

Premio Strega 2025: Inspired Lunacy, Madhouses, Genetics, and Trauma. Mental Health in Contemporary Italian Literature

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Introduction

Founded in 1947 by Maria and Goffredo Bellonci and sponsored by Guido Alberti, owner of the Strega liquor company that gave the award its name, the Premio Strega—one of Italy’s most renowned literary prizes—aims to reflect the country’s literary interests and tastes, among both readers and professionals. The competing books have since been judged by the original jury, the “Amici della domenica”¹, later joined by literary circles, school classes, the Dante Alighieri Society, and different Italian Cultural Institutes abroad. Over the years, the prize was awarded to authors now considered canonical, including Ennio Flaiano, Cesare Pavese, Alberto Moravia, Elsa Morante, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Natalia Ginzburg, Anna Maria Ortese, Lalla Romano, Primo Levi, Umberto Eco, Dacia Maraini, and Margaret Mazzantini among others. The most recent winner was Andrea Bajani (2025) with his novel *L’anniversario*, which won both the main Premio Strega and the Premio Strega Giovani.

Having followed the 2025 edition closely, I would like to dedicate this report to a theme shared by many of the twelve competing books: mental health. Its prominence is striking, given the enduring stigma surrounding mental health in Italy and considering that the prize’s selections suggest a growing public interest in discussing mental health beyond the medical field—whether in schools or through a literary platform like the Premio Strega.

After a brief overview of mental health in Italy, I will examine the aspects mostly addressed by this year’s competitors, aiming at tracing an itinerary through the different texts. A thematic progression was therefore preferred over an alphabetical order or the

1 “Sunday Friends” (my translation).

ranking of the finalists. Consequently, only the novels in which mental health plays a central role are included here.

Mental Health in Italy

The June 2024 Mental Health Report from the Italian Health Ministry states that the mental-health expenditures in 2023 reached nearly 3,590 million euros²—an amount insufficient to meet current care needs. The OECD confirms that “Italy spends less on [general] health than the EU average”.³ The Mental Health Report 2023-24 further shows a 10% rise in demand for mental-health services compared to 2022, alongside more ER visits and hospitalizations, but fewer psychiatric professionals (29,114 in 2023⁴, 30,101 in 2022⁵), fewer residential facilities, and fewer hospital beds.⁶

Such structural limits are tied to persistent social and cultural biases. As Bruno et al. observe, “[s]tigma toward mental illness in Italy is deeply rooted in a combination of historical, cultural, and structural factors”.⁷ Using Kenny et al.’s (2018) “Prejudice towards People with Mental Illness Scale”, they demonstrate the link between bias and discriminatory practices towards people with mental illnesses, while also showing Italy’s lack of tools to analyse the problem. These findings reflect prevailing public attitudes toward mental health.

For instance, the 2025 Doxa survey, conducted on 1,000 people aged 18-65, shows that 72% of respondents believe that people with mental-health problems are dangerous to themselves, while 55% think such disorders make individuals dangerous to others as

2 See Ministero della Salute — Ex DGSISS — Ufficio di statistica: *Rapporto sulla salute mentale. Anno 2023*. Rome, 153. https://www.salute.gov.it/new/sites/default/files/imported/C_17_pubblicazioni_3502_allegato.pdf (1.12.2025).

3 OECD – European Commission: *State of Health in the EU. Italy. Country Health Profile 2023*, 10. <https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/m/italy-country-health-profile-2023> (20.12.2025).

4 See *Rapporto sulla salute mentale. Anno 2023*, 43.

5 See Ministero della Salute — Ex DGSISS — Ufficio di statistica: *Rapporto sulla salute mentale. Anno 2022*, 41. https://www.2001agenziasociale.it/materiale/Rapporto%20S.M._2022.pdf (19.11.2025).

6 Pietro Pellegrini: *Rapporto Salute Mentale 2023: un commento*. In: *la terra è blu. forum salute mentale* (2.12.2025). <https://www.news-forumsalutementale.it/rapporto-salute-mentale-2023-un-commento-di-pietro-pellegrini/> (19.11.2025).

