able to see what I mean from these few remarks. A tender hug.

Antonio

Turi  
September 3, 1933

Dearest Tania,

Three cards and a letter from you have arrived in the last six days. I haven't had a single line from Carlo, which doesn't in the least surprise me. When he turned up here, I thought that you had changed your mind again (and certainly for the last time) after leaving Turi on July 10 and had decided to do something different from what you had committed yourself to doing. I have only one cause for satisfaction: that all the foolish song and dance that was started a year ago is now finished, dispatched. I've looked over your old letters: I found the very one, dated August 24, 1932, in which you suggested that a doctor of your choice should come and visit me. Here are your exact words: "You may rest assured that I won't undertake anything or try to secure any information without your consent and will do so only in the way that you wish."

This last year nothing has been done according to my wishes, everything has been manipulated, bungled, confused, embroiled according to the whims of the moment. I'm writing you this so that you won't be surprised if from now on you find me somewhat or even greatly changed. It's the failure to achieve anything that upsets me. This was a possibility that had to be foreseen. If you remember, in the conversation I had with you last March, after my fainting fit, despite my confusion of mind and body, I begged you to follow my instructions to the letter. I did this precisely because I wanted to be quite certain, in the likely event of a failure, that this was in no way due to a course of action different from the one that I recommended. You disregarded this admonition. Don't think that I'm blaming you now. To tell you the truth, I would find this less irksome. The fact is that you have made me lose all my faith in myself, which was my



chief source of strength in the past. Now I know that I can no longer count on anybody, whatever happens to me, and everything fills me with gloom because my strength is so depleted.

Please stop sending me copies of the letters that your mother and Giulia write to you—I find them too distressing. The truth is that I've lost my capacity for self-direction. All impressions from outside leave me painfully elated or depressed. I thought I had a certain personality, a strong central focus for my will and feelings. In the past year everything has disintegrated. Right up to a few days ago, you kept showing me by your actions—I set no store by words—that none of the things that I want and consider sensible deserve to be taken seriously. I have to draw my own conclusions from this. I don't want to discuss what you did with Carlo after leaving Turi, which I learned about from your card of September 1; I'll only say that I was astounded.<sup>1</sup> It's true that you confess to being scatterbrained: but that you should pass off as my "wishes" the exact opposite of what we had agreed together is absolutely incredible.

I want to tell you something that will certainly distress you and which I would not have written in the past for other reasons (apart from the wish not to upset you). Inspector Saporito, when he visited me, told me (I don't know on what authority) that my illness was caused not only by physical factors but also, to a large extent, by emotional disturbances, such as the impression that I had been abandoned by my family (not materially, but with regard to certain aspects of the inner life that are very important to an intellectual). He also knew that in 1931 and 1932 I had not received any visits, etc. I don't agree with this affirmation, because I've always lived detached from everybody, but I admit that it contains a percentage of truth amounting to perhaps 10 or 20 percent. I have always been very headstrong, and I find it unspeakably exasperating that my wishes, although recognized as legitimate, should not be followed because of minor considerations or through thoughtlessness. But now I've had my say. This has been a year of experiences which have left marks on me that are not just metaphorical. I've written to you in this vein (I thought I *had* to write to you) because I don't know

exactly what I'm going to do. In any case, don't be surprised if you hear nothing from me for a few weeks.

A hug.

Antonio

Please inform the bookshop that I haven't received any periodicals for a month; moreover, I'm still waiting for various periodicals for the month of July (for example, *Educazione fascista*), and in any case, no publications for August have yet arrived. Perhaps some of them have gone astray.

---

1. This refers to a fact mentioned in an earlier letter, which is not in this collection. In 1932 there was an attempt to exchange political prisoners: the Italian government was to have released Gramsci in return for the release of a few prelates by the Soviet Union. The Soviet diplomat and historian, M.P. Kerzencev, a former ambassador to Rome, and another Soviet diplomat named Makar, were singled out as suitable persons for the negotiations. The trip made to Turi at that time by the Reverend Giuseppe Pizzardo (who became a cardinal a few years later) was certainly connected with such a purpose. It was unsuccessful, however, since the prison authorities did not allow him to meet with Gramsci. Moreover, in the same year (1932), the Soviet Ambassador to Rome, V.P. Potëmkin, had requested that Mussolini authorize Gramsci's release. After 1933 a special committee abroad, which included Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, organized a campaign for the release of Gramsci and other anti-Fascists who had been condemned.

80

Clinica Quisisana<sup>1</sup>  
Rome

January 25, 1936

Dear Iulca,

Your note puts me in a terribly embarrassing situation. I still haven't decided whether I ought to write or not. I fear that whatever

I write, I will be putting a great deal of pressure on you. From one standpoint, it is quite contrary to my nature to want to coerce you in any way; but from another, if I think about it coldly, coercion in certain matters seems necessary, even a good thing. I have been in a similar situation for many years, from 1926 on, when I was arrested. Then, my own existence was brusquely, brutally channeled in one direction by external pressures; liberty grew possible only for the inner life, and my will became solely the will to resist. But I don't want to wander too far from the main question that concerns me and you, as well, although you don't mention it in your note: your trip to Italy, the length of which is up to you and doesn't mean you have to commit yourself. The principal aim of such a journey would be to help you acquire once more, definitively, the energies demanded by a normal life of active work. I believe you must convince yourself that this trip is necessary, among other reasons, for you and for the children (whose future, given the conditions of our lives, depends on you and your capacity for work). However, the only way you can be persuaded is if you see the trip as it really is, as motivated by practical interests and not by a sentimental morbidity; it is something that could free you, perhaps forever, from a multitude of worries, repressed feelings, and other obsessions.

I am truly a friend of yours, and after ten years have a real need to talk with you as one friend to another, with great frankness and openness. For ten years I've been cut off from the world. What a terrifying experience it was to look out from the train after six years of seeing nothing but those roofs and walls, those surly faces, and to realize that the vast world had gone on existing with its meadows and woods and ordinary people, its flocks of boys and girls, its particular trees and vegetable gardens! But most of all, what a shock it was to look into a mirror after such a long time—it made me run back to the *carabinieri*. . . . Don't think I want to touch your emotions this way: what I'm trying to say is that after so long a time and so many events, the true significance of which may have escaped me, after so many years of a compressed, shabby, obscure, and miserable life, if I could talk with you as friend-to-friend, it would be a great

help. This doesn't mean you have to feel the weight of awful responsibilities on your shoulders; simple conversations such as friends usually engage in are all that I have in mind.

To sum up, I am quite convinced that everything points toward advantages for both of us from such a trip. It seems to me that I've changed a good deal, and it's impossible that you haven't also. Don't worry about practical things; I'm sure we can take care of them. You might travel with someone else, then Tatiana can come to meet you, so that you feel physically safe in case some weakness overcomes you. Do you really believe that it would be tragic to give up for six or eight months the surroundings you're used to and the presence of the children, in order to benefit from experiences that can be extremely useful for you in the long run? I'm convinced that this is a positive enterprise and only wonder why I didn't think of it earlier. (I was like a worm inside a cocoon unable to unwind himself.) But the essential thing is that you remain calm and consider these things slowly, concretely, practically, placidly, not letting yourself be influenced by anyone, not even by me. Do you think the boys, knowing I can't move, would object or be sorry if you came to visit?

