In focusing on the life writing of high-profile protagonists of the violence of the anni di piombo, this chapter marks a departure from the preceding chapters’ analysis of third-party representations of female terrorists as developed in the cultural production of the 1970s and 1980s. It examines how the female perpetrators of the anni di piombo represent themselves in the 1990s, in the context of a political climate that is predisposed to considering the possibility of pardoning former terrorists. It explores how their writings negotiate existing cultural representations of women’s participation in political violence and attendant cultural norms in a bid to construct themselves as worthy of social rehabilitation. Its treatment of texts that consciously deploy the language of trauma and acknowledge the traumatic import of the anni di piombo also constitutes a departure from previous chapters’ exploration of unconscious expressions of trauma in cultural production. Finally, the chapter also addresses the highly contentious and problematic nature of perpetrator speech and explores how Italy’s former terrorists negotiate public sensitivities and preconceived expectations in their life writing.

The fact that high-profile members of domestic terrorist organizations are granted a political voice and enjoy cultural prominence is a striking and perhaps unique feature of Italy’s recollection of the traumatic past. Sergio Zavoli’s prime-time television interviews with leading members of terrorist organizations in La notte della repubblica (1989) constituted a mediated, cultural encounter between individuals responsible for antistate violence in the anni di piombo and the Italian public, and they established a precedent for postterrorist speech.¹ The subsequent emergence of a significant corpus of autobiographical writings by, or extended interviews with, former members of terrorist organizations in the mid-to-late 1990s advanced the process begun by La notte della repubblica.² Augmented by a smaller number of novels and short story collections penned by former terrorists, the corpus may now be said to constitute a subgenre of postterrorist

R. Glynn, Women, Terrorism, and Trauma in Italian Culture
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narration. As Silvia Dai Prà puts it, “gli anni Settanta, soprattutto se visti dal punto di vista eversivo, vendono, piacciono, fanno tendenza” [the Seventies sell, their subversive side, in particular, is trendy and has a certain appeal]. Neither the success enjoyed by the corpus of postterrorist narration, nor its mainstream publication by Italy’s major publishing houses, should surprise us, as Leigh Payne intimates: “audiences find perpetrators’ power alluring. Perpetrators, after all, ‘do’ violence; victims are ‘done to.’ [. . .] What makes the stories of perpetrators so compelling is, in part, that they are agents: they act upon others.”

Beyond exerting a compelling narrative pull, it might also be argued that the success of postterrorist narration is testament to the enduring relevance of the anni di piombo for the Italian public. That success also indicates the important role the writings of former terrorists may perform in shaping the memory and working through the traumatic legacy of those violent years. The political and historical context in which the corpus of postterrorist narration emerges is significant; the demise of Italy’s First Republic in 1992 and the associated reform of the political and electoral systems encouraged state institutions to revisit the experience of political violence and to investigate the possibilities of working toward a form of legal “reconciliation” with former terrorists. The attempt to promote such a reconciliation constituted a formal recognition that political violence no longer posed a significant threat to the country. It also amounted to an acknowledgment of the shortcomings of the pentitismo legislation of the 1980s: it had now become clear that low-ranking members of terrorist organizations ran the risk of serving longer prison terms than those more heavily involved in planning and carrying out terrorist actions, as they had insufficient knowledge of their organization to avail of a reduction in sentencing in exchange for cooperation with the authorities. Preliminary consultations with interested parties on the possibility of granting an indulto (a form of pardon) to former terrorists culminated in July 1997, when the Italian Parliament’s Judiciary Committee opened the debate on a proposed law designed to reduce the sentence served by those incarcerated for terrorism-related crimes committed before 1989. Although that debate was subsequently cut short by the emergence of the “new Red Brigades” and their murder of government consultants Massimo d’Antona in 1999 and Marco Biagi in 2002, the official moves toward legal reconciliation provided an impetus for former terrorists to narrate their own stories to the Italian public.

The corpus of postterrorist narration may be seen, then, as an attempt on the part of former terrorists to promote their public rehabilitation, facilitating their release from prison and easing their reentry into Italian society. It has been suggested, for instance, that such texts function as a