

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Women Writers and Italian Fascism: Figures of Female Resistance in Paola Masino, Paola Drigo, and Milena Milani

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zb9x6dr>

Author

Gomez, Carmen Marie

Publication Date

2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Women Writers and Italian Fascism:

Figures of Female Resistance in Paola Masino, Paola Drigo,
and Milena Milani

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Italian

by

Carmen Marie Gomez

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Women Writers and Italian Fascism:
Figures of Female Resistance in Paola Masino, Paola Drigo,
and Milena Milani

by

Carmen Marie Gomez

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Lucia Re, Chair

This dissertation brings into focus a vital body of women's writing about fascism in order to highlight the articulation of a literary discourse that undermines fascist depictions of femininity. I provide evidence of the emergence of a distinctly Italian approach to feminist creative and theoretical practices, founded in critical interpretations of sexual difference. I consider the work of three authors who have yet to be fully acknowledged in the Italian literary panorama: Paola Masino (1908-1989), Paola Drigo (1876-1938), and Milena Milani (1917-present). My analysis focuses on the stylistic, thematic, and structural elements that Masino, Drigo, and Milani employ to engage with and re-imagine normative fascist narratives of femininity and womanhood. The scope of the project is multi-faceted: I attempt to 1) recuperate

these particular authors who have not yet been fully recognized by Italian literary scholarship; 2) highlight their critical engagement with and resistance to fascist constructions of woman; 3) recapitulate and illustrate through my analyses fascism's use of rhetorical strategies intended to streamline and contain femininity by way of patriarchal conceptualizations of gender and the 'naturalization' of concepts meant to relegate women to a subservient role; 4) and finally, to suggest that feminist literary critics learn from the 'Italian approach' found in the works of innovative theorists such as Adriana Cavarero and Teresa de Lauretis. These Italian scholars anticipated the 'new' direction of the kind of feminist literary scholarship practiced by Rita Felski and others as a dialogical practice that creates positive aesthetic value through the highlighting of textual tensions, polyvalent forms, and constructive figures of resistance. The authors studied in this dissertation re-imagine traditionally female realms and identities with new and empowering energies. Masino, Drigo, and Milani not only utilize narrative strategies to disrupt patriarchal ideologies and gendered narrative identities but additionally create new figures that redirect women's representations. Milani's novel, *La ragazza di nome Giulio*, written in the early 1960s, provides a retrospective account of women's experience of Italian fascism, building upon the discourses of her predecessors, Masino and Drigo, in order to create a new female textual imaginary and a feminist narrative voice. Milani's novel provides a fractured yet compelling image of a female narrative self that illustrates simultaneously women's repression by and resistance to a limited patriarchal imaginary. Milani's novel constitutes a link between the cultural resistance by female writers such as Masino and Drigo to women's cultural and political oppression during the fascist era, the wartime and postwar *letteratura partigiana* and *memorialistica resistenziale* authored by women such as Ada Gobetti, and the narrative acts of

resistance that would continue to shape women's narratives in the period of the elaboration of Italian feminist thought and practice in the 1970s.

The dissertation of Carmen Marie Gomez is approved.

Claudio Fogu

Thomas Harrison

Lucia Re, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	35
The Myth of the Mother in Paola Masino's <i>Monte Ignoso</i>	
CHAPTER 2	99
“Queste donne (buone)”: Femininity and Rurality in Paola Drigo’s <i>Maria Zef</i>	
CHAPTER 3	154
Toward a Feminist Narrative Voice: Milena Milani’s <i>La ragazza di nome Giulio</i>	
CONCLUSION	198
Bibliography	209

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge Professor Lucia Re, who opened my eyes to an incredibly valuable collection of literature by Italian women. I am very thankful for her patience, support, and guidance throughout my coursework, during my exams, and in the process of completing the dissertation. Her constant mentorship has inspired and shaped my work as a literary scholar and feminist.

Special thanks goes to Professor Thomas Harrison for his encouragement in moments of difficulty.

Thank you to Professor Claudio Fogu, for patiently reading and providing extensive comments to this dissertation.

To my colleagues and friends in the Italian Department: thank you for being my companions throughout this process. I would like to thank especially Sarah Carey, for being an extraordinary mentor and friend; Claire Lavagnino and Melina Madrigal, for providing me with endless love and support; and Christopher White for his camaraderie and, at times, commiseration.

My special gratitude goes to Emily Davidson for almost single-handedly reviving my spirit and for inspiring me to trudge through the daily writing practice. Together we have dispelled the myth of the solitary scholar.

Thank you to my family: for everything, always. To my mother, Diana, who lives by example and, like her powerful namesake Artemis, has shown me that there is no limit to women's potential. Thank you to my father, Robert, who borrowed fifty dollars to pay his college tuition—the first contribution to what would become a lifetime investment—and initiated a legacy of education, community involvement, and social responsibility. His support has made every goal within reach. To my brothers, Antonio and Rafael, and my sister, Felice, for paving the way.

And finally, my infinite gratitude goes to Randy Schwartz for remembering to believe in me when I had forgotten to believe in myself.

VITA

EDUCATION

June 2013 PhD in Italian, University of California, Los Angeles
2008 M.A. in Italian, University of California, Los Angeles
2003 B.S. International Business and Legal Studies, University of San Francisco

HONORS AND AWARDS

UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship (2010-2011)
UCLA Graduate Research Mentorship (2009-2010) Cecchetti Graduate Research Award (2010)
UCLA Center for European and Eurasian Studies Pre-Dissertation Fellowship (2009)
UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship (2009)
UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship (2008)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2009 Guest Lecturer Fiat Lux Freshman Seminar
University of California, Los Angeles Los Angeles, California
2006-2009 Teaching Associate/Instructor Italian Levels 1-5
Department of Italian University of California, Los Angeles Los Angeles,
California
2007-2008 Teaching Associate/Instructor Accelerated Advanced Italian and Conversation
UCLA Study Abroad Program Florence, Italy
Teaching Associate “Language, Meaning, and the Making of Poetry”
Honors Collegium, University of California, Los Angeles Los Angeles,
California

PUBLICATIONS

“Gender, Science, and the Modern Woman: Futurism’s Strange Concoctions of Femininity,”
Carte Italiane 2.6 (2010).

“Milena Milani’s *La ragazza di nome Giulio*: A Forgotten Feminist Novel.” *MLN* 125.1 (2010).

Review of *Re-writing the Journey in Contemporary Italian Literature, Figures of Subjectivity in Progress* by Cinzia Sartini-Blum *MLN* 124.5 (2009).

Contributor, *BiGLI (Bibliografia generale della lingua e della letteratura italiana)*. Rome: Salerno, 2009.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

February 2012 Scripps College, California Interdisciplinary Consortium of Italian Studies, “La vita nella strada: Suburban Spectacle and Familial Fictions in Paola Masino’s *Periferia*”

April 2010 UCLA, International Institute and the Postcolonial Theory and Literature Colloquium, “Islands of Otherness: Representations of Sardinia in the Work of Grazia Deledda.”

April 2010 University of Wisconsin-Madison, GAFIS Symposium, “Scientific Subjugation and the Deformation of the ‘Feminine’ in Italian Futurism”

October 2009 UCLA, Graduate Student Conference, “*La pasta passatista e il pasto futurista: Food, Gender, and Feminine Identities in Futurist and Fascist Italy*”

May 2009 Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, California. Presenter: “Futurism + 100”

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1980s, Italian literary and cultural studies witnessed an influx of valid contributions on women writers, thanks primarily to the efforts of literature scholars (most of them women themselves) dedicated to recuperating this all but forgotten literature.¹ Yet much work is yet to be done in defense of feminist critical readings of Italian texts. Despite the nearly forty years separating current research from the radical feminism of the 1970s, few literary critics embrace feminist interpretations of narrative. Feminists, however, have tackled the issue in their critical work of the last ten years, asking the questions: what does feminism have to contribute to the world of literary scholarship? How has feminism evolved from the radical thought of 1970s feminists? And, how can feminism continue to be relevant in contemporary contexts? In this dissertation, I will bring into focus a vital body of women's writing about fascism in order to highlight not only the vast contribution of women writers on this particular historical moment and their articulation of a counter-discourse to fascist depictions of femininity,

¹See, for example: Anna Santoro and Francesca Vegliione, *Catalogo della scrittura femminile a stampa presente nei fondi library della Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli* (Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1984); Santoro, *Narratrici italiane dell'Ottocento* (Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1987); Rinaldina Russell, *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) and *The feminist encyclopedia of Italian literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997); Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (London: Athlone, 1995); Luisa Ricaldone, *La scrittura nascosta: Donne di lettere e loro immagini tra Arcadia e Restaurazione* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 1996); *Il Novecento: Antologia di scrittrici italiane del primo ventennio* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1997); Marina Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998); Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, eds., *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge [England], New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008). In the volumes that focus on contemporary, rather than Renaissance and Early Modern women's writing, very few excerpts mention or dedicate much space to the authors considered in this dissertation.

but also to evidence the emergence of a distinctly Italian approach to feminist creative and theoretical practices founded in critical interpretations of sexual difference. I consider the work of three authors who have yet to be fully acknowledged in Italian literary scholarship: Paola Masino (1908-1989), Paola Drigo (1876-1938), and Milena Milani (1917-present).

My analysis in the following chapters draws from a relational mode of inquiry and focuses on the stylistic, thematic, and structural elements that Masino, Drigo, and Milani employ to at once engage with and re-imagine fascist narratives of femininity and womanhood. The scope of the project is multi-faceted: I attempt to, 1) recuperate these particular authors who have not yet been fully recognized within the Italian literary panorama 2) highlight their critical engagement with and resistance to fascist constructions of woman; 3) recapitulate and illustrate through my analyses fascism's use of rhetorical strategies to streamline and contain femininity by way of patriarchal conceptualizations of gender and the 'naturalization' of those concepts, meant to relegate women to a subservient role; 4) to suggest that feminist literary critics learn from the Italian example, found in the works of innovative theorists, primarily Adriana Cavarero and Teresa de Lauretis. These scholars anticipated the 'new' direction of feminist literary scholarship, identifying it as a dialogical analytical approach that creates positive aesthetic value through tension, polyvalent forms, and constructive figures of resistance. Rather than merely questioning "sites of traditional male power in Italian society" (Lucamante 15), the authors studied in this dissertation re-imagine traditionally female realms and identities with new and empowering energies—home and hearth, the countryside, and the female body.² In this way, Masino, Drigo, and Milani not only utilize narrative strategies to disrupt patriarchal ideologies

² In *A Multitude of Women*, Stefania Lucamante identifies sexual politics, the family as a problematic societal entity, and the workplace as specific examples of the sites of male power that she examines in her analysis of the hybridity of Italian women's writing.

and feminized narrative identities but additionally create new figures that constructively redirect women's representation. In my analysis of Masino and Drigo's novels, I will investigate the way these authors break apart notions of femininity under fascism by evidencing, on the one hand, women's struggle to acquiesce entirely to the socially-prescribed features of their sex, and by constructing new female literary models. Milani's novel, written decades later and representing a narrative retrospective on women's experience during fascism, builds upon the discourses of women writers, like Masino and Drigo, to create a female textual imaginary and a feminist narrative voice. Milani's novel envisions a fractured yet contiguous conception of the female self and a female narrative voice that illustrate simultaneously women's containment in and resistance to a patriarchal imaginary. In this way, *La ragazza di nome Giulio* links women's cultural and political oppression during fascism with narrative acts of resistance that became integral to women's contributions to a *letteratura partigiana* following the war and the subsequent feminist movement in Italy.

The novels and authors included in the dissertation are those that have been forgotten within the Italian literary panorama (as in the case of Milena Milani), relatively overlooked (Masino), or considered of limited relevance (Drigo). The absence here of those names (which are just beginning to be fully recognized for their literary contributions) that more regularly surface in critical discussions of Italian women novelists—Elsa Morante, Natalia Ginzburg, Anna Banti, Alba De Céspedes, Lalla Romano, and Anna Maria Ortese, just to name a few—does not suggest that these women did not also engage with fascist narratives of femininity in compelling ways.³ Rather, I chose to recuperate and illuminate these three women writers who

³ As Lucamante rightly observes, even more prominent women writers from the 19th and 20th centuries are measured separately from their male counterparts. Instead of being included in relevant genres and modes according to their prose, women writers are often considered in a

acted as precursors and contemporaries of a vast, valuable collection of Italian women who used the genre of the novel and realist modes to bring into focus the complexities of sexual difference and its aesthetic and political usefulness. I will go on to suggest that these three writers, Masino, Drigo, and Milani, contributed to the evolution of a uniquely Italian feminist practice by producing narrative styles, themes, and tropes that can now be read as forms of resistance to fascism's gendering of culture and society. These female figures gave way to a rich and prolific period of women's writing during the postwar partisan movement in Italy. The partisan movement, and women's participation therein, marks not only a powerful intersection between the political and cultural resistance enacted by women during and after fascism, but also highlights the act of narrating as a way for women to understand the recent fascist past, illuminate discourses of sexual difference, and envision Italian feminism as an aesthetic, as well as political, practice.

* * *

American feminist and literary scholar Rita Felski attempts to address issues surrounding the continuity of feminist literary scholarship in her critical work, *Literature after Feminism* (2003). Felski's book is, in many ways, a response to a practice of feminist literary criticism that only strive to debunk, denounce, and dissect patriarchal literary traditions without fully appreciating the many narrative perspectives women can represent. This innovative approach

category apart from traditional literary categorizations. Lucamante cites, for example, Robert S. Gordon's *An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Literature* (London: Duckworth, 2005), which only includes women's contributions to Italian literary productions in an awkward chapter that appears almost as an afterthought, entitled 'Other Voices,' pp. 123-39. Some encyclopedic catalogs do a better job of representing Italian women authors, listing them as it would male authors, according to an alphabetic ordering. See, the *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, v. 1 and 2, edited by Gaetana Marrone (New York: Routledge, 2007).

seeks, in some ways, to reconcile the distinct varieties of feminist criticism outlined in Elaine Showalter's "Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1979). Showalter's essay distinguishes between two forms of feminist critical practices. The first, identified as "feminist critique," is concerned with woman as reader. The problem with feminist critique, Showalter contends, is that it is male-oriented, although it does effectively criticize and expose images and stereotypes of women that limit women's participation in literary history and culture. Showalter's response to this limited form of feminist engagement is "gynocritics"—adapting the French term *gynocritique* to identify the second variety of feminist criticism concerned with woman-as-writer. "Gynocritics" opens up the literary canon to women writers and attempts to focus on a "newly visible world of female culture" ("Towards a Feminist Poetics" 28), bridging feminist critical practices across interdisciplinary fields. Showalter's distinction between feminist critique and "gynocritics" seeks to recuperate female textual and intellectual productions by isolating them from male culture—seemingly inviting only sympathetic readings of women's literary contributions and setting them in a category apart from male-authored texts. Such an approach according to some critics not only comes dangerously close to the exclusivist patriarchal values it opposes, but precludes women's dialogical engagement (be it historical, political, or discursive) with patriarchal discourses.⁴

Felski's book, on the other hand, while building on Showalter's work, presents women as both engaged readers of male and female-authored texts, and dedicated writers who learn from both. In addition to providing a thorough outline of the various trends in feminist literary criticism that have surfaced since the Women's Movement of the 1970s, Felski presents

⁴ For an analysis of the critical problems inherent to Showalter's theory see Toril Moi's discussion of "Toward a Feminist Poetics" and the latter "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981) in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985). pp. 75-80.

innovative and insightful readings of literature by women while also addressing past feminist critical practices and the often negative responses to them. Facing head-on feminism's weaknesses and criticisms that claim feminist scholarly practices are too political to be literary, Felski gives feminism a public voice elaborating on the many ways feminist critical practices contribute to new readings of literature by both male and female authors, past and present. One of Felski's many contributions in *Literature after Feminism* is her assertion that literature is double-sided. In response to the invectives of traditional literary scholars that claim that feminist critical practices cannot be literary because they are political, Felski outlines a dialogic model that counters this "either/or" way of thinking with a more fluid methodology of "both/and."⁵ In Felski's words:

Our sense of how things are comes from diverse and sometimes conflicting sources: science, religion, art, politics, the media, and the various and varied contingencies of our own lives. Literature is one of the cultural languages through which we make sense of the world; it helps to create our sense of reality rather than simply reflecting it. At the same

⁵ See p. 141. Felski cites this line of thinking as an example of an "either/or" approach to literary analysis. Feminist criticism is both political and literary—content manipulates form in constructive ways that allow literature to effect women's experience (and others' experience of women) on multiple levels. "The critic writes against the grain of traditional interpretations, showing how careful attention to gender can transform our sense of what a work of literature is really about. She brings into focus patterns, themes, and designs that were previously occluded or invisible, showing how the text draws on, yet also rewrites, the meanings of masculine and feminine" (*LF* 148). In her introduction, Felski takes particular issue with John Ellis' *Literature Lost* (New haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), a jeremiad against the corruption of a scholarly study of literature by "race-gender-class" critics. Felski also cites Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994); *The Death of Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1990); and *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) by Roger Kimball. Each of these works in some way disparages feminist criticism, accusing feminists of assaulting the canon and debasing university curriculum with resentful, hostile, and irrational critiques of history and literature. See *LF*, p. 171.

time, it also draws on, echoes, modifies, and bounces off our other frameworks of sense-making. No text is an island (13).

Felski argues, in this and in her previous work (*Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*), that feminist literary theory—with sustained dedication to its original tagline that “the personal is political”—provides an approach to reading and writing that integrates literary and political practice.⁶ Felski points out that women’s literature is concerned with a myriad of contemporary issues that attempt to simultaneously mark sexual difference as an essential aspect of human consciousness, while also trying to reconcile complex interpretations of identity – encompassing diverse rhizomes of race, sexuality, gender, national belonging and countless other qualifications – with collective and individual symbolic and political praxes.

What Felski attempts, and succeeds in accomplishing, is to present a fresh, contemporary perspective on feminist scholarly practices as critical inquiries that go beyond incriminations of patriarchy to illuminate new ways of reading and writing. Her contemplation of current feminist scholarship marks the evolution of feminist thinking beyond the contributions of radical thinkers during the 1970s women’s movement, as well as a secondary phase of feminist criticism that attacked phallogocentric semiotic practices to reveal gender as a fundamental category of human understanding. Though Felski readily admits that these interpretations are somewhat outdated, she also rightly points out their contribution to literature, not only in resurrecting a number of texts that had remained invisible to canonical research, but by also changing the way we think about writers, readers, and the aesthetic value of literature. Feminism, as Felski demonstrates,

⁶ *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989).

enriches the way we value good (and bad) literature by breaking open aesthetic categories and bringing to critical attention a wealth of texts that have been historically marginalized.⁷

Stefania Lucamante situates a similar argument in the Italian context in her book *A Multitude of Women*, published in the same year as Felski's *Literature after Feminism*. Lucamante attempts to shed light on the limitations of the traditional Italian canon, both in its prolonged exclusion of women writers and its difficulty in accepting the novel as a legitimately Italian genre.⁸ Adopting Elaine Showalter's three-phase paradigm presented in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), which stipulates a maturation of women's creative production, Lucamante proposes a fourth, hybrid phase, adding to Showalter's categories of the imitative ("feminine"), of protest ("feminist"), and of self-discovery ("female").⁹ The hybrid phase, as Lucamante describes it, strives to appreciate the innovations of women novelists (examined in the texts of women writers born beyond the 1960s and producing texts well after the social struggles of 1968 and the 1970s feminist movement in Italy) without "falling into essentialism" (9). Lucamante posits Felski's "both/and" double-sided model in the Italian context, reinforcing women's pluralistic creative expression with the aid of Italian feminist thinkers, like Teresa de Lauretis, Rosi Braidotti, and Adriana Cavarero. While Lucamante's book offers much needed insight into

⁷ For Felski's discussion of aesthetic value, see *LF*, pp. 135-141. Other scholars reaffirm feminism's contribution to literary studies, countering the argument that feminist scholarship has corrupted higher education. See for example, bell hooks: "When the feminist movement exposed biases in curriculum, much of this forgotten and ignored work was 'rediscovered.' The formation of women's studies programs in colleges and universities provided institutional legitimation for academic focus on the work of women." *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), p. 20.

⁸ See *Multitude*, pp. 5, 18.

⁹ See Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 3. For Lucamante's interpretation see *Multitude*, p. 8

contemporary women writers in the 1990s and beyond, establishing a dialogue between the work of these women and their “fore-mothers” (Elsa Morante, in particular), it leaves aside an entire earlier generation of women writers whose feminist narratives not only contributed to the recognition of the novel as a valuable instrument for Italian literary expression, but also provided critical interpretations of gender construction and sexual difference, through the themes, style, and structure of their novels, identifying aspects of women’s cultural and historical experience under fascism that would help to later define a uniquely Italian feminist practice.

This dissertation endeavors to address this and other gaps in the valuable work of feminist literary scholars in the Italian tradition and beyond. Felski’s *Literature after Feminism* successfully maps the expansive contributions of feminist literary scholars, however fails to mention an Italian example (of criticism or literature) in this book or in the earlier *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (1989)—with only one exception, a brief mention of Teresa de Lauretis’ *Alice Doesn’t* in her chapter on narrative plots in *Literature after Feminism*.¹⁰ Felski is not alone. Very few feminist critical texts and anthologies, that are not specifically the work of Italianists, accredit Italian female scholars, with the exception of de Lauretis and Braidotti in a limited number of cases.¹¹ These influential scholars, however, draw from the theoretical framework

¹⁰ See p. 104. Felski cites de Lauretis’ discussion of gender, narrative, and the Oedipal story that firmly anchors sexual difference in the act of storytelling. De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984). De Lauretis examines the semiotic division between man-hero-human-subject and woman as obstacle-boundary-space to be journeyed across, penetrated, conquered, or commanded over in order to elaborate on systems of meaning that categorize woman as pure symbol—that is, she is not necessarily a woman but identified only as fundamentally non-man.

¹¹ Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, scholars of Italian feminist practice and women’s writing, offer, for example, *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2002). Toril Moi’s fundamental *Sexual/Textual Politics*, reprinted in 2006 and 2008, does not mention a single Italian contributor to feminist theoretical practices. The *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009)

established by the accomplished Italian feminist philosophers and theorists who developed the Diotima group during the women's movement in Italy in the 1970s and in the years that followed. De Lauretis attempted to recuperate the distinctly Italian conceptualization of sexual difference as a mechanism for female expression and empowerment, and incorporate Italian feminist thought into contemporary feminist theory at large, in her essay "The essence of the Triangle: Or taking the risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy the U.S., and Britain" (1994).¹² The essay questions the possibility of anti-essentialist feminism, an alternative to separatist notions of early Italian feminism or French theorists' idealization of a feminine symbolic. In her insightful interrogation of how feminism might conceive a political and discursive practice that begins with the notion of woman (rather than woman as she is identified vis-à-vis male desire),¹³ de Lauretis suggests that women must take advantage of the tension and contradiction that arise between sex (the biological reality of being a woman), femininity (the qualities and dispositions that are socially-constructed and assigned to women), and experience (living in the world as a woman).¹⁴ To cultivate and embrace the tension between binary oppositions—between the masculine and the feminine, representation and identity, the personal and the political (or art and politics, for that matter)—is to resist an essentialist view of feminism, on the one hand, and to engender the essential difference of feminist theory, on the

compiled by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace dedicates several pages to de Lauretis. *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* mentions de Lauretis briefly.

¹² This essay was included in *The Essential Difference*, Schor, Naomi, and Elizabeth Weed, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994).

¹³ See *Sui generis*, pp. 530-531 in which de Lauretis argues, from a social point-of-view, being female signifies femininity, which, in turn, signifies sexual attractiveness according to male-determined parameters of attraction. The socialization of gender, as the process by which women arrive at self-identification as sexual beings, provides that women interiorize a masculine image of their sexuality and, thus, appropriate as their own identity a male construction of femininity.

¹⁴ See "The Essence of the Triangle," p. 4.

other. That is to say, feminism, in embracing sexual difference as a fundamental category of human experience, develops a relational mode of thinking that is defined not in its opposition to an ‘other’ but in the tension that arises in the space between binary categories.

De Lauretis’ analysis builds upon and takes as an example a uniquely Italian hypothesis of feminist practice. Early champions of Italian feminist thought, like Carla Lonzi and the collective efforts of the Diotima group, developed, at first, a strategic female essentialism that sought to deconstruct the authority of male-determined discourses and authorize the voice(s) of women according to an Irigarayan model.¹⁵ Carla Lonzi’s emphatic pamphlet, *Sputiamo su Hegel. La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale* [*Let’s Spit on Hegel. The Clitoral Woman and the Vaginal Woman*] (1974)—which preceded Luce Irigaray’s *This sex which is not one* (1977) and Diotima’s conceptualization of sexual difference in *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* [*Thinking Sexual Difference*] (1987)—anticipated notions of a pluralistic female sexuality and subjectivity.¹⁶ The pamphlet—taking a Hegelian model of sexual complementarity and gendered division of private and public spaces and practices as its target—directly questions patriarchal conjectures of femininity and their political and theoretical implications, calling for women to unite in opposition to their historical subordination. The early efforts of the Diotima group, formally established in Verona in the 1980s, responded to plural views of female subjectivity by focusing on collective intellectual productions and recuperating female genealogies that were systematically erased by patriarchal philosophical discourse. Rather than encouraging a truly

¹⁵ For a critical overview of the practices of Diotima, its various contributors, and the influence of Luce Irigaray on the group’s practices, see Re, “Diotima’s Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism” in *Italian Feminist Theory*.

¹⁶ A translation in English of Lonzi’s essay, “Let’s Spit on Hegel,” is available in *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel* along with other feminist critical readings of Hegel’s philosophical contributions, Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1996).

dialogical and dexterous form of exchange, however, Diotima, under the leadership of Luisa Muraro, endorsed a kind of authoritarian feminism; a monologic system of inquiry predicated on generational hierarchies and symbolic motherhood.¹⁷

This ideological shift was contemporaneous with the loss of one of Diotima's founding members. *Il cielo stellato dentro di noi* [*The Starry Sky inside of Us*], published by the group in 1992 and Adriana Cavarero's pivotal *Nonostante Platone* [*In Spite of Plato*] (1990), mark a distinct break between Cavarero—one of Italy's most celebrated feminist theorists and philosophers—and her intellectual association with Diotima.¹⁸ Unlike Diotima's matrilinear system of production supplanting male-dominated discourse and authority with a female-dominated one, Cavarero opted to engage with hegemonic philosophical discourse to create the valuable tension that de Lauretis alludes to in "The Essence of the Triangle." As I point out in the final chapter of the dissertation, de Lauretis' 'figures of resistance' correspond to Cavarero's manipulation of language to rediscover a female subject "I" through and against patriarchal discourse. While Cavarero's personal history situates her at the heart of a developing feminist discourse in Italy on the heels of the political feminist movement of the 1970s, and though a contemporary of the more widely recognized de Lauretis (by American feminists), her insights are not as readily considered by American literary and theoretical feminist scholars.¹⁹ Perhaps

¹⁷ See "Diotima's Dilemmas," p. 53-55.

¹⁸ *Il cielo stellato* no longer cited Cavarero as one of its collective authors. See "Diotima's Dilemmas," p.53.

¹⁹ Cavarero has yet to receive adequate scholarly attention from American and international feminists in spite of her widely translated texts: *In Spite of Plato* was translated into English in five years after its initial release in Italy (New York: Routledge, 1995); *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* in 2000, *Relating Narratives* (London: Routledge); *Corpo in figure* was redistributed as *Stately Bodies* (Chicago: Michigan Univ. Press, 2002); *A più voci* is available under the English title, *For More than One Voice* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005).

one explanation is that Cavarero's expertise is in the field of philosophy, but even in these anthologies her name is largely absent while other Italian contributors, like Braidotti, enjoy only limited recognition.²⁰

Nonetheless, Cavarero's work is highly relevant to feminist literary theory as it pertains, in large part, to language and other forms of expression. Just as Lonzi's subversive pamphlet—positioning a plural female sexual subject against the repressive hetero-normative standard as a symbol of women's resistance—acted as antecedent to the strategic essentialism of a “French” or Irigarayan female symbolic, Cavarero constructed a framework for precisely the type of “both/and” feminist criticism that Felski calls for in *Literature after Feminism*. In her conceptualization of sexual difference, and in her break from Diotima's limiting mode of matrilineal thinking, Cavarero develops a dialogic system of engagement that, like the work of de Lauretis and Braidotti, allows feminism the critical capacity to touch on a number of topics, including but not limited to, literature and philosophy, politics and creative expression. In addition to *Nonostante Platone*, which dissects Platonic philosophical discourse and reappropriates myth (as a fundamental category of story-telling and cultural reference) for female subjects, Cavarero's *Corpo in figure [Stately Bodies]* (1995) examines bodily metaphors in political discourse and representation, taking into consideration the problematic dualism between mind and body that has relegated women in Western thought to the realm of the corporeal, thus casting them as nonpolitical. The subsequent *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti [Relating Narratives]* (1997) looks critically at the relationship between narration and selfhood, using narrative models in philosophy and literature to reveal new ways of thinking about the

²⁰ Anthologies and theoretical guides for feminist philosophy dedicate limited space to the work of Rosi Braidotti. Nancy Arden McHugh's *Feminist Philosophies A to Z* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2007) has a section on Braidotti, pp. 14-15, but fails to mention Adriana Cavarero or the Diotima group in general.

formulation of human identities. *A più voci [For More than One Voice]* (2003) analyzes the unique embodiment of voice, identifying in the vocal event (especially from the mouths of women) a system of enunciation that opposes the monolithic authority of the ‘word.’

I have outlined Cavarero’s critical contributions here for two reasons: first, because they continuously resonate through my readings of the authors considered in this dissertation; and second, to emphasize an overdue appreciation for Cavarero’s critical voice and to situate it in contemporary discussions of feminist critical theory. Since her departure from Diotima, Cavarero’s scholarship has developed a dialogical mode of feminist thinking that simultaneously engages with and deconstructs patriarchal systems of inquiry. I use the term “dialogic” in a strictly Bakhtinian sense—a form of relational, multivocal representation that opposes a monologic, dominant voice that is illustrative of hegemonic ideologies.²¹ In her assessment of sexual difference and language in “Per una teoria della differenza sessuale,” as well as in her critical engagement with patriarchal philosophical discourse in *Nonostante Platone* and in her investigation of dualist representations of the mind and body and her consideration of the act of enunciation against the enunciated, Cavarero has pinpointed the many contradictions inherent in patriarchal discourses while also evidencing the many creative ways women have historically circumvented the limitations of oppressive ideologies. That is to say, she has adopted a “both/and” methodology that not only disrupts repressive patriarchal paradigms by exploding them from the inside out, but also recognized positive relational modes of expression and creative female representation.²²

²¹ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981); also, for feminist readings of Bakhtin’s dialogism, see Dale M. Bauer and Susan McKinstry, eds., *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1991).

* * *

This project starts by embracing Felski's notion that "no text is an island." That is to say, literature does not stand apart from politics, history, religion, and art but rather presents a mechanism in motion that enables us to interact with the way these various and conflicting components contribute to how we make sense of the world. In this way, my approach embraces the dialogisms inherent to Italian feminist practices and the "both/and" methodology endorsed by Felski. Because literature and history are complicit in exploiting the power of language to delineate certain narratives, this project endeavors to read historical and ideological discourses through literature; to examine the ways in which narratives of individual and collective identities and experiences intersect and collide in the literary text. It will also explore the ways women dialogued with these discourses through their writing, identifying and problematizing women's historical and cultural representation. My analysis is firmly situated in an Italian tradition: the novels I examine respond to and are contextualized by an influential moment in Italian history—Italian fascism (1922-1943)—in which the intersection of politics and aesthetics constitutes not only an apt occasion for feminist inquiry but a fundamental component in fascism's development of a nationalist ideology and culture. A critical investigation of Italian fascism and its use of rhetoric to reinforce ideological hegemony and political autarky is hardly a new contribution to Italian cultural studies. A number of scholars, consistently citing Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as a starting point, have

²² I am borrowing the language of Hélène Cixous for the "exploding" of restrictive feminine identities: "If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man... it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of." "The Laugh of Medusa" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1,4 (1976): 887.

contemplated fascist ideology and the discursive formation of the regime.²³ Relevant in this project is the work of those scholars that examined the special role of gender and gender construction in fascist ideological discourse. This dissertation does not attempt to contribute yet another voice to a critical discussion of fascist discursive strategies through a close examination of rhetorical practices, but seeks to provide instead a comprehensive critical reading of women's responses and resistance to fascism-as-discourse through the literary text. In particular, I will examine the way women interacted with fascist metonymical constructions of woman by way of gender valuation and categorization, and the way women writers disrupted fascist feminine identities in their texts to challenge unilateral prescriptions of womanhood and produce modern, complex female figures. In addition, I attempt to make connections between the narrative methodologies employed by writers included in this project and the themes and tropes that became emblematic of Italian feminist thought and practice. In connecting women's literary responses to Italian fascism with feminism, I am not only trying to elucidate a connection between women's experience of these two fundamental historical events, but also imply that Italian feminism and women's literary practice in Italy have historically bridged the gap between political and literary discourse, thus anticipating the post-structuralist approach of international feminist theorists, like Felski, and derailing claims that feminist critical inquiry cannot at once encompass the purportedly oppositional categories of politics and art.

Coinciding with an influx of Italian feminist theory by Diotima, Cavarero, and de Lauretis in the 1980s and 1990s, and shortly thereafter, were a number of innovative critical investigations of Italian fascism, its construction of gender, and women's experience during fascism. Works like Maria Antonietta Macciocchi's *La donna 'nera': 'consenso' femminile e*

²³ Most recently, Simonetta Falasca Zamponi's *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

fascismo [*Woman in Black: Female Consensus and Fascism*] (1976), *Rethinking Italian Fascism* (1986) edited by David Forgacs, *Fascism in Popular Memory* (1987) by Luisa Passerini, *La nuova italiana* [*The New Italian Woman*] (1987) by Elisabetta Mondello, *La corporazione delle donne: ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio fascista* [*The Corporation of Women: Female Models during the Fascist Ventennio*] (1988) by Marina Addis Saba, and *How Fascism Ruled Women* (1992) by Victoria De Grazia, contributed new paradigms to a discussion of gender and discourse during the fascist *ventennio*. These works revealed fascism's institutionalized misogyny in constructing feminine social subjects and dissected those problematic representations. Later critical texts, like Robin-Pickering Iazzi's volume, *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture* (1995) and her subsequent *Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture, and Fascism* (1997) re-examined women during fascism as speaking-subjects and innovators of social meaning through their creative productions. Other contributions, like *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy* (1996) by Barbara Spackman and *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (2000) by Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi adopted a literary and cultural studies approach, respectively, to examine the way rhetoric and aesthetics contributed to the totalitarian ideology of the regime.²⁴

²⁴ Claudio Fogu contemplates the creation of a fascist imaginary and its effect on the process of history-making in *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) but does not explicitly address constructions of gender. There are a number of scholarly studies on the relationship between rhetoric and ideology and its particular situation in Italian Fascism. See, Ernest Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977). Other texts examine the cultural and political effects of international fascism on women. See, for example, Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Kevin Passmore, *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe, 1919-45* (New Brunswick: Manchester University Press, 2003); and Annalisa Zox-Weaver's *Women Modernists and Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) which examines how women artists in photography, literature, and film interpret, dramatize, and exploit Hitler Gôring, and Pétain in their public work and archival materials. Alison Scardino Belzer reads femininity from the Great War through Italian Fascism in *Women*

In the last ten years, however, little scholarly attention has been dedicated to women writing during fascism, despite the prolific literary production by women during this time.²⁵ While these histories and literary critiques offer much needed insight into the discursive practices of the regime and its effect on women, the subject has, by no means, been exhausted—especially in light of progress in feminist literary studies. Cavarero’s later works, de Lauretis’ many essays, and critical examinations of feminist literary practice itself, like that of Felski, provide new and enlightened ways of re-reading literature by women.

Much of the critical work examining fascist discursive strategies and gender construction turn on fascism’s figuration of reproduction as a public, political issue. The regime adopted the body (in particular, the reproductive body) as a metaphor for its social and political objectives.

and the Great War: Femininity under Fire in Italy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) examining the way constructions of femininity during the World War I influenced women’s participation in a less empowering form of national citizenship during Fascism.

²⁵ See Scarparo, Susanna, and Rita Wilson, eds. *Across Genres, Generations, and Borders: Italian Women Writing Lives* (Newark, Delaware: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2004). Scarparo and Wilson’s volume examines the processes involved in women’s writing lives, specifically as autobiographers and biographers. Some of the essays employ feminist theoretical approaches concerning the connection between subjectivity and historical representation, the mother-daughter relationship, and various constructions of self-articulation. Similarly, *Italian Women and Autobiography: Ideology, Discourse and Identity in Female Life Narratives from Fascism to the Present* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) collects essays that look at the autobiographical practices of women and the complications of self-representation through historical, literary, and feminist lenses. These volumes focus specifically on autobiographical and biographical writing between borders and generations and do not directly consider realist fictional modes. Kershaw, Angela, and Angela Kimyongür, eds. *Women in Europe between the Wars: Politics, Culture and Society* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007). This volume attempts to recuperate the forgotten contributions to politics, culture, and society by women in the period between the two World Wars, analyzing women’s agency in the construction and reconstruction of European nation states. It does not take Italian women writers as a specific example. See also *Scrittrici nella politica culturale del Fascismo*, F.R. Andreotti and S. D’Ortenzi, eds., volume in *Quaderni del ‘900. Fascicoli Monografici V* (2005). pp. 168. This volume is dedicated to women writers in the first half of the 20th century and their dialogue with burgeoning fascist political and social ideologies. Perry Willson offers a critical overview of the social, political and geographical complexities of women’s lives in Italy in *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (2010).

Mussolini's "sano regime politico" shared properties with the human body and was constituted as an amalgamation of individual parts incapable of individual function, but that through their combination would corroborate the authority of the regime and position the Duce as its omnipotent leader.²⁶ Conceptualizing the nation and the regime as a "whole" and healthy body depended on a Hegelian breakdown of opposite but complementary counterparts.²⁷ In this scheme, masculine comes to represent male identity categorically and femininity becomes a synecdoche for female existence. Both categories were economically refigured to streamline production and reproduction as a single patriotic practice. Men who were successful in economic terms were imagined as particularly capable of sexual reproduction, whereas involvement in economic production was perceived as potentially devastating to female fertility.²⁸ Within a fascist (re)productive economy, demographic and economic issues were recast as biological obligation and civic duty in episodes like the fascist "Battle for Births," portraying flailing systems that were dependent not on policy but on the reproductive capacities of the Italian people. The regime acted politically to reinforce cultural gender distinctions, offering financial incentives and imposing regulations that would manipulate reproductive practices and discourage emigration. While the regime offered women increased political involvement through the creation of women's groups and organizations (which focused primarily on educating women on wifely and motherly duties), these institutions sought to sanction a traditional codification of gender and force women further into subordinate roles. If women were imagined by fascism as

²⁶ "Discorso dell'ascensione," p. 379; See Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, p. 150.

²⁷ See Re, "Fascist Theories of 'Woman,'" p. 82.

²⁸ "Production and reproduction are strictly, and asymmetrically, linked for men and women: only men involved in economic production are figured as capable of sexual reproduction, whereas involvement in economic production is presumed to destroy the woman's ability to reproduce" (Spackman 35).

political ‘agents’ and national citizens, it was in large part to attend to the State’s micro-systems—specifically, birthing the sons that would go on to defend the *patria* as it increased its international autonomy through a parallel increase in population.

Fascism as political regime is not at issue in this dissertation, rather I investigate the combined force of totalitarian policies and the crystallization of fascist ideals through certain kinds of discourse. I look at how women writers both question and subvert in different ways the rhetorical strategies of the regime. In this sense, the rhetorical strategies of the regime, their contribution to a dominant ideology, and the implications of that ideology on Italian culture become the object of a literary, rather than an historical, analysis. This assumption is at the heart of Barbara Spackman’s investigation of fascism’s “regno della parola” [“kingdom of the word”] and its contradictory relationship to the regime’s popular motto: “Il fascismo fa la storia, non la scrive” [“Fascism makes History, it does not write it”].²⁹ As Spackman and other critics have demonstrated, fascism, in fact, attempted to both make history and to write its own history,³⁰ employing a number of discursive strategies to manipulate the performative and positional functions of language in such a way that language becomes in itself act and event.³¹ New theorizations of linguistic functions, Spackman maintains,

[...] allow us to think of fascism as a discursive regime in which the relation between language and event is not one in which language functions to mystify a reality of pure

²⁹ All translations from Italian are mine unless otherwise noted. The fascist “Regno della parola” is an expression coined by Franco Venturi in “Il regime fascista” in *Trent’anni di storia italiana (1915-1945)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961), 186-7. Cited by Fogu in *The Historic Imaginary*, p. 21.

³⁰ See Falasca Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*; also Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary*.

³¹ Spackman comments on this ‘linguistic turn’ in literary studies citing Mario Isnenghi’s evaluation of rhetoric that “has lost its pejorative connotation.” The turn has inspired new theoretizations of discourse as a totality that challenges the opposition between ‘word’ and ‘thing’ (*Fascist Virilities* 133).

force, but rather one in which language itself functions as one of the realities of force and violence (xv).

If we are able to conceive of fascist language as force and violence, then its discourse on gender may more clearly be seen as a violent force used against women to subjugate them. The rhetorical practices of the regime perpetuated its policies through the conflation of gender and sex: women's political involvement was contingent upon their subscription to fascism's reproductive fantasy and its parallel gender conscriptions—configurations that were essential to the development of fascist ideology.³²

Fascism's re-invention of woman as a reproducer and of the family as a social entity served not only to enhance the regime's totalitarian control, but also had extensive cultural and ideological implications that, I would argue, are still relevant to contemporary Italian politics.³³ In fact, in her examination of fascism and the culture of virility, Spackman notes that the regime's principal fantasy was a reproductive one that prefaced and determined the other features that together comprised fascist ideology.³⁴ While Spackman alludes to fascism's

³² Macchiocchi might have referred to this as Fascism's seduction of women in *La donna 'nera,'* however, I am hesitant to take this stance. While I do believe Fascism attempted to 'seduce' women in this way—subsequently relegating them to inferior political and cultural positions through the promise of better national citizenship—I do not agree that women consented to such an agreement because they were psychologically seduced. For an excellent analysis of Macchiocchi's *La donna 'nera,'* see Pickering-Iazzi's first chapter "Unseduced Mothers" in *Politics of the Visible*, pp. 22-56.

³³ Scandalous intersections of sex and politics in Italy are at issue again with ex-Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, addressing even foreign audiences in articles included in popular magazines, like "Basta Bunga Bunga: Have Italians had enough of Silvio Berlusconi—and the culture he embodies?" included in the June 6, 2011 issue of *The New Yorker*. Robin Pickering-Iazzi touches on gender politics and their manifestation in contemporary neo-fascist political parties, like "Alleanza nazionale" in *Politics of the Visible*. Paul Ginsborg alludes to the continued relationship between politics, culture, and representation in his biographical work, *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power, and Patrimony* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

³⁴ See *Fascist Virilities*, p. 145.

constructions of femininity (and thus of woman) through a discussion of masculinity and the cult of fascist virility, her consideration of femininity, in particular, and women's counter-interpretations of fascist political and discursive practices is secondary.³⁵ Though she does not directly consider femininity as the asymmetrical counterpart to a dominant fascist rhetoric of virility, Spackman identifies gender politics, and its role in a fascist body politic, as a fundamental component in the formulation of fascist ideology. In his pivotal "Discorso dell'Ascensione" [Ascension Day Speech] Mussolini makes clear the extent to which the "policing" of gender, and the organization of gender controls through pronatalist policies and reproductive incentives, was not merely an afterthought, but central to the formation of fascist ideology.³⁶ Fascism's biologizing of gender and sex in such a way that masculine means male and feminine means female became so engrained that any reversal or deviation of fascist gender codes would be perceived as unnatural, a monstrosity.³⁷ Such knowledge, as Spackman rightly observes, is based upon an "ideological sedimentation so thick that it seems as natural as the ground we walk upon" and contributes to an acquiescence of gender politics as equally natural (5).

Robin Pickering-Iazzi and Lucia Re, and a number of other contributors, examine the specific situation of gender in fascist discourse in the volume *Mothers of Invention* and

³⁵ Spackman does include a chapter on fascist feminism, focusing specifically on Teresa Labriola and her internalization of fascist conceptions of virility in a reformulation of female empowerment. pp. 41-8.

³⁶ Spackman includes a thorough analysis of Mussolini's "Discorso dell'ascensione" in her final chapter in *Fascist Virilities*. For Fascism's gender controls and the role of gender in the formulation of fascist ideology, see, in particular, pp. 144-145.

³⁷ See Spackman, p. 34. See also "A FASCIST FEMINISM" by Andrew Hewitt in *Qui Parle* 13.1 (2001): 29-55 and Bellassai on homosexuality under Fascism.

Pickering-Iazzi develops this theme further in *Politics of the Visible*.³⁸ Pickering-Iazzi's analysis in *Politics of the Visible* (the first and only book-length study of women's writing during Italian fascism) combines literary criticism and cultural studies to touch on an array of issues ranging from mass-mediated images of Italian fascism for foreign consumption and the inherent contradictions of the regime in formulating cohesive ideologies to Italy's problematic position in configurations of modernity. Its most useful contribution, in terms of my own analysis, however, is the re-examination of the work of women writers during fascism, in light of concurrent historiographies like those listed above, to situate women as speaking subjects that constantly negotiated dominant codes and signs. Pickering-Iazzi intently situates her position as one of perpetual inquisitiveness, presenting her chapters as essays to be read against one another in the vein of Cavarero's and de Lauretis' dialectic of tension as a way for women to engage with and speak against patriarchal discourse. Combining literature, archival materials, and media representations, Pickering-Iazzi investigates diverse cultural productions pertaining to high and mass culture and their micropolitical implications—building upon the recent work of historians who identified the micropolitical as “the terrain where the multiple determinants of gender, class, generation, and location bear on social subjects as they negotiate relations of power and authority in daily life” (7). Implied throughout her analysis is the problematic relationship between politics and culture, its particular situation in Italian fascism, and women's ability to speak politically through the development of female subject positions in culture.

Re also cites micropolitical literary practices in her examination of Fascism's “technologies of gender” in her chapter “Fascist Theories of ‘Woman’ and the Construction of

³⁸ Other contributors include Barbara Spackman, Rosalia Colombo Ascari, Mariolina Graziosi, Clara Orban, Maurizia Boscagli, Fiora Bassanese, Emily Braun, Carole C. Gallucci, and Jacqueline Reich.

Gender.” Re applies de Lauretis’ adaptation of a Foucauldian “technology” of sex to read gender in any given period as a cultural construction that is constantly in process, rather than a category stemming from biological difference. This conceptualization of gender as cultural construction is, furthermore, continuously shaped and reshaped through discourses “that have a more or less direct, institutional power to influence the field of social meaning and therefore [generate], promote, or reinforce specific notions and representations of gender” (76). The particular institution that Re takes into consideration is Italian fascism, interpreted not as a political regime but rather as a discursive one that extended beyond the realm of politics to influence cultural representation, and in particular, the codification of gender. In her analysis of texts representative of a hegemonic fascist discourse—and thus representing the dominant “technology” of gender—and the countertechnologies found in women’s literary production during the 1920s and 1930s, Re establishes the discursive potency of the regime in engendering narratives of femininity that sought to reinvent Hegelian notions of complementary sexuality while also displacing oppositional models. Re’s essay is fundamental to this project because it resolves, to some extent, the paradoxes of Fascism’s treatment of women. In one respect, Italian fascism provided a unique opportunity for women to become politically involved through the advent of political organizations and social groups—one of the regime’s many tactics to mobilize (and control) the masses.³⁹ At the same time, as Re demonstrates, fascism espoused a model of femininity, in its discourse and through the projects of its organizations, that was categorically subordinate to male/masculine virility and power; one that specifically targeted feminism, women’s suffrage, and the quest for equality initiated in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century by

³⁹ See De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*.

influential women like Anna Maria Mozzoni.⁴⁰ If, as Spackman asserts, fascist discourse and its varied political, ideological, and rhetorical interpellations can all be evoked and interpreted through the fascist rhetoric of virility, and a study of fascist rhetoric is necessary to understanding fascist ideology, then it follows that, as Re implies, literary writing acts as a micropolitical practice in which women are able to respond to both the political and rhetorical strategies of fascism.⁴¹

I have outlined these particular works at length because my analysis builds upon the critical contributions of Spackman, Pickering-Iazzi, and Re, while also drawing from other analyses of fascism's aesthetic politics. I adopt Spackman's idea that, within a fascist body politic of the nation, "metonymy serves to reattach the 'parts' that are the individuals by figuring them only in their relation to that body" and repurpose the regime's use of metonymical configurations to consider fascism's treatment of gender. I build upon the work of Pickering-Iazzi by examining the way women writers were able to re-position woman as a speaking subject through literature and problematize traditional female subjectivities while inventing modern female figures. The project is, in many ways, a continuation of Re's analysis of fascism's

⁴⁰ Re makes this point in her thorough analysis of two texts representative of fascist gender discourse, Giovanni Gentile's 1934 "La donna nella coscienza moderna" and Ferdinando Loffredo's 1938 *Politica della famiglia*; not to mention the Duce's own commentary on the subject of female subordination, suffrage, and the perils of feminist ways of thinking: "La donna deve obbedire... La mia opinione della sua parte nello Stato è in opposizione ad ogni femminismo. Naturalmente essa non deve essere schiava, ma se io le concedessi il diritto elettorale mi si deridebbe. Nel nostro Stato essa non deve contare," in Ludwig, Emil, *Colloqui con Mussolini* (Verona: Mondadori, 1932) and cited in Meldini, ed., *Sposa e madre esemplare: Ideologia e politica della donna della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Florence: Guaraldi, 1975); in Re, "Fascist Theories," p. 78. For a history of Italian feminism, see Addis Saba or Parati.