7 Francesca Bruno et al.: *The Prejudice Towards People with Mental Illness Scale: Psychometric Properties of the Italian Version (PPMI-IT)*. In: *EJIHPE* 15.126 (2025), 1-14, 8.

well. Furthermore, only 60% considered mental illnesses curable.⁸ Regarding the impact of social media on mental health, 40%—mostly 18-34-year-olds—felt pressured to meet certain aesthetic standards and feared being judged, 55% felt that being different posed a risk, and almost 50% reported anxiety or inadequacy after using social media.⁹ Another relevant point emerges from the Ipsos Mind Health Report for 2024, which notes within the Italian population a “scarsa consapevolezza sul tema del benessere mentale e sull’importanza di un supporto professionale, nonché la crescita del trend relativo all’autodiagnosi e alla gestione autonoma dei disturbi”.¹⁰ The internet and social media can therefore exacerbate mental-health issues¹¹ or subtly reinforce stigma even through language, as highlighted by Alice Facchini.¹²

Culturally, literature—especially that validated through awards—can both reflect and shape public attitudes, helping to challenge entrenched prejudices. The following section examines how the 2025 Premio Strega novels engage with mental-health themes and what this reveals about contemporary Italian culture.

Inspired Lunacy, Madhouses, Genetics, and Trauma: Premio Strega 2025 and Mental Health Issues in Modern Italian Literature

Skimming through the available articles documenting and commenting the 2025 Premio Strega edition, most authors point out several recurrent topics across all twelve books, such as family and personal relationships. Because these motifs dominated the finalists,

8 Older and thus not considered in detail here, but still worth mentioning, is a study by Carmine Munizza et al. on the perception of depression in Italy. A striking 75% of interviewees felt that people affected by depression should not talk publicly or openly about it. See Carmine Munizza et al.: Public Beliefs and Attitudes towards Depression in Italy: A National Survey. In: *PLOS ONE* 8.5 (2013), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0063806>.

9 See Doxa: *Salute mentale 2025 (settembre 2025)*. <https://www.quotidianosanita.it/allegati/allegato1758790755.pdf> (19.11.2025).

10 Ipsos – AXA: *Mind Health Report: una fotografia della percezione della salute e benessere mentale in Italia* (2024). <https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/mind-health-report-fotografia-percezione-salute-benessere-mentale-italia> (19.11.2025). “[...] limited awareness of mental well-being and the importance of professional support, as well as a growing trend of self-diagnoses and the independent management of mental health issues” (my translation).

11 On the impact of social media on mental health we refer here in an exemplary way to a recent systematic review: Fazida Karim et al.: Social Media Use and Its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic Review. In: *Cureus*, 12.6 (2020), 15. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.8627> (20.12.2025).

12 See Alice Facchini: Uno squilibrio da non trascurare. In: *Parole – Internazionale Extra* (2023). <https://www.internazionale.it/essenziale/notizie/alice-facchini/2023/03/15/squilibrio-disagio-psichico> (19.11.2025).

some critics considered the selection overly monothematic and insufficiently reflective of today's diverse literary scene.¹³ Many reviewers also noted a shift toward autobiography and autofiction, which Paolo di Paolo sharply criticized as a sign of a crisis in fiction.¹⁴ Sceptical reviews aside, it is undeniable that this year's edition's true focus was mental health, as Melania G. Mazzucco, head of the prize's executive committee, stated: "Il *leitmotiv* di quest'anno è la follia. [...]. Nel 2025 la salute mentale è un'emergenza sociale, ma anche letteraria".¹⁵ The competing books approach the issue through four main, often interrelated perspectives: the figure of the brilliant yet unstable genius; the *topos* (both in the sense of a recurrent theme and of a physical place) of the psychiatric ward; the female experience of institutionalization, linked to questions of genealogy and inherited vulnerability to certain (mental) illnesses or trauma; trauma itself, understood both as familial and structural.

These four categories structure the following analysis, with two representative books discussed for each.

Inspired Lunacy: Dino Campana in *Ricordi di suoni e di luci. Storia di un poeta e della sua follia*¹⁶ (Martinoni, 2025) and Kurt Gödel in *Incompletezza. Una storia di Kurt Gödel*¹⁷ (Gambetta, 2024)

The trope of the brilliant yet tormented genius is central to Renato Martinoni's *Ricordi di suoni e di luci* and Deborah Gambetta's *Incompletezza*. Martinoni retraces the final years of poet Dino Campana (1885-1932), many of which he spent in a psychiatric institution, while Gambetta follows the history of the Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel (1906-1978), focusing both on his ground-breaking work on the incompleteness theorems and his mental health difficulties.

