Grazia Deledda: The Politics of Non-Involvement

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the present dissertation is to reappraise the work of Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) in the light of psychological, semiotic and feminist theory introduced in Chapter I, "Methodologies". Towards this end Chapter II, "Syllabus," reviews the social and political climate into which Deledda was born and the key events in her early family life up to the time of her marriage in 1900. Using her personal letters and her autobiographical novel Cosima as primary sources, the link between Deledda's personal experience and her writing is established. The letters and Cosima are also analyzed in an effort to reach a better understanding of Deledda's veiled antagonism towards familial and societal restrictions. It is our intention, in so doing, to demonstrate just how the effects of 19th-century patriarchy were negotiated by Deledda as a woman author. Paying particular attention to those episodes and relationships which influenced the ambivalent nature of her views on sexuality and gender relations Chapter III, "Marriage of the Mind," continues to explore Deledda's obsession with such sexual themes as pathology, the consequence of that restrictive web of prohibitions which, in the lives of women, tolerated no exposure to the outside world and subverted any natural expression of sensuality.
Through her literary treatment of women in the short story "Battesimi" and the novel *Nostalgie*, the extent of autobiographical intrusion, introduced in Chapter II, is examined in more detail.

Chapter IV, "The Business of Writing", investigates Deledda's entrepreneurial skills in her letters and fiction noting how she employed gender tactics to develop her career aspirations despite the opposition of her family and the pressures of society. Chapter V, "Gender Wars", examines the nature of both male and female characterization in Deledda's novels in order to uncover her views regarding inequality. Her language and images are evaluated here by enlisting semiotics to corroborate her anxiety and anger in respect to gender issues.

It is our intention herein to show the author's constant awareness of women's power and potential as well as their plight at an almost total absence of legitimate channels allowing them. Deledda's profound personal frustration with sexual and professional repression will be shown to have had a significant impact on the nature of the style and content of her literary output.
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Preface

A spectrum of views from the conservative to a still timid feminist ticket has continued to consider Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) primarily through her novels, dividing them into those prior to and those following Il segreto dell'uomo solitario (1921), considered to be the watershed between Deledda's early Sardinian period and a new, more intimate psychological phase in her writing. For the most part her letters have been used thus far to elaborate upon evaluations of her novels. It is the purpose of this dissertation, rather, to employ Deledda's letters in a concerted attempt to reach a better understanding of her literary reaction to the crisis of 19th-century gender issues, that growing antagonism of women towards familial and social restrictions which marked the age, to demonstrate how the personal and global effects of that historical period were negotiated by Deledda as a woman author. By utilising her letters up to 1900 and her final novel Cosima, published posthumously in 1937, her ambivalent views on sexuality, femininity and gender relations will be seen to be the result of a number of traumatic incidents in her early experience in Sardinia. It will be shown how these events impacted significantly on her life as a woman and crucially influenced her development as a writer.

Chapter 1 "Methodologies" will begin with a review of previous criticism of Deledda with the aim of introducing the advantages of using a variety of methodologies in the study of her work rather than remaining limited to a fixed literary focus. It is our belief that employing a spectrum of approaches yields a deeper understanding of
Deledda's writing as more than just a creative exercise. Together with a literary analysis, feminist, psychoanalytic and semiotic methodologies will be used to discover messages in her writing sometimes not accessible by implementing one method alone. Since Deledda's early life is of utmost importance in reaching an understanding of her psychological development and of how it affected the content and style of her writing, this opening chapter will defend the use of biography and cite some of the historical/developmental background to feminism, psychoanalysis and semiotics.

"Syllabus", Chapter II, will introduce the social and political climate into which Deledda was born. Her family life will be discussed paying particular attention to those episodes and relationships, described in her correspondence and in Cosima, which particularly influenced the ambivalent, sometimes vague and contradictory nature of her opinions concerning sexuality and gender relations. It will become evident that because of Deledda's constant struggle to assert herself as a woman and as a writer she lived in an ongoing state of flux between submissive and rebellious moods. These struggles and temperaments are reflected in the personalities and in the actions of many of the characters in her stories and novels.

Deledda allowed herself to become successful through escape from her rigid patriarchal background, but it was an escape for which she invariably punished herself. It will become clear that she exhibited a typical psychological dynamic of self-flagellation for her own trespass through many of her characters, who are punished for attempts at escape from tradition or who fail in the wake of a short-lived success.
Chapter III, "Marriage of the Mind," will explore Deledda's obsession with writing on sexual themes as pathology, the consequence of that restrictive web of prohibition which, in the lives of women, tolerated no exposure to the outside world and subverted any natural expression of sensuality. This chapter will examine Deledda's chronic ambivalence on gender issues by considering her letters to Stanis Manca and Andrea Pirodda and by an analysis of the short story "Battesimi" and the novel Nostalgie.

It is through a comparison of her correspondence and her literary treatment of women that the extent of autobiographical intrusion into her text, a topic introduced in Chapter II, will be examined in further depth.

"The Business of Writing", Chapter IV, will investigate Deledda's entrepreneurial skills in her letters and fiction noting how she employed gender tactics to develop her forbidden career aspirations despite the opposition of family and the pressures of society. This topic is of special interest in that it is not often broached by critics as a significant influence. In fact, practical concerns impacted substantially on the nature of Deledda's writing. Ahead of her time in understanding the literary market, she employed those strategies deemed necessary to gain not only artistic recognition but also to become financially successful. As a female author Deledda cleverly concealed her practical side by directing the growth of her "business of writing" through a veneer of propriety. Strategically, however, she used female tactics with editors and publishers, displaying either confidence or submission as the "useful contact" or the monetary return dictated. Aware that as a woman she must not seem overly attentive or knowledgeable in financial matters, Deledda carefully concealed her business acumen while at the same time
exaggerating her role as a primitive artist or a delicate female. After her marriage she avoided entrepreneurial impropriety by using her husband Palmiro Madesani as a barrier between her femininity and the investment world. Indeed in a time when the romance novel was at its height of popularity Deledda's writing sold well to a wide Italian audience both to the traditionally-minded and liberal. Moreover, through a persistent programme of translations, Deledda easily captured the European popular market thus notably expanding her business.

Chapter V, "Gender Wars", will analyze the nature of several of Deledda's female characters in order to locate masked opinion regarding gender inequality. Consideration of Deledda's letters to Marino Moretti (1885-1978) and an analysis of the male characters in Canne al vento, Fuga in Egitto, and L'incendio nell'oliveto, will demonstrate Deledda's notion that there exists a natural spectrum of gender traits in both men and women and that this spectrum is more acceptable than a polarization of masculinity and femininity. Enlisting semiotics and its methods, the language and images of the short story "La moglie" will be analyzed in order to examine Deledda's attitude regarding traditional gender separation. It will be shown that, at the level of text, she was acutely aware of women's power and potential, a perception she often concealed in her own life yet one with which she consistently threatened the tenets of patriarchy through her works.

It will be argued generally that Deledda's profound personal frustration with her sexual and professional repression had a significant impact on the nature of her literary style and content. Determining the extent to which she reflected her own suffering and desires in her writing is, consequently, essential in evaluating her more impartially. For
a turn-of-the-century Italian woman writer the options for success were few. An explanation of how Deledda survived a repressive 19th-century mentality in which she was herself firmly enmeshed is to be found in her actions and in her writing. Caught in the certainty of patriarchy, Deledda reflected a stressful reality with which she coped with varying degrees of success and of failure. An important critical goal here, then, is to find ways of accessing the impact of Deledda's life on her creative genius. While some feminist ideology may currently seek to dispel patriarchal bias by proposing gender-neutral vocabularies, it is precisely within that traditional vocabulary used by Deledda that crucial information resides. Her language reflects well the 19th-century linguistic heritage which feminist ideology rightly seeks to change; but it is only by finding our way through this gender-coded diversionary maze that we may determine how our author produced her texts and through that text, defied tradition.
Chapter I: Methodologies

A. Early Critics

Although the writings of Grazia Deledda have rarely been at the epicentre of Italian critical debate, as might be expected of a Nobel Prize winner, a series of opinions expressed over more than a century has translated into a sizable compendium of analysis covering her work from her earliest adolescent stories and poems of the 1880s to her final posthumously published Cosima quasi Grazia of 1937. Had it not been for the enormous public popularity of Deledda's books, no less than thirty novels, ten collections of short stories, as well as numerous articles on Sardinian folklore, it is unlikely that the controversy over her literary significance would have burgeoned as it did. Critics were forced to deal with the reality of her success in the literary marketplace.

The formal and professional promotion of Deledda's work began in the mid-1890s with the positive reinforcement of two aging but still influential critics, Ruggiero Bonghi and Mario Rapisardi. Bonghi was almost seventy at the inception of Deledda's career and had agreed to write an introduction to her 1895 novel Anime oneste. By praising Deledda's originality Bonghi had hoped that his introduction might assist the young and enthusiastic woman writer climb "l'erta della giovinezza."¹ The wise and seasoned would promote the young and aspiring. Rapisardi's zealous appraisal of Deledda's La via del

male of 1896 was motivated largely by moral criteria. This critic praised Deledda's portrayal of traditional religious and moral values coloured by her personal sense of fatalistic resignation and expiatory suffering. Rapisardi saw in the young Sardinian woman a kindred spirit and preserver of his own most cherished ideals. As he notes in a letter to the young author:

A chi non più giovane e affaticato pur sempre dalla nostalgia del bene; assalito da perpetui dolori eppur sempre ostinato a credere nel trionfo del Vero; portato irresistibilmente a combattere i corrottori, i trafficatori, gli ipocriti; la voce d'una giovinetta d'alto ingegno e di nobile cuore giunge gradita come gorgheggiò di rosignuolo a chi si aggira notturno fra gli agguati e gli orrori d'una foresta.²

Luigi Capuana's interest in Deledda was less emotional. At the turn of the century Capuana was in the process of cataloguing Italian writers according to literary type with a view to restoring Italy's cultural grandeur by giving credit to its former and contemporary authors. Fast on the heels of the popularity of French "realism", his promotion of an exclusively Italian verismo included the example of Grazia Deledda in his scheme of literary "ismi" which was to become fundamental to the critical thought of the day. Thus, while he disparaged Deledda's existential ramblings and lack of philosophic conviction, he lauded her Il vecchio della montagna (1900) and Elias Portolu (1903), for their realism. Unearthing and transmitting primitive Sardinian culture was, for Capuana, Deledda's primary contribution to verismo. He suggested that:

² Ibid. 93.
La signorina Deledda fa benissimo a non uscire dalla sua Sardegna e di continuare a lavorare in questa preziosa miniera, dove ha già trovato un forte elemento di originalità. I suoi personaggi non possono essere confusi con personaggi di altre regioni; i suoi paesaggi non sono vuote generalità decorative. Il lettore, chiuso il libro, conserva vivo il ricordo di quelle figure caratteristiche, di quei paesaggi grandiosì; e le impressioni sono così forti che sembrano quasi immediate, e non di seconda mano.  

From the outset Deledda's realism was inexorably linked to her regionalism, a literary trend promoted by turn-of-the-century critical judgement as particularly modern and meaningful. Deledda clearly welcomed and consciously contributed to reinforcing her image as a realist writer in the vein of Emile Zola and Giovanni Verga and considered herself the saviour of a noble, yet waning Sardinian popular culture. Verga, the father of Italian *verismo* and a preservationist of his own Sicilian folk culture, however, acknowledged Deledda with reservation. Among her earliest critics, he betrayed what would become a characteristically ambiguous reaction to Deledda's work among her contemporaries. While praising her 1904 novel *Cenere*, for example, Verga likened the quality of her writing to that of a German contemporary, Berthold Auerbach, an author of secondary importance and inferior talent. Later, Benedetto Croce would in like manner associate Deledda with Salvatore Farina, a minor Sardinian writer.


4 Momigliano, *Ultimi studi* 94.

Qualifications and marginalizations by such influential adjudicators as Croce and Verga were to reverberate in subsequent Deleddian criticism.

Partisan opinion gave rise to controversy and debate over Deledda's place and value in the literary pantheon. Among the old guard of her supporters was the influential critic and writer Federico De Roberto who in 1904, in his review of *Cenere* for *Il Corriere della sera*, praised her description of local colour and her balance of psychological introspection and romanticism which he saw as characteristic of the great Russian novelists. As more novels and short stories appeared, Deledda criticism focussed almost exclusively on the issue of her literary allocation: whether her works should be categorized as examples of *realismo*, *romanticismo*, *regionalismo*, *decadentismo*, *psicologismo* or *symbolismo*. While Bonghi had labelled her work generically as illustrative of *modernismo*⁶, subsequent critics waged an ongoing polemic over placement and definition, a debate which witnessed heightened interest after Deledda's Nobel Prize in 1926 and again after her death in 1936.

Suggestions of a lingering or late *romanticismo* in Deledda's style were made by Eurelio De Michelis who, while noting Deledda's "romantic" literary formation, placed her writings somewhere in the cusp between *realismo* and *symbolismo*. In his pivotal *Grazia Deledda e il decadentismo*⁷ of 1938, De Michelis continued a line of argumentation introduced by Arnaldo Bocelli, who had allocated Grazia Deledda "in quel

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⁶ Ruggiero Bonghi, Preface, in Grazia Deledda, *Anime oneste*, (Milano: Cogliati, 1895) VII-XII.

⁷ Eurelio De Michelis, *Grazia Deledda e il decadentismo* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1938).
moto romantico che fu il verismo nel suo trapasso al simbolismo.” Giuseppe Dessi, from his very first reading of Deledda, vehemently opposed those who had defined her work as decadente since decadentismo assumed a culture and literary sensitivity which, in his opinion, she simply did not possess.

Natalino Sapegno, on the other hand, while noting Deledda's "tecnica verista" classified her "abbandono passionale, di rivolta alle convenzioni stabilite" as "tipicamente romantico." His 1946 "Ricordo di Grazia Deledda" expanded the discussion in literary categorization to consideration of Deledda's portrayal of the individual within the context of society, a portrayal, in Sapegno's estimation, openly fraught with conflict. He felt it was necessary for his fellow critics to exercise caution with Deledda since:

... sottraendoci all'angustia e ai pregiudizi di una critica tradizionalmente attenta quasi soltanto ai valori formali, questo dobbiamo riconoscere nell'opera della Deledda: questo iniziale se breve, respiro umano; ... che troppo presto si piega con le ali spezzate sotto i dettami di una legge... di un ambiente e di una desolata struttura sociale.  

Sapegno's observations were justified. Issue-centred criticism, commentary which did not necessarily delve into the significance of Deledda's content but rather argued over which current literary stream could most readily or most appropriately be

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10 Ibid. 294.
applied to her writing, seemed the contemporary norm. Such criticism was, as often as not, confused and self-serving. While one critic may have opposed another on the issue of classification, both might agree and laud Deledda's lyricism or psychological introspection. While two might concur on her innate morality, the same two might diverge on cataloguing or language.

Classification according to literary type has remained an issue, though not a major one in Deleddian criticism, with a few lingering assignments to type spilling forward in time even into the evaluations of more contemporary critics. Olga Lombardi, for example, revisits the "ismo" tradition in her 1979 Invito alla lettura di Grazia Deledda with reference to the familiar categorizations of realismo, decadentismo and simbolismo used by her predecessors.

Deledda's most influential critic in the first half of the twentieth century was Benedetto Croce, Italy's most prolific, and perhaps most feared pen. Croce's focus on the cultural education of Italy during this period translated into a philosophy of the spirit wherein art was viewed as pure intuition unencumbered by learned theory, moral intent and practical or political concerns. Croce was to base his evaluation of Deledda, characteristically, on these aesthetic principles by asserting that she lacked "il dramma del poeta e dell' artista che consiste in un certo modo energico e originale di sentire il mondo." True poetry must, in its grandeur of spirit, inspire and universally move the reader. Croce judged Deledda to have fallen short on these important prerequisites and

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12 Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, 377.
found her writing repetitive and common. Though he recognized the beauty of her descriptions, Croce, in his distinction between *poesia* and *non-poesia*, considered Deledda uninspiring and relegated her to the latter, less felicitous, category. Apropos of the similarities in her many novels Croce wrote the following:

... non sarebbe agevole differenziare tra loro nel loro merito artistico, essendo a un depresso tutti del pari plausibili, e nessuno così fatto da imprimersi profondamente nel cuore e nella fantasia dei lettori.\(^\text{13}\)

Critics did not limit themselves to questioning Deledda's depth of spirit and literary inspiration but also focussed on her use of language. Her aptitude for writing in standard Italian, which was seen by some as deficient because of dialectal interference, was an ongoing topic of debate. The never ending discussion over *la questione della lingua*, the appropriateness of using "pure" Italian in literature, were questions treated with respect to her work by Emilio Cecchi as early as 1912.\(^\text{14}\) Cecchi had taken up Deledda's defence by noting her natural lyricism and her intentional leaning away from the use of her native dialect. Even after her death Enrico Falchi, who had been Deledda's friend and among her strongest supporters, continued to praise her lyricism while rejecting accusations of dialect retention. In defending Deledda from the negative criticism implied by those labelling her output as examples of *regionalismo*. Falchi characterized Deledda as having transcended national standards. Consequently he placed

\(^{13}\) Ibid. 378.

her in the company of the finest European and international authors. By the 1940s Francesco Flora would also champion Deledda's style emphasizing its lyric and choral quality. For Flora, Deledda's writing echoed

... la stessa melodia delle singole creature vive nel ritmo e nell'armonizzazione di quel mondo naturale e mitico e religioso che il paesaggio iscrive e interpreta in un simbolo nativo e perenne.\textsuperscript{15}

Simultaneous praise and rejection of Deledda was again symptomatic of an often ambiguous attitude towards her writing. Critics would offset a negative judgement with at least one redeeming quality in the young author who seemed to please and yet confuse. Renato Serra, for example, had labelled Deledda's work as "commonplace" and "monotonous" as early as 1914,\textsuperscript{16} but qualified his criticism by adding that "... nelle pagine sempre mediocri c'è un non so che di umano e sincero, una epicità che rende una certa luce."\textsuperscript{17} Even the much acclaimed Dessi, appalled by Deledda's Nobel victory in 1926, was to temper his judgement. Having labelled her once "un gigante di fumo,"\textsuperscript{18} Dessi afforded Deledda at least a modicum of approval by the end of his lengthy career. He thus admitted:

\textsuperscript{15} Francesco Flora, "Grazia Deledda,"\textit{Storia della letteratura italiana} (Verona: Mondadori, 1965) 694.