⁴¹ See *Fascist Virilities*, p. xi; Walter Adamson makes the claim that a study of fascist rhetoric is necessary to gain an idea of the functioning of fascist ideology in "Modernism and Fascism. The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903-1922," *American Historical Review* 95.2 (April 1990): 559-90. For literary writing as a micropolitical practice, see Re's "Fascist Theories," pp. 80-1.

construction of gender as a discursive practice that infiltrated cultural conceptions on the levels of discourse and ideology. It is my hope to expand on already existing studies of women's literature during fascism by looking at the way women responded, through a parallel counter-discourse, to the regime's discourse on women, while also taking into consideration the limitations of labeling these women as feminists and their rejection of such labels.⁴² While we may read the narrative strategies employed in their writing today as feminist, the project of these writers was not exclusively political. Rather, writers like Masino, Drigo, and Milani, responded in discourse to a fascist construction of womanhood that, in popular fascist culture, sought to metonymically replace the real experiences of women in the world. Through literature, and the micropolitical practice of literary writing, women were able to circumvent monologic formulations of femininity to reinterpret women's experience of fascism.

What I hope to create through my analysis is a connection between women's experiences from fascism to feminism through literature. That is, I hope to establish women's battle against fascism and restrictive fascist feminine identities as a battle fought with pen and paper in which women writers were able to etch out and lay bare styles, themes, and tropes that would later be employed to qualify Italian feminist practice. My analysis applies contemporary feminist critical

⁴² See Carole C. Gallucci's critical analysis of women's counter-discourse to Fascism through literature in "Alba De Céspedes's *There's No Turning Back*: Challenging the New Woman's Future" in *Mothers of Invention*; Ellen Nerenberg, "'Donna proprio... proprio donna': The Social Construction of Femininity in *Nessuno torna indietro*" in *Romance Languages Annual 3*, pp. 267-73. See also Gallucci and Nerenberg, eds, *Writing Beyond Fascism: Cultural Resistance in the Life and Works of Alba De Céspedes* (2000). Flora Maria Ghezzi's *Corpi imprigionati: scritture femminili del ventennio* (2001) offers an insightful analysis of women's writing about and during Italian Fascism. Her analysis draws from the Foucauldian notion of 'resistance' to explore themes of motherhood and sexuality, colonial voyages and exoticism, and the image of the urban "crisis-woman" ("donna crisi"). Ghezzi's analysis is especially relevant for chapters one and three of this dissertation in which gender construction is particularly rooted in two competing body politics, setting Fascism's conflation of the biological, historical, and cultural roles of women against women writers' use of bodily metaphors to react and transgress constructions of gender to express an original notion of self.

strategies to read and re-read these contributions by women writers not only to examine the ways they dissect fascist models of gender and sexuality, but also to extract the constructive female identities that emerge in each text. On the one hand, the female figurations that the texts elicit debunk fascist narratives of femininity, turning archetypal (or metonymical) models of womanhood on their head. On the other, the texts juxtapose the gendered characterizations of women based on hetero-normative ideals of sexuality and reproduction with complex female characters who are consistently trying to negotiate the often-conflicting experiences of gender, sex, and self. My readings of Masino, Drigo, and Milani rely on the feminist critical work of de Lauretis and Cavarero who reinterpret this kind of conflict as the production of constructive tension that enables women to speak through and against the language of men to create positive female representations. My textual analysis is centered in the experience of fascism precisely because of the regime's articulation of an aesthetic politics, combining from the offset the unruly categories of art and politics. While feminism, for the most part, was a problematic classification for these authors, feminist narrative styles and themes are identifiable in their novels. The association between fascism and feminism demarcates not only a relational trajectory between women's experience and the advent of feminist practices, but presents a unique opportunity for investigating the intersection between politics and art, which has occupied a central role in the attempted discrediting of feminist literary practices. If fascism presents scholars with the occasion to examine aestheticized politics, then feminism allows us to investigate a politicized aesthetic that counteracts monolithic, patriarchal conceptions of woman.

I am careful in my textual analyses to avoid misguided readings of the texts as mere extensions of the private experience of the authors themselves, or as candid insights into their psychological and political leanings. However, it is important in my analysis to consider the way

the rhetorical strategies of the fascist regime sought to “author” women through the conflation of gender and sex. That is to say, while these texts exist independently of their authors, the women writers I consider here are in some ways responding to fascist narratives of femininity that not only effected the diegetic reality of the protagonists, but also the extra-diegetic experience of historical women during Fascism and the authors themselves. In her comprehensive mapping of women’s responses, both positive and negative, Felski recognizes a dialogical engagement with literary and political discourse, implicitly identifying that both literature and politics employ narrative strategies to create and disseminate female identities. That is to say, political discourse has historically told the story of woman, rendering woman, as historical being, into Woman-as-sign and essentially precluding female agency (as authors and as political agents). Teresa de Lauretis also contemplates the distinction between woman (as an allegorical figure or cross-section of male desires) and women (real historical agents). De Lauretis distinguishes “woman” as a fictional construct, “a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures,” a position which serves “both as their vanishing point and their specific condition of existence” (*Alice Doesn’t* 5). In this sense, woman, de Lauretis contends, is

the other-from-man (nature and Mother, site of sexuality and masculine desire, sign and object of men’s social exchange) [a] term that designates at once the vanishing point of our culture’s fictions of itself and the condition of the discourses in which the fictions are represented. For there would be no myth without a princess to be wedded or a sorceress to be vanquished, no cinema without the attraction of the image to be looked at, no desire without an object, no kinship without incest, no science without nature, no society without sexual difference (5).

Alternately, de Lauretis describes women as:

the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain [...] The relation between women as historical subjects and the notion of woman as it is produced by hegemonic discourses is neither a direct relation of identity, a one-to-one correspondence, nor a relation of simple implication. Like all other relations expressed in language, it is an arbitrary and symbolic one, that is to say, culturally set up (5-6).

The vision of woman that consistently emerges in Western patriarchal culture is one of pure representation, an immutable, culturally constructed text that does not begin from women but claims to represent them in discourse. This bifurcation of women's political and cultural representation informs my study of both fascism's use of rhetoric and gender constructions to force women into a subordinated role, and women writers' anticipation of a uniquely Italian feminist counter-discourse that at once engages with contemporary political and cultural discourses while subtly questioning the authority with which women are represented second-handedly. Fascism was able to "author" woman – not only as sign but as national citizen—through the conflation of gender and sex, civic obligation and private practice. Fascism figured women into the national body politic by way of their biological capacities and traditional expectations of the "feminine gender" as one that 'naturally' complemented fascist male virility. The 'feminine,' as well as the archetypal figuration of the woman-as-mother, became a metonym for a diversity of female experience, virtually supplanting a varied and complex existence with an image of fascist femininity. While this image of fascist woman was accepted by some women, it remained problematic—even so-called 'fascist feminists' struggled to reconcile their individual

experience and beliefs with the limited representative models that fascism had to offer.⁴³ This project is dedicated to that struggle. While these narratives exist independently of their author, the micropolitical process of literary writing is continuously complicated by these womens' experience of the world around them, in particular their direct dialogue through literature with archetypal fascist feminine identities.

* * *

The dissertation is organized into three chapters, each about a specific author. Each chapter considers aspects of Fascism's constructions of femininity, its supplanting metonymically the complex negotiations of female experience in history, politics, religion, and art with oversimplified, gendered identities. Specifically, I consider the archetypal categorization of the woman-mother; the dichotomy between spirit and matter in fascist discourse; the feminization of matter (land, the masses) to be exploited and controlled by an omnipotent leader; and finally, the feminine/female sexual body measured against fascist notions of appropriate and deviant sexual practices. Throughout my analysis, I look at the ways each author first evidences, and subsequently problematizes gender construction and female identity by, in the words of Cixous, 'exploding' those identities from within a patriarchal context and creating new processes of female self-identification in motion. These discourses adhere to the forms of Italian feminist literary practices proposed by Cavarero and de Lauretis inasmuch as they at once engage with the repressive discourses that define women from the outside in and resist those discourses through constant questioning and the presentation of new models.

⁴³ See Spackman's analysis of Teresa Labriola's writings as an example of the difficulty in confining feminist longings within a fascist model of femininity, pp. 34-48.

The first chapter reads Paola Masino's first novel *Monte Ignoso* (1931) against fascist archetypal constructions of maternity, determined through the combined role of wife and mother and the propensity for nurture and self-sacrifice.⁴⁴ The chapter begins with an examination of fascism's pronatalist policies during the "Battle for Births" and the subsequent sacralization of fascist policies in its actual and figurative alignment with the Catholic Church after the 1929 Lateran Pacts. I argue that fascism's sacralized politics evoked the power of myth not only to legitimate political autarky, but also to reinforce narratives of gender that relegated women to the maternal role. In *Monte Ignoso*, Masino not only evidences the allegorical strategies of the regime in constructing gendered identities, but complicates and critiques such constructions through her central themes of maternity and religion. Masino re-appropriates the power of myth to evoke the adverse archetype of the primordial Great Mother in order to counteract fascist constructions of maternity as self-sacrifice. I read Masino's novel not only as a predecessor to an Italian matrilineal feminist symbolic, which employs female genealogies as a mechanism for empowerment and authorization, but cite the protagonist's struggle between her identity as mother (reproductive being) and as woman (sexual being) as an example of positive tension in the construction of modern female identities. The methodology I employ derives from the theoretical considerations of Adriana Cavarero in *Nonostante Platone*, which sequesters female

⁴⁴ The first chapter is dedicated to Paola Masino's *Monte Ignoso* (1931). For critical readings of Masino's *Nascita e morte della massaia* (1945), see Blelloch, Paola, "From Trunk to Grave: the Hallucinated Story of a Housewife" in *Nemla Italian Studies* (1989); Re, Lucia, "Fascist Theories of 'woman' and the Construction of Gender" (1995); Rorandelli, Tristana, "*Nascita e morte della massaia* di Paola Masino e la questione del corpo materno nel fascismo" in *Forum Italicum* (2003); D'Ortenzi, Silvia, "*Nascita e morte della massaia*: Paola Masino" in *Quaderni Del '900* (2005); Cesaretti, Enrico. "Nutrition as Dissolution: Paola Masino's *Nascita e Morte della Massaia*" in *Quaderni D'italianistica* (2007). On women writers under fascism see also Re, Lucia, "Women and Censorship in Fascist Italy: From Mura to Masino" in *Culture, Censorship, and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*, Guido Bonsaver and Robert Gordon, eds. (Oxford: Legenda, 2005).

literary figures from Western philosophy and mythology to re-construct women's narrative authority in an affirming female genealogy reinforced through the female gaze.

Chapter two examines the double marginalization of women in cultural representations of the rural through a close reading of Paola Drigo's 1936 novel *Maria Zef*. I begin by analyzing the relationship between fascist aestheticized politics and the politicized aesthetics inherent to the *strapaese* movement beginning in the mid-1920s.⁴⁵ It is my supposition that *strapaese*, in competing with *stracittà* to define and represent a cultural manifestation of fascism's political ideologies, used similar discursive strategies to integrate fascist political and social dogma's into creative practices. The stylistic similarities of Drigo's work to the literary traditions of Italian *verismo*, as well as *strapaese*'s employment of dualisms to reinforce fascist gender politics, invites a comparison between the politicization of Italian rurality during fascism and the politico-cultural implications of the 'picturesque.' I argue that the dual characterization of the picturesque as representative of figures that are at once idyllic and 'backwards' is reinterpreted during fascism by the advocates of *strapaese* to reinforce other dualisms: primarily, Culture vs. Nature, Leader vs. the masses, and implied in each category, masculine vs. feminine. Dualistic classifications were then organized into hierarchical systems of power that were framed, through discourse, as pertaining to a purportedly 'natural' order. I subsequently investigate the ways that these discursive frameworks were used to subordinate women both politically and culturally. My reading of *Maria Zef*, complemented, in part, by her other prose and personal writings, looks at the way the author responds through her writing to contemporary categorizations of the rural and the gender politics that are implied therein. I will consider, especially, Drigo's depictions of rural realities (measured against the idealized forms proposed in the writings of *strapaese*) and the

⁴⁵ *Maria Zef* is also offered in the English translation by Blossom Steinberg Kirschenbaum (Lincon: U of Nebraska P, 1989).

author's decision to represent rural women as a particular sub-population that has been historically under-represented in Italian narrative productions.

The third and final chapter differs in content from the previous two inasmuch as it considers a retrospective examination of women's experience of fascism. Milena Milani's novel *La ragazza di nome Giulio* [*A Girl Named Jules*], rarely, if ever, mentioned within the Italian literary panorama, was originally published in 1964 and was immediately censured for public indecency.⁴⁶ Published roughly thirty years after the novels of Masino and Drigo, Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio* provides more direct links between women's writing and a burgeoning Italian feminist movement, as well as a necessary analysis for Italian women in the 1960s of the recent fascist past and the limitations constructed around sex and gender. The chapter discusses Milani's use of the female body and the conceptualization of a plural female sexuality that includes homosexuality as figures in confronting the complexity of women's identity and selfhood. Reading the body as an allegorical mechanism in the text, I utilize Italian feminist theory to also analyze the discursive structure and the divisions between the narrator and the narrated self. Fractured identities and split subjectivities, manifested in language by the division between narrator and narrated, create on a textual level, a feminist imaginary. Sexual difference, perceived not only through the protagonist's complicated relationship to fascist feminine types but also in the struggle to identify oneself in the world, becomes an essential aspect of the text in a postmodern interpretation of women's experience of fascism and the quest to create a textual identity that, as de Lauretis proposes in "The Essence of the Triangle," begins with woman. The atmosphere of conflict and tension in the experience of the protagonist breathes life into a

⁴⁶ An English translation of *La ragazza di nome Giulio* is available under the title *A Girl Called Jules*, Graham Snell, trans. (London: Hutchinson, 1966).

woman's narrative of the self and champions sexual difference as a fundamental aspect of human experience.

One of the first and most direct fascist policies resulting in the gendering of culture and politics was the "Battle for Births," a campaign initiated by the regime in response to Italy's demographic crisis in the 1920s and 1930s. The regime's focus on bolstering the population, in an attempt to strengthen national autonomy through sheer quantity, coincided with what Emilio Gentile has referred to as the 'sacralization of politics.' The pronatalist policies of the regime also embraced religious and ritualistic dimensions of the Catholic Church, making the fascist ethos increasingly appealing to Italian women. As a result, the fascist regime was able to develop a cult of motherhood that locked women into a single role: that of the fertile, nurturing mother. The first chapter of this dissertation examines how Paola Masino was able to evidence and demystify fascism's archetypal classification of the woman-mother by invoking an alternate symbolic female model: the primordial Great Mother.

CHAPTER ONE

The Myth of the Mother in Paola Masino's *Monte Ignoso*

In his *Discorso dell'ascensione* on May 26, 1927, Benito Mussolini alluded to the political and ideological endeavors that would motivate fascism's subsequent "Battle for Births":

l'Italia, per contare qualche cosa, deve affacciarsi sulla soglia della seconda metà di questo secolo con una popolazione non inferiore ai 60 milioni di abitanti. [...] sta di fatto che il destino delle Nazioni è legato alla loro potenza demografica.

Quand'è che la Francia domina il mondo? Quando poche famiglie di baroni normanni erano così numerose che bastavano a comporre un esercito.

Italy, to count for something, must arrive on the threshold of the second part of this decade with a population of no less than 60 million inhabitants ... it is a fact that the destiny of a Nation is linked to its demographic power. When had France ever ruled the world? When a few families of Norman barons were so prolific that they could amass an army.¹

Employing militaristic rhetoric to mobilize the masses, Mussolini encouraged Italian families to procreate, equating population demographics to the glory of the nation. The speech marked the beginning of a series of pronatalist campaigns propagated by the regime to bolster the population. Between 1925 and 1938, fascists implemented a number of incentives primarily targeting rural and low-income Italian families to increase births. Couples that complied were rewarded with better health care, welfare benefits, and tax breaks while unmarried individuals

¹ Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e discorsi*, vol. 6 (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1934). pp. 378-83.

were met with dramatic disincentives including a celibacy tax for unmarried men, limited civil service jobs, and reduced benefits for bachelors. Fascist sexual politics were more broadly aimed at moralizing Italians by endorsing traditional patriarchal gender categories within a heterosexual framework. In addition to outlining a model of the family under patriarchal authority, the regime targeted 'degenerate' sexuality beginning in the early 1920s with the regulation of prostitution and continuing into the 1930s with an outright ban on homosexual practices.² These policies (laying a practical foundation for the anti-semitic policies and 'degeneracy' politics to come) intended not only to extirpate transgressive homosexual practices but also to regulate female sexuality by confining it to a patriarchal, heterosexual model.³

Women were at the center of Mussolini's "Battle for Births," resulting not only in the political valorization of woman's role in the private sphere and her reproductive duties, but also creating a mythology of motherhood that affected women's social and symbolic representation. Biological rites that were once a source of women's empowerment were politicized and "industrialized" for the benefit of the nation, measuring childbirth in terms of mass

² Homosexual acts were outlawed in 1931. For a critical look at fascism's defense of a traditional concept of masculinity and its implicit rhetorical denigration of homosexuality, see Bellassai, "The Masculine Mystique" or *L'invenzione della virilità: Politica e immaginario maschile nell'Italia contemporanea*. See also the volume *Mascolinità all'italiana: costruzioni, narrazioni, mutamenti* edited by Elena Dell'Agnesse and Elisabetta Ruspini.

³ Extramarital or illicit sex became the target of government controls as early as 1923. Policies implicitly identified women as the cause of this moral crisis, directing punitive acts and restrictions toward prostitutes while tactfully overlooking the male patronage of brothels. Mussolini demanded that prostitutes carry special passports with a record of their vaginal examinations-- failure to comply could lead to fines or arrest-- while male patrons were afforded continued discretion. Additionally, the women of the case *chiuse* were required to submit to obligatory medical exams, police surveillance, and vexatious laws-- one of which imposed a one year prison term for hosting dances or serving liquor and six months for soliciting from windows (De Grazia 44). Hidden behind closed doors, prostitutes continued to service male sexual needs.

(re)production.⁴ As a result, female sexuality became a matter of the State and any sexual practices performed outside normative procreative relations were deemed immoral and unpatriotic. The 'duty' of women as citizens of the State was to birth the sons of the new Italian nation; to create the soldiers that would empower and defend its national patriarch. Fascist pronatalist politics reinforced traditional gender roles and sexual practices, demarcating the home as the feminine sphere and reproduction as women's biological destiny. Gender expectations under fascism had an immediate effect on cultural conceptions of family and women's roles therein, but also extended to theoretical formulations of womanhood and female civil obligations at all levels of discourse.

The moral attitude inherent to fascist politics during the 1920s resulted in the ideological and philosophical subordination of Italian women through the regime's theoretical discourse, emphasized in texts specifically targeting gender through familial hierarchies, the education of girls, and women's obligation to the state. Integrating fascism's oppressive sexual politics into ideological discourses on sexuality and gender had profound repercussions not only for Italian women but also for women's socio-political and cultural representation.⁵ The political practices of the regime were further amplified by a "politics of symbols" that situated State authority into a familial pyramid of power, positioning the Duce not only as Italy's political leader but also as its

⁴ Pronatalist politics began as early as 1926 and 1927 targeting both men and women. Qualitative mothering and nurturing was not officially prized and deemed as important as quantitative motherhood: the more babies the better. The relationship between mother and child was indeed not as important as "defending the race" and strengthening the nation through sheer mass. All men were expected to become fathers. A punitive tax was placed on male celibacy in 1926. Mussolini's focus on increasing the birthrate was counterintuitive, however, considering the economic slump. A majority of Italians suffered from hunger and many were forced to emigrate. De Grazia offers a concise history of fascist pronatalist politics and a thorough analysis of women's entry into mass politics during fascism in *How fascism Ruled Women*.

⁵ See Re, "Fascist Theories of 'Woman'." Also, Addis Saba, *La corporazione delle donne*.

national patriarch. Fascism developed a mythology of leadership—placing Mussolini in opposition to the masses, figured as a malleable object to be manipulated by an omnipotent leader—propagating a national narrative of masculine virility as not only superior, but necessary for shaping the inchoate masses, characterized by feminine irrationality and sensitivity.⁶ The singular authority of the Duce constituted one tenet of a broader fascist symbolic patrimony that espoused a unified national identity and a collective fascist destiny. Fascism modeled a political culture around a credo of faith, loyalty, and glory that intentionally adopted the doctrinal platform of the Catholic Church to create a pseudo political religion.⁷ The traditional religiosity and devotion of Italian women to the Catholic Church made the religious and ritualistic dimension of the fascist creed all the more appealing to them, although there are no specific studies on this aspect of fascism's reception by women yet.

Fascism's pronatalist agenda purportedly supported women—in 1925 the regime created ONMI (Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia), instituted a national holiday for mothers and children, and dispatched organizations of fascist women to reach out to rural housewives and mothers, encourage procreation, and instruct them on proper hygienic practices. Yet, fascist campaigns, conflating political practice with a patrimony of symbols, myth, and religion, more broadly sought to normativize and streamline gender roles in a division of duty that ultimately

⁶ See Falasca Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, especially "The politics of symbols: From content to form."

⁷ Emilio Gentile discusses at length the sacralization of politics during fascism in *Il Culto del Littorio: La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Rome: Laterza, 1993). See also, Michael Burleigh who states: "Fascism itself was an attempt to transcend the narrow horizons of conventional class or interest politics, whether of the left or the right, in favor of an all embracing anti-politics based on a series of potent myths whose veneration was taken to religious heights." *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2007), 55-6.

promised the glory of the nation.⁸ As citizens of the fascist State, women were largely forced into what Luce Irigaray identifies as a "desubjectivized social role dictated by an order subject to the division of labor-he produces, she reproduces-that walls up [women] in the ghetto of a single function" (*Body against Body* 18). Women were not only ideologically locked into their biological role as mothers but also into a picture of femininity, disseminated by fascist propagandistic culture and rooted in maternal sacrifice, that paralleled Catholicism's depiction of the virgin-mother and equated womanhood with sacrifice, nurture, and unconditional love.⁹

Born in Rome in 1908, the writer Paola Masino grew up under fascism. Yet, throughout her literary oeuvre, Masino consistently calls into question the implications of gender, family relationships, and women's experience.¹⁰ Her first novel, *Monte Ignoso*, contemporaneous to the development of the pronatalist policies outlined above, explicitly questions, subverts, and contradicts the allegorical implications of the fascist regime's attempt to regulate sexuality and gender roles. Masino's innovative conceptualization of motherhood is essential to the text: it

⁸ See Caldwell, Lesley, "Reproducers of the Nation: Women and the Family in fascist Policy" in *Rethinking Italian fascism: Capitalism, Populism, and Culture*.

⁹ This emblematic mother is at the heart of Laura Benedetti's examination of literary representations of maternity in *Tigress in the Snow: Motherhood and Literature in Twentieth-Century Italy*. Benedetti rightly claims that the theme of motherhood is important to the understanding of Italian culture as a whole, citing literature as something that not only reflects but also "anticipates, corrects, challenges, and shapes social forces" (Benedetti 3-4). She continues to investigate the mythical stature of the mother propagated by "images of the mother seen through the eyes of the son" (4) and distant from women's quotidian realities. Tracing representations of motherhood from the turn of the century to the Feminist upheavals of the 1970s, Benedetti examines motherhood as a site of constant negotiation that calls into question a woman's notion of self. Women's experience of motherhood, Benedetti infers, is informed not only by the biological events that transform woman into mother, but predominantly by the philosophical and historic narratives that qualify motherhood.

¹⁰ Other critics have examined the trope of maternity in Masino's *Monte Ignoso*. See Flora Maria Ghezzi, "Fiamme e follia, ovvero la morte della madre arcaica in *Monte Ignoso* di Paola Masino" in *Esperienze letterarie* 28.3 (2003): 33-55. See also Louise Rozier's *Il Mito e l'allegoria nella narrativa di Paola Masino* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2003).

links the varied themes of religion, politics, reality, and mythology in the novel, creating a complex web of symbology and biological reality that, in Masino's view, informs women's experience of the world and influences the creation of a female socio-symbolic identity. Through the female protagonist (Emma), maternity in the mythical space of *Monte Ignoso* is metaphorically linked to a prehistoric, pagan vision of The Great Mother. Masino reappropriates for maternity the opposing extremes of procreation and destruction, highlighting the conflict inherent not only to the Mother as symbol but also to the dissonance implicit in modern women's negotiation between autonomy and social expectations in 20th century Italy.¹¹

Monte Ignoso frames one woman's self-investigation in an experiment of literary form and style in which popular assertions or 'truths' are continuously posited and subverted creating a persisting attitude of ambiguity, conflict, and confusion. In adopting the Mother as a central figure in her narrative and in light of her redefinition of maternity as a procreative and destructive force, Masino reshapes women's experience of the maternal as a highly abstract, archetypal dilemma: employing the fantastic and magical realist modes, Masino obfuscates the interpretative boundaries between the diegetic reality of *Monte Ignoso* and fantasy, hallucinations, and madness.¹² It is my hypothesis that the abstraction, symbolism, and allegory, denigrated by some critics as "fuochi di artificio gratuiti" producing symbol and allegory without depth or meaning, are revealed through a feminist reading of the novel as a complex mapping of

¹¹ In "Gender, Identity, and the Return to Order in the Early Works of Paola Masino," Allison Cooper examines the ways that Masino's early work reacts to and critiques the post-war (WWI) search for epistemological 'certainties' in the wake of the European crisis of modernity. Cooper reads *Monte Ignoso* and Masino's earlier play *Le tre Marie* between "modern woman's desire to be self-determining" and "the immobilizing power of history [and] tradition" inherent in the notion of a 'return to order' (390-91).

¹² See Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. For an analysis of Masino's use of the fantastic, see Cooper, p. 395. See also, Armitt, *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* for a critical look at feminism and the fantastic.

female experience during the 1920s and early 1930s in Italy and Europe—an experience weighted with social, historical, and symbolic expectations of gendered roles and identities.¹³ By interpreting women's individual identity against the symbolic, cultural, and political constructions of "Woman" through the trope of maternity, Masino is able to illustrate the complexity of women's self identification, both real and symbolic, within and against a fascist conceptualization of femininity. Masino's re-figuration of the mother and maternal values, appealing to the archetypal features of the primordial Great Mother and the legacy of female genealogies, offers a counter-mythology to fascism's sacralization of maternal nurture and sacrifice. The author's hyperbolic use of metaphor and mysticism evidences and at the same time demystifies the spectacular and religious propaganda disseminated by the fascist regime in its attempt to appropriate and refashion cultural and social values in the pursuit of political glory and totalitarian control.

Masino's investigation of the mother anticipates feminist political and theoretical practices to come. Motherhood—re-examined in the work of seminal feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Luisa Muraro and the Diotima Group—became a guiding framework for Italian feminist practices in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to questioning fascist constructions of gender and identity, Masino creates in *Monte Ignoso* inter- and extra-diegetic female genealogies that intersect across textual planes. My analysis in this chapter will dialogue specifically with the work of Adriana Cavarero, whose reinterpretation of the myth of Demeter in *Nonostante Platone* resurrects the attributes of the archaic Great Mother to contradict women's perceived passivity in the reproductive experience. Cavarero's 'rewriting of myths' acknowledges women's agency not only in the choice to generate or not, but in the

¹³ See Carlo Emilio Gadda's review of *Monte Ignoso* in *Solaria* (July-August 1931).

broader philosophic-symbolic patrimony that historically sought to erase it. Additionally, Cavarero examines the importance of the gaze in the mother-daughter relationship as a way of looking that reinforces a distinct female subjectivity and agency. Masino employs similar symbols, myths, and allegories, privileging maternity as an archaic, archetypal, creative and destructive force that is reinforced and re-enacted in the gaze between mother and daughter.

Finally, I will suggest that Masino's reinterpretation of the mother and motherhood not only calls into question fascist articulations of femininity and the maternal, but also creates a textual atmosphere in which female collectivities and perspectives are privileged and reconstructed. In her refashioning of the maternal, Masino creates a vision of motherhood that emerges as a site of constant negotiation. The tension created between the binary extremes of creation and destruction informs not only the thematic elements of the text but its construction as well—the dialogue between fantasy and reality, often overlooked as a manifestation of Emma's purported madness, transports the tension Emma experiences from the thematic to the structural level.¹⁴ In *Monte Ignoso*, Masino creates a site in which polarities not only inform each other by means of opposition, but also imbue and characterize one another through constant dialogue and tension. The conflation of and conflict between love and violence, creation and destruction, maternity and sexuality permeate the narrative time and space, producing an atmosphere of ambiguity, confusion, and chaos.

¹⁴ Ghezzi identifies Emma's hallucinations as forms of female hysteria and madness, reading Masino's articulation of women and insanity along feminist lines: "Il ritratto dell'insanità mentale femminile che si configura nelle pagine della Masino si sottrae, infatti, alla codificazione tradizionale, alla stratificazione simbolica che si è accumulata su questo tema. Il topos che da secoli permea il sostrato culturale, antropologico e filosofico della civiltà occidentale è quello dell'associazione naturale tra follia e femminile: nel sistema binario, infatti, che costituisce le fondamenta della tradizione filosofica dell'Occidente e che governa il sistema del linguaggio e della rappresentazione, la donna è, ab origine, associata all'irrazionale, al caos materico, al disordine delle pulsioni naturali, in opposizione all'elemento maschile collegato invece alla razionalità, al pensiero al discorso, alla cultura" (43-4).

* * *

Monte Ignoso is divided into eleven chapters and recounts the tragic dissolution of one family composed of three members: a mother, Emma; a father, Giovanni; and their daughter, Barbara. The novel takes place in the fictional town of Monte Ignoso, presumably named for Masino's birthplace near Pisa in Central Italy. The town shares its name with the dominant *casa rossa* overlooking the town and situated at the base of an ancient volcano. Barbara experiences a hallucination at the beginning of the novel—a vision of a white-haired man depicted in one of the many paintings in the corridor of the house. Emma's concern for her daughter's hallucination is amplified by her knowledge of the hidden realities of the *casa rossa*. Emma, believing that the paintings that haunt her own existence are now claiming her daughter, destroys the painting of the white-haired man. The hallucination and Emma's response to it seem to catapult the narrative into a series of strange events. Each week that follows is marked by an odd event: Marco, the stableman and Emma's lover, commits suicide; Giovanni goes mad, displacing the memory of his real mother, Giulia, a cruel and greedy woman, with the benevolence of Barbara; Emma sends Barbara away to school; Barbara falls ill and dies, Emma blames Giovanni who had locked her from the room at the moment of Barbara's death. Determined to punish Giovanni for disrupting the mother-daughter gaze, Emma regards Giovanni with cruelty, inspiring in him a puerile affection that morphs into romantic love and seemingly cures him of his madness. The sudden arrival of Spring, inciting impromptu and almost pagan celebration and frivolity in the town, coincides with Giovanni's return to normalcy. To further damage him, Emma recounts to Giovanni her affair with Marco. Giovanni leaves in anger but Emma follows him, seeking in their reunion some sort of salvation. The Spring and the perspective of a new life with her

husband and with another child seem to point to a possible salvation for Emma. But Giovanni, fulfilling his manly duties in the face of an adulterous wife, strangles Emma, forcing her head into a puddle at his feet, until all falls silent.

The novel is largely organized by a series of seemingly disconnected events that eventually lead to the death of Emma: Barbara's hallucination, Marco's suicide, Giovanni's fall into madness, the departure of Barbara and her untimely death. Each event appears as an unlikely catalyst for the next (Emma and Marco's argument is spurred by a discussion of Barbara's hallucination, leading Marco to hang himself; Giovanni's madness is triggered by Marco's suicide and his irrational fear of his own mortality; Emma sends Barbara away in response to Giovanni's illness). The occurrence of each event is also marked by distinct temporal repetitions. Although the text explores the interludes, each of the primary narrative events unfolds on a Sunday: "Due settimane fa, qui, tra qualche ora, Marco si uccideva. La notte di domenica. [...] - Su questo piazzale, l'altra domenica, Giovanni è impazzito. [...] -Oggi, domenica, Barbara ha cominciato la sua nuova vita. [...] Tra una settimana, che cosa avverrà?" ["Two weeks ago, here, in just a few hours, Marco killed himself. Sunday night. [...] -The next Sunday, in this courtyard, Giovanni went mad. [...] -Today, Sunday, Barbara began her new life. [...] In another week, what will happen?"] (*MI* 102). The reoccurrence of Sundays implies both a cyclicity of time and a sense of the sacred. Emma makes these temporal themes explicit when she continues: "Tutte le domeniche. Domenica: giorno di Dio" ["Always on Sunday. Sunday: the day of God"] (102). Sunday, recognized in the text as well as in the broader cultural imagination as a sacred day according to Christian-Catholic dogma, is also designated as a fateful day in the narrative. Emma's foreboding question—"Tra una settimana che cosa avverrà?"—not only highlights the cyclicity of time and the significance of Sundays but also

adumbrates the events of the following Sunday, specifically, the death of Barbara. The attention called to Sunday, its repetition and its significance, is the only attempt Masino makes to acknowledge the passing of time. Beyond this weekly flux there is no indication of a temporal setting or historical context- an aspect of the text that coincides with the practice of the Magical Realist mode. The pronounced absence of linear, historical time, in fact, lends a sense of atemporality to the text, conflating a primordial past with an indistinct present. Ghezzi comments on the chronotopic structure of Masino's text, claiming that it is “collocato [...] in una sfera cronotopica ancestrale, remota, al di fuori della storia e del tempo, al di qua dello spazio sociale e culturale, quello dell'antico villaggio è un universo magico e sacro, concepito come profonda disarmonia, caos primordiale e indifferenziato....” [“situated ... in a remote, ancestral chronotopic sphere, beyond history and time, on this side of social and cultural space, the figure of the ancient village constructs a magical and sacred universe, conceived of profound disharmony, primordial and unadulterated chaos”] (“Fiamme e follia” 40). In Ghezzi's view, the village of Monte Ignoso resides outside the limitations of space and time, belonging to a primordial and magical universe in which chaos and disharmony reign, and Emma, as mistress of the house and of the village, seems to link the community to this primeval heritage.

Changing seasons also imply a temporal cyclicity in *Monte Ignoso*. After leaving for school, Barbara marvels at the serenity of her new environment, noting:

Monte Ignoso non conosce queste giornate modeste, di sole limpido e tepido,
Monte Ignoso non conosce che l'autunno sanguinoso e l'inverno feroce. Non
esiste la primavera, a Monte Ignoso, e l'estate è come un bollente inverno, è come
l'inverno feroce e distruggitrice. I prati sono secchi, gli alberi appassiscono, i
monti sudano a torrenti fangosi, gli uomini si chiudono nelle case e impazziscono

o muiono. Sui monti fiammeggia la neve, come d'inverno i roghi di pini, e intorno siedono in circoli degradanti gli uomini, per trovare ristoro.

Monte Ignoso does not know moderate days like this, clear and warm with the sun. Monte Ignoso does not know anything but bleeding autumns and fierce winters. Spring does not exist in Monte Ignoso and summer is like a boiling winter; like the ferocious and devastating winter. The fields are dry, trees wither, mountains sweat rivers of mud, men close themselves up in their houses and either go insane or die. On the mountains, the snow blazes like pyres of pines in the winter; and men sit in humiliating circles around them, seeking solace. (*MI* 113-14)

The town knows only the brutality of Autumn and Winter, which seems to segue into a "boiling" Summer. Each season is depicted as a continuation of the previous one, harsh and destructive, without any period of restoration and repose. The epithet "bloody" or "bleeding" qualifying the Autumn in Monte Ignoso simultaneously recalls the reddening of leaves in the Fall, the redness of the skies that overlook the town and the ancient volcano, as well as the other 'bloody' episodes that permeate the text and are often associated with the womb and childbirth. In this way, the violence and the cyclicity of the seasons seem to echo the binaries of life and death, which also imply a prehistoric, natural cycle of life at the hands of an omnipotent mother. In a narrative largely about maternity, Masino's repression of Spring-recognized as the most fertile of seasons, biologically and symbolically characteristic of rebirth and renewal-is significant. The fierceness of Autumn and Winter, representative of the extremes of time and climate, further characterize the town of Monte Ignoso. The eventual arrival of Spring toward the conclusion of the novel is

misleading: rather than bringing renewal, hope, or happiness, the season brings the final demise of Emma.

Drawing attention to the changing seasons, the repetition of Sunday, and life and death cycles, Masino creates a temporal framework in *Monte Ignoso* that parallels the thematic strands of the novel. With the recurrence of Sundays, the reader becomes aware of the passage of time, yet this flux is situated within a divine and archaic dialectic: though time apparently passes, Emma and the other inhabitants of Monte Ignoso are entrapped in a seemingly parallel atemporality in which the implications of linear, historical time have no bearing. Identifying time as both cyclical (repetition) and monumental (eternal- belonging to a primordial heritage), Masino establishes a temporal framework that is traditionally associated with female subjectivities.¹⁵ The cycle of the seasons alludes inherently to the natural cycles of life and death, appealing to a conceptual temporality that is cyclical and eternal, rather than linear and progressive. As such, Masino's articulation of time in *Monte Ignoso* belongs to a larger symbolic network that is linked to the female body and female subjectivity. Emma's connection to the house and its primordial heritage, to the cyclical passage of time, is established through her reproductive capacities and maternal inclinations.

Masino delineates a 'female' textual imaginary that is framed spatially and temporally by women's historical, sexual, and social personification. Space, characterized most profoundly by the *casa rossa*, embraces the private realm of domesticity traditionally designated as a feminine domain; while time is conceived as cyclical and almost ritualistically repetitious to the extent that seems to collapse into an atemporal textual continuum, halting its rhythm only at the novel's conclusion and coinciding with the death of Emma. The textual categories of time and space in

¹⁵ See Julia Kristeva's essay, "Women's Time" in *The Kristeva Reader*.

Monte Ignoto, although adopting figures that have been recognized as emblems of women's writing, does not, however, portray these allegorical representations without conflict and complication. On the contrary, each model of femininity brings with it the polarization and complication of the ideas that it attempts to represent: the nurturing characterization of home and hearth is juxtaposed with the austerity of a tomb, the emblematic mother is plagued by a desire to destroy her own child, and the fertile earth is also a mechanism for ultimate destruction. In presenting traditionally 'feminine' models against their binary opposites in a persistent context of chaos and confusion, Masino is able to at once evidence the social and political constructions that inform patriarchal systems while actively resisting their confinement. In placing her character on the threshold between competing planes of interpretation both intra- and extra-textually, Masino employs the mode of the fantastic to bring to light issues of female oppression and contributes to the conceptualization of a different subjectivity.

The theatrical opening of the novel leads the reader into a hallway lined with paintings. Described by the narrator as religious kitsch of little value, the paintings nonetheless come alive as scenes of a confrontation between violence and sexuality that not only permeates the reality of the novel, but also belongs to a rich symbolic history stemming from some of the most proverbial and essential stories of the Bible. Allegorical images of celestial grace do not line the walls of the *casa rossa*, but rather brutal incidents from the Old Testament: Joseph being thrown into a well by his jealous brothers, Jacob and Rebecca deceiving Isaac, Amnon raping his sister Tamar, and Judith decapitating Holofernes after having seduced him. The disquieting and disorienting darkened hallway renders strange and uncanny the Biblical images that were intended to elicit faith and virtue. Masino's rendering of the Biblical paintings casts shadow on the stories of the Bible, highlighting the violence and hypocrisy inherent to each. From the

outset, Masino establishes an implicit and mysterious connection between Emma and the house (especially the hallway of paintings), both of which belong to a parallel, mystic existence. The hallway of paintings constitutes a portal that, inter-textually, connects various metaphysical realities and also creates a metatext in which diverse literary modes collide. If the novel can be read as an exploration of competing extremes (birth and death, reason and madness, fantasy and reality) the hallway of paintings can be interpreted as the textual matrix that links these opposing binaries and positions Emma as the mater and guardian of the dual realities embedded in the text. As the sole mediator between the archaic, surreal world contained in the paintings and the "reality" of Monte Ignoso, Emma acts as guide to the various realms that intertwine and intersect in *Monte Ignoso*, granting her unique perspective unparalleled authority in the text.

Female figures are prominent in the Biblical images of the *casa rossa*. It is not the Virgin Mother, however, that captivates both the internal and external spectator, but the powerful and vengeful figure of Judith brutally murdering Holofernes in a bed covered with blood. This story, in particular, draws upon inherent themes of sexuality, violence and carnality while also envisioning woman as the agent of her own destiny, capable of the brutality of men. Judith sharply contrasts with the image of the Virgin Mother, who, pictured here with the Holy Family, seems strange and out of place. The allegorical associations of goodness and virginity, traditionally assigned to the Virgin Mary, are overlooked in favor of Judith's boldness, action, and audacity. In privileging Judith in the metatext of the paintings, Masino designates an alternate view of female potential highlighting destructive capacities rather than the procreative ones acknowledged and idolized by Italian fascism and by the Catholic Church. A predilection for violence on the part of women, imagined in the figure of Judith, creates a paratext—a sort of vestibule for the novel itself. Following in the wake of other experimental Italian women writers,

Masino represents an alternate notion of fascist sacrifice and glory in *Monte Ignoso*, figuring woman as a powerful and willing participant in a contrary form of "sacred violence."¹⁶ The sacred and dutiful act of Judith punishing Holofernes represents one side of female agency-the side that parallels the violence of men-and subsequent episodes of the novel highlight yet another: the rite of motherhood and childbirth, re-imagined as a parallel experience to the bloody sacrifice of Italian soldiers on the battlefield and representing a form of corporeal violence and sacrifice reserved to woman.¹⁷

Allusions to temporal cyclicity, the simultaneous creative and destructive atmosphere of the Monte Ignoso and of the *casa rossa*, and the powerful female figures that emerge from the

¹⁶ The experimental style of Masino's narrative, as well as her creative conceptualization of maternity, are reminiscent of female futurist writings like those produced by Valentine Saint-Point, Enif Robert, Rosa Rosà, and Benedetta, who contemplated the complex categories of gender and sex in relation to women's creative capabilities. In particular, Robert's *Ventre di donna* metaphorically compares the destruction of her womb in an autobiographical account of a hysterectomy to the sacrifice of soldiers during WWI; re-imagining her reproductive incapacitation as a catalyst for other creative practices. See my article, "Gender, Science, and the Modern Woman: Futurism's Strange Concoctions of Femininity" in *Carte Italiane* 2.6 (2010). See also Lucia Re's feminist interpretations of the women of Futurism in "Futurism and fascism, 1914-1945" in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, pp. 190-204 and "Maria Ginanni vs. F.T. Marinetti: Women, Speed, and War in Futurist Italy" in *Annali di Italianistica: A Century of Futurism, 1909 to 2009*. For a critical overview of women's contributions to Futurism in Italy, see Claudia Salaris, *Le futuriste: Donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italia (1909-1944)* (Milan: Edizioni delle donne, 1982). Mauro Bersani identifies the theme of "sacred violence" in Monte Ignoso, referring to Masino's use of a "violenza sacra, né buona, né malvagia" in his postscript to the text (211). Ghezzi adopts the term in her assessment of the Biblical scenes depicted in the paintings lining the enigmatic hallway of the *casa rossa* that remain untouched by the grace of God (39).

¹⁷ The figure of Judith reappears in writing by other women, especially in the novel *Artemisia*, a novel, and the corresponding play, *Corte Savella*. Both texts take as subject Artemisia Gentileschi, a Neapolitan Baroque painter who followed in the style of Caravaggio. Sexuality and violence figure largely in the life and work of Artemisia Gentileschi, who underwent a public trial following her rape by painter Agostino Tassi, and whose most celebrated work portrays the murder of Holofernes at the hands of Judith. For a critical analysis of the figure of Artemisia and of female subjectivity in Banti's writing, see *Beyond Artemisia: Female Subjectivity, History, and Culture in Anna Banti*.

paintings in the hallway, construct a series of textual matrices that not only link etymologically to the trope of maternity, but also produce a perturbing aura that emanates from the textual structure to inform other themes and images throughout the text. The mood generated by time, setting, and structure suffuses, in particular, Masino reconstruction of maternity in *Monte Ignoso*.

* * *

In *Monte Ignoso*, Masino depicts maternity, its spaces and its relationships, as eternal and divine. This theme, elaborated on several occasions throughout the text, is most evident in the episode with Giulia, Giovanni's mother and a wicked, despicable woman. Giulia, defined by her avarice and disregard for others, constitutes a direct opposite to Emma's caring regard for the townspeople at the beginning of the novel. It is her eventual demise, however, that makes explicit the affiliation between the maternal and the sacred. Giulia is notorious for her abuse of the community, provoking the collective hatred of the town. One townswoman implores God to kill Giulia from uterine cancer: "Signore, fa morire la signora Giulia d'un cancro all'utero perché questo è giustizia [...] Mangiatele le interiora. Vuotatele come ha vuotato le nostre case" ["Heavenly Father, make Giulia die from uterine cancer because this would be justice. ...Eat up her insides. Empty her out just like she has emptied out our houses"] (*Monte Ignoso* 31). The punishment supplicated by the townswoman is portrayed as divine justice not only for Giulia's abusive behaviors but also for her lack of maternal instinct and compassion, recast as sins against a sacred and natural order. The plea draws a parallel between motherly nurture and the home, thus recasting Giulia's greed for material goods and her pillaging of the villagers with a sort of maternal abandonment. Masino makes this association clear with Giulia's contrast to Emma. Both are regarded as prominent figures, but whereas Emma commands with grace and

generosity, Giulia, a miserly and uncaring woman, exploits the townspeople for her personal gain. The differences between the two women are related through Giovanni's perception of them: “Chiuso in questo cerchio di bassa avarizia, Giovanni pensava a Emma e alla sua generosità, a quella sua *casa rossa* alta sul monte da dove i contadini e i mendicanti ripartivano con pani e fiaschi d'olio e cartocci di sale nelle ceste, come a una reggia e a una regina fabulose” [“Locked in this circle of abasement and greed, Giovanni would think of Emma and her generosity, of her house high atop the mountain, as a benevolent queen in a fabulous kingdom, where peasants and beggars would leave with bread and bottles of oil, with packages of salt in baskets”] (*MI* 29). The description, once again, illustrates a parallel between the women and their respective homes. In this instance, and from the outside, Emma's *casa rossa* appears as a site of nurturing benevolence apt for a woman of her character (a depiction that is complicated as the novel continues); and Giulia, in her "casa squallida" ["squalid house"] (30), hoards the goods she acquires through the exploitation of others.

