



Research Article

Unwritten Power: Reimagining Female Leadership in Italian Literature through Feminist and Transformational Frameworks

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Abstract

This paper examines how Italian literature reimagines female leadership by focusing on characters whose authority does not stem from social status or rhetorical skill, but from their ability to endure trauma, offer emotional support, preserve cultural memory, and develop an intellectual identity. The analysis employs a feminist theoretical framework that combines Carol Gilligan's ethics of care, Judith Herman's trauma theory, and Hélène Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*, along with models of transformational and servant leadership (Bass & Riggio; Greenleaf). The study highlights five key female figures: Gertrude (the Nun of Monza) and Lucia Mondella from *The Betrothed*, Ida Ramundo from **History: A Novel**, Marianna Ucrìa from **The Long Life of Marianna Ucrìa**, and the maternal voice in Natalia Ginzburg's **Family Lexicon**. Each protagonist opposes patriarchal norms not through direct rebellion but via alternative forms of resistance: moral resilience, cultural transmission, inner intellectual life, and maternal leadership. By linking literary character analysis with leadership theories and trauma-informed critique, this paper advocates for redefining leadership as a relational, ethical, and contextually grounded practice—shaped as much by silence, care, and memory as by vision or speech.

Keywords: Italian literature, female leadership, feminist literary analysis, transformational leadership, servant leadership, caretaker leadership, gender and power, historical trauma, resilience, moral authority, cultural heritage, emotional strength, ethical clarity, women's agency

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1. Introduction

Italian literature has long served as a space to explore the dynamics of power, gender, and resistance. However, the idea of leadership—particularly as exercised by women—has often remained implicit or overshadowed by more traditional narratives of authority. This paper aims to highlight female leadership in Italian literature, not as a form of public command or institutional control, but as a complex set of practices shaped by trauma, caregiving, cultural preservation, and ethical conviction. Moving beyond conventional leadership models that focus on visibility, charisma, and formal power, this study contends that female protagonists in Italian literary works demonstrate deeply transformative forms of leadership that are relational, emotionally intelligent, and historically grounded.

The central thesis of this paper is that Italian literature reimagines leadership through the lives and voices of women whose power is shaped not by dominance or hierarchy but by resilience, rebellion, moral clarity, and the enduring capacity to care. These women—Gertrude in *I Promessi Sposi*, Lucia Mondella, Ida Ramundo in *History: A Novel*, Marianna Ucrìa in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, and the maternal narrator in Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare*—lead from within the margins. Their authority is not consistently recognized by the societies they inhabit, but it becomes evident through their influence on others, their ethical commitments, and their ability to endure and respond to suffering with empathy, intelligence, and purpose, and their rebellion.

To frame these literary portrayals, the paper employs an interdisciplinary methodology that brings together feminist literary criticism, trauma theory, and contemporary leadership studies, particularly the models of transformational and servant leadership. Carol Gilligan's ethics of care, Judith Herman's theory of trauma, and Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* provide critical tools for analyzing how gendered experiences of silence, caregiving, and marginalization become sources of leadership. These frameworks are complemented by the leadership theories of Bernard Bass, Ronald Riggio, and Robert Greenleaf, which help articulate how humility, service, and moral example constitute powerful but often overlooked forms of leadership.

By examining how female characters lead through emotional labor, cultural transmission, and personal integrity rather than institutional authority, this paper advocates for a broader and more inclusive understanding of leadership. In contexts where formal power is denied or out of reach, these women develop alternative strategies to assert agency and create change. Whether through Lucia's transformative moral clarity, Gertrude's trauma-induced but commanding presence, Ida's maternal resistance in the face of fascist violence, or Marianna's intellectual self-fashioning within a patriarchal society, these characters demonstrate leadership as a layered and ethically meaningful practice. Likewise, Ginzburg's depiction of female memory-keepers in *Lessico familiare* shows how the act of storytelling itself can become a quiet yet enduring form of leadership—preserving cultural identity across generations.

This study argues that leadership, as depicted through these women, is not a fixed or public role but a fluid, emotional, and ethically driven response to historical limitations. Italian literature, in this light, becomes an essential archive of alternative leadership styles—those created in silence and care, inspired by memory, and maintained through relationships. These stories urge us to rethink leadership not as a matter of command or charisma, but as the ability to nurture, endure, transform, and lead through presence rather than words.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines feminist literary criticism, transformational and servant leadership theories, trauma studies, and cultural memory scholarship. These interconnected perspectives are used to analyze representations of female leadership in Italian literature, not as displays of formal authority, but as deeply rooted responses to social constraints, historical trauma, and moral obligations.

Feminist theory offers the foundation for understanding how gendered structures influence the lives and voices of women in literature. Based on Carol Gilligan's ethics of care (1982), the research emphasizes how relational, emotional, and nurturing influences are key to the leadership shown by characters like Ida Ramundo and Lucia Mondella. These women demonstrate a care-based leadership model that exists within private and domestic spaces, challenging dominant ideas of power and control.

Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and Robert Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership model inform the reading of female characters who lead through humility, moral integrity, and service to others. These frameworks help clarify how seemingly powerless women—through emotional intelligence, spiritual clarity, and ethical example—become agents of transformation. Lucia's redemptive influence on the *Innominato* and Marianna Ucria's intellectual resistance are understood through these theoretical lenses.

Trauma theory, particularly the work of Judith Herman (1992), is applied to understand the psychological and emotional toll of systemic violence, coercion, and isolation. Gertrude's leadership is analyzed not only as a function of authority but as a trauma-induced reaction to patriarchal oppression. Ida Ramundo's maternal resilience and ultimate psychological collapse are similarly explored as responses to prolonged exposure to war, loss, and marginalization.

Additionally, cultural memory theory—particularly Gardner and Laskin's (1995) conception of leadership through storytelling and narrative cohesion—guides the analysis of Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare*. Here, leadership is seen in the act of preserving familial and collective identity through language, memory, and the transmission of shared cultural values across generations.

Methodologically, this research employs close reading and comparative literary analysis. Primary texts are examined within their historical and cultural contexts, focusing on language, structure, and character development. Using this approach, literary portrayals of female characters are critically analysed to uncover embedded leadership practices that challenge traditional models based on authority, visibility, and dominance. Instead of viewing leadership as a fixed set of traits or positions, the study considers it a fluid, context-dependent process rooted in resilience, ethical commitment, and relational intelligence.

By integrating these frameworks, the study redefines leadership as a multifaceted, emotionally resonant act that thrives in the margins of power and emerges from struggle, silence, and care.

3. Leadership

Leadership style refers to the methods by which leaders guide their teams in executing plans and motivating members across political, business, and military settings (Kotter, 2001; Lindsay).

According to Daniel Goleman (2000), there are six primary leadership styles that yield different outcomes.

