

# The Golden Dawn of Italian Fashion



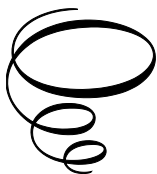
# The Golden Dawn of Italian Fashion:

*A Cross-Cultural Perspective  
on Maria Monaci Gallenga*

By

Rosanna Masiola and Sabrina Cittadini

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-5061-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5061-2

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has a precise date of origin. Its seeds were sown on the occasion of a conference organized at the Università per Stranieri of Perugia, Palazzo Gallenga: Italian Fashion. Comunicare la Moda Italiana nel Mondo (June 5-6, 2001). The conference saw the participation and benefited from the sponsorship of Brunello Cucinelli, who invited the participants to his medieval Borgo Solomeo. Prestigious speakers like Stefania Ricci (Director of the Museo Salvatore Ferragamo) and Lapo Cianchi (Director of Communication & Events, Pitti Immagine) shared their experience and their vision of the cultural promotion of Italian fashion.

In addition, seminars and workshops were held by the authors at the same university on Jewels, Fashion, and Made in Italy (2014), Luxury Branding (2015), and The Language of Fashion and Made in Italy (2016).

A further stimulus came from a visit to the same university by Paolo Taticchi, Professorial Teaching Fellow in Management and Sustainability and Executive Director of Global Student Experience at Imperial College, London, and Jummy Okoya Olajumoike, Senior Lecturer at the University of East London, who organized a seminar on *Luxury and Italian Fashion* (June 2015). The approach to fashion and textiles likewise benefited from the seminar jointly organized by Paolo and Doctor Rajimi Balachandran (ZARI, Chennai, India), on Fashion, art, and weave: the enchanting narrative of the Kancheepuram silk sari of Tamil Nadu (September 2015). As always, Dr. Angela Taticchi from our University gave her precious support to the initiative.

Seminars held by Eugenia Paulicelli (Visiting Professor of Italian and Fashion Studies, CUNY, New York), on Fashion Culture and Media (April 2016) gave a fresh perspective on the multi-disciplinary aspects of Italian fashion studies. Professor Paulicelli generously assisted our graduate and post-graduate students in exchange programmes on fashion studies at her university.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Professor Cecilia Moretti, President of the Società Dante Alighieri of Perugia, for inviting us to give a conference in

2019 (Masiola, *The Pre-Raphaelites. The utopic and revolutionary roots of spirituality in Europe: 1848*).

Sabrina Cittadini started her doctoral thesis on Maria Monaci Gallenga in 2013 and brilliantly defended it in 2017. She held seminars and gave presentations on the topic, while also teaching Italian language and fashion culture. She presented her original findings on the relationship between Gallenga and James Cadogan Cowper at a conference, *Le Stanze della Memoria* (1917), and seminars on Maria Monaci Gallenga and Made in Italy (2017 and 2018); and Italy Outside Italy: The World of Made in Italy (2019), all held at Università per Stranieri.

This volume is the first monograph on Maria Monaci Gallenga. It has been the result of intense research, travels, interviews, and gathering documentation over the last ten years, visiting the museums and collections of Italian textiles and fashion designs, from Prato to Florence-Pitti, from the Victoria and Albert to Venice and Trieste. When visiting the museums was not possible, we had our graduate students on exchange programmes abroad researching Italian luxury brands, from New York to Tokyo, and we also sent them around the “sartorie” in Umbria. In particular, we should note the excellent theses by Ciro Di Paola, Camilla Santinelli, Serena Loretoni, and Chiara Vero.

For her long-lasting personal friendship and encouragement, even in difficult times, we gratefully acknowledge Giuliana Grego Bolli, Rector of our University.

We wish also to express our gratitude to the whole team at Cambridge Scholars Publishers who have supported this project, alongside other past projects. In particular, our thanks go to the senior commissioning editors, Victoria Carruthers and Camilla Harding. For this project, senior commissioning editor Rebecca Gladders is owed special thanks for her encouragement in getting us started. Amanda Millar, as typesetting manager, deserves all of our gratitude for the perfectionism and problem-solving skills she has shown over the years since we started working together in 2009. A big thank-you to Courtney Blades for the elegant cover.

Adam Rummens, resident commission editor at CSP, has been a bridge over troubled waters through the hard times of the COVID-19 emergency. We greatly appreciated his 24 hour commitment, especially during the lock-down of the big names in international publishing. Adam has been a



constant and friendly presence in times of doubt and uncertainty. To all of the team at CPS, thank you again and again.

Mary Chambers has a special place and we owe her endless gratitude for pre-submission reading, for indexing, and for accepting to work at short notice and always delivering on time. Without her attentive and meticulous linguistic suggestions we would have been lost.

We gratefully acknowledge the following museums and institutions for their generous support and for their permission to use images at a difficult time:

Dr Chris Gebel, Image Request Direction, Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart (GERMANY)

Dr Conna Clarke, Image License Manager, Philadelphia Museum of Art, (USA)

Image Request Department, Museum of Art, RIDS - Rhode Island Design School, Providence RI (USA)

Dr Camilla Cecchi, Scala Agency, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art (ITALY-USA)

Without the personal recollections, documented information, and the garments and fabrics from the family's private collection put at our disposal by Maria's grandson, Giovanni Gallenga, our research would have been deprived of historical authenticity and originality. We thank him for his patience in letting us see (and touch) Maria's early experiments in painting and tapestries at Villa Morgagni, where Maria had her laboratory in Rome, where we could also see precious paintings and images of members of the Gallenga and Monaci families. We had the good fortune to be able to visit him in Rome, just before the explosion of the pandemic. We spent the whole day examining letters and documents, thus clarifying aspects of his grandmother's personality and activities which had not been dealt with before, especially regarding the Umbria period.