\textsuperscript{17} Serra, "Grazia Deledda", \textit{Storia della letteratura italiana}, ed. Emilio Cecchi (Milano: Garzanti, 1984) 479.

Cercare nella Deledda la "piacevolezza", fermarsi alla sua "fattura superficiale", cioè al suo "scrivere male", metterla sullo stesso piano di Térésa, Neera, Zuccoli, significa lasciarsi trarre in inganno dall'esteriorità, non penetrare al di là di questa, non vedere il mondo diverso da cui veniva e che tentava di rappresentare; significa mettersi nell'impossibilità di cogliere la carica essenziale e la forza poetica che fanno di lei una grande scrittrice.¹⁹

Others were lavish in their praise. The Nobel selection committee of 1926 drew considerable attention to Deledda's fine Christian virtues of female discretion and modesty. In his presentation of the Nobel Prize in December of 1927, Heinrich Schuck introduced Grazia Deledda to the audience in this manner:

... non ha mai preso parte nelle lotte politiche, sociali e letterarie... ha vissuto la propria vita tranquilla, lontana dai rumori del mondo... vede gli uomini quali sono, pur credendo che potrebbero essere migliori, e che nessun altro, all'infuori d'essi medesimi mette ostacolo all'avvento del regno di Dio.²⁰

Certainly the religious and moral character of Deledda's works secured for her, in the Nobel committee's estimation and among the reading public at large, an added grassroots popularity which contemporary authors, such as the cerebral Luigi Pirandello, could not win and did not soon enjoy.


The unconditional adoration of Deledda by Attilio Momigliano reflected the personal convictions which characterized an older, more conservative wave of society. Momigliano directed his attention towards Deledda's "indefinibile elevatezza morale" by commenting:

>C'è in lei qualche cosa di patriarcale e di vergine, un istintivo attingere alle profondità originarie della nostra natura, e quel fondo indiscriminato di psicologia che si ritrova più alle sorgenti della vita civile che nel suo progresso.\(^{22}\)

Moreover, besides Francesco Di Pilla and Attilio De Michelis, who later gathered and published much of Deledda's correspondence, it was Momigliano who in 1936 first initiated the recovery of Deledda's letters from her son Santus with an obvious sense of devotion and respect for the traditional patriarchal values he felt she exemplified.

Deledda's designation as a "regional" writer was securely established among her critics by her early twenties. She had, in fact, worked hard towards positioning herself as the leading Sardinian researcher for Angelo De Gubernatis's compendium of Italian regional folklore being gathered late in the 19th century.\(^{23}\) In 1893 she was appointed consigliera of the Sassari division of "La società per le tradizioni popolari italiane" by

\(^{21}\) Attilio Momigliano, "Intorno a Grazia Deledda," Ultimi studi 82. (Originally in Il corriere della sera, June 15, 1946.)

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Articles for the "Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane" were collected by Angelo De Gubernatis between 1893 and 1901.
virtue of her research articles and stories related to Sardinian customs and folklore.\textsuperscript{24} By taking this direction, Deledda had self-defined her culture, and perhaps by association, her literary limits as singularly insular in more than just a geographic sense. Certainly the Sardinian content of her stories and novels was enough to dispel any doubt among her critics as to her first loyalty. Even when she later transposed the settings of her works to mainland sites such as the Po Valley in \textit{L'ombra del passato} (1907), or to a Mediterranean sea-coast town in \textit{Il paese del vento} (1931), there remained an aura of provincialism in her writing which tended to marginalize it in the minds of many a mainstream critic. Even her 1924 \textit{Danza della collana}, considered to be among her more modern novels, is set in the outskirts of Rome, in the suburbs of the capital rather than at the epicentre of Italian cultural life.\textsuperscript{25}

It was specifically Deledda's portrayal of remote settings, especially those still rooted in the folklore and mythology of her native island, that drew many a foreign critic to respond more positively than even her mainland judges or her Sardinian compatriots. For the foreign critic Deledda's detachment seemed to imply primal passions hidden in ancient societies. Indeed, the portrayal of uncontrollable and illicit loves seemed

\textsuperscript{24} "Sangue sardo" (1888) and "Eleonora D'Arborea" (1889) were published in \textit{Ultima moda} by Perino; "Il castello di San Loor" (1889) and "Il castello di San Onofrio" (1891) in \textit{La Sardegna}. "Nuoro" (1892) appeared in \textit{Le cento città d'Italia} while "La donna in Sardegna" (1893) and "Leggende sarde" (1894) were published in \textit{Natura e arte} in Milan. "Lauda di Sant'Antonio", (1893) was published in \textit{Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane}; "Albo di costumi e tipi sardi" (1900) in \textit{Rivista per signorine}. "Tipi e paesaggi sardi" (1900), was published in \textit{La nuova antologia}.

\textsuperscript{25} Grazia Deledda, \textit{Danza della collana} (Milano: Mondadori, 1982).
perpetually in vogue among European writers. The often explicit eroticism of D. H. Lawrence's novels thus corresponded happily to a similar, though submerged sensuality in Deledda's work. Among the most influential of her foreign admirers, Lawrence consequently championed Deledda's literary suggestions of a "basic instinct" just under the surface of traditional propriety. Indeed it was his preface to the English translation of her 1920 La madre, that was instrumental in placing Deledda in the mainstream of internationally acclaimed contemporary authors.

For a period after World War II Deledda's work was given short shrift in Italian critical discussions. Post-war critics seemed weary of her moralizing, the very attitude which had proven so attractive to the more conservative pre-war critics. Politically, the cold war era's critical reticence may have resulted from an anti-fascist post-war bias which saw her lack of political commitment as condoning fascist ideology. Her neutrality, however, was to serve her well in the long run.

Most post-war critics continued to focus on Deledda's regionalismo, defining her work as non-national and tracing her inspiration back to foreign sources. Luigi Russo, for example, who saw at work in Deledda the regional influence of Verga and the foreign one of Dostoyevsky, maintained:

... l'arte della Deledda è modernissima, pur nella ristrettezza e insularità delle sue esperienze; e non ci dibattiamo ancora nel secolare dualismo tra forma e contenuto, quando vorremmo disprezziare il contenuto 'provinciale' per esaltare il contenuto 'europeo' o 'metafisico' di uno scrittore. Quello della Deledda è un mondo barbaro elementare e mistico, psicologicamente remoto... dalle nostre esperienze intellettuali, ma sentito... come può sentirlo uno spirito
Influences of the French tradition, Balzac's realism, Bourget's psychological introspection and the adolescent appeal of Eugène Sué were noted by several major critics. The fact that critics associated Deledda with non-Italian authors at once increased her popularity abroad and tended to exclude her from the Italian scene. Moreover, both Mundula and Cambosu, Sardinian critics, were particularly influential, even after the war, in conserving Deledda's image as a strictly provincial author and in reinforcing the myth of a distant Sardinia with Grazia Deledda as its first true voice.

Her works were tentatively reconsidered by some critics during the 1950s and 60s using methodologies which engaged sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis and linguistics. Historical approaches, especially those broaching economic, political or social questions were also more frequent. Tanda's historical/sociological study of Deledda in 1965 and Di Pilla's 1966 research into Deledda's personal history in Sardinia are the leading examples of a critical direction taken by Deleddian studies after mid-century.

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27 Mario Mundula, Grazia Deledda (Roma: Formaggini, 1929).
28 S. Cambosu, "Ricordo di Grazia Deledda," Ichnusa (Sassari: Gallizi, 1951) I-II.
A new enthusiasm for Deledda studies was sparked by a call for papers to commemorate the 100th anniversary of her birth. The "Convegno di Studi Deleddiani" met in Nuoro in 1971 and published its proceedings the following year. Contributors to the "Convegno" scrutinized Deledda's use of Sardinian cultural traditions. They examined the historical implications and the linguistic background of her writing, availing themselves of anthropological and sociological perspectives as well. Francesco Alziator noted the detailed and exacting scholarship in her gathering of local traditions, deeming Deledda to be part and parcel of that "mondo agro-pastorale, ... di quella cultura sarda" which she had portrayed in her works with "esattezza storica." Antonio Piromalli in his presentation of Sardinian culture and society outlined the traditional structures of social justice in Sardinian life exemplified in Deledda's writing. According to Piromalli:

La vita si svolge secondo moduli fissi determinati dall'organizzazione economica e familiare di stampo patriarcale, i motivi della vita morale sono legati a tale organizzazione e conservano miti e ideologie bibliche, pagane, paleocristiane.32

This socio-anthropological approach to the study of Deledda's works was taken up and expanded upon in the 1980s by Vincenzo Greco and Anna Dolfi.

An alternate sociological view presented at the Convegno addressed the issue of


32 Angelo Piromalli, "Cultura e società nei romanzi di Grazia Deledda." Atti, 217.
Deledda's lack of social responsibility. As a rare detractor, Girolamo Sotgiu interpreted Deledda's apparent passivity to social injustice as emblematic of a Sardinian ruling class mentality. Sotgiu includes Deledda among "quelli che all'interno dell'isola portavano allo sfruttamento e alla prevaricazione." He also saw her writing as directing attention away from ruling class responsibility by camouflaging a reality "ove la durezza si addolcisce [e] la sofferenza diventa fatalità." In her defence, Giovanni Todde attributed Deledda's lack of social involvement to the effect of the demoralizing injury suffered by her people, that sense of helplessness which had translated into a pre-programmed negativity. Todde felt that

Le ingiustizie della società, le reazioni dei poveri, che si trovavano di fronte all'incomprensibile della legge civile e troppo spesso all'insufficiente conforto della religione - nel cui campo accanto a figure di talento esistevano purtroppo elementi che ben poco di cristiano avevano nel loro comportamento - portavano logicamente ad una sensazione di rassegnazione, che la Deledda seppe cogliere nelle sue opere.

Among the topics also broached at the 1971 "Convegno" was Deledda's literary style analyzed by Giorgio Squarotti. This critic distinguished a clean and intentional separation of lyric and story in her descriptions, in her use of dialogue and in the progression of events in her novels. According to Squarotti, the very schematization and

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33 Giovanni Sotgiu, "Vecchio e nuovo in Sardegna nell'età delleddiana." Atti, 97.

34 Ibid.

fragmentation of her writing portrayed the psychologically guilt-ridden journey of her characters quite effectively. He also noted evidence of Deledda's day-dreaming in the fable-like quality of her style, an evasiveness possibly resulting from psychological stress. For this critic Deledda's writing transcended the simple engagement of pathetic fallacy whereby nature echoes human emotion. Where former critics had perceived a certain "flatness" in her writing Squarotti found, rather, that Deledda's style was much more subtle. He observed the following:

All'interno di una costruzione d'apologo-fiaba la Deledda può esercitare quello che è il modulo tipico del suo narrare, il discorso indiretto libero, di tipo strettamente individuale ... descrive la vicenda della malattia morale dei suoi personaggi, fornendo la coscienza di quella parola che la possa definire nel modo più adeguata... il linguaggio della coscienza è un generico italiano medio, rispondente molto bene all'indistinzione di classe... Deledda veramente dimostra di aver scoperto una nuova struttura narrativa ... più adeguata al dato della coscienza stessa, cioè al carattere della malattia morale, non a una pretesa di coerenza realistica.36

Such observations from contributors to the 1971 "Convegno" have served to broaden considerably the Deleddian critical spectrum in the past twenty-five years, rekindling interest in the significance of her sardità and introducing new groundwork for expansion of the anthropological, socio-psychological and linguistic approaches which followed. Mario Massaiu's La Sardegna di Grazia Deledda37, for example, was soon

36 Giorgio Squarotti, "La tecnica e la struttura del romanzo deleddiano." Atti, 153.
broaching topics of Sardinian economic and social history while giving special attention to the impact of a pastoral/patriarchal society upon Deledda's creative consciousness.

Through the 1970s Spinazzola, in his numerous prefaces to Mondadori's reprints of Deledda's novels, concentrated on the psychological stresses imposed upon Deledda's characters by traditional social structures. Although he found Deledda's depictions somewhat naive, a kind of "psicologismo senza psicologia", he is among the first of the modern critics to take a psychological view of Deledda's characters. In his lengthy preface to her *Romanzi sardi*, for example, he detects an inter-relationship between author and character and believes that

Il segreto più autentico della prosa deleddiana sta nello sforzo di captare religiosamente, all'unisono con i personaggi, la verità che si sta facendo strada nel conflitto delle loro coscienze. La scrittrice si pone allo stesso livello dei suoi protagonisti: non partecipa ma vive il dramma da cui sono agitati.39

In the vanguard of anthropological studies is Vincenzo Greco's "Amore fra cugini: letteratura e contesto antropologico nella Deledda"40 wherein he likens the lingering regulation of Sardinian social life to ancient tribal tabu. In his study of three of Deledda's stories41 Greco explains the nature of sexual infraction within the traditional family and

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39 Ibid.


41 "Il vecchio della montagna", "A sinistra" and "Il nemico".
introduces discussions on the general topic of gender relations and sexuality.

Cultural anthropology coupled with psychoanalytic skills have also been applied to Deledda's work in Anna Dolfi's *Grazia Deledda* in which the psychological impediments to social change suffered by Deledda's characters are put through Jungian analysis. In her criticism of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) Dolfi sees the protagonist's *malattia* as neurosis, a fracturing of the personality caused by the inability of the moral conscience to adhere to its own ideals. For Dolfi, the hero of this novel inevitably falls prey to the subconscious which tends naturally toward the profane. Dolfi's complete and scholarly study of the "guilt-punishment-expiation" nexus as it is portrayed in Deledda's major novels, as well as her consideration of the economic and cultural conditions which influenced Deledda's artistic career, serve to bridge the gap between earlier traditional methodologies and more recent applications of psychoanalysis to literature.

B. "Scrittura al femminile"

Criticism of Deledda, as that of other women writers of her day, was coloured by 19th-century gender bias. It is difficult to imagine, given the long history of marginalization of women writers, that Deledda would not have been judged from established patriarchal positions when she began to publish her first novels before the turn of the century. In 1892, in fact, she experienced her first critical rebuff from a

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theatre critic and columnist for the Roman Tribuna, Stanis Manca, a Sardinian of noble birth. Manca had lashed out at her in derogatory terms stating that he thought her literary aspirations monstrous.\textsuperscript{43} His comments regarding her works, like those of subsequent critics, became less virulent and more patronizing as she became successful.

Luigi Russo labelled Deledda "una semplice narratrice tramutata a poco a poco in una narratrice di arte e di riflessione ... pur nella modestia delle sue forze femminili."\textsuperscript{44}

Momigliano considered Deledda

\begin{quote}
... la donna che, con tutta la sua attività e la sua fama di narratrice, è rimasta moglie e madre e mescola naturalmente e senza iattanza i suoi interessi di scrittrice ai suoi affetti e alle sue cure di famiglia e di casa.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Capuana's judgement likewise dwelt on the theme of female propriety with only a slight variation. He considered

\begin{quote}
... già molto il vedere persistere nella novella e nel romanzo regionale lei giovane e donna, e per ciò più facile ad essere suggestionata da certe correnti mistiche, simbolistiche, idealistiche che si vogliano dire, dalle quali si lasciano affascinare ingegni virili.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Here Capuana's double-edged pronouncement clearly evaluated Deledda in terms of male


\textsuperscript{44} Russo, I narratori, 138.

