Jomarie Alano’s recent translation of Ada Gobetti’s *Partisan Diary* brings to English-language readers a vital account of Gobetti’s experiences in the Italian resistance. First published in 1956, Gobetti’s diary focuses on the last twenty months of the Second World War when German troops poured across the border to occupy Italy. Already a well-known figure among anti-Fascists in the previous decades, Gobetti during this period of occupation transcends easy categorization because she was involved in a variety of resistance efforts. The text makes a unique contribution to our understanding of the Second World War.

Firsthand accounts of the war abound, but few combine the immediacy of a diary with the hindsight of a memoir as well as Gobetti’s. Using notes she took at the time, Gobetti pieced together this diary after several years had passed. This technique, and Gobetti’s brilliant narrative style, magnifies the poignancy of daily events. She puts us in the room as she and her fellow activists make important decisions but also adds commentary that previews the outcome, sometimes with heartbreaking results: “We parted under the glow of that smile of his. That is how I saw him again in my mind sixteen months later when, in France, in an underground newspaper, I read the news of his horrible end” (pp. 23-24). The meticulous footnotes provided by Alano keep the reader in the know about the different people and groups that Gobetti meets; the inclusion of indices organized by name and place also helps.

If Gobetti is not a familiar name to non-Italian specialists, her story will capture their interest. Alano’s introduction sets Gobetti in her historical context. She was the young widow of Piero Gobetti, a fierce critic of Fascism who died after fleeing to Paris in 1926 to avoid arrest, leaving her to raise their infant son, Paolo, as a single mother. She worked as an English teacher (her dissertation was on Alexander Pope) while taking on more responsibilities within the network of Turin anti-Fascist intellectuals. At the time the diary begins she was participating, alongside her teenaged son and with the support of her second husband, Ettore Marchesini, in the resistance at every level. The “little family of intellectuals” carried out acts of sabotage, published and distributed clandestine newspapers, and provided aid to other partisans (p. 7). Meanwhile, Gobetti organized two women’s groups to help rally women to defeat the Nazi-Fascist threat. She was indefatigable in her participation. Like the writer Iris Origo, whose well-respected diary, *War in Val d’Orcia*, covers the German occupation of Tuscany, Gobetti made her home the de facto headquarters of resistance activity in her area. But, unlike Origo, Gobetti ventured out into the field, hiking across the Alps to France. Predict-
ably, the French maquisards did not know what to
make of her—a lone woman among men. They
were somewhat relieved when they discovered
she was “the mother” (indeed, Paolo was with
them) but suspicious that she might be a Mata
Hari-style seducer/spy. Finally, she gave “a magni-
ficent idiotic speech” that allowed them to justify
her presence as a humanitarian-minded activist
looking to network with local women about phil-
anthropy (p. 258). During its weeks in France the
group delivered information to the Allied com-
mands and gathered newspapers, a radio, and
guns to bring back to occupied Italy. After liber-
ation, Gobetti became the vice mayor of Turin, the
first woman to hold that position in any Italian
city.

This diary is valuable for those interested in
learning more about Second World War history; it
uncovers fascinating details about resistance
work, political ideology, ethical dilemmas, and
gender roles. Gobetti’s most personal meditations
center on her son’s safety and the sacrifices made
by his generation. She was determined to support
Paolo’s independence and respect his choices, but
she worried constantly when he was on a mission.
Her words testify to the importance of family
bonds, a theme highlighted also in Caroline
Moorehead’s excellent recent biography of Amelia
Pincherle Rosselli and her two sons, companions
of Piero Gobetti, Carlo and Nello Roselli, A Bold
and Dangerous Family (2017). Jomarie Alano has
written a book-length biography, A Life of Resist-
ance: Ada Prospero Marchesini Gobetti
(1902-1968) (2017), for those interested in learning
more about Ada Gobetti, a unique and inspiring
individual. Gobetti’s diary reveals how important
involvement in resistance activities was to those
opposed to Fascism and German occupation. Cre-
ating committees and political organizations gave
them a way to plan for an uncertain future; carry-
ing out acts of sabotage and spreading clandestine
news allowed them to display their noncompli-
cance with an authority they deemed unjust. And
being together to support each other gave them
the courage to persevere through monstrous hard-
ship.