The characterization of Giulia, measured against Emma, and the sacralization of her death dialogue with fascist conceptualizations of the mother during the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to adopting a hierarchical familial framework to push its pronatalist platform, fascists attempted to reinvent political loyalty as a form of faith, re-appropriating the sentiments associated with the Holy Family and the Church to reinforce collective investment in the national family. The rhetoric and ideology employed by the regime endorsed the sacrifice of the individual for the greater good of the nation: “transigente elemento, partecipe di un'opera immensa che lo trascende: egli porta il suo contributo e scompare. Il suo dovere è di dare la sua opera alla costruzione della vita collettiva nazionale, alla costruzione dello stato, dovere che non viene meno mai” [“transitory element, participant in an immense endeavor that transcends him:

he brings forth his contribution and vanishes. His duty is to give his efforts over to the construction of a collective national life, to the construction of the State, an obligation that never fades”] (Bottai 586). Individual Italian citizens were measured as the working parts of a larger whole—participants in a mythical collective that transcends even his or her earthly existence. In this way, fascist leaders utilized the mythical and moral potency of Christian-Catholic dictum to reinforce the power of the PNF, recasting political dedication as the earthly embodiment of God's kingdom: "tutto ciò che il cattolicesimo ha di fattivo, il fascismo lo assorbe e se ne alimenta e della nazione-stato fa il più glorioso regno di Dio in terra" ["everything productive that Catholicism has to offer, fascism absorbs it and feeds off it, creating of the nation-State the most glorious kingdom of God on Earth"] (Orano 141). Fascism's glorification of a national and implicitly spiritual collective mirrored that of religious doctrine throughout the ages, figuring individual sacrifice as participation in a sacred order.¹⁸

By conflating the institutional and mythic powers of Church and State, Mussolini depicted himself as a messiah-figure, evangelizing the masses with the promise of spiritual and political transcendence. Within this framework of glory and sacrifice, woman is relegated, both symbolically and socially, to the role of mother: she is expected to birth the sons that would sacrifice themselves in war gloriously and willingly for the advancement of the Italian fascist State. Women's biological capacities were recast as a mythical destiny and procreation was no

¹⁸ Sacrifice is historically and etymologically associated with the conceptualization of the sacred. *Sacrificare*, from Latin to the French *sacrifier*, means to make or render sacred. Thus the contemporary meaning, to surrender someone or something for the sake of a larger order, implicitly suggests a religious or ritualistic act. For critical interpretations of violence and the sacred in creative productions, see Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* (New York: Harpers Collins, 1991); *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972/1977); *The Idea of the Holy* by Rudolph Otto, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958).

longer her privilege but a political and spiritual obligation. The heroism and glory of war adopted the "trenchocracy" developed during the first World War, venerating the 'holy' soldier of fascism and honoring the mothers and widows as victims of the "red" aggression (Burleigh 59). In opposition to the noble (and sacred) sacrifice of the men on the battlefield, women's glory was identified in passive inactivity—in a mother's willingness to forfeit her sons to war for the betterment of the nation.¹⁹

Masino's characterization of Giulia, and our subsequent reading of her character, is rooted in fascism's depiction of motherhood. Giulia's cruelty, her avarice, and her disregard for her son are abhorrent especially because she is a woman and a mother. This point is made obvious through her death, painted as divine retribution for her failure as a mother. When Giulia hurries to leave after the woman's prayer for her demise, the entire congregation follows her, continually insisting that she be punished.

La signora Giulia si alzò in fretta e uscì di chiesa. Dietro lei anche la folla si mosse. Prima le donne che ancora imprecavano e i fanciulli con le mani in croce gli occhi al cielo, poi gli uomini a capo scoperto, che guardavano in terra. Improvvisamente sembravano tutti vestiti di nero come nei giorni di processione solenne. Qualcuno aveva preso in sacrestia i lampioni sacri. Avanzavano con quelli e circondavano uno di loro che portava il Cristo in croce, sanguinoso. Il prete non aveva saputo impedire questa violenza. Così composti passavano per le strade del paese dietro la donna fuggente.

Giulia got up in a hurry and left the church. The crowd mobilized behind her.

First the women who continued to curse her and the children with hands in the

¹⁹ See Laura Wittman's *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body*.

form of a cross and their eyes pointed toward the sky; and then the men with their hats off, looking at the ground. Suddenly, everyone seemed dressed in black, as if in a solemn procession. Someone had taken the sacred lanterns from the sacristy. The crowd marched forward, surrounding the person carrying a bleeding Christ on the cross. The priest did not know how to hinder this violence. Composed in this matter, they passed through the streets of the village behind the fleeing woman. (*MI* 32)

The scene takes the form of a religious procession, adopting Christian relics and traditions to empower a pagan curse. Giulia's death comes a day later as summoned by the townspeople with the bloody decomposition of her uterus. The event is extremely symbolic: the descriptions of Giulia's violent end ("...l'hanno trovata che si rotolava sul pavimento in un mare di sangue") ["they found her rolling around on the floor in a pool of blood"] (32) recall the sacred violence of Christ's crucifixion and bloody representation on the cross. Blood also links the extreme violence of the event, concentrated against the maternal body, to the event of childbirth. The female body, as a reproductive body, is equated to the bodies of beasts and, as a grotesque and inherently sinful object, merits the extreme suffering imposed on Giulia.

In her original cry, the townswoman in pleading for Giulia's death demands that she suffer: "Perché è donna deve soffrire di più, come una bestia" ["She has to suffer more because she is a woman, like a beast"] (*MI* 31). The episode with Giulia creates an explicit parallel between the events of birth and death, labeling each as sacred and violent. Blood, marking the passage into life and the subsequent departure into death, links each event in an act of carnal sacrifice that, as it is depicted in *Monte Igoso*, is rooted in the body of the mother. The bleeding womb, representative of the experience of childbirth, is, in the episode with Giulia and

throughout the novel, the catalyst for both creation and destruction. This unique reproductive privilege, represented in *Monte Ignoso* as a contemporaneous act of creation and destruction, earthly and divine practices, situates women and mothers in an ancient, symbolic, and natural order.

The discourse of violence inherent to Masino's reformulation of maternity continues with her articulation of women's sexuality. Through Emma, Masino isolates women's sexuality, depicted as transgressive and perverse, from the role of mother. Originally depicted as a virgin figure against the malice of Giulia, Masino systematically unveils Emma's multiple layers revealing a complex characterization of woman that is constantly in conflict. Emma views her own sexuality as a curse, the result of a primeval belonging that resigns her to Monte Ignoso and casts her as complicit with the figures of the paintings: "Voi tutte facce da criminali. Stupratori. Ladri. Falsari. Incestuosi. Che avete edificato le basi dell'umanità, guardate che sono vostra sorella in tutto il male" ["You all, with the faces of criminals. Rapists. Thieves. Counterfeiters. Incestuous offenders. You are the base of all humanity. Look! I am your sister in evil"] (23). The paintings and the figures represent for Emma, and in the larger context of the novel, a "base of humanity" ("basi dell'umanità"—implicating both the foundations of humanity and the baseness of that foundation) that is predicated on violence and hypocrisy. Depicting the Biblical characters as rapists, thieves and liars, Masino's interpretation of the origins of humanity and religion resurrects the violence and sacrifice inherent to the Old Testament as an integral, if complicated, aspect of celestial redemption. Judith, while belonging to this heritage, represents a unique female figure: in these scenes depicting the violence of men against each other or against women (Joseph being thrown into a well by his jealous brothers, Jacob deceiving Isaac, Ammon raping his sister Tamar), presented in contrast to the celestial grace of the virgin Mary, the actions of

Judith subvert this hierarchical paradigm, suggesting that women, too, are capable of violence and revenge.

Using images from the Bible, Masino creates an interpretative framework for *Monte Ignoso*. The allegory and symbolism embedded in each image elicits a particular reading of the text that is immediately subverted and complicated. In other words, Masino positions Emma (and the reader) against these images in an attempt to evidence their allegorical influence while also debunking it. As Allison Cooper suggests, the paintings and the figures within them become "[grotesque] visual metaphors of the monstrous nature of the archetypes they represent" (389). Masino connects these archetypes to the worst aspects of fascist patriarchy. Emma's experience in the novel, framed by her interaction and dialogue with the paintings, is figured as a struggle against fascist social mandates of femininity.

* * *

Taking the stableman, Marco, as her lover, Emma attempts to exorcise the sexual impulses that lead her away from her roles as mother and wife. The ideological divide imposed between female sexuality and women's cultural roles manifests as a spatial divide as well: Emma meets her lover only in the stables, a place "simbolicamente [associabile] al mondo agreste e animale... al di fuori della rispettabilità sociale e del matrimonio borghese" ["symbolically linked to the agrarian world of animals... located outside of bourgeois marriage and of social respectability"] (Ghezzi 51). Emma's clandestine affair with Marco figuratively and literally threatens her divine and immaculate "maternal aspirations" (50). After a quarrel, Marco kicks her in the stomach (or womb, "ventre") rendering her unconscious and believing her dead. The meeting in the stable reaffirms the association between women's reproductive and sexual body

and the bodies of beasts with the description of a pregnant mare: "La giumenta era gravida: il ventre gonfio le pendeva tra le gambe e pulsava come un cuore. Sembrava che dovesse staccarsi e spiacciarsi a terra" ["The mare was pregnant: her engorged belly hung between her legs, pulsing like a heart. It seemed as though it might break off and crash into the ground"] (*MI* 45). Maternal realities are repainted as grotesque and violent. The promise of life symbolized by the mare's pregnant belly is quickly juxtaposed with death and devastation: "[...] nella scuderia si creava un'atmosfera di veglia funebre. I mucchi di fieno erano umidi con un odore forte come se traspirassero un sudore malato, la carrozza e i carri nell'angolo estremo della stalla sembravano furgoni mortuari" ["...in the stable it created an atmosphere of mournful wakefulness. The piles of hay were moist and smelled strongly, as if perspiring a sickly sweat. The carriage and the carts in the far corner of the stall resembled an obituary caravan"] (45). The alternate descriptions alluding first to life and then to death correspond to the dualistic reality created in the text and extend to a discussion of sexuality: creation metaphorically aligns with the figure of the mother and the maternal body while sexual pleasure, defined outside a female propensity for procreation, represents destruction, disharmony, and chaos. This initial schematization of maternity and sexuality aligns with fascist social mores during the 1920s and 1930s. Emma's attempt to distance her motherly attributes from her sexual passions, the descriptions of her affair with Marco as bestial and perverse—all of these elements denigrate woman's active role in her own sexual development advocating, by default, a passive female sexuality relegated exclusively to procreative relations.

While Emma's sexual inclinations associate her with earthly practices, her role as a mother performs an inverse operation, connecting her with the divine and the eternal. In *Monte Ignoso*, the power of motherhood comes not from woman's biological destiny as the bearer of

children, but rather from the violence and profundity of maternal love—a love that isolates and authorizes the mother:

Io non sono più una donna. Sono una forza di amore materno: una tua forza. Sono un tuo miracolo e anche una dimostrazione. Se mi distruggi, distruggi la volontà materna, la concezione. Non troverai più alcun ventre che voglia portare un figlio, o che possa, perché senza questo amore non si può creare, neppure fecondate da un seme divino. Non distruggermi, Dio onnipotente, io sono quello che tu non potrai mai essere: madre. Che tu non sia madre, questa è la tua forza.

I am not a woman anymore. I am a force of maternal love—your force. I am your miracle, a demonstration. If you destroy me, you will destroy maternal will and conception. You will not find another womb that will carry a child, or that can, because without this love there is no creation, not even inseminated by a divine seed. Do not destroy me, omnipotent God. I am what you will never be: a mother.

That you will never be a mother...this is your strength. (103-104)

Rather than identifying women's biological capacities as obligation or as some celestial benevolence bestowed upon women by a higher (masculinized) power, Emma refers in her speech to a unique authority born of women and the singular female experience of bearing children and being a mother. Masino's portrait of motherhood, masterfully explicated in Emma's powerful monologue, envisions the body and experience as essential components in formulating an exclusively female model of potentiality without confining women to the corporeal. The will of mothers, their love, exists independently of their bodies, and while God may destroy a body, an individual, He may not destroy the dynamism created through the maternal experience.

Masino's conceptualization of "maternal will" enables women to participate in the realm of spirituality, of philosophy and ideas, rather than be confined to the material world through their body. Yet, she does not completely eliminate the body from this spiritual transcendence, rather, the body facilitates the spiritual through the act of childbirth. Corporeal realities, childbirth in particular, seem to breathe life into a distinct female mode of conceptualization. Refiguring maternity in this way, as not only biological but as a form of symbolic and spiritual engagement in the world of ideas, Masino authorizes female will, implicated in the figure of the Great Mother and in the work of Cavarero, and women's capacity to choose whether to give life, and employ her reproductive abilities, or to prohibit it.

In her speech, Emma identifies Mary, the Holy and Virgin mother, as belonging to an archaic female, maternal order (and implicitly cites Mary's body as a maternal body, and thus an inherently sexual, beastly body). When he comes to life in the painting of the Holy Family, Christ, as an infant, confirms his mother's participation in a powerful female order, telling his mother:

eri la più degna. Poi hai partorito. Ora sei madre. Ora sei come lei, e lei, e lei, come tutte queste donne. Prima pensavi che Dio ti ha eletta una di un suo mistero ora pensi che io sono generato da Dio, dunque sono il migliore. Ma domanda un po' a ognuna di loro se suo figlio non è il migliore .

you were the worthiest. Then you gave birth. Now you are a mother. Now you are like her, and her, and her-like all these women. Before you thought that God had elected you at random for his mysteries and now you think I am better than all others because I was created by God. But, ask each of these other women if her child is not the best. (66-7)

In citing female procreativity and the maternal experience as dominant and divine, Masino conflates the realms of the heavenly and the material in the mother's body. Even Mary, alien to the sins of the flesh, is irreversibly attached to the material world through her body. The conceptualization of motherhood depicted in this dialogue opposes the model in which the female body is a mere vehicle to collective empowerment and transcendence. Mothers, represented by Emma and even by the Virgin Mary in *Monte Ignoso*, will never love God, country, or countrymen with the same passion with which she embraces her child.

* * *

Masino's depiction of the omnipotent mother reclaims women's agency in the reproductive process and anticipates the ethos of contemporary feminist theorists. As an arbiter of life and of death, Emma is refigured in the resemblance of the archetypal Great Mother. A constellation of both the Good and the Terrible Mother, the Great Mother is both nurturing and protective and aggressive and devouring.²⁰ This view of motherhood, containing the power of procreation combined with maternal will or women's agency, the Great Mother is the dominant figure not only of fertility and abundance but also of absolute devastation. Adriana Cavarero adopts the figure of the Great Mother as a mythic figure for woman capable of representing her female subjectivity within her own symbolic order. In *Nonostante Platone*, Cavarero attempts to reconcile feminist philosophical criticism with metaphysics by reading philosophy through the grid of sexual difference. Her analysis sheds light not only on potential reformulations of a

²⁰ For a theorization of the Great Mother, see Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963, especially pp. 18-39. Camille Paglia *Sexual Personae* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990); Bachofen, Johann J., trans. Ralph Manheim, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967).

female subjectivity, but illuminates the implicit biases of a masculine symbolic order on the cultural imagination.

The Great Mother is predominantly represented in Cavarero's discussion of Demeter, the mythological earth-mother goddess of fertility and abundance. Demeter is one of the emblematic female figures that Cavarero "steals" from the patriarchal imagination and re-appropriates in a female symbolic order.²¹ The myth of Demeter documents the reaction of the goddess to the abduction of her daughter, Persephone (Kore). After Hades kidnaps Persephone and takes her into the underworld to make her his wife, Demeter refuses to replenish the earth. To save the earth from desolation, the gods were forced to come to a compromise, allowing Persephone to spend part of the year with her mother on earth and part of the year in the underworld as the wife of Hades. The myth accounts for the seasons—Spring arrives when Demeter is reunited with her daughter while the Winter represents Demeter's despair during Persephone's absence. Taking back the myth of Demeter and reinterpreting the potency of fertility and the Great Mother, Cavarero reminds us that the omnipotent mother is not only a representative of life, but also, and more importantly, an agent of both creation and desolation. Inserting the Great Mother into a traditional, philosophic and allegorical dialectic, Cavarero seeks to disrupt a symbolic order founded in orthodox gender codes.

The masculine symbolic order and idea itself of action are, according to Cavarero, predicated on the opposition between birth and rootedness, on the one hand, and death and adventure on the other. While men are generally associated with action and risk, women are

²¹ See Cavarero's discussion of Demeter in *Nonostante Platone*, pp. 65-96. Cavarero states: "In questo libro invento figure femminili, anzi le rubo: saccheggio i testi classici, da Omero a Platone, per trasferire le loro 'eroine' su una nuova scena, riservata alle donne, dove esse assumono un senso diverso" ["In this book, I invent new female figures. Actually, I steal them: I ransack classical texts, from Homer to Plato, to transfer their heroines onto a new scene, reserved to women, where they assume new meaning"] ("Prefazione," *Nonostante Platone* 7-8).

relegated to the stagnancy of the home and regarded as passive and inferior. Platonic thought reinforces this dualism by segregating the living or material world from the universal world of ideas. Man pursues death, risk and glory in an attempt to transcend the world of the living, while woman's purportedly immanent materiality, a mere vessel for reproduction, is confined to the mundane. In the Western philosophic tradition, death is perceived as the final untying of the body from the soul, allowing the transcendence of the soul into the universal world of ideas, whereas birth is depicted as a temporary stitching together of these two elements, the virtual imprisonment of the soul. As such, Western philosophy assigns the masculine and the feminine to oppositional axes in which woman is not afforded the opportunity for action, agency or transcendence. This belief system trivializes bodily experiences and, subsequently, the body and, in turn, erases the significance of sexual difference in philosophy.

Cavarero subverts this assertion by resurrecting the myth of Demeter. Plato's allusion to Demeter in *Cratylus* imagines Demeter as a nurturing figure while minimizing the broader implications of her fertility.²² The fertility of the Great Mother represented in the myth of Demeter and resurrected in Cavarero's analysis, consists not only in woman's biological capacities but her maternal will. Dismissing the body as a mere part of the living world, she contends, is to virtually erase the Great Mother from Western Philosophy, who represents a combination of woman's biological and metaphysical destiny. In the general symbolic order, birth and death function as oppositional categories with death designating the final release of the soul from the material world. Cavarero's interpretation of the Great Mother, however, reassigns life-giving and death-giving drives as contemporaneous aspects of female fertility: the power of Demeter, according to Cavarero, is not only to generate but the choice to generate or not.

²² "Demeter appears to have been called Demeter, because like a mother (meter) she gives the gift of food." Plato, *Cratylus*. 403b. English translation by H.N. Fowler.

E proprio qui sta il significato più profondo del "segreto" femminile della vita attribuito dalle culture origini alla Grande Madre: il generare è esperienza solo femminile ma non è processo automatico e necessitante di cui le donne siano mero veicolo. [...] il mito di Demetra rivela una figura sovrana della soggettività femminile la quale decide, nella singolarità concreta di ogni donna, se generare o no, essendo il generare una prerogativa radicata nel suo potere-e quindi nella sua scelta-di farlo, e non invece il compito imposto da un'etica esterna, socialmente comandata, ma che si pretenderebbe inscritta nella legge di natura. Anzi la physis, lungi dal comandare una generazione di cui la madre sarebbe strumento, mostra di essere un tutt'uno con la madre e di radicarsi nella scelta di questa: è la madre ad assecondare o ad arrestare il nascere in cui la physis consiste, e non viceversa. [...] la scelta, che costitutivamente appartiene alla potenza materna, si porta dentro qualcosa di effettivamente terribile come tutti i segreti, ossia la possibilità del nulla come un non più dell'umano genere, la terra desolata] (71-2)

And right here lies the deepest meaning of the feminine 'secret' of life, which archaic cultures attribute to the Great Mother: to generate is an exclusively female experience, but it is not an automatic and obligatory process where women are mere vehicles. / ... the myth of Demeter reveals a sovereign figure of female subjectivity who decides, in the concrete singularity of every woman, whether or not to generate. For this sovereign figure, the act of generating is a prerogative rooted in her power-and therefore in her choice-to carry it out. It is not a duty imposed by a socially prescribed, external ethics supposedly inscribed in the law of nature. Quite to the contrary, far from being a force that prescribes an act of

generation in which the mother is supposed to be an instrument, physis shows itself to be at one with the mother and to be rooted in her choice: the mother either assists or vetoes the birth that constitutes physis, not vice versa. ... the choice that belongs constitutively to maternal power carries within it, like all secrets, something truly dreadful: the possibility of nothingness, the annihilation of humankind, the desolation of the earth.²³

Appealing to archaic traditions, Cavarero reshapes maternity and fertility as a power exclusive to women in which each individual woman is able to exercise her own authority: ultimately, it is the woman who decides whether to give birth or not. Cavarero turns socio-cultural, metaphorical gender relationships inherent to a masculine symbolic order on their head, refiguring the female body as an extension of woman's will. The authority afforded to women in this re-imagining of the female body, mind and spirit situates woman in a position of extreme power: the proliferation of life, or its dramatic annihilation, rests in the decisive power of the Great Mother.

Masino presents a similar maternal dialectic in *Monte Ignoso*, oscillating between generative potential and extreme annihilation, positioning the mother beyond the realm of God and religion and belonging to an ancient and eternal tradition. This conceptualization of maternity differs dramatically from the angelic, nurturing figure of the mother of the Western imagination, reconciling the metaphysical and corporeal experiences of childbirth in a divine and sacred act:

Si può distruggere una madre? Dio può distruggere il mio corpo di donna e il mio amore di donna, che ha creati. Ma come può distruggere il mio amore di madre

²³ Citations in English are taken from *In Spite of Plato*, Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy's translation (New York: Routledge, 1995). pp. 64-5.

che non ha creato? Lui ha detto alla donna: - Partorirai con dolore. E la donna si è messa ad amare quel suo dolore sopra ogni altra cosa. Ecco la logica nostra. Dio può ammazzarmi cento figli e quei cento figli io li amerò il doppio, perché li rifarò dentro me come li volevo: belli, buoni, sapienti. Ma bisogna sapere che i nostri figli sono morti per poterli ricreare: o credere che siano vivi per dargli la nostra vita.

Can you destroy a mother? God can destroy my woman's body and my woman's love, which He created. But how can He destroy my maternal love, which he did not create? He said to woman: "You will have a painful childbirth." And woman started to love her pain above all else. That is our logic. God can kill one hundred children and I will love those hundred children twice as much because I will remake them inside me, just how I want them: beautiful, good, wise. We have to know our children die so we can re-create them, or at least believe they are alive to give to them our own life. (*MI 151*)

In Masino's maternal effigy, it is the physical pain and the violence of childbirth that permits a sort of transcendence. Childbirth represents a consecrated rite that connects woman's earthly body to the divine and ancient tradition of the Great Mother. In this passage, women's procreative capabilities are figured into a larger creative dimension, exempting the mother from the providence of God: while God has the power to take life ("Dio può ammazzarmi cento figli e quei cento figli io li amerò il doppio..."), the mother has the dual capacity to reform it at her will and to her own desire ("perché li rifarò dentro me come li volevo: belli, buoni, sapienti"). Female creative potential, in this light, appeals to both a physical ability and an imaginative one as well,

linking women's biological destiny to other creative pursuits and, more importantly, posits the whole of female fecundity within the realm and control of woman.²⁴

Masino, like Cavarero, develops a conceptual matrix of maternity that includes not only origins, but ends as well. In *Monte Ignoso*, Masino foreshadows Cavarero's later articulation of the mother as capable of both reproduction and annihilation, and associates female procreativity and the maternal experience to celestial omnipotence. The author's strategy performs multiple functions: on the one hand, it makes apparent a mythology of motherhood present in contemporary and historic socio-symbolic articulations of femininity and female experience; and, on the other, it reformulates this vision of the mythological mother as one that gives life but who is also capable of taking it away. Masino's rearticulation of the mother and maternity appeals to the ancestral and primordial omnipotence of the archaic Mother: the pre-Oedipic or Great Mother from classic mythology.²⁵ Emma is also an example of the Freudian *femme forte* or phallic woman: a mother imagined as an omnipotent dominatrix, a bearer not only of life but also of death that desires her child as her possession.²⁶ Emma's 'ownership' of her child (and of her maternal capacities) is most clearly demonstrated in her desire to protect and defend Barbara, even if the task requires that she take her own child's life.

Voglio che muoia, la voglio ammazzare io, me l'ha chiesto, perché soffre troppo.

[...] Volevo essere sola con lei alla sua morte, io e lei sole, unite con tanti legami

²⁴ Masino alludes briefly to women's negotiation between procreation and creativity toward the conclusion of the novel as Emma contemplates what her life might have been had she not given birth: "Forse avrei potuto essere una grande scrittrice o una pittrice o una musicista celebre" ["Perhaps I might have been a great writer or painter or famous musician"] (187).

²⁵ Ghezzi discusses Emma as an extension of the Freudian *femme forte* in "Fiamme e follia." See pp. 46-50.

²⁶ See *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Elizabeth Wright, Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1992, pp. 314-15.

di carne, come quando l'ho fatta. Io e lei sole a soffrire. [...] Bisogna che io la partorisca nella morte, capisci? Tu non puoi, io sì, io sola, e intanto tutto il mio sangue scorre via. Come quando è nata e in quest'aria non sapeva respirare, così morrà, e in quell'aria non saprà respirare. Chi le insegnerà a respirare?

I want her to die. I want to kill her myself-she asked me to because she was suffering. I wanted to be alone with her when she died. Her and I, alone. United with a carnal bond, like when I created her. Her and I, alone. Suffering. I need to birth her into death, do you understand? You cannot. I can. Only me. And, in the meantime, my blood will run out, like when she was born and she did not know how to breathe this air. And so, when she dies, she will not know how to breathe that air. Who will teach her to breathe? (*MI* 153-4)

Death, like birth, is envisioned as departing from the mother's body and under her protection. In killing Barbara, Emma would be able to deliver her ("birth her") into death. Both acts, the first and the last, adopt the contemporaneous materiality and spirituality contained in the maternal body and remain within the determination of the Great Mother: should Barbara die, it should be under Emma's watchful gaze and by her hand. The figure of the mother, imagined as both good and terrible delineates woman as an end in herself in spite of fascist socio-political gender codifications that envision women's role and civil obligation exclusively in the act of reproduction. Rather than subscribing to a system of complementary opposites, Masino's representation of woman comprises a whole in herself: she possesses the dual capacity of giving life and taking it, of creation and destruction. Women's fertility is reinterpreted as an active symbol that implies a connectedness between body and thought, physical action and agency, and

reaffirms woman's wholeness: no longer recognized in light of a purportedly innate materiality, woman is allowed access to a philosophical world of ideas.

* * *

In her reappropriation of maternal metaphors, Cavarero contends that, in order to identify female gender distinctions in an autonomous symbolic system, women must look to the relationships between mother and child, especially between mother and daughter. According to Cavarero, in looking to her daughter, woman finds the "measure of her own appearance and being in the world." This "dual order of the gaze" between mother and daughter allows woman to see herself within a relationship of correspondence marked by sexual difference. For Cavarero, the gaze is an essential aspect of women's process of recognition: "L'ordine naturale/natale degli sguardi vuole pertanto che la madre e la figlia stiano in una visibilità reciproca. Vuole che nella relazione fra madre e figli si guardi il genere femminile cui ogni donna appartiene, trovando in questo sguardo la misura del suo apparire, e perciò del suo essere del mondo" ["The natural/natal order of gazes requires that mother and daughter be visible to each other. It demands that we look at the female gender in relationships between mothers and children. Every woman belongs to this gender, and finds in this gaze the measure of her own appearance and being in the world"] (*Nonostante Platone* 69; *In Spite of Plato* 62). Woman looks to her daughter to understand her individual being in the world and, in turn, her daughter inherits the tradition of procreation.

This unique female belonging forms a "maternal continuum," the interruption of which marks symbolically the end of the world. The dialogic exchange essential to Cavarero's "dual order of the gaze" between mother and daughter reinforces an inherent doubleness in female existence that parallels the mother's binary existence: woman is both mother and daughter,

arbiter of life and of death. Her intrinsic being is intertwined in a continuous cycle of generation and decomposition. Cavarero's order of the gaze also manifests the continuity of a female genealogy in visual exchange. This unspoken dialogue and connectivity among women extends horizontally situating female agency and identity in the relationship between women and denying implicitly the hierarchical authority of a "higher power":

Abbiamo così un'accezione di femminile radice di quel theorein, di quel "guardare" che il filosofo rivolge a ciò che è eterno: non dunque un theorein che va verso l'alto, dis-traendosi da questa terra, ma un theorein che orizzontalmente si dipana in relazioni rispondenti, nella direzione natale dell'umano apparire. Un mondo segnato dalla differenza sessuale, a questo sguardo e in questo sguardo infatti appare, e si manifesta nella reciprocità e nel riconoscimento di quello dei due sessi al quale la physis affida la nascita: appunto l'innegabile matrice femminile dell'umano apparire. (*Nonostante Platone 69*)

Hence we have a feminine stem in the meaning of theorein, the "gaze" that the male philosopher directs toward the eternal. This theorein does not look up; it does not divert its attention from the earth. It is a theorein that extends horizontally in relationships of correspondence, in the direction of birth and the arrival of humans into the world. In fact, the world that appears to this gaze and within this gaze is marked by sexual difference. This difference manifests itself in reciprocity, and the recognition of the one sex to which physis entrusts birth: the undeniably feminine matrix of the appearance of humans on this earth. (*In Spite of Plato 62*)

Cavarero's theorization of the female gaze coincides with Masino's representation of motherhood as a maternal force, positioned against God and answering only to her self. The horizontal visual exchange identified by Cavarero conceptually builds upon a notion of female identity and subjectivity that is inherently collective and relational: the individual woman finds her being in the world through her dialogue and relationship to other women.

The Biblical images of the hallway create in the novel a distinct visual code while also referring metaphorically to the 'lineage' that protects and condemns its mistress. The hallway, the paintings, and the biblical characters are introduced to the reader through Emma's gaze: "[...] La fiamma piccola d'una candela brillò e s'indugiava sui loro volti a scrutarli. Un terrore grande li aveva subito fermati, ma in un attimo avevano riconosciuto la persona sopraggiunta e ora le sorridevano con aria d'intesa" ["The small flame of the candle glowed, slowly scrutinizing their faces. Initially paralyzed by fear, after a moment they recognized the intruder, smiling conspiratorily"] (*MI* 7). A character that we retrospectively recognize as Emma, wanders the hallway in the early hours of the morning, literally shedding light on the secret practices of the biblical characters. The "aria d'intesa" expressed between the characters of the paintings and Emma suggests a shared intimacy and secret knowledge of the nocturnal practices that only unfold under the cover of darkness, when the *casa rossa* undergoes a mystic transformation:

Era una notte molto calma; era tiepida, e benché il cielo fosse tutto spento, era una notte luminosa. Nebbie rossastre si erano distese nelle arie e creavano onde di calore e di luce. Ma verso le due del mattino le nebbie si sciolsero e l'oscurità affogò il mondo. Allora gli uomini camminavano cercando il suolo con le mani e con i piedi come uno caduto da uno stagno.

It was a very calm night, tepid; and even though the sky seemed completely extinguished, it was a luminous night. Reddish fog spread through the air creating waves of color and light. But, around two in the morning, the fog dissolved and the world drown in the darkness. After that, men moved as if lost in swamp, looking for the ground with their hands and feet. (7)

This passage, repeating the first phrases of the novel, reveals a transformation that occurs in Monte Ignoso by night: from the calm and warmth of a serene night the atmosphere passes into total darkness and "obscurity" envelops the world. Masino positions the reader in a state of confusion—grasping for the doorway with their hands in total darkness and stumbling through an unfamiliar world. This experience stands in opposition to Emma's, who expertly navigates the darkened hallways, interacting with the various characters of the paintings.

Masino anticipates Cavarero's revision of womanhood and fertility, marking both Emma and Barbara as beneficiaries to an ancient female tradition that grants both a privileged perspective in the novel. The passage introducing the house and town of Monte Ignoso describes the house as protected and preserved in the perennial red haze of the volcano (a sort of primordial maternal gaze). As an emanation of the mysterious paintings and the *casa rossa*, Emma absorbs the prehistory and potency of the volcano at her doorstep, apparent in her fiery red hair and centennial gaze:

Quel che avvinceva in [Emma] erano i capelli rossi legati con tre giri di trecce intorno alla testa, e gli occhi color verde languido affogati in uno sguardo di una vecchiezza secolare. Quand'ella guardava una cosa, anche la più insignificante, sembrava che quel movimento di sollevare le palpebre e muovere la pupilla intorno e fissare, fosse nato nella sua volontà già da millenni, ch'ella lo avesse

risvegliato da un sonno infinito, trascinato traverso secoli e mondi, fino nell'ora presente come la luce di una stella.

What was intriguing in Emma was her red hair, pulled back into braids that wrapped three times around her head, and her pale green eyes, which were lost in a gaze that looked back centuries. When she looked at something, even the most insignificant thing, the act of lifting her eyelids and moving her eyes to fixate her gaze was seemingly born of a centennial will. It was as if she had awoken that desire from an infinite sleep, traversing worlds and centuries, to arrive in the present moment, like the light from a star. (27)

Emma's gaze, apparently belonging to a primordial tradition, exudes an ageless authority that commands throughout the text. It is the light of her candle that first illuminates the hallway, revealing the mysterious and magical world that claims the *casa rossa* by night. In this and other episodes in the novel, it is Emma that directs the action of the narrative, quite literally choosing what comes to light. Again at the time of Marco's suicide, the event unfolds through the eyes of Emma: "Alzò le palpebre e rimase con gli occhi fissi, nudi di paura. Nelle sue pupille immense, riflessa appariva e spariva l'immagine dell'impiccato. Fu un attimo" [She lifted her eyes and stood still with a blank, frightened stare. Reflected in her immense eyes, the image of the hanged man swang in and out of focus] (53). The cinematic image of the Marco's body, reflected in the eyes of Emma, explicitly frames the narrative—the reader experiences the narrative events through and with Emma.

Emma's gaze reasserts the authority of her point-of-view in the text while also positioning her as the mistress of the house and the town surrounding it. Her unparalleled perspective

emerges as dominant in the text. It is only toward the conclusion, with the arrival of Spring in Monte Ignoso, that the command of Emma's gaze diminishes:

Così, per molti inverni, Emma aveva sorvegliato la vita del paese intorno a sé. E dal suo osservatorio, a volte, con gioia e orgoglio grandi, aveva visto gli uomini interrompersi nella loro fatica per volgersi verso la *casa rossa* e guardare il suo giardino e in quella visione riposarsi e gioire. [...] Questa notte la *casa rossa* è buia, sola in mezzo a tutto Monte Ignoso, ma ora Monte Ignoso ha la primavera e non ha più bisogno di Emma.

So, for many winters, Emma had witnessed the life of the village around her. And sometimes from her observatory, with great pride and immense joy, she had seen the men interrupt their labor to turn and look at the *casa rossa* and find rejoice and repose in the vision of the garden. [...] Tonight, however, the *casa rossa* was dark, alone atop the fiery mountain. Now, Monte Ignoso had Spring and the village no longer needed Emma. (189)

The excerpt alludes to a textual authority: situated atop the hill, Emma has an expansive view of the town below her and is able to witness (and subsequently recount) the passage of life in Monte Ignoso. As Flora Maria Ghezzi observes, the arrival of Springtime, historically symbolizing the fertility and fecundity associated with the maternal, disrupts the maternal continuum inserting temporality into a textual world that was atemporal and archaic:

Spezzatosi, attraverso lo sguardo negato e la morte, il continuum della genealogia materna che è infinità temporale, si instaura nel microcosmo di Monte Ignoso la dimensione della temporalità. [...] Ora, invece, profilandosi il declino del regno

matriarcale, il ciclo stagionale spezza con il suo ritmo cadenzato la cristallizzata fissità, la sterile e bruciante desolazione che regnava nei territori del materno. Once the continuum of an infinite maternal genealogy is broken, through death and the negation of the gaze, a temporal dimension inserts itself into the (spatio-temporal) microcosm of Monte Igno. [...] Parallel to the fall of the matriarchal realm, the seasonal cycle breaks from its cadenced rhythm and crystallized steadiness; from the sterile, burning desolation that reigned over maternal territories. ("Fiamme e follia" 53)

Spring marks not only an interruption of an archaic maternal order in the text, but also the final demise of Emma's privileged role of observer:

Nascosta tra gli alberi, vide il paese ai suoi piedi, e in faccia la *casa rossa*, alla sua stessa altezza. Vide se stessa là. Vide la propria vita. Ma non la vide quale realmente era stata, la vide come lei poteva vederla ora, quella che ora si sarebbe fatta, con la sua nuova natura. Una vita semplice di donna contenta tra il marito e la casa prospera. Più tardi, una vita felice abbracciata con Barbara. Invece, una casa muta da dove tutti sono partiti incontro alla morte. Lei è l'ultima guardiana del focolare e parte per cercare il fuoco; un tizzo per riattivare le ceneri spente.

Hidden between the trees, she saw the village at her feet and, in front, at her level, the *casa rossa*. She saw herself there. She saw her life, but she did not see it as it had actually been. She saw her life as she could now see it, the life that she could have made now, with her new disposition. A simple life: a woman happily married in a prosperous home, and, later, a life contentedly holding Barbara. Instead, what was there was a silent house. All had left to meet their end. She was

the last guardian of the hearth gone to find a fire, a spark to rekindle the extinguished ashes. (186-87)

As she leaves the *casa rossa* and Monte Ignoso in search of Giovanni, Emma looks upon the town from the outside; she looks upon the *casa rossa* and sees herself there as she would in a mirror. As she looks upon it, Emma seems to assign specular properties to the house, searching in her view of it for some sort of reciprocity or recognition; longing for a way to identify herself in this “new” environment after the arrival of Spring. Her inability to find herself in the image of the house, or in the world, in general, develops progressively following Barbara’s death. Without her daughter, Emma appears to have lost the vision of herself in the world:

si guardò [nello specchio]. Sperava vedere il proprio volto rischiarato dall’aprile. Ma il suo volto era ancora come quando lei era rientrata nella stanza dove Barbara era stata malata e quella stanza era vuota e non c’era che il volto di Emma riflesso dallo specchio dell’armadio. [...] I capelli rossi di Emma impediscono il lutto, qualsiasi lutto. Quando Barbara sarà morta li coprirà con un fazzoletto nero, come usano le contadine. [...] si chiuse le trecce nel fazzoletto e il fazzoletto annodò sotto il mento. Si guardò. Allora prese lo specchio e lo scoteva forte, come per farne schizzare fuori un’immagine. Poi se lo portò vicino alla bocca, vi soffiava sopra, con un limbo del vestito lo ripulì. Lo contemplava a lungo. [...] Con il pollice sembrava volergli incidere sopra linee, cancellarne altre false. Finalmente abbandonò le braccia lungo il corpo e scoteva il capo. Nello specchio non c’era più Emma di prima ma non c’è neppure quella Emma che lei vorrebbe essere. ... Alzò alto lo specchio e lo scagliò a terra con violenza, per richiamare la

sciagura sul proprio capo. Lo specchio si ruppe senza rumore, adagiandosi tra la polvere.

She looked at herself in the mirror. She was hoping to see her face illuminated by April. But her face was the same as it was when she had returned to the room where Barbara lay ill and that room was empty; there was nothing but the reflection of Emma's face in the armoire mirror. ... Her red hair seemed to stifle her grief, any grief. When Barbara is dead she will cover it with a kerchief, like the peasants do ... She wrapped her braids in the kerchief and knotted it beneath her chin. She looked at herself. And then she took the mirror and shook it hard, as if to rattle out an image. After, she brought it close to her mouth, she blew on it and wiped it clean with her sleeve. She contemplated the mirror at length. [...] With her thumb she tried to carve out lines on her face, erase others that were misleading. Finally, she dropped her arm to her side and shook her head. In the mirror, she could not find the Emma from before, nor could she find the Emma that she wanted to be. She lifted the mirror up and slammed it to the ground violently in order to recreate the tragedy in her mind. The mirror broke without a sound, blending easily into the dust. (167-69)

Emma's thwarted attempts to reclaim some sort of reciprocal gaze after the death of Barbara, to dictate her own identity in the world or rediscover her particular way of belonging to the larger order, reassert the significance of female genealogies in the text. Without Barbara to return her gaze, for her to look upon and watch over, Emma's authority begins to wain. Her inability to find her own reflection, to mold it in the ways she sees fit, seems to affect the authority of her point-of-view in the text. No longer able to dictate the trajectory of her own story she perceives that

her fate is intertwined with that of the darkened house. Emma's death, anticipated in this moment of observation and foretold with the abandonment of the *casa rossa*, reiterates what will be her final loss of authority.

As it emerges in the text, Emma's empowering gaze appears to be part of a female heritage passed between generations of women. Emma and Barbara, claiming the antique house as their birthplace, participate in this parentage—a primeval belonging that passes from mother to daughter in a contiguous female genealogy. The mystic 'patrimony' that allows Emma this entitled perspective, however, is revealed as a female legacy manifest in the experience of childbirth and motherhood: Emma fell victim to it while still in the womb as her mother was possessed by the paintings: "La mia mamma, la tua nonna, Barbara, li guardava quand'era incinta e la incantavano" ["My mother, your grandmother, Barbara, the watched her while she was pregnant. They bewitched her"] (*MI* 35). Intuiting the implications of Barbara's hallucinations, Emma fears that her daughter, too, will be subject to this fatalistic inheritance. Despite Emma's efforts to distance Barbara from the chaos of Monte Ignoso by sending her away to school, Monte Ignoso seems to follow Barbara. Emma says as much in a letter to her daughter, telling her: "Monte Ignoso è partito con te, Barbara, e io ora vivo sola in uno spazio vuoto" ["Monte Ignoso left with you, Barbara, and now I live alone in an empty space"] (*MI* 111). Though the nun reading the letter to Barbara passes off Emma's comment as the usual prattle of mothers, Barbara interprets her mother's statement more severely: "Mamma ha ragione. Monte Ignoso anche da me lo sapevo già che è qui" ["Mama is right. I already knew Monte Ignoso was here with me"]. Barbara's participation in this female legacy is recognized and reasserted in the gaze. When a nun forces her to forfeit her own clothes for the standard uniform, Barbara falls into silent protest: "Non parlava più, la guardava. Certo nei suoi occhi doveva essere una preghiera

soprannaturale, mostruosa, perché l'altra la rialzò con uno strattone per romperne l'incanto" ["She fell silent, watching her. There must have been a supernatural, monstrous plea in her eyes because the sister picked her up with a jerk to break the spell"] (110). In this episode, Barbara's eyes, inherited from her mother, emanate the same bewitching authority. Visual exchange and empowerment among women is not limited to Emma and Barbara in Monte Ignoso; rather, Masino constructs a visual and textual genealogy between diverse female characters that penetrates the various interpretative strands of the novel while also extending beyond the boundaries of the text to recall more abstract literary sisterhoods.²⁷ Predominantly framing the narrative through Emma's eyes, Masino not only grants her protagonist exceptional authority, she also delineates an underlying connection between Emma and the implicit author (who makes her presence known at sporadic times throughout the text). This abstract affiliation between female character and author is animated in the relationships between the women in the text—not just between mother and daughter, but also in the primordial sisterhood of all women.

Masino's representation of female perspective in *Monte Ignoso* opposes a visual culture and tradition in which woman is often positioned as the object rather than the subject of the gaze.²⁸ Emma and Barbara's penetrating gaze, and their subsequent roles as observers and

²⁷ The varied episodes of the novel recall prominent literary women: Emma's affair with Marco calls to mind Lawrence's controversial 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; readers are reminded of Medea in Emma's desire to kill her own child; and the Biblical characters of the paintings elicit powerful images of women, each linked to female sexuality and motherhood.

²⁸ Using psychoanalysis as a foundation in deconstructing the filmic image, Laura Mulvey examines woman as image in her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (*Screen* 16.3 Autumn 1975) identifying the sexual imbalance in a visual order that prescribes woman as the object of the gaze and man as the bearer of the look. Mulvey's examination of scopophilia has proved multidimensional, influencing feminist readings of a range of interdisciplinary texts from literature and film to art history. See for example, Broude, Norma, and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: IconEditions, 1992), especially, "The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," by Patricia Simons, pp.

interpreters of the textual world, subverts this tradition and empowers a distinctly female subjectivity in the text as well as providing a modern characterization of the gaze as an aspect of social, historical, and psychological agency. Privileged female agency takes shape in Emma's ability to navigate the diverse comprehensive planes of the novel in an exchange between textual worlds, revealed in the dynamic with the paintings in the hallway. Emma's position as observer is complicated by the paintings ability to watch back, implicating a gaze that is dialogic in nature. The gaze in *Monte Igoso*, rooted in reciprocity and recognition, mobilizes the supernatural connection between women and illustrates a more expansive female genealogy that claims not only Emma and Barbara but also a collective female identity. This visual exchange creates a mechanism by which the characters of the diverse textual planes are able to connect and interact, participating in a legacy of reciprocity and recognition that pervades women's historical and symbolic realities.

The gaze is the initial factor in a subjective interchange between Emma and Judith, who seem to share a presupposed, mythical agency. Both characters share the violence and sexuality inherent to the unique vision of motherhood depicted in *Monte Igoso*. Judith's audacity and authority at once encourage and intimidate Emma. It is, in fact, Judith who suggests that Emma kill Barbara in order to protect her, inspiring in Emma the dormant violence associated with the curse of the women of the *casa rossa*. After Barbara's hallucination, Emma demands that the figures of the paintings do not interfere with her daughter's future, that she be allowed to exist outside of the fatalistic heritage of the *casa rossa*. Barbara, Emma claims, should not belong to that heritage because she is pure, "concepita semplicemente, secondo la natura, come certo Dio vuole che si faccia" ["conceived naturally and simply, as God intends"] (41). Unlike Emma,

39-58; also E.A. Kaplan, *Looking for the other: Feminism, film, and the imperial gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*.

conceived perversely in the hallway under the watchful gaze of the biblical characters that consecrated the act, Barbara is the product of a bourgeois marriage, conceived according the "natural" order of the heterosexual model. Judith, however, assures Emma that her attempts to preserve Barbara go overlooked, encouraging her to instead act of her own authority, to dominate with violence: "Dio si occupa di cose che non ci riguardano... Se vuoi difendere Barbara, uccidila. Nulla si salva se non si uccide" ["God is busy with things that do not concern us... If you want to defend Barbara, kill her. Nothing can be saved without killing"] (41). The collective Judith refers to ("ci"/ "us") identifies the association between her and Emma-a relationship amongst women. Implicitly, the statement suggests that the women in the novel belong to an isolated order, reiterating a primeval interpretation of maternity that either remains outside of God's celestial providence or is forgotten by it.

The connection between Emma and Judith is not limited to perceptual exchange but also manifests in an active interaction that informs Masino's characterization of Emma and, in turn, the momentum of the novel's plot. Just as she inspires in Emma an unprecedented, archaic maternal instinct, Judith also appears as the instigator of more direct forms of violence. Emma aspires to achieve the same level of courage, power, and agency exercised by Judith. After destroying the painting of the white-haired man following Barbara's hallucination, Emma measures her actions against those of her forebear:

Emma non ha ucciso che una sua fissazione, in'immagine. E ne ha bruciato i resti perché temeva di guardarli. Invece Giuditta tiene alta la testa stillante di Oloferne. Prova a bagnarci le tue dita, Emma, in questa fontanella di sangue. Emma ubbidì. Con l'indice scivolò lungo i due rigagnoli di vermiglione. Aveva qualche cosa di salato e ferruginoso in bocca. Con la lingua secca si umettava le

labbra. Posò in terra la candela e con la mano libera si squassava il corpo, per aprirlo, per farne uscire tutti quei tubi di vermiglione di cui Dio doveva averle riempito le vene. O lei era dipinta o Giuditta era viva e la testa recisa di Oloferne anche: in quel momento c'era una sola forma di vita, e tutte le cose ne partecipavano....

Emma did not kill but a figment of her imagination, a symbol. She burned the remains because she was afraid to look at them. Judith, on the other hand, holds high the disembodied head of Holofernes. Bathe your fingers in his blood, Emma. Emma obeyed. She slid her index finger along two red rivulets. Her mouth tasted of salt and rust. With a dry tongue, she wetted her lips. Emma placed the candle on the floor and with her free hand she beat against her body to open it up, to release those crimson strands with which God had filled her veins. Either she had been painted or Judith was alive, and Holofernes' lacerated head, too: in that moment, there was only one life and it encompassed everything. (40-41)

As Emma obeys the imperative phrase directing her to "bathe her fingers" in the blood of Holofernes, the boundary between the diegesis and the subtext of the painting is obscured and integrating Emma into the context of the painting and allowing the characters of the painting to infiltrate the textual 'reality.' This episode is similar to an unassigned imperative later in the text encouraging Emma to continue her trajectory: "Su, Emma, alzati e cammina ancora, va' a cercare Giovanni" ["Come on, Emma, get up. Keep walking. Go find Giovanni"] (*MI* 189). Masino makes the source of these imperatives ambiguous, allowing for diverse interpretations: it could be Judith that encourages Emma to "bagnare le dita" in the blood and to continue her search for Giovanni (to bring the narrative to a conclusion with her own death—a death that curiously

imitates the decapitation of Holofernes)-thus abstractly interjecting the 'reality' of the paintings into the novel's diegesis; or, it might also be the voice of the implicit author-Masino herself-who willingly acknowledges her own participation in the unfolding of narrative events. Either scenario delineates a horizontal female collective that interactively participates in the narrative events.