Your letter starts off with a sentence that sounds like d'Annunzio—I don't like that. Also, some words are cut short. You must have been quite agitated. I wonder whether if I caressed you, you wouldn't feel calmer. A hug.

Antonio

This letter is extremely tangled up, but I don't want to rewrite it.

---

1. In the summer of 1933, Gramsci's brother Carlo had requested that because of his failing health Antonio be transferred from the prison at Turi. Police authorities notified Carlo that his brother would be transferred to the Clinica Cusumano, a private hospital in Formia. On November 19, 1933, Gramsci was moved from Turi to the infirmary of Civitavecchia prison, where he remained for eighteen days while his hospital room at Formia was fitted out with iron bars and transformed into a cell. He was kept at the

hospital in Formia "in a state of detention" until August 24, 1935, when he was transferred to a Roman hospital, the Clinica Quisisana. He died there on April 27, 1937.

81

Clinica Quisisana<sup>1</sup>  
Rome  
[June 16, 1936]

Dear Delio,

Your notes are growing shorter and more stereotyped all the time. I think you have enough time to write longer and more interesting letters. There's no need to dash them off at the last moment, just before going out to play. Right? I don't believe you would like your father to get the impression from your notes that you're a stupid little boy who is interested only in the fate of his parrot and in reading trashy books. I think that one of the most difficult things at your age is to sit down at a table to put your thoughts in order (or even to think) and to write them down with a certain style. This is an apprenticeship that is sometimes harder than that of a worker who wants to become professionally qualified, and it should begin at your age. A big hug.

Твоя Папа<sup>2</sup>

1. See Letter 80, n. 1.

2. "Papa" in Russian. Gramsci signed many letters to his sons in this manner.

82

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[Summer, 1936]

Dear Delio,

I was told by Mamma Iulka that my last letter (and perhaps others, too) made you unhappy. Why didn't you write me? When there is something that disturbs you in my letters, you should let me know and explain your reaction. You are very dear to me, but I'm not able to hug you close and to help you, as I would like to, to solve the problems that you dream up. Please repeat the question that you asked me about Chekhov, which I failed to answer: believe me, I don't remember it at all. If you believe that Chekhov is a social writer, you are right, but this shouldn't swell your pride since Aristotle said that all men are social animals. I think that you intended to say much more—for example, that Chekhov was depicting a certain social reality and aspects of life in his time, expressing them in such a way as to make him seem a "progressive" writer. This is exactly what I think. In his fashion, and with the particular cultural background that he had, Chekhov helped liquidate the middle classes, the intellectuals, and the petite bourgeoisie, as vehicles of the history and future of Russia. In real life, these people believed themselves to be the heroes of who-knows-what miraculous revolutions, but Chekhov showed them up as they actually were—petty individuals swollen with putrid gases, a butt of jokes and of ridicule. What did you mean? Please write and tell me. Obviously one cannot sum up Chekhov in a few words.

You mention that the Pioneer magazines assigned a lot of space to Tolstoy and little, if any, to Gorky. Now that Gorky is dead<sup>1</sup> and one feels the extent of the loss, it might seem unfair. But you must always be capable of judging with a critical eye: don't forget that

Tolstoy was a universal writer, one of the few of any country who achieved the highest perfection in art and who aroused, and still arouses, despite many bad translations, torrents of emotion in men and women hardened by daily labor and possessing only a rudimentary culture. Tolstoy was truly a vehicle for civilization and beauty. No one in the modern world can come up to his stature; he is in a category with Homer, Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Cervantes, and a handful of others.

I was very pleased to have your letter and to know that you feel better, that you climbed up on a wall to look at the eclipse, and that you'll be swimming, and walking in the woods, and learning Italian. Growing up strong is an activity in itself. A big hug.

Папа

---

1. Maxim Gorky had died on June 18, 1936.

83

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
November 24, 1936

Dear Iulca,

I have decided to write you a letter like a professor, filling it with pedantry from top to bottom just to make you laugh, but wonder whether I can do it. Usually, I'm pedantic when I don't mean to be. Because of the many times that I've been subjected to censorship during the events of these past ten years, I've had to develop a style to suit the circumstances. Let me tell you a little story that will make you laugh and also illustrate my state of mind. One time, when Delio

was little, you wrote a charming letter to show me how he was beginning to learn about geography and to have a sense of direction. You described him lying in bed in a north-south position, repeating that in the direction of his head lived races who used dog carts, to the left was China and to the right Austria, the legs pointed to the Crimea, and so on. In order to have this letter in my possession, I had to defend it without having even read it to see what the whole issue was about! The director of the prison kept me for an hour, wanting to know what secret messages were contained in it! "What is Kitai, and what's this about Austria?" "Who are these men who make dogs drag their carts?" I had quite a time trying to offer a plausible explanation for all this, without having even glanced at the letter. Finally, I asked the man brusquely, "But aren't you married? Surely, you understand how a mother might write to her distant husband about their child." He gave me the letter on the spot. (He was married but had no children.)

The episode is a silly but significant one. Since I knew that the director would go on reading my letters afterward with the same acrimonious, suspicious pedantry he had shown in this case, I was forced to develop a prison style of writing, which I may never be able to shake off after so many years of disciplining what I want to say. I could tell you about similar episodes and other things, but would do it only to make you laugh. It might be very saddening to have the many trials of the past years laid out before you. Your letter cheered me up, instead. I can't remember when you last wrote so gaily . . . and with so few mistakes.

Sweetheart, think a bit and then write me a long letter about the *Malyski*,<sup>1</sup> without being too objective. By the way, your sententious aphorism, "To write a report (!) about the children's life would be to destroy the essence of it" is one of the most ridiculous things I've ever heard!—a tale taller than the Himalayas. I don't want a report—I'm not a policeman—but only your subjective impressions. Dearest, I'm so isolated that your letters are like bread, they nourish me: pedantry could never do that. Why do you continue to measure out the rations that you send me? When all is said and done, it looks as



though you are far more pedantic and professorial than I, only you prefer not to admit it. A miserable fellow like me writes asking for a description of his children's life, and you answer from your safe hide-out, "Oh no, to write about the children's life would be to destroy the essence of it." Isn't this pedantry? It's pedantry of the worst kind. Think a bit, and then you'll see that I'm right. Sweet Iulca, I send you a tender hug.

Antonio

---

1. *Malyshi* means "little ones" in Russian.