Autocratic leadership functions through a direct authority structure where leaders retain full control and oversee their team members. The leader manages all communication channels and asserts dominance during interactions, as noted by Chira (2016). The task-focused nature of this leadership style leads to negative outcomes such as employee bullying and fear, while also reducing worker satisfaction (Salin & Helge, 2010; Forsyth, 2010).

Paternalistic leadership involves leaders demonstrating parental care through loyalty and extended employee commitment. Employees under this leadership style tend to exhibit better organisational skills, higher trust, and stronger loyalty (Erben & Guneser, 2008; Bass). The approach has two main drawbacks, as highlighted by Padavic and Earnest, because it can lead to biased treatment of employees and become difficult to sustain when market conditions turn uncertain and union influence grows. Paternalistic leadership tends to be more effective in collectivist non-Western societies than in individualistic Western societies, according to Cheng et al. (2004), who also observed cultural differences in its acceptance.

Democratic leadership encourages collective decision-making while promoting group interests and equality through active participation, according to Woods (2010) and Foster (2002). The approach results in improved productivity and creativity, along with higher morale, but it can fail when quick decisions are needed or when roles require clear definition (Martindale, 2011).

Laissez-faire leadership, introduced by Lewin, Lippitt and White in 1939, grants complete decision-making authority to followers while leaders intervene only when asked. The approach yields optimal results when employees possess both skill and motivation, but their performance declines when they lack essential guidance and feedback from their leaders (Essortment; Forsyth, 2010).

The transactional leadership approach employs reward and punishment systems to manage performance through performance-based rewards and exception-based intervention when performance issues arise (Liu, Liu & Zeng, 2011). The operational efficiency and productivity improve under this style, but emotional environments negatively impact its performance unless effective emotional management is in place.

Through transformational leadership, individuals learn to view situations differently as their personal goals align with broader organisational objectives. Transformational leaders exhibit charisma, intellectual stimulation, personalised attention, and visionary communication, according to Schultz and Schultz (1998) and Carless, Wearing & Mann (2000). Through active engagement of intrinsic motivation and innovation, this style fosters significant organisational transformation.

Research shows leadership effectiveness relies on establishing trust because it results in higher organisational citizenship behaviours, employee satisfaction, and openness (Legood et al., 2021). The success of different leadership styles strongly depends on organisational culture, task characteristics, group dynamics, and cultural orientation.

My inquiry centres on identifying the leadership styles demonstrated by the female protagonists in Italian literary works, with particular focus on how their behaviours, decisions, and interpersonal interactions conform to or contest traditional leadership models.

4. Gertrude, the Nun of Monza: Power and Resistance in a Patriarchal World

Alessandro Manzoni presents one of his darkest and most powerful literary portrayals in *The Betrothed* through the character of Gertrude, the "Nun of Monza." Inspired by the historical figure Marianna de Leyva y Marino, Gertrude is a noblewoman forced into a convent against her will, yet she manages to assert control over its internal affairs. Her story is both that of a woman crushed by patriarchal oppression and one who actively resists it. Even before her birth, Gertrude's fate is sealed by her family: as a noble daughter, she is destined for religious life to safeguard family wealth and inheritance. From an early age, she is conditioned to believe that becoming a nun is her unavoidable destiny. Her father uses psychological manipulation and environmental control to suppress any signs of resistance. Whenever she shows hesitation, she is met with isolation, emotional pressure, and the fear of disappointing her family. Eventually, under coercion, she accepts her role in the convent. Only then do the other nuns begin to show her affection—marking the start of her tragic downfall. Within the convent, Gertrude proves far more active and assertive than the average nun. Owing to her noble lineage, she is addressed as *La Signora* ("The Lady") and holds a position of authority. As both a member of the religious order and aristocracy, she enjoys privileges and acts with a sense of entitlement, believing she can impose her will on others. Within these confines, she establishes dominance by setting strict rules for the younger nuns and postulants, exerting a level of control she would not have been allowed in the outside world. However, this assertion of authority stems not from strength but from a deep need to claim some space for herself within an oppressive system. The power she holds is ultimately hollow. Though she dominates life within the convent, she remains at the mercy of larger forces: Church authority and familial expectations. Trapped in this double bind, Gertrude becomes both victim and oppressor, making her one of the most complex characters in Manzoni's novel. In a desperate attempt to escape her confinement, Gertrude begins a secret affair with Egidio, a man later revealed to be a criminal. Through this illicit relationship, she seeks emotional and physical liberation. Instead, it draws her deeper into a cycle of moral corruption. Under Egidio's influence, Gertrude becomes complicit in acts of extortion, intimidation, and possibly even murder. The young novice who exposed their affair is ultimately killed—an act that marks Gertrude's final descent. At this turning point, she transforms from a victim of systemic oppression into an active participant in wrongdoing.

The story exposes the limited options available to women within a patriarchal society. Gertrude's attempts at rebellion fail to grant her freedom and instead result in destruction, not liberation. Her character is not shown as inherently evil but as a woman faced with two bleak choices: submission or resistance, both dictated by a society that offers her no real agency. *The Betrothed*, through Gertrude's journey, powerfully demonstrates the devastating consequences of forced monasticism and the precarious space granted to female authority in a patriarchal world. Gertrude symbolises noblewomen who were denied control over their lives, often being sent to the Church for reasons of family finance or political interests. Although the convent provides her with some authority, she remains a figure of coercion and tragedy. Her efforts to attain autonomy through rebellion lead not to empowerment but to ruin.

Gertrude's leadership in *The Betrothed* is complex, paradoxical, and deeply influenced by trauma and systemic oppression. Her authority does not conform to traditional or idealised models of leadership. Instead, it arises from a restricted and coercive environment, motivated by survival, and ultimately results in moral compromise and personal downfall. Within the

convent, Gertrude displays an authoritarian leadership style. She enforces strict discipline on younger nuns and postulants, demands obedience, and is addressed as La Signora, a title reflecting her elevated social standing. However, this authority is limited to the cloistered world of the convent—a microcosm where she can exert control. Beyond these walls, she remains powerless, subject to the decisions of patriarchal institutions and her family's will. Nonetheless, Gertrude's leadership is rooted in coercion and psychological trauma. Forced into religious life against her wishes, her initial resistance was met with manipulation, isolation, and emotional pressure from her father. Her eventual submission was not a genuine choice, but a survival strategy. Seen in this context, her leadership is a reactive form of self-assertion—a means of reclaiming control in a world that repeatedly denies her agency. It is not a leadership characterised by vision or inspiration, but one defined by self-preservation and emotional compensation. She seeks to assert her identity and influence wherever she is permitted.

As the story unfolds, Gertrude's leadership becomes morally flawed. Her secret affair with Egidio—a manipulative and criminal figure—marks the point where her authority turns destructive. She becomes involved in deception, extortion, and possibly murder, using her influence in ways that breach the very principles of her religious role. Her leadership shifts from a defensive stance to active wrongdoing, driven by a desperate need for liberation. However, this pursuit of freedom ultimately worsens her entrapment, revealing the dangerous effects of seeking power without true independence.