\textsuperscript{45} Momigliano, Ultimi studi, 83.

\textsuperscript{46} Capuana, Gli ismi, 153.
superiority. If the virility of male writers could be compromised by the seductive allure of symbolism, how much more easily could Deledda, vulnerable in her femininity, be led astray? Like other women writers of her day Deledda fell easily into this gender-typing where not only writing was seen as masculine but where certain styles or interests were perceived as threatening to the entrenched standards of the mainstream literary canon.

A woman writer, for example, was not expected to deal with social issues. Deledda, in fact, dealt with very few. Consequently her writing, which for the most part described interpersonal relationships, tended to confirm by example the marginality of writing women. Deledda's work thus fit into the traditional slot of "scrittura al femminile" which considered women's writing as peripheral, introverted, autobiographical, and sometimes self-therapeutic. The lack of social commitment in her work, as Sotgiu pointed out, resulted in her eventually being placed outside the mainstream so that while, before the war, patriarchal bias had interrupted Deledda's success, after it, a more liberal mentality continued to keep her on the perimeter. Grouped with the morally traditional or reactionary, she often kept critical company with authors like Invernizio, Neera or Vivanti in anthologies of writing women. She was more likely to be contrasted with, than likened to Alba de Cespedes or Ada Negri, who represent a more openly radical trend in Italian women authors of the time. Feminist studies also tend to showcase the most active and preferably the most militant of women authors, with Sibilla Aleramo invariably at the forefront. Moreover, grouping women authors separately from their male counterparts has the effect of suggesting and thus, by

47 See note 33.
degrees, helping to entrench a somewhat arbitrary, artificial division of literary talent based on gender. Until quite recently such a separation relegated women writers to secondary status and placed them at the margins of critical literary discourse. Minimal linkage of Deledda's work with other turn-of-the-century female writers, moreover, has evoked little interest in her from feminist quarters. Deledda's conservativism and neutrality have made pro-women critics gravitate towards writers of a more rebellious bent.

Just as earlier discussions on morality and social commitment had engendered opposing views with respect to Deledda's value as a writer, current and more liberal positions have produced divided views on Deledda's contribution to women's writing. In 1988 Angelo Pellegrino was of the opinion that

I temi drammatici della scrittrice sarda non sono generati dalle conseguenze dei mutamenti sociali, ma da una concessione della vita moralistica e provinciale, dalla quale non è estraneo un certo attardato cattolicesimo.48

Pellegrino touched here on the source of the continued difficulty of modern criticism in validating Deledda's contribution to a larger literary pool. Morality seemed still at the root of Deleddian critical analysis whether it was viewed from the conservative right or the feminist left. Her marginalization by feminist critics, consequently, might well be the result of their continuing to take the morality of her work at face value. Her having espoused the trappings of traditional Catholicism, however, precludes neither the

probability of Deledda's psychological unrest concerning the unequal treatment of women in that tradition nor the presence of this unrest in her creative writing.

A more recent wave of interest in women's studies has seen Deledda included in surveys of Italian women authors. Patricia Zambon's "Leggere per scrivere"\textsuperscript{49}, which presents the similarities of character and experience in Deledda, Negri and Aleramo is one such survey. Zambon proposes that the natural propensity of these diverse authors toward writing is their common bond. In all three there is a clear understanding that personal suffering and solitude are the driving forces behind their work and that their creativity draws upon the "cultural humus"\textsuperscript{50} of the family.

Others have also taken up the female gender focus from various points of view. Neria De Giovanni, in her 1987 essay entitled "L'estetica della massaia"\textsuperscript{51} considers the more obviously traditional aspects of Deledda's female reality as a duty-bound Sardinian woman. Similarly in her Women on the Italian Literary Scene\textsuperscript{52} Alba della Fazio Amoia, while making a clear distinction between feminist and non-feminist women authors, significantly omits Deledda from both categories. Rather, as in traditional criticism, Fazia Amoia sees Deledda simply as a regional writer exemplifying the enduring


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. 313.


morality of her cultural inheritance. Likewise Sabino Caronia reiterates the regional character of Deledda in his presentation of Dessi's influential judgements on her which spanned a lengthy period between 1927 and 1974.\textsuperscript{53} Lynn Gunzburg has also revisited Deledda as a regional writer attributing her public popularity and international recognition to the appeal of her folklore and lyricism.\textsuperscript{54} Regardless of advances, "woman", seems invariably equated still with tradition, morality, location and song.

Ada Testaferri's gender discussion revolves around the sociological structuring of femininity and motherhood as revealed in Deledda's \textit{La madre}. In her 1989 essay, Testaferri discusses the limited choices offered the protagonists of Deledda's novels within the rigid structuring of patriarchal morality. When forbidden \textit{Eros} intrudes upon conditioned behaviour the human spirit is compromised. Testaferri views gender separation portrayed by Deledda in terms of archetypes which force a personality-splitting in some of her characters. She comments:

È come se nella scrittura si effettuasse anche per la Deledda come per Paolu [the protagonist], un processo di individuazione, soggetto a sua volta, alla duplice influenza archetipa del Femminile e del Maschile, di tendenze cioè interne e di esigenze esterne.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{54} Lynn. M. Gunzburg, "Realism Folklore and Grazia Deledda," \textit{Veltro} (Summer) 1983.

\textsuperscript{55} Ada Testaferri, "Infrazione all'Eros proibito come processo d'individuazione in \textit{La madre} di Grazia Deledda," \textit{Donna: Women in Italian Culture} (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1989) 118.
Bruce Merry discusses Deledda in terms of female behaviour as well, addressing Deledda's socio-psychological conditioning as it is portrayed in *Cosima*. In schematic form he analyses the social rise and fall of both male and female characters resulting from marriage liaisons depicted in *Elias Portolu* (1903), *L'incendio nell'oliveto* (1918) and *La via del male* (1916). Merry is perhaps unique among modern critics in having broached the marriage issue in terms of the economy of sex.\(^\text{56}\)

Of particular importance as background to the gender issue in Deledda is Marina Zancan's outline of the historical changes in models of female morality between the late 18th and early 20th centuries. Zancan considers Deledda's development as a woman writer in the light of the historical changes of the times and with specific reference to her early Sardinian experience as it is revealed through her letters. According to Zancan:

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\text{In questo periodo ... intorno alla figura femminile, si avvia una grande trasformazione concettuale: l'amore, per secoli metafora di processi di auto affermazione, sintesi di complessi percorsi di conoscenza e di autovalorizzazione, rappresenta ora lo spazio privato e sentimentale dell'individuo, che le figure di donne consentono di rappresentare in racconto.}\(^\text{57}\)
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It is Paola Blelloch, however, who has perhaps succeeded in redrawing even bolder lines between the cautious respect for Deledda's portrayals of sexuality and what

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\(^{56}\) Bruce Merry, "Dolls and Dragons: The Problem of the Depiction of Women in Grazia Deledda's Novels," *Women in Modern Italian Literature* (North Queensland, Austral.: James Cook University, 1990) 1-37.

might be considered feminist introspection into female evasion. Bleloch discusses the
recurrent patterns of stress in Cosima and notes Deledda's instinctive opposition to the
restrictions of traditional patriarchy. Calling upon Jung's concept of the bond between
instinct and archetype, Bleloch finds in Cosima the first patterns of evasion into Nature
which are sought by women repressed by their social condition. She explains her
position as follows:

Metaphorically, to overcome the Jungian "shadow" and
reach beyond patriarchal oppression, women must travel
long forbidden paths of memory, probably back to pre-
patriarchal time. That is why the "rape trauma" archetype,
and its opposite, "the green world" are fundamental to the
understanding of feminine literature and its alternating
patterns of suffocation and elation, passiveness and
activity, submission and rebellion.\(^5^8\)

We shall see that Deledda's ambiguous behaviour and its reflection in her characters fit
these symptoms precisely.

Feminist theory in its various forms, whether existential, Marxist or post-modern,
has sought generally to describe and explain woman's marginalization and propose
prescriptions for its eradication. Re-reading literature from a feminist perspective
presupposes that women described therein, or indeed that women authors themselves,
have been socially distanced or existentially eliminated from what might be described as
exclusively male privilege. Feminist analyses of literature tend generally to focus on
characterizations of men and women in literature which exemplify this supposition and

\(^{58}\) Paula Bleloch, "Archetypal Patterns of Rebellion and Submission in the Novels of
on authors, both male and female, who describe women's marginalization in the historical or sociological context of patriarchy. Some feminist re-readings of literature, such as those by Juliet Mitchell, have attempted to designate women’s writing as a branch of literary history in order to validate it within the greater scheme of importance afforded "classic" male literature in general. Paralleling women’s writing to that of male authors at least serves to include it in a mainstream historical context. If a women’s literary tradition can be shown to have differed from a male tradition, then a case for women’s marginalization might be presented and a duty to redress it assumed. Simple recognition of the injustice is, in effect, an important first step to serving the cause.

Whether or not this line of reasoning has helped or hindered the female writer's crusade, the fact remains that a feminist re-reading of history, sociology, anthropology, politics or literature offers new perspectives to be reckoned with on the old topic of gender inequality. By being gender specific, feminist criticism has succeeded in slightly levelling the playing field in what was previously a one-sided debate. Yet the debate is still hierarchical in approach. Women writers are often seen as victims, misunderstood, unappreciated and bound, despite themselves, to show signs of rebellion against a system of adjudication which has unjustly obscured their talents. Yet battles against patriarchal patronizing and stereotyping of women and a myriad complaints of unfairness towards women writers have succeeded not so much in arousing sympathy or obtaining equity as they have in fomenting controversy. The focus, as it were, remains on the battle, rather

than on the desirability of evaluating talent.

Feminist deconstructionism like that of Julia Kristeva has astutely proposed eliminating traditional categorizations altogether, thus removing the forum of debate and allowing written works, regardless of authorship, to be judged with neutral eyes, unencumbered by either gender's lobby. It is hoped that the affirmative action waged by some feminist criticism, despite its confrontational overtones, may serve as a transitional discussion that will eventually put to rest the necessity to defend, or the need to attack, in what should be reasoned discussion of art unrestrained by the artist's sexual proclivities.

C. Toward a New View of Grazia Deledda

While some of Grazia Deledda's critics have begun reconsidering her work in the light of new critical perspectives, all agree that she is not a feminist by any stretch of the imagination. Her personal conservative behavior and the apparently non-threatening nature of the literary content of her writings have by and large resulted in her being relegated to a decidedly reactionary niche. In fact, Deledda's work often sings the praises of patriarchy in what may seem conventional intonation and conservative scansion. But as the first Italian woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature it may seem curious that, regardless of her conservativism, Grazia Deledda's works should not have been subjected to the intense scrutiny by feminist critics which was afforded her contemporaries Sibilla Aleramo and Matilde Serao. Such neglect may perhaps be attributed to her publicly espoused personal philosophy which allegedly championed religion and apparently
accepted a traditional role for women in society. She does not support women enthusiastically and so neither does she offend patriarchy. She does not amplify injustice or openly incite rebellion. Her philosophy seems anything but radical or subversive and could, if anything, provide ample fodder for the feminist canon.

Yet often at the level of logic and of text, it is the disturbed submission of her characters and the pathological repetition of her stories which alert the careful reader that more must be immersed beneath the surface than meets the quick perusal of an unsuspecting eye. In fact, it is at the point where "schisms in the referential line" occur, diversions from the expected, that an unconscious message, a decidedly rebellious one, is to be found. Deledda's portrayals of characters who digress from traditional gender roles, her undercutting or replacing dramatic resolution with morality, the frequent absence of dénouement in her plots and her duplications of story line and situations are all indicators of turmoil beneath a veneer of propriety. Hers is a quandary wherein a desire to engage in the controversy of gender through her writing and a conditioned reaction not to do so struggle simultaneously, furtively and subconsciously in an attempt to exorcise demons which she herself would have been at pains to explain had she been put to the test. At a more intimate level of this dynamic are issues of sexual repression and social marginalization which tend to recur in Deledda's writing as major themes.

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Nancy Chodorow\textsuperscript{62} and Janine Chasseguet-Smergel\textsuperscript{63} have already provided new methodological venues of criticism on repression and its wake with their theories on the pre-patriarchal source for the voice of the female writer. The effects of a nature-bound matriarchy, rather than a culpable patriarchy, are considered by them to have influenced the development of the male as well as the female disposition. Rather than fixing blame, such a theory has shifted the causes of gender difference to a primordial, common ancestry whose essence is matriarchal.

Consideration of such theories then seems a natural course of action in reappraising the works of Deledda as well. Her writing demonstrates, to be sure, a sense of the timeless and archaic recognized, as we have seen, by more than one established critic as a distinguishing element in her writing. In many of her novels too, the image of the moral ancestral matriarch often surfaces to haunt rather than to comfort. Moreover, many of Deledda's characters, both male and female, find it difficult to detach themselves from hearth and home where the matriarch reigns supreme in all her guilt-inspiring magnetism. The concept of "mother", in fact, is rarely a happy one in Deledda's writing. Matriarchy often seems merely an inverted patriarchy where all the same rules apply, where women suffer under the stewardship of a female, rather than a male head of the house. Indeed the roles of "mother" and "father" often overlap and are sometimes


Nor are episodes of childbirth or child-rearing depicted as might be expected given a traditional background. Deledda's portrayals of maternity, rather, are fraught with difficulty, insanity and death.

The philosophy of the French school of feminist thought from Simone de Bouvoir to Julia Kristeva has continued to influence international criticism by expanding the spectrum of candidates to include formerly ignored authors. By doing so these critics have promoted a more equitable tally for women's writing, deeming it neither secondary nor separate from male writing but equally unique. In particular the psychoanalytic methodology employed by Hélène Cisoux relates well to the present discussion of Deledda and her works. Cisoux's hypothesis concerning women's literature couples language and sexuality and proposes pre-linguistic sources for understanding the character of the female writer. Cisoux's theory thus lends weight to the argument that there is a connection between Deledda's hidden sentiments concerning the injustices of gender separation and her obsession with writing. While her subject matter is both patriarchy and matriarchy, her writings are often expressed in tones of anger and doubt. Deledda's construct of language reflects an antithetical quality, a constant attempt to keep anger and resentment at bay while praising her traditional heritage. Unconsciously, she seeks to reconcile the opposing values of human justice and traditional morality. Cisoux has catalogued similar polarities in patriarchy as "binary oppositions" and has described

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64 See Chapter V, "Cross-Gender Dressing", 187-201.
65 See Chapter II, 56-60 and 70-74. See also Chapter III, 125-201.
66 See Chapter V, note 86.
their negative effects on women's lives. She sees that writing offers women in particular the possibility at least of some degree of pleasure, however thwarted, within a rigid scheme where women's lot is decidedly subordinate. Deledda's writing reflects those oppositions described by Cisoux and reveals the reactions they invariably cause in women. As she develops the sexual themes in her novels Deledda portrays her women as being invariably trapped between their natural sexuality and their loyalties to tradition, between what is female and what is male. It is precisely because of these new trends in criticism which astutely take into consideration the influences of a socialized gender scheme, that Deledda's conservativism must be put to the psychoanalytical and linguistic test.

Writing as unconscious therapy held Deledda in a life-long attempt to reconcile opposing states of female existence. While the religious and submissive women characters in her works are honoured by their families and communities, and no doubt acknowledged by many a traditional reader, others tread forbidden territory. Both types of women, however, are generally severely punished by the author and depicted as stressed and unsympathetic. Deledda's treatment of non-traditional professional women, for example, is particularly dark since they pose a threat to married women who, in turn, are usually portrayed as terribly unhappy with their conjugal lot. It is curious that Deledda, a professional writer and skilled business woman herself, should have painted the successful modern woman and the traditional wife more than once in decidedly

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unflattering, even derogatory terms. As well, her young mothers are morose and unloving while matriarchs can be cruel and authoritarian. Deledda's women are, with rare exception, uni-faceted, with limited depth of emotion; they often seem caricatures rather than real people. 68

It is logical to surmise, then, that such female portraiture reflects Deledda's own need to express women's issues at those emotional locations where they have transgressed the traditional boundaries of family and society. This would explain why she paints her female characters in such sombre strokes, punishing them both for their natural instincts and for their intellectual and artistic aspirations. A need for castigation of successful women, as well as punishment of traditionally compliant ones, seems to echo Deledda's own reactions to her professionally successful yet personally guarded life. Her writing, as it were, may have served her as both an outlet for her repressed feelings and a forum for punishment of what she may well have considered her "un-feminine" side. Her stories, one might argue, were tools for readjusting her failed emotional experiences. Yet ironically, writing was to become for her at once the origin of her professional success and the venue in which she would replay over and over again spent passions and thwarted loves. Personal anger, guilt and self-flagellation re-evoked through her writing, were repeated, relived and distanced through a uniquely efficient and creative imagination.