84

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Delio,

I was very glad to get the parrot feather and the flowers. But I can't imagine what the bird is like and why he's losing such large feathers. Maybe the artificial heat is bad for his skin, or maybe there's nothing seriously wrong with him, and with the good weather, all the irritation will pass. Perhaps you should give him something very fresh to eat as a substitute for what the members of his species eat in their native land, because I read somewhere that birds kept indoors, on an unsuitable diet, suffer from avitaminosis, lose their feathers, and contract a kind of mange (which is not infectious). I once saw a sparrow, who was in a bad way because he ate only the soft part of bad bread, recover with the addition of a little green salad to his menu. I forget in what connection I spoke to you about "fantasy"; maybe I was referring to a tendency to indulge in idle

daydreams, to build skyscrapers on a pinhead, and so on. A big hug to you, dear Delio.

ПаПа

85

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[January 23, 1937]

Dear Iulik,<sup>1</sup>

You must draw as you want to, just for fun and not "seriously," as though you were doing an unpleasant piece of homework. I'd like to see the drawings you do for school, though! How do you do these drawings? Seriously, or like those you do for fun? You really seem to be doing quite well at school; and how is your health? Do you run about and play, or is your only amusement this playful scribbling of figures on paper? Thank you for your good wishes. Today I have a bad headache and can't write you a long letter.

Kisses.

ПаПа

With whom are you studying the violin?

---

1. This is a familiar form of Giuliano.

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Long live Iulik! I received a photograph of you, and it made me very happy to see what you look like. You must have grown a great deal since the time of that other photo sent to me a while ago—grown and changed. Now you're nearly a young man. Why don't you write me any more? I keep waiting for a long letter.

A hug.

Твои Папа

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Delio,

I haven't read much Wells because I don't like his books very much. I think that if you don't read them either, it will be no great loss to your intellectual and moral development. His book on world history didn't strike me very favorably either, although he tries (and this is something of an innovation, at least in the historical literature of Western Europe) to broaden the traditional historical horizon by giving importance not only to the Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans, etc., but also to the Mongols, Chinese, and Indians, etc. As a writer of stories of fantasy, I find him too stuffy and mechanical; and as a historian, he lacks intellectual discipline, orderliness, and method. Let me know if you like me to write like this and if you understand

everything. I haven't answered your second-to-last letter. I liked your vision of a world peopled by elephants walking on their hind legs, with highly developed brains. If their population were a large one, God knows what huge skyscrapers they would have to build. But what use would a brain be without hands? Ostriches hold their heads high and free, walk on only two feet, but this does not mean that their brains are greatly developed. In the case of man's evolution, a combination of many favorable circumstances helped him to become what he was even before he developed the will to achieve certain things and sufficient intelligence to discover the means for achieving them. It would seem that quantity becomes quality for man and not for other living beings. Write me a long letter. A hug.

Папа

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Delio,

You wrote four lines that seem to be taken from a grammar for foreigners: "The parrot is well!" (give him my heartiest congratulations and best wishes!) "What's the weather like? Here it's fine!" etc. And how are you? And what do you think of Pickwick?<sup>1</sup> And how are your exams going to go? Do you feel a little scared, or are you quite confident? For some time now you've been writing very little and about uninteresting things. Why? Write me longer letters. A kiss.

Папа

1. The hero of Dickens' novel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*.

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Delio,

I see that your latest interest is monkeys. The photograph you sent me is a good one: that must be a thinking monkey. No doubt he is thinking about the carobs and other things that the zoo authorities are going to feed him. And what about the parrot? When I mentioned salads, I was talking about sparrows. What does your bird eat? Tender greens like lettuce, or dried fruit and vegetables, such as broad beans, nuts, chickpeas, and almonds? When I was a boy, we kept a small parakeet that came from Abyssinia. All day long it would nibble at broad beans and chickpeas (we ate the almonds and nuts) and was very unlovable because it never did anything else and wasn't at all handsome. It had a great head, as large as its whole body, and was a yellowish-gray. I hope your bird is much more beautiful and likable. Write me something about the books you're reading. Congratulations on your studies and on the badge you were awarded. An affectionate hug,

Твои Папа

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dearest Delio,

I feel rather tired and can't write you a long letter. Go on writing to me about everything that interests you in school. I think you like history, as I liked it at your age, because it concerns living men; and everything that concerns them—as many men as possible, all the men in the world, insofar as they unite in society and work and strive to improve themselves—must necessarily interest you more than anything else. But is this the case for you? A hug.

Antonio

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Iulik,

I was very excited at getting your new drawings: they show that you're cheerful, and I think you must also be well. But tell me something: can you do drawings that are not just for fun? In other words, are you capable of drawing seriously when you do pictures as a joke? You haven't told me whether they teach you drawing in school and if you also like to draw seriously. When I was a boy, I used to draw a lot, but always rather painstakingly: nobody ever taught me. I used to copy, in enlarged form, the illustrations in my

comics. I also tried to reproduce the basic colors with a system that was simple but required a lot of patience. I still remember a picture that cost me at least three months' work: a little peasant had fallen fully clothed into a vat full of grapes all ready for pressing, and a buxom peasant girl was watching him, half scared and half amused. The picture formed part of an adventure series in which the protagonist was a terrible ram (Barbabucco); with his sudden and treacherous butting, he sent his enemies or disrespectful children flying through the air. There was always a hilarious ending, as in my drawing. How I loved to enlarge the picture! I would measure with a double-edged ruler and compass, check the results, check yet again with a pencil, etc. My brothers and sisters would watch me sometimes and laugh, but they preferred to shout and run about, and so left me to my labors. A hug to you, dear Iulik.

Папа

92

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Iulik,

I liked your drawings a lot because they are yours. They are also highly original and I don't believe that nature ever invented such amazing things. The fourth drawing shows an extraordinary animal; it can't be a cockroach because it's too big and has only four long legs moving like those of the large quadrupeds, but it's not a horse either because it has no visible ears (the first animal you drew also appears to have no ears, and the same is true of one of the men). It could be a lion, tame and . . . transparent—transparent because both the rider's legs are visible. I also like the fact that your men can walk on tiptoe in the most awkward places: on the tip of a branch and on the heads of animals (perhaps this is why the animal has lost

its ears) . . . Dear Iulik, do you mind if I laugh at your drawings? I really like them as they are; but instead of drawings done on the spur of the moment, you should send me the ones you do for school. A kiss,

Папа

How are you doing at school? Do you manage to study well, without growing tired and nervous? And do you like studying?

93

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Delio,

Why don't you tell me about your little parrot? Is it still alive? Perhaps you no longer mention it because I once remarked that you were always talking about it? Cheer up, Delio! Tatanicka wants me to tell you how I had a puppy at your age and how I had grown half crazy with the joy of owning it. So you see! It's true that a dog (even the tiniest one) gives much more satisfaction than a parrot (but perhaps you disagree), because it plays with its master and grows attached to him . . . Mine had obviously never grown up, because when he was extremely excited, he would lie on his back and pee all over himself. What endless shampooings! He was so small that for a long time he was incapable of climbing the stairs. He had long black fur and looked like a miniature poodle. I had him clipped like a lion, but he couldn't honestly be called beautiful, in fact he was rather ugly, even very ugly, now that I come to think of it. But how he amused me and how I loved him! My favorite game was as follows: when we went for a walk in the country, I would put him on a rock and then move away while he watched and whimpered but didn't dare to jump down. I went off in zigzags and then hid in a hole or a ditch. The dog would howl at first, and then, having found a



way of climbing down, would rush off in pursuit of me. This amused me very much because the poor little creature, who was still very young, would search behind every stone, barking his head off, run to the edge of every small—but in his eyes, large—ditch, and seem to go out of his mind as I quickly moved away after calling him. What joy, when I finally let myself be found! And what abundant peeing! Dear Delio, will you write to me about the parrot now? A hug.