Gertrude thus exemplifies a tragic, inverted form of leadership. The authority she acquires is limited, conditional, and ultimately superficial—dependent on the very system that has deprived her of freedom. Her rebellion only pulls her further into guilt and corruption. As both victim and oppressor, she becomes a potent symbol of how patriarchal systems distort and ruin female agency.

Gertrude's leadership is neither empowering nor redemptive in any traditional sense. It is authoritarian, trauma-influenced, morally flawed, and ultimately self-destructive. Yet it remains deeply human—a reflection of the tragic complexity of a woman struggling to assert control in a society that offers her no real alternatives. Through Gertrude, Manzoni presents a haunting vision of leadership built on suffering and shaped by structural injustice.

In *I Promessi Sposi*, Gertrude is often seen as a morally flawed or villainous character—a woman who misuses her power and causes suffering to others. However, her character gains new interpretive depth when viewed through trauma theory. As Judith Herman (1992) describes in *Trauma and Recovery*, trauma can deeply fracture a person's sense of self, breaking the link between internal morals and external actions. In traumatic situations—particularly those involving long-term coercion and emotional imprisonment—the victim may develop survival strategies that outwardly seem like complicity, cruelty, or moral failure. Gertrude's shift from a reluctant noble daughter to a harsh, authoritarian figure within the convent is not just a story of personal decline but a psychological response to a system of totalising patriarchal control. She is not merely a victim of her father's command but of a wider social order that restricts female independence under the pretence of duty, obedience, and spiritual discipline.

Herman's concept of "chronic disempowerment" is particularly relevant to Gertrude's journey. Without the chance of open resistance, Gertrude is systematically deprived of her voice, agency, and emotional will. Her education, future, and even her inner desires are heavily influenced by male authority, especially by her father, whose manipulation and emotional

coercion make her passive and complicit in her own entrapment. Once forcibly confined to the convent—a space that pretends to be sacred but actually acts as a prison—Gertrude’s act of asserting dominance over others does not indicate personal empowerment. Instead, it reflects what Herman describes as a “traumatized identity” trying to regain control by copying the same structures of domination that previously destroyed it (Herman, 1992, p. 102). Her cruelty is a sign of trauma, not sadism.

Thus, Gertrude’s actions inside the convent can be reinterpreted as a form of distorted agency—a desperate effort to stabilise a fractured self in an environment where all genuine expressions of dissent or autonomy are barred. Her authoritarianism, far from being a sign of restored power, becomes a performance of control in a context where real agency remains inaccessible. What appears as moral corruption is, in fact, a psychological consequence of internalised violence. Read in this way, Gertrude emerges not simply as a failed leader or morally ambiguous character, but as a deeply damaged individual—a woman caught in a feedback loop of trauma, trying to navigate the ruins of a self shaped and shattered by patriarchal oppression.

Gertrude, the "Nun of Monza" in *The Betrothed*, is a profoundly tragic and morally complex character shaped by trauma, coercion, and systemic oppression. While her actions may be morally compromised, traces of goodness remain—her early resistance to an imposed fate, her emotional vulnerability, and her situational intelligence reveal a self-striving for autonomy in a world that denies her agency. Her cruelty and control are not signs of inherent malice, but symptoms of a fractured identity formed under psychological captivity.

Her leadership, though authoritarian and ultimately destructive, functions as a survival mechanism within the closed system of the convent. It reflects a paradoxical authority: real in its local enforcement, yet hollow and constrained by patriarchal domination. Gertrude’s leadership is not empowered or inspirational—it is reactive, trauma-driven, and self-protective. Yet, it also exposes how traditional structures of power can deform leadership itself when autonomy and ethical choice are denied.

Gertrude thus emerges not as a villain, but as a woman caught between submission and rebellion, victimhood and agency. Her story is a powerful critique of the systems that create distorted forms of leadership and suppress moral potential. In her, Manzoni offers a haunting meditation on how oppression can twist both the soul and the structures meant to preserve it.

5. Lucia Mondella

Lucia Mondella is the central female protagonist of the historical novel *The Betrothed*, a character who embodies the values of humility, faith, and quiet moral strength. She is introduced through a modest physical description that highlights her natural grace and reserved demeanour. Rather than being portrayed as a woman of exceptional beauty, Lucia is depicted as a young woman shaped by poverty and simplicity, deeply rooted in the rural life of 17th-century Lombardy (Manzoni, 2023, Ch. 2). Lucia works in a silk mill and has been raised by her mother Agnese. Despite her modest background, she leads a relatively secure life—until she becomes the object of desire of Don Rodrigo, a local nobleman who abuses his power. Her engagement to Renzo, a fellow villager, is thus threatened, forcing her into a series of displacements and trials that reveal her inner strength.

Lucia embodies the purest and most sincere form of religiosity in “The Betrothed”. Her actions are consistently guided by a deep belief in Divine Providence, and even when faced with danger, she responds with compassion and unwavering trust in a higher power. This is especially clear in her reaction to her own kidnapping, where instead of giving in to fear or bitterness, she shows concern for her captor, the Innominato's, soul. Her moral compass stays steady, rooted in a sense of mercy and justice that applies to all, regardless of their status or intentions. Throughout the novel, Lucia lives in a delicate balance between religious conviction and human emotion. Her love for Renzo is not dramatic or overtly expressed but reveals itself through quiet devotion and dignified restraint. Her faith shapes a refined emotional world—sensitive, grounded, and deeply sincere. She contrasts with more assertive or worldly characters but remains very much a product of her environment: a modest, rural girl shaped by her time and place. Though often seen as meek or overly devout, Lucia shows subtle intelligence and quiet agency. She can take initiative when necessary, such as finding a clever way to ensure help arrives quickly when needed. Her encounter with the Nun of Monza reveals her ability to evoke empathy and forge meaningful connections even in dark circumstances. The pivotal moment of the story occurs when she persuades the Innominato to reconsider his life through her humility and sincerity. Her spiritual strength, rather than outward resistance, becomes the force that prompts his transformation. Lucia's ethical worldview is firmly rooted in compassion and the belief that mercy has the power to redeem. She even suggests the possibility of shared grace between herself and her former oppressor, marking the start of his moral redemption. Her journey continues beyond her physical liberation and eventual reunion with Renzo. Burdened by a vow made during her captivity, she initially resists the path to personal happiness, struggling between her desires and spiritual duty. Only through the wise counsel of a trusted spiritual guide can she reconcile these inner conflicts. Ultimately, Lucia's story is one of quiet but profound leadership. She does not command others or seek influence, yet her moral clarity, emotional resilience, and steadfast faith make her a catalyst for change among those around her. Her strength lies not in power, but in her unwavering dedication to compassion, humility, and the belief in a divine justice greater than herself.