D. The Function of Biography

Can knowledge of Grazia Deledda's life experience contribute in any meaningful way to a better or more profound understanding of the text she has written? Can her creative work be illuminated by knowledge of her psychological make-up, thereby creating a double mirror effect where both her lived reality and that of her literary world are alternately and even simultaneously reflected in each other as ground and foreground, text and sub-text? Finally can the attempt to answer such questions be deemed a justifiable component of literary criticism? C. S. Lewis has dubbed it a "personal heresy"... that a writer's life might throw significant light on his work." 69 Samuel Beckett, too, has remarked that: "The author is never interesting". 70 The continued popularity of aesthetic and historical approaches to literary criticism would seem to suggest that the significance of biography is, if not redundant, at least still secondary to insightful analysis.

As applied to the works of Grazia Deledda, however, biographical background is a key to understanding the sensibility of an author who is closely linked to her literary production. So explicitly, in fact, does the work of Deledda reflect her own life and personality that it is difficult to see how both her biography and a psychological analysis of her characters could not be given primacy in understanding her fiction. Since the works to be studied in the present dissertation include Cosima and Nostalgie, both


70 Ibid.
creatively autobiographical, then determining the relationship between fact and fiction, between reconstruction of the self and bald creativity, becomes a central issue. But can such an exploration be deemed "literary criticism"? If one considers Freud's use of literature in illustrating his clinical findings, it becomes apparent that seeking confirmation of the workings of the human psyche in examples from literary sources was a bold and original application at the time. Although unconventional, however, it remained so only until such couplings won acceptance as a key factor in the emerging field of psychoanalysis. In like manner, new approaches to literature, as Freud's example demonstrates, retain their aura of radicalism only until many have taken them seriously and rendered them acceptable to a significant number of those in the profession. As literature once proved a valid source of significant psychoanalytic introspection, the psychoanalysis of character and author may now in turn serve to expand our knowledge of the creative spring of literature. Psychoanalysis continues to "read" patients as text and to "analyze" behaviour using informed biographical backgrounds. Literary criticism may similarly be applied to "read" authors' creativity by analyzing comparable elements of an author's personal history and those elements from the written text which bear clear signs of correspondence or resonance.

As we have seen in the field of Italian literary criticism, psychoanalysis has been employed sparingly in deference to the aesthetic literary approach and it is perhaps because Deledda's works have so long been considered from this viewpoint that interest

71 Otto Rank's minutes of the "Psychoanalytic Society of Vienna" from 1906 attest to this early methodology of linking psychoanalysis and literature and its eventual acceptance. See G. Leonelli, "Tutti i mercoledi in casa Freud," La repubblica, Aug. 17, 2000.
in her has generally waned despite her Nobel fame. Another plausible cause of her relative neglect may be attributed to the continuance of conventional views on writing which still tend to relegate the work of female writers to the category of non-classics despite decades of attempts to remedy this unfortunate mind-set. Since the field of psychoanalysis has never lost its particular interest in women, however distorted the viewpoints or stereotyped the conclusions may at times have been, it is perhaps through clarifying past prejudice and traditional imaging of women writers that a belated rehabilitation and return of Deledda to the centre of an informed and gender neutral, if not unbiased, critical discourse might best be achieved. Literary criticism may, then, by employing a variety of approaches at its disposal, make a serious attempt at reversing stereotypical images which have plagued the female writer in general and Grazia Deledda in particular, through her difficult and much neglected history.

Fortunately substantial biographical background material on Deledda is available for analysis. This primary information serves as a vital source for validating the essential connections between author and text and must lie at the foundation of any psychoanalytic-literary methodology. Generally speaking, when sufficient biographical information is available linking author to text, there often exists ample material to document and analyze aspects of an author's pathology as expressed through her art. Such, it is our conviction, is the case for Deledda's female characters who exhibit undeniable symptoms of maladjustment. It is not a mere coincidence that the same symptoms which appear in Deledda's letters concerning her personal life are those that recur in novels like Cosima and Nostalgie, both of which are unequivocally known to be
autobiographical.

E. The Implications of Semiotics

Variously classified in its early stages as "structuralism" and "semiosis" and later standardized as "semiotics", this epistemological approach to the written text has sought more recently to meld non-traditional fields of literary criticism into a common purpose, realigning the conventional and often somewhat arbitrary classification by type into more realistic and varied viewpoints. In general, semiotics is based on the premise that the communication of meaning between individuals is effected through idea impressions, or, as Umberto Eco proposes, through "signs of signs", be they physical gestures, oral language, art, music, advertising copy or written text. In the language of literature in particular, the meaning of the text is communicated to the reader via a repertoire of implicit "signs" and "codes" transmitted, sometimes, though not always, independently of the "sender's," or author's knowledge or intent. The individual reader, "receiver" or "addressee" gleans an identifiable message from a mutually understood or shared code within the text and is thus said to be as important to the created work as is the author. What may result, indeed, are as many individualized readings of a text as there are individual readers. It is for this reason that the text is said to read the reader.

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72 See Chapter V "Signs of the Times" 202-203.

73 Semiotic terminology is taken from Marcel Danesi, Messages and Meanings: An Introduction to Semiotics (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 1993).
Because of the difficulty of applying the techniques of semiotics, such concepts have tended to elude many a conservative critic for in practice "semiotics" has its separate unconventional boundaries and a structured method which define literary codes according to "sign" collection and message deciphering. Lexicon, grammar and syntax are semiotics' primary linguistic "signifiers", while the use of description, dialogue and symbol elaborates the field of "signification". Irregularities or violations, the "schisms in the referential line" of text defined as "drift" or "entropy", identify originality, hidden message or even aesthetic merit by their mere divergence from standard flow. It is this lapsus in the text that is recognized by Julia Kristeva, for example, as particularly "generative" and characteristically "female" in the creative process of writing. Kristeva has linked the semiotic study of narrative to the field of psychoanalytic feminism, forming a kind of psychoanalytic investigation of narrative creation aptly labelled "semanalysis".74

Prerequisite to the semiotic approach is a full knowledge of the historic and cultural background of the work under analysis. "Messages" collected at the surface level of the text alone will depend on the strength and accuracy of the readers' experience and knowledge and may yield many layers of "signification". Accordingly, of impediment to the unbiased analysis that semiotics may endow is interference from traditional literary opinion and biographical information.

Yet the pitfalls of the semiotic process in analyzing Deledda are those of traditional literary criticism itself. Semioticians have recognized the dangers of

74 Toril Moi, Sexual Textual Politics (London: Methuen, 1985) 162.
emotional interference among literary critics and the shortcomings of changing literary fashion. They have not, however, acknowledged among themselves the dangers of similar in-house partialities. If in semiotics the text is said to read the reader, then how, by the same token, is interpretation not influenced by reader experience and bias? The influence of critical overload, the arbitrariness of contemporary and changing aesthetics, as well as literary opinion influenced by creed or nationality would all seem legitimate dangers to which conservative critics and semioticians alike might both be subject.

Consequently the traditional, the psychoanalytic and the semiotic approaches do not appear to be necessarily at odds with the present discussion on Deledda. For this turn-of-the-century author, recent histories and numerous Sardinian cultural studies are readily available. Deledda herself has left considerable autobiographical background material and contributed substantially to the available cultural history and folklore studies on Sardinia which inform her own work. Certainly, then, part of the accuracy of any critical approach to Deledda must take into account the nature of the management of her own personal history, consideration of the times in which she lived as well as the literary influences to which she was exposed. Both her letters and her major autobiographical work, Cosima, furnish a solid foundation on which to construct a valid reassessment of her work. The relative acceptance of psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches may remain a question of opinion and a matter of preference. Used in communion, however, both may reach beyond the limitations of either.

These, then, are the approaches taken in the following analysis of Grazia Deledda's writing. With the assumption that history and biography play an important role
in delving into "the message of the medium," Deledda's creativity around difficult gender issues will be explored through the venues of inference, language, psychoanalysis and semiotics.

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75 An adaptation of Marshal MacLuhan's well-known aphorism.
A. Sardinia in Transition

The political movement which took place prior to the birth of Grazia Deledda is, in the history of the Italian peninsula, one particularly rich in philosophical successes while less so in tangible results. The land closure laws instituted in 1820 had initiated an economic trend toward privatization of property in the extended holdings of Piedmont, among which was included the then remote island of Sardinia. "L'editto delle chiudende" decreed that anyone having access to communal pasture or agricultural lands, merely by drawing perimeters and enclosing chosen parcels with stone walls, could gain full ownership of such lands. The concept of "closure" was designed to replace the traditional system of communal sharing with private ownership. By so doing it was expected that the self-interest of new property owners would be sufficient to assure economic progress. The idea of economic renewal through the distribution of agricultural land paralleled that of the English Enclosure Act of 1760. The consequences of these laws were generally similar. "Closure" without legal supervision tended to advantage those with revenue and power while doing little to safeguard the interests of

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1 Except where indicated, historical information is derived from Denis Mack Smith, Italy and Its Monarchy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

2 Massaiu, La Sardegna di Grazia Deledda, 67-151.

the poor. It was under "l'editto" that the former public lands around Nuoro, Deledda's
birthplace, were appropriated from the local administration by already well-to-do
property owners, much to the disgruntlement of destitute share-croppers and shepherds.
The poor, unable to compete for the private property offered by the new statute, were
thus systematically deprived of their centuries-old access to pasture and farm land.

While examples of enlightened agricultural policies abroad had been part of the
success stories of more than one European state, the position of the poor remained
universally unaltered. The dramatic orchestration of Italian unification, spearheaded by
Piedmont a decade before the birth of Grazia Deledda, was not solely a quest to rid the
peninsula of foreign control, that of Austria in the north and the Bourbon tyranny to the
south. It was also a desire for economic expansion on the part of a newly amalgamated
constitutional monarchy. Despite the ultimate successes of Italian unification, the
traditional system of communal sharing on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia and on the
southern peninsula, did not enjoy an easy transition to capitalism.

While a universal philosophy of capitalist expansion at mid-century had been
sound business practice for emerging states, the effect of superimposed economic
ideologies upon traditional, rural economic sub-structures was an increase in the misery
and despair of peasant populations. Mortality rates which had registered a marked
upswing early in the century, increased rather than waned. Levels of poverty spiralled
upward. The belief that self-interest would assure economic progress for all was an
idealistic assumption which did not materialize and the peasantry throughout the Italian
peninsula and the islands was eventually forced to forfeit to a landed gentry its access to
pastures, fields and forests which had hitherto offered them, at the very least, the possibility of physical survival. But while the new private owners wielded power enough to divide the agricultural spoils, they often lacked the skills and the long term financing to sustain and work extended holdings. Thus members of a rising landed "borghesia" were often forced to leave fallow newly enclosed parcels of land for want of operating capital. Further, excessive taxation, as well as unforeseen costs for agricultural machinery and labour threatened the economic viability of newly enclosed holdings. The restructuring of the peninsula's agricultural economy also dealt a final blow to an already declining noble class unable to compete in a free enterprise system. All strata of society were thus adversely affected. Peasant farmers were forced to turn to day labour in order to survive. Shepherds became servants and often bandits. Even the well-to-do were compromised during this period of political transition.

On the island of Sardinia, the remotest of Piedmont's pre-unification territories, "chiusura" was especially devastating for the indigenous agro-pastoral population. In 1868, in Nuoro, a popular uprising violently protested the sale of the communal forest by local authorities to private interests. The popular chant of the rebellion, "De su connottu" (that which once we knew), defined the sentiment of the revolt and remained embedded in the collective consciousness for generations. A mature Grazia Deledda would describe from inherited memory the sounds of that rebellion in her 1904 novel Cenere:

In quel lamento era tutto il dolore, il male, la miseria, l'abbandono, lo spasimo non ascoltato del luogo e delle persone; era la voce stessa delle cose, il lamento delle pietre che cadevano dai muri neri delle casette preistoriche,
dei tetti che si sfacevano, delle scalette esterne e dei
poggiuoli di legno tarlato che minacciavano rovina, delle
euforbie che crescevano nelle strusciole rocciose, delle
gramigne che coprivano i muri, della gente che non
mangiava, delle donne che non avevano vesti, degli uomini
che si ubriacavano per stordirsi e che bastonavano le donne
e i fanciulli e le bestie perché non potevano percuotere il
destino, delle malattie non curate, della miseria accettata
inconsiamente come la vita stessa. 4

Such were the grass-roots repercussions of the drive toward Italian unification formally
achieved under the leadership of Cavour in 1861.

The intent of the new constitutional monarchy inherited from Piedmont had been
to modernize the Italian peninsula in order to compete with rapid industrialization and
trade schedules at European and international levels. Italy's new unified and liberal
government had sought to increase national income by converting a lethargic agricultural
economy into a modern industrial trading power. In the process, however, it had caused
economic disaster and had fostered systemic crime in the agricultural south. In the
backlash to unification, Sardinia had become part of "la questione meridionale," the
justification of political error voiced by those whose zeal had forever altered a stable
feudalistic economy. Still archaic and isolated, Sardinia enjoyed none of the advantages
of Italian unification but rather suffered unconscionable exploitation of its natural
resources. Despite the peasant uprisings around Nuoro, woodlands were in fact sold to
mainland interests. An inequitable taxation structure had also set rates in Sardinia
considerably higher than those of the mainland. The Deleddas' economic solvency was

of course affected by the new tax system. After her husband's death in 1892, Francesca Deledda-Cambosu comments as follows:

E sono tante le tasse; sono sempre più gravi, e ci rodono come un cancro inguaribile. Io non dormo, pensando alle tasse; un giorno o l'altro l'esattore verrà in casa a sequestrare. Lo vedo in sogno, ne ho paura come del demonio.\(^5\)

An unfair tax policy and the imposition of an incongruous and prejudicial legal system had also led many, in protest, to a life of banditry.

Despite her privileged position, Grazia Deledda, having experienced this social upheaval first hand, inherited the resentment suffered by all her people, regardless of their class. Her anger and her pessimism, as well as her desire to immortalize a ravaged popular culture, emerge clearly in her writings about Sardinia. Such sentiments were the result of the political restructuring which had forever altered "that which once we knew". Indeed Deledda's direct knowledge of the repercussions of Italian unification in Sardinia served to establish the time frame of many of her novels in an era during Italy's strained political transition.

Prior to 1850 the unregulated economy of Sardinia had been naturally conducive to the financial rise of a landed middle-class. Fiscal liberty had originally attracted Deledda's father, Giovanni Antonio, from Cagliari to Nuoro, where he soon became the owner of "tancas" (farm land) and woodlots around Nuoro. As did many of the local land-owners, Giovanni Antonio enjoyed the proceeds of lucrative exports to the mainland.

of cork and fossil coal, while trading locally in wool, cheese, oil and wine. But when the fifth offspring of the family, Grazia Maria Cosima Damiana was still a child, Giovanni Antonio suffered the loss of an important shipment of charcoal to the continent, a loss which seriously diminished expected income. As a result, some of the family lands were sold. Giovanni Antonio concentrated his efforts on reduced sales at home and started a rudimentary printing business. But the printing press at "casa Deledda", though inspirational to the young Grazia, produced no significant income and was soon abandoned.

The family's financial reversals directly affected the psychological development of the Deledda children as well. Neither of the nobility, nor of the peasantry, nor, to be precise, of the wealthier landed gentry, the Deleddas had come into their money through the hard work and singular business acumen of their father. Grazia's mother Francesca, though of peasant stock, nonetheless shared her husband's belief that property owners were somehow noble and worthy of respect. In the children's upbringing financial growth determined social position; those with cash income and property were ranked high on a new scale of untitled nobility. Giovanni Antonio's financial position was the determining factor in his standing in the social hierarchy of his immediate community. As a result the Deledda children grew up with a clear image of their superiority. The boys were to be educated and continue the family business. The girls were to marry well and raise children. We shall see that Grazia's own choices of friends, colleagues and marriage partner were, with some minor exceptions, all made with her social status firmly in mind. Associations based on wealth or position, or even those based on
financial potential, rather than on sentiment, were considered the most appropriate. Indeed, from the beginning, many of Grazia's stories dealt with the drama of those who had fallen tragically because they were attracted to socially unsuitable or poor partners. Nobility of spirit, an elevated sense of personal value, and an often condescending understanding of the poor were characteristic of an attitude among the *nouveau riche* which mimicked the familiar, though vanishing mentality of the titled.

Deledda's personal correspondence reflects this type of social segregation based on money. Writing to Angelo De Gubernatis, at the age of twenty-three, she describes her unfortunate attraction to the young student, Andrea Pirodda, in the following manner:

> È giovane, bello, intelligente, ma è povero, occupa un grado assolutamente inferiore al mio e la mia famiglia mi lascerà morire prima di concedermi a lui.6

Despite her love for Pirodda, Grazia does not oppose her parents' ethos. She does not fight for Pirodda nor does she imagine marrying him. Rather, she accepts her situation as the will of God.