13 See Laura Casale: Premio Strega: ombre e luci (?) dell'edizione 2025. In: *Ultima pagina* (2025). <https://ultimapagina.net/blog/2025/07/05/premio-strega-ombre-e-luci-delledizione-2025/> (19.11.2025)

14 See Paolo di Paolo: L'avventura dell'io e il premio Strega 2025. In: *siamomine* (2025). <https://siamomine.com/premio-strega-2025-autofiction-letteratura/> (19.11.2025)

15 Sabina Minardi: Premio Strega, una dozzina a sorpresa. In: *L'Espresso* (2025). <https://lespresso.it/c/cultura/2025/4/15/premio-strega-dozzina-sorpresa/53774> (19.11.2025). "This year's *leitmotiv* is insanity. [...]. In 2025 mental health is a social, but also a literary emergency" (my translation).

16 "Memories of Sounds and Lights. Story of a Poet and his Folly" (my translation). Renato Martinoni: *Ricordi di suoni e di luci. Storia di un poeta e della sua follia*. San Cesario di Lecce 2025.

17 "Incompleteness. A Story about Kurt Gödel" (my translation). Deborah Gambetta: *Incompletezza. Una storia di Kurt Gödel*. Milano 2024.

Rather than offering Campana's factual biography, Martinoni explores the "perdita della Poesia" (embodied in the novel as "The Chimera"), as Pietro Gibellini, who nominated the novel for the Premio Strega, describes it¹⁸—a loss that mirrors the protagonist's disintegration. This fragmentation is conveyed not only spatially, with chapters structured following the random places the poet visits, but also through a terse prose and a dream-like atmosphere in which reality and delirium blur: "Ora marcia spedito lungo la mulattiera, il protagonista di questo romanzo di poesia (sempre meno di poesia) e di follia (sempre più di follia). Attraversa ponti gettati sopra profondi dirupi. E qualche volta, guardando giù, gli viene voglia di lasciarsi cadere. 'Tutto è vano', direbbe allora, mentre precipita: 'Tutto è sogno'".¹⁹ Unable to recover Poetry, the protagonist is left only with Folly and, ultimately, Death: "Ha quarantasette anni non ancora compiuti, il folle, ed è internato da quando ne aveva trentatré. Non c'è un cappellano che lo assista. La sorte dei mentecatti è proprio questa".²⁰

'Incompleteness' is likewise the central concept in Gambetta's novel, an unconventional narrative text that gives ample space to mathematical explanations and formulas, weaving together "la ricerca con la sorpresa".²¹ Here, 'incompleteness' refers not only to Gödel's theorems, but also—perhaps above all—to his need to recover the missing pieces of his life: "Perché il senso di tutto sta nell'equilibrio, la natura si fonda sull'equilibrio. Le cose che cedono al disequilibrio crollano. Occorre complementarità".²² The book traces both his intellectual journey and his gradual descent into obsessive-compulsive patterns and persecutory fears.

Both novels expose the extreme fragility of exceptional minds, revealing the tragic beauty found at the intersection of genius and psychological breakdown.

18 <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/ricordi-di-suoni-e-di-luci/> (19.11.2025). "loss of Poetry" (my translation).

19 Martinoni, *Ricordi di suoni e di luci*, 103-104. "Now he marches swiftly along the mule track, the protagonist of this novel of poetry (though less and less poetry) and folly (though more and more folly). He crosses bridges built over deep chasms. And at times, as he looks down, he feels the urge to let himself fall. 'Everything is vain,' he would say as he fell: 'Everything is a dream'" (my translation).

20 Idem, 161. "He is not even forty-seven yet, the fool, and he's been in an institution since he was thirty-three. There's no chaplain to look after him. That's the fate of madmen" (my translation).

21 According to Claudia Durastanti, <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/incompletezza-una-storia-di-kurt-godel/> (19.11.2025). "(re)search with surprise" (my translation).

22 Gambetta, *Incompletezza*, 146. "Because the meaning of everything lies in balance, nature itself is grounded in balance. Whatever yields to imbalance collapses. We need complementarity" (my translation).