Umbria, however, holds a special place, as it was in Umbria that Maria Montessori started her first educative experiments, which she also successfully implemented in Rome, not far from where Pietro Gallenga had his medical laboratory (Quartiere San Lorenzo). An exhibition on Maria Montessori has been hosted at Palazzo Gallenga (December 2019).

Umbria is also home to other legendary fashion designers and entrepreneurs, including Luisa Spagnoli (1877–1935), Pino Lancetti (1932–2007), and more recently to Brunello Cucinelli (1953) and Nicoletta Spagnoli (1955). The present survey attempts to contextualize what lies beyond branding and relies on a strong cultural and conceptual tradition of beauty and art.

Rosanna Masiola and Sabrina Cittadini  
Perugia-Greenwich-Trieste, March 25, 2020.

## PREFATORY NOTES

The book is a transdisciplinary survey on the origins of Italian fashion as a cross-cultural phenomenon. It analyzes the multi-faceted aspects of Maria Gallenga's contribution to 'Made in Italy' in contextualizing her work. It expands the perspective to the Italian American and British relationships and transactions, especially those of the Gallenga family and the Pre-Raphaelites. Gallenga was an artist and designer, a sponsor of modern arts and organizer of exhibitions, and a combative entrepreneur. The unpredictable overload of the digital images on social media featuring her costumes counters her unfair oblivion and points to renewed appraisal of her models, after a hundred years have passed, thus stimulating further investigations and a new critical approach to luxury fashion and its diachronic variation, to imitative effects and come-back trends. In fact, the discovery of Gallenga's creations by the Fendi sisters in Umberto Tirelli's collection was a providential accident, which sparked a renewed interest in the 1980s, re-vitalized by the creative talent of Romeo Gigli's mantles for males, Cavalli's luscious long coats, Valentino's arabesques, and Dolce & Gabbana's opulent golden ornamentations Made in Sicily.

The first chapter ("The Gallenga enigma") introduces Maria Monaci Gallenga's cultural background and context, stigmatizing the unfair oblivion into which she fell and offering a fresh perspective on the development of her early artistic phases and her later engagement in humanitarian and educative initiatives in Umbria. The circumstances of her passing away just before the liberation of the region in July 1944 are particularly revealing, as her husband Pietro, a medical scientist, could not obtain for her the medicines she needed, as the war was raging and there was no way of crossing the Nazi lines. This circumstance has been disclosed to us by Giovanni Gallenga.

The second chapter, "Forgotten females in fashion: emancipation vs. Fascism", highlights the extraordinary determination of Gallenga and two other forgotten women entrepreneurs, Rosa Genoni and Rosa Giolli Menni (the three "Gs"), in the creation of an Italian style during the decades of Fascism and their cultural independence and resistance. It also expands to contextualize the female emancipists' contribution to the world of Italian

culture and identity on the international scene, as Genoni and Giolli also promoted regional arts and crafts.

The third chapter, “The Golden Dawn of the Renaissance Made in Italy”, pinpoints the Florentine Renaissance as a factor establishing the lure of Italian luxury fashion, and the role great masters have had in the localization of fashion as a Florentine phenomenon, from the Leonardo bag to the Gallenga-Fendi bag. Gallenga opened her Bottega Italiana in Florence, Palazzo Spini Feroni, which now houses the Ferragamo Museum. The chapter introduces the critical debate on luxury from the times of imperial Rome to the avant-garde movement of Italian “Futurismo”. It analyzes the cultural lure and appeal Florence had for Anglo-Americans, as the first silent movies were also shot there (e.g. *Romola* starring Lillian Gish), and Genoni and Gallenga’s contribution to the re-imagining of the identity of Italian luxury fashion, and the re-creation of medieval and Renaissance-inspired models and designs.

The fourth chapter, “The Golden Decades of Fashion: From Rome to Paris”, outlines Genoni and Gallenga’s contribution to the establishment of a national fashion and the creation of a fashion freed from subserviency to Paris. The chapter outlines the phenomenon of modernism and its transatlantic influence and literary echoes (e.g., Fitzgerald, Roth). In particular, Gallenga challenged Paris on its own grounds, as she first participated in the International Exhibition in Paris (also known as the Art Déco Exhibition), with her show room at the Italian Pavilion being an unprecedented success, and the next year she opened her Boutique Italienne in Paris. The task was not easy, and surprisingly, Maria laments the inertia and inefficiency she found in Italy, while in France the initiative was hailed a success.

The fifth chapter, “The Transatlantic links and Italian Americans” focuses the dynamics of success and the recognition of Maria Gallenga in the United States. It was a success which she found at the beginning of her career in 1915 when she participated in the Panama-Pacific Exhibition in San Francisco. The 1920s in America were also the years of Rudolph Valentino and Al Capone, but with the advent of Fascism the imagery and perception of Italy changed. In 1931, Maria was invited to put on an exhibition by the Italian American community in Birmingham (Alabama). Two years later, Italo Balbo and his flying squadron were publicly acclaimed, on the occasion of Italy’s participation in the Chicago World Fair, where Maria was present. The fact that Italy was represented by a fashion designer, a woman, who also promoted Italian culture and arts and

crafts, enhanced the profile of Italian Americans, although it was the American aristocracy who bought the products, as can be seen from the gifts to the collections of the American museums. The contribution of Hollywood and the evolving fashion system marked a major period for luxury brands and high-end products.