> Io non mi ribello né mi lamento. Riconosco soltanto la fatalità che perseguita tutti, chi in un modo chi nell'altro, e talvolta mi inebriò nei miei stessi sconforti pensando che se è così è per volontà di Dio.7

True passion might not have been so welcoming of the rules which admit of social


7 Ibid.
stratification and one wonders if her religious submission to those rules here is an easy way out of an uncomfortable situation.

Deledda's apprehensions regarding the general financial instability of her family during those early years did not change her outlook on social hierarchy but actually served to fuel much of her drive toward a financial future which could sustain it. The real threat of her family's financial downfall, especially after the death of her father, did much to reinforce Deledda's need to pursue a writing career. Economic uncertainty served to breed in the young woman a degree of practical caution as well as a rebellious independence, that ambiguity of personality so often evidenced in the dichotomous nature of her literary characters.

Marianna, in the novel Marianna Sirca (1915) for example, is a well-to-do but lonely thirty-year-old woman. She has inherited family property but lacks love. While Deledda describes her as haughty and vain, Marianna is nonetheless emotionally vulnerable to the allure of Simone, a local bandit and distant relative who, were she to become involved with him, could very well threaten not only her social but also her economic security. Marianna fights unsuccessfully against a love she feels for a man who is her social inferior. To be truly worthy of her, Simone must surrender himself to the authorities and pay for his criminal past. His poverty, however, is not as easily overcome. Marianna and Simone are both torn; she is unable to reconcile herself to his social status; he is unable to forfeit his freedom for the financial security Marianna could provide as his wife.

Similarly Annarosa in L'incendio nell'oliveto (1917) struggles with her love for
the son of the local blacksmith, Gioele, "il ragazzo povero e di bassa gente." Bound by a tradition which obliges her to marry "per interesse, per obbedienza alla famiglia," Annarosa chooses the rather disagreeable but financially established Stefano. But her decision teeters precariously between family pride and personal desire, leaving Annarosa in a state of psychological turmoil. It is a delicate balance that Deledda draws here between Annarosa's love and what she deems to be necessary. Secrecy is used to conceal the truth of her feelings and thus protect the system. Annarosa suffers in silence knowing that in either case: "pride goeth before disaster and a haughty spirit before the fall." (Bib. Proverbs 16, v. 18).

Major choices regarding Deledda's future were dependent upon similar regulations of traditional patriarchy. Despite her keen interest in learning, Grazia was allowed only a limited education, merely to the fourth grade, which she repeated twice for the sheer pleasure of it. Like her other female siblings, she too would be processed for marriage and motherhood, a preparation she seemed neither to reject nor to lament. This pre-programmed design for the 19th-century woman typically ignored personal aspirations. Grazia inherited from her background a rigid set of social and moral standards from which she could not easily deviate and upon which she would ultimately build her personal and professional existence. Her life choices, as well as much of the subject matter of her writing, then, while influenced by strong moral conditioning, were ruled also by a genuine fear of financial failure and loss of social status.

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8 Grazia Deledda, _Lincendio nell'oliveto_ (Milano: Mondadori, 1992) 40.

9 Ibid. 179.
A changing economy and the resulting financial reversals suffered by previously well-to-do families like the Deleddas impacted significantly on a privileged yet ill-equipped second generation. So did the philosophic tenor of the times. Grazia and her siblings were not immune to the new philosophies. Late in the century even the island of Sardinia was feeling the impact of the changing social consciousness of the mainland which spilled over from pre-unification fervour. Despite its rigid patriarchy, the former Kingdom of Sardinia, or Piedmont, had been among the most progressive European states on the question of human rights. Radical reform bills in the Piedmontese legislature aimed at including women as equal citizens in the projected plan for a newly unified state, had won, if not consensus, at least a formal hearing. The lobbying of Aldo Morelli and Anna Maria Mozzoni in the 1860s reflected a growing international interest in female emancipation. A reactionary backlash, however, was to produce an inevitable swing to the right following an initial partisan show of support in a newly constituted Chamber of Deputies. After Unification there remained a sense that even those of liberal leaning had somehow betrayed the cause, thinking it best to abandon the fight for female equality for the greater good of society in general and for the more immediate concerns of statehood. The issue, however, did not die. Unquestionably, it gathered strength at the turn of the century even in Sardinia. As a spirited and intelligent young girl Grazia Deledda too was touched by the issue of female equality and by the general feeling of disappointment and betrayal which, on an international level as well, had begun to permeate the awakening consciousness of women. A growing spirit of rebellion, following hard on the heels of Unification was to influence, however laterally, young
Grazia's life in a way that would have been unthinkable in young women of a previous generation.

B. The Decline of the Deledda Family

It was into this age of transition that Grazia Deledda was born in Nuoro, in September of 1871, to Giovanni Antonio Deledda and Francesca Cambosu. Deledda's autobiographical and final work Cosima, first published as Cosima quasi Grazia, relates her own interpretation of the facts of her family life up to 1900. Except for a few variations in the time-line and some alteration of names, Cosima gives an emotional history of a family in crisis.

In Cosima Deledda portrays her father Giovanni Antonio as a conventional patriarch, disciplining his children as he believed was required of him as head of the family. The use of physical violence among the siblings appears sporadically in Cosima and is always described by Deledda in a seemingly dispassionate way. She had, generally, in all her works, not commented upon the violence which she chose to include in her narratives but rather left the reader to judge for himself. Cosima is no exception. Deledda thus describes a scene between her father and brother, Giovanni Antonio and Andrea:

10 "Grazia," "Cosima," and "Deledda" are names used interchangeably in the rest of the chapter.

Uno dei fatti più dolorosi fu la scoperta fatta un giorno dal padre, di denari che mancavano dal suo cassetto chiuso a chiave. Egli non si ingannò un attimo solo: chiamò il figlio Andrea, che allora aveva sedici anni... Un furore muto, alimentato di rimorso, di paura per l'avvenire, di propositi di fermezza e di repressione ad ogni costo, lo sosteneva nel lungo interrogatorio che fece ad Andrea. Il giovane negava di aver preso i denari... Allora il signor Antonio prese una corda e la lanciò ad una trave della cucina: chiuse le porte e le finestre, mandò fuori le donne. Disse con calma: "Vedi Andrea: io stesso farò giustizia immediatamente, se tu non riconosci la tua colpa. Ti impicherò con le mie mani." E l'altro confessò.\textsuperscript{12}

Giovanni Antonio's death threats to a son who lied may not have been considered extreme behaviour at the time but the fear instilled in the other children, especially in those sent from the room after the noose was slung over a rafter, undoubtedly contributed to their later emotional difficulties. Deledda's almost matter-of-fact account of such disciplinary action can hardly be disinterested. Andrea was her favourite brother and it is curious that she should retell this story at all, and in such detail. Rather than repressing the violent memory, however, she not only includes it in \textit{Cosima} but emphasises it as the event that provoked their father's illness thus precipitating the downfall of an entire family. Indeed we know from Deledda's letters that it was Andrea's irresponsible actions that had destabilised his father's plan for the children's financial future.\textsuperscript{13} Although the specific incident does not appear in Deledda's letters her description of it here seems to suggest, in the context of what is an admittedly autobiographical work, that it not only

\textsuperscript{12} Grazia Deledda, \textit{Cosima} (Milano: Mondadori, 1986) 34.

\textsuperscript{13} Di Pilla, 61.
did occur but that its inclusion here, rather than exculpating her father and her brother, serves to blame them.

Given our current knowledge of the effects on children of witnessing violence, this particular passage substantiates the modern belief that abused children and children who witness violence, tend to develop anxiety and depression as well as phobic conduct. Moreover, children exposed to violence also tend to repeat their parents' behaviour in their adult lives. As we shall see, Deledda did indeed develop symptoms and reactions which fit a pattern of anger and revenge. While she exposed the cruel reality of her own childhood in her writing, it is obvious that she remained its victim. As a parent, she too would sternly punish her own children. It will also be seen in the following discussion of her letters how she expressed an anxiety and depression characteristic of abused children and how the phobias of her childhood surface repeatedly throughout her creative writing.

In spite of being witness to such violence, young Grazia idealized her father as well as her brothers. They were among the few men with whom she had direct contact and certainly the most important male models in her life. A patriarchal society which denied her access to the outside world naturally fostered in her an almost incestuous


attachment. Indeed, she was particularly drawn to her brother Andrea who shared her love for nature; but she also admired the sensitive and intelligent Santus who represented a world of knowledge. Santus "aveva una cultura larga e profonda"\(^1\) which Grazia naturally found congenial because of her own literary interests.

But Grazia was especially fond of her father whom she describes in *Cosima* as "giusto e buono. Molti ricorrevano a lui per consigli e consultazioni legali, profondamente persuasi della sua dottrina e soprattutto della sua rettitudine."\(^2\) *Cosima*, "quasi Grazia", is proud to be the daughter of such a father. She admires his financial success as well as his poetic nature. Giovanni Antonio was known locally not only for his entrepreneurship but for his engaging extemporaneous recitations in dialect. Deledda's romanticized image of him is nowhere so evident as in her description of his eyes. "Gli occhi grigi o azzurri o verdastrì secondo la luce del momento, potevano essere quelli di un santo ma anche quelli di un guerriero."\(^3\)

Alongside his saintly qualities, however, Deledda includes in *Cosima* negative aspects of his more threatening nature exemplified in the incident with Andrea. It was known, too, that Antonio Deledda fraternized with local bandits notorious for theft and murder in the area around Nuoro. She describes clandestine meetings in their own home with the famous "fratelli" of the local crime family whom, even years afterwards, when

\(^{17}\) Deledda, *Cosima* 34.

\(^{18}\) Ibid. 44.

\(^{19}\) Ibid. 15.
writing Cosima, she was still reluctant to identify by name.\textsuperscript{20}

Grazia's feelings for her father were undoubtedly ambivalent and writing Cosima may well have served to justify in her mind the more unsavoury side of his character which had likely inspired considerable fear and disappointment in her as an adolescent. Her very strict upbringing required that parents be respected and that the girls especially remain silent and dutiful, at the service and command of the men of the family. Their fulfilment as women could only be achieved with their allocation to a preferably wealthy husband and by their ability to successfully produce offspring. After marriage it was women's role to duplicate family traditions while continuing to remain subservient, children, as it were, of new masters. Because of her character and interest in writing, even as a traditional girl, it was uncertain whether Grazia would be up to this particular task.

The reality of her father's darker side could not be easily reconciled with her hero-worship of men, instilled in her as a vulnerable and malleable young girl. And so in Cosima the ambivalence felt towards her father's double nature results in a transference of her disappointment and fear onto the family servant Elia. At the end of her story Deledda recounts an episode where Elia saves the life of a child who is drowning. As a result this selfless act the good servant falls ill himself and Cosima nurses him back to health as she would an ailing father. Thankful to his young mistress, Elia shows Cosima a hidden treasure of gold coins, the spoils of his former life as a bandit, which he offers to give her in payment for her kindness. Suddenly she sees Elia, whom she had respected

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 33-34.
and admired up to this point, as a satanic individual and imagines the hidden gold to be the snares of sin. She is tempted to take the money. Significantly, however, she immediately perceives Elia as her seducer and flees from him. That night she dreams of her maternal grandmother who speaks to Cosima of the true love she had had for her husband, Cosima's kindhearted grandfather, Andrea. The dream consoles and somehow rescues Cosima from the temptation of Elia's gold, from what she suggests is a fate worse than death. Cosima's attraction to and simultaneous revulsion at Elia's "treasure" is a key indicator here of the emotional dynamic which is activated when sexual desires are perceived to be incestuous. Here Deledda's lingering Oedipal fantasies, her forbidden attraction to both her father and her brother seek resolution in a balanced and beatified image of the true love shared by her grandparents, which is also significantly so unlike that of her parents.\footnote{Giuliana Sanguinetti-Katz, "La scoperta dell'identità femminile nel romanzo Cosima di Grazia Deledda," \textit{Rivista di studi Italiani} 12 (1994) 55-73.} It is most likely that Deledda's own guilt, resulting from an inner disaffection for her father, is related here in the actions of Cosima who conveniently makes Elia a wicked substitute. There is also some retribution meted out by Deledda who obviously remembers clearly being put at the epicentre of conflicting messages.

The death of Deledda's father when she was twenty-one years old signalled a serious blow to the family's fortunes with little hope of total recovery. Business matters did not pass to the first-born son Santus, as might have been expected. Santus had abandoned his studies in his final year of university and had returned home to Nuoro defeated and depressed. His drinking was soon associated with a previous departure of
his closest friend Antonino\textsuperscript{22} from the same university. Deledda conjectures that

\begin{quote}
... Forse anche la lontananza dell'amico fu per Santus dannosa: egli cominciò a frequentare compagni meno intelligenti e fini di quello, e a domandare denari più del necessario. Anche di lui si seppe che studiava sempre meno, e che beveva.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Santus's weakness and his dependence upon family resources became even more pronounced after he withdrew from the university. The "great expectation" of the family was dashed and Santus slipped gradually into the society of the street-people of Nuoro, totally dependent and ruined.

Andrea had never shown interest in an education and had taken to the streets as a teen leaving the family in despair at his petty thievery and womanizing. Andrea's brushes with the law and his violence also increased as time passed. Ironically, despite her natural ability and hands-on experience with family finances, as a woman Grazia could play only a secretarial rather than a managerial role with respect to the family finances while Andrea, as the lesser of two male evils, assumed a position of leadership. Grazia, who under her father's supervision had kept the household books and business accounts, witnessed first hand the quick depletion of inheritance monies under Andrea's control so that she surely became acutely aware of her own economic vulnerability.

There is no doubt that the traditional play of gender roles in the Deledda

\textsuperscript{22} Antonino Pau was the friend who visited Santus frequently at home during their University years. He was Deledda's first infatuation.

\textsuperscript{23} Deledda, \textit{Cosima} 47.
household denied equality to its female members even in the absence of adept males. In her immediate family situation Grazia had witnessed the negative impact of patriarchy even in her brothers. The widening chasm between concepts of individual freedom and an ideal but no longer feasible set of cultural standards and restrictions had adversely affected a family whose ultimate success depended upon the strength and unquestioned leadership of its men.

Partially as a means of escape from her family problems, Deledda had diverted her boundless intellectual interests elsewhere. She had become an avid reader of foreign and Italian novels and of "romanzi d'appendice" appearing in serial form in local and peninsular newspapers. She began to write stories for children. She studied Italian. But the initial freedom allowed her in reading and writing verses and stories was abruptly curtailed by the vehement opposition of family and community to her first attempt at publication at age fifteen. She had overstepped the bounds of female propriety. As she explains,

I miei primi piccoli successi letterari furono accompagnati, come certi grandi successi, da vivi dispiaceri. In famiglia mi si proibiva di scrivere: poiché il mio avvenire doveva essere ben altro che io sognavo: doveva essere cioè un avvenire casalingo, di lavoro esclusivamente domestico, di nuda realtà, di numerosa figliolanza.

Finché si era trattato di novelline per ragazzi, transeat; ma quando cominciarono le novelline d'amore, con convegni notturni, baci e paroline compromettenti, la persecuzione si manifestò inesorabile, da parte di tutta la parentela, con rinforzi esterni, che erano i più terribili e pericolosi. Una ragazza per bene non può scrivere di queste cose, se non per esperienza o per sfogo personale: cosa che, se attira in un certo modo su di lei la curiosità dei
giovanotti dell'intero circondario, non desta in loro l'idea fondamentale di chiedere la mano di sposa della scrittrice. Vuol dire che tutto il mondo è stato sempre paese.24

Frustrated on more than one account, Grazia began to internalize her already mixed feelings about a possible future in writing. The structure of the traditional patriarchal family was an artificially imposed logic which offered minimal protection or opportunity and bore little resemblance to the actuality of family events. A clear separation of the sexes with rigid allocation of duty and responsibility was a system of authority, however, to which she began grudgingly to subscribe.

The arduous and dysfunctional life of her own mother as it is described in Cosima was for the young Grazia a primary cause of her disillusionment. The birth of a baby sister, which opens her personal history is, moreover, an important example of a key issue which haunts Deledda's mature reflections. Cosima's first sight of the baby is described as a disappointment:

...fra cuscini e pannolini, stava la neonata. Fasciata con le manine in dentro, come si usava, aveva la testina coperta da una cuffietta rosa; e da questa cuffietta il viso rosso, gonfio, con la bocca già spalancata al pianto.25

It is an image of pain, frustration and bondage, which our author first associates with childbirth. She describes herself announcing the arrival, not of a little sister, but of a brother Sebastianino, whom she has named after her favourite uncle, the priest. Thus, at

25 Deledda, Cosima 15.
a tender age herself, she had already understood the hierarchy of gender and the importance of the church. She describes the contorted and reddened facial features of the new baby who seems to her most unlike the beautiful blond Baby Jesus whose portrait hangs above her parents' bed.

