

"Women with guns at their side women who rob who kidnap who attack prisons who shoot representatives of the law and of the state woman who have followed their road to the end going from the role of support and consoler of their male colleagues to that of protagonists."

Nanni Balestrini was born in Milan in 1935. Known both as an experimental writer of prose and verse and as a cultural and political activist, he played a leading role in avant-garde writing and publishing in the sixties. His involvement with the extra-parliamentary left in the seventies resulted in terrorism charges (of which he was subsequently acquitted) and a long period of self-imposed exile from Italy.

Let A Thousand Hands... is an extract translated from the novel *La Violenza Illustrata* (Einaudi, 1976). Using one of Balestrini's favorite techniques, it is a montage of newspaper reports of the death of Mara Cagol, one of the founders of the Red Brigades. His most recent novels are *Gli Invisibili* (Bompiani, 1987; tr. *The Unseen*, Verso 1989) and *L'editore* (Feltrinelli 1989)."

Nanni Balestrini

Let A Thousand Hands Reach Out to Pick Up the Gun



the two sisters told the magistrate its been 5 years since we last saw her standing arm in arm they looked at the dead woman weeping in silence the body of the woman was stretched out naked on the marble bench. From the man's sub-machine gun came the series of shots that hit the woman and also hit the man who even though with a bullet in his body managed to reach the first line of trees and disappear into the woods.

Naturally nobody knows who left the bunch of red roses nobody has seen anything and none of the local farm people have seen strangers. However their line of escape is blocked in front of them is the carabinieri's 128 across the middle of the road the bandits have no time to go into reverse. A patch of blood in the centre of the chest another on the left arm the fingers of the right hand blackened and contracted as if frozen in the act of gripping the earth the left hand wearing a gold ring with three small stones. And I started shooting again and downed the girl who was screaming wildly the man also started shouting I'm wounded and he ran off into the fields and disappeared.

Then for the whole of the day the searching of the woods continued an operation in which 300 carabinieri 80 policemen 20 finance guards 6 helicopters and a number of dog-handler units are still involved. The carabinieri fire a second shot which one assumes hit the man who was on the back seat of the 127 a bloodstain was found afterwards. The black hair in the subdued light of the morgue not red as it had appeared at a distance yesterday in the sunlight between the trees on her lip a small scar. It was found the bullets still in the magazine one of the girls ended up killed while the soldier tries to reload his weapon the accomplices manage to escape on the young woman's chest there are three holes the demonstration.

At 10.45 the coroner begins the autopsy will finish at about 1 o'clock with the following result the young woman had been hit by two bullets one hit her in the left shoulder and the other the fatal one went through her chest. The officer comes down tells his men to keep at a distance he goes towards the farmhouse which was supposed to be abandoned according to information received previously. Three hours of tension pass while doubts questions hypotheses proliferate at 4.30 the two sisters arrive at the carabinieri barracks in a police car they reach the hospital shortly before 5 o'clock. The attempt to escape in a red Fiat 127 and a white Fiat 128 was blocked by the carabinieri but while the women had dived to the ground coming out of the lefthand driver's door the man had inexplicably exited by the right door in other words on the side most exposed to enemy fire.

A corpse with no name it is that of a woman between 35 and 40 with curly red hair she is dressed in a beige jumper faded jeans and red sandals with a raised cord heel. The lieutenant goes up to the farmhouse to peer through a groundfloor window it is at this moment that a SRCM-type hand grenade is thrown from the floor above. They stand up and proceed slowly towards the the morgue at the door the public prosecutor is waiting for them they betray no emotion remain impassive before the photographers' flashguns the door closes behind them. The doors of the criminals' car spring open and suddenly a hail of gunfire explodes because they have two pistols and a sten gun with them.

Her face looks strange in death one might say surprised she is wearing very tight jeans and a beige sweater but it is all stained red so you guess the colour rather than see it. He went and banged on the door saying carabinieri here at this point a first-floor window opened out of which a woman appeared who replied what do you want the officer demanded entry and from another window the first hand grenade was thrown. It was not a long wait at 5.15 the

public prosecutor comes out nods his head it's her he says they recognised her at once they only had to look at her face. They were cut off, and the red Fiat 127 collided with the 128 these were the last moments of violence the robbers again leapt out and ran off across the grass heading downhill.