The sixth chapter, “The Gallengas in London: Anglo-Italian cross-cultural fertilization”, transgresses the boundary of fashion to delve into the cross-cultural exchanges and transactions between the Italians in England and Anglo-Americans in Italy. In particular, it examines the complex and sometimes conflicting socio-cultural and aesthetic dynamics contributing to the perception of Italy as a country of tradition and innovation in luxury fashion and design. The influence of Italian culture and Dante, spearheaded by Antonio Gallenga and the Rossetti family, connects with the utopic and revolutionary vision of 1848. It touches on the social engagement and idealism of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, which later influenced the work of Maria Monaci Gallenga, and considers the inspirational motifs common to the Pre-Raphaelites (Frank Cadogan Cowper). The correlation with the world of arts and crafts is not accidental, as the Gallenga family was linked first to the Schunck family of the Manchester textiles and dyes empire, and also to the Stuart family in Florence, through marriages. One section deals in detail with the ladies of the British aristocracy who bought and wore Gallenga’s clothes. Following the idealized cultural projects of post-Unified Italy, the country was sadly submerged by the tragic events of the Second World War. Maria Monaci Gallenga passed away in dramatic circumstances on the eve of the liberation of Umbria. Her fame passed away with her.

Today her memory has been retrieved from the past through the digital media, yet those images do not tell the whole story, especially when references are misleading or incomplete. The present work has aimed to go beyond the “digital” limits and explore the hidden links in a transdisciplinary perspective, where history and arts, literature and communication, women’s studies, and emancipation contribute to defining the “Golden Dawn” of Made in Italy in the crucial decades between the two world wars.



“...a simarre of the richest Persian silk, exhibiting flowers in their natural colours embossed upon a purple ground permitted to be visible – all these constituted a combination of loveliness...”  
—Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, 1820

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE GALLENGA ENIGMA

### **Abstract**

The first chapter describes the figure of Maria Monaci Gallenga, contextualizing the phenomenon of Italian fashion and the “Made in Italy” effect. It introduces the main themes of the research and the comparative historical approach used in defining the socio-cultural context and its dynamics.

It raises issues and questions concerning her ascent in the world of fashion and her sudden withdrawal from the fashion scene, as she devoted the last years of her life to the help of those in need in the tragic war years in Italy (1938-1940).

*Key words:* Maria Monaci Gallenga, Italian fashion, Fascism, women’s emancipation and entrepreneurship

### **1 Introductory observations**

This book tells the story of the fashion artist Maria Monaci Gallenga (1880–1944) and aims to shed light on her important contribution to Italian fashion and the promotion of “Made in Italy” in a cross-disciplinary perspective.

Maria Monaci Gallenga played a crucial role in Italian fashion, anticipating the strategies of the cultural system of fashion. This is the first monograph on this artist, featuring her international ascent in the decades of women’s emancipation in the 1920s and 1930s, and the unjustified oblivion her name suffered after her death in 1944.<sup>1</sup> The focus of the research is on the cross-cultural context, which has hitherto been

overlooked by the scarce literature on this subject; it thereby contributes to a broader perspective on the early internationalization of Italian fashion and the role of women. Gallenga was also a precursor in promotional practices, labelling and the branding of her creations with her Renaissance logo, investing in the “Made in Italy” brand as a cultural asset and highlighting the potentials of regional heritage and feminine craftsmanship.

The themes explored in the following sections are intended to contextualize Gallenga within the complex dynamics of “Made in Italy” brand and female entrepreneurship in the first decades of the twentieth century and the years between the world wars, as well as the combined re-interpretation of Middle Ages and Renaissance styles in fashion. There had been other stylists in Italy who took pride in the Renaissance arts and crafts revival, like Rosa Genoni; patriotic pride in the arts and promotion of the textile industry was crucial to the fascist perspective on the definition of the new national identity. Gallenga’s cosmopolitan activism, however, clashed with the autarchic standards set by Fascism. The luxury of her creations and her experimentation in gold and silver printing techniques was in contrast with the policy of austerity and the use of uniforms. Her affiliation to the arts and crafts movement in Italy and the Roman Secession is a further manifestation of her interpretation of the theories and models in the wake of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its Italian connection. The Gallenga and Monaci families had developed cultural contacts and academic links aimed at the dissemination of Italian literature and arts, especially in the Anglo-American world. It is not surprising that Maria Monaci Gallenga was acclaimed in London, New York and also Paris, benefiting from her privileged cultural position, and capitalizing on her success in the wake of the international world fairs, and also on the solidarity and sympathy of the transatlantic women’s emancipation movements. Although she had no mentors in the field of fashion, she could boast of prestigious family names: née Monaci, the daughter of Ernesto Monaci, rector of the University of Rome and illustrious philologist, she married Pietro Gallenga, a medical scientist.

Maria Monaci Gallenga challenged the world of European luxury fashion and elegance from London to Paris, the world capital of fashion, taking many financial and political risks to do so. In the United States, she received awards for her first participation in international fairs; she was honoured by an invitation from the Italian American community, celebrating the opening of her first Gallenga France shop, subsequently renamed *Boutique Italienne*, with subsidiaries and representatives in the most important cities of Europe. Yet, after all her cultural initiatives,



alongside the promotion of her creations worn by celebrities and aristocrats from Eleonora Duse to Lillian Gish, Gallenga seems to vanish from the fashion scene, prioritizing the world of art and interior decoration until, in 1938, she retires to a life devoted to the welfare of the distressed rural communities in Umbria until the time of her death in 1944. For many years her name would be totally forgotten.

In the 1970s, the Fendi sisters discovered her models with the Umberto Tirelli collections (Gnoli 2006: 121—131; 2014: 24—25); this was the initial step towards a long-overdue recognition, as a Gallenga silk and velvet evening bag inspired the Fendi sisters. In more recent years, Gallenga's designs inspired the leaders in international fashion, like the transgressive Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019) mantle for the iconic fashion columnist Anna Piaggi (1931–2012).