Папа

94

Clinica Quisisana  
Rome  
[no date]

Dear Delio,

No note from you this time. From Giuliano's photograph I was able to see a corner of your room, with the parrot's cage. It's a pity that the bird isn't visible. I hope that with fresh salads (which must be chopped up very fine) and millet seed he will make a complete recovery and that he will grow some long, shiny feathers again. Kisses to you.

Папа

## APPENDIX

Letter from Tatiana Schucht,  
in Rome,  
to Piero Sraffa,  
King's College, Cambridge  
May 12, 1937

Dear Friend,

Please don't be angry with me because I waited so long to answer and to describe our great misfortune in detail.

First of all, I want you to write to me whether you think it useful, or, rather, absolutely necessary, that you put Nino's manuscripts in order. Clearly, only someone competent should undertake this work. On the other hand, Nino expressed the desire that everything be transmitted to Giulia and be kept by her until other instructions of his come to light. I thought it best to put off sending anything in order to find out whether you are willing to take charge of, and revise, this material, with the help of one of us in the family. Also, I want Giulia to be well informed about my sending you these writings, so that she can claim them before any are lost or interfered with by anyone.

The cremation has already taken place. It was difficult to obtain permission for it, but finally we succeeded. I arranged for a photograph of the corpse to be taken and a death mask made. Now I will have the latter cast in bronze along with the right hand. The plaster

model came out pretty well, but I hope the bronze cast will be even better, since I turned the work over to a sculptor.

I also have some photos taken at Formia after Nino received his liberty-under-surveillance booklet. I haven't tried to locate the booklet yet. Nino suffered a cerebral hemorrhage the evening of April twenty-fifth. That same day, at 12:30 P.M., I had brought him the booklet with the signature of the registrar of the judge in charge of surveillance of the Rome Law Courts, and a statement by the office of surveillance to the effect that as soon as the period of conditional liberty was up, there would be no more security measures taken with regard to Nino.

That day, Nino didn't seem to feel worse than usual. On the contrary, he was far more serene than he had been. I came back to the clinic, as I always did, around 5:30 in the afternoon. As usual we discussed the events of the day; and when I prepared to study a bit for a lesson on French literature, thinking he would continue reading on his own, he objected, insisting that I had come to keep him company and, in any case, shouldn't have taken a job that demanded specialized knowledge and that would exhaust me. Even so, we looked up some words together in the *Larousse*. He didn't want me to read Corneille to him. Afterwards we talked until suppertime. When I suggested taking the booklet down to show to the authorities or calling the Police Commissioner, he said that there was no hurry, I could do it another time.

For dinner he ate the usual soup with pasta, fruit compote, and a piece of sponge cake. He left the room to go to the bathroom, but was brought back on a chair carried by several people. Walking along, he had lost control of his whole left side, but spoke coherently and explained how he had weakened several times yet had not struck his head against anything and had crawled to the door and called for help. A patient who happened to walk by called a nurse, who told him to try to open the door himself, and he succeeded, leaning on his right side. Unfortunately, this cost him an enormous amount of energy when he should have stayed quiet. After he was put back in bed, one of the doctors in the clinic at that time came. Dr. Marino refused to give injections containing stimulants, saying that they

could make him get worse, while Nino continued insisting that they give him these injections, asked for a cordial, pleaded for a double dose—in other words, was entirely himself, able to give a detailed account to the doctor of what had happened. When they brought him a hot-water bottle for his feet, he told me it was too hot, then remarked that the left foot didn't feel very much heat. Professor Puccinelli was expected from one moment to the next for an emergency operation. I gave instructions to the doorman and operating-room staff to tell him to visit Nino as soon as he arrived. About 9:00 P.M. he came in with an assistant, examined the perfectly immobile left side, arm and leg, ordered ice to be put on the head, the hot-water bottle taken away from the feet, and a salt enema, which Nino said he didn't want. He explained to Puccinelli just what he had felt in the bathroom, and clarified the fact that he hadn't fallen unconscious, only lost the sensitivity and mobility of his left side. Puccinelli tried to get him to move the lower limbs, mechanically repeating Nino's own words, "The left leg is weak, yes, it's weak." He ordered that Nino be bled. Nino still spoke clearly, showing some signs of weariness, which Puccinelli noted. The doctor said that he should keep absolutely still; whereas when he had arrived, he had found him on his stomach and had to turn him over. Nino kept trying to find a more comfortable position, grasping the iron bars of the bed with his only free hand. I had to warn him not to lean out too far on his paralyzed left side for fear he would fall out of bed. He understood exactly what I meant and forced himself to move over to the other side. Unfortunately, an hour passed before they came to bleed him, and during this time he vomited several times. Even though I was alone, I was able to help him. He asked to urinate, but while he did, he kept on vomiting. Then he tried to blow his nose, which had become stopped up with food, talked, searched for a handkerchief without saying anything, groped around, then closed his eyes, while continuing to breathe with difficulty. When the bleeding failed to have the effect that it should have, Dr. Belock communicated to the sisters that the patient's condition was extremely grave. I was forced to protest violently against the priest and sisters who came in, so that they would let Antonio alone. Instead, they

kept on insisting on asking him if he wanted this or that. The priest even informed me that I was not the person in charge there. The next morning, about 10:00, Frugone came. All that night the situation remained the same.

When I asked Frugone exactly what condition the patient was in, he said that he was very sick and that he himself had nothing to say, just as an architect has no opinion to express when a house falls down. However, he ordered that leeches be placed on the mastoids and some injections be given. In the afternoon, Nino seemed to breathe more easily. But twenty-four hours after the attack, the violent vomiting began again, and his breathing became terribly painful. I kept watch over him all the time, doing whatever I thought best, wetting his lips, trying to help him to get his breath back artificially when it seemed about to stop. But then he took a last deep breath and sunk into a silence that never could change.

When I called the doctor, he confirmed my fear that it was all over. The time was 4:10 A.M. on the twenty-seventh. At 5:15 the sisters carried the body to the mortuary chamber. After following them down, I stayed there for a while, then came up to meet Carlo, who was supposed to come the same morning. While waiting for him, I telephoned a friend to ask him to send someone to make a death mask. When Carlo came, I asked him to go in search of a photographer. Meanwhile, my friend came with the man who was to make the death mask. It was difficult to get them admitted, but I insisted that formalities be taken care of afterwards and that this was an emergency. Luck was on my side somehow, so that we were able to do the work. Before going out, these persons had to make all sorts of written declarations about their relationship to me, etc.