In the area of the shoot-out a fierce battle that lasted more than half an hour a young woman was killed who belonged to the kidnappers' gang. The lieutenant called up support there's someone there come out in reply a window was flung open on the first floor and two hand grenades thrown at the same time explode the splinters lacerate the officer's arm and face. There would anyway have been other elements that would have made identification easy a small ring the sisters had a similar ring the mother had given to all three ten years previously. Still in the 127 and the 128 the woman and her accomplice fire at the officer then seeing that escape is impossible the way out is also blocked by the blue FIAT 127 patrol car the gangsters start running towards the woods across the grass around the farmhouse.

The body lying on the slope of the hill the red hair splayed across the green the face disfigured this was the end of her short life in the din of gunfire of exploding grenades of a desperate bid for freedom broken off by a hail of bullets. At that moment from a window on the first floor a hand grenade is thrown which explodes a few yards from the lieutenant taking off his arm and injuring his eyes. The woman terrorist killed yesterday in the shootout at the farmhouse finally has a name. The carabinieri officer seeing that the criminals are not accepting defeat himself fires a first hail of bullets that seems to scare the two out in the open.

The central nucleus of the inquest is represented by the few square metres of the morgue in which the still nameless woman's body lay. The explosion tore the officer's arm off the grenade splinters blind him he falls headlong while a pool of blood extends around his body. It seems it was not easy to establish the woman's identity on her was found a fresh identity card coming from a

avoiding the blast of the grenade which went off behind him and he fired his gun hitting the woman.

On that day in mid-February the trail went cold it re-emerged again on Thursday concluding in the image of the young woman stretched on the ground dead after the grenade battle with the carabinieri. Between the gangsters and the carabinieri who in the meantime had taken his pistol and had thrown himself to the ground to the left shielding himself behind the car there was an exchange of gunfire. The identifying features which made the identification possible were a series of moles that the woman had on her back a scar mark on one lip and a ring which she was wearing on her hand. The officer dives forward and while the grenade flies over his head and explodes behind him he shoots with his issue 9mm pistol the woman is in the line of fire and falls hit by two bullets which go through her chest and her right arm.

Women with guns at their side women who rob who kidnap who attack prisons who shoot representatives of the law and of the state woman who have followed their road to the end going from the role of support and consoler of their male colleagues to that of protagonists. The man and the woman he relates in a low voice barely marked by the emotion which has taken hold of him since the tragedy they got into the 128 and the 127 parked on the grass they left in a hurry perhaps because they thought they had killed the whole patrol. This latter detail was decisive it was a ring with three mounted stones which had been given by the mother to all three sisters. There followed another shoot-out in the course of which the woman was hit at this point according to the false version provided by headquarters the carabinieri ran out of ammunition and the other man took advantage of this to escape.

In the yard of the farmhouse at the point where she had been struck down this morning there were found six red roses. Immediately afterwards he saw the bandits' two cars which were trying to get past the carabinieri's car which was blocking their way but they got out onto the road ending up in a ditch. Yes it's her

There are still the two cars which were to be used for the gangsters' final getaway they are a red 127 and a white 128 it appears they crashed and ended up half in a ditch. Meanwhile with his other hand he takes his service pistol and in turn rushes towards the farmhouse while two women and a man are running towards a car. They were able to identify her on the basis of a number of moles and a cut on one lip one detail which convinced them was a small ring which the body was still wearing on the ring finger of the left hand. When one of the pair suddenly pulled out a grenade and threw it in the direction of the officer he dived to one side then threw himself forward keeping low and escaping the effects of the blast.

Here are a number of different-coloured wigs used by the young woman as disguises in her exploits. The driver runs over he is a soldier married fifty years old with 4 children calm thoughtful brave he takes the 9mm gun with 7 bullets in it he sees his colleagues on the ground shot up his nerve steady he has not a moment of uncertainty. A gold ring with three small black stones it was a memento of her mother she had given an identical one to each of the daughters also getting one made for herself the flurry of confusion about her identity was thus resolved. The man had shouted enough I'm wounded I surrender but almost simultaneously he had thrown another grenade and the driver of the patrol car ducking in order to avoid it had fired at the woman who was killed while the man succeeded in escaping.

She is the head of the bandit group which breaks into prison she is the one who rings the bell at the front gate and who runs towards the cell a short-barrelled machine pistol under her arm while her colleagues immobilise the warders. The officer fires a shot but over their heads to indicate that they should stop as regulations require the fugitives do not stop they reach a 127 parked under the trees and try to make a getaway. The identification of the woman was carried out at about 5.30 in the morgue where the body had been taken by the two sisters. He took out a grenade and threw it at the soldier he realised what was happening he threw himself forwards

stock of stolen documents. As they came round the corner of the farmhouse they found our 127 in the way in the attempt to get round it they went off the road then they got out raising their hands we surrender they were ten yards from me in the grass I raised my gun the man was sheltering behind the woman.