* * *

In order to facilitate the interchange between textual planes, enacted in the female gaze and exchanges between women, Masino situates her female characters on the threshold.²⁹ Emma is, in fact, introduced as occupying the threshold, literally between the kitchen of her own house and the world beyond.³⁰ Physically situating Emma in the doorway at the opening of the

²⁹ Both Flora Maria Ghezzi and Louise Rozier examine Emma residing on the threshold in their respective critical works on the novel, "Fiamme e follia, ovvero la morte della madre arcaica in Monte Ignoso di Paola Masino," and *Il mito e l'allegoria nella narrativa di Paola Masino* (see especially chapter 1). Ghezzi describes Emma in relation to the hallway (which she also identifies as the textual threshold of the competing themes of the novel). She states: "La valenza liminale del personaggio è iscritta nella prima sequenza del testo che la inquadra sulla soglia di una porta che si apre tra la casa e il giardino, preannunciandone, così, simbolicamente, la posizione nomadica ed erratica tra normalità e follia, visibile e invisibile (i cui labili confini la donna disinvoltamente attraversa) e tra vita e morte (frontiera che l'attende ben presto al suo varco)" ["(Emma's) liminal value is inscribed in the first lines of the text framing Emma on the threshold between the kitchen and the garden, and setting up symbolically her nomadic, erratic position between normality and insanity, the visible and the invisible (the feeble parameters of which the character casually crosses), and between life and death (a frontier that soon awaits her)"] (42-3). Rozier envisions Emma similarly, "sospeso fra sogno e veglia" ["suspended between dream and wakefulness"] as the mythic, atemporal witness to the surreal events that unfold in Monte Ignoso (44).

³⁰ At the beginning of the second chapter, we see Emma positioned theatrically in the doorway of the kitchen in an excerpt that resembles the stage directions of a Pirandellian play: "La signora Emma stava sulla porta che dalla cucina va in giardino e guardava sua figlia Barbara mangiare un uccellino arrostito. Erano le quattro del pomeriggio. La signora Emma, stando così sulla soglia, era tutta circondata di chiara luce. La luce scivolandole sui capelli rossi e sul vestito cupo s'intorbidava, ribolliva, diventava grumosa e piena di sangue" ["Emma stood in the doorway

novel, Masino anticipates the figurative implications of her orientation on the threshold that are explored later in the novel. The privilege of Emma's point-of-view in the text, her ability to bear witness to the diverse and contradictory worlds of the paintings, the house, and the reality outside, is made apparent in her ability to navigate the figurative spaces of the novel that are concealed from the other characters:

Passava da una stanza all'altra per dimostrarsi la propria libertà. Entrava e usciva. Ma ogni volta che varcava una soglia, un'impressione strana le pesava sul petto, di vincere un'ostacolo secolare, di muovere una pietra. Era come un morto che risuscita. Il suo primo gesto è quello di sollevare sul petto la lapide, e poi sempre camminerà contro la vita ritrovata con quel marmo sul cuore.

She walked from one room to another just to prove she was free. Going in and going out. Each time she crossed a threshold, a strange feeling would come over her, as if she had overcome an ancient obstacle or moved a mountain. She was like a corpse come back to life-her first gesture was to raise a tombstone to her chest, and then walk forever, against a life rediscovered, with that stone on her heart. (155-56)

Emma's spatial freedom (contrasting the confinement of Giovanni to a single room following Barbara's death) animates a freedom of perspective. Her hallucinations, rather than pertaining to

between the kitchen and the garden, watching her daughter eat a roasted bird. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Standing as she was in the doorway, Emma was surrounded in white light. The light, refracting off her red hair and somber dress, roiled and seethed becoming thick and full of blood"] (*MI* 13). The light illuminating her figure from behind the door grants Emma a celestial grace and authority that is developed later in the novel. Light and grace, however, are quickly confused by the grotesque description of the light refracting off her body and dress, "cupo" and "grumoso," concealing violence and unease. In short, prefiguring the representation of woman and mother to come while also drawing an allegorical parallel to volcanic lava and the fiery mountain at the doorstep.

irrationality and insanity, stand in contradiction to the madness and psychological impotence of Giovanni, seemingly representing larger truths that are only accessible through her eyes.

Emma's liberty of perspective, however, is also described as an inescapable burden—the manifestation of the indelible connection between Emma and the place of her birth. From the incipit, Emma appears as the victim of a pre-ordained trajectory inherited at the time of her conception. The privilege and liberty of her perspective comes at the price of her belonging to an archaic tradition that relegates her to the destiny of Monte Ignoso and the *casa rossa*: “Intorno ad ogni uomo che passi su questa terra è saldato un suo universo feroce che lo isola e difende [...]. Intorno a Emma era la *casa rossa* che la custodiva gelosamente, come un amante il proprio amore, fino alla follia, fino, come più tardi si vedrà, alla morte” [“There is a fierce universe that surrounds every man that passes on this earth, isolating and defending him [...]. The *casa rossa* surrounded Emma. It protected her jealously, like a lover safeguards his love, to the point of insanity-to death, as we shall soon see”] (*MI* 43-4). Emma, and subsequently Barbara, belong to an apparently genealogical lineage that extends from the volcano to the home and, finally, to the town.

Judith, like Emma, is depicted on the threshold:

Nella sala degli armadi Giuditta l'aspettava in piedi sulla cornice del proprio quadro come su una *soglia*. Emma parlava con lei e con tutta quell'umanità dipinta, come i ciechi vedono: scivolando leggermente con i polpastrelli sui volti e tra le pieghe delle vesti, soppesando l'aria intorno ai corpi. Giuditta, quella notte, le ammiccava maligna. Lei aveva ammazzato un uomo vero, che aveva giaciuto con lei.

In the hall of armoirs, Judith stood waiting for her in the frame of her painting, as if on a *threshold*. Emma spoke to her, and to all of that painted mankind, like the blind see: sliding her fingertips along their faces and in the folds of their clothes, weighing the air around their bodies. That night, Judith winked at her malignantly. She had killed a real man, a man that shared her bed. (*MI* 40) [my italics]

The frame of the painting highlights the physical and perceptual boundary between textual worlds while also illuminating the trespassing of the figures from one world to another. Ignoring the obvious border between the world of the paintings ("l'umanità dipinta") and her own reality, Emma interacts effortlessly with the figures. Judith's malevolent wink, again, reinforces the connection between women enacted in visual exchange. This small example implicates larger textual thresholds: the hallway of paintings, the *casa rossa*, and the town itself, all of which seem to belong to an atemporal, mystic tradition.

The volcano, for which the town of Monte Igno and the *casa rossa* are named, continuously informs the description of the novel's setting. The house, as an imaginary re-creation of Masino's own *casa materna*, seems to embody a maternal character, spawning and dominating the town that surrounds it: "...*casa rossa* sul monte: il monte era un antico vulcano. Un monte di fuoco, *Mons Igneus*, Monte Igno.³¹ La casa si chiamava così. E poiché era molto

³¹ In an undated letter to her mother, Paola Masino writes of her natal town: "Forse è questo il mistero del paese, il suo funebre inesorabile incanto, struggente nostalgia pur quando si dimora in essa. Il contatto con l'alba marina, primigenio, a ridosso di quel fuoco interno del vulcano che dette nome al paese *Mons Igneus: Montignoso*" ["Perhaps this is the town's mystery: its inexorable, lugubrious enchantment; a nostalgia that consumes, even when you take refuge in it. Touching the seaside dawn, sheltered from the volcano's internal fire that gave the town its name, *Mons Igneus: Montignoso*." Masino's personal letter, and her representation of the real town of Montignoso, are infused with the same poetic attitudes and motifs that drive her novel. Her native land, characterized by fire and the volcano, elicits a sort of maternal longing. In the

antica e intorno le era nato un villaggio anche il villaggio aveva quel nome: Monte Ignoso" ["...red house on the mountain: the mountain was an ancient volcano. A mountain of fire, *Mons Igneus*, Monte Ignoso. The house shared its name. Even the village, born in the area surrounding the ancient volcano, took that name: Monte Ignoso"] (34). Masino draws upon the traditional feminine symbolic of 'mother earth' while simultaneously subverting the allegorical associations between earth, the feminine, and fertility with the volcano's potential for destruction. Invoking the prehistoric and mythical power of the volcano and including a destructive element in her interpretation of motherhood, Masino portrays maternity as something ancient and pagan- a divine rite of woman that predates metaphoric constructions and social practices predicated on gender categorizations.

* * *

Rising above the house, the ancient volcano casts a reddish glow over it, inspiring the epithet "la casa rossa" or "the red house." The semantic and phonetic implications of the phrase, playing on the sounds of the 's' to evoke alternate interpretations, such as "la casa rosa" ("the pink house") or "la cassa rossa" ("the red casket"), introduce a complex motif of femininity and destruction that is explored throughout the novel while also eliciting the larger symbolism of the

first lines of the letter, Masino writes that she is in her mother's house, the house where she was born, and sitting there, looking out onto the panorama that her mother looked upon so often, makes her feel connected. The connection Masino describes is one of physical and ontological significance, creating an atmosphere of protection and nurture that allows her a certain degree of creative freedom. Masino continues: "Parlo e sono tra le tue braccia, mamma, mi sento protetta, dico pensieri non responsabili perché tu mi proteggi e mi culli" ["I speak and I am in your arms, mama; I feel protected; I say irresponsible things because you protect me and cradle me"]. The relationship between mother and daughter, animated in the letter as protective and nurturing, seems to inspire the author's literary voice. Masino is able to verbalize "irresponsible" ideas in an unedited dialogue with her mother that is distinctly associated with the conceptualization of a "casa materna" in *Montignoso*.

volcano itself. At once fertile earth and device for devastation, the volcano, like the house, represents a paradox-on the one hand, earth or land is typically associated with fertility and abundance, responsible for nourishing and nurturing its inhabitants; on the other, the destructive power of the volcano is insurmountable, at once fearsome and mystifying. The house itself, seemingly possessed by the ancient mountain that overshadows it, fosters alternating attributes of nurture and destruction. Unlike the nurturing hearth of the traditional Italian literary imagination, Masino's *casa rossa* adopts the metaphorical violence of the volcano disrupting the typical representation of the home as warm, inviting, and restorative. Rather, the *casa rossa* is described as cold and barren, consistently equated to a tomb or place of death.

The author amplifies these alternative renditions of the 'hearth' at the time of Barbara's departure for school. As the child says her final goodbye to the garden and the house, from a distance, she composes a short poem characterizing the place of her infancy with vibrant descriptors. Looking at the house, she describes it in the poem as "Fuoco: Vuoto dentro. Ossa nere" ["Fire: Empty inside. Black bones"] (95). Her portrayal perplexes Giovanni, to whom she dictates her words so that he may write them for her, and he asks what she means. Barbara responds simply, "Guarda la casa. Lo capisci" ["Look at the house. You will understand"] (95). The episode is illuminating on multiple levels-Barbara's privileged poetic vision, depicting the house as "fire" and "emptiness," contradicts orthodox imagery of home and hearth while also affirming the allegorical association between the house and the volcano. After she returns from leaving Barbara at school, Emma describes the house invoking a similarly catastrophic metaphor: "Quando aprì la porta della casa, le parve scoperchiare una tomba. Chiuse la bocca per conservare più a lungo l'aria libera che aveva bevuta nella notte e avanzò piano senza sfiorare i muri, come in mezzo a due file di bare" ["When she opened the front door, it seemed as if she

was lifting the lid off a tomb. She closed her mouth to conserve as long as possible the free air, drunk in during the night, and moved forward slowly, so as not to disturb the walls-moving as if she were caught between two rows of coffins"] (102). Emma's portrait of Monte Ignoso, equating the house to a tomb, is extremely disquieting. What was a poetic allusion in Barbara's view becomes a direct parallel between the home and that which it should protect from- death.

In her analysis of *Monte Ignoso*, Ghezzo contemplates the dual characterization of the "casa rossa" as both hearth and tomb, citing the opposition between nurture and violence as a paradigmatic illustration of Freudian *Unheimliche*:

Lungi dall'essere luogo di intimità familiare, la dimora antica, nel suo configurarsi come regno della domesticità in cui erompe improvvisa la violenza e la follia, pare visualizzare, in modo paradigmatico, l'ambiguità semantica cristallizzata nella definizione stessa del freudiano Unheimliche: enantiosema, come è noto, che simultaneamente rimanda a due ambiti semantici opposti, quello di una confortevole familiarità e quello di una perturbante estraneità

Far from being a place of familiar intimacy, the ancient dwelling- as a configuration of the realm of domesticity in which violence and madness erupt at random-seems to display paradigmatically the semantic ambiguity crystallized in the conception of the Freudian Unheimliche: a well-noted enantiosis that is simultaneously reminiscent of two opposing semantic poles, one conveying comfortable familiarity, and the other relating a disquieting strangeness.

("Fiamme e follia" 42-3)

As Ghezzo observes, Masino's subversion of traditional socio-spatial dynamics produces an uncanny effect, eliciting oppositional, yet complicit images of familiar comforts and disquieting

peculiarity. Masino's use of the Freudian uncanny departs at a literal level: the term *Unheimliche* implicates that which stands in direct opposition to the familiar, tame, intimate, and friendly.³² Yet Masino's interpretation of the *Unheimliche*, like the Freudian concept, is a much more complex investigation of the interaction between binaries. The intimation of the strange, prompted by the descriptions of the house, unhinges the ordinary through intimate familiarity: "[The] uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through a process of repression" (Freud 241). In both Freud's analysis and Masino's animation of *Unheimliche*, competing conceptualizations of what is familiar and what is strange are dramatically intertwined.

The dualisms inherent to an understanding of the uncanny are illuminated in the text beginning with the spaces that frame the narrative. Masino plays upon these dualities creating a parallel between the articulation of space in *Monte Ignoto* and the thematic, structural, and stylistic elements of the text. Making the home disquieting and uncanny, Masino also links these characteristics to Emma and maternity. Domestic space, equated to the maternal womb by Freud—original and quintessential 'home'³³—is traditionally characterized as a feminine realm. Competing themes of violence and nurture are amplified in the 'feminine' spaces of the home. The kitchen, for example, is described as follows:

La cucina è alta e profonda e silenziosa come un tempio. Gli altri giorni, giorni di lavoro, è piena di contadini, nell'atmosfera fumigante le fiamme del camino diventano un incendio, i carboni dei fornelli pianeti caduti dal cielo con il loro

³² See Freud, *Das Unheimliche*. See also, *La perturbante: Das Unheimliche nella scrittura delle donne*.

³³ See Luce Irigaray's "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother."

pezzo di notte; le caldaie appese a catene di ferro intorno al focolare, prigionieri antichi. Nel mezzo è il tavolo di marmo bianco, vastissimo: su vi fioriscono boschi di alloro, s'innalzano monti di spezie, cresce una fauna preistorica dagli occhi più grandi dei boschi e dei monti. Maiali montoni cinghiali pesci uccelli, che dal ventre squarciato credono di partorire gli uomini e le cose e tutto guardano con amore materno. I cuochi nascosti nel fondo delle marmitte, traversano mari d'olio: le sguattere si tuffano nell'aceto e si lardellano di salvia: i fanciulli innalzano e sorreggono il fuoco con il loro soffio di giovani eroi.

The kitchen was long with high ceilings, like a temple. Other days it was full of servants, and, in the smoky atmosphere of the working day, the flames of the hearth were like a wildfire: the coals in the stove like planets that had fallen from the sky, bringing with them a piece of the night; the pots hanging on chains around the fireplace were ancient prisoners. In the middle of the room, there was an extensive marble table. On top of it, laurel plants were flowering, mountains of spices rose into the air, a prehistoric fauna grew, with eyes bigger than forests and mountains. Pigs, sheep, boars, fish, birds believed to birth men from their lacerated bellies and looked upon everything with maternal love. Chefs, hidden at the bottom of large canisters, span seas of oil; porters dive into the vinegar and anoint themselves with sage; the children raise and sustain the fire's flames with the breath of young heroes. (13-14)

In addition to infiltrating the realm of the domestic with literary fantasy, Masino links the kitchen directly to a maternal symbolic that purports care and cultivation while also revealing motherhood and birth as grotesque and violent. Animals, "maiali montoni cinghiali pesci

uccelli," are suspended in loving self-sacrifice, forfeiting life and flesh for the nourishment of men, implicating the violence, sacrifice, and death necessary in caring for others. This particular form of violence and self-sacrifice is explicitly linked to maternity: the animals believe to birth men from torn wombs ("ventre squarciato"), gazing upon them affectionately with maternal love. The kitchen resembles a temple with a large marble table at its center, an allegorical altar appropriate for the violent sacrifice of the animals, performed willingly and affectionately. In the spaces of the home and, in particular, the kitchen, maternity is represented as a willing, violent, and sacred act of sacrifice. Masino reshapes motherhood as an act of violence that—in tearing apart a womb to birth a child and killing animals to nourish that child—requires both life and death, generation and devastation.

In Monte Ignoso and in the *casa rossa*, the world illuminated by day seems to be a fiction masking a broader mystic reality that envelops the town and the house by night:

Come un incantamento la notte avvolge Monte Ignoso.

La terra gli uomini le cose abbandonano la forma quotidiana per ricrearsi in elementi solitari aspri ostinati, rocce.

Tutto cozza, come pianeti in fuga pazza per gli universi, si moltiplica o si annienta ma non unisce e amalgama a creare un ordine o un'armonia.

Nelle tenebre gli alberi sono falli ottusi, vulve gli abissi. La terra è questo sesso ibrido che in una sacra idiozia attende un segno divino che lo faccia vivere. L'aspettazione densa, tragica, come una colonna di fumo s'innalza dal mondo verso il cielo. Ma non c'è più il cielo. Non c'è ancora il nulla.

Like an enchantment, the night enveloped Monte Ignoso.

Land men things abandon their quotidian forms to be reborn as isolated elements rugged obstinate, rocks.

Everything clashes, like planets in erratic flight between universes, it all multiplies or annihilates, but it does not come together, unite, to create an order or harmony.

In the dark, the trees are obtuse phalli, vulva the abyss. The earth is a hybrid sex that, in sacred foolishness, awaits a divine signal to give it life. Dense, tragic expectation, it rises from the earth into the sky like a column of smoke. But, there is no more sky. Still, nothing. (*MI* 43)

This passage, reinforcing the state of chaos and disorder experienced by both the characters and the reader, situates the surreal, alternate realities of the town and the house in the feminine providence of night and darkness.³⁴ Subverting light and darkness, order and disorder, Masino complicates the 'reality' of the narrative, appealing to the ancient matriarchal tradition explored by Cavarero in which passive femininities are substituted by female agency represented in simultaneous acts of procreation and destruction. The description of the night in Monte Ignoso also appeals to the discourse of sexuality and violence examined throughout the novel. Trees become "obtuse phalluses," abysses are transformed in to "vulva," both of which come together in a depiction of nature as a sexual hybrid. On the one hand, Masino's rearticulation of Nature

³⁴ The lunar is generally characterized as the feminine. Etymologically, the term has its origins in the mythical goddess, Luna, however the darkness of night is also aligned metaphorically with the darkness of the womb. The primacy of night over day alludes to an ancient matriarchal system of origins: "Another no less significant manifestation of [...] basic law is the primacy of the night over the day which issued from [the] womb. The opposite relation would be in direct contradiction to matriarchal ideas. Already the ancients identified the primacy of the night with [...] the primacy of the mother. And here, too, age-old customs, the reckoning of time according to nights, the choice of the night as a time for battle, for taking counsel, for meting out justice, and for practicing the cult rites, show that we are not dealing with abstract philosophical ideas of later origin, but with the reality of an original mode of life" (*Mother Right* 77).

(generally associated with regeneration and the maternal as "Mother Nature") alternately characterizes images of nature with both the masculine and the feminine: the coming together of male and female. On the other, the author inserts masculine prerogative into the experience of the maternal.

In either scenario, Masino's imagining of Nature, and its implicit connection to the maternal, is one of conflict, confusion, and disorder; and the narrative, situated within the province of the maternal, exudes a similar tone and sentiment. Positioning the narrative within a primordial, matriarchal dialectic and subverting the metaphorical rationality of day with the surreality of night, Masino is able to create a mythopoetic subtext in the novel that associates representations of femininity and the maternal with disquieting images of chaos and disorder, all of which combine to create in the novel a persisting attitude of fantasy and the uncanny. The passage itself departs from the generic principles of prose and borders on poetry, as night's "enchantment" seems to capture narrative form as well. Paragraphs composed of fragmented and isolated sentences and syntax evolve into poetic forms. The abandonment of "quotidian forms" is reiterated in Masino's neglect of syntactical order: she forfeits commas, leaving the earth, men, and things to be amalgamated and "recreated" into abstract and disorderly images (simultaneously "solitari aspri ostinati, rocce").

Masino articulates female genealogies as a form of reciprocal engagement and perspective that is evident in the intratextual communication between Judith and Emma, and between Emma and Barbara. In *Monte Ignoso*, the surreal seems to belong to the same female tradition that designates women as mothers, situating Masino's female characters in a position of authority that results from a primordial, mythical genealogy. This fantastic and powerful order appears to extend from land to house to woman, enacted in the connection between Emma and

the paintings and Emma and Barbara, and solidified in the potency of the female gaze. Masino manifests the reciprocal visibility between mother and daughter described by Cavarero in *Monte Ignoso* creating a textual female genealogy rooted in the originary female matrix that not only highlights sexual difference but also births under recognized forms of female creative potential. Masino creates direct parallels between an exclusively female genealogical belonging, maternity, and perspective in the text. At one point, Emma draws a connection between her ability to 'birth' children and ideas through her unique vision of the world: "[Barbara] le era nata su dal ventre, come nasce dagli occhi lo sguardo" ["(Barbara) was born of her womb, like the gaze is born of the eyes"] (*MI* 136). Barbara's participation in this heritage is, perhaps, one explanation for her maturity, perception, and authority in the text. While Emma's visions are colored in obsession, Barbara's hallucinations and poetic capabilities are described through the lens of youthful imagination. Emma and Giovanni's reaction to her original hallucination of the white-haired man are juxtaposed with Barbara's childish ease-as her parents fret, Barbara playfully recounts a story to the empty plate in front of her (17-18). Alternating between hallucinatory tendencies and childish make-believe makes the implications of Barbara's vision ambiguous, on the one hand; and on the other, presents an unorthodox representation of the hallucinations as more mysterious aspects of a natural order. Situating intense perceptions in the mind of a child, Masino creates an atmosphere of uncanniness; yet Barbara, even though a child, is able to accept mysterious phenomena with ease, unencumbered by the weight of historical and cultural signification.

In Barbara's view, God, Death, and Love are yet another aspect of the world around her: "Barbara amava le cose grandi e misteriose, Dio, la Morte, l'Amore. Ne parlava come di persone reali e cercava di rappresentarle" ["Barbara loved great and mysterious things: God, Death, Love. She spoke of them as if they were real people, trying to represent them"] (19). In Barbara, both

child and woman, Masino is able to conflate diegetic reality and fantasy in a unilateral and poetic vision. Barbara's exceptional perspective, inherited from her mother and unleashed in a child's imagination, inspires her unique representation of the world. As the child prepares to leave Monte Ignoso, she dictates a memoir of the house in verse to her father, who diligently records it:

Scrivi in [questo] modo. In mezzo, in grande: Monte Ignoso. È il titolo. Sotto:

C'è un ramo rosso nel cielo grigio

e tre aranci e una lucertola secchi sul ramo ma non c'è più terra.

C'è un fuoco tutto vuoto dentro, pieno di ossa nere.

Intorno quattro cavalli con le criniere

e le pance gonfie

Sopra la testa gli pende uno, impiccato a una violacciocca d'oro.

Ecco fatto. Questa è una poesia.

Write it (this) way: in the middle, in big letters, Monte Ignoso. That is the title.

Underneath:

There is a streak of red in the gray sky

and three oranges and a lizard, dessicated on the streak but the earth is no more

There is a fire completely empty inside, full of black bones.

Surrounding four horses with manes

and swollen bellies.

Overhead, someone is hanging, strung up on a golden wallflower.

Done. This is a poem. (96)³⁵

Barbara's poem is almost a visual text. The house, as witnessed through the eyes of Barbara, takes on even more ghastly characteristics. Barbara radically subverts traditional metaphors of home and hearth, depicting what should be welcoming and nurturing as burning and death. The poem, implicitly evoking gendered qualifications of home and hearth, also explicitly reiterates visions of the pregnant belly (referred to as the horses' "swollen bellies") as grotesque. Syntactically setting the line a part from the body of the poem, Barbara's free-flowing poetic composition emphasizes the profound maternal motif that thematically links diverse passages and structures in the text.

* * *

Giovanni kills Emma by simultaneously strangling her (as a husband punishing an adulterous wife) and forcing her head into a puddle at his feet. The act recalls and reverses the image of Judith and Holofernes: Giovanni eliminates Emma's authority and the power of her gaze in a single, symbolic act of castration. The end of Emma, firmly situated in a position of authority in the text because it was her gaze that guided the reader through polyvalent interpretative planes, can only result in the final demise of the fantastic world of *Monte Ignoso*. The apparent return to order dismantles a textual atmosphere filled with tension and chaos. Emma's death, at the hands of her husband, seems to mark a return to the normative patriarchal order that is the foundation of fascist constructions of gender—reassigning power to the

³⁵ In the original Italian, "ramo" can be understood as a streak or ray of light as well as the branch or limb of a tree. I believe the diverse interpretations of the word are intentionally at play in Barbara's poem, however, I opted to translate it as corresponding to the first line of the poem (rather than as a 'lizard on a branch') to make evident the association between the gray sky ('cielo grigio') and the disappearance of the earth ('terra').

patriarch— as well as demarcate allegorically the final erasure of an exclusive female authority. The power of the Great Mother, cultivated in the text through alternate conceptualizations of motherhood and childbirth, is eclipsed, at least temporarily, by the arrival of Spring, which brings with it more traditional notions of re-birth, fertility, and nurture.

CHAPTER TWO

“Queste donne (buone)”: Femininity and Rurality in Paola Drigo’s *Maria Zef*

In this chapter I will examine the double marginalization of women in politico-cultural representations of the rural, specifically taking into consideration the relationship between fascism and the *strapaese* movement. In particular, my analysis of *Maria Zef* and the texts of *strapaese* investigate the conflation of aesthetics and politics in formulating discourses of power and authority, and in turn, how the narrative strategies employed by Paola Drigo and, predominantly, Mino Maccari of the *strapaese* movement relate to the contemporary socio-political climate of fascist Italy. In its idealization of rural figures and evocation of pastoral idylls, *strapaese* revives the socio-cultural ideologies that, at the time of Verga and Italian verists, were employed to create a dual vision of the ‘picturesque’: while the picturesque (like the portrayals of the peasantry in *strapaese*) elicits pleasurable images it also implies a certain sociological backwardness that surfaced during the Risorgimento to qualify Italy’s southern regions and islands. Employed during the 18th and mid-19th centuries as an ideological stance to placate the racist perspectives of Northern Italy onto the South and naturalize certain socio-political attitudes, the picturesque is redeployed by the intellectuals of *strapaese* to streamline certain oppressive and divisive politics instigated by the fascist regime. Infusing rural images with beauty and an appreciation for ‘simpler’ things, *strapaese* used aesthetic categories of the picturesque to integrate fascist social policies at the level of culture. *Strapaese*’s veneration of rural populations also had the function of imbuing in those masses a distinctive nationalistic and patriotic character—as representatives of Italian tradition—that created in them an idealized

model for Italians but also symbolically tied the poorer classes to the socio-political ideologies and agendas of the regime, garnering popular support.

The opposition between the picturesque and the grotesque (and inherently the North and South) during the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries in Italy is reinterpreted during fascism and within the *strapaese* movement to create patriotic, aesthetic models while also engendering hierarchies of power. Nelson Moe examines an ideology of the picturesque during the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth as an early form of aestheticized politics. Moe looks critically at the way Northern Italy engaged with its Southern Other through a dialectic of simultaneous repulsion and attraction: an insistence upon, or veritable obsession with, the negative qualities of the South and its tendency to repulse that incited fascination, longing, and desire.¹ *Strapaese* aestheticized the Italian peasantry in a similar way, plucking allegorical images of rural living to create a metonymic, idealized vision of country living that, in addition to ignoring the more problematic conditions and hardships that were a part of rural life, reinforced the traditional gender constructions and patriarchal hierarchies that were the core of fascist ideologies and politics. In embracing, at least partially, a picturesque way of looking that captured a simultaneous attraction and repulsion to an Other, *strapaese* identified and reasserted other dualisms: in particular, Culture vs. Nature, leader vs. the masses, and, implicit in each category, masculine vs. feminine. These oppositional categories were subsequently organized in the politico-cultural imagination of fascist Italy to invigorate patriarchal hierarchies and systems of power that, situated and preserved in the heritage of the land and the traditions of a purportedly untouched people, adopted the properties of a ‘natural’ order. In simplifying aesthetics to mere ‘observation’ (in

¹ See Moe, *The View From Vesuvius*. pp. 169-170.

strapaese) and in a return to the countryside (through fascist policy), these male-dominated institutions were able to double their authority.

Through a close reading of *Maria Zef* between Italian *Verismo* and Neorealism, and also taking into consideration some of Drigo's other prose and personal writing, I will examine the ways in which Drigo responds to fascist and *strapaesano* representations of Italian ruralism. Investigating the themes, styles, and structures that appear in her writing, I will attempt to illuminate Drigo's animation of the political and cultural ideologies that intersect in portrayals of the peasantry. Despite the author's explicit repudiation of political, theoretical, or philosophical engagement in writing (preferring instead to leave art pure, void of social influence and predetermined theses), I will suggest that the pronounced absence of politics in *Maria Zef* is in itself a powerful form of political engagement. *Maria Zef* reveals a population that is not only geographically isolated, but also marginalized in terms of cultural and political representation. While I shed light on the marginalization of Italy's peasant sub-populations in Drigo's novel, I will focus specifically on the double erasure of women, for whom social and economic suffering is compounded by the limitations of fascist gender constructions and rigid patriarchal hierarchies. In her personal writing, Drigo negates her participation in feminist political practices, claiming instead to represent the conditions of an entire population; yet the themes and characters that surface in her writing anticipate similar tropes and techniques later identified by feminist literary critics as figures of resistance. Additionally, by engaging with the ideological precepts implicit to contemporary representations of rural culture, the author undermines fascist, male-dominated narratives of power.

* * *

Paola Drigo, born Paola Bianchetti, to well-standing family in 1876, did not truly begin her literary career until well after her marriage to Giulio Drigo (nineteen years her senior) in 1898 and the birth of her son in 1899. Drigo's literary career began in 1911 with the publication of the short story "Ritorno" in *La lettura*, a literary journal hosted by *Corriere della Sera*. "Ritorno" would soon be followed by numerous other short stories published in various literary magazines as well as several collections: *La fortuna* (1913), *Codino* (1918), and *La signorina Anna* (1932). Drigo's wifely and motherly duties often interrupted her writing, resulting in a disjointed literary production in which her collections of short stories, as well as her subsequent novels, are separated by years of silence. The years isolating *Codino* and *La signorina Anna* are illustrative of one such period in which Drigo was required to assume the professional and financial responsibilities of her husband, a prominent landowner and agribusiness executive, following his death in 1922. During this period, Drigo encountered a series of economic issues and gave up her life in the city to see to the family's affairs at their villa in the country—an experience she recorded and later published in the autobiographical novel *Fine d'anno*. Following her hiatus in the country, Drigo published her only two novels, *Maria Zef* and *Fine d'anno*. Though relatively brief, the author's time in the country influenced the style and content of a number of the short stories in *La signorina Anna*, as well as her novels. *Fine d'anno* takes a more direct approach narrating in the first person the hardships of a woman forced into the countryside after the death of her husband. The novel focuses on the internal struggles of the protagonist as she attempts, on the one hand, to assume the role of proprietor while also resolving a number of financial problems, and on the other, to understand the complexities of her relationship with her only son.

While Drigo's 1936 novels are distinct in their tone, both novels adopt a complex and powerful female protagonist. Unlike the mature and sophisticated protagonist transplanted from the city to the countryside in *Fine d'anno*, however, Mariutine (Maria), the protagonist in *Maria Zef* is introduced as young, innocent and naïve. The subsequent narrative episodes— beginning with the death of her mother and ending as she kills her uncle in order to protect her younger sister— come together in a sort of distorted *bildungsroman* in which Mariutine is forced to abandon the exuberance of her youth in order to survive (and, in some ways, overcome) the perils of womanhood in rural Italy. The novel maps the experiences of Mariutine who, after the death of her mother, assumes a maternal responsibility for her younger sister, Rosute. The two orphans fall into the care of a paternal uncle, Barbe Zef, with whom they return to the family's austere and impoverished cabin (*baita*) located in the mountains of the Friuli-Veneto. In the weeks after their mother's death, the younger daughter, Rosute, is forced to stay in a hospital in an adjacent town because of an infection in her leg while Mariutine remains with her uncle. During this time Mariutine undergoes a number of physical and psychological transformations after suffering the abuse of her uncle. Her experience sheds light retrospectively on the character of her late mother who, like Mariutine, was repeatedly violated and abused by Barbe Zef, forced to terminate various pregnancies and eventually contracting syphilis which contributed to her premature aging and, ultimately, her death. The youthful energy and naïvete that set Mariutine apart at the beginning of the novel are systematically dismantled in the events that follow and, in order to protect Rosute from similar circumstances, Mariutine kills her uncle on the eve of her sister's return.

Maria Zef opens with a verbal portrait of a distant scene: “Erano due donne un carretto ed un cane... Andavano lungo l'argine del fiume, dopo il tramonto, verso una grossa borgata di cui

si vedeva appena brillar qualche lume sull'altra sponda" ["There were two women, a cart, and a dog... They walked along the bank of a river after sunset toward a large group of houses. On the opposite bank, small lights were barely beginning to flicker"] (*Maria Zef* 49). This highly visual initial portrait of the two women, later revealed as the protagonist and her mother, is extremely picturesque: not only do the vision of the river directly after sunset and the sparse lights on the opposite bank evoke painterly images of familiar scenes, but the subjects of the scene – the two women and their dog—adopt the quaint character of the landscape surrounding them. In her interpretation of the picturesque, presented in this first snapshot of the peasant culture that permeates the rest of the novel, Drigo reveals implicit facets of its characterization—first, that the distance between reader/viewer informs an analysis of picturesque (and often folkloric) images; and second, that the landscape becomes a protagonist in its own right, influencing the way we read the characters embedded in it. Drigo goes on to contemplate each of these issues in *Maria Zef*, collapsing the distance between the reader/viewer and the characters and landscapes presented in the novel, as well as providing insight into the complex relationship between art, culture, and politics inherent to literary representations of the rural.

Drigo's use of the picturesque, as well as her internal critique of it, recall a literary penchant that predates *Maria Zef* by nearly fifty years found most predominantly in Italian *Verismo* and the literature of the 19th century. Described by some critics as an almost verist novel,² the narrative styles and structures employed in *Maria Zef* resemble those of Italian verists. As the novel continues, in fact, it describes a gathering almost identical to the one introducing one of Verga's most acclaimed short stories, "Nedda," with which the author is credited for laying down the principles that would go on to define the literary mode. In his

² See Azzolini, who describes *MZ* as "un romanzo quasi verista" (12).

reading of Verga, as well as in other pre- and post-Risorgimento literature, Nelson Moe examines the geopolitical climate in Europe during the mid- eighteenth to late nineteenth century and the visual and textual representations of Italy and the South through the lens of the ‘picturesque.’ Moe’s analysis integrates theories of climate and dominant socio-political positions with close readings of Italian literature and literary criticism to delineate a popular geographical poetics that, on the one hand, examines the role geography plays in the production of cultural representations; and, on the other, describes the relationship between perspective and the picturesque. In the traditional sense, the picturesque represents a “landscape that has been ‘pictured,’ whether in visual or textual form, so as to evoke a strong appreciative response in the observer or reader” (Moe 255); but it also implies imaginings of remote, backwards places and people. Moe concentrates specifically on the folklorization of Italy’s southern regions and islands in the literary production surrounding the Risorgimento. He focuses on the “dual vision of an alternately picturesque and backward south” that infiltrated the “consciousness of Italy’s middle and upper classes” (4).

The opening scene in *Maria Zef* is almost identical to that of Verga’s *Nedda* and contains elements of the picturesque as defined by Moe:

Quando il cielo cominciava ad impallidire, rapide e scarmigliate rientravano le vendemmiatrici cogli ultimi cesti d’uva; come grandi diavoli balzavan fuori dai tini i pigiatori correndo alla Fontana a lavarsi le gambe pelose e rosse di mosto; la massaia scodellava con aria d’importanza la zuppa nelle ciotole. Allora il gatto sbucava guardingo di sotto all’aratro; il cane si accovacciava scodinzolando accanto al posto del padrone di casa. Dopo un attimo di tramestio, di urti, di

risate, si faceva all'improvviso un gran silenzio: tutti mangiavano avidi, curvi sul piatto, con occhi sfuggenti. Ma dopo mangiato, qualcuno diceva:

- Cantaci dunque qualche cosa, Mariutine!

As the light in the sky began to fade, the disheveled women started to file in with the last baskets of grapes. Like little fiends, the grape-crushers popped out from the vats, running to the fountain to wash their furry legs, red with must. The mistress was serving up soup into little stone cups with an authoritative air. The cat slipped prudently under the plough; the dog crouched close to its master wagging its tail. After a moment, the bustling, clatter and laughter a great silence enveloped the room as everyone ate eagerly, bent over their plates with shifty eyes. But after everyone had eaten, someone called out:

- Well, sing us something, Mariutine! (MZ 52)

It is therefore useful to read *Maria Zef* side by side with *Nedda*. From this perspective, reading *Nedda* as an interpretative key for what is to come, we may consider Mariutine a tragic figure, despite the difference in the respective descriptions of the two female protagonists. While Nedda is revealed as a clear victim of poverty and suffering from the outset (“Forse sarebbe stata bella, se gli stenti e le fatiche non ne avessero alterato profondamente non solo le sembianze gentili della donna, ma direi anche la forma umana”) [“She might have been beautiful if hard labor and struggle had not dramatically altered her; not just her soft, feminine features, but—I would say—even her human form”] Mariutine maintains the vigor of youth: “era ella piuttosto una bambina che una donna, di tredici o quattordici anni appena, con un visotto tondo ed ingenuo, e due begli occhi azzurri dall’espressione infantile” [“she was more child than woman, barely thirteen or fourteen, with a round, naïve face and two beautiful blue eyes with an expression of

youthfulness”] (*MZ* 49). It is Cantine, Mariutine’s mother, who shows the signs of destitution, aged beyond her years by dire conditions: “Vecchia forse non era, ma così logora e malandata da sembrare decrepita. Tossiva continuamente, e camminava trascinando i piedi, ma pareva facesse fatica anche a rispondere a chi la salutava [...] la voce le tremava, e le tremava la bocca sulle gengive sdentate” [“She was not that old, but so worn out and and in such bad condition that she seemed almost decrepit. She coughed continuously and dragged one of her feet when she walked. Even her response’s to the people’s greetings seemed labored ... her voice trembled, and so did her toothless mouth over her gums”] (50-1).³ Perhaps more revealing than the possible associations between Verga’s Nedda and Drigo’s Mariutine is the implicit allusion to female genealogies and the role they play in the tragic unfolding of both narratives. At the center of each story is a mother-daughter relationship. In “Nedda,” the tragic life of the protagonist culminates as Nedda is unable to properly nourish her child because of her own desperation and the child dies. In *Maria Zef*, Mariutine loses her mother, Catine, early in the novel; yet the relationship between mother and daughter goes on to vivify the text not only in the maternal dynamic between Mariutine and her younger sister, Rosute, but also as a broader, structural theme.⁴ Catine’s disposition imbues the landscape with sisterly qualities, animating the “Bosco Tagliato” – a natural landmark that designates the passage home for Mariutine throughout the

³ In her essay, “La genealogia del personaggio e ‘le figure in penombra’ di Paola Drigo,” Lori Ultsch examines the influence of Verist literature on Drigo’s literary production, referencing “Nedda” in particular: “La descrizione di Nedda riecheggerà in alcune descrizioni fatte da Drigo delle sue protagoniste similmente abbattute dalla miseria e privazione, rassegnate al loro destino commune di sofferenza” (32). Ultsch identifies the recurrence of similar, tragic female protagonists in a genealogy of female characters that progressively inform one another to expose the social subordination of peasants, and in particular, women in Drigo’s novels and short stories.

⁴ See Ultsch’s analysis of the relationship between Mariute and Rosute as a maternal one in “La genealogia del personaggio.”

novel— with a similar silence and austerity. Her history, unveiled systematically in retrospect as Mariutine faces the same injustices and brutality, sheds light on a collective and fatalistic destiny that awaits, in particular, the women of the Italian peasantry.

The style and language of Drigo's novels, as well as her short stories, are consistent throughout her work and exhibit a clear connection to the canonical tenets of *Verismo*. In "Nedda" Verga employs the figure of the "focolare" ["hearth"] as a mechanism to at once distance and connect the narrator to his story. His memory (and imagination) "sparks" much like the kindle before him, implying that the narrative to come is a truthful re-presentation of lived experiences and observations. The figure of the hearth also contributes to the nostalgia and the picturesque images that shape his narratives. In Verga's famous "Letter to Farina," which prefaces "L'amante di Gramigna," the narrator explicates a verist approach to representation, claiming to merely repeat stories gathered through experience and observation: "[...] te lo ripeterò così come l'ho raccolto pei viottoli dei campi, press'a poco colle medesime parole semplici e pittoresche della narrazione popolare, e tu veramente preferirai di trovarti faccia a faccia col fatto nudo e schietto, senza stare a cercarlo fra le linee del libro, attraverso la lente dello scrittore" [...I will repeat it to you just as I heard along those country lanes, with nearly the same simple, picturesque words used in popular folktales; and you will prefer to find yourself face to face with plain, simple facts without trying to search for them between the lines of a book or through the lens of the author"].⁵ Verga's narrative strategy reaffirms the implicit narrator's position as observer, contributing to a realistic diegesis while also establishing the authority of the narrator and, implicitly, of the author. While Verga alleges to simply recount the "fatto nudo

⁵ Verga, *Tutte le novelle* (LiberLiber 2002). English translations of Verga's stories are available under the titles, *The She-Wolf and Other Stories*, Giovanni Cecchetti, trans.; and *Sicilian Stories*, Stanley Applebaum, trans.

e schietto,” he also maintains his position as an outside observer, implying distance between the narrator and the text. In “Gramigna” it is the letter that isolates the narrator and the narrated, while in “Nedda” imaginative “peregrinations” in front of the fireplace transport the narrator across temporal and geographical distances to “recollect” the story of the *varannisa*. The narrator creates an immutable distance between observer and object and appropriates that distance to compound the authority of his gaze.⁶

While *Fine d'anno* more readily reveals the relationship between narrator and author through the use of first-person narrative, *Maria Zef* offers a particularly disciplined example of Verga's *discorso indiretto libero*. In *Maria Zef*, Drigo consistently distances the authorial pen leaving the reader to identify with the dominant point-of-view of Mariutine through intimations of her inner thoughts and emotions. The image of the hearth appears frequently in the text, but rather than igniting the imagination, the fire seems to illuminate the stark realities of peasant life. Following the final confrontation between Mariutine and Barbe Zef toward the end of the novel, the reader encounters the two characters in a very candid moment in which the literary veil is perceptively lifted:

Se il diavolo zoppo avesse voluto spiare nell'interno della baita dei Zef quella sera, al posto del brigante assetato di vendetta e della Maddalena piangente e implorante che Mariutine aveva creato colla fantasia, avrebbe veduto un pover'uomo calvo, affaticato e vestito di logori panni, curvo sulla sua scodella di zuppa, e una ragazzetta bionda, dagli occhi azzurri e dall'aria gentile, che lo serviva premurosamente. / Quelle due creature, che il giorno prima avevano così

⁶ For feminist readings of authority and the male gaze, see Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*; De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*.

violentemente cozzato, mangiavano l'una accanto all'altra in silenzio, dinnanzi a un gran fuoco.

If the *diavolo zoppo*⁷ were to peak inside the Zef's cabin that evening, in the place of a revenge-thirsty bandit and a weeping, pleading Magdalene that Mariutine had imagined, he would have seen a balding man in frayed rags, poor and tired, bent over his bowl of soup, and a blonde girl with blue eyes and a kind disposition who devotedly waited on him. / Those two creatures, who had so violently clashed the day before, ate side by side in silence in front of a large fire. (181)

The metatextual fiction of the *brigante* and the *Maddalena* that Drigo inserts into the text through the inner thoughts of Mariutine at once defends the diegetic validity of the narrative against sensational literary abstractions while calling attention to the artifice that informs cultural representations of rural realities. Again, the scene painted in the imagination is extremely visual, evoking the picturesque through a catalog of similar images; yet the passage serves not to glorify the moment, but rather to accentuate its lack of affectation.

Another notable passage, at the novel's close, reveals a glimpse of an implicit narrator.⁸ In her final effort to raise the ax before she kills Barbe Zef, Mariutine stops to reflect on the tragedy of their collective circumstance:

Un'improvvisa pietà di lui, di sé, della vita, del comune destino, la fece vacillare sulle ginocchia, indietreggiare tremando verso l'uscio cui era entrata. Pietà di

⁷ The "diavolo zoppo" or "lame devil" seems to be a figure of Neapolitan folklore and has an extensive literary presence. See *Publications* by the Folklore Society of Great Britain (London: David Nut, 1897); *Il Diavolo Zoppo* is an eighteenth-century text by Alain René Le Sage offered in Italian translation (Milan: Bietti, 1939). Orlandini, Artemio, *Il Diavolo Zoppo* (Bologna: s.n., 1863); There is also a film by Luigi Maggi called *Il diavolo zoppo* (1909). Vélez, de G. L., and Lucio D'Arcangelo. *Il Diavolo Zoppo*. Milano: Mondadori, 1997. Print

⁸ See Ultsch, p. 33-4.

quell'essere che era là per terra, e dalla nascita alla morte era stato anch'esso un mendico, un misero; nato forse senza perfidia, ma che povertà, promiscuità, solitudine, privazione assoluta di tutto ciò che può addolcire ed elevare la vita, avevano abbruttito e travolto. Tranne l'ubriacarsi e l'accoppiarsi con qualche femmina, che altro aveva avuto quel meschino dalla sua vita?... Null'altro, null'altro al mondo, che faticare e patire... Ed ora....

An unexpected pity for him, for herself, for life and their common destiny, caused her to waver, to stumble back toward the door through which she had just come, trembling. Pity for that thing, there, on the ground. From his birth to his death, he, too, had been poor, wretched; not born wicked, but sullied and devastated by poverty, promiscuity, solitude; the absolute privation of any kind of relief or advancement. Besides getting drunk and going to bed with a few women, what else did that beggar have in life? ... Nothing else, nothing else in the world beyond struggle and suffering... And now... (188)

This final reflection, though attributed to Mariutine, seems to emanate from an observer outside of the “common destiny” that afflicts both Mariutine and Barbe Zef. The passage builds upon the final episodes of the novel in which Barbe Zef’s brutality is broken down and revealed as desperation—days before Mariutine’s final act, she subverts the dynamic of power in the *baita*, coming to blows with Barbe Zef and commanding him to take action in regard to Rosute. After the confrontation, Barbe Zef—referred to throughout the novel as the “padrone”—is subjected to the authority of Mariutine: “Egli era là... Inerme, annientato, in potere di lei che lo guardava, che lo spiava...” [“There he was... Defenseless, annihilated, subject to her authority as she watched him, spied on him”] (MZ). The final reflection of Mariutine before she lowers the ax upon her

uncle suggests an interjection of the implicit narrator not only for its tone but also in its literary scope: the statement evokes pity quite clearly in an effort to illustrate the tragic destiny of both characters.