Lucia Mondella represents a quiet yet deeply effective form of leadership in “The Betrothed”, one that challenges conventional notions of authority and power. Unlike other characters in the novel who exercise dominance through force, status, or manipulation, Lucia leads through moral clarity, compassion, and spiritual conviction. Her leadership aligns with what modern theory would describe as servant leadership—a model grounded in humility, empathy, and a selfless commitment to the well-being of others.

Lucia's actions are guided not by ambition or a desire to control, but by a consistent faith in Divine Providence and a profound ethical sense. She does not command others, yet she influences them in lasting and transformative ways. The clearest example is her encounter with the Innominato, where her gentleness and sincerity awaken his conscience and lead him to repentance. In leadership terms, this is an instance of transformational leadership, where change is brought about not by force but by example, emotional intelligence, and moral influence. Lucia inspires change by embodying the very values she believes in—faith, compassion, and mercy.

Lucia's influence extends far beyond her immediate circumstances. Though often perceived as passive or overly pious, she consistently demonstrates agency through small but decisive actions—persuading others, offering counsel, and remaining emotionally resilient under pressure. Her quiet strength lies in her ability to uphold her convictions without imposing

them, making her a model of values-based leadership. In theological and ethical terms, her belief that mercy leads to redemption becomes the foundation of her worldview and the driving force behind her decisions.

What makes Lucia's leadership particularly striking is its countercultural nature. In a society that equates authority with dominance and control, Lucia redefines power as something rooted in integrity and service. She leads not with force, but with faith, not through command, but through example. Her moral authority stands in contrast to the institutional and patriarchal powers that shape her world, offering a different vision of what it means to lead. Lucia Mondella embodies a form of leadership that is spiritual, ethical, and deeply relational. She may not hold formal power, but her influence is profound.

Carol Gilligan's seminal work *In a Different Voice* (1982) offers a powerful reimagining of moral development, arguing that traditional psychological theories—such as those proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg—prioritise abstract principles of justice, autonomy, and rule-based reasoning, often reflecting a distinctly male moral perspective. In contrast, Gilligan identifies a parallel model of moral reasoning grounded in relational ethics: an "ethic of care." According to this framework, many women understand moral problems not in terms of conflicting rights or universal duties but through relationships, context, and the responsibilities of care. Rather than striving for detachment or impartiality, the ethic of care values emotional attentiveness, responsiveness to others' needs, and a commitment to preserving relationships and alleviating harm. Care-based ethics does not imply moral weakness or passivity; rather, it redefines strength as the ability to nurture, support, and protect others through interpersonal connection. Lucia Mondella embodies Gilligan's ethic of care in both her demeanour and her influence over others. Unlike figures who assert control or authority through speech or action, Lucia operates within the moral logic of compassion and relational responsibility. Her interactions—particularly with Renzo, her mother, and the Innominato—reflect a form of leadership based not on power or persuasion but on emotional presence and unwavering ethical consistency. When confronted with fear, violence, and powerlessness, she does not retaliate or posture; rather, she centres others' dignity and well-being, trusting in humility and inner conviction.

This is most evident in her encounter with the Innominato, a moment often interpreted as religious or symbolic. However, through the perspective of Gilligan's theory, Lucia's ability to awaken his conscience arises from her care-focused moral clarity. She does not plead or argue; her composed suffering and integrity undermine his worldview. Her influence stems from what Gilligan would describe as relational moral leadership—a form of leadership based on care, rooted in empathy and the refusal to cause harm. Lucia, often underestimated because of her silence and passivity, becomes a transformative moral agent precisely through the values that the ethic of care aims to promote: connection, compassion, and emotional resilience.

6. Elsa Morante's „La Storia”: A Portrait of War and Survival

Einaudi published Elsa Morante's historical novel *La Storia* under the Struzzi series no. 58 in 1974. The story is set in Rome from 1941 to 1947, illustrating the impact of World War II on Italian society. The book combines realistic storytelling with poetic elements, depicting war atrocities, destroyed neighbourhoods, the Jewish ghetto, and partisan operations in the Castelli Romani. "La Storia" remains a fundamental work in Italian literature, despite receiving mixed reviews from readers. Ida Ramundo exemplifies silent strength and resilience amidst

war, discrimination, and personal tragedy. Living in fear, hardship, and burden, she becomes a powerful symbol of those who endure history's darkest moments without recognition or reward. Through her, Morante explores the idea of resistance—not through direct confrontation, but through passive resistance and maternal protectiveness. Ida is deeply insecure about her partly Jewish identity, and her life is shaped by secrecy and inherited fear. As a widowed schoolteacher under fascist rule, she is already marginalised and vulnerable. Her fragile world shatters entirely in 1941 when she is raped by Gunther, a young, intoxicated German soldier. From this trauma, she bears her second son, Giuseppe, known as Useppe. From then on, Ida's life is driven by one imperative: to survive. She does not resist oppression with open defiance or political rebellion but endures quietly. Her form of resistance lies in her resilience—to persevere, to protect her children, and to keep them alive amid violence, fear, and poverty. Ida's strength manifests through her endurance of war-related hardships rather than acts of heroism. She walks through bombed Rome—from San Lorenzo to Pietralata—protecting Useppe from destruction. Her eldest son Nino initially supports fascism but later joins the partisans. His dangerous political decisions force him to distance himself from his mother, yet she remains worried for his safety. Ida faces profound loss when Nino dies during a police chase. At this point, Useppe becomes her sole purpose, a fragile child born into a world already scarred by violence and fear. From his birth, Ida dedicates herself entirely to his care, investing every resource into protecting him. As Useppe's health declines—due to epilepsy, malnutrition, and the psychological toll of wartime—Ida clings to him desperately. His death signifies not just the loss of a child but the collapse of her last connection to hope and life. It shatters her already fragile mental state. After Useppe's death, Ida descends into a profound psychological breakdown. She retreats from reality, refusing to let go of her son's lifeless body, living in a state of delusion and denial. In her moment of absolute loss, only one creature remains: Bella, the family's faithful dog. More than a pet, Bella represents her last link to affection, loyalty, and emotional grounding. The dog bears witness silently to Ida's despair and the disintegration of her family. Eventually, authorities intervene—removing Ida from the home and euthanising Bella, who is seen as a threat or a remnant of her painful reality. Bella's death symbolises the extinguishing of the final protector of Ida's inner world. With Bella gone, everything intimate, loving, and loyal in Ida's life is erased. She is institutionalised in a psychiatric hospital, where she remains for the next nine years, living in psychological isolation until her death.