The Madhouse Experience: Ferdinando Palasciano in *Di spalle a questo mondo*²³ (Marasco, 2025) and grandma Venera in *Quello che so di te*²⁴ (Terranova, 2025)

While only briefly touched in the novels discussed above, the psychiatric internment becomes central in Wanda Marasco's *Di spalle a questo mondo* and Nadia Terranova's *Quello che so di te*. Marasco draws on the life of Ferdinando Palasciano (1815-1891), a surgeon who, on the battlefield, treated all wounded regardless of allegiance—thus anticipating one of the guiding principles of the Red Cross—but who later suffered from severe dementia. Terranova, by contrast, uncovers the hidden story of her grandmother Venera, institutionalized after a stillbirth and a subsequent breakdown.

In both novels, the psychiatric ward functions as a 'heterotopia' in Michel Foucault's sense: a secluded, rule-bound space apart from ordinary life²⁵, evoked already by Marasco's title. She alternates between Ferdinando's wife's first-person narration—marked typographically by italics—and Ferdinando's own perspective, rendered in the third person, suggesting his estrangement from himself due to dementia. As memories, dreams, and delusions overlap, the psychiatric ward becomes an ever-present backdrop, haunting every layer of the narrative: "Oppure, se non era un sogno, dopo le lacrime aveva imboccato la strada delle illusioni. E quella stanzuccia manicomiale, assoluta e scarafaggescia, con l'odore di cose marcite e i tonfi di frutti caduti, poteva essere davvero il suo giardino, emerso dalla graniglia su cui poggiava i piedi".²⁶ At the same time, while trying to reassemble the fragments of his life, Ferdinando finds, as Giulia Ciarapica notes, "nella follia uno sguardo più lucido sulla realtà".²⁷

Such clarity is not granted to Venera in *Quello che so di te*. On the contrary, she is further silenced: labelled 'hysterical' by doctors, rendered literally mute by the internment experience, and erased from hospital records, thereby losing her story and her voice:

23 "Turned Away from the World" (my translation). Wanda Marasco: *Di spalle a questo mondo*. Vicenza 2025.

24 "What I Know About You" (my translation). Nadia Terranova: *Quello che so di te*. Milano 2025.

25 See Michel Foucault: *Des espaces autres (Hétérotopies)*. In: Idem: *Dits et Écrits, 1954–1988*, vol. IV (1994), 752-762.

26 Marasco, *Di spalle a questo mondo*, 9. "Or else, if it wasn't a dream, after the tears he wandered down the road of illusions. And that tiny hospital room, stark and crawling with cockroaches, smelling of rot and echoing with the thud of fallen fruit, could truly have been his garden, risen from the gravel beneath his feet" (my translation).

27 <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/di-spalle-a-questo-mondo/> (19.11.2025). "in madness a more lucid perspective on reality" (my translation).

Delle altre centodue entrate da gennaio a giugno potrei sapere tutto ciò che gli incendi e l'incuria dell'archivio hanno risparmiato – spero che ciascuna di loro abbia generato per sangue, affetti o affiliazione una persona che oggi ne ascolti il richiamo. Spero che le storie del manicomio si moltiplichino e che le internate, [...], le isteriche, [...], le nevrotiche, [...] invadano il mondo, il nostro mondo assurdo e finitamente stabile rendendolo la loro colonia.²⁸

Terranova's novel thus attempts to "re(-)member" Venera, restoring a body and a voice previously dismembered and consigned to oblivion. This is significant given that the first-person narrator attempts to reconstruct Venera's story while navigating postpartum after her own daughter's birth—she, too, is trying to 're-member' her own body.²⁹ Venera's institutionalization thus echoes across three generations, opening the path to the discussion of female genealogies.

Female Genealogies and Genetics: grandma Venera in *Quello che so di te* (Terranova, 2025) and the Wukabi in *La signora Meraviglia*³⁰ (Anglana, 2024)

"L'asse della storia è dato dalla ricostruzione di un caso di follia in famiglia, che diventa un viaggio nel tempo e nei corpi di una bisnonna e della narratrice: due diverse esperienze della maternità, tra dolori, incanti e alchimie fisiologiche", writes Salvatore Silvano Nigro about Terranova's novel.³¹ Venera's breakdown, "la prima donna della mia [della narratrice] stirpe per cui è stata usata la parola pazzia"³², hangs over the narrator and

28 Terranova, *Quello che so di te*, 135. "Of the other one-hundred-and-two women who entered the psychiatric ward between January and June, I was able to learn only what the fires and the archive's negligence have spared—I hope that each of them has, through blood, affection, or affiliation, generated someone who still listens for their voice today. I hope the stories of the psychiatric ward multiply, and that the institutionalized, [...], the hysterical, [...], the neurotic, [...] women spill into the world, our absurd and precariously stable world, claiming it as their own colony" (my translation).