While a comprehensive study of Drigo's work in relation to the women writers of *Verismo* is yet to be done, stylistic elements and the socio-cultural concerns of writers like Matilde Serao and Grazia Deledda surface in Drigo's work. Serao's contemplation of the picturesque in *Il ventre di Napoli* sheds light on Drigo's unapologetic presentation of rural realities and the deconstruction of the pastoral myth. Regional-cultural specificities inherent to the writing of Grazia Deledda, especially the use of dialect and references to various "razze" or races, reappear in Drigo's stories and novels, as well as a Deleddian fatalism that is animated in Mariutine's tragic "chain of destiny."⁹ The suffering that Mariutine experiences at the hand of her uncle is identical to that of her mother—resulting in her physical and psychological deterioration—and revealing the broader plight of rural women. Throughout the novel, Mariutine makes reference to this predetermined destiny equating it to being "attaccato alla catena" ["in chains"] (MZ 101). It is Pieri, a young peasant who plans to escape his destiny by emigrating to "America"¹⁰ and implies his intention to marry Mariutine upon his return, who expresses this idea most explicitly: "Se oggi non partissi più, se rinunciassi a tentar la fortuna adesso che son

⁹ Deledda's writing often brings to light issues surrounding the construction of racial identities, especially internal cultural distinctions of race in Italy and, in particular, in Sardinia. See, for example, such stories as "Il natale del consigliere" in *Chiaroscuro* or Deledda's novel, *La via del male*.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the imaginary "America" in MZ refers in particular to South America, encompassing a range of continents in a single, liberating idea. Episodes of emigration and the experience of "America" also connect Pieri to Barbe and both men to Mariutine's absent father. The text only alludes briefly to Mariutine's father and his death abroad, incorporating in the text an implicit fear of "America" and its potential perils, propagated by the Duce and inherent to fascist discourse.

giovane e che ho un appoggio, sarei costretto a rimaner sulla montagna per tutta la vita. [...] Mi sembrerebbe di essere attaccato alla catena come una bestia” [“If I did not leave today, if I did not take a chance, now while I am young and I have some support, I would have to stay on this mountain forever. I would feel chained up, like an animal”] (101). Pieri’s comment recalls numerous allusions that compare Mariutine and others to beasts throughout the text [in the first pages of the novel, Mariutine is pictured pulling a cart through the countryside in “il suo ufficio di cavallo” (“the work of a horse”) (49)]. Unlike Pieri who, as a young man, has the opportunity to “tentar la fortuna” (102) and evade the chain of his circumstances, Mariutine recognizes death as the only possible escape: “[...] prima di lei sua madre era passata per lo stesso destino, e nulla, nulla, aveva potuto cambiarne il corso, se non la morte...” [“Her mother before her had succumbed to the same fate. Nothing, nothing, could have changed her course, if not death”] (179). Mariutine and Pieri are distanced by economic circumstances (Pieri comes from what Mariutine would consider a wealthier rural family, established in the community at the foot of the mountain rather than isolated in its peaks), as well as the circumstances of their gender and sex. In this light, the “chain of destiny” that emerges in *Maria Zef* is determined not only by socio-economic class, but compounded by the limitations of gender. In addition to being linked to the plight of the peasant, the apparent “chain of destiny” animates the distinctly female genealogy between mother and daughter and their collective fate.

* * *

Moe’s critical contribution to readings in of the picturesque and their particular situation in Italian culture, outlined above, is useful in my analysis of Drigo because it explores how the aesthetics of a naturalized conception of beauty and harmony were used to conceal socio-

political attitudes that were far from harmonious. The beauty of the picturesque was largely employed during the 18th and mid-19th centuries to obscure the racist gaze of Italy's North onto the South before (and partially after) unification. The dual perception of rural culture as both picturesque and backward was re-mobilized during the 20th century *strapaese* movement, attempting to naturalize the severely restrictive, divisive politics instituted by the regime. Led by Mino Maccari, Ardengo Soffici, and Leo Longanesi on the pages of *Il selvaggio* and its allied-review *L'italiano, strapaese* (established in opposition to Bontempelli's '900 and *Stracittà*) competed to represent the principal mode of expression for a new fascist aesthetics during the mid 1920s.¹¹ Like the popular "folklorization of the south" in post-unification Italy and investigated by Moe, which viewed the south as "the privileged reserve of those ways of life that were threatened by modern civilization" (215), *strapaese* envisioned rural culture as a repository of Italian ethnicity and tradition.¹²

The movement was established, in many ways, as a response to *stracittà* and Bontempelli's appeal for the de-provincialization of Italian culture, advocating instead a model of civilization based on ethnic identity and the pastoral myth. Parallel to Verga's description of Milan as "la città più città d'Italia" ["the most 'city' city in the world"] (*Novelle* 2: 498), *strapaese* imagined "il paese più paese del mondo" ["the most 'country' country in the world"] Like the representations of southern culture found in Verga's short stories and presented to a predominantly urban audience, Maccari and other *strapaesani* set the idyllic countryside in sharp relief against urban degeneracy, motivated by foreign cultural intervention: "[...] quelli che si

¹¹ See Ben Ghiat, pp. 20-9.

¹² Moe comments on the "virtual explosion" of folklore studies in Italy during the 1870s that contributed to popular conceptions of the Mezzogiorno as the region of the picturesque, with a particular focus on Sicily (215-216).

salvano dalla civiltà americana, ricercando nella terra le radici della nostra razza e insieme i segreti della nostra vera grandezza [...]” [“...saving people from American civilization and rediscovering in the land the roots of our race, and, along with them, the secrets of our true greatness”] (Troisio 74).¹³ By highlighting the binary opposition between the urban and the rural, manifest in the politico-aesthetic debate between *stracittà* and *strapaese*, proponents of *strapaese*, like *verismo*, established a division (or distance) between the two categories that became essential to an appreciation of either extreme. That is, though purporting to subvert the dominant gaze of the (urban) observer recognized in Verga’s many imaginative peregrinations, *strapaese* only succeeded in reinforcing it—the movement’s failure to achieve its scope of becoming *the* fascist aesthetic can be attributed, on the one hand, to the lack of a lucid, comprehensive aesthetic framework, and on the other to its inability to access the very populations it celebrated.¹⁴

¹³ “...un immenso contrasto con le passioni turbinose e incessanti delle grandi città, con quei bisogni fittizii, e quell’altra prospettiva delle idee o direi anche dei sentimenti. Perciò avrei desiderato andarmi a rintanare in campagna, sulla riva del mare, fra quei pescatori e coglierli vivi come Dio li ha fatti. Ma forse non sarà male dall’altro canto che io li consideri da una certa distanza in mezzo all’attività di una città come Milano o Firenze. Non ti pare che per noi l’aspetto di certe cose non ha risalto che visto sotto un dato angolo visuale?” [... an immense contrast between the turbulent, incessant passions of the big city with all its abstractions, and another perspective on ideas or, I would say, sentiments. For this reason, I might have liked to hide away in the country, along the seashore, amongst fishermen and gatherers, alive, like God made them. But perhaps it is better that I consider them from a distance, in the midst of a great city like Milan or Florence. Does it not seem that, for us, certain things have more character when viewed from a given, visual perspective?”] (*Carteggio Verga-Capuana* 80). Cited in Moe, p. 349.

¹⁴ *Il selvaggio*, of the three literary journals mentioned during the intellectual debate for a fascist aesthetics, can perhaps be read as the most dedicated to the tenets of *strapaese*. Unlike *L’italiano* and ‘900, *Il selvaggio* did not feature foreign contributors or languages, although no complete collection of the magazines many issues exists. Despite its popular content (including short satiric poems, songs, and illustrations) and efforts to include only “authentic” Italian content, the journal, while available to a more expansive audience than ‘900 (which concentrated on a limited intellectual elite) and *L’italiano* (which was focused on a more strictly literary culture), *Il*

Strapaese at once responded to the economic and doctrinal needs of the regime, reinventing fascist patriarchal politico-cultural ideologies and emphasizing an agricultural imaginary. On the one hand, the *strapaese* movement developed an aesthetic ethos around the image of the peasant, while on the other it countered the economic and demographic issues that the nation faced during the *battaglia del grano*. Launched in 1925, the ‘battle of grain’ imposed strict import controls and encouraged Italian landowners to cultivate grain in an attempt to achieve national autonomy in cereal production. Though Italy accomplished this goal by the late 1930s, the government’s involvement in agricultural production mainly benefited large arable farmers. Private landowners, especially those in the south, suffered from a lack of modernization and diversification: the “battle of grain” encouraged inefficient farming practices and grain displaced other viable products like citrus, olives, and wine, which subsequently depleted potential export markets.¹⁵ In addition to the dire economic implications, the ‘battle of grain,’ and the propaganda that accompanied it, effected cultural conceptions of Italian rurality.¹⁶ The regime’s agricultural initiative sought to cultivate ethnic belonging—identifying Italians as a hardworking people with strong ties to traditional social mores—as a means for encouraging

selvaggio remained restricted in its reach and likely did not access the peasants featured in its pages, many of which were illiterate. See Troisio’s *Introduzione*, pp. 9-49.

¹⁵ For a general history of the “battaglia del grano” as well as other economic strategies employed by the regime after the Great Depression, see Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), esp. pp. 205-239; and *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), esp. pp. 407-528.

¹⁶ See, for example, the advertisements included in Duggan’s *A Concise History of Italy*, which advertise a national grain exhibition as well as a grain growing competition, p. 219.

patriotism. Even the campaign for a specific type of national identity utilized militaristic rhetoric to fight hunger with the rigor of soldiers going into battle.¹⁷

The axiomatic principles of the *strapaese* movement are strongly influenced by the narrative strategies employed during fascism. Mussolini, and subsequently the PNF, integrated aesthetics and politics in defining its innovative and authoritarian political approach. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi investigates the relationship between power and representation during the *Ventennio*, identifying fascism as a form of “aesthetic politics.” Falasca-Zamponi describes the way the Duce and the regime infused political practice with the performative power of language to narrate its own happening. Inherent in its approach to power and policy, fascism (or Mussolini) conceives of the omnipotent political leader as artist—taking the populace as its raw material and shaping its masterpiece.¹⁸ As Falasca-Zamponi points out, the symbolic patrimony cultivated through speeches, rituals, and images embraced and subsequently disseminated traditional, hetero-normative gender constructions not only in its policies but in its cultural representation as well. The metaphor of the artist shaping the will of the crowd parallels the dominant metaphor exercised in *strapaese*—that of the *contadino* willfully conquering the (feminized) land as master of his own atmosphere. Like its fascist forefather, the *strapaese* movement integrated a purportedly ‘natural’ order founded upon implied dualisms that ensure the authority of the leader over the masses, man above nature, and, implicitly, the masculine over the feminine.

¹⁷For an examination of fascism and media see Hibberd, Matthew, *the Media in Italy: Press, Cinema and Broadcasting from Unification to Digital*. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008); or Stroumbouloupoulos, *Love, Hate & Propaganda: The Strongmen*. (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2010).

¹⁸ See *Fascist Spectacle*, “The Politician as Artist.” This way of thinking was, in large part, influenced by the work of Gustave Le Bon—especially his essay “La psychologie des foules,” to which Mussolini referred on numerous occasions.

Aesthetics evolve from purportedly natural origins adopted by the *strapaese* movement to create a political aesthetics (to complement fascism's aesthetic politics) that would inherently propagate a specific political agenda while also laying claim to an unprecedented "realist" representation void of artifice and influence. *Strapaese's* return to the Italian countryside and its simpler ways of life meant a return to the picturesque in the movement's idealization of the Italian peasantry, albeit with a radical inversion of the original negative connotations of the picturesque in the nineteenth century. Realities of famine, emigration, and destitution were supplanted with images of the 'robust' *contadino*, master of fertile lands and fertile women. Instead of evidencing lucidly its own discursive strategies, the *strapaese*, on the pages of *Il Selvaggio*, denigrated the efforts of artists and aesthetes to embellish narrative and claimed to reveal simple 'realities': "Strapaese non è dunque un gingillino, non è un frutto di divagazioni o di sottilizzazioni estetiche e letterarie: ma l'espressione d'un bisogno reale, maturato, sofferto; una creatura viva, fatta di sangue, di nervi, di cervello e di volontà" ["Strapaese is nothing but a small trinket—it is not the result of aesthetic and literary amusement or abstraction. It is, rather, the expression of a real need, developed, labored; a living creature of flesh and blood, with nerves, a brain, and willpower"] (Bisorco 77).¹⁹ Despite its explicit rejection of literary and aesthetic subtleties, the passage employs metaphors of the body to reinforce the 'naturalness' of its sentiments. The mode of representation espoused in passages like this one reimagines Verga's "fatto nudo e schietto" with a fascist edge. Citing the Duce, Orco Bisorco (one of Mino Maccari's many pseudonyms) proclaims in the pages of *Il selvaggio*: "La voce di Mussolini è scesa nel nostro cuore, che è il cuore del popolo schietto, custodito da schietta intelligenza" ["The voice of Mussolini has settled in our heart, the heart of a candid people, safeguarded by

¹⁹This and subsequent citations refer to Bisorco's writings from *Il Selvaggio* reprinted in the volume by Troisio.

candid intelligence”] (Bisorco 75). In addition to obfuscating aesthetic strategies and authorial influence, the rhetoric of the movement embraces corporeal metaphors to emphasize its ostensibly organic system of representation. Bisorco not only purports an inherent naturalism but also depicts *strapaesano* narrative as immediate and visceral—a corporeal reaction rather than predetermined manipulation.

Borrowing from the plain language of Italian *Verismo*, *strapaese* delineates an aesthetic that elicited the simplicity of Italy’s pastoral myth to distance its own intellectual and political investment, praising action over the passivity of rhetoric: “Ma le questioni letterarie, i problemi artistici, estetici, le tendenze, le scuole, le mode, le polemiche? Non c’interessano se non in quanto possano interessare quelli che per noi sono i principi essenziali dello spirito italiano, e i valori che attraverso i secoli esso ha affermato” [“Literary discussions, artistic and esthetic issues, trends, schools, style, controversies? They can only interest us inasmuch as they inform the essential principles of the Italian spirit and the values that such a spirit has affirmed over the centuries”] (80). Embracing a rural way of life and the language of the peasantry as the genuine expression of the Italian spirit, the movement sought to entrench “Italianness” in the nation’s imperial history and the image of its fertile lands. The language of the peasant—presented in stark contrast to the language of intellectuals and degenerate urbanites—was thus cast as expression without pretense, a language dedicated to action and authority: “[...] il linguaggio che si parla dalle mura del «paese più paese del mondo» è duro e aspro e talvolta ferisce; perciò ci piace rimanere arcigni, ringhiosi e salvatici a guardia della nostra tana piuttosto che scendere in cerca di successi o di favori nelle facili combatte” [“...the language that we speak from inside the walls of the ‘most country village in the world’ is rugged and severe, cutting at times; because we prefer to be grim and snarl savagely, to protect our lair rather than go looking for

favors and handouts”] (77). In its rejection of artistry in favor of straightforward representation, *strapaese* formulates a discourse that attempts to appear organic and truthful by utilizing similar strategies to those employed by the regime. In this way, *strapaese* borrows the power of narrative to legitimate its authority as the only aesthetic approach appropriate to the period.

Despite its explicit rejection of allegory and rhetoric, *strapaese* employed folklore and myth to create picturesque visions of rural realities similar to those utilized to characterize the South during and immediately after the Italian Risorgimento. While the parameters of the movement as an aesthetic ideal are difficult to quantify (as are attempted categorizations of *strapaesano* texts),²⁰ the discursive strategies of *strapaese* are fairly straightforward. Using the countryside as a resource in the propagation of an inherently political agenda, *strapaese* employed rural figures to defend an “authentic” Italian cultural identity rooted in Nature. The movement positioned itself in defense of “quelli elementi di italianità che costituiscono le radici naturali della civiltà nostra e della nostra potenza” [“those elements of Italianness that comprise the natural roots of our civilization and our power”] and against “teorie, pratiche e tendenze che

²⁰ Such parameters are not easily identified—the movement spent much of its time explicating what it was *not* rather than what it was: “[Strapaese non è] né un fenomeno di estetismo, né un aspetto di gretto regionalismo o campanilismo, né un circolo o vuoi cenacolo letterario, né un tempietto ove si adori il passato e ci si nasconda per sfuggire alla realtà, ai bisogni e agli imperativi dei giorni d’oggi, né una gretta religione delle cose piccine, del paesello arcaico, del casolare tranquillo, del pio bove, del pane odoroso, del muro scrostato, del pisciatoio ottocentesco, delle cose dimenticate, dell’odor di stantio, della patina del tempo, degli uomini all’antica, e via discorrendo” [(Strapaese is neither) an aesthetic phenomenon nor a measly derivative of regionalism or *campanilismo*; it is neither a literary club nor some little temple where we venerate the past and hide from reality, as is the tendency these days; nor is it a narrow-minded religion of small things, of ancient villages, of tranquil manors, of reverent oxen, of sweet-smelling bread, of crumbling walls, of old outhouses, of forgotten things, of stale smells, of times past, of ancient men, and so on and so forth”]. Cited in Troisio, p. 15. As the group was imprecise in outlining its own principles, *Strapaese* is more adequately identified as an intellectual movement rather than a literary mode; as such, it would be difficult to determine with any certainty what texts were representative of this literary category, although some have tried. See for example, Best’s analysis of Fabio Tombari’s *Tutta Frusaglia*, pp. 18-28.

sotto la specie della modernità potessero inquinarli e corroderli” [“theories, practices and trends that, under the auspices of modernity, could pollute and contaminate them”].²¹ In situating *strapaese* as an organic alternative to modernization and urbanization and sanctioned in tradition and history, advocates of the movement developed a discourse that claimed to reveal truth rather than construct narratives. That is to say, *strapaesani* constructed a set of implicitly political aesthetics that, like fascism under the cult of the artist-leader, seemed to narrate itself and double its own authority.²² In addition to borrowing fascism’s influential discourse of power, *strapaese* reinvigorated the dogmatic principles that dictated the PNF’s political strategies. Episodes like the *battaglia del grano*, and the subsequent *strapaese* movement that idealized ruralism as an Italian national identifier, crystallized historical, social hierarchies and privileged masculinized Culture over an often feminized, subordinate Nature.²³

Images of the peasant and the rural proffered by *strapaese* were imbued with popular fascist values and traditional gender distinctions. Land, in turn, was characterized in *strapaesano* aesthetics and popular literature as passive and fertile, a deferential resource to be exploited.²⁴ It

²¹ Cited in Troisio, p. 15.

²² As Falasca-Zamponi describes it: “Because we normally tend to identify sense with reference, content with form, and reality with representation, the fact that events seem to narrate themselves self-referentially doubles the authority of power, whose discourse purportedly tells the truth. Power becomes both the producer and the product of its own discursive formation. The power of narrative and the narrative of power form an explosive combination” (*Fascist Spectacle* 3).

²³ Ecofeminists have critically examined the feminization of landscape. See, for example, Jo Little and Patricia Austin, “Women and the Rural Idyll;” Linda MicDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place*; Jo Little and Michael Leyshon, “Embodied Rural Geographies: Developing Research Agendas.”

²⁴ For a discussion of ruralism and gender in popular fascist literature and beyond, see David Albert Best, *Ruralism in Central Italian Writers, 1927-1997. From Strapaese to the Gendering of Nature: Fabio Tombari, Paolo Volponi, Carlo Cassola, Romana Petri* (Ancona: Ancona University Press, 2010). Best’s critical inquiry investigates the way that physical, socio-

is through an examination of intersecting constructions of gender and ruralism that the cross-section between the fascist “battle for grain” and the “battle for births” is made plain. The attention to the Italian peasantry cultivated by the *battaglia del grano* stems from fascist pronatalist policy: as the regime shifted its focus to garner public support, its concentration on rural areas and practices resulted primarily from the population’s contribution to the nation’s demographic problem (addressed during the ‘battle for births’). Rural women were celebrated as the most fecund, producing more children than their urban counterparts, and thus fulfilling, on a micro level, the regime’s objectives for national self-sufficiency and autarchy.²⁵ Women who readily embraced a modernized urban way of life, on the other hand, were publicly defamed as

economic, cultural factors have on literary production, and in particular, the ways human processes combine to conceptualize space. Best’s analysis considers “how individuals relate to the land as resource and how the concept of human individual and (or in) Nature is presented; this leads to an appraisal of the relationship between gender landscape, and rurality” (12). In determining the complexities of the relationship between individuals and Nature, Best seeks out parallel appreciations of the ‘feminine’ sphere and the female body with landscape and, in the case of some writers, the creation of a ‘pornotopia’—identified as “a peculiar but frequent type of metaphor where landscapes are described using terminology relating to the (female), while the body itself is considered a landscape of sorts” (12). Best’s analysis focuses on the *mezzadria* (central Italian regions) in Italy’s cultural imagination and explores misogynistic interpretations of the dominant (active) man against the (passive) material of the land or the female body. His innovative approach does not concentrate on symbolism or allegory, but rather the representation of certain spaces as agrarian resources, both passive and available for exploitation; subsequently, Best examines the parallels between this treatment of landscapes and the treatment of women in patriarchal narrative settings. The study spans the socio-political implications of fascism during the 1930s to contemporary conceptualizations of landscape in post-WWII Italian literature.

²⁵ Following the economic collapse of the ‘battle for grain’ the peasantry, especially rural women, were provided for: the collapse of the ‘battle for grain’ in economic terms, these efforts on the part of Italian peasant women were continually rewarded: increases in public spending—including maternity benefits and family allowances—were issued to counteract the project’s failings, raising the total from 1.5 billion to 6.7 billion lire (*The Force of Destiny* 490). For more on the *massaie rurali*, see De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* and Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy*.

immoral, sexually promiscuous, and infertile.²⁶ Political organizations— claiming to give moral, social, and technical assistance to rural women, but more directly aimed at political mobilization— were created to streamline female participation in fascist policy and supplant autonomous women’s organizations.²⁷ Fascist women’s organizations, like the *Sezione massaie rurali dei fasci femminili*, promoted traditional gender roles by deeming the private and the passive as the domain of women. Peasant women in these sections were treated to technical education on small-scale farming and domestic science, childcare and craft manufacturing, and were strongly discouraged from making the rural-urban shift. These policies sought not only to relegate women to gendered, subdued identities but also succeeded in shifting public expectations concerning domestic obligation to the realm of civic duty.

The political projects of the *Massaie rurali* were glorified and re-envisioned in *strapaese* in an attempt to insert the regime’s policy into the nation’s cultural imagination. *Strapaese*, in its aestheticization of fascist politics, adopts the paternalistic ideals that frame the regime’s socio-cultural platforms. Promulgating the “paese più paese del mondo” in the pages of *Il selvaggio*, proponents of *strapaese* sought to extend rural, dualistic economies of power—situating man above woman, culture above nation, and action above rhetoric—from the local to the national level. Pastoral idylls, supposedly emanating from nature, were plucked from the popular imagination to sanction fascist ideologies at the cultural level:

²⁶ See Ghezzo, “Topographies of Disease and Desire: Mapping the City in Fascist Italy” or the chapter dedicated to the ‘*donna-crisi*,’ another archetypal figuration of femininity during fascism, in *Corpi imprigionati*. See also Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*; Horn, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity*; and De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*.

²⁷ Beyond the various branches of the *Fasci Femminili*, the most popular women’s groups at the time were those organized through the Catholic Church. Neither offered women the opportunity for political and social involvement outside of a male-dominated institution (Willson 4).

Noi soli abbiamo osato fondare Strapaese, il paese più paese del mondo, dove le donne fanno figlioli, dove gli uomini pigliano moglie, dove si beve il vino e si mangiano bistecche, dove si balla il trescone. Noi soli abbiamo osato dire che l'impero non si farà se non italianizzando gli italiani, se non scoprendo e potenziando i valori prettamente nostrani, radicati nella terra e nei secoli. Noi soli abbiamo proclamato che per imporsi al mondo è vano scimmiettare gli altri, ma è necessario resistere colla nostra originale, caratteristica vita italiana, che nelle tradizioni gloriosissime trova la forza per trionfare; senza snaturarsi, nell'avvenire.

Only we dared to create *Strapaese*, the most country village in the world—where women birth sons; where men take a wife; where we drink wine and eat meat; where we dance the *trescone*. Only we dared to say that, to create an Empire, Italians must be Italianized, discovering and reinforcing genuine, local values, rooted in the land and over centuries. Only we proclaimed that, in asserting ourselves on the world stage, it is futile to imitate others, but, rather, it is necessary to resist by way of our own original, characteristic Italian way of life that will find its power to overcome in the future, free from distortion, through the glorious traditions of the past. (Bisorco 75)

While fascism used its resources to rally the nation's women (under the auspices of political involvement) around a predetermined gender category, *strapaese* sought to disseminate dominant gender considerations on a cultural level. Like the women participating in the *Sezione Massaie Rurali* of the *Fasci Femminili*, the women of *strapaese* were also envisioned as subservient and fertile—those who reproduced prolifically were celebrated and rewarded. Men,

on the other hand, were envisioned as the masters of this timeless tradition “radicati nella terra e nei secoli,” aggressively taking wives, drinking wine, and eating steak. An ode to “Donne” in one issue of *Il selvaggio* edited by Maccari outlines the contemporary political and cultural consideration of women:

Di donna senza ciccìa
Strapaese non s’impiccìa
Uomo non regna
Se donna non è pregna
Donna che pesa un’onzia
La propria casa sconcia
A donna che ingrassa
Togliamo la tassa.
Women without a little meat
Stapaese does not entreat
A man cannot dominate
Unless his woman is pregnant
A woman that weighs an ounce
Her’s is a disgraceful house
A woman gaining weight
Enjoys a tax break.²⁸

The poem aligns the cultural aims of *strapaese* with the political action of the regime and reiterates the active energy of the movement as “una creatura viva, fatta di sangue, di nervi, di

²⁸ From *Il selvaggio*, 15 August 1932 (Rome: N7), 1.

cervello e di volontà” (Bisorco 77). Even the language and method of the movement itself is notably gendered: while poetry, artistry, and embellishment are deemed feminine, passive, and weak, the language of *strapaese* is masculine, active, and violent.

Similar constructions of gender and power frame *Maria Zef*—after the death of her mother, Mariutine continually refers to Barbe Zef as the *padrone* of the family’s small *baita* and encounters some anxiety over her new role managing the house and the household economies (MZ 29). Again, upon visiting the Àgnul family, a family of *massariotti* socially and economically superior to the Zefs, Mariutine takes care to adhere to the rigid hierarchies of the country.²⁹ The traditional framework of gendered roles and hierarchies contributes to the drama of the novel, especially in the later episodes in which traditional dynamics of power are inverted and dismantled. The dramatic conclusion of the novel, terminating with the decapitation of Barbe Zef at the hands of Mariutine, is fraught with symbolism from the critical standpoint of both fascism and Feminism. Fascist bodily economies not only provided a vehicle for national unification around popular symbols, but also conceived of the (masculine) artist-leader as the virtual head ensuring the cohesion of otherwise inchoate masses into a homogeneous national body. Similar to the northern perception of the South as a diseased body in need of a Piedmontese cure to reinstate the healthy functioning of the national body, fascism used images of disease and degeneracy to rally public support for its vision of national regeneration. Domestic and Foreign policy measures, as well complementary practical and symbolic exercises, were coupled as two

²⁹ “In campagna, nelle famiglie di *massariotti*, si segue rigidamente la gerarchia, ed il posto del vecchio abitualmente era quello dato a Mariutine, a destra del padrone di casa” [“In the countryside, in families of *massariotti*, hierarchies are rigidly observed. Mariutine was given the place usually assigned to the elder, to the right of the master of the house”] (131). The Àgnul family is referenced as a family of *massaia*, most likely acting as steward for a group of sharecroppers. Portrayal of sharecroppers in *Fine d’anno* differs from the respect and admiration afforded the Àgnul in the eyes of Mariutine. For a breakdown of rural hierarchies and economic class systems, see Willson.

sides of the totalitarian vision for collective change. The government sought to take ‘necessary hygienic actions’ in order to cure the ‘plagues’ originating from southern ‘delinquents’ and their ‘diseased’ surroundings.³⁰ Behaviors and people deemed ‘unhealthy,’ that did not foster a utilitarian patriotism, were to be removed from circulation, effectively amputated, to ensure the well-being of the collective national body. On the one hand, the final event of the novel comprises a literal act of castration in which Mariutine eliminates and allegorically emasculates the patriarch that continuously rapes and violates her, breaking the cycle of oppression. On the other, the removal of his head, both literal and figurative object of authority, represents an act of resistance in the context of fascist political and symbolic patrimony.

Drigo’s consideration of disease and authority in *Maria Zef* are distinctly gendered. Situating discourses of power in the context of peasant culture provides an added complication to traditional trajectories of authority—while hierarchical models remain intact, the socio-economic situation of the peasantry and internal power struggles present a finite limit to individual authority. In *Maria Zef*, Drigo explores masculine power struggles and the commodification of women within that dynamic. Compar Guerrino, head of the Àgnul household and referred to throughout the novel as *il gobbo* due to an extreme deformation, is isolated as a concrete example of the fascist patriarch:

Se ufficialmente Compar Àgnul figurava come il capo di casa, in realtà il vero ed unico padrone era il gobbo. [...] / Dai particolari riguardi che gli usavano le massaie, dalla deferenza colla quale tutti lo ascoltavano, si capiva che era il gobbo la testa e la direzione dell’azienda, lui, quello che teneva le redini di tutto e

³⁰ Mussolini, “Discurso dell’Ascensione,” pp. 52-60, 73; See Ben-Ghiat, pp. 17-20; Spackman, *fascist Virilities*, 143-55.

decideva gli affari. / I fratelli, benché ormai sulla cinquantina, stavano completamente ai suoi ordini e sotto la sua autorità [...].

If, officially, Compar Àgnul acted as the head of the household, in reality, the only true master was the hunchback. ... / It was understood in the way the housewives regarded him, the respect with which everyone listened to him, that the hunchback was the brains of the family business; that he held the reigns, made all the decisions. / His brothers, though well beyond their fiftieth year, were completely at his orders, under his authority. (129)

While the description of Compar Guerrino's authority over his affairs and his family is explicit—securing for him a position of power in the community—his masculinity (and, thus, his dominance) is called into question implicitly by his physical deformation. Described as “gobbo davanti e di dietro” [“hunchbacked in front and in back”] (128), the physical manifestation of a fascist strength of character is absent in the portrait of Compar Guerrino. As a result, Drigo's treatment of gender and authority undermines the pretense of a ‘natural’ order marking men/masculinity as superior to women/femininity.

Dispelling the myth of gendered hierarchy, the relation between gender and struggles for power are revealed as socially constructed; and the complex dynamic between socio-economic status, gender, and authority is explored in the tripartite relationship between Guerrino, Barbe, and Mariutine. While Mariutine's rape seems imminent from the novel's incipit, the circumstances of the rape unveil the historical sexual subordination and commodification of women. Barbe and Mariutine happen upon the Àgnul household after leaving Rosute at the hospital. Having saved one of the brothers' cows and her calf, Barbe is eager to take advantage of the Àgnul's hospitality. Once there, Mariutine quickly catches the eye of Compar Guerrino

who favors her throughout the evening. Guerrino later reveals his preference for Mariutine and offers to ‘help’ by placing her in the home of a nearby family where she can earn a living. The proposition, marking an exchange between the two men and taking Mariutine as its object, ignites a sort of masculine anxiety in Barbe who subsequently lays his claim to Mariutine in the only way available to him.

After returning to the family *baita*, warns Mariutine about Guerrino’s character:

Quello, capisci, senza interesse non dà neppure una goccia d’acqua a un moribondo. Ma è un donnaio e un libertino; e gobbo davanti e dietro, e brutto e vecchio a quel dì com’è, non ha ancora smesso. Tiene una casa a Belluno... so anche dove... E trova il suo interesse anche là: serve prima sé, e poi gli altri. Ha avuto più donne quello che capelli in testa. Tutte le *fantatis* che sono andate a servire da sua madre, poi tutte quelle di sue cognate; e tante e tante altre ancora. Tu gli piaci, ti dico. Ha messo gli occhi su di te. E da me aspetta che io gli faccia il ruffiano.

That man would not give a drop of water to someone dying of thirst if there was not something in it for him. He is a womanizer, a playboy; hunchbacked in front and in back, ugly and old from the day he was born, and he still has not stopped. He has a house in Belluno... I know where it is... he gets what he wants there, too. He takes care of himself first and then he helps others. He has had more women than he has hair on his head—all the women that worked for his mother, then the ones that worked for his brother’s wives, and lots and lots of others. I am telling you, he likes you. He has got his eye on you and he thinks I will hand you over. (148)

Guerrino's intentions are made plain in Barbe's speech: whatever authority nature has denied him, Guerrino recuperates through clever economy and purported generosity. What is more interesting is Barbe's response to it. In the passage, Mariutine's uncle almost appears protective, disparaging Guerrino's behavior. Those feelings, however, are quickly displaced with violence and jealousy, ending with Barbe raping Mariutine. The second rape, committed days later and initiating the habitual violation of Mariutine by Barbe, is also prefaced by the thought of Guerrino. Barbe, drunk after a trip to town, tells Mariutine about another encounter with Guerrino in which *il gobbo* inquires about Mariutine a second time: "Ah ah! Il tuo spasimante non ti perde di vista. Ha pazienza, il gobbo! ... Ma tu, che fai? Perché tenti di scappare?" ["Ha ha! Your sweetheart has not forgotten about you. The hunchback is patient! ... What do you think you are doing? Why are you trying to run away?"] (159). Guerrino's interest in Mariutine, and his ability to take her away at his will, threaten the security of Barbe's position as *padrone*, and in order to re-establish his authority, Barbe attempts to repossess his masculinity through the sexual 'possession' of Mariutine.

Sexuality, as it appears in *Maria Zef*, is tantamount to violence. The author continuously reveals the political reworking of gender into hierarchical categories, leaving Mariutine as its victim. Her abuse and isolation are compounded by the political and cultural isolation of the entire community, represented in the silence of the mountain and in the particular form of silence that Mariutine shares with her mother. The constant abuse results not only in Mariutine's psychology, but also takes effect on her physical form transforming her youthful beauty into the likeness of her mother:

Sofferenza che non era esclusivamente morale: i lineamenti stanchi, il pallore del volto, la piega amara della bocca, non riflettevano soltanto il profondo mutamento

ch'ella, senza definirlo, sentiva in sé,— devastazione di tutto ciò che poteva significare letizia, speranza, amore—ma anche uno strano malessere fisico che la spossava in tutte le membra.

A suffering that was not limited to her emotions: apparent in her tired features, the pallor in her face, the bitter crease of her mouth; all reflected not only the profound change, without definition, that she felt inside herself—the devastation of anything related to joy, hope, love—but also a strange, physical illness that exhausted her whole body. (MZ 162)

For Mariutine, the abuse of her uncle, the loss of beauty, and the desperation in her appearance marks a passage into a womanhood that is distinctly different from the women imagined by *Strapaese* and fascism: rather than plump, fertile, and affectionate, Mariutine is reduced to a shadow of her former beauty.

Again, in an episode in which Mariutine seeks solace from her predicament with Barbe, visiting an elderly healer located near the family cabin, fascist/*strapaesano* visions of gendered identities are deconstructed. After recognizing her ailments as not only emotional but physical, Mariutine turns to an acquaintance of her mother's, identifying in her a brief respite from the violence of men: “Era una donna, almeno, un essere simile a lei, una creatura umana...” [“At least she was a woman, a person akin to Mariutine, a humane being”] (165). Upon arriving at the woman's house she sees a strange “creature” resting on the floor:

[...] seduta per terra su di un pezzo di vecchia coperta, come i bimbi prima di imparare a camminare, una strana creatura senza età, senza sesso, con una grossa testa su esili spalle, vestita di un camiciotto di ruvida lana scura. I suoi capelli

erano canuti, la fronte grinzosa come quella di un vecchio, ma gli occhi ceruli erano limpidi, infantili.

[...] sitting on the piece of an old blanket on the ground, like a baby that has not learned to walk, was a strange creature, ageless and sexless, with a large head on top of slender shoulders. It was dressed in an old, tattered wool smock. Its hair was hoary, its forehead wrinkled like an old man's, but its blue eyes were lucid, puerile. (168)

As Mariutine presses the older woman about the “creatura,” she responds: “—Un innocente..., Non parla e non ode. I maggiori errori e i maggiori dolori della vita gli sono risparmiati” [“An innocent..., mute and deaf. Saved from life's greatest sins and suffering”]. The moment is revealing for several reasons. On the textual level, the episode stands out as isolated metatext in which Mariutine discovers her mother's desperate past, eliciting the same “chain of destiny” referred to throughout the novel but explicitly marking it as female fatalism: it is in this moment that Mariutine realizes the improbability of her escape from a predetermined fate and begins to contemplate Rosute's future (ultimately leading her to murder her uncle). The socio-symbolic implications of this creature without age and without sex, literally unaffected by political and cultural narrative as deaf and mute, are two-fold: the mystery surrounding the creature's existence leads the reader to question its origins, especially when considering the multiple pregnancies that Catine faced (revealed by the elderly woman) and their termination; and also in light of the suggestion of incest, reinforced later in the novel as Mariutine agonizes over Rosute—“Ma... Rosùte di chi era figlia? ... di chi?” [“Who was Rosute's father... who?”] (186). Drigo's representation of Mariutine's complex reality differs dramatically from the picturesque images proffered by *Strapaese*, leaning more toward an intimate and grotesque vision of the

inherent violence and desperation of rural life. The grotesque, asexual body of the creature in front of the fireplace, described as innocent, directly opposes fascist values and the allegory of the degenerate body, as well as undermines the patriarchal model that endorses procreation only according to the hetero-normative model. The asexual creature, manifesting physically degenerate socio-sexual relations and backward rural practices, presents a hybrid of forms that fascism sought to isolate meticulously into a series of dualisms.

* * *

An investigation of gender and the female experience, as well as the way gender constructions influence dynamics of power, pervades Drigo's literary *oeuvre*. Despite contemporary readings of her work,³¹ Drigo negated any feminist motivations in her writing. Instead she stated that it was the "human condition" that inspired her straightforward investigation of rural subjects: "È proprio la "condition humaine" quella che mi fa pietà; come vedete, qui si va più in là del femminismo, e, a parlarne, si arrischia di intaccare alle basi tutto un edificio, che è meglio lasciar stare" ["It is the "condition humaine" that I pity; you see, it goes beyond feminism, and to speak of feminism is to risk chipping away at the base of an entire edifice that it is better to leave alone"] (*Paola Drigo, settant'anni dopo 185-92*). Drigo's dismissal of feminism seemingly results from two express beliefs: first, that feminism was exclusively a political project; and secondly, that art should not be subject to political, theoretical, or philosophical discourses that would diminish its cultural value. Drigo's preface to *La signorina Anna* illustrates the latter. The author warns:

³¹ See Ultsch "La genealogia del personaggio;" Azzolini, "Il silenzio del Bosco Tagliato, lettura di *Maria Zef*;" and the various critical contributions of Patrizia Zambon.

Non si ricerchino *tesi* nei miei racconti. Il “si vuol dimostrare” è secondo me compito dello scienziato, del filosofo, non dell’artista; e quando costui v’inciampa dentro, ciò avviene quasi sempre a detrimento dell’arte [...] È altrettanto vero però che il maggior orgoglio del narratore consiste nel far scaturire dai singoli casi narrati, lieti o tristi che siano, qualche verità, qualche considerazione d’interesse umano generale, qualche sentimento, che oltrepassi i limiti del suo racconto.

Do not look for *theses* in my stories. The “desire to demonstrate” is, as far as I am concerned, the project of scientists, of philosophers, not that of the artist; when it stumbles into art, it is almost always to art’s detriment... It is also true, however, that the greatest pride of the narrator is that of evoking in a single narrated episode, be it happy or sad, some greater truth; a reflection of universal human interest, a sentiment, that extends beyond the limit of the narrative. (8) [original italics]

In an attempt to embrace universal human interest and sentiment, Drigo remains neutral in regard to specific historical, political, and ideological shifts. Her use of the verist *discorso indiretto libero* lends itself to this project by purportedly removing any authorial influence. Drigo’s approach, to access universal human interest and to eliminate historic-cultural references, is conspicuously familiar to the project of Massimo Bontempelli’s Magic Realism and its influence in the writing of Paola Masino discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. In 1913, Bontempelli did have the opportunity to review *La Fortuna*. More notable, however, are the similarities between Masino and Drigo—neither of whom accepted feminism as a concrete motivation in their narrative content or construction, but whose work predominantly concentrates

on female figures in what may be considered, retrospectively, as a form of universalist feminism in its questioning of socially-constructed female identities and women's symbolic subordination, especially during fascism.³²

Drigo's refusal to acquiesce to a feminist agenda is, perhaps, motivated by the perceived limitations of such a categorization. Women writers that came before and after her rejected similar associations in response to the interpretative constraints of feminist perspectives and the inability of conservative readings to accommodate a range of desires, forms, and points-of-view.³³ The author's dissatisfaction with the popular success *Maria Zef*, expressed in her personal letters, reveals an underlying frustration with the perception that her literary accomplishments were anything less than the result of labored effort and careful study: "[...] io sono quasi malcontenta del suo 'successo': sì, non rida, è proprio così. Sono io forse venuta al mondo oggi? E l' *Amore*, e la *Fortuna*, e *Codino*, e *Un giorno*? *Maria Zef* ha sorelle e fratelli maggiori e minori" ["I am fairly displeased with its 'success': do not laugh, but I truly am. Was I, perhaps, born yesterday? *Amore*, *Fortuna*, *Codino*, and *Un giorno*? *Maria Zef* has sisters and brothers, both older and younger"].³⁴ Rather than an isolated example of her talent, Drigo regards *Maria Zef* as one link in a chain of literary accomplishments that ought to be understood collectively. Despite the author's continual rejection of feminism, in examining her cumulative literary production, many critics note a discernable dedication to female figures that situates even

³² For a critical comparison of the two authors, see Silvia Boero, *Vite parallele di Paola Drigo e Paola Masino: Voci femminili di dissenso nella letteratura del periodo fascista*.

³³ See Felski, *Literature After Feminism*, p. 92. A lack of feminist engagement is a striking phenomenon for Italian women writers, in particular—from futurism to neorealism—for which Drigo is arguably a precursor.

³⁴ This passage is cited in Patrizia Zambon, "Paola Drigo, le opere e i giorni," p. 34; it originates, however, from the unedited letters from Drigo to Diego Valeri conserved in Venice at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

a general consideration of fatalist destiny and human suffering in the experience of one or another female protagonist.³⁵ In a further defense of the evolution of her work beyond the success of *Maria Zef*, Drigo highlights the predominance of female figures in her work, claiming: “*Maria Zef* non esisterebbe se non esistessero Nanna, Innocenza, Rosa, Adelaide, Paolina, Anna, dolorose creature, che la precedono, esprimendo in vario modo il dolore ch’è nel destino umano” [“*Maria Zef* would not exist if Nanna, Innocenza, Rosa, Adelaide, Paolina, Anna had not already existed, the anguished beings that came before her expressing, to various degrees, the suffering that is a part of human destiny”].³⁶ This list, grouping the female protagonists of Drigo’s various short stories in a genealogy of written women, presents the author’s systematic representation and defense of women in her prose. Although she did not recognize these efforts as feminism, that is really how we today read it, as a form of universalist feminism that denounces violence against women at all times and specifically in the fascist era.

The setting and the characters in *Maria Zef* are located geographically and ideologically beyond the margins of civilization and political influence. Returning home after the death of her

³⁵ Lori Ulstch also touches upon the resonances of feminism in Drigo’s work, citing the exceptional emphasis placed on the development of female characters in *Maria Zef* and the many short stories predating the novel. Paola Azzolini repositions the “dolore ch’è nel destino umano” to in a feminist framework, adding: “[...] vi è un altro elemento, non del tutto esplicito, che è doveroso sottolineare. L’unità generica del destino e del dolore diviene più precisa e circoscritta, se si riflette a come la presenza di questo dolore sia sempre vissuta, patita da un personaggio femminile” [“There is another element at work, not entirely explicated, that it is important to underline. The general relationship between destiny and suffering is more clearly defined if we reflect on the fact that this pain is always suffered and experienced through a female character”] (11). Azzolini more firmly roots the dominant themes of the novel in a feminist literary tradition, examining the nuances of the mother-daughter relationship and the corresponding dialogue between song and silence in the novel (16-18).

³⁶ Citation is taken from a letter from the author to friend and colleague, Bernard Berenson. It was published in “Patria e mondo nelle lettere di Paola Drigo a Bernard Berenson” in *Paola Drigo. Settant’anni dopo*. Eds. Beatrice Bartolomeo and Patrizia Zambon (Pisa-Roma: Fabrizio Serra, 2009); 188-92.

mother, Mariutine, Barbe Zef, and Rosute encounter Pieri on the train. Their stop is identified as the last on the line. From that point the trek home requires hours of walking, from the last town on the railroad called Calalto to Passo, where Pieri lives, “e poi il resto” (MZ 73). The one room cabin or *baita* where the Zef reside is well beyond the periphery of the village, isolated in the mountains. The geographical mappings of the setting parallel the socio-economic hierarchies at issue in the novel. All of the characters exist beyond the realm of modernity and progress, symbolized by the train and its tracks, which end well before the villages that house the primary characters. Even the stations leading to the last stop in Calalto suggest isolation and abandonment: “Era un trenino che saliva ansimando tentennando e sbuffando. Tranne nel periodo della villeggiatura, non caricava quasi mai né merci né viaggiatori [...]. Parecchie stazioni passarono senza che nello scompartimento salisse nessuno” [“It was a small train that gasped and snorted up hills slowly. Aside from vacations, it rarely carried goods or passengers. It passed several stations where no one would board”] (MZ 70-71). Once beyond the scope of civilization, the rigid hierarchies of the country separate families and circumstances: “[...] anche per i poveri l’inverno non era uguale per tutti; c’era una gradazione di privazioni e di sacrificio, una differenza nella sorte...” [“...even for the poor, winters were harder for some. There were varying degrees of privation and sacrifice, a disparity in circumstances”] (110).³⁷ Pieri’s family lives in town and is considered with prestige and admiration: “La sua famiglia era una delle più agiate e considerate, di quelle che, tra i pastori, formano come una specie di nobiltà; gente di ceppo vecchio, ben provvista di tutto, orgogliosa e interessata” [“His was one of the most affluent and esteemed families, one of the families that, amongst peasants, form a sort of nobility: families with a long lineage, well-provided for, proud and involved”] (111). Despite the

³⁷ On internal hierarchies of the Italian peasantry, see Willson.

perceived affluence of his family, Pieri is forced, like many, to abandon his native country in the hopes of finding his fortune. The Zefs, whose destitution is difficult to imagine without witnessing it first hand, occupy the lowest tier in this implied social order.³⁸

In one key episode in the narrative after Barbe and Mariutine leave Rosute at the hospital— marking a turn in the plot after the death of Catine and before Mariutine’s inevitable violation—Mariutine considers photographs of the “king and queen” in a tavern in town. After looking at length at a painting depicting what might be interpreted as a lovers’ quarrel,³⁹ Mariutine turns her attention to the photographs:

Ai lati di quel quadro c’erano le fotografie del Re e della Regina. La Regina aveva un diadema di brillanti in testa, e sei file di perle dai chicchi grossi come nocciole, e anche essa pareva a Mariutine bellissima. Il Re invece le piaceva un po’ meno: era vestito come un uomo qualunque, appena con nastro a tracolla che non voleva dir nulla, e soprattutto le sembrava troppo vecchio, con quei capelli a spazzola,

³⁸ “[Il casolare dei Zef] era una delle solite baite di alta montagna della cui povertà e primitività, senz’averle viste, si ha difficilmente l’idea: colla parte inferiore costituita da muretti a secco, la superiore in tronchi d’abete, i tetto aguzzo e sporgente” [“The Zef’s house was a typical mountain cabin. It was difficult to imagine its poverty and primitiveness without having seen it. The back part of the cabin was built with dry wall, the front, the front with pine logs; the roof jutted upward into a sharp point”] (*MZ* 85).

³⁹ The passage reads: “Raffigurava un giovane dai capelli biondi lunghi che gli toccavano quasi le spalle; era vestito di velluto nero e portava un gran cappello piumato. Egli teneva per la vita una fanciulla bella come un angelo, coi capelli lunghi ricci per le spalle anch’essa, vestita di raso celeste, così stupendamente come Mariutine non aveva mai visto, e si chinava su di lei per dirle qualche cosa. La fanciulla del quadro però non pareva contenta. Chinava la testa con aria perplessa e malinconica. Che mai le diceva il giovane dal grande cappello piumato? ... Perché era così triste la bella fanciulla?” [“It depicted a young man with long blond hair, almost reaching his shoulders; he was dressed in black velvet and he wore a large, feathered hat. He held a young girl by the waist and was leaning over her as if to tell her something. She was beautiful, like an angel, with long, curly hair that also touched her shoulders and dressed in pale blue satin—Mariutine had never seen anything so spectacular. The girl in the painting did not seem happy, though. She lowered her head with an attitude of perplexity and melancholy. What could the boy be saying to her? ... Why was the beautiful girl so sad?”] (121).

con quei baffoni. Ma forse si poteva veder male perché troppo lontano dalla luce.
Peccato!