Then the photographer came. He had to be interrogated, too. And when Carlo returned in the afternoon and headed toward the mortuary chamber, to see his brother, the door was closed in his face. After he refused to give an account of himself, he was told that the prohibition was an order from the Ministry. No one was supposed to see the corpse. We were subjected to an interrogation about the mask and the photographs and had to declare whether we had sent out announcements of his death or not, and whether the

funeral would be a private one. Carlo and I were the only persons present except for the numerous police guards who followed the body out and watched the cremation. In fact, since we didn't yet have a license for the cremation and since Carlo had to go to Sardinia first for the papers, the funeral parlor informed us of a police order which stated that the cremation be done at once; otherwise they would come themselves to bury the corpse. When we appealed to the Ministry, they told us that they didn't know anything about the whole matter and that we should try to find out who had sent the warning to the funeral parlor. Now the ashes have been deposited in a zinc box laid inside a wooden one and set in a place reserved by the government, where it can remain ten years without payment. I will request authorization to transport it. The news of Gramsci's death was broadcast by the radio and published in the newspapers. All of them used the same expression. I'm sending you what appeared in the *Messaggero*. It's shocking. I don't know how to go about protesting. I received a letter from Fabrizio Maffi to the Gramsci family, in which he says that he would be honored to do something in memory of Gramsci. Best regards. I hope that you will write to me.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Principal Editions of Gramsci's Work in Italian

*Scritti giovanili (1914-1918)*. Turin: Einaudi, 1965.

*"Sotto la Mole."* Turin: Einaudi, 1960.

*L'Ordine Nuovo 1919-1920*. Turin: Einaudi, 1954.

*Socialismo e Fascismo: L'Ordine Nuovo 1921-1922*. Turin: Einaudi, 1966.

*La Costituzione del Partito Comunista 1923-1926*. Turin: Einaudi, 1971.

*Lettere dal carcere*. Edited by Sergio Caprioglio and Elsa Fubini. Turin: Einaudi, 1965.

### *Quaderni del carcere*

*Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*. Turin: Einaudi, 1948.

*Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*. Turin: Einaudi, 1949.

*Il Risorgimento*. Turin: Einaudi, 1949.

*Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo stato moderno*. Turin: Einaudi, 1949.

*Letteratura e vita nazionale*. Turin: Einaudi, 1950.

*Passato e presente*. Turin: Einaudi, 1951.



Some Works on or by Gramsci in English

Cammett, John M., *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967.

Fiori, Giuseppe, *Antonio Gramsci, Life of a Revolutionary*. Translated by Tom Nairn. London: New Left Books, 1970.

*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Edited by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.

(This book revises and greatly expands an earlier anthology of Gramsci's writings: *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. Edited and translated by Louis Marks. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1957.)

INDEX

- Abstentionists, 30  
Action Française, 112, 116-119  
Action Party, 243  
Adler, Viktor, 14  
Agrarianism, 8-9, 16  
Albania, 218-219  
Ales, Sardinia, 7-8  
Anarchosyndicalism, 18  
Ancona prison, 69, 71  
Antipositivism, 15, 18, 20, 23  
Apulia, 59, 138  
Arcangeli, Professor, 254  
*Arditi*, the, 25  
Atavism, 228  
Austria, 14, 96  
*Avanti*, 17, 21-22, 29, 82, 206  
Azione Cattolica, 109, 116, 119
- Bacchelli, Riccardo, 104-105  
Bakunin, Mikhail, 10, 96  
Barbagallo, Corrado, 168, 170, 231  
Barbusse, Henri, 261  
Bari, 171-172  
Bartoli, Matteo, 12, 20, 80, 82, 108, 187  
Belock, Dr., 279  
Benevento, 138  
Beraud, Henri, 104  
Bergson, Henri, 17  
Bernstein, Eduard, 47, 230-232  
Berti, Giuseppe, 39; letters 10, 93, 116  
Bertoni, Giulio, 108, 209  
Bianco, Vincenzo, 147, 149
- Bohemians, 182  
Bologna prison, 69, 84  
Bolshevik Party, 34  
Bolshevism, 25  
Bordiga, Amedeo, 26-27, 29-30, 32-33, 62, 64, 95, 97  
Bourgeoisie, the, 15-16, 18, 51-54; haute, 20; petite, 15, 25, 53  
Boyl, Marquis of, 106  
Bucciarelli, Marietta, 62, 64-65  
Buddhism, 122-124  
Bukharin, Nikolai, 29, 34, 47  
Bureaucracy, 5  
Busch, Wilhelm, 65
- Cagliari, Sardinia, 11-12, 100, 102, 107  
Caianello, 69  
Calabria, 127  
Cambridge University, 37, 277  
Campanella, 3  
*Capital* (Marx), 22  
Capitalism, 42, 167-168  
Capitalist countries, revolution in, 6  
Caporetto, Battle of (1917), 22  
Caprioglio, Sergio, 59  
Carena, Pia, 78  
*Case del popolo*, 16, 25  
Caserta, 138  
Castellamare Adriatico, 69  
Castelnau, General de, 116  
Catholic Action, *see* Azione Cattolica  
Catholic Church, 109, 172-173,

Catholic Church (*cont'd*)  
200-201  
Catholic Party, 25; French, 137  
Catholicism, 137, 192, 242; French, 145  
Catholics, 13-15, 17, 116-118, 180  
Cattaneo, Carlo, 205, 207  
Cavour, Conte Camillo Benso di, 53, 115, 167  
Cantonieri, the, 213  
Charivari, 117, 119  
Charles Albert, King, 115  
Charles Albert College, 101  
Chekhov, Anton, 265  
Chesterton, Gilbert, 180  
Child labor, 10-11  
Christianity, 122-123, 173  
Church, the, 205, 220-221; and State, 119, 200-201, 204; *See also* Catholic Church  
Ciarlantini, Franco, 204  
Ciasca, Raffaele, 141  
Ciampi movement, 168  
Civitavecchia, 255, 263  
Class consciousness, 15  
Clinica Cusumano, 261, 263  
Clinica Quisisana, 264; letters written from, 264-276  
Combes, Emile, 119  
Comintern, the, 6-7, 26, 29, 31-32  
Communes, 205  
Communist leaders, 30  
Communist Party: France, 34; Italy, 3, 6, 7, 26-27, 29, 32, 131, 139; Soviet, 34, 224  
Como, 32  
Cooperatives, 25  
*Correspondance Internationale*, 31  
Cosmo, Umberto, 12, 203, 205-206  
Cosacks, 217, 219  
Crémieux, Benjamin, 234  
Crime, 127-128  
Crispi, Francesco, 111-112, 118, 218  
Crispotti, Filippo, 94-95  
Croce, Benedetto, 3-4, 18-20, 45-47, 52, 79, 81-82, 89, 168, 170, 189-193, 195, 204, 207-209,