29 On the interplay between "remembering" (in the sense of "commemorate") and "re-membering" (in the sense of "putting back together something that has been dis-membered / torn apart") see Elizabeth Cooley: Remembering and Dis(Re)Membering: Memory, Community and the Individual in Beloved. In: *Studies in English. New Series* 11.32 (1993), 1-10.

30 "Madame Marvel" (my translation). Saba Anglana: *La signora Meraviglia*. Palermo 2024.

31 <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/quello-che-so-di-te/> (19.11.2025). "The story revolves around the reconstruction of a case of insanity in the family, which becomes a journey through time across the bodies of a great-grandmother and the narrator: two different experiences of motherhood, marked by heartache, fascination, and physiological alchemies" (my translation).

32 Terranova, *Quello che so di te*, 31. "the first woman in my [the narrator's] family to whom the word 'insanity' was ever applied" (my translation).

her newborn daughter as an inescapable fate, since mental illness seemingly ‘runs in the family’. The narrator’s confrontation with her ancestor aims to break this cycle: the story that begins with her daughter’s birth and the fear of succumbing to madness like Venera, ends with the narrator peacefully leaving the hospital archive, having finally laid Venera to rest and returning to “il mondo dei vivi”³³

A very similar dynamic appears in Saba Anglana’s *La signora Meraviglia*. While helping her aunt collect the documents to apply for Italian citizenship, the narrator ventures forth into her family’s history, torn between Ethiopia, Somalia, and Italy, and marked by colonialism, migration and displacement. In doing so, she encounters the ‘Wukabi’, a family spirit believed to cause temporary mental and physical impediments. Yet the ‘Wukabi’ is nothing other than a personification of the trauma of exile:

Probabilmente si placa solo attraverso un riconoscimento, un perdono, un rito. Nella storia del singolo come in quella di un popolo. [...]. Chissà quanti nomi ha il Wukabi in giro per il mondo. Si diverte con le vie dell’esistenza, con le infinite combinazioni che il viaggio può generare. Si è travestito, ci ha seguiti qui in Italia. Il Wukabi te lo porti in valigia, il Wukabi adora viaggiare.³⁴

Guided by the question “Quanti demoni abitano una mente?”³⁵, the novel shows that only by actively confronting her family’s past can the protagonist—herself plagued by unexplained chest and stomach pains—reconcile with her identity and her ‘Wukabi’.

33 Idem, 256. “the world of the living” (my translation).

34 Anglana, *La signora Meraviglia*, 231. “It probably settles down through acknowledgment, forgiveness, a ritual. In an individual’s history and that of a people. [...]. Who knows how many names the Wukabi has around the world. It delights in the ways of existence, in the endless combinations generated by the journey. It has disguised itself; it followed us here to Italy. You carry the Wukabi in your suitcase, the Wukabi loves to travel” (my translation).

35 In the words of Igiaba Scego, <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/la-signora-meraviglia/> (19.11.2025). “How many demons inhabit one’s mind?” (my translation).

Dealing with Family and Structural Trauma³⁶: *L'anniversario*³⁷ (Bajani, 2025), *Libero and Felice in Poveri a noi*³⁸ (Carrieri, 2023)

Trauma is also central in the last two novels discussed in this report: Bajani's *L'anniversario* and Carrieri's *Poveri a noi*. In Bajani's novel, the protagonist cuts ties with a toxic home dominated by an overbearing father and a submissive mother. Carrieri, by contrast, follows two friends, Libero and Felice, "[d]ue perdenti, almeno all'apparenza"³⁹, bound by a shared trauma: Felice's beating in middle-school while Libero helplessly witnessed it, amid a precarious South Italy offering little to young generations.

Bajani critiques patriarchy in 'universal' terms, omitting proper names: "mio padre" or "mia madre" used by the narrator could be anyone's parents.⁴⁰ Childhood silence and repressed frustration left the narrator with lasting anxiety when dealing with his parents: "Mi preparavo con molto anticipo alle telefonate con i miei genitori. Mano a mano che si avvicinava il momento di digitare il loro numero sulla pulsantiera mi facevo più nervoso, e puntuale arrivava la dissenteria, i dolori all'intestino [...]".⁴¹ The 'anniversary' in the title thus signals the day he broke away from his toxic home, seeking redemption—a hope embodied by his 2-year-old son, on whom the novel ends.