Ida Ramundo, the central figure of Elsa Morante's *La Storia*, may not initially appear to embody traditional ideas of leadership. She is neither assertive, politically active, nor influential in any public sphere. In fact, much of her life is characterised by fear, passivity, and trauma. Yet, through her endurance, maternal devotion, and quiet resilience in the face of immense suffering, Ida exemplifies a powerful and unconventional form of leadership—one rooted in survival, empathy, and the emotional labour of caregiving in a brutal and dehumanising world.

Ida's story urges readers to rethink what leadership truly signifies. In a world torn apart by violence and injustice, her maternal, emotional, and sacrificial leadership remains a quiet, enduring force—a testament to human dignity amid societal collapse.

In Elsa Morante's **History: A Novel**, Ida Ramundo is depicted not as a conventional heroine or authoritative figure but as an emotionally fragile, socially marginal woman whose life is shaped by intersecting forces of historical violence, racial discrimination, sexual trauma, and political collapse. Initially, her timidity and passivity may seem contrary to any model of leadership; she is a teacher who avoids confrontation, a mother often immobilised by fear, and

a woman actively hiding her Jewish heritage in Fascist Rome. However, when viewed from the perspective of trauma theory—particularly Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* (1992)—Ida’s actions reveal a much deeper psychological story. Herman describes complex trauma as the long-term impact of exposure to ongoing threats, coercion, and helplessness, especially when escape or resistance is impossible. Ida, who endures a life of cumulative violence—from the early loss of her parents to her rape by a Nazi soldier—embodies the lasting effects of such trauma. Her near-dissociative episodes, sudden memory lapses, and emotional numbness are not signs of mental weakness but somatic responses to surviving an “unlivable reality” (Herman, 1992, pp. 135–137).

Ida’s silence, indecision, and submissiveness are often mistaken—by readers and those around her—as moral failure or passivity. However, from a trauma-informed perspective, these traits reveal the imprint of sustained psychological injury. Her rape is a pivotal moment not only because of the immediate violence but because it crystallises a broader pattern of powerlessness—her Jewish identity becomes a liability, her body a site of occupation, and her home a space of permanent insecurity. Importantly, she chooses to carry the child born from that violence, Useppe, and becomes wholly devoted to his care. This caregiving becomes the core of her moral identity and primary mode of resistance. Amidst fascism, genocide, bombings, and displacement, Ida asserts what little control she has by creating a protective world around her son—an emotional sanctuary insulated, however temporarily, from the brutality outside.

Through this role, Ida exemplifies what Carol Gilligan (1982) defines as the ethic of care: a relational and context-driven moral framework that privileges responsibility, compassion, and the preservation of human connection. Gilligan critiques traditional justice-based models of ethics for neglecting the way women, in particular, navigate moral life through attentiveness to others and the sustenance of relationships. Ida’s leadership is enacted not through assertiveness or public influence, but through self-sacrificial devotion—her moral authority resides in her refusal to allow the violent logics of fascism to invade the domestic, emotional space she constructs around Useppe. Every bowl of soup, every lullaby, every small act of comfort is imbued with ethical significance; it is Ida’s way of saying “no” to a world determined to erase empathy and love. As such, her caregiving is not merely instinctual or maternal—it is political, even radical.

However, this ethic comes with a heavy psychological toll. Ida never fully recovers from the accumulated traumas she endures, and when Useppe dies—her final source of emotional meaning—she is utterly exhausted. Her breakdown is not sudden; it is the gradual unraveling of someone who has absorbed too much grief and repression to carry on. According to Herman, trauma victims may appear outwardly functional for long periods while inwardly deteriorating. Ida’s emotional collapse reflects this: her death soon after Useppe’s is not accidental but the final stage of what Herman calls “traumatic surrender” (Herman, 1992, p. 202)—when the psyche can no longer sustain the illusion of safety or coherence. Morante does not depict Ida as a martyr, saint, or revolutionary. Instead, she offers us a portrait of ethical endurance amidst historical catastrophe. Ida’s leadership exists in the margins—in every effort to shield, nurture, and bear witness—and her final silence is not a sign of defeat, but a record of the price paid by those who lead through caregiving in a world that rewards domination and erases suffering.

In *La Storia*, Elsa Morante provides a radical redefinition of leadership. Ida does not lead through charisma, command, or control, nor does she influence political systems or rally

groups. Instead, her leadership is grounded in caregiving, love, survival, and moral integrity amid destruction. In a world ravaged by fascism, war, and social collapse, Ida's acts of maternal protection and emotional resilience embody a form of leadership that is deeply moral, relational, and profoundly human.

Ida's leadership begins in her role as a mother. Her life is entirely organised around the care and survival of her son, Useppe. This caregiving is not passive or apolitical; it becomes a quiet form of resistance. In a context where institutions are used to control, harm, and erase, Ida's maternal devotion protects not just a child but the very possibility of love and tenderness. Her insistence on preserving a small domestic world—feeding, nurturing, loving—is a refusal to allow violence to consume all aspects of life. Though she is voiceless in the public sphere, her leadership emerges in the private one, where she becomes a moral anchor for her child and a figure of ethical endurance for readers.

Her strength lies in survival, not victory. Ida continues despite her deteriorating physical and mental health, despite grief, loss, and fear. She does not lead by changing external events, but by refusing to be morally broken by them. Her endurance is not the absence of suffering—it is the persistence of care and dignity within it. She shows that leadership can emerge not from overcoming pain, but from staying emotionally present in the midst of it. Her refusal to detach, to become numb or cruel, is a form of ethical leadership, even if it lacks recognition or reward.

Ida leads not only her child but also the reader, offering a counterexample to dominant forms of heroic, militarised, and masculine leadership. She does not save lives on a battlefield, but she saves her son's spirit for as long as she can. She does not confront fascism head-on, but she preserves human feeling in a world that has abandoned it. Her leadership is moral and emotional: she does not instruct, but she teaches through example. By continuing to care, grieve, and love in a world that punishes vulnerability, she challenges the very definitions of what leadership entails.

This form of leadership aligns with feminist and ethical theories that value care, interdependence, and relational strength. Carol Gilligan's ethics of care and Joan Tronto's work on caregiving argue that care is a moral and political act, not merely a private one. Ida's actions demonstrate this: her caregiving is not sentimental, but radical. Feminist theorists like Judith Butler and bell hooks emphasise that vulnerability, emotional presence, and love are not signs of weakness but foundations of resistance. Ida's leadership is powerful precisely because it is grounded in these qualities. She maintains humanity not by defeating inhumanity, but by refusing to mirror it.

Although Ida's story ends in tragedy—she loses Useppe and ultimately breaks down—her leadership does not fail. Instead, it reveals its highest cost. Her collapse is not a failure of character but a consequence of bearing the unbearable. Yet even in her unravelling, she continues to model a kind of moral truth: that caring in a world of cruelty is not only difficult, but heroic in its own way.