On either side of the painting were photographs of the king and queen. The queen wore a sparkling tiara on her head and six strings of pearls, each pearl seemed as big as a hazlenut. Mariutine thought they were beautiful. She did not care for the king as much: he was dressed like every other man, just with a useless ribbon around his neck. Mostly, he seemed too old to Mariutine, with his combed hair and that mustache. But maybe she could not see well because she was too far from the light. What a shame! (*MZ* 121).

The ambiguity surrounding the photographs appears intentional: on the one hand, the king and queen may be interpreted figuratively, like the painting portraying the two lovers, it is a work of art open to interpretation and perhaps relying on folklore and myth in the creation of a visual narrative. On the other hand, the photographs may offer insight into a distant political framework, referencing the historical figures of Italian royalty. The shift from painting to photograph is also remarkable: while the former elicits allegorical interpretations, the latter appeals more to historical documentation. In either case, what Mariutine offers is quite clearly an interpretation of the images, imbued with her own sentiments and values and subject to her point-of-view (“Ma forse si poteva veder male perché troppo lontano dalla luce”). It is notable that she perceives the queen in a positive light, worthy of her adornments, while she looks upon the king with distrust. Even with the decadence of his appearance and his obvious ranking, Mariutine fails to believe in his authority, labeling him as “un uomo qualunque.” If we are to read the photographs as a historical reference, delineating a distant and subsequently limited socio-political framework for the novel, then we might also gain insight as to how historical

documentation presents a parallel narrative rather than a definitive reality. Like the portrait of the peasant offered by *strapaese*, an example of fascist virility and patriarchal values, the photographs of the king and queen offer an inverse caricature of political realities, viewed from the perspective of a marginalized peasant girl. Drigo's decision to narrate this one possible historical reference through Mariutine's understanding is also telling: not only does it imply parallel narrative strategies in animating both historical and fictional events, but it also privileges, once again, the dominant perspective of Mariutine, subverting the dominant (masculine) gaze at the foundation of fascist discourse and *strapaese* aesthetics.

Geographical, as well as politico-ideological, isolation are amplified in the case of Mariutine whose abuse is undocumented and without recourse. After being repeatedly raped by her uncle, Mariutine despairs in solitude: "Sola sulla montagna con lui. Gridare, fuggire? Chi l'avrebbe udita? Chi l'avrebbe soccorsa?... Dove andare?... Dove, dove, dove trovare asilo o pietà?" ["Alone on the mountain. With him. Scream, run away? Who would have heard her? Who would help her?... Where could she go? Where, where, where, to find refuge or pity?"] (160). Social and political marginalization is manifest semantically in Drigo's use of silence to characterize the "Bosco Tagliato." The setting becomes a powerful character in its own right, qualified repeatedly by silence and austerity. The silence of the mountain not only energizes the atmosphere created in the text, but also suggests a correlation between the geographical marginalization of the peasant population that resides there and their exclusion from national political and cultural discourses. Mariutine acknowledges the connection between silence, solitude, and isolation one evening as she lays awake in the Zefs' remote cabin:

Talvolta, di sera, quando Barbe Zef e Rosùte dormivano ed ella indugiava in cucina ad agucchiare, le balenava improvvisa la sensazione della solitudine

assoluta, del silenzio così profondo e vuoto che dava l'angoscia. Allora levava gli occhi dal lavoro, e tendeva l'orecchio ad ascoltare. Nulla... Neppure il grido delle civette. Neppure il vento... Nulla.

Once in a while, at night, when Barbe Zef and Rosute were sleeping and she would pass time sewing in the kitchen, a feeling of absolute solitude, of profound silence and agonizing emptiness, would suddenly flash over her. She would look up from her work, strain her ears and listen. Nothing... not even the screech of a crow. Not even the wind... Nothing. (98)

Mariutine's lack of resources accentuates her desperation, but it also alludes to her absolute marginalization: the Zefs (and the sub-population that they represent), located at the very margins of society remain undocumented and unheard. Displacement from contemporary society and culture is most profoundly felt at the moment of Barbe Zef's death. Pausing briefly to pity her uncle before lowering the ax, Mariutine is the only witness to his final demise: "Non un grido: solo un fiotto di sangue" [No scream: only a stream of blood"] (188). This final image, constituting the last lines of the novel and depicting Barbe Zef bleeding in silence, offers no resolution; rather, the reader is left with similar sensations of despair. Drigo's conclusion, in many ways, adheres to her conviction to represent only the human condition—even Barbe Zef, who victimized and was victim, is pitiable in his silent death. Drigo, in concluding with the murder of Barbe Zef at the hands of Mariutine, however, celebrates an exceptional act of female agency and aggression that might later be recognized as a feminist act of resistance to the oppressive socio-political ideologies that conspired to exploit the protagonist.

Depictions of the land corroborate Drigo's creation of a solitary world beyond the limits of modernization. In the place of a picturesque vision of a tranquil and simplified rural

landscape, Drigo presents the untamed areas of the Friuli-Veneto as violent, devastating, and dramatic:

È raro che la montagna offra un'immagine di serenità: più spesso i suoi aspetti offrono una visione di violenza e di angoscia, come un pietrificato tormento, il dramma delle forme [...] Il suo silenzio ha il senso grandioso e disumano della solitudine di cui è figlio; la sua solitudine è così austera e senza moto, che spaura l'anima che l'interroga assai più della mobile immensità del mare.

Rarely does the mountain present a picture of serenity: more often, its features offer a vision of violence and anguish, like agony petrified, a tragedy of forms... Its silence carries with it the vast and savage sense of solitude from which it was born; a solitude so severe and unwavering as to be more frightening to an interrogative soul than the unstable immensity of the ocean. (MZ 92)

Far from a picturesque vision of pastoral settings, the severity of the setting complements the desperation of the characters, further isolating them (both geographically and ideologically) from the modern world. While the narrative alludes to the advances of modernity beyond the diegetic realm (the railroad that ends well before the arrival home for Pieri and the Zefs, the deforestation of the *ceppaia* and the demand for Barbe Zef's coal, the external affairs of the Agnul family and peasants of a greater socio-economic status, and the marvels of a distant and promising 'America'), the community remains ideologically isolated from the advents of the outside world and the progression of historical time. As Mariutine observes in the novel:

Nelle città, nei villaggi, nei luoghi abitati, la vita varia e corre; l'aspetto delle cose può trasformarsi da un mese all'altro; l'uomo fabbrica case, getta ponti, apre strade; edifica e distrugge; la gente parte e ne arriva di nuova; le impressioni si

sovrappongono alle impressioni. Ma il ritmo della vita della montagna è così lento ed uguale, che nello sguardo umano le sue immagini si fissano in marmorea immobilità. [...] Mariutine sa che potrà andare, tornare, rimanere assente metà della sua vita, e al ritorno troverà tutto senza mutamento.

In cities and villages, in inhabited places where life ebbs and flows, appearances can change from one month to another. Man constructs houses, erects bridges, lays roads; he builds and he destroys. People leave and new ones arrive; one impression overlays another. But, the rhythm of life in the country is so slow and even that its images cement with the fixity of marble in the human imagination.

...Mariutine knows she could come or go, stay away for half of her life, and upon returning she would find everything unchanged. (82-83)

This passage evidences a distinct distance between the passage of a linear, historical time, revealing in its place a folkloric interpretations of temporality.⁴⁰

Folkloric time, interpreted through the lens of *strapaese*, is linked to the preservation of Italian heritage and traditional values, safeguarding the simplicity of peasant culture (and a latent Italian spirit) against the influence of hyper-intellectualism and urbanization. Per its own proclamation, *strapaese* defended the cultural and, implicitly, moral character of Italians:

“Strapaese è stato fatto apposta per difendere a spada tratta il carattere rurale e paesano della gente italiana; vale a dire, oltreché l’espressione più genuina e schietta della razza, l’ambiente, il clima e la mentalità ove sono custodite, per istinto e per amore, le più pure tradizioni nostre”

[“Strapaese was founded with the intention to forcefully defend the rural, pastoral character of

⁴⁰ See Bahktin’s discussion of the folkloric chronotope in “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination*, esp. pp. 146-51. Lucia Re examines the significance of folkloric time versus historical time in realist and neorealist narrative in *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement*. See especially pp. 36-49.

the Italian people; that is to say, in addition to the candid, genuine expression of the race, the environment, the climate and the mentality that protects with instinct and love the purest of our traditions”] (76). Parallels between the dangers of modernization and a loss of desirable values were illustrated in discourses on emigration, denigrated culturally through *strapaese* and condemned politically in response to fascist Italy’s demographic problem.⁴¹ Drigo touches upon the issue in two episodes of the novel: in the explicit situation of Pieri and, indirectly, in the sub-narrative explicating the absence of Mariutine’s father. Pieri anticipates eagerly his departure for South America and the promise of a better future. The experience of Barbe Zef, and, subsequently, of Mariutine’s father counters Pieri’s optimism with evidence of a tragic past and a failed attempt to find fortune. Mariutine’s father mysteriously died while abroad with his brother, and Barbe returned with a scar across his face, leaving him with a perennial (and grotesque) expression of laughter.⁴² The predominant absence of men— Mariutine’s obvious lack of a father and the displaced promise of a husband in Pieri—in itself speaks against the patriarchal models that served as a platform for the ideals of both *strapaese* and fascism. By eliminating the father/husband, providing the counterpart to the Duce’s artist/leader in the private sphere, Drigo decomposes fascist patrilineal hierarchies. Though Mariutine is still subject to male domination, the authority of the male gaze is deconstructed rhetorically by privileging the point-of-view of

⁴¹ Mussolini refers to this problem repeatedly in his *Discorso dell’ascensione* and its potential adverse effects on the future of the nation.

⁴² “Una cicatrice gli tagliava il sopraciglio e la palpebra d’un occhio costringendolo a strizzarlo in modo che pareva sempre che ridesse: un ricordo dell’America—aveva detto—d’una sera in cui era un po’ *bevuto*, dove però non le aveva date, ma prese: la sua fedina criminale era pulita” [“A scar slashed through the lid and brow of one of his eyes, forcing him to squint in such a way that he always seemed to be laughing. A souvenir from America, he said, from a night when he drank a little; when he did not throw any punches but he caught a few. His criminal record was clean”] (*MZ* 70).

the female protagonist and symbolically in the erasure of male authority in the novel through the realities of emigration.

The vision of the peasantry offered in *Maria Zef* does not elucidate a people unaffected by urbanization, industrialization, and modernization; nor does it cling to traditional values and a simpler way of life; rather, it depicts a population forgotten by politics and history. Semantically, the historical marginalization of the group is presented in the opposition between silence and song.⁴³ Silence and isolation—presenting symbolic and socio-ideological distance from modern culture—sharply contrasts the idyllic imagery and allegory inherent to the folkloric, provincial songs presented in dialect. The most obvious example of the dialogue between dialect and literary Italian language, and between the use of song and silence, is found in the episode in which Mariutine and Pieri sing together. The song, representative of folkloric tradition specific to the socio-cultural microcosm in which Pieri and Mariutine are entrenched, presents an idealized vision life on the mountain and a romantic depiction of young love:

Lùs la lune, criche l'albe
Jeve sù il contadin,
E i ucei par chès charandis
Fan balzà il mio curisin.
Va pel bosch, pa la montagne
Russignùl co l'è in amôr,
E s'al chate la compagne
I confide il so dolor
The light is shining, the sun is rising

⁴³ Azzolini examines this opposition in “Il silenzio del Bosco Tagliato,” see p. 16.

The peasant awakes
The birds in the hedges
Make my heart dance
Into the woods, up the mountain
He sings like a nightingale when he is love
and if he finds his companion
He will confess his heartache to her. (104-5)

While singing, Mariutine reflects on the moment, thinking to herself: “C’era qualche cosa di toccante nelle parole e nel motivo di quel canto, qualche cosa di malinconico e di profondo nelle note finali di ogni frase, lunghe e tenute. Le voci giovanili svanivano nell’aria senza che nessuna eco rispondesse, eppure il cielo senza sorriso, e la natura intorno, arida ostile e senza dolcezza, parevano pieni del loro sentimento” [“There was something touching in the song’s theme and the words; something melancholy and profound in the final notes of each verse, long and drawn out. The youthful voices vanished on the air without an echo in response; and, yet, the unforgiving sky, the nature around them, hostile and callous, seemed to absorb their sentiment”] (105). The song seems to correspond, in some ways, the later depiction of the lovers in the painting, playing upon the innocent stings of young love that contrast painfully what is to become of Mariutine. The longer version of the song refers explicitly to betrothals, marriage, and, implicitly, the protagonist: “Cussi anche Mariutine / Fin ch’a l’è di maridà” [“And even Mariutine / As long as she is worthy of marriage”].⁴⁴ These lyrics, associating more directly the peasant culture of song with the story of the protagonist, is excluded in Drigo’s text; yet, the author’s decision to include a song in dialect that recounts an idyllic vision of young love in the mountains seems deliberate.

⁴⁴ See Luigi Manzi, *Giuseppe Ricciardi e le sue lettere inedite sul risorgimento italiano*. pp. 354-57

While the song represents an imaginary vision of what should have been, the silence of the mountain and its inhabitants depict a dramatically different reality in which the suffering and destitution of the Zef is underscored, yet remains unacknowledged.

If the silence of the “Bosco Tagliato” can be read as a ‘language’ of the subordinate (that is, the historical absence of a certain group of voices) in *Maria Zef*, then it is particularly representative of the women in the novel.⁴⁵ Austere silence, solitude, and suffering are experienced through women in the novel and seemingly passed down through generations from Catine to Mariutine. Traditionally negative attributes of silence and withdrawal are refigured in the character of Catine to represent maternal affection and acceptance. Catine’s character is associated with internal anguish and icy silence: “Se ogni creatura umana ha la sua essenza speciale, il suo modo di essere profondo, che determina intorno ad essa una speciale atmosfera, l’atmosfera di Catine era di tristezza, di disagio, quasi di gelida angoscia” [“If every human being has a unique essence, its own profound way of being that creates a special atmosphere around it, Catine’s atmosphere was one of sadness, discomfort, of frigid affliction”] (MZ 96). Yet, these are the aspects of her character, criticized by outsiders, that are most adored by her daughters: “non in loro, che attraverso il silenzio e l’asprezza delle rade parole materne, sentivano l’appassionato amore, la vigilanza di ogni istante, la sollecitudine gelosa in cui tremava quasi un fremito di paura; non in loro!...Ma negli altri, povera *mâri*, negli altri [...] ella produceva senza sua colpa questa impressione...” [“not to them, who sensed in her silence and in the harsh, rare maternal word the fierceness of her love, watchfulness over each moment, a

⁴⁵ For feminist interpretations of silence, or the absence of voice, as a metaphor for women’s historical marginalization and, subsequently, as a language of resistance, see: *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*, Shena Malhotra and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2013); *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. pp. 524-6. De Lauretis, *Figures of Resistance*.

painstaking concern quivering with fear. Not to them! But, to everyone else—poor mother, not for any fault of her own—she gave this impression to everyone else”] (96). Even after her death, the quintessence of Catine, and the illustrations of her maternal love, are captured in silence. Silence, as an indicator of maternal love, characterizes not only Catine, but also the “Bosco Tagliato” and its paradoxically comforting and disquieting solitude. Silence elicits a metaphysical connection between mother and daughter that transcends Catine’s death and illuminates Mariutine’s fatalistic future. Mariutine’s reaction to her mother’s death is forestalled until she reaches the “Bosco Tagliato” during her return to the family cabin at the height of the mountain. At one point in the journey, the traveling party comes across a grove of stumps (*la ceppaia*), testimony to distant and industrious civilization. The Zef family lives tellingly beyond the *ceppaia*, not only on the outskirts of civilization but past even its most marginal peripheries.

The *ceppaia* itself, rather than invoking picturesque images of a beautiful but wild landscape, is tragic and grotesque: “Di sera, la sinistra ceppaia sembrava un’adunata di nani difformi emergenti a mezzo petto dalla terra, immobili, eppure come tormentati da un tragico vento; di giorno, il luogo era squallido, di uno squallore malinconico e deserto, battuto atrocemente in pieno sia dal sole che dalla pioggia” [“At night, the grove of stumps looked like a sinister assembly of deformed dwarves rising halfway from the earth, immobilized and tormented by a fatal wind. During the day, it was a dismal place; inculcated with a mournful, deserted squalor and perennially stricken with sun and rain”] (82). Considered from the dominant perspective of the protagonist, however, the austere landscape offers familiar comfort: “Il vuoto atroce della solitudine senza confini non c’è più: la madre lo riempie del suo respiro. [...] qui, *ella*, le viene incontro; la natura ha lo sguardo di lei triste e profondo; il silenzio, la voce della sua voce. Qui nulla cambierà... Qui la madre sarà eternamente...” [“The excruciating emptiness

of a solitude without limits vanished: her mother filled it with breath... here, she met her; the landscape has her look of profound sadness; the silence, the voice of her voice. Here nothing will change... Here her mother will exist eternally”] (84). Unable to grieve the death of her mother until this moment, Mariutine welcomes this unorthodox nurture. Drigo’s characterization of the landscape in *Maria Zef* and its exclusion from historical time and space (both literally and figuratively) lends to the “Bosco Tagliato” and the mountain sensations of fantasy and folklore. Contradictory to the folklorization of picturesque lands in the imagination of the *strapaesani*, this land is predominantly envisioned through the eyes of Mariutine (rather than conquered by a dominant male gaze) and embodies ‘feminine’ qualities that are contradictory to the fascist prototype. Unlike the fertile and prolific lands of fascist and *Strapaese* imagery—associated with the feminine and thus manipulated and shaped by male domination—the wild landscape in Drigo’s novel is barren and silent, triggering in Mariutine nostalgia for an unorthodox maternity. Seeing the *ceppaia* and returning to the “Bosco Tagliato”

significava l’improvviso risvegliarsi di qualche cosa che pareva impietrito e sigillato per sempre, il trasalire dell’anima al ritorno d’un’immagine a lungo invano invocata [...] ora, ecco, senza chiamarla, la madre le veniva incontro: *ella*, come le era rimasta nella memoria inconsapevolmente dai giorni dell’infanzia: svelta e diritta, coi lucidi capelli neri, portando Rosùte piccina tra le braccia. Avanzava tra gli sterpi in silenzio, e la guardava. [...] Poi più tardi... quando?...— forse c’è un distacco di anni tra l’una e l’altra immagine—*ella* è seduta laggiù su quel tronco appena abbattuto [...] già coi capelli meno neri, già curva e triste.... suddenly, it awoke in her something that seemed to have been petrified, forever sealed off; the startling return of an image that for so long had been invoked in

vain[...] now, here she was, without being called, her mother came to her. It was *her*, as she had remained in her memory, unconsciously, since the days of her childhood: slim and straight with smooth black hair, carrying little Rosùte in her arms. She moved through the wood in silence, watching. [...] Then, later... when?...—there might have been a distance of years between the two images— *she* was sitting on the trunk of a newly fallen tree [...] her hair already fading, already slumped and sad... (82) [original italics]

The atmosphere of sadness, austerity, and anguish represents a maternal embrace. Rather than a subdued but beautiful landscape, Drigo creates in her novel a site in which an active and complex relationship between mother and daughter unfolds. The distance and silence separating the “Bosco Tagliato” and Mariutine from the ‘civilized’ world seems to preserve a female reciprocity in isolation from outsiders while also relegating Mariutine to a fate of suffering and subordination that parallels her the experience of her mother.

* * *

In her letters and personal writing, Drigo reiterates her distaste for the “military” pursuits of feminism:

No: io non sono femminista. Non lo sono, se per esserlo si intende fare qualcosa di pratico, di tangibile; parlare, scrivere, deliberatamente in un dato tempo, a un determinato scopo; appartenere a un clan: in una parola *militare*. Non ho mai fatto nulla di tutto questo, e difficilmente lo saprei fare. Quel sentimento di simpatia e di solidarietà che intravedete nei miei racconti è semplicemente *umanità* (forse più particolarmente rivolta alla donna perchè la condizione, e il dolore, della

donna mi toccano di più), ma rimasto sempre allo stato di sentimento, ed espresso soltanto, quando l'occasione mi si presenta, anonimamente in modesti aiuti morali e materiali. Opera senza metodo, sporadica, insufficiente; e quindi quasi inutile.

No: I am not a feminist. I am not a feminist if being one means doing something practical, tangible; deliberately speaking and writing at a given time, with a given goal; belonging to a clan: in a word, *military*. I have never taken part in any of that, and I would struggle to know what to do. The sentiments, sympathy and solidarity that you identify in my stories is simply *humanity* (perhaps more readily directed at women because the condition and the pain of women move me more), but always on a sentimental level; and only expressed anonymously as a modest, moral and physical aid, when the situation arises. [original italics]⁴⁶

The human condition surfaces as the thread unifying the various thematic strands of her work. Yet, in *Maria Zef* (as well as in *Fine d'anno* and in many of her short stories) Drigo scrutinizes the violence and injustice that color contemporary female experience. In *Maria Zef*, the “chain of destiny” that condemns Mariutine to the fate of her mother, is symbolically undone when she murders her uncle by cutting off his head with an ax. This extremely powerful act of inverting male aggression unto itself marks Mariutine’s final liberation from the violence and oppression of her situation, as well as deconstructing allegorically the patriarchal system of power and authority to which she is systematically subjected.

Though Drigo unites the characters of her prose under the umbrella of a common destiny and humanity, her stories and novels shed light on the particular hardship of women and the

⁴⁶ Cited in Azzolini, p. 12. Previously published in “Patria e mondo nelle lettere di Paola Drigo a Bernard Berenson” in *Paola Drigo. Settant'anni dopo*, Beatrice Bartolomeo and Patrizia Zambon, eds. (Pisa-Rome: Gabrizio Serra, 2009). pp. 188-92.

violence perpetrated against them. Re-readings of Drigo's text illuminate a social imperative that guides her narrative choices, shedding light on figures that have been historically under-represented. In a preliminary draft of the preface to *La signorina Anna*, Drigo asserts:

Queste donne (*buone*) ... Non le ho cercate, ma osservando intorno a me la vita ho veduto anche queste, e mi hanno interessato infinitamente più delle altre. Le altre hanno infinito numero di artisti a loro disposizione per dipingerle per trascriverle per fotografarle, per cinematografarle per metterle in scena e il loro... Queste di questo volume vivono generalmente nell'ombra e bisogna andarle a cercare. A me piace camminare. Certo sono meno divertenti. Ma la vita non ha sempre un sapore pochadesco ma tragico. Nessuna di queste novelle è completamente [*inventata*], ossia ...ognuna di esse ha uno spunto, o un punto di partenza anche lontanissimo nella verità [...].

These women (*good women*)... I did not make them up. Rather, observing life around me, I saw them, too, and I found them infinitely more interesting than the others. Other women have an infinite number of artists at their disposition, to paint them, to write about them, to photograph them, to film them, to put them in center stage... The women in this volume usually live in the shadows; you have to go looking for them. And I like to walk. They are, of course, less entertaining. But life does not always have this satirical yet tragic flavor to it. Not one of these stories is entirely [*made up*]; that is each one has a spark, a distant point of departure rooted in reality.⁴⁷ [*original italics*]

⁴⁷ Published in *Appunti della psicologia femminile italiana* in Sibilla Aleramo, *La donna e il femminismo*. Ed. Bruna Conti. The final edit of this passage read: "Le creature che s'incontrano qui, non sono quelle che piacciono generalmente al pubblico che dedica qualche ora alla

This passage, alluding to Drigo's role as an author/observer in the vein of Verga, articulates the author's intention to represent figures that have been previously overlooked in literature. While the language and style of Drigo's prose evade political engagement and feminist activism, the conspicuous absence of politics in her descriptions of peasant life (or life on the margins of society), as well as her consistent discussion of female experience, is in fact, a form of political engagement.

cosidetta letteratura amena. Sorelle di altre alle quali diedi in passato amore e pietà, sono modeste creature senza splendore, a cui pochi o nessuno presta attenzione, figure in penombra, vestite solamente della loro sincerità e del loro dolore. Mi hanno interessato infinitamente più di quelle che posseggono brillante scorta di paggi e cavalieri, posto eminente sulla scena dell'arte e della vita, predilezione di pubblico ricco e generoso. Ho vissuto, creandole, veramente con loro, e il raccontarne le vicende, il fissare le linee toccanti o tragiche del loro destino, mi è costato talvolta vera sofferenza" ["The creatures that you encounter here are not usually agreeable to audiences that dedicate an hour or two to the so-called literature for pleasure. Sisters of those women who I granted love and pity in the past, these are modest creatures without beauty, to whom few or none dedicate much attention; figures in semi-darkness, usually clothed by sincerity and by pain. I found them infinitely more interesting than those women who have scores of valets and gentlemen, celebrated in art and in life, a predilection for rich, generous audiences. Creating them, I truly lived with them; and recounting their circumstances, fixing the trajectories of their destinies, touching and tragic, at times caused me real suffering"]. (7 Prefazio, *La Signorina Anna*)

CHAPTER THREE

Toward a Feminist Narrative Voice: Milena Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio*¹

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which Milani uses the female body, and the concept of a plural female sexuality, as figures of female self-questioning, creating in *La ragazza di nome Giulio* a fundamentally female textual identity. Milani confronts the complexity of female identity and the relationship between sexuality and violence, motivated by difference, within an extreme patriarchal society, such as fascist Italy, while putting into question accepted social institutions of gender, nationality and family. Using the figure of the body as her principal symbolic and metaphorical instrument, Milani relates the physical discomfort associated with a stifled female existence in fascist Italy; she articulates the intricate and contradictory composition of the female self in that era, while expressing, through her writing, the difficulty inherent to both female self-identification and to formulating female narratives of the self. Before turning to an analysis of the text itself, I will outline some of the methodological and theoretical issues that are essential to my reading: the question of gendered language, of the female body, and of sexuality. Milani's novel not only reveals the psychological and physical hardship that women endured during Fascism in Italy—made explicit in Jules' thwarted sexual coming-of-age and in her final, self-imposed erasure—but it also illuminates certain discursive strategies that later generations of women were able to employ in creating narratives of female selfhood. Writing in the early 1960s, Milani critiques fascist narrative of femininity whose influence in Italian culture extended well beyond the fall of the regime. Building upon the work of her

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published with the title, "Milena Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio*: A Forgotten Feminist Novel" in *MLN* 125.1 (January 2010).

predecessors, who acted as pioneers for women's writing practices in Italy, Milani's novel provides a link between them and the new feminist writing and thought that emerged after 1968. In her retrospective novelistic critique of fascism's gender practices, Milani is able to manipulate form and content to produce a textual imaginary that is non-linear and driven by memory, opposing narrative styles that sought to contain and define women's histories and stories within a patriarchal framework.

Milani, born in 1917 in Savona, was the daughter of working-class parents. The author's formative years, as an adolescent during the rise of fascism, shared a number of contextual similarities with the protagonist of *La ragazza di nome Giulio*. Milani, unlike the indifferent and aloof character Jules in her novel, was consistently engaged in cultural and intellectual production in Italy. At the youthful age of nineteen, the writer/painter served as "littrice per la poesia" in San Remo in 1941 and went on to act as a supplemental editor for an issue of *Roma fascista* dedicated to young women in German universities.² Milani's intellectual contributions as a writer and editor, taking her from Savona to Rome and eventually to Milan, Venice, and Paris, shifted radically during the 1940s, however, as she began to frequent intellectual groups in Rome that stood in opposition to the regime.³ Forced to leave Rome in 1943, Milani settled in Venice (a city that figures prominently in *Giulio*). In 1964, Milani released *Giulio* for the first time and the novel, along with its author, found itself at the center of a clamorous trial for having "gravely

² See Serri, Mirella, *I redenti: gli intellettuali che vissero due volte, 1938-1948* (Milan: Corbaccio, 2005), pp. 78-9.

³ See Barcella, Gianfranco, *Invito alla lettura di Milena Milani* (Empoli: Ibiskos, 2008); and Lorenza Rossi, *Milena Milani: Una vita in collage* (Turin: Seneca Edizioni, 2012). Rossi's biographical work focuses primarily on Milani's work as a painter but does offer insight, through interviews with Milani, into her life, the intellectual trajectory of the author, and her historic encounters with other important cultural figures, like Giuseppe Ungaretti, Corrado Alvaro, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.

offended the common sense of decency.” Although other authors, including Alberto Moravia and Pier Paolo Pasolini, had been denounced, the case was the first in Italy in which an author, male or female, was publicly condemned.⁴ In the course of the trial, the printing plates for *La ragazza di nome Giulio* were destroyed and Milena Milani, abandoned by her editor, was labeled a pornographer. After winning the appeals case, the novel was re-released in 1968 to enjoy several editions and ample success in intellectual and public circles.⁵ *La ragazza di nome Giulio* was translated into several languages, gained the attention of noted intellectuals of the period, including celebrated French feminist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, and was adapted into a film of the same title, which officially represented Italy at the Berlin Film Festival in 1970. However, the significance of the novel, as the earliest pioneering feminist assessment of female identity and sexual difference in fascist Italy, has yet to be fully explored and acknowledged: in fact, the novel and its author seem to have been largely forgotten.

For Milani the trial marked the most significant in a series of public confrontations resulting from her unwillingness to conform to the literary trends of the moment and her ability to anticipate the times.⁶ *La ragazza di nome Giulio*, recounting the coming-of-age in fascist Italy of a girl, Jules, is a concrete example of Milani’s progressive voice--a voice that lucidly articulates the simultaneous banality and significance of everyday experiences and objects, and

⁴ Milani mentions both of these authors in an interview conducted by Mario Apice and published in 1982.

⁵ Super Poket Longanesi, Milan 1972 and 1975; Rusconi, Milan 1979; Newton Compton Editori, Rome 1994; “Premio Centro Culturale Arte Scienza”; “La Pisanelliana,” Florence 1994; “Premio Gold Market”; “Rosa d’Argento alla popolarità e al successo,” Cortina d’Ampezzo 1994; Edizioni ES, Milan 2001.

⁶ For a thorough account of Milani’s artistic career in Italy and the importance of her hometown, Albisola near Savona, Italy, in her painting, see Simona Poggi, *Milena Milani, Albisola amore* (Milan: Viennepierro, 2005).

interweaves the intricate historical and philosophical questions on the margins of individual observations and insights. In the narrative, the protagonist goes by Jules, named for her foreign father; however, Milani changes the name to its Italian equivalent in the novel's title. In order to highlight the issue of gender identity, *Giulio* narrates Jules's experience in the first-person, tracing her story from pre-adolescence to early adulthood, during the fall of fascism in Italy. The narrative is composed of three parts that span across time and space, ordered only in the narrator's memory as the recollection and repetition of significant events. Like Milani's previous protagonists, Jules, as we shall see, reclaims her corporality both as a form of liberation, and as a means of uttering a desperate and often violent cry for female emancipation.⁷

Milani's interpretation of female experience in *Giulio* and of the way female sexuality is shaped by a misogynistic paradigm, anticipates feminist ideas later expressed beginning with the Women's Movement in Italy in the 1970s, as well as highlighting (sexual) difference as an essential element in human experience.⁸ *Giulio* also marks a shift in female authorship in Italy, from the self-determined, independent outlook of women writers, such as Sibilla Aleramo, Matilde Serao, and even Paola Drigo, during the first part of the twentieth century, to the renewed coming-together of women during the later 1960s, after a long hiatus, and the establishment of a collaborative movement.⁹ Building on her historic feminist predecessors'

⁷ Jules is a descendent of Anna Drei from *Storia di Anna Drei* (1947), and she reappears in Mara from *La rossa di via Tadino* (1979), with what Neria De Giovanni so aptly describes as "un cosciente percorso di autoanalisi memoriale" that allows each protagonist to realize an autonomous female identity by way of her own corporality (or female sexuality) (125).

⁸ See De Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain," *The Essential Difference*, eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994) 1-39.

⁹ I am referring specifically to authors such as Anna Banti, Elsa Morante and Natalia Ginzburg who attributed very little of their intellectual success to their experience as women, preferring to

thorough examination of the private realm of female thought and experience, Milani anticipates the idea that “the personal is political” and undermines the authority of patriarchal preconceptions of history, sexuality and narrative. The text provides, in narrative form, a necessary analysis for women in 1960s Italy, of the recent fascist past, illuminating the limitations constructed around sexuality and gender roles in contemporary Italian society, rooted in fascism, and laying a foundation for the subversive movements of 1968, as well as the later feminist movement. Milani revolts not only against the subservient role of women during fascism (excluded from politics and confined to the private realm), but also implicitly against the return of the fascist model of women during Italy’s economic boom and the author’s immediate present, setting a precedent for Italy’s most progressive female voices.¹⁰ Milani’s analysis of the body and female sexuality also arguably influenced the leaders of the Italian feminist revolution. In *Sputiamo su Hegel: La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale*, Carla Lonzi advocated “autocoscienza femminile,” which requires a reappropriation of the knowledge of natural events (menstruation, birth, copulation) that have been sanitized and psychoanalyzed in male terms. The “donna vaginale,” in accepting a passive sexual role, accepts the male model of sexuality, fostering ideologies of patriarchal virility and supporting the myth of the all powerful phallus;

believe that literary skill was unilateral, although their work has been interpreted differently by feminist literary critics and readers. For an interesting analysis of the “female voice” in Morante, see Lucia Re, “Utopian Longing and the Constraints of Racial and Sexual Difference in Elsa Morante’s *La Storia*,” *Italica* 70.3 (1993): 361-75; on Ginzburg, see Rebecca West’s introduction in *Natalia Ginzburg, Voice of the Twentieth Century*, eds. A. M. Jeannet and G. Sanguinetti Katz (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000). For a brief history of the Women’s Movement in Italy, see Gabriella Parca, *L’avventurosa storia del femminismo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1976).

¹⁰ In addition to the many theatrical and literary works of Dacia Maraini, notable Italian feminist authors include Luisa Passerini, who narrates the female experience during 1968 and in the initial stages of the women’s movement in *Autoritratto di gruppo* (Florence: Giunti, 1988), and Franca Rame, actress and author, who protests the condition of women during the economic fluctuations following the Second World War and after the sexual revolution, accompanying student movements in 1968, in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (Milan: La Comune, 1978).

whereas the “*donna clitoridea*” achieves consciousness by reclaiming possession of her body, her independently pleasure-giving organ, the clitoris, and thus her physical and symbolic capacity for (sexual) autonomy.

* * *

In her discussion of sexual difference Adriana Cavarero deconstructs the apparent neutrality of the universal subject “I” in language: the sexually neutral “I” that is the subject of rational, philosophical discourse is actually sexed, or rather “gendered.” While the term “man” is purported to encompass both female and male subjects, as in the phrase “man is mortal,” “woman” refers customarily only to a single sex. The perceived subject “I,” like the “general” term “man,” referring to the whole of the human race, is situated within the male economy of language. The composition of a sexed subject would thus logically require an additional gender component; that is, man + masculine gender = man, while man + feminine gender = woman (189-94). Since both language and gender are founded through and within male parameters, woman is “incapable” of being a linguistic subject in and of herself. Her assigned “I” is, in essence, male-determined. As Cavarero observes, “she does not represent herself *in* language, but rather accepts with language the representations of her produced by man. And so woman speaks and thinks, speaks herself and thinks herself, but not beginning from herself” (197). Our “mother tongue” is, in fact, a “father tongue” incapable of representing a female conception of self in its entirety. The universalization of language established man’s specificity as a speaking

being, thus inaugurating the male “I” as a purported “neutral” which contains the other sex (204).¹¹

How, then, does woman become subject of her own language? The dilemma of language, more specifically, of the inescapable gendering of language, is manifest in the composition of female-authored literature: how can woman create an authentic, female representation of self in a language that excludes her? How can she express herself as subject, not only of her native language, but also as the female subject of written expression? Cavarero maintains that the task of woman, as a speaking subject, is “to speak through language our alienation from language” (198), that is, to speak through language woman’s erasure from patriarchal discourse. Teresa De Lauretis supports Cavarero’s concept, suggesting that women “speak at once ‘the language of men’ and ‘the silence of women’ [. . .] to pursue strategies of discourse that will speak the silence of women in, through, against, over, under, and across the language of men” (243). The female writer’s task, then, is to adopt literary figures that will express her difference. She must relate woman’s exclusion from a traditionally male dialectic in order to establish herself as a rational and articulate speaking subject and adequately represent herself in language.

In terms of sexual difference, the physical body is an appropriate starting point. It is through the figure of the female body that woman can identify difference: not only her biological difference from man, but her difference from the whole of the misogynistic imaginary. In *La ragazza di nome Giulio*, Milani adopts the figure of the female body as a poetic device to speak female experience “in, through and against” patriarchal models of language and literature. Her work prefigures the insights of noted feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti who, in her analysis of the discourse of the body, questions the primacy of language and the language/body opposition

¹¹ On this, see also Patrizia Violi, *L’infinito singolare: considerazioni sulla differenza sessuale nel linguaggio* (Verona: Essedue, 1986).

concluding that the body is never merely biological. The body represents “an inter-face, a threshold [. . .] of material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed” (219). She continues to cite the body as “one’s primary location in the world, one’s primary situation in reality.” Braidotti’s analysis of the body in terms of feminist and literary discourse is useful because it establishes the body as one’s principal connection to reality, the manifestation of a tangible, physical identity, while simultaneously recognizing the body as the locus upon which contradictory realities collide. For Milani, writing about the body does not mean merely writing *from* the body and experiencing its contradictions as a kind of free-flowing female *écriture*. On the contrary, the body for Milani is the site for a complex, lucid reflection on the articulation of identity and sexual difference. In *Giulio*, the body functions as a borderline, or to cite Derek Duncan, a “hiatus between internal and external, [...] a place of passage between separate realms” (372).¹² Duncan’s interpretation of the corporeal is especially relevant to my reading of *Giulio* because it emphasizes more clearly that the body is not only a meeting point for isolated realities, but occupies the space between binaries, simultaneously representing the barriers between oppositional poles and their common relationship. The body, although arguably mutable and movable, is the threshold between internal and external and the foundation for difference, material and perceived.

As we shall see, however, Milani’s novel is not solely concerned with the gendered body as a textual space and a symbolic locus of competing oppositions. Milani’s text is focused specifically on female sexuality. With her adoption of the female body as a differential text about female sexuality, Milani anticipates the fundamental work of revolutionary feminist philosopher

¹² Duncan’s article, although concentrating on a different female author in a different period, provides a thorough analysis of the body as a rhetorical device and its particular relevance in literature (specifically autobiographies) by women: “Corporeal Histories: The Autobiographical Bodies of Luisa Passerini,” *The Modern Language Review* 93 (1998): 370-83.

and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, who espouses the plurality of female sexuality and its substantial role in undermining the authority of patrilineal intellectual ideals. In her essay, “This Sex Which Is Not One,” Irigaray begins her analysis on the premise that female sexuality has always been conceptualized within male parameters.¹³ That is to say, female sexuality is constructed as the passive complement to its male counterpart. Freud, and other psychoanalysts, viewed the opposition between “masculine” clitoral activity and “feminine” vaginal passivity as phases or alternatives in the healthy development of female sexuality. On the contrary, Irigaray, proposes that, within the phallogentric sexual imaginary, by which woman, too, is measured, woman finds no adequate definition. Irigaray’s analysis underscores the opposition between female sexual organs while also stressing the distinction between internal and external body space. Female sexuality is divided between (at least) two sex organs: the “masculine” clitoris (external), and the mysterious “feminine” concealed in the vagina (internal). “*She is neither one nor two,*” and in an economy that claims to number everything in units, her sexual organ, which is not one, is demoted to *none* (Irigaray 26). Due to the plurality or doubleness of her sexual existence, woman is unable to stabilize any autonomous sexual identity within the dominant logic, and her sex organ, condemned as a mere negative space, is perceived as complementary to a more authoritative male sexuality. Woman, resigned to vaginal passivity, becomes the object of a masculine sexual economy. In choosing the female body and female sexuality as rhetorical figures, Milani stresses the connection between the sexual subordination of woman and her

¹³ Originally published in French under the title *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), it has been translated into English under the title, “This Sex Which Is Not One,” *New French Feminisms*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, trans. Claudia Reeder (Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1980) 99-106.

erasure from discourse: at either level, woman is incapable of achieving the independent status of subject.

* * *

In *Giulio*, Milani's protagonist experiences difference in and through her body, made apparent as she contemplates herself in the mirror on several occasions throughout the text: "Lo specchio rifletteva il mio corpo levigato, scuro di sole, dove risaltavano i seni piccoli e bianchi, la striscia di pelle chiara ai fianchi, e quel punto misterioso, soffice e coperto di ricci che era il mio sesso di donna, quella zona di me stessa dove io ero differente." ["The mirror reflected my soft body, tanned from the sun, with two small, white breasts that stood out, a strip of pale skin along my hips, and that mysterious spot, soft and covered with curled hair, my female sex; that place of mine, where I was different"] (267). Jules's perception of self as woman, and inherently as other, is situated specifically in her female sex, the part of her body that establishes her sexual difference. Her difference is marked not only by a clear position of inferiority, but also a lack of understanding. That "mysterious" female organ that lies hidden behind a soft layer of hair has no appropriate definition other than its pronounced contrast to the male sex organ. Jules's physical difference parallels her otherness within a larger patriarchal order, a concept that Milani relates through the use of symbols. In Jules's first explicit heterosexual encounters with Amerigo, the male sex organ is depicted as a "serpente" ("snake") in search of its "nido" ("nest"). The imagery of the snake and the nest propels the same misogynistic sexual imaginary cited by Irigaray: an order in which man is active and woman is passive. Within this imagery, female sexuality has the sole purpose of completing and giving pleasure to an autonomous male sexuality--her female sex is the nurturing home to the restless snake. The symbolic image of the snake as the male sexual

organ, alive and independent, stays with Jules as she continues to explore her own sexuality. Familiar symbols resurface as Jules recalls the image of the “snake,” sketched on walls of the city, in search of a “nest”—her sex visually recreated as an oval with a slash through the middle: “Qualche volta a Senigallia, sulle case, ci sono brutti disegni con un serpente che cerca un nido. Il nido lo fanno come un ovale con il taglio in mezzo e forse è fatto così, ma io quando mi guardo non posso vedere bene, perché sopra ho questa peluria corta e soffice” [“Sometimes in Senigallia there would be vulgar drawings on the walls of houses of a snake looking for its nest. They drew the nest as an ovale with a slash through the middle, and maybe that is what it was like; but when I look at myself, I cannot see very well because it is covered with a short, curly fluff of hair”] (155). Again, Jules’ female sex is shrouded in mystery—hidden internally and contrary to the visible male sex organ. It takes its place within the sexual order as an ambiguous combination of shapes and lines; but even in its ambivalent, symbolic representation, Jules’ female sex is depicted as divided: a contiguous circle, a whole, cut in two by an invasive slash.

Division and difference are inherent even to her exploration of autoeroticism. As she discovers pleasure within an independent expression of her own sexuality, she nonetheless attributes all pleasure-giving features of her body to the male order. “Ho trovato in basso, tra le mie gambe, come un piccolissimo serpente nel mio ovale con il taglio, è una lingua di serpente che sporge, è cosa mia, attaccata a me, anche lui, questo serpentello appena nato che non ricordavo di avere” [“I found it, low and hidden between my legs, like a tiny snake in my oval with a slash; it was the protruding tongue of a snake; he is mine, attached to me, this little snake that was just born, that I did not remember having”] (160). The clitoris, her autonomous, pleasure-giving, sex organ is perceived as her own masculine “little snake” (“lui”) or a “snake’s tongue,” a mutated, inferior version of a superior male sex. Her adolescent “giochi d’amore”

(“love games”) grant her an instant of liberation from a restrictive sexual differentiation: “[...] ero senza elemento ‘corpo,’ non esisteva più, solo correnti fredde e calde mi attraversavano” [“I was without the element ‘body.’ I no longer existed—only hot and cold waves rushing over me”] (161). But even Jules’ final orgasmic liberation is measured from within the confines of phallogentric sexuality—pleasure is perceived as a moment of physical emancipation, an instant of forgetting her body’s difference and the subordinate categorization of that difference in a larger ideological system. Freed of her body, Jules’ is able to experience the sexual sensation, the enjoyment, reserved to men: “Io *sentivo*, finalmente raggiungevo quel desiderato e sconosciuto godimento che Dio ha riservato all’uomo, come unica salvezza” [“I *felt*, I finally achieved that unknown and desirable pleasure that God reserved to men, their only salvation”] {original italics} (162). Her salvation comes with her ability to “possess” herself, to act as simultaneous sexual subject and object: “[...] ho posseduto Jules. Io sono diventata Amerigo, anche Lorenzo” [“I possessed Jules. I became like Amerigo, Lorenzo too”] (161). Paradoxically, her revelry as subject is only possible with a contemporaneous self-subordination. Jules as masculinized subject (*io*) overpowers Jules as feminized object (Jules). Even in her autoerotic explorations Jules’ identity is divided in two, not in the positive sense stipulated by Irigaray, but rather as a form of alienation. Her continual pursuit of (or acquiescence to) sexual encounters is driven by a greater dissatisfaction stemming from the impossibility of “possessing” herself entirely. Masturbation, although making a kind of self-possession possible, provides release only if Jules’ adopts the role of man. However, to embody this role is to further confuse her eventual self-recognition as woman (“Che ragazza sono io se divento uomo?”) [“What kind of a girl am I if I am becoming a man?”] and to succumb to the normative sexual model.

Milani's textual and contextual references to sexuality and symbolism in *Giulio* elicit a more expansive vision of repression, not just in terms of gender and sex, but also at social and political levels during the early to mid 20th century in Italy. The author's decision to narrate Jules at this significant time in Italian history evidences a connection between Jules' individual identity as woman, women's collective identity in fascist Italy and the concept of a supreme national identity. Jules' sexual oppression mirrors the more systematic marginalization of women, experienced in and through the body, both as a collective and as individuals, under the fascist regime in interwar Italy. In Jules' experience, the phallus represents not only the physiological site of a dominant masculine sexuality, but also the allegorical instrument of oppression under the aegis of a totalitarian national policy. Sexual, social and symbolic culminate in Jules' reflection on her acquaintances and her disillusioning spiritual, sexual and educational experiences, all of which coalesce into one frightening mass, forcing her into submission:

Mia madre, Lia, Lorenzo, Amerigo, Serafina, padre Dario, i lontani protagonisti di questa storia, sino ai più recenti, l'amico di Lorenzo, Franco, le ragazze che stavano con me in montagna, le altre compagne di scuola, Camillo con il viso liscio come un fiore, Luciano che entrava nella mia stanza, le conoscenze occasionali, tutta questa folla che appare e scompare se io scuoto il mio cervello, mi sembra confondersi in un essere unico, enorme, spaventoso, che non è uomo o donna, ma forse è più uomo che donna, se distintamente vedo agitarsi, gonfiarsi, protendersi, un volgare, assurdo aggeggio maschile, il phallus degli antichi; quasi esso mi minaccia, mi terrorizza, mi obbliga a coprirmi gli occhi, ad allagare le

gambe e ho schifo, voglia di rimettere [...] sono sperduta nella mia squallida solitudine di ragazza Jules.

My mother, Lia, Lorenzo, Amerigo, Serafina, Father Dario—the distant characters of this story all the way to the more recent ones—Lorenzo’s friend, Franco, the girls who were with me in the mountains, my schoolmates, Camillo with a face as smooth as a flower, Luciano who came into my room, casual acquaintances, this crowd of people that appears and disappears if I shake my head; they seem to blur into a single being, enormous and frightening, not a man or a woman, but maybe more man than woman; if I see clearly, it becomes agitated, swells and stretches out, an absurd, vulgar male contraption, the phallus of antiquity; it is as if it is threatening me, terrorizing me, obligating me to close my eyes and spread my legs, and I am disgusted; I want to vomit ... I am lost in the squalid solitude of the girl Jules. (171)

Milani conjures the distant characters of the novel, evoking not only their role in the narrative, but also the symbolic significance of those roles: Jules’s mother, who remains nameless as a representation of (misguided) maternity; Serafina as a reminder of the socio-economic divergences between women, yet exemplary of the inescapable collectivity of women and female existence; Lorenzo as a constant reminder of Jules’s destiny within the prominent social order; Padre Dario, personifying the stature of religious institutions and spirituality, the obvious opposite of physicality and sexuality; and Lia, Amerigo, and Franco, inexorable souvenirs of a deviant, illegitimate sexuality, representatives of Jules’s rupture with the social and sexual mores of the period. In this single, metatextual moment, Milani establishes a connection between poetic representation, the symbolic sexual order and the socio-political situation of fascist Italy. The

threatening image of the “phallus of antiquity” illustrates a more complete historical oppression. It is a physical representation of fascist aesthetics and virtues of vigor, tenacity, force and power, a device useful in constructing what Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi refers to as the “symbolic patrimony” (110) of fascism focused around an omnipotent male leader.¹⁴ Milani presents the phallus as the iconographic representation of a dominant patriarchal society, founded upon the virtues of war and violence and unified in a single linear depiction of totalitarian power. The phallus, distinctly representative of the extreme, patriarchal structures of fascism, forces Jules to surrender to social ideologies that exclude her, confining her to a suffocating solitude, where individual regresses into outcast. In *Giulio*, political and social oppression is equated to a violent and frightening sexual despotism. Jules experiences social, political and sexual oppression in her body and through her sexuality. The form of the body, in this case, the female body, is, indeed, the “threshold” that Rosi Braidotti speaks of, where very different elements of history, politics, poetics and aesthetics collide, while making significant distinctions between the political, sexual and literary subject and object.