The birth of Giuseppina, according to Cosima, had exacerbated her mother's depression. She became increasingly despondent so that her children were neglected and the entire household was flung into disarray. Cosima's older sisters were moved to a separate room while she herself was forced to share the maid's room and also the maid's affections with Giovanna, moved out of the crib in her parent's room to make way for the new baby. This understandably caused all of the girls to feel some degree of jealousy but especially Cosima who was most directly affected.

Giovanna, no longer the baby of the family, suffered more than the others. Unable to speak because of an enlarged lingual cartilage, she seemed younger than her actual years. One winter, when the children were still very young, all the girls were taken ill at once.

Cosima si sentì stringere la gola, fu assalita da una febbre altissima e cominciò a sognare le cose più strane e spaventose. Giaceva nel letto della camera a pian terreno, e nei momenti di lucidità vedeva il viso pallido della madre piegarsi sul suo...  

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26 The illegitimate daughter of Deledda's uncle, Nanna the maid, had been taken on to help the family when the first child was born. An adolescent at the time, Nanna had virtually grown up in the household and was treated more as a member of the family than as a servant.

27 Deledda, Cosima 28.
Deledda recounts that she remembers awakening one morning to learn that Giovanna had died in their shared bedroom upstairs. There is no doubt that the death of a sibling would have been especially frightening for any child but especially for a child of Deledda's age and sensitivity. In Cosima it is obviously a pained author who also remembers her own illness and her brush with death.

Giovanna was the pride of the family, praised by her father, after whom she was named, as the most beautiful of the Deledda daughters. Grazia's plainness in contrast may have caused her considerable guilt when Giovanna died in the room they shared with Nanna. The death itself is in fact described in terms of a sacrifice. Giovanna dies on Saint Anthony's day. A relative, not knowing of the child's death, asks Francesca in passing whether the traditional "porcellino" has been prepared in honour of her husband's patron saint. Francesca retorts that the victim is upstairs in the girl's room, sacrificed already, as it were, to her husband and Saint Anthony.

Grazia describes her mother's experience as "Il sapore del più grande dolore che possa colpire una donna."28 She notes too that "Cosima ne senti anche il sapore."29 Afterwards Francesca becomes even more depressed, silent and withdrawn:

Dopo la morte di Giovanna, l'umore della mamma cambiò. Era sempre seria; adesso diveniva melanconica, taciturna, chiusa in un mondo tutto suo; badava ai figli e alle cose domestiche, ma con una freddezza quasi meccanica, con

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28 Ibid. 28.

29 Ibid.
For Cosima, "quasi Grazia", the death of a sibling and the sentimental distancing and loss of affection she suffered as the result of it, was fundamental in her formulation of attitudes towards sexuality and childbirth. The implications of Deledda's still describing such events in her final work, *Cosima*, and her reactions to these events are significant also for a better understanding of the adaptive venues traditional women used in coming to terms with the disparity between their natures and their desires in a tradition which denied them both.

As a means of escape Deledda sets the image of her mother in sharp contrast to that of the family servant Nanna and her grandmother. Nanna is an earthy, strong woman, very unlike her own mother, who had served the family for many years, taken on initially when the first Deledda child was born. Nanna carried out all the household and childrearing duties of a traditional mother as Francesca's strength and sanity declined. She also worked the family fields harvesting crops and tending the animals. Deledda mentions that it was common knowledge in the neighbourhood that her father had been sexually involved with Nanna when the children were young. Describing the unhappy marriage of her parents, Deledda stresses her mother's sexual frustrations with a husband who was much older than herself. She describes her mother as frail and pale, "né giovane né vecchia... né allegra né triste, quasi impassibile e quasi enigmatica." In

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid. 16.
effect, her mother has no character at all compared to the colourful portrait she paints of Nanna. Even Deledda's grandmother, "la piccola nonna materna - quella nonna che partecipava della natura delle fate nane della tradizione locale"32 is a much more appealing, happy and satisfied woman than her mother. Deledda's "nonna", to whom she escapes in her dreams, speaks fondly of Andrea, the husband she loved, the memory of whom accompanies and comforts her in her old age. The grandmother is remembered as a "fairy godmother" whose stories of the legends of the land seem to nurture Deledda's own propensity for story telling. Her inherited love of nature and her fascination with the myths and customs of her grandmother's time come inspired by a mythologized grandmother she knew only as a child. The idea of a primordial, dream-like ancestry represented by such a grandmother filled a vacuum for a child sadly deprived of maternal affection and stimulation, and was to remain an idealized rather than a realistic model of womanhood.

Except for such caricatures, none of the Deledda women pictured in Cosima seem exempt from the varying degrees of trauma almost invariably linked to their sexuality. Francesca Deledda, for example, bears seven children to a much older husband she does not love. Two female children die in infancy. Deledda's few but pointed criticisms of her mother's emotional distance are painful examples of a common reaction in children of large and loveless marriages where duty invariably replaces affectionate family interaction. It is obvious too that the marriage, though prolific, was hardly ideal and that it had produced unsettled if not unbalanced offspring.

32 Ibid. 72.
Grazia's behaviour, her views of life and her reactions to family events are good indicators of the degree of psychological adaptation she was able to muster in response to the parental neglect which affected all the Deledda children in varying ways. The mere fact of her tendency to articulate her feelings through writing, as well as the nature and content of that articulation, offer substantial evidence of the long-term campaign against lingering symptoms of strained and violent family relationships which, in the past century, were not considered damaging to children but necessary forms of discipline.

Like the problems of social adaptation encountered by her brothers who were expected to fulfil the traditional role reserved for men, Deledda's plight in adjusting to female requirements was difficult as well. Primary among her problems was her discomfort with her mere physical appearance. Small and dark-skinned, she excused photographs of herself as the fault of the lens or romanticized her image as childlike, Spanish or oriental. In a society where the image of female beauty did not correspond to Deledda's likeness, the criticism and rejection she suffered especially from Stanis Manca who had called her a "dwarf," were to have lasting psychological effects. Perhaps more devastating still, her writing was seen as unfeminine, an aberrant choice of activity for a young girl who wrote on matters not merely amorous but sexual. Deledda's natural look and inclination did much to further a difficult transition to womanhood, a femininity which was first sought after and failed at home.

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33 Grazia Deledda, "To Giovanni de Nava" 20 May 1894, Grazia Deledda: Biografia e romanzo. 29

34 See Chapter I, 19 note 43.
Moreover her mother's growing mental illness had left Deledda prey to the childish and antagonistic behaviour of her older sisters who taunted and cuffed her incessantly. An example in *Cosima* describes her early memories of physical mistreatment at the hands of her sisters in this way:

... scendono Enza e Giovanna, che vanno anch'esse a scuola, piccole di statura, quasi come gemelle... La piccola Cosima, che ancora non ha l'età di andare a scuola, le guarda con ammirazione e invidia, ma anche con un certo timore, perché esse, specialmente Enza, non solo non giocano volentieri con lei, ma le prodigano pugni, spintoni e parolacce: tutta roba imparata dalle compagne di scuola.

Although the names of Deledda's sisters are authentic in *Cosima*, the facts here are altered for, as we know, Giovanna who was younger than Grazia, had died at the age of six. It is likely that our author's own lingering feelings of victimization led her to rearrange the order of the Deledda daughters. Deledda herself becomes, then, the youngest in a family of two older brothers and two older sisters, and for the reader, the sympathetic victim of a brood of disturbed and violent individuals. This shuffling of positions in *Cosima* may also be indicative of self-punishment for her jealousy towards her incompetent yet favoured brothers and guilt over the death of Giovanna, the beauty of the family, who had died so young. It may be, tragically but simply, that Deledda, suffering from terminal cancer while writing *Cosima*, could not have but felt, when looking back on her early family life, utterly dispossessed.

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C. Deledda’s Romantic History.

Although her ordinary physical needs may have been met, Grazia’s emotional development was considerably hindered by a severe, strictly controlled upbringing. Besides the want of maternal love or reassuring female models, the discomfort of a grating male presence was also critical. It is particularly in her life-long attitude of uneasiness towards men that Deledda’s experiences with her two brothers and her father take on especially significant proportions. The authority of “paterfamilias” conferred on men by patriarchy and the system’s double standard had ironically served neither her nor her brothers well. While the tradition took male dominance to be a given, in effect it granted leadership by virtue of a personal strength and loyalty which neither of her brothers possessed. In Cosima she makes ambiguous allusions to Santus’s "vizio" which, unconvincingly, is attributed to an initial dose of cognac administered to him after a minor accident.36 Not surprisingly, he is separated from the women of the family on the advice of the family doctor:

Allora fu deciso che egli, e Andrea che si offrì
generosamente di sorvegliarlo, andassero ad abitare in una
casupola che la famiglia possedeva in un orto non molto
distante dalla casa.37

Although he was allowed to visit the family during the day he was forced to sleep away

36 Ibid. 36-37.
37 Ibid. 90.
from them. Santus's drunken "eccessi" clouded what Deledda also suggests was his homosexuality. While it is not directly mentioned, her many descriptions allude obliquely to what at the time could not be said directly. She writes that Santus

... era buono e mite, in fondo, e il primo ad essere mortalmente triste del suo vizio, che il dottore aveva dichiarato essere null'altro che una malattia dalla quale il paziente non può, anche con tutta la sua volontà, mai guarire..."39

The love that dares not speak its name40 seemed to be embodied by Antonino, Santus's university friend.41 Unlike the other young men who would show interest in the Deledda sisters, Antonino spent time alone reciting poetry to his companion Santus. In fact, "...solo la compagnia di Antonino pareva fargli piacere: si chiudeva per lunghe ore nella camera alta della casa."42 In other references she is even more explicit. Santus "... non fumava, non beveva, non guardava le donne."43 Nor was his disposition or his physical demeanour manly in the traditional sense. In Cosima, Santus is portrayed as the delicate and inventive spirit who told the local children stories and entertained them with his

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid. 90.
40 Oscar Wilde's thinly veiled allusions to homosexuality has passed into the collective language pool.
41 Antonino Pau.
42 Deledda, Cosima 36.
43 Ibid. 34.
multi-coloured balloon. Santus's "enigmatic" illness, was clearly an open embarrassment to the family and it is likely that Deledda was confused by his relationship with Antonino, whose disinterest in women as well quite pointedly raises the issue of Deledda's own difficulty with sexuality in general. Antonino

Fu il primo, il lungo amore di Cosima. Quando egli veniva a cercare Santus, ella si nascondeva, presa dal terrore che egli potesse rivolgerle un semplice sguardo. Ma non c'era pericolo: egli passava accanto a lei e alle altre ragazze anche maggiori e più belle ed esperte di lei, senza neppure vederle.

To further confound her, Antonino was Deledda's first infatuation amid the limited possibilities of her brothers' friends, a love who seemed to deny her very existence. Her innate shyness and tendency to withdraw from men were not unusual given the times, but this first love object and his response to her tentative yearning would certainly have circumscribed her natural instincts. Moreover, as normal as her sexual feelings may have been, it is likely that the constant presence and pressure of the unhappy relationship of her parents could not but have produced in her a guarded reaction and strategies of prudence and control in her subsequent relationships.

If Santus's passivity and "illness", compounded by Antonino's humiliating rebuff were of little value to her in providing a suitable male model on which to embroider her own sexual "persona", she had every reason to expect otherwise from Andrea, who is

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44 Ibid. 36

45 Ibid. 35.
described in definitely masculine tones with quite a goodly portion of sensuality, given that it is a sister who is "looking" at him:

Anche la sua persona è tozza, squadrata, le vesti trasandate; ma la testa è caratteristica, possente, tutta capelli nerissimi; il profilo è camuso, con le labbra sensuali; gli occhi di un grigio dorato, corruscanti come quelli del falco.⁴⁶

Andrea's swarthiness and engaging rebelliousness initially draw the young Grazia towards him. She perceives him as her soul-mate, one with whom she shares her love of the countryside and cultural humus of Sardinia. He is her first most stalwart and understanding protector who is himself unconventional and supportive of her own "difference" in being a young woman interested in the male preserve of writing. Her closeness to him affords her what she could not enjoy on her own as a woman, almost unfettered access to the broader world away from family and thus an unequalled opportunity for gathering first-hand material for her literary ambitions.

Cosima... era... una specie di ribelle a tutte le abitudini, le tradizioni della famiglia e anzi della razza, poiché s'era messa a scrivere versi e novelle, e tutti cominciarono a guardarla con una certa stupita diffidenza se non pur a sbuffeggiarla e prevedere per lei un quasi losco avvenire. Andrea prese a proteggerla e tentò in modo invero molto intelligente ed efficace, di aiutarla.⁴⁷

Andrea's involvement in her collecting information on peasant life, otherwise

⁴⁶ Ibid. 10.
⁴⁷ Ibid. 56.
inaccessible to her, is made quite explicit in the following passage:

Più efficaci furono le lezioni pratiche che il fratello volenteroso le procurò facendole conoscere tipi di vecchi pastori che raccontavano storie più meravigliose di quelle scritte sui libri, e portandola in giro, nei villaggi più caratteristici della contrada, alle feste campestri, agli ovili sparsi nei pascoli solitari e nascosti come nidi nelle conche bosbose della montagna.48

But this idyll between brother and sister, with him sensitive to the budding author's needs, solicitous to her whims and aspirations, anxious to please her at every turn, soon turns sour. It becomes clear that the attraction, at least on his part, develops into more than is proper between siblings as it overflows into the ambivalent, shifting territory of incest. Andrea's behaviour acquires more the lineaments of a young man courting than is meet in such a relationship:

Per Cosima Andrea preparò con una sella e una bisaccia una comoda poltrona; e i migliori bocconi furono per lei: per lei il rognone dell'agnello, tenero e dolce come una sorba matura, per lei il cocuzzolo del formaggello arrostito allo spiedo, per lei il più bel grappolo d'uva primaticcia portata appositamente per lei dal fratello premuroso.49

At this crucial phase in her development it is not a brother's attentions that Deledda required. Her awakening sexuality makes Andrea's "courtship" unsuitable and, to the embarrassment of both, they are roundly mocked by their friends at an outing in

48 Ibid. 58.
49 Ibid. 59.
the nearby hills:

Si accorsero, i convitati, di queste gentilezze quasi galanti, e cominciarono a urtarsi coi gomiti; e come se una parola d'ordine si trasmettesse fra loro con questo gesto, un bel momento tutti sporsero verso Cosima le loro forchette fatte con stecchi di legno, e ad esse infilati pezzi di pane, di cacio, di tutte le vivande che si trovavano sulla mensa.  

Andrea is thus transformed from a loving, doting brother-friend, supportive of Deledda's budding creative talents, into an overbearing, frightening moralist who added his damning censure to that which had already begun to torment her from all sides in the narrow-minded, restrictive milieu into which she had been born. Andrea too would have to be abandoned and she must look elsewhere to fulfil herself, both as a woman and as an author.

Deledda now turned almost instinctively outside her family circle to a poor disabled young poet of Nuoro. Clandestine meetings and first embraces signalled a normal sexual direction for the young couple. Discovered by the gossips of the town, however, the relationship was soon terminated by Andrea who threatened the young man and soundly beat his sister.

Un giorno Andrea disse, in pubblica piazza, che avrebbe fracassato col bastone l'altra gamba del "suonatore di chitarra", e a Cosima somministrò una dose di schiaffì e pugni che oltre le membra le pestarono l'anima come il sale.

50 Ibid. 59-60.
51 Cimino walked with a limp but his interest in poetry and his guitar-playing about town had obviously captured Deledda's attention.
Such an event must have been traumatising for Deledda despite its predictability. Her natural attraction to the opposite sex, already considerably restrained by the fears instilled in her by her upbringing, was thus further undermined by Andrea on the excuse, it seems, of family honour. Having been raised in an environment where women were considered a commodity, Deledda's association with Cimino, a poor man, a social inferior, could only be perceived as disloyal and fraught with danger. As an economic asset to the family, she could not be squandered on "riff-raff" but must seek a well-born and preferably a well-to-do husband. Because of the young couple's indiscretion it was Andrea's duty to punish both offenders. Andrea's jealous rage, however, betrayed deeper feelings for his sister which were to persist up to the time of her marriage.

Psychologically, then, the link between sexuality and physical pain had surely been established in Deledda's mind by early adulthood. She had already witnessed the sacrifices of her mother. The most disturbing of her childhood experiences had revolved around her viewing, first hand, the relationship between sex and suffering, between childbirth and death. Andrea, the brother whom she so loved, and in whom she had at first found a congenial companion and soul-mate, had betrayed her not only by turning against her aspirations but by reacting with an unusual degree of harshness. It is not surprising that caution and a need to wield control became characteristic of her subsequent relationships.

52 Deledda, Cosima 88.
Perhaps most significant, her fear of sexuality and its connection with suffering were sealed by witnessing the result of her older sister Vincenza's abortion attempt and death. As recounted in *Cosima*, the eldest daughter had married an impoverished young man and was relegated to a refurbished family shanty together with her husband. *Cosima* describes both partners as volatile by nature, unleashing their frustrations upon each other even as newly-weds. Having married a husband beneath her station, Enza was soon depressed by the squalor of her home life. An early pregnancy was too much for her to bear and she died in an attempt to end it. She was twenty-eight years old. Her death most likely served to confirm in a younger sister the virtual inevitability of pain and perhaps death even for women who express their sexuality through the sanctioned channels of marriage.