Regarding the above inspiration, we need to clarify one important aspect related to authenticity. A Pinterest reference misleadingly attributes the design to Mariano Fortuny. The design, however, is exactly the stylized magnified pomegranate that Gallenga made for Eleonora Duse's evening mantle and gown. Erroneous attributions are recurrent in referring to Gallenga's work, especially in digital media.<sup>2</sup> The lasting fame and international renown garnered by Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (de Osma 2015; Byatt 2016), conversely, is a striking contrast to Gallenga's marginalization and late recognition.

Yet, it is only through webpages and social media platforms that her models and name have been made visible, albeit within the limits of authenticity and often with inadequate information. An important exhibit was held in Rome in 2018 to celebrate her activity: *Maria Monaci Gallenga: Arte e moda tra le due guerre* (de Guttry and Maino).

Eventually, the concept of roots and cultural heritage featured the work of Umbrian-born stylists and brands like Luisa Spagnoli, Pino Lancetti and Brunello Cucinelli. Cucinelli may justly be reputed to be the cultural heir of Maria's Renaissance-based philosophy in his innovative approach to the mission and values of the "Made in Italy" brand, advocating a neo-humanistic stance in the fashion system.

## 2 Gallenga, the enigma

Gallenga's story was not the conventional fairy-tale of the seamstress progressing from "rags to riches"; she was never a "seamstress", nor was

she the fortunate or “exotic” expatriate featured in the fashion narratives of success. On the contrary, her life-story resonates with patriotic pride in the promotion of arts and crafts from Italy, in the spirit of idealism of the post-Unitarian Italy of her father’s literary activity. The 1920s and 1930s were the decades of the revolutionary and modernist *avant-garde* in fashion and the arts in Europe; in Italy, Gallenga played a key role with other entrepreneurial women in the creation of a “new woman”, and, at the same time, resisted the restrictions and constraints of the fascist regime. Living through the emancipation movements sweeping across the Western world, Gallenga committed herself with passion and enthusiasm to the creation of an Italian fashion system, paving the way for what is today seen as the glamour of “Made in Italy” (Paulicelli 2014: 1-9, 2016)

Her multi-faceted role and activity raises questions regarding her subsequent obfuscation and neglect, which cannot simply be imputed to the hardships of war and post-Fascism. Gallenga shared similar ideals of emancipation through the assertion of professional status with other Italian female fashion stylists of her time, like Marta Palmer, Maria Rosa Genoni, Lydia De Liguoro, Rosa Giolli Menni, and the Italian expatriates in Paris like Elsa Schiaparelli and Nina Ricci. There was a close relationship between the enthusiasm and expectations heralding the twentieth century, and the interwar decades highlighting and welcoming the role of women in the world of fashion and design, and this continued after the war.

Gallenga died in one of the darkest hours of Italian history, in Umbria in 1944. She had lived there since 1940, when she left Rome and the world of fashion to start a new life engaged in social activities and the welfare of the rural population. There is no documented reason for the neglect she suffered after her retirement and the phasing out of her Bottega d’Italia in Via Veneto in Rome, although the brand would have benefited from the investments in Italian fashion in the 1950s, especially those from the American market, that were made thanks to the Marshall plan and the first recognized Italian international fashion show organized by Marquis Giovanni Battista in his Villa Torrigiani in February 1951, an “event that launched a multibillion dollar industry”.<sup>3</sup>

Compared to the cited Italian stylists, who were active in the then blooming scenario of Italian fashion, Maria did not outlive her fame.

The Montorsi atelier in Rome, for instance, was favoured by the fascist regime; they did not wind up and remained in business until the 1970s. The famous Schubert started his career at Montorsi’s and then went on to

establish his own brand name (Capalbo 2008, 2012). The Gucci family had returned to Florence from America, and they re-opened a new shop in Florence, Piazza della Signoria in 1940. Italian fashion enterprises are usually family-based; but there are also devoted apprentices who take their first steps, start a business of their own or acquire and save the brand name. Maria's prestigious Bottega in Via Tornabuoni, 4, in the historical Palazzo Spini Feroni, after her phasing out in the late 1930s, has become a Ferragamo boutique and since 1995 has housed the Ferragamo museum (see chapter three). There is no plaque to remember the Gallenga Florence shop.

To be a young apprentice working with a fashion master is a usual first step in the international scenario of fashion, yet Gallenga was never an apprentice herself, like Ricci or Genoni, nor did she have any protégé or disciple who could save the brand. Finally, the brand was not acquired by any international group, and her name was forgotten for many decades. Sadly today, the name occurs mainly in imitation "vintage" clothing on social platforms. Furthermore, Gallenga was eager to help other artists and exhibit their creations in her Bottega, in Paris as in Florence and Rome. When she retired from Paris in 1936, her activities were mainly focused on interior design. Subsequently, the Bottega Italiana of Via Veneto changed its name to Gallenga and was more of an art gallery and salon where artists gathered. Maria Gallenga focused on sponsoring Italian crafts and arts, and was personally involved in the launch of modernist artists in Rome as well as on the international scene. If these aspects coexisted among her multifaceted activities, it was her liberal patronage of the arts which eventually prevailed as the final years of her activity in Rome were drawing to a close.

Marianne Carlano (1993), Gloria Raimondi (1996, 2009, 2011), and Roberta Orsi Landini (2000) were among the first to publish short studies of Maria's life. Unfortunately, Carlano was unable to interview Maria's first daughter Valeria (b. 1906), who assisted her in the management of the Boutique Italienne in Paris from 1926 to 1934, as she had passed away in 1989.<sup>4</sup>

In 1972, the costumes with all the materials and accessories were acquired in bulk by Umberto Tirelli from Mario, Maria's son. Mario ran the Gallenga shop in Via Veneto, specializing in interior design and furnishing. The costumes were held by the Tirelli Trapetti Foundation in Rome and subsequently transferred to the Museum of Costume at the Palazzo Pitti Foundation.<sup>5</sup>

No former partner or external collaborator seemed to have any interest in preventing the winding up and subsequently the oblivion of the name. As Gallenga was at the centre of a hall of fame in the golden world of divas, diplomacy and aristocracy, reviving the name as a luxury brand would have been a worthwhile investment, especially considering the fact that production embraced a variety of items and also included interior design. Seen in this perspective, Gallenga was a forerunner of luxury brand extensions and the globalization of local products, like when you see, for example, tiles and pieces of furniture signed by fashion leaders, as with Gucci's new "Décor" line of ceramics, cushions and candles, or Prada's Art Déco, featuring furnishing.