In an attempt to re-establish a progressive social, collective body and to differentiate fascism from the “sensuous consciousness” of Marxism, Mussolini and Fascism accentuated the spiritual aspect of fascist principles and practices, de-valuing the physical body as the locus of material, animal passions. Falasca-Zamponi points out the fascist dimension of anti-materialism

¹⁴ As Falasca-Zamponi states, “[the] possibility of unifying around national symbols ensured the cohesion of otherwise inchoate ‘masses,’ their shaping into a homogeneous political body” (5). Symbolic practices, as well as the cult and myth of the “Duce” as supreme leader, assisted in the spiritualization of fascist politics and aesthetics, which distinguished fascism from contemporaneous movements of Marxism and capitalism. Even post-Risorgimento, the unification of Italy had not genuinely integrated diverse regional identities. Adopting symbolic practices allowed fascism to rally Italian citizens around a unified conception of “Italianity,” civil society and the state. See also Emilio Gentile *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell’Italia fascista* and Spackman, *Fascist virilities*.

(122), which assisted in the degradation of material happiness and the reappropriation of the bourgeoisie as the symbolic antagonist to fascist dogmas. Economic or material happiness, tangentially privileging human needs above the state, suggested laziness and acted in opposition to energetic force and active fascist ideals. Subsequently, fascist principles looked to denigrate materialistic pursuits, focusing on the spirituality inherent to fascism and the construction of the “whole man.” Mussolini and the regime’s antimaterialistic efforts resulted in the effective “abandonment” of the physiological body. The individual’s body, rather than acting as a site for self-identification and physical autonomy, was labeled negatively as the material domain of hedonism and pleasure (Falasca-Zamponi 122). The body was, thus, used as an instrument for distinguishing the master from the masses. Since material needs and pleasures dictated the behavior of the inchoate masses, governing the masses meant governing the body (125). “Il Duce,” the primary symbol and author of fascist policy, became the authoritative subject of the new state, rendering the masses the “object” to be manipulated (8-9). While the leader embodied the vigorous ethos of fascism, the masses were disdained for their female irrationality and sensitivity (8). Hence, the physical body, assigned to the passive, detrimental realm of femininity--originally the personal space of the individual as well as the frontier between individual and collective--was forfeited for the advancement of the political body and the progression of the state.

The divorce of spirituality and physicality emerges in *Giulio* in Jules’ private struggle between body and soul. Her existence is fractured: “Da qualche tempo, in me, si andava accentuando come una frattura tra il mio corpo e la mia anima, ognuno viva di una vita propria, ed era l’anima ad avere la peggio, ad essere soffocata. Il corpo, dopo quei contatti, quegli abbracci, acquistava come una diversa bellezza, [...] più completa” [“For some time, a fracture

between my body and my soul worsened in me, each one lived a life of its own, and my soul got the worst of it, suffocated. My body, after that contact, those embraces, almost acquired a new beauty... a more complete beauty”] (*Giulio* 245). Jules’ flailing spirituality is perceived as the direct result of her blossoming sexuality. Her soul, living in her body (294), is prisoner to the material domain: “La mia anima era prigioniera dentro il mio corpo, racchiusa nelle braccia, nelle gambe, in tutte le mie forme piene di armonia, nella lunga schiena diritta, nelle spalle delicate, nella pelle che qualche volta mi accarezzavo per sentire se era liscia, se era morbida, nei miei occhi, nei capelli, in me stessa” [“My soul was a prisoner inside my body, enclosed in my arms, in my legs, in all of my harmonious forms—my long, straight back, delicate shoulders, in my skin that I would caress now and then to feel its softness, in my eyes, hair, in me”] (215). It is her physiological form that entraps her soul and prohibits Jules’ individual progression, thus leaving her with the belief that transcendence depends upon anatomical deconstruction or subordination. Just as sexual elevation provided a release from the difference and difficulties of her body, spirituality and religion offer Jules a means of eliminating the material in a quest for “absolute purity”: “[...] io pensavo spesso alla morte, come a una beatitudine da raggiungersi prima o poi, a una felicità quasi sovrumana [...] mi piaceva soffermarmi sulla possibilità concessa agli uomini di pervenire a quello stato di purezza assoluta, dove nemmeno il corpo esiste più” [“... I thought a lot about death, as bliss to eventually aspire to, an almost superhuman happiness... I liked to contemplate the possibility, bestowed upon men, to achieve a state of absolute purity in which the body no longer exists”] (202). Death, as ultimate transcendence, consists of the dissolution of the material body, which dominates the soul with its “vigilant, incandescent senses” and desires (202). In this sense, Jules’ eventual progression as

individual, and capacity for self-recognition, prescribes an escape from her material element, an evolution of the spirit through sexual liberation or physical disintegration.

The rhetorical denigration of the body also provided a framework by which the regime was able to rework social conceptions of gender and sex. Fascism was able to claim control over the female body through the cult of motherhood and the normalization of sexuality. For women, the regime propagated active involvement in the creation and defense of a national race and a “modern” identity while pronatalist politics and eugenicism recast women into traditional social and sexual roles, undoing the efforts of early 20th-century feminist groups and refiguring “femininity.”¹⁵ The regime, rehabilitating paternal authority and patriarchal conceptions of family, intermingled the private and public functions of women by reassigning reproduction as a patriotic obligation—virtually laying claim to the female body as an instrument necessary for the progression of the race. Maternalistic domestic policies effectively isolated women from the public sphere: woman’s new “political” role as mother required that she be in the home. In terms of sexuality, the patriarchal family model reappropriated the female body as a vehicle for increased male virility—a man was not considered a man unless he was a father (De Grazia 43)—and the advancement of a masculine hierarchal order. Woman was objectified as an instrument in the progression of the ‘whole’ male subject.¹⁶ Female sexuality was reduced to the mere task of child bearing and femininity was equated to motherhood.

¹⁵ See De Grazia, p. 44 – one of the primary accomplishments of early Italian feminists was to invoke special social meanings of motherhood. Arguably, fascist social-sexual politics were effective in the marginalization of women especially because they attacked and appropriated this special, empowering capacity of Italy’s female compatriots.

¹⁶ Fascist policy and aesthetics proclaimed the movement a moral revolution capable of creating a modern mass society while preserving individual and national identities. Unlike liberalism and Marxism, fascist ideology offered a comprehensive aesthetic—objective, spiritual, moral—that catered to the ‘whole’ person, allowing subjects to benefit from national solidarity while

The fascist cult of motherhood resulted in the later “normalization of sexuality.” Legitimate sexuality was founded solely in the procreative sexual act while all other forms of sexual relations were condemned as “deviant.”¹⁷ For women, this legitimization proscribed all expressions of sexuality alternative to the physical act of making babies. The concept of sexual deviance, in tandem with the elimination of matter as the basis for sexual differentiation, is of singular importance within the context of *La ragazza di nome Giulio* as it calls attention to Jules’s difference both as woman and *from* fascist ideals of woman. As we have established, the plurality of Jules’s female sexuality and her atypical sexual practice make it impossible for her to conform to contemporary sexual canons. Jules’s promiscuity creates a fundamental affront to the behavioral norms outlined by fascist philosophy; however, it is her first sexual liaisons with Lia (her housemaid in Perugia), which explicitly underline her digression. Within this exclusively female relationship, Milani identifies an alternative model of sexuality in which the patriarch is eliminated altogether. Jules’s sexual reality parallels her individual reality as a woman. Like her sexuality, Jules’s connection to the community of women is also anatomically established. For Jules, female collectivity, like sexuality and individuality, is founded in the female body. Her experience as woman, as part of a larger order, begins with menstruation:

celebrating individuality and autonomy. However, the creation of a ‘whole’ person functioned exclusively on the basis of virile fascist values and individual contributions to the advancement of the state. See Ben-Ghiat, “Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the ‘Third Way.’” Ben-Ghiat’s article discusses the notion of ‘spirituality’ as a defining characteristic of fascist aesthetics distinguishing it from liberalism and Marxism as a moral movement. Of particular interest is Ben-Ghiat’s discussion of the ‘whole’ person as an element of fascist literature.

¹⁷ Although these standards applied to both men and women, the practice of “legitimizing” sexuality for men meant removing illegitimate sexual practices from public spaces (De Grazia 44-45), or, the institutionalization of brothels (an exercise particularly effective in penalizing prostitutes).

[...] percepivo quella misteriosa forza che rendeva le donne uguali le une alle altre, io come mia madre, mia madre come Serafina, anchi'io come Serafina, e anche uguale alla donna del pane, della frutta, alla Signora Bianca, un'amica di mia madre, a sua figlia Bice. Tutte fatte nello stesso modo, chi prima chi dopo, a me capitava adesso, dopo un'intera estate di bagni.

[... I intuited that mysterious force that creates all women in the same way, one to the other; I like my mother, my mother like Serafina, even me like Serafina, and even the same as the woman at the bakery, the one selling fruit, Ms. Bianca—a friend of my mother's—her daughter, Bice; all made in the same way, some sooner, some later. Now, it was my turn after a whole summer of swimming. (65)

Collectivity is corporeally manifested as the blood running through a common vein, connecting women throughout history, beyond economic and political borders, and of different ages. Blood, richly red and vibrant, symbolically represents the essence of Jules' womanhood, the cornerstone of the exclusively female passage from girl to woman. The color red, allegorically linked to this female rite of passage, reappears throughout the text in the moments Jules is truly invigorated; as she is falling in love with the Venice, she observes the city from the window of her apartment and finds expression in the colors she perceives: "... i colori scendevano in me, se c'era azzurro mi calmavo, se c'era grigio diventavo triste, ma la sera al tramonto quando a volte c'era il rosso, io diventavo di fuoco" ["... colors sank inside me: if it was blue, I was calm; if it was gray, I felt sad; but in the evening, at sunset, when it was sometimes red, I caught fire"] (217); as she registers for classes Ca' Foscari wearing a dress that is "rosso fuoco" ("fire red") (224). Yet, the abandonment of the material for the spiritual forces Jules to renounce that essence in favor of social configurations of appropriate feminine gender. Repression, for Jules, translates into

forced, physical renunciations of her essence: as Amerigo swallows up her menstrual blood during one of their sexual encounters (74); when Padre Dario forces her to give up her red dress, a dress in which she feels herself; as she is forced to forego exercise and foods she loves:

[...] mia madre dice: non mangiare troppa frutta, non mangiare tanto pane, non correre troppo, non fare troppi bagni; sono cose che mi fanno male; io ho addirittura in mente un elenco lunghissimo di cose che non devo fare, perché mi fanno male; anche padre Dario mi ha fatto allungare i vestiti perché averli corti era male e mi ha fatto fare la comunione perché non farla era male, e vado a messa e mi confesso, e vado persino a scuola e studio latino, greco e francese e altre cose perché non farle è male o fare il contrario mi farebbe male.

... my mother says, "do not eat too much fruit, do not eat too much bread, do not run too much, do not swim too much;" it is bad for me. I have a long, mental list of things I should not do because they are bad for me. Even Father Dario made me lengthen my dresses because wearing short ones was bad. I go to mass and I confess; I go to school and study Latin, Greek, French, and other things too, because not doing those things or doing the opposite of what I am told would be bad for me. (156-7)

Void of a tangible, female identity, Jules struggles to catalog herself within the accepted social system. Notions of gender are not manifest in Jules' physiological being but are rather expressed as renunciations of physical appetites, desires and personal liberties.

In situating her protagonist on the outskirts of accepted social conventions, Milani is able to question the authority of the cultural institution of gender, as well as nationality and family, as absolute constructions of identity. Jules often questions her composition, her adaptation of self,

in a national context and a reconfigured gender ideology: “Io non mi sono fatta gambe, le braccia come le ho, nemmeno ho pensato di nascere ragazza” [“I did not make my legs, my arms like they are. I did not even think to be born a girl”] (148); and, “ infine . . . se sono stata creata in questo modo, di chi è la colpa?” [“afterall... if I was created in this way, whose fault is it?”] (148). Gender is depicted as mere circumstance. Even the singularity of Jules’s name, evidenced immediately in the title, reminds us of her gender ambiguity.¹⁸ Combined with her deviant behavior and her physical impulses, her unconventional name creates confusion as to where Jules belongs amongst the customary conceptualizations of gender. Ideological ambiguity extends beyond gender in *Giulio* to question the notion of nationality and the prevalent family model. Jules, a girl with a man’s name, has no normative models by which she can gauge her individual identity: her mother, a young widow, struggles against the fascist ideals of the woman-mother, enjoying an affluence that allows her to evade fascist social fixtures. Jules’s father is notably absent, a situation marked by considerable repercussions in the context of the fascist patriarchal order. Her father’s erasure in this particular historical context is two-fold: primarily, he is not physically present to act as patriarch, to direct Jules’s development; yet Milani further distances the father figure, identifying him as a foreigner in a profoundly nationalistic culture. With relatives beyond the borders of Italy, Jules often questions her allegiance to her native country and her finite identity as “Italian”: “l’Italia, che parola grossa, che mai significava? . . . Io ero nata in Italia per caso, lo sapevo, ma non so se mi sentivo italiana nel profondo del cuore” [“Italy, what a big word, what did it even mean?... I was born in Italy by chance, that I knew, but

¹⁸ It is worth noting the importance assigned to names and naming in the text. As we see already from the title of the narrative, Jules’s name plays a significant role in her construction of individual identity and the notion of belonging/deviance--it is a foreign name traditionally assigned to a man. References to names and naming are also strewn throughout the text, especially regarding the naming of animals.

I did not know if I felt Italian in the depth of my heart”] (221). Nation, like gender and family, succumbs to equivocation and circumstance. By obscuring the traditional tenets of gender, nationality and family, Milani raises questions of belonging--to a culture and to a nation--while subtly critiquing fascist values of a supreme national identity and patriarchal hierarchies. Jules’s foreign father, her distant relatives in England, her and her mother’s ambivalence toward the war and avoidance of fascist institutions, and the geographical breakdown of Italy’s national territory into isolated cities, classes and political associations amplify the ambiguity of constructed social identities. Unable to conform to orthodox interpretations of gender, nationality and sexuality, Jules, not one, but many, is no longer quantifiable within the parameters of a contemporary fascist paradigm; not one, she is, as Irigaray warned, demoted to none.

It is through this fragmentation, however, that Jules is able to reclaim an autonomous identity. Divergent paths to a distant redemption (sexual and spiritual, material and immaterial) are inscribed on and experienced through her body. The body simultaneously imprisons and protects her soul. Her inability to achieve sexual satisfaction with any male partner, or understanding from any relation, guards Jules against the “penetration” of her being, her final transgression into the establishment. Being, at once, male and female, sexual and spiritual, Italian and foreign, Jules keeps her acquaintances at a distance and avoids confinement to a single social role. As many, and as none, her identity belongs only to herself:

[...] io non volevo far sapere interamente i miei pensieri, io volevo essere una specie di enigma, non volevo che nessuno, nemmeno mia madre, potesse capire a fondo la mia anima. [...] Non volli dare nemmeno a lei la soddisfazione di penetrare in me, nelle oscure vie del mio spirito, forse perché avevo un invincibile spavento che qualcuno potesse vedere sino in fondo [...].

I did not want to let my thoughts be entirely known. I wanted to be a kind of enigma: I did not want anyone to be able to understand the depths of my soul, not even my mother. . . . I did not even want to give her the satisfaction of penetrating in me, in the dark pathways of my spirit. Perhaps it was because I had an unconquerable fear that someone could see all the way through. (258-9)

Composed of fractured pieces of an unidentifiable whole, Jules differentiates herself from common preconceptions of identity, determined along black and white binaries of self and other, object and subject, male and female. As simultaneous sexual, political and speaking object and subject, Jules maintains self-possession. Indeed, it is in her ‘otherness,’ the distance and difference her body affords her, that Jules feels, sees and lives her existence as Jules. Constant incursions upon her body, felt socially, spiritually and sexually, infringe upon Jules’ private perceptions of self: “Ero ridotta a un manichino di me stessa. [...] Non ero più una ragazza viva, sbagliata magari, ma viva. Non sentivo più [...] i desideri, gli impulsi, un odore, un colore, una forma” [“I had been reduced to a figure of myself... I was not a living girl anymore—flawed perhaps, but alive. I did not feel anymore... desires, impulses, scents, colors, forms”] (240). Although a meeting point for colliding realities and symbolic forces, Jules’ body also provides shelter from a violent and invasive outside world—a world that threatens to destroy her essence as individual, to penetrate her soul, resigning Jules to mere form, to any and every “woman.”

Jules’ desire to be ‘possessed’ by a man, to complete the sexual act, borders on obsession. Sexual desire is revealed in the course of the narrative as violent and depleting, a symptom of Jules’ internalization of a male-determined sexual-social destiny in which she can complete herself by way of a sexual encounter that combines physical and the spiritual redemption in a single act. Jules views her virginity as an obstacle, rendering her difference (once a source of

pleasurable individual essence) non-human as Jules develops into a woman: “io odiavo la mia stupida verginità, quel paravento che mi divideva dal piacere completo, da quel bisogno di sapere che cosa mai si prova in certi momenti, e se io potevo sentire come gli esseri umani sentono” [“I hated my stupid virginity—that barrier that isolated me from total pleasure, from that need to know what you feel in certain moments, and if I would ever be able to feel like human beings feel”] (275). Within this socio-sexual framework, Jules’ existence is fractured between her body and her soul, her spiritual existence and its physical manifestation. Despite misguided sexual encounters throughout the novel—often masking sexual and psychological abuse, as in the case of Lia, the fascist war secretary and her philosophy professor—Jules’ first experience with intercourse is performed within a fairly normative model. Having finally fallen in love with Franco—a sentiment unprecedented in her previous encounters—Jules gives herself to him physically as a final attempt at completeness. Even this attempt, combining the spiritual capacity of love with its carnal manifestation in her sexual experimentation with Franco, is thwarted and Jules’ leaves the experience feeling insurmountable hopelessness, convinced that she will never achieve the wholeness and, instead, be destined to forever seek out temporary relief from her difference (or incompleteness) through deleterious sexual partnerships that further incapacitate her.

Throughout the novel, Jules’ refers to sexual satisfaction on the level of spiritual transcendence, pointing toward man’s special privilege in accessing this particular form of redemption. First, during her “love games” Jules’ refers to orgasmic liberation as a right reserved to men [“quel desiderato e sconosciuto godimento che Dio ha riservato all’uomo” (162)]. Again, as she contemplates her future interaction with Franco, she not only cites this experience of “pure joy” as one that is exclusive to man, but implores God to allow her access: “Dio [...] aiutami.

Non voglio essere diversa dagli altri, voglio essere una creatura normale, fatta di carne, di sangue, come gli altri. Voglio che il mio affetto possa manifestarsi, possa procurarmi la vera pura gioia che tu hai concesso agli uomini, in cui si placa il tormento della carne” [“God... help me. I do not want to be different from others, I want to be a normal, made of flesh and blood, like everyone else. I want to be able to demonstrate my affection, to experience the true, pure joy that You granted to men, the joy that alleviates the torments of the flesh”] (264-5). What is made plain to the reader (and to the narrator—a future alter-ego of the girl named Jules who is, presumably, fully immersed in the “inevitable melancholy” (296) that absorbs Jules at the end of the novel) is that any attempt by a woman to achieve “wholeness” from within a male-determined sexual paradigm was precluded from the outset. Jules’ perceived difference—which, on one hand, empowered her as a figure apart from such paradigms – is, at least in the sexual encounter, not different at all. As pioneering feminists, like Carla Lonzi, later pointed out, the normative hetero-sexual model was predicated on penetration of women by men, determined to precipitate reproduction and fundamentally negating female pleasure.

Jules’ role as an object, as sexual instrument for male pleasure, was predetermined by the circumstances of her sex and her gender. Sexual abjection—introduced in the episode with Lia—is most profoundly felt in Jules’ experience with the fascist political secretary and in her later relationship with her philosophy professor. Jules is obligated to participate in a fascist organization for young women by her physical education instructor, to fulfill the “*doveri della donna*” (“women’s duties”) marketed as female political mobilization (166). When she fails to salute *romanamente* upon the arrival of the fascist war secretary, she is reprimanded by her instructor, who is also the organization’s *fiduciaria*. Subsequently forced into the secretary’s office, the secretary discovers that Jules lacks a father figure in the home and informs Jules that

she is not to blame, that her stubbornness is the result of bad upbringing: “...sei cresciuta male. Dove manca il capo famiglia non c’è una linea di condotta. Devi essere potata come una pianta” [“You were raised poorly. When the head of the family is missing, so too is the leadership. You need to potted, like a plant”] (168). The statement itself suggests that any potential success Jules might have had was automatically foregone, regardless of Jules past or future efforts, with the death of her father. Purporting to fill that lack, the secretary steps in. “Potting” Jules, purportedly replenishing a deficient patriarchal guidance, reveals itself in the episode with the secretary as abusive sexual subjugation—attempting without success to get Jules to kiss him, the secretary proceeds to masturbate in front of her, commanding that she watch—“Guarda, guarda, bambina mia, guarda” [“Watch, watch, my child, watch”] (170). The episode recalls the relationship with Lia in its disquieting and incestuous integration of maternity and paternity with sexual authority. Both circumstances call attention to sexual deviance *within*, and not merely outside of, the fascist hetero-normative sexual model, deconstructing such a model from the inside out. Whereas the episode with Lia does not affect Jules negatively, however—“Non è un episodio vergognoso, quello che ebbi con Lia. ...Più tardi quando parlai con altre ragazze (e questo fu anni dopo), qualcuna mi disse di avere conosciuto molte cose incominciando con donne...” [“It is not a shameful experience, the one I had with Lia. / After, when I spoke to other girls (and this was years later), some told me that they had learned a lot starting with women”] (36)—her experience in the secretary’s office makes clear her sexual objectification – “...io ero stata uno strumento per lui” [“For him, I was an instrument”] (174). As Jules describes it, there is “una sorte di pudore della ragazza verso l’uomo, che la fa più espansiva e tenera verso ragazze dello stesso sesso” [“a sort of timidness (shamefulness) that girls have toward men, which makes them more effusive and tender with their same sex”] (36). Jules’ use of the word ‘pudore,’ read literally,

suggests timidity, an inhibition that prevents a girl or a woman from truly being herself in the presence of men. In the broader context of the novel, however, and specifically in the episode with the fascist secretary and other men, female ‘pudore’ might more readily take on its alternate signification of “shame.” Through this and other similar episodes, Jules experiences a systematic deconstruction that slowly transforms her, through continued sexual encounters, from a girl named Jules to a woman resigned to a repressive destiny as an object of male pleasure.

The relationship that unfolds between Jules and her high school philosophy professor is also worth noting because it literally philosophizes Jules’ sexual and social suppression, perpetuating to the level of discourse the oppressiveness inherent to women’s sexual development in fascist Italy. Initially, the relationship appears fairly innocent in comparison to the other sexual encounters that precede and follow it, but it is the first in a series of relationships (with Lia in Perugia, Amerigo and the fascist secretary in Senigallia, Luciano in Cortina) that seemingly convinces Jules that she is “in love,” and that such feelings could in some way liberate her from her burdened, adolescent existence. What is interesting in this episode is that the relationship develops almost entirely through conversation—that is, monologic ramblings on the part of the professor who speaks endlessly of the importance of Eros. Jules’ involvement in these conversations is limited to an occasional kiss or having her hair ruffled condescendingly by the professor. Yet, when she confesses the affair to her mother, Jules parrots an intimation of the professor’s beliefs that, while presented as genuine, seems forced:

Rapidamente, impetuosamente dissi quello che era successo, che bisognava scorgere la bellezza che si incarna nei corpi, e che un’anima ben fatta, anche se non era incarnata in una forma perfetta, era armoniosa ugualmente, io non desideravo altro [...] Così parlando, sentivo veramente in me fluire tutte le frasi

che lui mi aveva dette in quei pomeriggi al caffè o nella sua stanza, mi reputavo privilegiata per avere potuto ascoltarle e capirle, mentre i miei compagni di scuola erano ancora dei ragazzi, non potevano arrivare a quei vertici, a quelle visioni. Quickly, furiously, I told her what had happened; that we needed to perceive beauty as incarnated in the body, and that a good soul, even if it was not incarnated in perfect form, was still harmonious in its own way. I did not want anything more than that... Speaking this way, I truly heard every sentence he had told me during those afternoons in the café or in his room; I felt privileged to have heard them and to understand them while my schoolmates were still children, they could not arrive at those pinnacles, at those visions. (193-4)

Having convinced Jules that she truly understands his philosophical rants, the professor makes Jules believe that this understanding will allow her to transcend the physical—the confusion that her sexual body presents—and access “un’anima ben fatta.” Jules interprets the relationship as her only passage to happiness: a love that, in part because it requires a sacrifice of beauty and juvenile longings, is representative of transcendence and ultimate happiness:

Voglio raggiungere la perfezione...lui me l’ha spiegato, questa è la diritta via dell’amore, è l’unica vera vita degna di essere vissuta dall’uomo. Eros è forte e potente, tutti gli uomini debbono onorarlo, debbono celebrarlo. Tu sai che cosa vuol dire amore? Vuol dire possedere stabilmente la bellezza e il bene, e quindi significa essere felici. Io voglio, capisci, voglio essere felice.

I want to reach perfection...he explained it to me: this is the direct path to love. It is the only life truly worthy of being lived by man. Eros is strong and powerful, all men must honor it, they must celebrate it. Do you know what love means? It

means to firmly possess beauty and goodness, and therefore it means happiness. I want that, you see, I want to be happy. (194)

The relationship with the professor presents a straightforward example of the influence afforded to man in an imbalanced power dynamic (a man in a position of power shaping the perceptions of an adolescent girl in his care). Nearly yelling the final sentence in her monologue to her mother, Jules reveals that her internalization of the professor's words are powerful only inasmuch as they pull at her own desires for happiness, for freedom from the confusions and complexities of her own body and from her inferior position in a patriarchal economy of power. In both instances, with the fascist secretary and the professor, Jules' sexual oppression is linked to paternalism delineating a clear connection between a patriarchal cultural and male-determined sexual patrimony that conspire to subjugate women in both the physical and discursive realms, intensifying the expression of the "phallus of antiquity" and its project of subduing Jules.

Milani confirms the allegorical importance of the human form, along with its social and political implications within the narrative, at once emphasizing and dismantling the juxtaposition between male and female corporality, with the final destruction of the metaphorical phallus. After a final attempt at attaining the sexual, spiritual transcendence reserved to men, to achieve selfhood and satisfaction as well as fulfill her destiny within the social order, Jules abandons herself to yet another sexual interlude with an unknown man on the periphery of the Venetian city limits. The experience, only amplifying her desperation, causes her to look upon his male organ, the symbol of her oppression, with disdain: "Era un nulla, quel sesso, uno straccio di carne svuotata, un volgare aggeggio che mi procurava soltanto angoscia e nausea insieme" (293-4). The deflated "phallus of antiquity," the almighty symbol of fascist patrimony, emptied of its glory and power, is unable to fulfill promises of potency, belonging and progression. Jules looks

to avenge herself by destroying the phallus that, as actual and symbolic vehicle for abuse, violence and sexual subordination, mobilized her social marginalization:

[...] volevo soltanto vendicarmi, soltanto fare del male dopo tutto quello che avevo ricevuto. [...] Odiai il mio prossimo, l'umanità intera, con le sue leggi, le sue ipocrisie, tutta la società di cui facevo parte. Odiai me stessa, mia madre, il ventre di mia madre da cui ero nata, e mio padre che aveva concepito con lei. [...] I discorsi della gente, le insinuazioni, le malizie che tutti continuavano ad avere; odiai le mie preghiere che non approdavano a nulla, davanti a quelle statue di santi, o a Dio in croce, nelle chiese conosciute in città differenti. [...] Io avevo intrapreso una via amorosa, o per lo meno cercavo di salvarmi attraverso l'amore, e quest'amore non mi era concesso, io non potevo avere nulla, nemmeno con quell'essere sconosciuto [...] e ora mi trovavo in un capannone in rovina, ai margini del mondo, su un giaciglio indecente, dove ancora restavo senza sapere come o perché. [...] Avevo tra le mani quel temperino [...] Così lo aprii, e spinta da una furia che mi atterriva, ma che mi portava avanti a fare qualcosa di definitivo, presi a vibrare all'impazzata colpi su quel sesso di ragazzo, su quel floscio intrico di nervi e di carne, che poco prima mi aveva posseduto.

I just wanted to avenge myself, to cause pain after all the pain I had endured. ... I hated my neighbor, all of humanity, with its laws, its hypocrisies—the whole society of which I was a part. I hated myself, my mother, my mother's womb from which I was born, and my father, who had conceived with her. ... The discourse of people, the insinuations, the malice that they perpetuated; I hated my prayers in unknown churches in different cities, in front of saintly statues or God

on the cross, that did not amount to anything. ... I had pursued the way of love, or, at least, I tried to save myself through love, and I was denied this love; I had nothing, even with that stranger... and now I found myself alone in a decrepit warehouse on the margins of the world, on an indecent cot without knowing how or why. ... I had that pocketknife in my hands... I opened it and, driven by a rage that depleted me but that drove me to do something definitive, I hurled myself upon that male sex, stabbing wildly at that flaccid strip of nerves and flesh that, minutes ago, had possessed me. (295-6)

Jules acts out against the incarnation of male supremacy, against the allegorical instrument of her subordination and violent disintegration. Her response is physical. It cries out against her deleted existence as repressed sexual, material being. The male body, too, is the surface upon which diverse codes of power collide—it represents the nation to which Jules did not belong, gender ideologies that excluded her, the elusiveness of a normative sexuality and spiritual progression. The phallus is the symbolic force behind an empire of social institutions that contributed to her abuse and neglect. It is the physiological site enjoining spirituality and sexuality in love, the only instrument capable of bestowing upon her the liberty that she so desired. The disfiguring of the phallus at the conclusion of *Giulio* mirrors the destruction of the fascist regime at the close of the second world war; the political, geographical and economic fracturing of the Italian state. Jules' individual desperation and emptiness recalls the larger vacancy of the nation:¹⁹ “La Guerra era finita e perduta, in un’ebbrezza che mi aveva lasciato svuotata [...] tanto la patria non significava niente, avevano buttato tutti la vita allo sbaraglio per

¹⁹ Avevo in me un vuoto, dove credevo di precipitare; e insieme una maliconia come mai prima avevo raggiunto. Qualcosa di indecifrabile sembrava incatenarmi, era forse la sensazione di essere sbagliata, una creatura nata male, che non sarebbe diventata mai una donna (Milani 255).

un'idea che era come zero, anzi meno di zero" ["The War was over, lost, in a haze that had left me empty... the homeland did not mean anything anyway. They had put everyone's life in jeopardy for an idea that counted for nothing, less than nothing"] (*Giulio* 227). Paradoxically, with the dissolution of a contiguous national identity, so comes the final disintegration of the girl named Jules: identified as individual only in her difference from the dominant social order, once that order is destroyed, Jules has no means of distinguishing self from other. Her fractured body, punctured soul and fragmented conception of self is only one case in an entire nation torn to pieces. Jules resolutely accepts her destiny as woman within the predominant system: "Ero come rassegnata, accettavo il mio destino. Sapevo quello che mi aspettava; conoscevo già la profonda malinconia, l'inevitabile malinconia, che da quel momento in avanti non mi avrebbe più lasciata" ["I was resigned. I accepted my fate. I knew what awaited me: I was already familiar with the profound melancholy, the inevitable melancholy, that would never abandon me from that moment forward"] (296). Leaving behind the warehouse and the boy, abandoned and bleeding, Jules also sheds her name ("Non sa il mio nome" – "He does not know my name"), the last tangible identity of the girl she once was.

* * *

Recalling the opening lines of the narrative, we find that Jules was never one, physically or textually, and "the girl named Jules" is the forgone identity of the narrator: "[...] io ero allora una ragazza che aveva nome Jules [...] Dico la parola 'adesso,' ma ogni cosa appartiene già ad un tempo remoto. [...] Oggi siamo già in un altro mese, in un altro giorno di un altro anno" ["I was, at that time, a girl that had the name Jules ... I say the word, 'now,' but everything belongs to a distant past ... Today we are in another month, another day of another year"] (11-18). The

composition of the text creates a literal representation of the conflicting realities manifest in the female body. The fragmenting of the physical body becomes a rhetorical figure for the fractured identity of Milani's protagonist, divided between time, space and contradictory ideologies. Simultaneous division and synthesis, characteristic of Jules' corporal reality, becomes the distinguishing elements of the textual body. Jules' incessant self-speak ("Io, Jules" – "I, Jules") immediately divides the protagonist in two: the narrator and the narrated self, the recollection of a conceived self, belonging to a remote reality. The narrative itself comprises a segmented whole: events are recalled and recounted in an ostensibly spontaneous fashion, yet are all encompassed by a single day, August 25th, the day in which Jules' difference evaporates along with her individual identity. Milani, segmenting person, place and history, all gathered into a single narrated moment and a unified textual body, evades the traditional tenets of chronological, historical narration, choosing instead the mosaic of memory. The author thus investigates in her own way the compositional experimentations of the Italian neo-avant-garde and anticipates postmodern literary and linguistic innovations while maintaining a solid connection to social experience and national history.

Linking the different categories of time and space only in their relation to the narrator's recollection and Jules' immediate experience, Milani is able to develop in her novel a relative narrational mode that at once embraces and utilizes patrilineal language while also breaking it open—speaking in language, as de Lauretis and Cavarero suggest, women's difference from language and creating a new subject "I" that is a simultaneous amalgamation of disjointed parts. The novel is divided into three parts that are not ordered chronologically or thematically. By structuring her novel in this way, Milani subverts traditional narrative modes by disrupting the categories of time and space. The narrative, jumping from one episode to another and linked only

in the memory of the narrator as she recalls her forgone existence as a girl named Jules, allows for whole comprehension only after the fact. The narrator begins on several occasions to speak about her time in the mountains at Cortina during the winter of 1942, only to use that episode to transition into other accounts from disparate times and spaces. To paint a chronological portrait of Jules' coming-of-age is to undertake a complex mathematical equation, revisiting the various episodes of the novel one by one to track down the mention of a specific age or year and its geographical counterpart. The mapping of geographical space as it is narrated stands in stark contrast to the map of Italy and Africa that hangs on the wall of the fascist secretary's office: "Sulla parete di fronte c'erano il re e il duce e in mezzo il crocifisso, a destra di chi entrava c'era una grande carta geografica con l'Italia e l'Africa e le bandierine tricolori sulle città dell'Impero" ["On the front wall there were portraits of the king and the Duce with a cross between them. To the right of the entrance there was a large map of Italy and Africa with little tricolor flags marking the cities of the Empire"] (163). The map, hanging in tandem with Italy's contemporary 'superpowers,' the Duce, the King, and the cross, emblematic of the country's religious patrimony, is infused with political and symbolic underpinnings of the current socio-cultural climate. The Italy imagined in the map, as a colonizing and self-contained nation, is extremely different than Jules' conception of space. As a girl that prefers immediacy and simplicity, things that "si risolvono con facilità" ["are easily figured out"] (11), the nation she knows is a mere architecture of the places she has experienced: Perugia, Senigallia, Cortina, Venice. Unlike the map of Italy, which designates important imperial centers with miniature images of the Italian tricolor flag, Jules' perception of space, and the perception of time and space available to the reader, is completely decentralized, connected only in the memory of the narrator and the experience of her protagonist.

The narrative itself is extremely self-reflective. The narrator—unnamed but who was once a girl named Jules—is simultaneously connected to and independent from Jules, the subject of the story she recreates in the text. Constantly connected to Jules through the repetition of the phrase, “Io, Jules,” the narrator is careful to distance temporally her narrative present from her past as Jules. The novel opens with a milieu of verb tenses: “Il venticinque agosto di questo anno è successo che io ho capito questa cosa” / “Fu un venticinque agosto eccezionale” / “Io abitavo allora a Venezia...” / “...io ero allora una ragazza che aveva nome Jules” [“It just so happened that on the 25th of August this year, I realized something / I was an exceptional August 25th / At the time, I was living in Venice / I was, at the time a girl that had the name, Jules”] (11). It continues:

Fui dunque, sino al venticinque agosto di quest’anno, una ragazza speciale.

Voglio dire con questo che io non sono tipo da confondersi con altre, ma questa mia differenza non sta nel colore dei capelli o nel taglio degli occhi; c’è piuttosto un certo riserbo, che mi fa stare distaccata, un qualcosa che mi rende Jules e basta, per intenderci.

Dicendo che io sono Jules e basta, affermo una sorta di mia indipendenza morale, di allontanamento dagli altri; è insomma come se abitassi in un’isola su cui poggio i piedi e intorno ci fosse acqua.

So, until the twenty-fifth of August this year, I was a special girl.

What I mean is, I am not the type to be confused with other girls. But this, my difference, is not found in the color of my hair or the shape of my eyes; it is rather a certain restraint that makes me indifferent, something that makes me Jules and that is all, just to be clear.

Saying that I am Jules and that is all, I am asserting a sort of moral independence, an estrangement from others. It is as if I lived on an island, with my feet on the ground, and all around there was water. (12)

Reading this passage, comprised mostly of direct descriptions and riddled with contradictory verb tenses, creates some confusion. On the one hand, we read that the narrator *was*, until the twenty-fifth of August of the year the story was originally recounted, a girl named Jules. The use of the remote past in the sentences that follow seem to at once contradict the epithet “questo” (“this”) describing the year in which the narrative events took place while also distancing further the narrative present (in which we, the readers are taking part) and the story that is to come—“Raconterò tutto di questo venticinque agosto” [“I will tell you all about this August 25th”] (11). On the other hand, as we continue reading, we discover an identifiable connection, and a continuously perceived connection on the part of the narrator, to the girl Jules: “Dicendo che io *sono Jules e basta, affermo una sorta di mia indipendenza morale [...]*” [my italics]. The subsequent use of the present tense reveals that the narrator either continues to relate in part to the girl Jules or is perhaps *rediscovering* her morally independent and original existence as Jules. Reading these introductory passages retrospectively, we are inclined to accept the latter interpretation, especially since the narrator is reclaiming an independence and originality that, in the course of the novel, comes undone, parallel to Jules’ sexual awakening as an adolescent and her subsequent, injurious sexual development.

Constant shifts in tenses throughout the novel, reflections by the narrator on the narrated self, and the pretext of the twenty-fifth of August as the basis for relating Jules’ more expansive life-story and coming-of-age suggest a certain literary consciousness at play in the text that further connects the narrative present of the narrator with her narrative past as a girl named Jules.

The narrator not only employs antithetic temporal references, but also acknowledges her use of them in the text. In telling the story of Franco, the narrator recounts: “Io subisco molte influenze. [...] Sono una ragazza impressionabile. Adesso subisco l’influenza di Franco” [“I am easily affected. Right now, I feel the effect of Franco”] (18), only to qualify her statement immediately afterward by clarifying, “Dico la parola «adesso», ma ogni cosa appartiene già a un tempo remoto. Perché oggi non è più il venticinque agosto, oggi siamo già in un altro mese, in un altro giorno di un altro anno” [“I say the word ‘now,’ but everything belongs to a distant past. Because today, it is no longer the twenty-fifth of August; we are already in another month, in another day of another year”] (18). The reference to the year creates confusion in itself, subverting the narrator’s previous description of “this year” in the first pages of the novel. The narrator interjects to first mark the use of the present tense as a narrative, and thus literary, strategy to submerge the reader in the diegesis, only to then interrupt the narrative reality with a temporal specification that inserts narrator-Jules back into the story of narrated-Jules.

Jules’ self-speak reaffirms this narrative connection between narrator and narrated self, not only by connecting the two semantically, but also in Jules’ tendency to narrate her own actions to herself. The various levels of Jules’ self-speak unveil, in turn, different interpretative textures within the novel. On the primary level we have the narrator who tells the story of Jules, which is also revealed to be an autobiographical account of an undetermined remote past; within that narrative we have the brief metanarratives that Jules (already embedded in the memory of the narrator) creates for herself. For example, on one particularly banal day in Senigallia, the same day Jules experiments with masturbation, she begins one of the novel’s many subsections with her self-speak, recounting her own actions in narrative form: “Io sono una ragazza che gira in una stanza. / Fuori è caldo, caldissimo. [...] Io ho detto che sono ammalata” [“I am a girl

padding in a room / Outside it is hot, very hot ... I said that I am sick”] (151). Even within the text, Jules multiplies the diegetic reality by creating a sub-story that narrates her actions, thus splitting the narrative action from its representation. “Io sono” [“I am”] qualifies the girl that turns about the room, and the reality of being ill is filtered through various layers of representation—Jules is not ill, Jules *said* she was ill.

Reflecting on the morning of the fateful twenty-fifth of August, the narrator describes this tendency: “Io, Jules, parlavo molte volte con me. [...] Ricordo che in quel venticinque agosto quando mi svegliai alla mattina avevo fatto un dialogo sotterraneo nel sonno, con una persona che ero ancora io, Jules” [“I, Jules, would often talk to myself. ... I remember when I had woken up in the morning, on that twenty-fifth of August, I had just had a clandestine dialogue with myself in my sleep, with the person that was still me, Jules”] (14). The passage situates the protagonist’s self-speak as a continuous dialogue (implying at least two participants) with herself, questioning reality against oneiric fantasy, all of which are encompassed in the memory of the narrator who is actively remembering who Jules is. Structuring the narrative in this way, Milani is not only able to afford narrator Jules increased clarity in reflecting upon her own experiences [as in the case with Lia— “Io la conoscevo bene, adesso” (“I knew her well, now”) (36)], but she is also able to engender a relational mode of self-identification that, while inaccessible to the narrated Jules during her adolescence and sexual development, is available to the narrator (also Jules) through the narrative practice of remembering.

In her book *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, Adriana Cavarero examines critically the Arendtian category of uniqueness—responding to the question of who someone is (their uniqueness) rather than what they are (a compilation of their abilities and talents)—and adapts a theory of uniqueness to feminist practices of reciprocity. Cavarero’s book builds upon her

previous work in *Per una teoria della differenza sessuale* and *Nonostante Platone* in analyzing the relationship between selfhood and narration, identifying the necessity of a *sè narrabile* (“narratable self”) in memory and discourse that contributes to an understanding of self through dialogue:

a ognuno di noi è familiare il lavoro narrativo della memoria che, anche in modo del tutto involontario, continua a raccontarci la nostra storia personale. Ogni essere umano, senza neanche volerlo sapere, sa di essere un *sé narrabile* immerso nell'autonarrazione spontanea della sua memoria. Non occorre, infatti, che la memoria personale sia esplicitamente sollecitata nel suo esercizio autobiografico, ossia non occorre che la memoria involontaria si faccia ricordo attivo: ciò in cui il *sé narrabile* trova casa, più che un consapevole esercizio di rielaborazione del ricordare, è la spontanea struttura narrante della memoria stessa. Per questo abbiamo definito il *sé narrabile* invece che *narrato*.

Familiar to each of us is the narrative effect of memory that, even in a completely involuntary way, continues to tell us our personal story. Every human being, even without knowing it, is aware of a “narratable self” that is immersed in the spontaneous self-narration of memory. In fact, it does not happen that personal memory is explicitly solicited in its autobiographic exercise. That is to say, involuntary memory does not actively remember: rather than a conscious act of re-elaborating what is remembered, the “narratable self” takes root in the spontaneous narrating structure of memory itself. For this reason, we call it a ‘*narratable*’ self, rather than a ‘*narrated*’ self. (48) [original italics]

In Cavarero's adaptation of Arendtian uniqueness, the experience of hearing oneself narrated, more so than the practice of narrating one's own experience, responds to the fundamental question: *who* are you? Or, in some cases, who am *I*? These questions become increasingly complicated for women, however, as Cavarero expertly demonstrates, since women are either abandoned by discourse or contained in the supposedly neutral category of Man that seek to represent humankind irrespective of sexual difference. Even Woman, with a capital "W" presents a problematic classification inasmuch as it posits a universal collectivity that displaces women's individuality and particular uniqueness. Like the troubling pronoun "I" discussed earlier in this chapter that, through its alleged neutrality, simultaneously contains and erases the potential for female individualization and selfhood, the larger problem of self-identity through narrative practices also begs the question: in a language that seeks to eradicate female uniqueness and in a narrative practice that eludes female individualization, how are women to identify and acknowledge selfhood? And, if they are precluded from participating in such narrative practices, do they have the opportunity of immortalizing that selfhood through a discursive practice of remembering?

Cavarero responds to these questions by reflecting on "spontaneous narrative reciprocity" which she locates most readily in friendships between women and the exchange between lovers. In the context of Milena Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio*, the latter possibility is inhibited by the patriarchal socio-sexual economy of fascist Italy and the former also seems impossible: Jules is isolated not only from affirming connections with men through sexual relationships, but jealously preserves her difference from women as well, referencing on several occasions her solitary existence. I would like to suggest, however, that, through an internal dialogue that bridges spatially and temporally disparate experiences, and the externalization of that dialogue

through the act of writing, Milani creates for Jules a textual environment in which she can actively narrate her former self and simultaneously hear herself narrated, thereby accessing her “narratable self” and making a form female self-identification possible.

While we might only speculate what became of the girl named Jules after the deleterious episode on the fateful twenty-fifth of August, constant allusions to the emersion of a poetic self and an inclination toward self narration might suggest that Jules, the narrator, is able to reclaim a sense of self through the act of writing. As the novel comes to a close, Jules begins to discover the potential of narrative and of prose writing and reading, in particular: “Incominciavo a capire che cosa significa un libro nella vita di un essere umano. A volte, con uno di quei libri tra le mani, cadevo in una specie di estasi, di smarrimento. Lo stringevo al petto, mi sembrava di possedere l’anima di chi lo aveva scritto” [“I was beginning to understand what a book could mean in the life of a human being. At times, with one of those books in my hands, I fell into a sort of ecstasy, of bewilderment. I would hold it close to my chest—It felt like I possessed the soul of whoever had written it”] (217). The experience of reading, of immersing herself in a book, grants Jules the ecstasy and bewilderment, the possibility to possess and be possessed, that she so desperately sought, and was denied, in her sexual encounters. A passion for reading quickly matures into a poetic inclination to compose:

Mi scopersi in quel tempo un animo addirittura poetico. Rileggevo a volte le mie lettere e quasi non avevo più spedirle, perché erano dei bei componimenti, dei temi di scuola sviluppati su determinati argomenti, ora un giorno di pioggia, ora le nuvole che corrono nel cielo, ora la nebbia fitta e profumata, ora il sole che incendia la Basilica, ora la Piazza con la gente seduta ai caffè, al Florian in

particolare, e i bambini che danno da mangiare ai piccioni, tutto è calmo, o sembra tale.

I even discovered in myself a poetic sensibility. I would re-read my letters over and over. I almost did not want to mail them anymore because they were beautiful compositions, developed arguments on academic themes: now a rainy day, now the clouds that run across the sky, now a dense, sweet-smelling fog, now the sun that enflames the Basilica, now the square with people sitting at cafés, at Florian, especially, and kids feeding the pigeons. Everything is calm, or it seems to be.