Ida Ramundo is a leader because she insists on love, care, and ethical presence when the world encourages detachment, violence, and survival at any cost. She leads not through command, but through emotional integrity. In *La Storia*, Elsa Morante presents a vision of leadership that is maternal, quiet, and often invisible to many—but essential for preserving our shared humanity.

7. Natalia Ginzburg's „*Lessico familiare*“: Memory, Language, and Resilience in Turbulent Times

Natalia Ginzburg published her novel “*Lessico familiare*” (Family Lexicon) with Einaudi in 1963. Ginzburg denies that the work is an autobiography; however, she states that it is a book about the people in her life (Ginzburg, 1963). The novel has been translated into multiple languages, including Hebrew, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean (Einaudi, 2010). The book is a charming and loving account of the Levi-Tanzi family from the 1920s to the early 1950s. It offers a nostalgic and humorous portrayal of the author’s daily family life, emphasising their language, mannerisms, and habits that are at the heart of the family. This distinctive use of language, the “family lexicon,” gives the novel its title and functions as a powerful tool for memory and storytelling. The dominant figure in the household is Giuseppe Levi, the stern and eccentric father, whose phrases and reprimands become part of the family’s collective memory. Although presented with a cheerful and often comic tone, the novel does not shy away from sombre historical facts. It recounts the fascist period, the impact of racial laws, and the political repression on Ginzburg and her family. Her exile in Abruzzo, the arrest and subsequent murder of her husband, Leone Ginzburg, for anti-fascist activities, and the disillusionment following the fall of the Resistance add layers of tragedy to the narrative. Furthermore, the novel addresses the suicide of Cesare Pavese, as well as the overall mood of Italy’s intellectual and political circles following the war. The story is told in a chaotic order, with events and characters introduced through dialogue and recollection rather than a strict chronological sequence. The characters, both family members and friends, are vividly depicted through Ginzburg’s restrained and direct prose, conveyed through their speech and actions. The maternal (Tanzi) and paternal (Levi) relatives, alongside intellectuals connected to the family, are portrayed with vividness, highlighting the intersection between private life and historical context. Although “*Lessico Familiare*” was not a commercial bestseller, it was widely reviewed, frequently reprinted, and remains a landmark of Italian literature from the 1960s (Einaudi, 2010). The 2010 edition features an introduction by Cesare Segre, reinforcing its literary importance. In 2016, it was also adapted into an audiobook narrated by Anna Bonaiuto for Rai Radio 3 (Bonaiuto, 2016). Thus, through the rich dialogue between personal and public spheres, “*Lessico familiare*” offers a deeply moving account of family relationships, culture, and politics during a time of upheaval. Ginzburg’s ability to combine the details of private life with the events of the Great War makes the novel a timeless masterpiece of Italian literature.

Natalia Ginzburg presents a world in which women play a vital, though often understated, role. While the narrative is primarily shaped by the dominant presence of her father, Giuseppe Levi, it is the women—quiet, steady, and emotionally resilient—who form the heart of the family and its memory.

One of the central female figures is Ginzburg’s mother, Lidia Tanzi. She is portrayed as gentle, affectionate, and tolerant, offering a calm and nurturing presence in contrast to her husband’s authoritarian and eccentric temperament. Her simple, reassuring way of speaking and her quiet authority within the household give her a kind of maternal leadership. Without ever needing to assert herself loudly, she becomes a stabilising force and emotional anchor for the family.

Natalia Ginzburg herself, though she claims to be merely an observer in the story, is the voice that carries the reader through the chaos and charm of her family life. As the narrative unfolds,

she slowly emerges—not only as a daughter and family member, but also as an intellectual, the wife of the anti-fascist activist Leone Ginzburg, and eventually as a widow. Her presence reflects a kind of strength found in vulnerability, and a deep connection to the ordinary details of language, memory, and domestic life. Her ability to weave personal experience with collective history makes her voice quietly powerful.

Ginzburg's sisters also appear in the narrative, offering subtle but meaningful portraits of women shaped by the same household. Sometimes they resist their father's rigidity; other times they bond with each other in shared understanding. Although they are not central characters, they represent different ways of navigating the family's strict environment and provide a sense of solidarity and quiet rebellion.

Other women—friends, the wives of intellectuals, and members of the cultural world surrounding the family—occasionally enter the story, adding further depth. These women reflect the broader social and political landscape of 20th-century Turin, particularly its progressive and anti-fascist circles. While not always in the foreground, their presence contributes to the broader historical context that shapes Ginzburg's private world.

Even working-class women—maids, neighbours, and acquaintances—make minor but memorable appearances. Through brief, vivid scenes, their language and expressions often become part of the family's "lexicon," the collection of repeated phrases and sayings that gives the book its title. These minor characters add social texture and a sense of lived reality to the story.

The women in "Family Lexicon" are not portrayed as grand heroines, but as quiet forces of continuity, affection, and resilience. They shape the world not through authority, but through care, routine, and the intimate language of everyday life. While the men in the story often dominate the conversation, it is the women who preserve the family's emotional core—and who, through Ginzburg's clear, subtle prose, leave the most lasting impression.

In this story, leadership manifests through cultural transmission and memory transfer among family members and intellectually connected groups beyond public view. Women have traditionally performed this role in preserving cultural traditions and language knowledge while acting as guardians of family history. Natalia Ginzburg illustrates how this subtle leadership style functions daily to sustain cultural heritage and collective memory. The author ascribes a central role to his mother, who maintains family unity within the novel. Through her parenting, she exerts a strong influence on cultural development and emotional growth, even though her husband Giuseppe Levi remains a demanding scientist. Through her spoken language, she conveys a perspective that blends irony with resilience, along with the capacity to face challenges with a light touch. She contributes her voice to the "family lexicon," which forms an individual linguistic framework that unites family members despite historical divisions.

Family language functions beyond emotional transmission because it functions as both cultural and mnemonic transmission in this story. Through oral transmission, repeated parental expressions along with inherited sayings serve to maintain cultural traditions which extend across multiple generations. The author shows how cultural leadership manifests through word transmission because words endure throughout times of war, exile, and loss to preserve family identity.

Female characters, aside from the author's mother, demonstrate this subtle yet significant leadership in the novel. The women of the Tanzi and Levi families, including aunts, sisters, and close friends, carry an oral history that preserves the past and ensures ongoing continuity. Through their storytelling, they share family anecdotes that both transmit moral values and influence the intellectual and moral development of younger family members.

The story portrays cultural transmission as a process that moves from private domestic settings into public intellectual and social domains. By choosing to remain "in the shadows," Ginzburg presents herself as a product of this cultural transmission. Her writing reflects the influence of female family members who taught her how to preserve memories through verbal exchange and written records, all while she grew up in a culturally vibrant environment with active political discussions.