Another missing link is the lack of an institutional epistolary archive: this is a striking contrast if compared to the richness of Ernesto Monaci's archive and the many studies it has engendered. There is even a street in Rome named after him. It seems as if all traces of Maria Gallenga have been forgotten for a long time, even in the places where she ran her activities, in Paris, Rome, Florence and other major cities in the world.

There are only assumptions which can be made as, more than other stylists, Maria lived through the tragic tensions of political conflicts and ideologies, and the antinomies of the regime, especially regarding fashion, which aimed at elegance and élitarian sophistication and subsequently dictated a military dress-code for the masses.

The reasons for her withdrawal may be related both to the personal sphere and to the historical and social context, which changed and subverted the approach to fashion as an ideal sophistication, cosmopolitanism and national identity from the 1920s to the 1940s, when the entire nation collapsed under the violence of the regime and the monstrosity of racial persecution.

More personal and emotional reasons, and the desire to concentrate on social issues with her husband, offer another key to understanding the dynamics interweaving Maria's own life with those of the community of artists and intellectuals. There is the fascist invasion of Abyssinia (1935–1937), soon followed by Italy's participation in the fascist war in Spain (1936–1939). The year of shame is 1938, the year of the "racial laws" and subsequent deportation of Italian Jews to the Nazi extermination camps.

Incidentally, it is also the year of Count Romeo Adriano Gallenga-Stuart's death, and the end of Maria's links and contacts with the ruling class and

diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Count Gallenga-Stuart had played an important role as senator and as a diplomat in international relations, and was a distant relative.

Undoubtedly, the phasing out of Maria's Paris boutique in 1934 was also caused by the severe effects of the Depression in France, and the fact that, rather than concentrating on garments, Gallenga prioritized the promotion of Italian modernist artists at international exhibitions and in her showrooms. But the political marginalization of Italy must also be taken into account, along with the enactment of autarchy.

There were black clouds gathering in the skies of Europe, and France would be attacked by Mussolini's army subsequent to Hitler's invasion. The declaration of war against France and England was proclaimed by Benito Mussolini on July 10, 1940.

Towards the end, from 1934 to 1938, Maria still managed the Via Veneto Bottega, and was more focused on furnishing private homes. She had worked there for over two decades. In 1918, the year of her father's death and the end of the war, Maria had opened her shop in Via Veneto, the heart of the legendary Dolce Vita of the 1950s. After twenty years, Maria then left her enterprise. As the war raged across Europe and Italy, and throughout the whole world, in Umbria she devoted herself to a new life, away from the luxury and glamour of the capital, and was no longer sought after by her aristocratic clientèle.

In Umbria, she devoted herself to humanitarian activities with her husband, Pietro, who had been involved in the national health relief plan to help the distressed communities in malarial areas. Pietro also chose to stay with the rural population, instead of staying in Rome and Umbria seemed to be a shelter from the regime's constraints and dangers of invasion. But it was not so after 1943, with the German occupation of those territories.

The switch from the gilt and glamour of the Roman aristocracy to humanitarian commitments was not entirely new, nor was it an isolated activity. It was part of Maria's commitment to and social perspective on the roles of women from the turn of the century. The determination of women to have a professional status and contribute to a modern society had seen women of different backgrounds united in common activities and ideals of emancipists. Women of the Italian nobility volunteered on the front-line with the Red Cross in the First World War, and subsequently in the Second World War: Princess Maria José and Edda Ciano Mussolini were among the many.

Already in the first years of the twentieth century, Maria Montessori had started her revolutionary paedagogic experimentations, establishing her first “Casa dei Bambini” in Rome, in aid of the poorer classes. As happened with many artists and scientists, Mussolini had shown complacency with regard to the work of Maria Montessori; however, Montessori was to flee the increasing oppression of the regime and go to India. Leaving Rome for the land of Saint Francis in Umbria,<sup>7</sup> to contribute to the education of the socially deprived children, was like a final call for Maria, who had already shown her generosity in the promotion of Italian culture.

Consequently, she was with her husband in depressed areas where illiterate communities were afflicted by tuberculosis and pellagra. The scientific research and experimentation of her husband found its *raison d'être* and influenced her commitment to the same cause. Furthermore, Maria had already experienced the devastating effects of the First World War, Pietro having served as a medical officer in the camp hospitals during the tragic defeat of Caporetto, on the North-Eastern front in November 1917. Maria was then a mother of three small children and was just at the beginning of her brilliant career, just before the outbreak of war she had been awarded the Grand Medal at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915.

Since 1910, Pietro Gallenga, a pioneering researcher in oncology, had also been an active member of the societies and organizations engaged in the national relief project for the depressed malarial areas following the land reclamation of the marshes of Lazio and Umbria.<sup>8</sup> Feminist writers like Sibilla Aleramo were board members of the society at a time when social progress called for educational programmes.<sup>9</sup> Before and after the two world wars, Pietro Gallenga organized and chaired meetings, also in his medical capacity as a representative of the Red Cross until the 1980s.

Maria, like other female fashion entrepreneurs in Italy, from Rosa Genoni to Luisa Spagnoli, did not miss the opportunity to lend her generous support and bring relief to the rural population in Umbria.

The Isola Polvese on Lake Trasimeno was also the place where many Italian Jews sought refuge trying to escape Nazi deportation in June 1944.