(222)

Jules' writing is marked by a distinct female character: branching from the epistolary it morphs into sophisticated compositions that discuss and describe elements of the quotidian, incorporating the neorealist attitudes that would characterize the literature of the postwar period in Italy. Moreover, the narrative structure and style elicit elements of both oral and written narration, drawing upon a tradition of orality that is often associated with women's narrative practices.²⁰

The undertaking of the female author in developing an essentially female subject is to speak her difference from prominent discourse, founded upon patriarchal archetypes. In *La ragazza di nome Giulio*, female difference is manifest in the physical and symbolic female form. A plural female sexuality isolates woman from patrilineal standards of sexuality, which seeks to confine woman to a passive role within the normative order. Sexual difference extends from

²⁰ Such an association can be recognized in the work of Luisa Passerini; for instance *Autoritratto di gruppo* and *Fascism in Popular Memory*, which also make connections between oral history and collective narratives and experience. The writings and practices of Diotima and the earlier contributions of Cavarero, including *Nonostante Platone*, focus on reciprocity in oral exchanges between women as both a narrative and political practice that reappropriates patriarchal discourses to empower women.

individual to collective through the use of symbols—symbols useful in confounding the sexual, the spiritual and the political, all of which have repercussions for individual and collective female identity within the fascist national culture of interwar Italy, defined by totalitarian patrimony in the late 1930s, the early 1940s and beyond. In opposition to the phallogocentric model of the “whole” man during Fascism, Milani fractures Jules’ identity creating a character reluctant to conform to accepted ideologies. Through Jules, Milani constructs a relative speaking subject who evades axiomatic principles of time, space and language, narrating the female experience “in, through, against, over, under, and across the language of men,” empowering the historically marginalized voice of woman as a speaking subject and engendering difference as the core of a textual female imaginary.

La ragazza di nome Giulio presents a necessary re-examination of the recent fascist past while also establishing discursive methodologies that would inform Italian feminist practices. Reading *Giulio*. In illuminating a protagonist that is both one and many (directly opposing women’s erasure from discourse as not one, so demoted to none), Milani is able to develop an essentially female speaking subject that embraces her sexual difference as a form of self-identification and empowerment. The novel thus presents both an implicit appeal for new narrative strategies and discourses that may identify women against the patriarchal paradigms that sought to oppress them, and a creative model of remembering for all women.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this dissertation and in the chapters that follow, I have (building upon the work of previous literary critics and historians) attempted to demonstrate how the link between public discourse and misogynistic ideology during Italian fascism affected especially the experience of women in Italy from the 1920s to the mid 1940s. In citing the discursive strategies of the regime, I recapitulated how fascism instilled its ideology in civil society, creating a dominant national culture that relegated women to a subordinate political, social, and cultural position. I subsequently suggested that women writers responded to such treatment through their works by establishing counter-discourses that engaged with and evidenced problematic tenets of fascist patriarchal paradigms while also dismantling from the inside out socially constructed gender ideologies. These creative contributions, responding through discourse to the simultaneous political and cultural oppression of women during fascism, helped to configure new identities for women through various forms of discursive engagement.

If we are to read fascism, in part, as a discursive regime, thus meriting the attention of not only historians and political scientists, but literary scholars as well, then we might also interpret antifascist resistance to the regime through literary works as a significant political as well as aesthetic endeavor. I am suggesting, yet again, that we create a dialogue between the supposedly independent categories of politics and literature. That is, the political circumstances of fascism as well as the resistance to fascism in Italy were shaped, in part, by literary practices, major and minor, that attempted not only to narrate the nation but also to narrate the individual experiences of Italians with competing political leanings. Examining the historical realities of fascism and the resistance in conjunction with these narratives by women allows for the opportunity to perform a

feminist analysis that applies Rita Felski's "both/and" methodology; a way of reinterpreting the aesthetic value of literature through an interactive, dialogic model that permeates diverse interpretative planes, focusing on the political and symbolic investments of both woman-as-reader and woman-as-writer. In approaching literary texts by women in this way, we are able to identify the ways women responded to the virtual 'authoring' of woman during Italian fascism vis-à-vis feminine gender through women's active practices of reading and writing. Felski's analysis—challenging the notion that in order to be literary, texts must not be political—brings to light instances of feminist 'figures of resistance,' which are at issue in the work of Teresa de Lauretis and Adriana Cavarero who, in turn, interpret women's resistance to patriarchal language as a form of political dissent. Historical accounts of women's participation in the antifascist resistance in Italy began to surface in the 1990s along with the critical re-examinations of the ways fascism attempted to govern women through pronatalist politics and propaganda, and with critical readings of both the regime's use of rhetoric in its aestheticization of politics and women writers' responses to fascist dogma through literature. Histories that attempt to resurrect the 'impegno femminile' praise not only real women's dedication to the partisan efforts, but bring to the surface a wealth of 'minor' literature that catalogs and recounts women's experiences of and participation in the Resistance, preserved mostly in the 'quotidian' genres of letters, diaries, testimonials and memoirs, and in the narratives deriving from an oral tradition—genres that, like the narrator's account in Milani's *Ragazza di nome Giulio*, together construct a larger historical picture that has yet to be fully explored.

In the words of Adriana Cavarero, these personal accounts—which may also be combined with the fictional accounts of women writers who, through the use of innovative style, structure and thematic nuances, attempted to recount the effects of fascism on the quotidian

realities of women during war—“[mettono] in parole il costitutivo intreccio delle storie individuali da cui risulta la grande Storia” [“put into words, the comprehensive plot of individual stories that formulate the larger History”] (*Tu che mi guardi* 163). Women performed active duties, like transporting arms and ammunition, fostering targeted partisans in private homes and residences, preparing and distributing necessary provisions to partisan groups, and stealthily navigating the black market to acquire those provisions. In addition, the *partigiane* also made intellectual contributions to the Resistance, and for the advancement of women in general, by conducting educational courses for women on political involvement and training exercises for the transportation of arms, forming women’s organizations (like the *Gruppo di Difesa delle Donne*, or GDD), as well as writing, publishing, and disseminating partisan pamphlets and newspapers.¹ Several women took up the pen following the liberation to document their experience of the war and re-live the glory of their days as young partisans through the act of narrating and of hearing themselves narrated.² In addition to the connections created between

¹ For an insightful examination of the Resistance in Italy *al femminile*, see Addis Saba, *Partigiane: Tutte le donne della Resistenza*. Addis Saba not only recuperates a number of previously forgotten accounts of women’s participation in the partisan efforts, but approaches her subject matter intently from ‘feminine’ point of view, collecting oral and written testimonials that do not fit neatly into a chronological ordering of events, but are appreciated through the lens of historic memory.

² To list only a few: Anna Garofalo, *In guerra si muore* (Rome: Universale Editrice, 1945); Aurora Rossetti, *Candida la partigiana* (Turin: UDI, 1945); Bianca Ceva, *Storia di una passione. 1919-1943* (Milan: Garzanti, 1948); Marise Ferro, *La Guerra è stupida* (Milan: Milano Sera, 1949); Ida D’Este, *Croce sulla schiena* (Venice: Fantoni, 1953); Ada Gobetti *Diario partigiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956). I will dedicate a few extra words to Ada Gobetti who, with her husband Piero, was one of the first dissenting intellectual voices to oppose the regime. After her husband’s death in 1926 following a vicious beating at the hands of fascist *squadristi*, Ada Gobetti supported herself through intellectual and literary practice as a teacher, writer, editor, and journalist and was promoted to the post of commander in a Justice and Liberty Brigade as the result of her dedication to the Resistance. Her *Diario partigiano* has since become one of the most recognized examples of Resistance literature in Italy. On Gobetti, see Stanislao Pugliese, *Fascism, Antifascism and the Resistance in Italy* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers,

men and women and different generations of Italians during the Resistance, a thread of interconnectivity was also forged between women from different social strata and backgrounds. As integral participants in the partisan movement, women, too, were targeted as suspect by both German and Italian fascist forces, often ending up in prisons throughout Italy. Prisons became virtual meeting grounds for women active in the resistance to inform other women about the principles and activities at the core of the antifascist movement. Despite frequent ill treatment and interrogations, housing “honest, antifascist women” with women of “malaffari” [“bad deeds”], one partisan asserts, provided for unprecedented encounters and new forms of intellectual exchange between women: “... in tutta questa porcheria potevamo almeno brillare le luci della nostra dottrina perché si intrecciavano con gente che non si sarebbe potuta conoscere in altro modo” [“...in all of that filth, at least we could shine a light on our cause because we were interacting with people that we would not have known otherwise”] (*Partigiane* 5).³

These last activities, useful in resurrecting an overdue appreciation for women’s historical participation in both the armed and unarmed resistance in Italy, also demonstrate, with particular relevance to my discussion of Fascism and literature by women, the polyvalent forms of women’s resistance to fascism through the micropolitical act of writing, as well as a renewed political and symbolic mobilization that arguably served as an example to the later organization of feminist groups during the latter 1960s and throughout 1970s. The ‘minor’ literature produced by women in the form of letters, memoirs, and diaries during and immediately after the collapse of Fascism enjoins the actions of resistance of the *partigiane* and women writing during fascism

2004), pp. 281-3; *Italian Women and Autobiography*, Ioana Raluca Larco and Fabiano Cecchini, eds.; Bartolio Gariglio’s epistolary collection *L’autunno della libertà: lettere ad Ada in morte di Piero Gobetti* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009). For an extensive bibliography of women writing about the Italian Resistance, see Addis Saba, *Partigiane*.

³ Cesira Fiori, partisan, cited in Addis Saba, *Partigiane*, p. 5

to the symbolic, and inherently political, praxis of Italian feminism through a constant investment in writing and re-writing women's historical and allegorical identities.

One of the goals of this dissertation was to link fascism with feminism inasmuch as both developed in historical moments that a) witnessed the profound intersection of aesthetics with politics as equally fundamental components of emerging discourses, and b) as points of collision for politicized aesthetics and aestheticized politics. Fascism compelled a number of women to examine and reinterpret female identity and experience in and against patriarchal conceptualizations of womanhood. In illuminating women's participation in the antifascist resistance in Italy during the 1930s as an intellectual, as well as physical, practice that encouraged women to tell their story, both individually and collectively, I am suggesting that writing, too, marked an effective method in which women were able to speak against hegemonic discourses and practices that sought to suppress their voices. That is to say, the authors included in this project contributed to the discourse of the resistance with pen and paper; they engaged with, infiltrated, and deconstructed dominant fascist narratives in a practice that was both literary and political. Masino, Drigo, and Milani contribute to what de Lauretis refers to as female "figures of resistance"; they adopted and adapted the language of men under fascism to oppose the authoring of woman by man that fascism required and exemplified more than any previous patriarchal regime. They voiced and reinterpreted a female dissent that was at once literary and political.

The contributions of these authors, antecedents to later forms of direct narration of women's experience of oppression, anticipated a distinctly Italian feminist practice that took as its antagonist the political *and* symbolic subjection of women. Italian feminism, like the narratives of the *partigiane* as well as the antifascist writers I discuss in this dissertation,

developed along simultaneously literary and political lines. The Women's Movement itself developed on the heels of the 1968 student and worker movements in Italy and abroad that, similar to the partisan Resistance, embraced "un falso universale maschile di 'operai' o 'contadini'" ["a false, masculinized universal conception of 'workers' or 'peasants'"] (*Partigiane* vii) that paralleled the purportedly neutral subject "I" at issue in Cavarero's later "Per una teoria della differenza sessuale." Women took issue with revolutionary political thinking in the 1960s because it reappropriated a traditional misogynistic patriarchal discourse that continuously failed to represent women's interests and espoused a model of sexual liberation that implicitly or explicitly sustained a position of inferiority for women.⁴ This discomfort within leftist political campaigns eventually inspired women's groups to break away from student and labor movements and create autonomous, separatist political groups. Carla Lonzi's pamphlet, *Sputiamo su Hegel, la donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale*, articulating women's dissatisfaction within communist party lines, responded in large part to fascist classifications of public and private, male and female predicated on a Hegelian division of sex and social roles as separate but complementary components in a broader patriarchal system. Lonzi's essays, touching on the categorization of the public and private along gender lines, psychoanalysis, and political theory, represented the feminist thinking of pioneering women's groups, like "Rivolta femminile" and the community gathered around the Milan Women's Bookstore. These groups advocated female separatism (or "autocoscienza") in response to radical social and political movements that failed to recognize the importance of sexual difference, and in order to 're-write' women's sexual

⁴ Luisa Passerini's *Autoritratto di gruppo*, combined collected oral histories with formal historiography and memoir to create a textual *pastiche* recounting the collective and individual experience of 1968 in Italy. It relates and critiques often conflicting political and socio-cultural leftist ideologies as they are experienced from a female perspective. Dacia Maraini's novels *Donna in Guerra* and *Il treno per Helsinki* also provide feminist critiques of the masculinist cultures of 1968.

autonomy and capacity for pleasure.⁵ The original break, responding to a political need, was soon revised into a form of symbolic empowerment. Adopting an Irigarayan model of plural female sexuality and the trope of the female body, champions of the Italian feminist movement were quick to embrace the power of rhetoric and allegory to further their cause.⁶ Although post-1968 feminist thinkers have yet to acknowledge Masino, Drigo and Milani as their direct predecessors, the rhetorical strategies of these writers, and especially their critical representations of the maternal function, of patriarchal violence, and of the plural nature of female sexuality, are, as I hope this dissertation has demonstrated, part of a distinctly Italian feminist genealogy that includes creative writers and thinkers.

Diotima, a group formed in 1984 by students of philosophy in Verona and perhaps even more widely associated with the beginnings of Italian Feminism than the work of Carla Lonzi, continued to question the conspiring categories of politics and discourse in their historical and seemingly everlasting subjugation and objectification of women. Diotima also responded to the political need of women by engendering symbolic practices and reinterpreting the myths of Western philosophy to include an empowered female subject. The group, in the beginning under the co-leadership of Cavarero and Luisa Muraro, in many ways responded to Lonzi's appeal to women to investigate women's predicament at its origins through the trope of maternity:

⁵ See Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*.

⁶ Lonzi's critique of psychoanalytic theory and the metaphysical qualifications of woman in *Sputiamo su Hegel* and in her other essays arguably employs the symbolic figures of the reproductive female body in opposition to women's sexual body (in the allegory of a 'vaginal' woman as opposed to a 'clitoral' woman) in much the same way women futurists contemplated women's symbolic sexuality. It is worth noting this common metaphorical matrix to point out the interchange between creative practices and socio-political goals; that is, looking at the way feminist texts utilize literary mechanisms to explode political and ideological realities. See, Claudia Salaris (1982), Lucia Re (2000, 2009), and Carmen Gomez (2010).

La maternità è il momento in cui, ripercorrendo le tappe iniziali della vita in simbiosi emotive col figlio, la donna si disaccultura. Essa vede il mondo come un prodotto estraneo alle esigenze primarie dell'esistenza che lei rivive. La maternità è il suo "viaggio." La coscienza della donna si volge spontaneamente all'indietro, alle origini della vita e si interroga.

Motherhood is the moment a woman reaches the moment of deculturization by revisiting the first phases of life in an emotional symbiosis with her child. She views the world as an alien object, foreign to the primary needs of the life she is re-living. Motherhood is her 'trip.' Her consciousness turns backward abruptly, to the origins of life, and questions itself. (*Sputiamo* 48)

Lonzi's critique of maternity as a journey that consistently sends woman backward is shaped largely in reaction to women's experience of aggressive fascist ideologies (Lonzi herself was born in 1931 and therefore grew up as a child under Fascism). The patriarchal and then fascist linear order, precluding woman from philosophical transcendence by situating her firmly at life's maternal, biological, instinctive and thus unthinking origins, is precisely that which Cavarero opposes and attempts to dispute in *Nonostante Platone*. It is also the inspiration for Diotima's earlier practices and collective publications.

The group's adoption of the name Diotima, the woman who appeared in Plato's *Symposium* to educate Socrates on love, represented an alternate vision of philosophical thought with woman at its center: Diotima, imagined within the group as the 'mother' of philosophical thought, was the fulcrum of a system that sought to "birth" ideas. A newly articulated matrilineal system eventually inspired Muraro's *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (1991) in which the author displaces patriarchal hierarchies to establish a uniquely female authority that is sanctioned

through female genealogies that reinstate a mother-daughter relationship that is cultivated through symbolic practices. While Muraro's "symbolic motherhoods" have been challenged by feminist critics for a number of reasons, they make clear the connection between the political responses of women to oppressive ideological discourses and the employment of symbolic practices.⁷ In these initial feminist texts and in the texts that followed, we can read feminism as not only a political practice but a literary one as well. Dissecting Platonic myth to show how misogynistic paradigms have historically told the story of woman from a male perspective, Italian feminist theorists outlined both the discursive and political repression of female subjects: in identifying female identity and women's experience within the confines of a feminine gender that does not begin with woman but seeks to contain her through discourse, patriarchal systems

⁷ Feminist scholars have criticized Muraro's approach for a number of reasons: a) the reversal and reinstatement of a neoplatonic, male-determined model that ultimately becomes that which it sought to dismantle; b) its ineptitude in incorporating and propelling the intellectual, sexual, social, and political identities and capabilities of all women; and c) its inability to dialogue with diverse ideologies and social constructions fundamental in the creation of alternative subjectivities, an issue that is exceptionally a 'feminine problem' but extends to the (re)creation of any marginal subject in discourse. See Re, "Diotima's Dilemmas." Displacing patriarchal and hierarchal traditions to construct exclusively female genealogies, in *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, Muraro contends that loss of truth or 'oblivion' is the result of the cultural repression of the relationship with the mother, both in the literal sense as a woman who gives life and in the figurative sense as the matrix of life itself. Her solution is to reinstate the authority of the mother in consensual hierarchy of symbolic mother (mentor or guide) and daughter. Muraro maintains that women have a privileged connection with their mother through their sex and in this mother-daughter relationship women can establish their own symbolic practices in opposition to male-determined discourses of power. However, Muraro adopts and subverts the Freudian sexual prototype substituting the threat of castration with a special bond between women. The mother-daughter relationship mapped out in *L'ordine simbolico della madre* succeeds only in subverting and reaffirming a lacking female autonomy situated in a dynamic of power and subordination. In response to a culture and discourse that simultaneously speak and negate woman as non-man, speaking only her lack or negativity, Muraro and Diotima endorse a similar relationship between two in order to create the conditions for an undivided ontological existence. Paradoxically, the mother-daughter relationship laid out by Diotima and Muraro only achieves its goal of female exclusivity and the abandonment of patriarchal impositions by embracing woman as only negative; thus, in her relationship with another woman (negative), two negatives beings can achieve a positive existence.

have succeeded in erasing woman altogether. Fascism appropriated historical and mythical discourses to extend women's subordination to a social and political level, conflating the independent categories of gender and sex to delineate women's civic obligation to the regime.

I have outlined above here this evolution of women's intellectual, creative, and active efforts from Fascism to feminism in order to illustrate a link between political and literary practices that has not only been consistently present, but has, in many ways, shaped the very category of Italian feminist thought and praxis. Though Cavarero's *Nonostante Platone* is marked as a split in the ways of thinking sexual difference between Diotima and the feminist philosopher, I might alternately label it as a point in the further evolution of Italian feminist thought that, in conjunction with the critical work of Teresa de Lauretis and Rosi Braidotti, develops a methodology that at once engages with male-determined discourses and opposes them, creating innovative 'figures of resistance' that speak woman by beginning with woman. Rooting the issue of sexual difference in language in her work, from *Per una teoria della differenza sessuale* to her more recent publications, Cavarero is able to investigate women's (self) representation on the level of discourse; and thus, examine its implications in *both* literature *and* politics. Lonzi, Diotima, and Muraro laid a foundation for feminist practice and theory as political as well as symbolic endeavors, and in highlighting relational modes of existence, Cavarero's dialogical model introduces language— literary, political, conversational, ideological, and otherwise— as a primary site of (sexual) difference that is fundamental in (re)creating diverse identities.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to bring to light language and discourse as a fundamental site of female repression during Fascism that not only inspired women to 'talk back' in kind, but presented models of dissonance that would be employed by women for generations

to come in the development of feminist theory and criticism. Just as the women who participated in the partisan movement in Italy, who actively resisted Fascist authority and exploitation, are only beginning to be recognized, it is my hope that the authors examined here, Paola Masino, Paola Drigo, and Milena Milani, might be similarly recognized for their own acts of resistance, contributing in their own way to a collectivity of dissenting female voices. Each of the texts considered in this dissertation, pursuing various thematic strands, structural forms, and modes of representation, illuminates women's narrative identities and gender constructions across the various discourses of history, politics, and culture and anticipates the symbolic relationships and figures that would animate the Italian feminist movement in the decades that followed. Masino, Drigo, and Milani not only debunk, denounce, and dissect misogynistic fascist discourses in their texts, but they also reveal innovative ways of thinking and writing about women, infiltrating the cultural imagination with fluid subjects dialogically and reciprocally engaged with the narratives that sought to define and confine them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adamson, Walter, "Modernism and Fascism. The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903-1922,"
American Historical Review 95.2 (1990): 559-90. Print.
- Addis Saba, Marina. *La corporazione delle donne: ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio fascista*. Florence: Vallecchi, 1988. Print.
- . *Partigiane: Tutte le donne della Resistenza*. Milan: Mursia, 1998.
- Albertazzi, Silvia. *Il punto su: la letteratura fantastica*. Rome: Editori Laterza, 1995. Print.
- Aleramo, Sibilla. *La donna e il femminismo: scritti 1897-1910*. Ed. Bruna Conti. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978. Print.
- . *Una Donna*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991. Print.
- Andreotti, F.R., and S. D'Ortenzi. *Scrittrici nella politica culturale del Fascismo*. Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2006. Print.
- Antonicelli, Franco. *Trent'anni di storia italiana (1915-1945)*. Turin: Einaudi, 1961. Print.
- Apice, Mario. "Milena Milani: 'Umori e amori' di un personaggio del nostro tempo." *Silarius* 18.104 (1982): 37-41. Print.
- Armitt, Lucie. *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic*. London: Macmillan, 2000. Print.
- Austin, Patricia, and Jo Little. "Women and the Rural Idyll." *Journal of Rural Studies* 12.2 (1996): 101-11. Print.
- Azzolini, Paola. "Il silenzio del bosco tagliato: lettura di *Maria Zef*." *Maria Zef*. Eds. Paola Azzolini and Patrizia Zambon. Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2011. Print.
- Bachofen, Johann J. *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*. Trans.

- Ralph Manheim. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1967. Print.
- Bahktin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. Print.
- Balzac, Honoré , Paola Masino, and Bertini M. Bongiovanni. *La ragazza dagli occhi d'oro = La fille aux yeux d'or*. Torino: Einaudi, 1993. Print.
- Bancheri, Salvatore. Rev. of *Il mito e l'allegoria nella narrativa di Paola Masino* by Louise Rozier. *Italica* 84 (2007): 639-641. Print.
- Banti, Anna. *Artemisia*. Milan: Mondadori, 1965. Print.
- . *Corte Savella*. Milan: Mondadori, 1960. Print.
- Barcella, Gianfranco. *Invito alla lettura di Milena Milani*. Empoli: Ibiskos, 2008. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Print.
- . *Mythologies*. Trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers. 1957. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012. Print.
- Bartolomeo, Beatrice, and Patrizia Zambon, eds. *Paola Drigo: settant'anni dopo*. Pisa-Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2009. Print.
- Bauer, Dale M., and Susan Jaret McKinstry, eds. *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1991. Print.
- bell hooks. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2000. Print.
- Bellassai, Sandro. *L'invenzione della virilità: Politica e immaginario maschile nell'Italia contemporanea*. Rome: Carocci, 2011. Print.
- . "The Masculine Mystique: Antimodernism and Virility in Fascist Italy." *Journal of Modern*

- Italian Studies* 10.3 (2005): 314-335. Print.
- Belzer, Alison Scardino. *Women and the Great War: Femininity under Fire in Italy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Benedetti, Laura. *Tigress in the Snow: Motherhood and Literature in Twentieth-Century Italy*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007. Print.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. *Fascist Modernities*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 2001. Print.
- . "Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the 'Third Way.'" *Journal of Contemporary History*. 31.2 (1996): 293-316. Print.
- Bernardini Napoletano, Francesca. "L'archivio di Paola Masino: Inventario." *Quaderni della rassegna degli archivi di stato*. Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, direzione generale per gli archivi, 2004. Print.
- Bernardini Napoletano, Francesca, and Galateria M. Mascia, eds. "Paola Masino." *Scrittrici e intellettuali del Novecento, I*. Milan: Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2001. Print.
- Bersani, Mauro. Postfazione. *Monte Ignoso*. By Paola Masino. Eds. Paola Azzolini and Patrizia Zambon. Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2011. 209-223. Print.
- Best, David Albert. *Ruralism in Central Italian Writers, 1927-1997: From Strapaese to the Gendering of Nature: Fabio Tombari, Paolo Volponi, Carlo Cassola, Romana Petri*. Ancona: Ancona UP, 2010. Print.
- Blelloch, Paola, "From Trunk to Grave: the Hallucinated Story of a Housewife." *Nemla Italian Studies* 13-14 (1989-1990): 89-103. Print.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994. Print.

- Boero, Silvia. "Metodologie di sovversione: Monte Ignoso di Paola Masino." *Forum Italicum* 42.1 (2008): 52-68. Print.
- . *Vite parallele di Paola Drigo e Paola Masino: Voci femminili di dissenso nella letteratura del periodo fascista*. Diss. U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005. Print.
- Bono, Paola, and Sandra Kemp, eds. *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford, 1991.
- . *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Bonsaver, Guido, and Robert S.C. Gordon, eds. *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*. London: Legenda, 2005. Print.
- Bontempelli, Massimo. *Due storie di madri e figli*. Milan: Mondadori, 1977. Print.
- . *Introduzioni e discorsi (1936-1942)*. Milan: Bompiani, 1945. Print.
- . *La vita intense; La vita operosa*. Oscar classici moderni. Milano: Mondadori, 1998. Print.
- . "Nuove novelle," Rev. of *La Fortuna*, by Paola Drigo. *Nuova antologia: Rivista di lettere, scienza ed arti* 16 June 1913: 659-60. Print.
- Bottai, Giuseppe. *Esperienza corporative*. Rome: Edizioni del Diritto del Lavoro, 1929. Print.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Print.
- . *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. Print.
- . *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006. Print.
- Broude, Norma, and Mary D. Garrard, eds. *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*. New York: IconEditions, 1992. Print.
- Burleigh, Michael. *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics from the Great War to the*

- War on Terror*. New York: Harpers Collins, 2007. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Buttarelli, Annarosa. *La sapienza di partire da sé*. Naples: Liguori, 1996. Print.
- Caldwell, Lesley. *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics, and Legal Reform*. London: Macmillan, 1991. Print.
- . "Reproducers of the Nation: Women and the Family in Fascist Policy." *Rethinking Italian Fascism: Capitalism, Populism, and Culture*. Ed. David Forgacs. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986.
- Capozzi, Rocco, and Luca Somigli. *Italian Prose Writers, 1900-1945*. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2002. Print.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*. Trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- . *Nonostante Platone: Figure femminili nella filosofia antica*. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1990. Print.
- . *Orrorismo, ovvero della violenza sull'inerme*. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2007. Print.
- . "Per una teoria della differenza sessuale." *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*. Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987. Print.
- . *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997. Print.
- . "Towards a theory of sexual difference." *The Lonely Mirror: Italian perspectives on feminist*

- theory*. Eds. Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 189-221. Print.
- Cesaretti, Enrico. "Indigestible Fictions: Hunger, Infanticide and Gender in Paola Masino's *Fame* and Massimo Bontempelli's *La fame*." *Spunti e Ricerche: Rivista d'Italianistica* 23 (2008): 5-20. Print.
- . "Nutrition As Dissolution: Paola Masino's *Nascita e morte della Massaia*." *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 28.2 (2007): 143-162. Print.
- Ceva, Bianca. *Storia di una passione. 1919-1943*. Milan: Garzanti, 1948. Print.
- Chiti, Eleonora, and Monica Farnetti, and Uta Treder, eds. *La perturbante: Das Unheimliche nella scrittura delle donne*. Perugia: Morlacchi, 2003. Print.
- Cooper, Allison. "Gender, Identity, and the Return to order in the Early Works of Paola Masino," *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture between Decadentism and Avant-garde*. Eds. Mario Moroni and Luca Somigli. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004. Print.
- Cox, Virginia. *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008. Print.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf, 1953. Print.
- De Giovanni, Neria. *Carta di donna: narratrici italiane del '900*. Turin: Società Editrice Nazionale, 1996. Print.
- De Grazia, Victoria. *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992. Print.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.
- . "Figures of Resistance." *Figures of Resistance*. Ed. Patricia White. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2007. 235-60. Print.

- . "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy the U.S., and Britain." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Namoi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.
- . *Sui generis: scritti di teoria femminista*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996. Print.
- De Nicola, Francesco, and Pier A. Zanon, eds. *La fama e il silenzio: Scrittrici dimenticate del primo Novecento*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2002. Print.
- Deledda, Grazia. "Il natale del consigliere." *Chiaroscuro*. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1921. Print.
- . *La via del male*. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1916. Print.
- Dell'Agnes, Elena, and Elisabetta Ruspini, eds. *Mascolinità all'italiana*. Turin: UTET, 2007. Print.
- D'Este, Ida. *Croce sulla schiena*. Venice: Fantoni, 1953. Print.
- Diotima. *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*. Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987. Print.
- . *Il cielo stellato dentro di noi*. Milan: La Tartaruga, 1992. Print.
- . *Mettere al mondo il mondo: oggetto e oggettività alla luce della differenza sessuale*. Milan: La Tartaruga, 1990. Print.
- . *Oltre l'uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell'autorità*. Naples: Liguori, 1995. Print.
- D'Ortenzi, Silvia, "Nascita e morte della massaia: Paola Masino." *Quaderni Del '900* 5 (2005): 39-52. Print.
- Drigo, Paola. *Codino*. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1918. Print.
- . *Fine d'anno*. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1936. Print.
- . *La fortuna*. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1913. Print.
- . *La Signorina Anna: Racconti*. Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1932. Print.
- . *Maria Zef*. Eds. Paola Azzolini and Patrizia Zambon. Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2011. Print.

- . *Maria Zef*. Trans. Blossom Steinberg Kirschenbaum. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989. Print.
- Duggan, Christopher. *A Concise History of Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.
- . *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. Print.
- Duncan, Derek. "Corporeal Histories: The Autobiographical Bodies of Luisa Passerini. *The Modern Language Review* 93.2 (1998): 370-83. Print.
- Durham, Martin. *Women and Fascism*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Durix, Jean-Pierre. *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Print.
- Ellis, John. *Literature Lost*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. Print.
- Euripides. *The Medea of Euripides*. Trans. Gilbert Murray. New York: Oxford UP, 1934. Print.
- Falasca-Zamponi, Simonetta. *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: U of California P, 1997. Internet Resource.
- Farnetti, Monica, ed. *Geografia, storia e poetiche del fantastico*. Florence: Olschki, 1989. Print.
- Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. Print.
- . *Literature after feminism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. Print.
- Ferro, Marisa. *La Guerra è stupida*. Milan: Milano Sera, 1949. Print.
- Fogu, Claudio. *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003. Print.
- Forgacs, David, ed. *Rethinking Italian Fascism*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986. Print.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jean Khalfa. *History of Madness*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Fraire, Manuela. *Lessico politico delle donne: teorie del femminismo*. Milan: Fondazione

- Badaracco, 2002. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Das Unheimliche*. Project Gutenberg. Web.
- . *The "Uncanny."* Trans. David McLintock. 1919. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.
- Gaborik, Patricia. "La Donna Mobile: Massimo Bontempelli's Nostra Dea as Fascist Modernism." *Modern Drama* 50. 2 (2007): 210-232. Print.
- Gadda, Carlo Emilio. Rev. of *Monte Ignoso*, By Paola Masino. *Solaria* July-Aug. 1931. Print.
- Gallucci, Carole C. "Alba De Céspedes's *There's No Turning Back*: Challenging the New Woman's Future." *Mothers of Invention*. Ed. Robin Pickering Iazzi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995. Print.
- Gallucci, Carole C., and Ellen Victoria Nerenberg, eds. *Writing Beyond Fascism: Cultural Resistance in the Life and Works of Alba De Céspedes*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2000. Print.
- Gariglio, Bartolio. *L'autunno della libertà: lettere ad Ada in morte di Piero Gobetti*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009. Print.
- Garofalo, Anna. *In guerra si muore*. Rome: Universale Editrice, 1945. Print.
- Gatt-Rutter, John. "The Aftermath of the Second World War (1945-1956)." *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*. 1996. Eds. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 533-56. Print.
- Gentile, Emilio. "Fascism in Italian Historiography: In Search of an Individual Historical Identity." *Journal of Contemporary History* 21.2 (1986): 179-208. Print.
- . *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*. Rome: Laterza, 1994. Print.
- . *La donna nella coscienza moderna*. Florence: Sansoni, 1934. Print.

- Ghezzi, Flora Maria. *Corpi imprigionati: scritture femminili del ventennio*. Diss. Rutgers U, 2001. Print.
- . "Fiamme e follia, ovvero la morte della madre arcaica in *Monte Ignoso* di Paola Masino." *Esperienze letterarie* 28.3 (2003): 34-55. Print.
- . "Topographies of Disease and Desire: Mapping the City in Fascist Italy." *MLN* 125.1 (2010): 195-222. Print.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Print.
- Ginsborg, Paul. *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power, and Patrimony*. London and New York: Verso, 2004. Print.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972/1977. Print.
- Gobetti, Ada. *Diario partigiano*. Turin: Einaudi, 1956. Print.
- Gomez, Carmen. "Gender, Science, and the Modern Woman: Futurism's Strange Concoctions of Femininity." *Carte Italiane* 2.6 (2010): n. pag. Web. 5 April 2013.
- . "Milena Milani's *La ragazza di nome Giulio*: A Forgotten Feminist Novel." *MLN* 125.1 (2010): 223-43.
- Hewitt, Andrew. "A FASCIST FEMINISM." *Qui Parle* 13.1 (2001): 29-55. Print.
- Hibberd, Matthew. *The Media in Italy: Press, Cinema and Broadcasting from Unification to Digital*. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2008. Print.
- Hipkins, Danielle E. *Contemporary Italian Women Writers and Traces of the Fantastic: The Creation of Literary Space*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Many Publishing, 2007. Print.
- Horn, David. *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton

- UP, 1994. Print.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977. Print.
- . "This Sex Which Is Not One." *New French Feminisms*. Eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Trans. Claudia Reeder. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980. 99-106. Print.
- . "Così Fan Tutti." *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. 86-105. Print.
- . *The Irigaray Reader*. Ed. Margaret Whitford. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Print.
- . *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. Print.
- Isnenghi, Mario. *Le guerre degli italiani: parole, immagini, ricordi 1848-1945*. Milan: Mondadori, 1989. Print.
- Jagentowicz Mills, Patricia, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Signatures of the Visible*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Jeannet, Angela M., and Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, eds. *Natalia Ginzburg, A Voice of the Twentieth Century*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000. Print.
- Kaplan, Elizabeth Ann. *Looking for the other: Feminism, film, and the imperial gaze*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Kernan, Alvin. *The Death of Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. Print.
- Kershaw, Angela, and Angela Kimyongür, eds. *Women in Europe between the Wars: Politics, Culture and Society*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. Print.
- Kimball, Roger. *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990. Print.
- Kowaleski-Wallace, Elizabeth, ed. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. London:

- Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Crisis of the European Subject*. Trans. Susan Fairfield. New York: Other Press, 2000. Print.
- . *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. Print.
- Laclau, Ernest. *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*. London: NLB, 1977. Print.
- Lardinois, A., and Laura McClure. *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001. Print.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. London: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.
- Lazzaro-Weis, Carol. *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993. Print.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *Psychologie Des Foules*. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1911. Print.
- Levy, Ariel. "Basta Bunga Bunga: Have Italians had enough of Silvio Berlusconi and the culture he embodies?" *The New Yorker*. Web. 6 June 2011.
- Leyshon, Michael, and Jo Little. "Embodied Rural Geographies: Developing Research Agendas." *Progress in Human Geography* 27.3 (2003): 257-272. Print.
- Little, Jo and Patricia Austin. "Women and the Rural Idyll." *Journal of Rural Studies* 12.2 (1996): 101-11. Print.
- Little, Jo, and Carol Morris. *Critical Studies in Rural Gender Issues*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Print.
- Loffredo, Ferdinando. *Politica della famiglia*. Milan: Bompiani, 1938. Print.
- Lonzi, Carla. *Sputiamo su Hegel. La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale*. Milan: Rivolta Femminile, 1974. Print.

Lucamante, Stefania. *A Multitude of Women: The challenges of the contemporary Italian novel*.

Toronto: U of Toronto P Incorporated, 2008. Print.

Ludwig, Emil. *Colloqui con Mussolini*. Verona: Mondadori, 1932. Print.

Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. *La donna 'nera': 'consenso femminile e fascismo*. Milan:

Feltrinelli, 1976. Print.

Maier-Katkin, Birgit. *Silence and Acts of Memory: A Postwar Discourse on Literature, History,*

Anna Seghers, and Women in the Third Reich. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press,

2007. Print.

Malhotra, Shena, and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, eds. *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the*

Edges of Sound. New York: Palgrave, 2013. Print.

Manetti, Beatrice. *Una carriera à rebours: I quaderni d'appunti di Paola Masino*. Alessandria:

Edizioni dell'Orso, 2001. Internet resource.

Manzi, Luigi. *Giuseppe Ricciardi e le sue lettere inedite sul risorgimento italiano*. Rome:

L'Italia Moderna, 1905. Print.

Maraini, Dacia. *Donna in guerra*. Turin: Einaudi, 1975. Print.

---. *Lettere a Marina*. Milan: Bompiani, 1981. Print.

---. *Memorie di una ladra*. Milan: Bompiani, 1972. Print.

Masino, Paola. *Monte Ignoso*. 1931. Genova: Il melangolo, 1994. Print.

---. *Decadenza della Morte (1928-1929)*. Roma: A. Stock, 1931. Print.

---. *Io, Massimo e gli altri: autobiografia di una figlia del secolo*. Ed. Maria V. Vittori. Milan:

Rusconi, 1995. Print.

---. *Nascita e morte della massaia: Romanzo*. 1945. Milano: La Tartaruga, 1982. Print.

---. *Periferia, Romanzo Di Paola Masino*. Milano: V. Bompiani, 1933. Print.

- . *Poesie*. Milano: Bompiani, 1947. Print.
- . *Racconto grosso: e altri*. Milano: Valentino Bompiani, 1941. Print
- Masino, Paola, and Maria V. Vittori. *Colloquio di notte: racconti*. Palermo: La Luna, 1994. Print.
- McDowell, Linda. *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. Print.
- Meldini, Piero. *Sposa e madre esemplare: Ideologia e politica della donna della famiglia durante il fascismo*. Florence: Guaraldi, 1975. Print.
- Meril Squier, Susan, ed. *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1984. Print.
- Milani, Milena. *A Girl Called Jules*. Trans. Graham Snell. London: Hutchinson, 1966. Print.
- . *La ragazza di nome Giulio*. Milano: Longanesi & Co., 1964. Print.
- . *Io donna e gli altri*. Milan: Rusconi, 1983. Print.
- . *La rossa di via Tadino*. Milan: Rusconi, 1979. Print.
- . *Oggetto Sessuale*. Milan: Rusconi, 1977. Print.
- . *Storia di Anna Drei*. Milano: Rusconi, 1978. Print.
- Moe, Nelson. *The View From Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: U of California P, 2002. Ebook.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- Mondello, Elisabetta. *La nuova italiana: la donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio*. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987. Print.
- Morante, Elsa. *La storia*. Turin: Einaudi, 1974. Print.
- . *L'isola di Arturo*. Turin. Einaudi, 1957. Print.

- . *Menzogna e sortilegio*. Turin: Einaudi, 1962. Print.
- Mozzoni, Anna M. *La liberazione della donna*. Milan: G. Mazzotta, 1975. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18. Print.
- Murari, Stefania. *L'idea più avanzata del secolo: Anna Maria Mozzoni e il femminismo Italiano*. Rome: Aracne, 2008. Print.
- Muraro, Luisa. *L'ordine simbolico della madre*. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1991. Print.
- Mussolini, Benito. *Scritti e discorsi*. 6 vols. Milan: U. Hoepli, 1934. Print.
- Namer, Fulvia Airoidi. "La terra e la discesa: L'immaginario di Paola Masino." *Otto/Novecento* 24.3 (2000): 161-86. Print.
- Nerenberg, Ellen. "'Donna proprio... proprio donna': The Social Construction of Femininity in *Nessuno torna indietro*." *Romance Languages Annual* 3 (1991): 267-73. Print.
- Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963. Print.
- Nozzoli, Anna. *Tabù e coscienza: La condizione femminile nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*. Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978. Print.
- Orano, *Il fascismo*. Rome: Casa editrice pinciana, 1939. Print.
- Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy*. Trans. John W. Harvey. New York: Oxford UP, 1958. Print.
- Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. Print.
- Panizza, Letizia and Sharon Wood, eds. *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.
- Parati, Graziella and Rebecca West, eds. *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002. Print.
- Parca, Gabriella. *L'avventurosa storia del femminismo*. 3rd Ed. Milan: Mondadori, 1981. Print.

- Passerini, Luisa. *Autoritratto di gruppo*. Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1988.
- . *Fascism in Popular Memory*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge UP, 1987. Print.
- Passmore, Kevin. *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe, 1919-45*. New Brunswick: Manchester UP, 2003. Print.
- Pedullà, Walter. *Massimo Bontempelli*. Rome: Editore Ponte Sisto di Lineagrafica, 2005. Print.
- Petrignani, Sandra, and Lalla Romano. *Le signore della scrittura: Interviste : Lalla Romano, Paola Masino, Alba De Cèspedes, Maria Bellonci, Laudomia Bonanni, Annamaria Ortese, Fausta Cialente, Livia De Stefani, Anna Banti, Elsa Morante*. Milan: La Tartaruga, 1984. Print.
- Pickering-Iazzi, Robin, ed. *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.
- . "The Politics of Gender and Genre in Italian Women's Autobiography of the Interwar Years." *Italica* 71.2 (1994): 176-197. Print.
- . *Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture, and Fascism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. Print.
- Plato, *Cratylus*. Trans. H.N. Fowler, 1921. *The Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts U. Web.
- Poggi, Simona. *Milena Milani: Albisola amore*. Milan: Viennepierre Edizioni, 2005. Print.
- Pugliese, Stanislao. *Fascism, Antifascism and the Resistance in Italy*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004. Print.
- Rainwater, Catherine, and William J. Scheick. *Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1985. Print.
- Raluca Larco, Ioana, and Fabiano Cecchini, eds. *Italian Women and Autobiography: Ideology,*

- Discourse and Identity in Female Life Narratives from Fascism to the Present*. New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. Print.
- Rame, Franca. *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*. Verona: Bertani, 1978. Print.
- Re, Lucia. *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.
- . "Diotima's Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism." *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice*. Eds Graziella Parati and Rebecca West. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2002. 50-74. Print.
- . "Fame, cibo e antifascismo nella *Massaia* di Paola Masino." *Il cibo e le donne nella cultura e nella storia*. Eds. Maria G Muzzarelli and Lucia Re. Bologna: CLUEB, 2005. Print.
- . "Fascist Theories of 'Woman' and the Construction of Gender." *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995. 76-99. Print.
- . "Futurism and Fascism, 1914-1945." *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*. Ed. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 190-204. Print.
- . "Maria Ginanni vs. F.T. Marinetti: Women, Speed, and War in Futurist Italy." *Annali di Italianistica: A Century of Futurism, 1909 to 2009* 27 (2009): 103-124. Print.
- . "Women and Censorship in Fascist Italy: From Mura to Masino." *Culture, Censorship, and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*. Eds. Guido Bonsaver and Robert Gordon. London: Legenda, 2005. 64-75. Print.
- Ricaldone, Luisa. *La scrittura nascosta: Donne di lettere e loro immagini tra Arcadia e Restaurazione*. Fiesole: Cadmo, 1996. Print.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Figuring the Sacred*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. Print.

- Robert, Enif. *Un ventre di donna*. Milano: Cooperativa Grafica degli Operai, 1919. Print.
- Rorandelli, Tristana. "Nascita e morte della massaia di Paola Masino e la questione del corpo materno nel fascismo." *Forum Italicum* 37.1 (2003): 70. Print.
- Rosà, Rosa. *Una donna con tre anime*. Milano: Facchi Editore, 1919. Print.
- Rossetti, Aurora. *Candida la partigiana*. Turin: UDI, 1945. Print.
- Rossi, Lorenza. *Milena Milani: Una vita in collage*. Turin: Seneca Edizioni, 2012. Print.
- Rozier, Louise. "The Theme of Childhood in Paola Masino's Periferia." *Italica* 84 (2007): 399-409. Print.
- . *Il mito e l'allegoria nella narrativa di Paola Masino*. Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 2004. Print.
- . "Paola Masino's Short Fiction: Another Voice in the Collective Experience of Italian Neorealism." *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 29.1 (2008): 145-164. Print.
- Russell, Rinaldina, ed. *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994. Print.
- Saint-Point, Valentine. "Manifesto della donna futurista." *Le futuriste: Donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italia (1909|1944)*. Ed. Claudia Salaris. Milan: Edizioni delle donne, 1982. Print.
- Salaris, Claudia. *Le futuriste: Donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italia (1909-1944)*. Milan: Edizioni delle donne, 1982. Print.
- Santoro, Anna, ed. *Il Novecento: Antologia di scrittrici italiane del primo ventennio*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1997. Print.
- . *Narratrici italiane dell'Ottocento*. Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1987. Print.
- Santoro, Anna and Francesca Vegliione. *Catalogo della scrittura femminile a stampa presente nei fondi library della Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli*. Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1984. Print.

- Sartini-Blum, Cinzia. *Rewriting the Journey in Contemporary Italian Literature: Figures of Subjectivity in Progress*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2008. 2008.
- Scarpato, Susanna, and Rita Wilson, eds. *Across Genres, Generations, and Borders: Italian Women Writing Lives*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004. Print.
- Serao, Matilde. *Il ventre di napoli*. Naples: F. Perrella, 1906. Print.
- Serri, Mirella. *I redenti: Gli intellettuali che vissero due volte, 1938-1948*. Milan: Corbaccio, 2005. Print.
- Showalter, Elaine, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977. Print.
- . *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. Print.
- Simons, Patricia. "Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, and the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture." *History Workshop Journal* 25.1 (1988): 4-30. Print.
- Spackman, Barbara. *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. Print.
- Stroubouloupoulos. *Love, Hate & Propaganda: The Strongmen*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2010. Print.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975. Print.
- . *Symbolism and Interpretation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982. Print.
- Troisio, Luciano. *Le riviste di strapaese e stracittà: Il selvaggio; L'italiano; '900'*. Treviso: Canova, 1975. Print.
- Ulstch, Lori. "La genealogia del personaggio e 'le figure in penombra' di Paola Drigo." *L'Anello*

- che non tiene* XV.1-2 (2003): 31-57. Print.
- Valentini, Daria, and Paola Carù, eds. *Beyond Artemisia*. Chapel Hill: Annali d'Italianistica, 2003. Print.
- Verga, Giovanni. *Carteggio Verga-Capuana: di Giovanni Verga e Luigi Capuana*. Ed. Gino Raya. Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1984. Print.
- . *The She-Wolf and Other Stories*. Trans. Giovanni Becchetti. Berkely: U of California P, 1958. Print.
- . *Sicilian Stories – Novelle Siciliane*. Trans. Stanley Appelbaum. Mineola: Dover, 2002. Print.
- . *Tutte le novelle*. Liber Liber Mediateca. Web. 22 June 2008.
- Violi, Patrizia. *L'infinito singolare: considerazioni sulla differenza sessuale nel linguaggio*. Verona: Essedue edizioni, 1986. Print.
- Warhol-Down, Robyn, and Diane Price-Herndl, eds. *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Newark: Rutgers State U, 2009. Print.
- Whitson, Kathy J. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. Print.
- Williams, James G. *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*. New York: Harpers Collins, 1991. Print.
- Willson, Perry. *Gender, Family, and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy 1860-1945*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.
- . *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: Le Massaie Rurali*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- . *Women in Twentieth Century Italy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Wittman, Laura. *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011. Print.

- Wood, Sharon. *Italian Women's Writing, 1860-1994*. London: Athlone, 1995. Print.
- Wright, Elizabeth, ed. *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1992. Print.
- Zambon, Patrizia. *Il filo del racconto: studi di letteratura in prosa dell'Otto/Novecento*.
Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004. Print.
- . "La narrativa realista nei romanzi d'autrice di fine Ottocento." *Problemi: Periodico
Quadrimestrale di Cultura* 108 (1997): 166-77. Print.
- . *Novelle d'autrice tra Otto e Novecento*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1998. Print.
- . *Scrittrici, scrittori: saggi di letteratura contemporanea*. Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2011. Print.
- Zancan, Marina. *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria
italiana*. Torino: Einaudi, 1998. Print.
- Zox-Weaver, Annalisa. *Women Modernists and Fascism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.
Print.