Who is the dead woman the question had no answer until this morning but in fact she was identified almost at once. The sergeant and the private run up but they are forced to throw themselves flat because a second grenade is thrown from the farmhouse wounding both of them. The identikit pictures in the possession of the carabinieri however did not bear much resemblance to the victim at the farmhouse in order to avoid recognition the woman had cut off her long black hair. All of a sudden the man turned back OK we surrender he shouted and almost at the same time a series of gunshots were fired in the direction of the sergeant and the private was also wounded.

There is a tense of waiting it is an important moment because it can make a decisive contribution to assisting the police inquiries enabling them to construct an identikit of the gang's members. This was the start of a fierce exchange of gunfire single shots and series of shots from inside two men and a woman were firing and perhaps another man too who had come out and who had managed to escape. She had dyed her hair red also her features were hardened by the hardships endured during the long period of years that she had been in hiding. Finally the others shouted that they were surrendering pointing his gun the carabinieri told them to come forward slowly the woman in front and the man behind.

Central command confirms that the four carabinieri of the patrol had come under fire from a man and a third person the woman had then been killed while her accomplice although wounded had managed to reach the bushes. The door is thrown open and a man and a woman come running out into the yard they throw another grenade they are holding sub-machine guns they fire wildly the sergeant and the private fall to the ground. Formal identification

was made possible once the name had been established for the first time at 5.10 today at the hospital morgue. They put their hands up and shout we surrender but instead of standing still or walking forward the girls are holding guns the other man still has a sten gun the gangsters back off.

How many accomplices two men and a woman two women and a man one man and a woman yesterday the second version was given as the official one. There is also a series of shots from the machine pistol and one of the bullets hits the private in the head the sergeant was wounded too in the leg. She was identified by her sisters who had not seen her for 5 years on the basis of various identifying marks a small scar on one lip some moles and a ring with the same setting which the three daughters had in common with their mother. The woman and her accomplice came down and the officer instructed them to put their hands up the gangsters raised their hands and the man shouted OK that's enough I've been hit but at the same time his hands went down towards his belt.

The carabinieri who were engaged in a gun battle with the people in the farmhouse state that they had seen only one man and one woman there was talk of two women of another individual who had been seen or heard escaping after the shoot-out. Immediately afterwards this same woman had thrown the second grenade it is not known how many of them there were but it is known that the woman got into the orange Fiat 127 and her accomplice into the white 128 and then the two cars collided and ended up in the ditch. The official identification was carried out by the woman's two sisters they had not seen her for 5 years they said but they identified her at once thanks to particular marks, especially a number of moles. Suddenly the man stops turns round puts his hands up and shouts OK I give up I'm wounded I surrender but he immediately puts his hands down again takes a grenade from his belt and throws it at the carabinieri.

Up at the farmhouse the branch of a cherry tree torn off by a burst of gunfire testifies to the violence of the bloody clash

between the carabinieri and the bandits. A man and a woman were the people who came out of the farmhouse after the throwing of the grenade which had knocked the lieutenant to the ground shooting wildly and mowing down the private they had reached and started the 127 and the 128. Before arriving at the lying-in room at the hospital already at the carabinieri headquarters they had identified the identical ring their mother had given them. Suddenly no sooner had the officer lowered his gun they made a break for it in his left hand the gangster has a second grenade once again a SRCM and he throws this one too this time at the lone officer.

Other evidence of the battle can be seen in the shattered glass of the windows in the window shutter blown off its hinges by the blast from an SRCM on the grass where the woman was shot down the blood looks like rust. Then the gangsters having hit the private too with a burst of gunfire tried to get away trying to get away in their car in order to get round the blue 127 carabinieri patrol car they dived towards the ditch running alongside the path. The identification happened at 5.10 in the morgue of the general hospital at that time the two sisters arrived they came into the room together with the public prosecutor. He seemed to be intending to use her as a shield I saw him put one hand inside his jacket I thought he was going to pull out a gun instead he pulled out another grenade he threw it in my direction

On the bodywork there are bullet holes the 127 has a shattered windscreen the sidelight of the 128 is blown out and it has a big 9mm bullet hole in its left side. There is a moment's pause in the jeep the driver takes the radio mike and makes contact with his patrol few words hurry I am here he repeats the phrase three times. Seeing the naked body of the woman marked by the cuts made during the autopsy more than by the facial resemblance they had not seen her for 5 years. I threw myself forward it exploded behind me I had run out of bullets I leaned over the private's body I took the magazine from his gun I put it in mine.