The fact that Maria's father, Ernesto Monaci, was a close friend and had common academic interests with the Jewish colleagues and scholars, like Salomone Morpurgo (1860–1941), was not irrelevant. In particular, he was

a close friend of the philologist Alessandro (Sandro) D'Ancona, who was intimate with the family, and called Maria "la nostra Marietta".<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly, the monstrosity of the racial laws, the raids and the deportation of the Jews of Rome (October 1943) were a fatal blow to Maria and her husband, who had been educated and raised in the values and beliefs of the Italian Risorgimento. This must have been especially tragic for Maria, who had been collaborating with the Coens of the "Grandi Magazzini" in Via del Tritone in Rome.

Maria died on 28<sup>th</sup> June, at her Villa "Le Masse", a few days after the Liberation by the Allied British forces following the battle of Lake Trasimeno.<sup>11</sup> The mansion where the Gallenga family lived bears no trace of furniture or decorations from that time, and seems completely empty, as if devoid of memory.<sup>12</sup> No diary or autobiography can tell us more about it.

### **3 Contextualizing Gallenga: more questions than answers**

Gallenga lived through the crucial years of the early century and its fashion evolution, but also through the advent of Fascism and its downfall. Other fashion artists and *ateliers* in France and Italy suffered the devastation of the German invasion, but Maria died just one year before the final victory was celebrated in 1945. Other artists outlived the war and kept their brands on the market, ready for the major phase heralding the ascent of the "Made in Italy" concept and its explosion on the American market.

The news of Maria Monaci Gallenga's death was overshadowed by the days of the battle of Trasimeno; it preceded the liberation of the area by only a few days. There was no article, and no tribute to remember her and her role, her activities supporting Italian fashion and arts and crafts abroad, or her activity in the area.

Conversely, Senator Romeo Adriano, Count Gallenga-Stuart, who had prominent roles in the fascist Ministry of Culture ("Ministero della propaganda"), had passed away in 1938, as already observed. His long-cherished dream was the establishment of the Università per Stranieri di Perugia at his former family palace (Palazzo Gallenga) for the promotion of Italian language, literature and arts, which he bequeathed to the city in 1931. On the occasion of the anniversary of his death (in 1939), Romeo

Gallenga-Stuart received tributes as the patron and founder of the university from the Minister for Education, Professor Giuseppe Bottai.<sup>13</sup>

At the time Maria had moved to Villa “Le Masse”, not far from the Gallenga-Stuarts’ mansion, the beautiful castle of “Il Mandoletto”, as Gabriele D’Annunzio named it.<sup>14</sup> The fact that they had a common family name and that they shared the same goal of the promotion of Italian culture and arts raises unanswered questions regarding the acknowledgement of links and possible contacts.

They shared the same ideals of a golden dawn at the turn of the century, based on Risorgimento values and beliefs, and the emergence of a new nation after the end of the First World War seemed to fuel their enthusiasm for the “modern times” and *joie de vivre*, from car races and sports to world fairs and fashion exhibitions.

But why did the lights on Maria go out? Was it because of envy on account of Maria’s prominent role in the aristocracy of fashion? Most artists, philosophers and intellectuals in the decades between the two wars had shared a common matrix in developing innovative concepts, experimenting with theories and applying new methods in all fields of knowledge and science.

A vision of the idealization of the Renaissance heritage and the quest for an artistic identity, oscillating between the ideas of national identity and cosmopolitanism, characterizes the dichotomy of her time. Maria Monaci Gallenga succeeded in complementing her aesthetic approach and marketing initiatives with her humanitarian activity in the last years of her life.

The question remains, however, as to whether Maria was an intimidating personality because of her aristocratic and academic family context? There is the curious instance of Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863–1938), the eccentric poet and military hero, not ordering items from her. D’Annunzio was one of the promoters of Italian fashion, a fashion maniac and brand collector. He ordered and designed items for himself and his female friends from several ateliers, and praised them in poetic taglines.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, D’Annunzio failed to complete his studies at the University of Rome where Maria’s father held courses; he was, however, part of the family’s entourage in their home in the heart of Rome, in Via Condotti, the now fashionable street not far from Piazza di Spagna. Ernesto Monaci and his wife, the opera singer Emilia Guarnieri, received



artists, scholars and young protégés: the dramatist Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) and the actress Eleonora Duse (1858–1924) were welcome. Besides, Eleonora Duse, with whom he had had a turbulent love affair, also knew Maria. Maria, or “Marietta”, as she was called as a child, was around. But was it because there was some sort of academic awe that D’Annunzio did not ask Maria to design the furnishing fabrics for his “Il Vittoriale” at Lake Garda? He asked, instead, Rosa Menni Giolli (1889–1975), the famous Milan-based designer.<sup>16</sup>

Another unclear point is Maria’s privacy regarding her inventions.<sup>17</sup> The secrecy in her experimentation with golden metals and precious silk could have been a precaution against checks by the secret police, especially as a consequence of the ban on the importation of luxury materials. There was a restriction on precious metals, when, in the later phase of Fascism, married women had to give all their gold rings to support the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.<sup>18</sup> For her creations, Gallenga would import precious silks from Lyon, the hub of the French textile industry that supplied silk to the haute-couture designers (Steele 2003, 2019). She could have already been under surveillance. A certain dislike for Gallenga’s visits to Paris aroused suspicions at a time when Paris was a safe haven for Italian exiles and anti-fascists.