The Italian Resistance and intellectual community recognised Leone Ginzburg as a cultural leader due to his crucial contributions to the Italian Resistance movement and the intellectual sphere. Without Natalia's writing, his legacy might have faded into obscurity because she served as the guardian of his memory and historical context. Through this act, female leadership demonstrates its power to remember and narrate history while ensuring that past voices do not vanish into nothingness.

Memory transmission functions as both an active preservation technique and a transformative method. Women who share stories and expressions alongside values transform historical content when they pass it down to future generations while addressing new social circumstances. Through this transformation process, female cultural leadership creates connections that span time between past traditions and present-day advancements.

Women who preserve culture and memory play a vital role in sustaining both family and collective identities. Ginzburg demonstrates how women pass down words and gestures through stories to make history resilient, thereby forming invisible bonds between different generations. Leadership appears through such subtle and often unrecognised methods, which serve as the essential foundation for developing a society that remembers its past while shaping an enlightened future.

This story offers a compelling exploration of a unique form of leadership—one rooted in culture, memory, relationships, and often driven by women. It questions traditional public and hierarchical notions of leadership by positioning it instead in the private, domestic, and emotional realms, especially through the roles played by women within families. The leadership here is not characterised by commanding others or possessing formal authority, but by the ability to preserve, transmit, and transform cultural memory and identity across generations. Leadership manifests in this narrative through the continual sharing of family language, values, traditions, and collective memory. It appears not through visibility or dominance but through everyday acts of storytelling, caregiving, and linguistic creativity. The mother, central to Natalia Ginzburg's *Family Lexicon*, exemplifies this form of cultural leadership. Her influence is subtle yet profoundly formative. Through her ironic, resilient, and emotionally intelligent language, she not only sustains the family during times of historical upheaval but also helps shape their cultural and moral landscape. Her repeated sayings, familiar expressions, and emotional tone form what Ginzburg calls the "family lexicon"—a private vocabulary that unites members, cultivates identity, and subtly conveys worldviews. This form of leadership—cultural leadership via oral tradition and memory—has long been practised by women and remains largely unacknowledged in conventional historical narratives.

It is often unseen because it operates in the background of political and intellectual life, yet it underpins both. The mother's role is essential in maintaining cohesion, passing down resilience, and embedding family stories into the broader cultural history. Despite Giuseppe Levi's stature as a public intellectual, it is the mother who anchors the family emotionally and culturally. What we observe here is a form of intergenerational, mnemonic leadership. The women in the Levi and Tanzi families—mothers, aunts, sisters—extend the practice of transmitting memory and culture not through institutions but via language and relationships. They do so in kitchens, through conversations, jokes, repeated phrases, and anecdotes. This oral tradition does more than preserve nostalgia; it provides a moral and intellectual foundation for the younger generations, influencing their perceptions of history, identity, and responsibility. It offers continuity amid rupture, especially during war, exile, and loss.

Natalia Ginzburg herself becomes both a product and a continuation of this tradition. Her decision to write from "the shadows," to focus not on herself but on the language and gestures of others, reveals how leadership can also take the form of cultural stewardship. Through her writing, she elevates the memory-keepers—those whose leadership consists not of directing others, but of ensuring that what matters is not forgotten. Her prose embodies the very leadership she describes: quiet, persistent, and rooted in care. Furthermore, Ginzburg's preservation of her husband Leone Ginzburg's legacy illustrates how female leadership functions as an act of historical narration. Without Natalia's voice, Leone's contributions to the Resistance and Italian intellectual life might have faded. Her role as a memory-bearer enables cultural continuity and restores visibility to those whose public leadership is at risk of being lost to time. Thus, the story reveals that leadership is not always loud or commanding. It can be quiet, intimate, and deeply embedded in everyday life. This cultural and mnemonic leadership, largely performed by women, sustains not only family identity but also broader collective memory. It connects generations, strengthens moral understanding, and provides a foundation for rebuilding societies that have experienced rupture. In this sense, Ginzburg redefines leadership as something rooted in the most human and often overlooked activities—storytelling, remembering, and passing down words that carry meaning.

8. Marianna Ucrìa: The Silent Rebellion

"The Long Life of Marianna Ucrìa" is a historical novel written by Dacia Maraini and published in 1990, when the book was awarded the Premio Campiello. The novel is based on the life of the author's maternal ancestor, Marianna Alliata Valguarnera (1730-1794), who was compelled to marry her uncle Pietro Valguarnera to preserve the family's wealth. Women during the 18th century existed under male dominance since they received little more than household responsibilities and social rules that defined their lives. Those who chose to surpass traditional social norms received severe punishments. Dacia Maraini brings Marianna Ucrìa to the forefront through her historical novel. Born deaf and mute, Marianna's silence becomes a symbol of her isolation as well as the source of her inner strength. Through her intelligence, resilience, and unwavering determination to fight social barriers, Marianna overcomes all obstacles and achieves success in her life. Because she was born deaf and mute, Marianna faces complete isolation from her surroundings, but through this experience she develops her personal worldview. In a society where most communication and authority rested on spoken words, Marianna's deafness would have likely rendered her invisible. She demonstrates that silence does not equate to powerlessness or inactivity. Her silence becomes a tool that allows her to express herself intellectually and rebelliously. Marianna's noble family upbringing in

early 1700s Palermo provides her with social advantages but also confines her within rigid societal expectations. The patriarchal norms of the time demand that Marianna's father, Duke Signoretto Ucrià, helps control her while demonstrating affection. The Ucrià family arranges her marriage to Pietro Ucrià when Marianna is thirteen, to safeguard their economic interests. The marriage between Marianna and Pietro Ucrià exemplifies the forced matrimony faced by aristocratic women, who had no say in choosing their partners. Despite these restrictions, Marianna exhibits independence by engaging in intellectual pursuits. Through reading and writing, she gains the ability to communicate with the outside world, since she cannot hear or speak. Her literacy allows her to absorb Enlightenment literature alongside David Hume's philosophical works, which she discovers during that period. Her intellectual curiosity poses a direct challenge to the conventional female role that society expects women to accept passively.

Through her mental strength and personal resilience, Marianna manages to escape the oppressive societal structures that surround her. She begins to question her preordained role within her family and society as she grows older. Her husband Pietro maintains an emotional distance from her, as their relationship lacks an intellectual connection. Traditional authority and family honour remain Pietro's primary concerns, but Marianna dedicates her thoughts and emotions to the pursuit of liberation, extending beyond her physical silence into the intellectual and emotional constraints imposed on women.

By questioning established norms, Marianna performs a subtle yet powerful act of rebellion. She escapes her marital confinement through an affair with Saro, the young servant who is at her side. Through this brief encounter, Marianna demonstrates her ability to claim independence while expressing her true desires. The affair reveals her emotional complexity and her capacity to love, qualities society has tried to erase from her being. Marianna defies societal laws to pursue her personal choices, even if it means battling the gendered and class-based barriers imposed by society.