It is curious, too, that one of Deledda's few discrepancies in *Cosima* is the date of Vincenza's death described as having taken place when she (Deledda) was only fourteen. In 1896, the actual year of Vincenza's death, Deledda was twenty-five. By pre-dating the event by eleven years in *Cosima*, Deledda accentuates her premature and dark understanding of female sexuality. Following the description of her sister's death, Deledda notes that "Cosima aveva quattordici anni, e conosceva dunque la vita nelle sue più fatali manifestazioni."

Significantly, too, the death occurs at Cosima's puberty, which suggests not only an advanced psychological maturation but also initiates an early pattern of repetition symptomatic of younger witnesses of family affliction. Pynoos and Eth explain such repercussions: "The symptoms include: recurrent and intrusive

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53 Ibid. 55.
recollections of the event ... a principal reaction of traumatized adolescents is a precipitation of a premature entrance into adulthood or a closure of identity formation."\textsuperscript{54} Writing Cosima at the end of her life Deledda was, in effect, still haunted by the memory of her sister's death, even though she had reproduced several literary reenactments of it throughout her career. Such mechanisms of repetition are methods of auto-therapy understood by modern psychoanalysis to be indicators of stress disorder.\textsuperscript{55} Repeating the story, and pre-dating the story, in effect, increased the "sympathy" factor for the young girl embarking alone on the frightening path of "womanhood" which was not likely to render her much happiness unless it came from her own imagination.

She describes her sister's death in graphic detail:

\begin{quote}
Non parlava, non si muoveva; ma un odore sgradevole e caldo esalava dal letto, e quando Cosima, con un coraggio superiore alla sua età, cercò di scoprire il mistero si accorse che l'infelice Enza giaceva in una pozzanghera di sangue nero e fetente.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

This lurid description recurs in "Il rifugio" (1932) where the events surrounding Vincenza's death are recycled again and framed in similar language. Here the pregnant Alys is discovered by Annarosa:

\begin{quote}
Alys stava immobile, con gli occhi pesantemente chiusi ... 
E quell'odore acre che sgorgava dal letto come da una
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} Pynoos and Eth, \textit{Trauma and Its Wake} 19-43.

\textsuperscript{55} Minsky, \textit{Psychoanalysis and Gender} 88-89.

\textsuperscript{56} Deledda, \textit{Cosima} 54.
pozza di sangue bollente! Senza esitare Annarosa sollevò le coperte e vide la triste verità: la principessa si era slacciata la fasciatura, e lasciava che la sua vita se ne andasse col suo sangue.  

It is a difficult demon to exorcize for it is firmly ensconced not only in her own painful reality, but in her cultural memory as well. In *Canne al vento* (1913), for example, first among the spirits she describes in the pantheon of Sardinian phantoms are those women who have died in childbirth. Efìx, the novel's hero, "sentiva il rumore che le panas (donne morte di parto) facevano nel lavar i loro panni giù al fiume, battendo con uno stinco di morte." These too, we now realize only too well, are echoes of Vincenza and an attempt by Deledda to achieve a degree of release from a past which remained to the end of her life, indelibly lodged in injury.

Elsewhere in her writings Deledda's depictions of mother/child relationships are ominously strained as well. The birth of children, such as those described in *Nostalgie* (1905) and *Il paese del vento* (1931), are particularly foreboding in nature, with mothers regretting their uncomfortable parenthood and revealing a lack of love toward their offspring. Indeed, the author herself seems tragically to have been the model for the severe mother depicted in her novels. Was she aware that she was destined to transmit her own unfortunate treatment by her parents onto her own children? Sardus, her eldest, who according to Deledda was much like his uncle Santus (even their names are similar), described his mother in the following terms:

* Aveva di quando in quando scatti di ribellione, forse dovuti *

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alla sua razza di origine italica sarda ... se dalle sue parole pareva scoppiare una tempesta primitiva senza perdoni, poi, passata la fantasia subentrava in lei risipiscienza e rimorso superiori alla gravità dello avvenimento.

Disse che anche una sola pagina scritta poteva dare la felicità suprema, più dell'amore, più della gloria, più ancora della stessa creazione di un figlio, perché il figlio può essere cattivo ... 59

Franz, her second son, inherited the more traditionally masculine characteristics of Deledda's brother Andrea. Yet Franz, sounding much like a whimpering child, laments his mother's treatment of him as a boy in this passage:

Ad un figlio che, allora studente, le disse di essere stato promosso ad un esame mentre era stato solennemente bocciato, Ella, dopo averlo fissato negli occhi, rispose: "No! Tu menti. Vergogna!" E stette un mese senza rivolgergli la parola. Per i figli il suo silenzio era il peggio dei castighi. Verso i figli è stata di una grande bontà e nello stesso tempo di grande severità. 60

The episode of Franz's lying to his mother bears some resemblance to Deledda's own childhood experience. One remembers her brother Andrea's falsehood and his father's threats. 61 Franz too is severely reprimanded for his lying and punished with his mother's silence. Deledda here clearly assumes her father's role as well as some of his behaviour so that family history repeats itself with Deledda herself as victim, but also as patriarch.


60 Franz Madesani, "Mia madre," Ciusa, Onoranze 37.

Her anxieties and reactions to disturbing episodes from her past were much like that behaviour described by Freud in his analyses of his early "Rat Man" and "Wolf Man" cases. Both patients studied by Freud during Deledda's own lifetime were discerned to be suffering the consequences of sexual trauma in childhood. Deledda's defensive reactions, her need to control relationships with the men in her life, including her own sons, her depressions and her mysterious illnesses are similarly symptomatic of disturbing childhood experience. Characteristically too, as she began to write, her stories reflected her own real-life experience in veiled accounts of passions curtailed interspersed with episodes of revenge perpetrated on her characters both male and female.

_Sangue sardo_ (1888) is, in this respect, a prime example of Deledda's own emotional turmoil. Ela, its heroine, is madly in love with Lorenzo. Lorenzo pays no attention to Ela's passion which leads her to despair. Lorenzo, ironically, falls in love with Ela's own sister, Maria. Resolved to right this unbearable turn of events, Ela awaits Lorenzo's return from university and kills him by the sea. Ela thus vents her frustrations, punishing Lorenzo for degrading her and depriving her of love. As Janet notes, "In the emotionally deprived young person, lack of affection tends to spawn sexual hyperarousal which is often played out in a chronic repetition of a situation". In effect, Ela has been sufficiently aroused to murder Lorenzo. Similar failed sexual situations are repeated ad


nauseam in Deledda's works in an attempt, it seems, to redress deficiencies or to fill emotional vacuums in her own life through vicarious moral punishment or revenge. The significance of this seemingly endless need to repeat such stories from *Sangue sardo* onward may be largely accounted for as a phenomenon aptly described by Janet:

> ... A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated... until we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization and recital of the event to others, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history.\(^64\)

Indeed, Deledda has written many such chapters of her own, cleverly colouring the truth regarding her past. In a letter to Stanis Manca, for example, she had explicitly stated that she had never been the victim of violence, but limited her experience to violence outside the family unit.\(^65\) While there is no evidence that she was sexually abused as a child, there can be little doubt that she assumed violence to be an unavoidable, integral aspect of sexuality. Current psychological theory holds that

> ... individuals of strict or violent upbringing often experience difficulty in weaning themselves away from harmful situations and from their cruel childhood caretakers. A healthy transference of affection to males beyond the family nucleus becomes a process fraught with distress in abused female children.\(^66\)

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\(^{64}\) Ibid.


\(^{66}\) Pynoos and Eth, *Trauma and Its Wake* 33.
Deledda's "transferral of affection", as we shall see in Chapter III, extended to the age of thirty.
Chapter III: Marriage of the Mind

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever fixed mark ...
(Shakespeare: Sonnet 16)

La libertà è una cosa più grande dell'amore,
la più grande della vita. Gli esseri più felici
anche senza amore, senza ricchezza, senza
potenza sono gli esseri liberi.¹

A. The Letters

The letters of Grazia Deledda, when read in conjunction with her short stories and
novels, give quite a different impression of her literary production than does an analysis
of her works alone. Indeed, without the letters the significance of much of what she has
written remains needlessly uninformed. This is not to say that Deledda's works, or those
of any other author, cannot be evaluated without attention to personal background but
merely that where Deledda is concerned, the addition of biographical information, found
in abundance in her letters, proves particularly revealing in determining the degree of
author intrusion into the text, an analysis of which may significantly redimension, though
not necessarily affirm, the artistic or creative aspects of her work.

The Deledda letters collected by Francesco Di Pilla in his Grazia Deledda:

¹ Grazia Deledda, "Il terzo," La casa del poeta (Milano: Treves, 1930) 168.
Premio Nobel per la letteratura 1926, and those catalogued initially by Eraldo De Michelis in his Opere scelte, attest to the importance major critics have attached to Deledda's correspondence as an essential resource for studies on the author. More recently Marina Zancan also saw Deledda's letters as "... un investimento preciso nel progetto di tradurre in realtà la propria fantasia". Francesco Floris proposed that the sum of Deledda's letters "... ci fornisce tanti particolari poco noti sul periodo vissuto a Nuoro... e ci aggiorna sui graduali progressi da lei compiuti nel difficile cammino dell'arte e del successo." Elisabetta Rasy has also noted the importance of the letters in Deledda's formulation of an acceptable self-portrait.

If the purpose of literary criticism is in part to determine the extent to which the reader is manipulated by the author's text, then taking into account Deledda's development as a writer, as it is revealed through her letters, is surely a key exercise in such a determination. Deledda's first and most important readers were men: colleagues, editors and would-be mates who provided her with essential feedback. The letters, even while fraught with ambivalence, clearly illustrate how Deledda handled herself in relation to the male and how she developed strategies in her relationships. They demonstrate as well her personal need to manipulate a tolerable reality with others, one which would preserve traditional female standards while allowing her power and control.

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2 Marina Zancan, "La 'donna nuova': scrittura e il modello in Grazia Deledda", Pellegrino, Metafora e biografia, 89.

3 Francesco Floris, "Grazia Deledda: Vita ed opere del periodo Nuorese" Ibid. 258-259.

Her letters deal both with business and romance and are thus a double-edged quest for a husband and a career. Despite several mishaps along the way, Deledda's was a well thought-out plan, a "marriage of the mind" designed to service her career ambitions as well as her cultural and personal needs.

The ambivalence of Deledda's reactions to a strict traditional upbringing which was set in opposition to her desire for literary fame is evident in her correspondence with potential marriage partners. In particular her letters to Stanis Manca, the journalist of aristocratic background with whom she corresponded between 1891 and 1899, reflect the common effects of her early childhood trauma. Stanis Manca was the handsome blond journalist described in *Cosima* who had been sent from Rome to interview Deledda for an article on provincial writers. The son of Sardinian nobility Manca, as a literary man, was all the more attractive to the young Grazia. Although they met only twice, she considered him a perfect match and proceeded to write impassioned, often self-demeaning letters to him for many years. Though initially tolerant of her exuberance, Manca was simply not romantically interested in her and admitted finally to being in love with another woman.\(^5\) Two years later she wrote to De Gubernatis that "quando venne a conoscermi il primo, [Manca] mi trovo troppo diafana, e cesso d'amarmi per questo".\(^6\) In *Cosima*, however, Deledda remembers the same incident in the following manner: "Egli un giorno le mando una lettera strana dove fra tutte le altre cose spiacevole, le diceva


che ella gli era sembrata quasi una nana." There is no doubt that she had been mortally insulted by Stanis Manca, her best prospect.

This episode with Manca is especially useful in identifying symptoms which were to carry over into Deledda's future behaviour and consequently into many of her literary characters as well. Deledda was obsessive and controlling in her letters to Manca and at the same time apologetic and clinging. Two years into their epistolary relationship, Manca had already become annoyed with her behaviour. In response to his criticism Deledda answered:

Mi credete fantastica ed anche squilibrata - anche squilibrata! - e con una esagerata tendenza alla melancolia, e con una strana idea fissa in mente... Sono cattiva e maligna... Soffro per ogni minima cosa, soffro intensamente...

Her reaction here simultaneously denies and affirms an unsettled condition. Indeed her behaviour with Manca is typical of the simultaneously angry and defensive postures characteristic of the verbally abused, postures which alternate between moods of depression and self-pity. In her letters Deledda conveys an urgent need for Manca to reply immediately to her correspondence, to be ever-present, as it were, to a life obviously bereft of both physical and emotional engagement. While her tone is often

7 G. Deledda, Cosima 98.
8 Deledda, "To Manca", 2 Nov. 1893, Di Pilla, 283.
childlike and vulnerable, she can be arrogant and cruel with him as well. What is significant is her rapid oscillation between the two as evidenced in the following outburst:

Io ho l'ingegno, la forza e la volontà ferrea, ostinata ed orgogliosa di un uomo robusto; ma perché dunque voi mi ripiegate come una foglia di canna e mi fate piangere e singhiozzare come una bambina picchiata?

Io vi odio, vi odio, vi odio e se fosse possibile mi vendicherei senza pietà di tutto il male che mi avete fatto, che mi fate e mi farete in avvenire.\(^1\)

Yet even such an intense hatred does not end the relationship and Deledda continues to write letters of termination to Manca for no less than seven more years.\(^1\) Her idealization of him, even when he rejected and humiliated her, echoed the pattern of idealization we have previously encountered which the young Grazia had played out with her father and her brother Andrea. It is a similar clinging to the male object in an almost sadomasochistic way, an inability to draw oneself away from what are obviously emotionally stressful situations. Deledda continued to cling to Stanis Manca, if only by mail, and persisted in treating him as her lover despite the fact that absolutely nothing had passed between them. Manca reappeared in Deledda's *Il paese del vento* as Nina's first love, Gabriele, the shadow of the man who rejected her in real life and who, in her writing, suffered a slow painful death. It was Deledda's way of avenging herself on Manca through her writing, a much more effective vehicle of wish-fulfilment than any of

\(^1\) Deledda, "To Manca," 13 Nov. 1893, Di Pilla, 287.

\(^1\) Rasy, *Ritratti di signora* 95.
her letters could possibly have been, letters which neither won his favour nor convinced him of her worth. But in her novel he is roundly punished because he had rebuffed her.\textsuperscript{12}

When clinical studies of "stress disorder" are applied to Deledda's behaviour as evinced from her letters, it becomes apparent that outbursts of anger alternating with episodes of passive behaviour cannot be glossed over as just a personality problem or mere bad manners. There is a definite sense in her letters to Manca that Deledda's earliest experiences are constantly at the surface of consciousness with childhood recollections, mostly images of a youthful vulnerable self, inexplicably and arbitrarily intruding upon the present. What surfaces is an insatiable need to comfort the child she once was. She seeks to describe her feelings to Manca in this manner:

Delle volte mentre passeggiò, se vedo la mia ombra sottile disegnarsi avanti a me, nel mio modesto vestitino da casa che mi rende più piccina di quel che sono, mi fermo sorridendo e mi derido, e dico alla mia ombra: sei dunque tu, tu, piccola mia, che avevi quelle idee per la testa, quelle pazzie nel pensiero?... Povera bimba.\textsuperscript{13}

Her capacity to suspend time in a trance-like state and, in this case, her ability to substitute a nurturing "other-self" for the emotionally absent mother whom we have seen in \textit{Cosima}, speaks volumes regarding Grazia's emotional history. As J. Herman explains,

In the aftermath of an experience of overwhelming danger [abandonment] the two contradictory responses of intrusion


\textsuperscript{13} Deledda, "To Manca" 13, Nov. 1893, Di Pilla, 278-279.
and constriction establish an oscillating rhythm... balance is what the traumatized person lacks. She [the traumatized woman] finds herself caught between extremes... between floods of intense, overwhelming feeling and arid states of no feeling at all, between irritable, impulsive action and complete inhibition of action. The instability produced by these periodic alterations further exacerbates the traumatised person's sense of unpredictability and helplessness.\(^\text{14}\)

Many of Grazia's emotionally stunted heroines fit this pattern as well. Maria in La via del male for example, is overcome with anger when the family servant steals a kiss. Her reaction is exaggerated:

\[
\text{Pietro Benu, il suo servo, l'aveva baciata! Ella era stata baciata da un servo! Vergogna suprema! Non esistono imprecazioni e insulti che ella fra sè e sè non prodigò quella mattina al servo sfacciato e vile.} \text{\(^\text{15}\)}
\]

Characteristically Maria is overcome with mixed feelings: "Dispetto, umiliazione, pietà, desiderio di vendicarsi, desiderio di non provocare il servo, ed anche una certa soddisfazione d'amore proprio, le agitavano il cuore."\(^\text{16}\) Yet feeling both sexual arousal and disgust, she remains confused and does not react to the situation. As the servant sleeps Maria

\[
\text{...intanto accudiva silenziosamente alle facende solite; non voleva svegliare il giovane [Pietro], ma non sapeva se per vergogna di farsi rivedere da lui, o per non interrompere il}
\]

\(^{14}\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* 47.