Her academic background in Rome and her aristocratic milieu were uncommon at the time for an entrepreneur and fashion designer, and stylists like Elsa Schiaparelli had rebelled against her own family of academics and scientists. Likewise, the name Monaci was revered by the scholars of Italian philology and dramatists. In the Italian *Enciclopedia Treccani* online, the Gallenga name is omitted, and her entry is featured as Maria Monaci. Whether this is due to subservience and admiration for Ernesto Monaci (1844–1918), the founder of the European romance philology and the author of the famous “Guida Monaci”, or whether it is simply an oversight is a moot point.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, Count Romeo Gallenga-Stuart has an exhaustive entry in the *Enciclopedia Treccani*, with reference also to his political activity in France after the Paris peace treaty in 1918.

This important link with the Gallenga family has been overlooked so far. It was, however, the powerful “open sesame” name with which she liked to sign her letters, and name her business. The scarce extant documentation in state archives features her as Gallenga. We have some ten letters regarding the organization and promotion of exhibits and Italian art

between Maria and Nello Tarchiani, the prominent art historian in Florence. The archive also contains some thirty letters with Tarchiani's correspondence with Romeo Gallenga-Stuart. One of these is a request for "intercession with the Minister", as Senator Gallenga was vice-secretary for the printing and publication department.

In her correspondence Maria Gallenga proudly uses the heading of the *Boutique Italienne*, "Société à responsabilité limitée au capital de 100.000 Francs", for an exchange which went on until 1929. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Gallenga family resonated with power and prestige, and the absence of the name Maria Monaci and the brand-name Gallenga is disorienting, hardly imputable to ideological prejudice.

Maria took pride in her Paris boutique, even more than her *Bottega Italiana* in Florence and Rome, if we can judge by those letter headings. However, there was no Vienna or Berlin branch and even after the success of the exhibition in Barcelona in 1929 and the prestigious recognition she received, she did not open shops there. She had no wish to open agencies where there existed social tensions and ideologies that could have been against her aspirations and jeopardized trade.<sup>20</sup>

Gallenga's products were then exported in Switzerland, to the fashionable town Montreux, on Lake Geneva, on the elegant Grand'Rue; in the Netherlands her textiles and design items could be purchased at Metz, the elitist Liberty department store in Amsterdam. Other luxury representatives were in *Chaussée de Charleroi* in Brussels, and in *Davies Street*, Mayfair, in London. The products of *Bottega Italiana* were show-cased in the most important cities of the United States.

When Maria retired to Umbria in 1939, she left her *Bottega* in Rome to the care of her son, Mario. In the wake of the downfall of Fascism and the armistice (September 1943), Mario crossed the border of the defense fortifications of the German "Gustav" line across the central regions in 1944<sup>21</sup> to join the troops loyal to the king and the Allied troops in the South of Italy (Fedele 2010), and took part in the battle of Cassino.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, after the end of the war, Mario took over the *Bottega d'Arte*, renamed Gallenga, in *Via Veneto*, and focused on interior designs and furnishing as his mother had done in the last years of her activity.<sup>23</sup> In the 1970s, Maria Gallenga's collections, the patent, and the wood-block printing stamps were purchased by the costume designer Umberto Tirelli. Tirelli, who designed costumes for the stage and the screen, had started his

rich collection of historic costumes in his atelier in 1964 with passion and enthusiasm.

Oddly, Mario was also a collector, but he was interested in historical stamps. The idea of parting with his collections was particularly painful for him as it must also have been when parting with his mother's precious collections of fabrics and designs when the Via Veneto premises were finally closed in 1974. On this occasion, a fellow philatelist describes Mario Gallenga's sadness in having to give up his precious stamp collection to avoid leaving "his children in the hands of brigands". Mario Gallenga had already experienced the greed of the Roman traders, who offered a ridiculous sum, heedless of the value of the rare collections.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4 The transcultural flows of fashion**

The world of fashion responds to the unpredictable trends of the market and follows the transcultural flows. There are differences in the production of luxury brands and haute-couture, whereas the common ground is the brand name and label, based on authenticity and originality and guaranteeing quality and identity. As one of her grandchildren recorded, Maria's patented printing technique left the fabrics soft; even on the side which had been pressed with stamps, glues and pigments, you could feel the smoothness of natural velvet (Cittadini 2017).<sup>25</sup>

The years when imports from England and France were blockaded, and the impositions of the League of Nations after the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, institutionalized national autarchy. The regime thus funded and sponsored the textile industry of patented home-made materials and artificial fibres (Paulicelli 2004: 99-108). However, the lure of luxury and the appeal of glamour and elegance could not destroy Maria's dreams and desire for change, and to strive for something exclusive and original, as a symbol of resistance to the uniforms imposed by the regime in its totalitarian policies and autarchy (Paulicelli 2004: 105-111; Gnoli 2014: 73-79; 2017). The quality of the garments and materials was warranted by patents as also indicated on the labels conforming to the recent standards regulation (see also Gnoli 2000, 2012).

The tags featuring the "Gallenga" logo showed two stylized Medieval Renaissance ladies: the logo featuring the identity and concept of the company, with two ladies with long-trained mantles and high turbans, inspired by Pisanello's drawing of "Three Dames" (1433-1438), surrounded by decorative circles with Art Déco flowers. Gallenga capitalized on her

inventions in the 1920s, at the time of the emergence of the Futurist Manifesto for fashion (Crispolti 1986; see also chapter three).

This is another aspect which problematizes her marginalization: in fact, Gallenga took care to patent her inventions, and well ahead of her times, she understood the importance of logo-type in a company's profile to convey its identity and mission. She made significant use of the logo on cards, invitations, labels, letter headings and brochures. The question of labels is interesting, as is the exploitation of authenticity, as much as the issues related to the use of a brand name.

Fortunes were made and lost as some famous fashion names went bankrupt, as fashion rapidly changed in the twists and turns of new "looks". Yet Gallenga kept a firm hold of the market. She changed the cut of evening gowns and patterns in line with the emerging geometrical stylization en vogue in the latter part of 1920s, as in the iconic short red dress with bare arms for Donna Francesca Florio, contrasting with the former medieval "angel sleeves" or "bat shoulders" which featured in her first phase of designs.