228-239, 242-245  
Culture, 43-44, 47, 55; national, 4  
Da Vinci, Leonardo, 205, 245, 258  
D'Annunzio, Gabriele, 18, 263  
Dante, 3, 71, 195-196, 205, 207-212  
Daudet, Léon, 108-109, 117  
De Man, Henri, 190  
De Sanctis, Francesco, 88-89  
De Wulf, Maurice, 234  
Democracy, social, 49  
Democrats, 53  
Dictatorship, 5; by the bourgeoisie, 54; Fascist, 30; of the proletariat, 42  
*Divina commedia* (Dante), 207, 210  
Dostoevsky, Fedor, 227  
Doyle, Conan, 180

Economic determinism, 235  
Economics, 47, 236, 239-241  
Economism, 15  
Einaudi, Luigi, 3-4, 12, 59, 86, 88, 204, 206  
Electoral colleges, 14  
Emigration, 13  
Emilia, Italy, 16, 25  
Engels, Friedrich, 9, 169, 197, 241  
England, 243-244; shop-steward movement, 139  
Erasmus, Desiderius, 189  
Erocole, Francesco, 168-169  
Europe, 51; history of, 230-238; reactionary forces in, 5; socialism in, 6, 13; Western, 24, 28; World War I, 3, 5, 13, 20-22, 25; *See also* names of countries  
Exceptional laws, 35

Factory councils, 26-28, 139  
Farinata degli Uberti, 71  
Fascism and Fascists, 3-4, 6, 16, 21, 25, 30, 32-33, 36-37, 40-41, 43, 47, 91, 131, 134, 143, 195, 231, 245  
Fascist Dairy Federation, 142  
Ferrero, Guglielmo, 168, 170  
Ferri, Enrico, 128

Finck, F. N., 108-109  
Fioretti, the, 172-173  
Florence, 110, 168-170  
Foggia, 138  
Ford and Fordism, 50, 182-183  
Formia, 35, 261, 263-264  
Fournière, Joseph-Eugène, 139  
France, 9, 94, 116-117, 127, 163, 230, 240-241, 243-244  
Franz Joseph, Emperor, 95-96  
Freud, Sigmund, 163  
Frugone, Dr., 80  
Fubini, Elsa, 59  
Fülöp-Miller, R., 190, 235-236  
Futurism, 17  
Galileo, 233  
Gandhi, Mohandas, 214  
Garibaldi, Giuseppe, 53, 95, 112, 115, 166, 243-244  
Garofalo, Raffaele, 128-129  
General Confederation of Labor, 25-26, 139  
Genoa, 24, 35  
Genile, Giovanni, 19, 194-195, 242-244  
Germany, 6, 14, 94, 163, 230, 240-241  
Ghilarza, Sardinia, 8-9, 20, 39, 89, 106, 130, 140, 142, 153, 203  
Gide, André, 104  
Gilles, Paolo, 74  
Giolitti, Giovanni, 230-231  
Gobetti, Piero, 33  
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 88, 93, 196-197  
Gompers, Samuel, 204, 206  
Gorky, Maxim, 191, 265-266  
Gradualism, 17  
Gramsci, Antonio, 3; ancestry, 218; arrest of, 5, 7, 35, 71; birth of, 7; character of, 11, 102, 174-176, 193, 200, 262; childhood, 10-11, 114-115, 162, 177-178, 224-225, 247-248, 273-276; and Communist Party, 29-32; cremation, 277, 281; death of, 3, 35, 38, 264, 280;

depression and, 253-254, 257; education of, 10-12, 178; elected deputy, 32; father of, 7-11; health of, 5, 10-12, 20, 30, 36-37, 39, 85, 93, 101, 134-135, 138, 142-143, 221, 228, 249, 251-252, 254-256, 259-260, 263, 278; imprisonment, 7, 36-40; intellectual development, 20-23; letters to mother of, 76-89, 100, 104-105, 113, 130-135, 140-143, 152, 202; library of, 86-87, 106-111; as martyr, 6; mother of, 8-9, 38, 121, 126; and politics, 12, 15, 36, 39; powers of resistance, 100-102; prisons occupied by, 69; *See also* names of prisons; requests for release of, 160, 261; and socialism, 20-25, 27-28; theories of, 6-7; trial of, 38, 71, 130, 134, 156, 252-253  
Gramsci, Carlo, 38, 59, 76-78, 98, 105-106, 130, 133, 140-142, 153, 160, 179, 184, 188, 190, 202, 248-249, 259-260, 263, 280-281; letters to, 100, 158  
Gramsci, Delio, 33-34, 59, 63, 71, 78, 101, 125, 132-133, 137, 139-140, 150-151, 161, 169, 194-196, 223, 228, 232, 258; letters to, 224, 247, 264, 265, 268, 270-273, 275, 276  
Gramsci, Edmea, 77-78  
Gramsci, Francesco, 7-11  
Gramsci, Gennaro, 10-11, 21, 77-78, 90-91, 100-101, 159  
Gramsci, Mrs. Giulia Schucht, 30-31, 34, 59-60, 63-64, 75, 78, 87, 90-91, 93, 98-99, 122, 131, 152, 156-158, 194, 252, 256, 260, 277; letters to, 124, 137, 139, 147, 150, 161, 167, 195, 219, 245, 258, 261, 266; mental health of, 38, 179, 181, 193, 221-223, 226, 228, 250-251  
Gramsci, Giuliano, 34, 63, 71, 78, 136-137, 140, 148, 150-151, 196, 225, 270; letters to, 269, 273, 274  
Gramsci, Grazietta, 78, 140, 142

Gramsci, Mario, 76, 98, 100  
 Gramsci-Paulescu, Teresina, 59, 78,  
 90, 141, 148, 159, 185, 202-203;  
 letters to, 120, 248  
*Grido del Popolo*, II, 21, 116  
 Groethuysen, Bernard, 94-95, 145

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 4,  
 18-19, 42, 45, 88, 165, 167, 174,  
 176, 240-241, 243  
 Hegemony, 42-45, 49-51, 53-55,  
 128-129, 185-186, 235  
 Historicism, 4, 169  
 History, 44, 46, 54-55, 235, 237-238,  
 240; Italian, 243  
 Humbert-Droz, Jules, 34

Idealism, 20; philosophical, 243  
 Illiteracy, 54, 127  
 Immanentism, 19  
 Imola, Congress of, 27  
 Industrial Workers of the World  
 (IWW), 139  
 Industry, 13, 24  
*Inferno* (Dante), 71, 205, 207-212  
 Intellectuals, 5, 48, 50; 227, 239;  
 Catholic, 192; collective, 44, 52;  
 Italian, 3-4, 22, 28, 41-44, 79,  
 185-187, 203-205, 229; organic,  
 43-44, 185, 187  
*Intellectuals* (Gramsci), 163, 185, 187  
 Intelligentsia, Italian, 3-4, 18  
 International affairs, 5  
 Internationalism, 10  
 Interventionism, 21  
 Isernia prison, 69  
 Italy, 3-4, 6, 8-9, 21, 24-26, 28, 34,  
 51-54, 127; North, 13-15, 53,  
 128-129; politics in, 14-15, 32-33;  
 South, 13, 15, 25, 53-54, 79, 112,  
 128-129; unification of, 28, 53, 112,  
 115; *See also* Sardinia; Sicily