In *Poveri a noi*, redemption amid precarity is also central. This tension is implicit right in the antithesis between the title and the protagonists' names Libero ('Free') and Felice ('Happy'). Both are trapped in an existential impasse—Libero teaching in a prison, Felice still failing his last university exam. Bari's dilapidated urban landscape mirrors their *malaise*:

36 See José M. Yebra: Transgenerational and Intergenerational Family Trauma in Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* and 'Three Friends'. In: *Moderna språk* 2 (2015), 122-139, who uses the term '(intergenerational) family trauma' to speak of such traumas and behaviour patterns passed from one generation to the next within a family dynamic. 'Structural trauma' is here intended, following Galtung's definition of 'structural violence', as the trauma that arises from precarious life conditions of poverty, limited job opportunities and social distress (Johan Galtung: Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. In: *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3 [1969], 167-191).

37 "The Anniversary" (my translation). Andrea Bajani: *L'anniversario*. Milano 2025.

38 "Poor Us" (my translation). Elvio Carrieri: *Poveri a noi*. Roma 2023.

39 In the words of Valerio Berruti, <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/poveri-a-noi/> (19.11.2025). "Two losers, at least apparently" (my translation).

40 See Emanuele Trevi's comment, <https://premiostrega.it/PS/libro/lanniversario/> (19.11.2025).

41 Bajani, *L'anniversario*, 86. "I would prepare well in advance for phone calls with my parents. As the moment to dial their number drew closer, I became increasingly nervous, and right on cue the diarrhea would start, the intestinal pains [...]" (my translation).

[...] camminare per le vie di Bari mi faceva soffrire. Mi si presentava dinanzi agli occhi l'invidia profonda che provavo nei confronti degli abitanti delle altre città, liberi di procedere nella loro storia. Io invece camminavo e sentivo i lamenti delle costruzioni antiche. Targhe, giardini, negozi, attività familiari che duravano da generazioni, locali, venditori di dischi, barbieri, tutto spazzato via. [...]. Era corretto il mio modo di interpretare lo spazio urbano? Vivere in quel limbo, in un nonluogo psichico a metà tra il disprezzo per il paese e quello per la metropoli, era diventato estenuante.⁴²

The novel's circular structure—from Felice's beating as a kid to a final beating involving the two friends this time, now adults—suggests both catharsis, when Libero finally defends his friend, and the persistence of an inescapable cycle of violence. As in many narratives of the South⁴³, Carrieri depicts southern Italy's contradictions, where beauty and decay, humane values and brutality coexist.

Conclusions

When it comes to mental health, the book selection for the 2025 Premio Strega edition reveals an interest, on the part of both authors and readers, in using literature as a channel for addressing mental-health issues—among other things, by re-examining people and events of the past in a more empathetic light. This reflects a willingness to actively confront the stigma that still surrounds mental health, focusing on a proactive management of one's mental well-being—a process that begins with acknowledgment, continues with the introspective processing of unresolved traumas, and ideally culminates in redemption. Whether this will lead to a new awareness of mental health remains for posterity to judge; for now, we read. And we look deep within ourselves.

42 Carrieri, *Poveri a noi*, 134-135. "[...] walking through the streets of Bari caused me suffering. Before my eyes appeared the deep envy I felt toward the inhabitants of other cities, free to move through their own history. I, by contrast, would walk and hear the moaning of the ancient buildings. Plaques, gardens, shops, family businesses that had persisted for generations, clubs, records sellers, barbers—everything had been wiped out. [...]. Was my way of interpreting the urban space correct? Living in that limbo, in a psychological non-place somewhere between contempt for the countryside and contempt for the metropolis, had become exhausting" (my translation).

43 Even if concerning Naples, see only as examples the analyses of Mario Trifuoggi, Francesco Sielo: *My brilliant city: Naples, urban poverty and the 'ethnographic imagination' of Elena Ferrante*. In: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 28.3 (2023), 362-379, doi: 10.1080/1354571X.2023.2173910 and Niccolò Scaffai: *Abitare lo spazio di Napoli*. In: *Between* XIV.28 (2024), 411-420 (*La dimensione pubblica dell'abitare*, eds. Clotilde Bertoni et al.).

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