Always keeping a firm control on the trends of the market, like a good house-wife she was able in management and accounting. Gallenga heralded the changes in trends and trans-cultural fashion flows, inclined to follow exotic suggestions which kept her safe from being "passé" or squandering assets, a fate which had befallen important fashion designers, like the extravagant Paul Poiret, who went bankrupt. Poiret's name is now legendary in the history of modern fashion. We cannot say the same for Gallenga, who supported and collaborated with many artists. There are many contradictory aspects in her sudden oblivion, considering the sophisticated team work she could produce, combining transcultural influences and the fusion of arts.

The following instance is another case in point, accounting for her original trans-cultural flows from art to symbols and from symbols to art. The inspiration and recreation of oriental symbolism in gold is epitomized in Donna Francesca Florio's iconic red dress. With Gallenga's design, fashion becomes a trans-cultural symbol, and a re-interpretation of oriental symbolism.

The new trend in fashion design and the use of decorative symbolism in Donna Florio's dress can be critically analyzed if we compare the Gallenga dress with Florio's iconic black dress, in which she was painted

by Giovanni Boldini at the beginning of the century, in 1901. The painting was ordered by her wealthy husband and there were several versions, as the aristocratic tycoon firmly rejected the idea of his wife “showing” too much, and several versions were made of this black silk velvet dress, heavy with repetitive black embroidered ornamentation covering all of the tight corset and also the whole back. Gallenga’s creation for the “Star of Italy”, as the German Kaiser called Donna Florio, and also inspired by Vittorio Zecchin, totally subverted the heavy dress-code chosen by Boldini, who always had women in black, and chosen by her husband who commissioned the painting. The painting was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1903, then sold by Florio’s husband to the Rothschilds in New York, in 1925, following his severe financial losses. The Gallenga model dates from this time. The Gallenga dress, in silk chiffon velvet, shows bare arms, has no ornamentation, is short cut at the front and a bit longer at the back, and is almost up to the knee, a step forward to women’s emancipation and choice in dress-code. The second half of the 1920s features lesser quantities of materials used, for economic reasons suitable to the needs of new women throughout the Western world. The fashion style of the Belle Époque is superseded, as short dresses are needed to dance to the rhythms of the new music. The heavy accessories and ornamentation of the dress in the Boldini portrait give way to golden print. The oriental design has a symbolic connotation, suggesting a mountain emerging from the waters and the ascent to perfection (Chiarelli 2000: 72). The same year, 1925, is also the year of Gallenga’s Paris success with Vittorio Zecchin and her group of artists.

Vittorio Zecchin (1878–1949), also known as the “Venetian Morris”, originally recreated his own designs inspired by Murano glassware, notably from the “murrine.” Like Maria, he was a multifaceted artist with a keen eye on the entrepreneurial market of crafts and interior design, and was also director of a Murano glass enterprise. Maria also made use of murrine in accessories to her designs. The cross-cultural flows between the visual and applied arts are accounted for in Zecchin’s poetic metaphors and his strong Venetian identity: “The beautiful murrine, rich in many beautiful colours, like my lagoon, like my sea, like my sky, like San Marco, like the fire of our furnaces. What a happiness to be able to transform glass into many precious stones, more beautiful than those of goldsmiths, more beautiful than the eyes of the women of the Orient” (Zecchin, in Artale 2017).<sup>26</sup>

## 5 Fashion as an intersemiotic system

The term “intersemiotic” implies that a “translation” between different cultural systems and arts may be an apt definition. This seems to apply well to the Oriental inspiration and stylized design of Vittorio Zecchin, and a poem by D’Annunzio evoking the same imagery. Zecchin designed a triptych, which Maria had then embroidered in silk. It has the chromatic code of Modernism of black, white and red, and is evocative of Oriental mysticism and mythology. The European themes of symbols and their psycho-analytic valence are reinterpreted, and a poem by Gabriele D’Annunzio offers another perspective on the world of arts and crafts. The image has been providentially retrieved and reproduced with D’Annunzio’s poem for Vittorio Zecchin.

The link with Vittorio Zecchin was based on a trans-adaptation of symbols and themes. The capes and cloaks designed by Maria are evidently inspired by the themes in Zecchin’s decorative panels of maidens and their mantles in the Hotel Terminus at the Venice Lido, created in 1914, and destroyed during the bombardments of the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> The cycle was inspired by the *Thousand and One Nights*. The style, echoing a Venetian orientalism, featuring precious mantles with their rich and precious decoration, is reminiscent of that of the Austrian Secessionist Gustav Klimt; this is how Zecchin describes his artistic influence on his textiles, paintings and the chromatic geometrical designs of his “murrine”. But the actualization and bringing to life of those materials is the result of his cooperation with Maria. When Maria exhibited her luxury capes and mantles in Paris (1925) and Monza (1923), Zecchin also designed the furnishings for her rooms. On her part, Maria was generous in helping with the permanent exhibition of the works of the young modern artists, the AMI group (Arte Moderna Italiana) in her showroom in Italy, and also in exporting them to overseas events.

A long overdue tribute to Zecchin and Gallenga, featuring poems and the visual arts, was offered by a Milan showroom in 2009, organized by Galleria Daniela Balzaretti. The catalogue is centred on the interdependence of myths, poems and the applied arts.<sup>28</sup> For the Gallenga-Zecchin triptych entitled “Fede” (“Faith”, ca. 1915), Alfonso Panzetta has chosen the *Poema Paradisiaco* (1893).

“They say that in your thick hair you have a red lock like a flame: in the mane enclosed. Is it true? I think about it, and see it flaming. I see it strangely flaming like a fatal sign. O passion burning with that fire! All the