The negative outcomes she faces from her family do not prevent Marianna from continuing to discover herself. She evolves into a woman leader through intellectual exploration, emotional awakening, and personal defiance, challenging the traditional roles imposed on women by society. Although she holds no formal authority, her strength resides in her mind and her unwavering determination to overcome the barriers that seek to confine her. The silent Marianna gains power through her deafness, which touches the hearts of others and enables her to surpass obstacles as a deaf, mute woman.

The novel depicts Marianna Ucrià's life as evidence that intelligence combined with determination allows people to challenge social oppression. Her journey from social outcast to changemaker demonstrates how inner strength and intellectual resistance can overcome opposition. Marianna's story illustrates how she overcame physical silence, but she also battled cultural and social barriers that sought to confine women to specific societal roles.

Throughout the years, Marianna evolves from an uninvolved character into a purposeful woman. After her husband's death, she manages his estates alone while raising children and making decisions that challenge the prevailing social norms of that era. The novel portrays Marianna's personal growth alongside her social transformation, revealing both her individual journey and the societal constraints faced by women during that period.

As she begins to reject the ideological structures of her society—especially those governing marriage, religion, and motherhood—Marianna embodies what feminist philosopher Hélène

Cixous famously theorised as *écriture féminine*: a mode of writing and subjectivity that resists phallogentric language and instead draws on the rhythms, contradictions, and sensuality of the female body and psyche. In her 1975 manifesto *Le rire de la Méduse*, Cixous calls upon women to “write themselves into history” by disrupting the symbolic order that has long excluded or distorted female experience. *Écriture féminine* is not simply a literary style; it is a philosophical stance and political act—a way of thinking, knowing, and expressing that refuses to be confined by rationalist binaries, linear logic, or the silencing mechanisms of patriarchal discourse. It privileges multiplicity over mastery, intuition over hierarchy, embodiment over abstraction. Marianna, through her reading and writing, enters into this tradition not by authoring fiction per se, but by constructing an alternative form of literacy—an inner dialogue and intellectual landscape that gives voice to what had previously been unspoken.

Her resistance to the fixed roles assigned to her—silent daughter, obedient wife, passive victim—unfolds not through grand gestures but through a slow and deliberate reclaiming of her inner life. As she absorbs Enlightenment philosophy, she begins to tell her story differently: not as a mute object of others’ decisions, but as a thinking, perceiving, and ethical subject. This redefinition of self is central to *écriture féminine*: the act of inscribing one’s own lived experience in a language that does not yet exist within official structures of meaning. Marianna’s silence, once imposed by trauma and social expectation, becomes a canvas onto which she writes her resistance—not with spoken declarations but with reading, contemplation, and a quiet yet radical realignment of values. She thinks herself into being in a space where her body and intellect were previously erased.

In this way, Marianna’s development mirrors a feminist genealogy of leadership that does not operate through dominance or visibility, but through narrative subversion and epistemic reconstruction. Her voice, while barely audible in the literal sense, becomes unmistakably present through the moral and philosophical authority she gains. This is a form of leadership that Cixous champions: the reclamation of voice not through mimicry of male structures, but through an entirely different relation to knowledge, desire, and identity. Marianna’s interior transformation thus stands as both a personal awakening and a literary intervention—an example of how *écriture féminine* can function as a form of political and intellectual resistance within a system designed to render women silent.

Marianna Ucrìa can be understood as a transformational leader not because she holds formal authority, but because she enacts the core principles of transformational leadership as theorised by Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio (2006). Transformational leadership is defined by the ability to inspire change through ethical conviction, intellectual stimulation, and personal example—qualities that Marianna exemplifies throughout her gradual emancipation from patriarchal control.

Although born into a Sicilian aristocracy that enforces silence, obedience, and subjugation—especially for women—Marianna gradually refuses to conform to its dominant values. Her life, initially shaped by trauma and isolation, is redirected by a deep and sustained process of self-education. Through immersion in Enlightenment texts and philosophical inquiry, she begins to develop a critical consciousness that challenges the religious dogma, gender hierarchies, and familial expectations that once confined her. This intellectual awakening constitutes a subversive form of leadership. Rather than accept the inherited moral codes of her environment, Marianna reconstructs her own ethical framework grounded in reason, care, and justice. Her transformation is not performative but deeply internal, rooted in introspection and clarity of thought.

At the same time, Marianna's leadership is rooted in moral integrity and ethical consistency. She becomes a symbol of idealised influence—not because she demands loyalty or attention, but because she quietly refuses to uphold the cruelties and hypocrisies she has inherited. Her actions towards servants, children, and even those within her own family reflect a deep sense of justice and empathy. She listens more than she speaks, and her silence—initially imposed by trauma—gradually develops into a conscious refusal to partake in oppressive discourse. This silence becomes rhetorical, a refusal to legitimise systems that have historically silenced her.

Although she never directly inspires others in a traditional political sense, Marianna's evolution exerts a subtle influence on those around her, particularly on the younger generation of girls for whom she becomes a model of quiet resistance. Her decision not to remarry, her distancing from religious orthodoxy, and her refusal to endorse the rituals of aristocratic life are all choices that embody a personal code of dignity and autonomy. In this way, Marianna's life narrates a new possibility for female subjectivity within a society that has long denied it. Her transformational leadership is not based on her ability to command others, but on her capacity to transform herself. By rethinking the world and her role within it, Marianna creates an alternative form of leadership—one grounded in intellectual emancipation, ethical principle, and the radical act of telling a life otherwise silenced.

9. Conclusion

The female figures examined in this paper—Gertrude, Lucia, Ida, Marianna, and Ginzburg's maternal narrator—present a radically altered view of leadership that challenges patriarchal assumptions about power, voice, and authority. These women do not lead by commanding others, occupying public platforms, or seeking institutional control. Instead, they exercise influence and moral authority through means often dismissed or undervalued: caregiving, ethical restraint, cultural remembrance, and intellectual withdrawal. Their experiences of trauma and marginalisation do not silence them; rather, they reinterpret silence, endurance, and relational responsibility as legitimate forms of power.

By applying theoretical models from feminist ethics, trauma studies, and leadership scholarship, this paper demonstrates that these characters engage in complex negotiations of agency within highly constrained environments. Whether it is Gertrude's authoritarianism as a trauma echo, Ida's caregiving as a moral stand against fascist brutality, Marianna's philosophical resistance through writing and silence, or Ginzburg's preservation of memory as intergenerational leadership, each narrative broadens the understanding of what leadership can mean in contexts where conventional authority is inaccessible or unviable.

By centring these literary figures, we are encouraged to reimagine leadership not as control, visibility, or dominance, but as a layered, ethically charged response to historical violence and personal vulnerability. Italian literature, in this way, not only reflects the limitations placed on women but also presents alternative models for change—quiet revolutions carried out through care, thought, memory, and ethical clarity.

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