Jacini, Stefano, 87-88  
 James, William, 48  
 Jean, Lucien, 256  
 Jews, 213-214, 216-217

Kamenev, Lev, 34  
 Kautsky, Karl, 14, 168-169  
 Kennedy, Margaret, 104  
 Kipling, Rudyard, 64

Labor movement, 25-26  
 Labriola, Antonio, 18, 47  
 Lamarmora, General Alberto, 106-107  
 Lao-tse, 151-152  
*Latifundia*, 8-9  
 Law, the, 227  
 Lenin, Nikolai, 6, 23, 26, 28-29, 31,  
 34, 43, 48-49, 51, 65, 139  
 Leopardi, Giacomo, 3, 104, 246  
*Letters of Gramsci*: notes on, 59-60;  
 style of, 4  
 Lewinsohn, Richard, 68, 86  
 Liberal Party, 164  
 Liberalism, 13, 193  
 Liberty, 46, 52, 54, 237-238; religion  
 of, 242  
 Livorno, 27  
 Loria, Achille, 47, 87  
 Lorianism, 47, 186  
 Lunacharsky, Anatole, 189-191  
*L'Unità*, 31-32, 59, 132, 135, 141,  
 143, 154  
 Luther, Martin, 189  
 Luxemburg, Rosa, 6  
 Luzzati, Alessandro, 95, 97  
 Luzzatti, Luigi, 173-174  
 Lyons, 34

MacDonald, J. Ramsay, 204, 206  
 Machiavelli, Niccolò, 48-50, 82,  
 110-111, 183, 185-186, 205,  
 207  
 Macis, Enrico, 71  
 Maffi, Fabrizio, 281  
 Mafia, the, 83  
 Malaparte, Curzio, 190, 193  
 Mameli, Goffredo, 111-112, 118  
 Manno, Baron Giuseppe, 106-107  
 Manzoni, Alessandro, 184, 187, 210,  
 212  
 Marchese, Eugenio, 106-107

Mariani, Mario, 74-75  
 Marinetti, F. T., 17  
 Marino, Dr., 278  
 Maritain, Jacques, 117, 119, 234  
 Marshall, Alfred, 87-88  
 Martello, Tullio, 95, 97  
 Martore, Egilberto, 94, 96  
 Marx, Karl, 6, 17-19, 23, 42, 44-45,  
 47-48, 75, 96, 168-170, 196-197,  
 216, 219, 241  
 Marxism, 16-18, 21, 40-41, 43, 45,  
 47-48, 50, 74, 82, 170, 186,  
 191-192, 236, 239  
 Marxist Party, 50-51  
 Masses, the, 27, 30, 46, 49, 53  
 Massis, Henri, 94-95  
 Materialism, historical, 4, 189, 236  
 Materialist theory, 55  
 Matteotti, Giacomo, 32-33  
 Maurras, Charles, 108-109, 111, 117,  
 119  
 Maximalism, 17, 232  
 Maximalist centrism, 27  
 Mazzini, Giuseppe, 53, 95-96, 115,  
 243-244  
*Memne*, 228  
 Mercier, Désiré Joseph, 234  
 Merlino, Francesco, 75  
 Metalworkers' union (FIOM), 27  
 Michels, Roberto, 117, 127-128  
 Middle classes, 51, 55  
 Milan, 24, 27, 32, 35, 59, 68-69, 72,  
 76, 82, 84-85, 88, 95-98, 100, 102,  
 107-109, 111, 113-114, 122, 124,  
 128, 130, 132, 134, 142, 157, 172;  
 prison life in, 74-75, 79-80, 87,  
 120-123, 125-126  
 Miners, 9  
 Molinelli, Guido, 63, 65  
 Mommsen, Theodor, 168-169  
 Monks, 173  
 Monopolies, State, 9  
 Morality, 227, 243  
 Moscow, 29-30, 32-34  
 Mussolini, Benito, 3, 17, 29, 32-33,  
 35-36, 38, 40, 134, 193, 195, 206,  
 232, 261

Nansen, Fridtjof, 74-75  
 Naples, 61, 67, 69-71, 73, 83-84,  
 165, 166  
 National reality, 51-52  
 Nationalism, 15  
 Nazism, 3  
 New Political economy (NEP), 29  
 Nicodemi, Dario, 145-146  
 Nilde, Signorina, 64, 181  
*Notebooks*, *see* *Prison Notebooks*  
*Notes on Machiavelli* (Gramsci), 48-49

October Revolution, 22  
*Ordine Nuovo*, 33, 78, 138-139, 149,  
 186, 206  
 Ordine Nuovo group, 7, 13, 24, 26,  
 204  
 Orenburg, 217, 219  
 Oristano, 101, 153  
*Ouvrièrisme*, 16  
 Oxford Congress on Philosophy,  
 191-192

Palermo, 61-62, 67, 69, 72-73, 83  
 Papini, Giovanni, 17  
 Paris, 90, 94-95, 117-118; Commune  
 of, 97  
 Partito Popolare, 13  
 Party, the, *see* Political party  
 Pascarella, Cesare, 84-85  
 Pascoli, Giovanni, 81  
 Passarge, S., 81  
 Paulescu, Paolo, 78-79  
 Paulhan, F., 94, 95  
 Paulhan, Jean, 95  
 PCI, the, 32-34; Central Committee  
 of, 33-34  
 Peasants, 13, 16, 21, 28, 53, 55, 128  
 Pellico, Silvio, 3  
 Piedmont, 42, 115, 218  
 Pili, Paolo, 142-143  
 Pirandello, Luigi, 80, 82  
 Pirone, Pinse, 106  
 Pius X, Pope, 14  
 Pizzardo, Reverend Giuseppe, 261  
 Poddighi, Father, 105  
 Poincaré, Raymond, 118

*Politica*, 243  
 Political figures, 3  
 Political leadership, 14  
 Political party, the, 4, 50-52  
 Politics, Gramsci and, 12, 15, 36, 39  
 Positivism, 16, 18-19, 46-47  
 Poverty, 9, 13  
 Power, 49, 55  
 Pragmatism, 47-48  
 Praxis, philosophy of, 19, 40, 45, 52, 55, 192-193, 234-235, 237, 241; *See also* Marxism  
 Prezzolini, Giuseppe, 17, 111, 204, 206  
 Prison literature, 3  
*Prison Notebooks*, 4, 36, 38-40, 43, 55, 81, 88, 111, 124, 128, 146, 173, 182, 185-187, 236  
 Prison school, 66  
 Privileged classes, 16  
 Proletarian movement, 6  
 Proletarian struggle, 5  
 Proletariat, the, 5, 32, 40, 49, 51, 54, 232; dictatorship of, 42  
 Property owners, 8-9, 16  
 Protectionism, 13-14  
 Protestants, 180  
 Proudhon, Pierre Joseph, 45  
 Psychoanalysis, 163, 222, 226-228  
 Puccinelli, Professor, 279  
 Pushkin, Aleksander, 196  
 Putzola, Anrioga, 140-141  
  
 Radicalism, French, 137  
 Radicals, 21  
 Ravera, Camilla, 81  
 Reed, John, 139  
 Reformation, 189  
 Reformism, 15, 17; social democratic, 26, 49  
 Regina Coeli prison, 62  
 Religion, 220, 243; of liberty, 242; *See also* Catholic Church  
 Renaissance, 183, 205, 207  
 Renzi, Serafino, 80  
 Restoration, the, 237  
  
 Revisionist movement, 47, 230-231, 234-235  
 Revolution, 55; Italian, 53-54; Russian, 5-6, 21-22; social, 24, 28  
 Revolutionaries, 5-6  
 Revolutionary action and thought, 49; twentieth century, 5  
 Revolutionary theory, 5  
 Ricardo, David, 204, 206, 239, 241  
 Risorgimento, the, 4, 15, 51-53, 82, 95, 115, 167, 244  
*Risorgimento, The*, 128-129, 207  
*Rivoluzione liberale, La*, 33  
 Rocco, Alfredo, 243-244, 252  
 Rolland, Romain, 160, 261  
 Rome, 12, 14, 35, 38, 83, 98, 130, 133-135, 138, 140, 254-255, 264-266, 268-277  
 Rosselli, Nello, 94-96  
 Rostovtzeff, M. I., 168, 170  
 Russia, *see* Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  
 Russian Revolution, 5-6, 21-22  
 Russo, Luigi, 188, 191  
  
 St. Francis of Assisi, 172-173  
 St. Thomas Aquinas, 119, 233  
 Salimbene of Parma, Fra, 173-174  
 Salvemini, Gaetano, 4, 20  
 Salvioli, Giuseppe, 168-169  
 Sanna, Antonio, 146  
 Sanna, Malvina, 144  
 Santu Lussurgiu, Sardinia, 11, 178-179  
 Saporio, Dr., 254, 260  
 Sardinia, 4, 7-12, 20, 39, 106-107, 115, 128-129, 179, 217-218; autonomy for, 12  
 Savoy, House of, 8, 53  
 Schools, religious teaching in, 243  
 Schreider, Isaac, 198-199  
 Schucht, Genia, 111-112, 222  
 Schucht, Giulia, *see* Gramsci, Mrs. Giulia Schucht  
 Schucht, Tania, 38, 40-41, 59-60, 121, 131, 141, 143, 148, 151, 153, 161, 195, 225, 277; letters to, 61, 68, 72, 79, 82, 85, 88, 91, 97, 103,

Schucht (*cont'd*)  
 107, 109, 111, 114, 122, 126, 138, 143, 149, 154, 156, 164, 171, 174, 177, 179, 181, 183, 188, 193, 197, 199, 201, 203, 208, 213, 215, 221, 226, 228, 232, 234, 236, 239, 242, 250, 253, 254, 256, 259  
 Sella, Quintano, 107, 110  
 Serebranyi Bor Sanatorium, 222  
 Serrati, Giacinto, 29  
 Sicily, 8-10, 112, 166, 218  
 Silvestri, Carlo, 95, 97  
 Sobero, Mario, 110  
 Social Democracy, 21, 49, 232  
 Socialist revolution, 24, 28  
 Socialism, 5, 6, 10, 16, 20-26, 78; in Europe, 6, 13, 232; Marxist, 20, 22; world, 5  
 Socialist leaders, 15, 27, 30  
 Socialist Party (Italy), 13-15, 20, 22, 25-27; "Communist" faction in, 27, 30; militant, 32  
 Socialists, 24; Italian, 4, 6, 13, 19-21, 23, 29; revolutionary, 5  
 Society, 42-43, 49-50; civil, 50-51, 185, 204; classless, 49; political, 204  
 Soffici, Ardengo, 17  
 Sorel, Georges, 18, 139, 230  
 Soviets (factory councils), 24  
 Spaventa, Silvio, 164-167  
 Special Tribunal, 131  
 Speri, Tito, 95  
 Sraffa, Piero, 37, 59, 206; letters to, 65-68, 277  
 Stalin, Joseph, 32  
 State, the, 42, 44, 48-52, 54-55, 142, 185-186, 200, 207, 226-227; Church and, 119, 200-201, 204  
 Stefani, Alberto de, 88  
 Stirner, Max, 45, 75  
 Sulmona prison, 69  
 Svevo, Italo, 163  
 Switzerland, 23, 34  
  
 Tagore, Sir Rabindranath, 94, 96  
 Taranto, 171-172  
  
 Tasca, Angelo, 12-13  
 Terracini, Umberto, 13, 27, 31, 134, 138  
 Theology, 237  
 "Theses of Zimmerwald," 23  
 Third International, 26, 139  
 Thomism, 119, 233  
 Tilgher, Adriano, 80, 82  
 Tirso basin, 153  
 Toesca, Pietro, 209, 211  
 Togliatti, Palmiro, 13, 27, 30-32, 34, 42, 129, 138  
 Tolstoy, Leo, 124, 245-246, 258, 266  
 Transcendentalism, 237, 242  
 Transformism, 243-245  
 Trotsky, Leon, 6, 29, 31, 34, 190-191  
 Tulli, Enrico, 177  
 Tulli, Pina, 176-177  
 Turi prison colony, 35, 59; letters written from, 136-269; life in, 136-138, 153, 157, 202, 249  
 Turin, 3, 7, 12, 14, 20-21, 24, 26-28, 59, 73, 101, 138-139, 149, 204, 218  
 Turin, University of, 80, 82, 88, 101, 206  
 Tuscany, 187  
 Twenty-one Points, the, 26  
 "Two worlds", 213  
  
 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), 5-6, 29-33, 43, 55, 261  
 Unions, 24  
 Unità Italiana, 166  
 United States, 50, 182-183, 191-192, 245  
 Ustica, 35, 59, 61-63, 68-69, 72, 83; description of, 61-62; letters written from, 61-68; life at, 65-66; prison school at, 66  
  
 Valia (niece of Tania), 125  
 Value, theory of, 241  
 Vatican, the, 116-119, 142  
 Viareggio Prize, 3  
 Vico, Giovanni Battista, 243



Vienna, 31  
Voci, *La*, 17-18  
Volpe, Giacchino, 88, 235  
Voluntarism, 23  
Vossler, Karl, 65

Wages, 9, 13  
War, 229-230  
Werfel, Franz, 163

Workers, 27-28, 41, 49, 54-55;  
  organization of, 50, 139; rights of,  
  24  
Working class life, 10, 13  
World War I, 3, 5, 13, 20-22, 25

Zévals, Alessandro, 117  
Zinoviev, Grigori, 29, 34  
Zionists, 216