\(^{15}\) Grazia Deledda, *La via del male* (Roma: Nuova antologia, 1922) 106.

\(^{16}\) Ibid. 108.
Similarly, Anna in Anime oneste internalizes her feelings for the poor Gonario. She too is conditioned by entrenched childhood fears and as a result chokes back her adult passions for him in silence. For Anna, confused and paralysed,

Tutte queste sottili riflessioni non le impedivano intanto di piangere sulla sua sventura; un pianto senza lagrime, senza gemiti e senza singulti. Il senso della realtà la avvolgeva, nonostante la gelida e confortante idea della fine... ma non strappava alcun grido di disperazione.\(^{18}\)

Maria's and Anna's behaviour resembles those same frustrations and humiliations which we see in Deledda's letters to Manca, letters which she understandably petitioned him so desperately to return to her when the relationship finally ended.

Deledda's fluctuating state of mind and her contradictory reactions to natural desires for success and love found expression in other interpersonal relationships which, like her bond with Manca, were carried on primarily by mail. Laden with intimate train-of-thought and private opinion, the letters are a blurred vision of warring wills through which she not only tests her men but indeed constructs herself. In her letters to Andrea Pirodda between 1892 and 1897, for example, we detect a similar emotional uncertainty in her investigation of another potential marriage partner. Andrea Pirodda was only two years older than Deledda, a local boy she had known as a teen. He was of humble stock,

\(^{17}\) Ibid. 109.

\(^{18}\) Grazia Deledda, Anime oneste (Milano: Treves, 1928) 171.
a native of the nearby Gallura region. Pirodda had succeeded in becoming a teacher, a laudable achievement given his background, but his social standing, or lack thereof, curtailed any real future he might have had with Grazia Deledda whose family in Nuoro was prominent and well-to-do.

Although Andrea courted Deledda in proper fashion, she reacted to his continued interest with alternating admiration and scorn. On one occasion she writes the following to Andrea:

Tutto l'orizzonte mi si irradia d'oro e di luce allorché io penso alla vita che passeremo insieme. Saremo camerati, amici, amanti e colleghi in arte, nello stesso tempo ... tutte le nostre due esistenze saranno fuse in un bacio eterno, ineluttabile.  

Yet in a letter to Epaminonda Provaglio, she boasts of having written to her poor teacher friend Pirodda: "Bisogna salire un po' più su per diventare il marito di una scrittrice, caro." While she was certainly very fond of Pirodda, as her letters illustrate, insults of this nature confirm that characteristic shift from interest to contempt, from kindness to pretension which often annoyed her friends and frustrated her search for a husband. It is through her letters during those formative years between 1891 and 1899 that she determined for herself the most practical attitudes required in her quest for a husband, a man who could assure her social position while promoting her financial and literary


success. Andrea Pirodda, alas, did not fit the bill.

Although Grazia's letters up to 1900 seemed to justify and codify the choice of a career in writing, still considered at the beginning of the 20th century an unfeminine and thus unseemly way of life for a young woman, she nonetheless clung to traditional womanhood and all the restrictions it implied. Ultimately it would be through an appropriate marriage that respectability might be conferred on Deledda's career ambitions. And so she rationalized her rejection of Andrea Pirodda in this manner:

Io... posso ben consumare la mia esistenza nel silenzio e nell'attesa, e morire prima ch'egli abbia una posizione come la richiede la mia famiglia a come la pretende anche la mia ragione... Egli non sarà mai altro che un po'ero insegnante, - e capirai bene che per me ci vuole altro, perché io, nella mia carriera, ho bisogno di essere sorretta da un uomo forte, ho bisogno di appoggio, di aiuto e di consiglio ed anche di una relativa agiatezza.²¹

By 1899 Grazia had understood not only the importance of marriage itself but the necessity of contracting it with the right man.

Grazia Deledda's personal correspondence correlates well to those lesser-known stories and novels written after 1900 which are so very close in their inspiration to the facts and feelings of our author during the formative years before she took a husband. Her dreams regarding her future life as a writer, juxtaposed with the guilt inspired by her emotional conditioning, encroached substantially on her creative work. Even with a cursory knowledge of her letters there emerge, in fact, clear indicators that some of the

²¹ Deledda, "To Provaglio"  11 Nov. 1893, De Michelis, 1052-1053.
main characters of her fictional works closely resemble Deledda herself, or the image of the person she wished not to be. For example, Regina in *Nostalgie*, shares Deledda's beliefs and behaviour as well as her environment and life experience. Indeed the main character in this novel is often not easily distinguishable from the Sardinian woman already known for her writings who left Nuoro for Rome at the turn of the last century.

Grazia's insertion of herself into her works had begun long before her marriage. Lara in *Fior di Sardegna* (1888), for example, is certainly the Grazia of the letters, as Francesco Di Pilla so accurately notes in his analysis of her early years.\(^2^2\) Indeed, the most striking evidence of Deledda's autobiographical bent is a passage in this novel where she reveals, in the protagonist's voice, the origins of her inspiration. Lara "... scrisse la data del giorno e del mese vicino all'iscrizione che nel primo giorno le aveva fatto immaginare un romanzo perfettamente simile a quello che le era accaduto."\(^2^3\)

It is a key statement in Deledda's earliest writing where "immaginare un romanzo" and "perfettamente simile a quello che le era accaduto" are prime testimony of her future writing technique. In *Fior di Sardegna* Lara expresses Deledda's desire to control a life through the vehicle of her imagination, an imagination prone to the reconstruction of a more tolerable reality.


\(^{23}\) Grazia Deledda, *Fior di Sardegna* (Sesto S. Giovanni: Madella, 1914) 123.
B. "Battesimi": Baptism by Fire.

Deledda's difficulty in extricating herself from her text is indicative of something other than the kind of literary biological determinism which traditional criticism has attributed to women's writing, an approach which classifies such writing as necessarily autobiographical for want of artistic creativity. At first glance such a judgement may seem reconcilable with works produced by Italian women writers at the turn of the century. One recalls, for instance, Sibilla Aleramo's autobiographical Una donna of 1906, a thinly veiled attempt at justifying to her adult son her decision to leave her marriage, written under the guise of a Christmas gift for younger members of her family. Deledda's Cosima, too, might be taken as merely a nostalgic return to origins. Yet even this obvious autobiography goes beyond the veneer of fond reminiscence by a woman at the end of her life. According to Charles Hanley,

> The art of the writer consists, in part, in the ability to create out of the real an imaginary world of characters and their lives that is, in a sense, more real (more true) and hence more engaging than the reality used as a point of departure for its creation.\(^{24}\)

Deledda's art undoubtedly sought that "more engaging" reality than the one allotted her at her "point of departure", a locus of entrenched patriarchal beliefs which demanded caution yet which inspired escape. Through her writing Deledda creates a fantasy world with the same trappings of her real-life experiences but one over which she may exercise

complete control. Reflecting on Freud's concept of "wish-fulfilment", Sanguinetti-Katz has noted that his

... theory presents the work of the artist as a continuation of the imaginative games played by children, who rearrange the world around themselves and create a world of their own to suit their needs. The artist's work is a continuation of the fantasies and day-dreaming of adults, who escape from the harsh reality which surrounds them into visions of a life more suited to their wishes.25

Since Freud a growing interest in the particular status of women has added to our knowledge of the forces which eventually led them to fight for political emancipation in the 19th century. Margaret Mead, in the 1930s, had noted asymmetries in the traditional view of gender roles in some tribal cultures. The "passive", "domestic" images of femininity, contrasted to the "active", "social" images natural to the male were proven, in effect, to be stereotyping non-universals.26 Traditionally associated with Nature as procreatrix of the race, woman's psychological functions were seen to restrict her full participation in culture, a view which served both to fix and strengthen a traditional view of male dominance. Simone de Beauvoir in the 1940s stressed a single human consciousness equally male and female in a common responsibility to culture in its goal of overcoming Nature.27 Where early sociological and anthropological studies outlined


woman's position in the structure of patriarchy, a combination of Lacanian semiotics and post-modern deconstructionist criticism has anticipated as yet unlabelled formulas for describing woman's psychic emancipation, setting out from positions from which one can hardly expect to appreciate the eventual sway. More recently Julia Kristeva has spearheaded the school of French feminist semioticians in the study of women's language, proposing a gender spectrum to describe female reality and suggesting the use of a "double discourse" for women in order that they might effectively challenge patriarchy in the reconciliation of motherhood and politics. It is this kind of "double discourse" that Deledda uses to cope.

That Deledda altered her reality to meet her own ends can be clearly deduced by considering her alterations to Cosima but also by carefully scrutinizing those images of women in her novels which reflect her experiences and beliefs so closely. Conflicting forces emerge clearly in her description of women's lives. Those emotional disturbances which were considered "natural" to women in Deledda's day, and which appeared as fear or as rebellion in her writing can now be reassessed as the consequence of a patriarchal society in which women were utilized simply to ensure the economic and social stability of the clan. Deledda's behaviour, as has been noted, was a constant adaptation to the rules and conditions set for women, and not due to any fundamental disturbance with which she was born. Of particular interest in her works in this regard are those accounts which pivot directly on psycho/sexual moments: marriage, in as much as it has

traditionally meant sexual initiation, and childbirth, its desired consequence. Just as Deledda's life experience formed the template which governed her personal responses to sexual situations, experience was also what directly affected the content of her writing and the development of her characters. Sexual initiation and its consequences reproduced those same elements of desire and retreat, of love and repulsion which we recognized in Cosima and in Deledda's correspondence. Extremely negative reactions toward sex and sexuality, then, emerge unquestionably as symptoms of Deledda's own emotional distress. We shall look in vain at the heroines of many a novel for a 19th-century example of that idealized nobility of soul which women of the past were expected to achieve through suffering. Deledda's heroines rarely resemble Manzoni's Lucia in I promessi sposi. On the contrary they share a stream of consciousness with their author who is struggling with an inherited, mythologized and distorted view of female sexuality.

The short story "Battesimi", published in 1932 as part of the collection La casa del poeta, might serve to introduce Deledda's camouflaged resentment of the female condition which she usually qualified with religious caveat. In "Battesimi" Deledda recounts the story of a husband and wife who are awakened one stormy night by their married daughter who has returned home begging protection from her husband. Deledda describes the daughter as "... pallida e grondante d'acqua come un'annegata, [who] invano domandava di entrare."29 The daughter calls to her mother for help as her father blocks her entrance to the paternal home. "Mamma, Mamma!" she cries, "Sono fuggita di casa,

29 Deledda, "Battesimi," La casa del poeta 76.
perché mi ha parlato male. Non voglio più stare con lui. Voglio tornare a casa. Sono fuggita, a piedi, così, così ...". The provocation of her husband's having "parlato male" does not seem to warrant the daughter's drastic action of fleeing her marriage on a rainy night. The reader might be led to believe that the girl is not telling the whole story as her hesitation in "... sono fuggita, a piedi, così, così ...", would suggest. We know only that the girl is overly distraught. The mother, seeing her daughter drenched by the rain recalls the image of her husband at the girl's baptism:

... il padre sorveglia tanto la madre quanto la figlia, e nel quadro gaio e dorato del battesimo, la sua figura grezza, dominante, con gli occhi neri, la barba nera, le sopracciglia che sembrano baffi, è ancora più significativa di quella del sacerdote.

Deledda has drawn the father in harsh strokes presiding over the lives of both his wife and his daughter with unchallenged authority. As is his sacred duty, he upholds the law of transference and proprietorship of the women of the family and thus cannot allow his daughter to leave her husband and return home. At her baptism, the presiding priest and witnesses had proclaimed the child's initiation into the clan, and all that it implied for a woman, with "Credo. Rinunzio." The story closes with these same words as the mother obeys the father's orders, assisting him in returning their daughter to her husband.

30 Ibid. 76.
31 Ibid. 74.
32 Ibid. 73.
This short story is particularly significant on several accounts in the present discussion of Deledda's writing for it reveals the kind of subversive rebellion and covert frustration born of patriarchal tradition, a tradition which in Deledda's experience was still respected to the letter. In "Battesimi" the daughter does return to her husband. The wives remain loyal to their husbands' authority. But there are signs of discontent. Our author, a traditional woman herself, weaves a double thread which sabotages the surface morality of her story. The female characters, while they cannot speak out against the injustice of patriarchal hegemony, have begun to question, within themselves, just why it need be tolerated. The daughter, representing a new generation, has contested the centuries-old status quo by trying to leave her husband. The mother begins to feel a divided loyalty between love for her child and respect for her husband and the rules of the clan. She merely wishes to protect her child from pain. Thus are Deledda's female characters beginning to differ from the totally self-sacrificing model to which they are bound by conscience and tradition.

Deledda also suggests in "Battesimi" that her story is not an isolated event but rather that her characters, both male and female, are universal types. The daughter as well as the father and son-in-law are unnamed. They are "padre," "figlia" and "marito." The wife is generically "Mariù," a diminutive of the commonest of female names. "Battesimi" also implies not a single event but baptisms in general, that rite of passage imposed on every offspring of the clan. It is not the free choice of an adult member but actually a "baptism by fire". In this instance Deledda's story might well symbolize the initiation of helpless, nameless "female" into traditional "womanhood" and the associated
"renunciation" of personal freedom. Yet when the priest, speaking for the child, utters the formula "Credo. Rinunzio" the infant revolts:

Solo lei, la piccolina non risponde; anzi, agita i pugni con una forza che fa sorridere la madre; e smorfie di protesta, di noia, di disgusto le smuovono il visino come se un sogno tempestoso le agiti l'anima addormentata.33

The silent female child is charged with rebellion. With contorted features and fists flailing Deledda's infant is helpless to speak out, though not compliant.

A first show of insurgence on the part of the female child is taken up again at the end of the story when the mature woman, having cried out for her mother's support over her father's shoulder, is refused entry. The mother's offer of a shawl to their daughter is rejected but it remains unclear by whom, the daughter or the father. Mariù

... andò a prendere uno dopo l'altro le biciclette e il capotto del marito. Portò anche uno scialle, per la piccola; ma fu rifiutato. La piccola era già ben coperta dal suo scialle di pioggia e di ubbedienza al destino.34

It may well be that the father, as a sign of punishment, will not allow the daughter to accept the shawl from her mother. By the same token the daughter herself could be refusing her mother's symbol of conformity in a gesture of open, though silent, rebellion. Where Deledda's women may be cowering under the mantle of subservience, the ambiguity of the final lines of "Battesimi" somehow sound a warning. The patriarchal

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid. 77.
scheme is still firmly in place but Deledda is forwarding, in her stark portrayal of 
woman's reality and in initial signs of defiance, a suggestion that even traditional woman 
might not long continue to acquiesce to the system's injustices.

It is particularly telling that, while Deledda ends many of her stories with a 
statement of submission to fate or morality, those endings are generally the weakest and 
most unconvincing parts of her texts. The conclusion of "Battesimi" is no exception. It 
is an easy solution but an uninspiring one. The final lines can hardly bring closure for 
even the conservative observer nor sufficient satisfaction for the more liberal reader. 
The story does reflect traditional life in all its harsh realism. Deledda has succeeded on 
this account. But what is the message? Is it really Deledda's intention to show that 
women must silently accept their lot? From the manner in which the unruly daughter is 
portrayed it would seem not. From the manner in which our author draws the still 
subservient mother awakening to her daughter's pain it would also seem that passivity in 
women is beginning to be disparaged. No reward, either terrestrial or heavenly is offered 
either woman. Suffering and division reign. And why, one might speculate, is the 
baptism not of a male child? Obviously there would be no conflict or message had such 
been the case. The situation itself, in fact, seems to accentuate an alternate philosophical 
view of women as being disturbed precisely by their external circumstances and not by 
their natures. On the contrary, Deledda depicts her as a pre-verbal infant rebelling 
physically to her baptism by fire.

One might further enquire: why is the story timeless and the setting non-specific? 
The conflict in "Battesimi" is reduced, in fact, to the singular action of a father's turning
away a daughter in a non-specific time and place. The real action of the story lies rather
in the mother's memory of her daughter's baptism, in its implications and repercussions,
in the growing division between the women, in the story's universal truth. The women
are compelled to yield to a tradition which serves them ill, unable to assist each other
despite the closest of natural bonds. The conflict of the story arises from the division of
custom and instinct and is decidedly gender oriented. At issue is the patriarchal system
wherein "sacrifice" is female, and "authority" is male.

Deledda's story has obviously been structured in symbolic terms as the story of
"everyman", or rather, in this case "everywoman." The characters have told their own
story and no judgement is openly rendered by our author. However, by the nature of her
characters' reactions to their situations, a different perspective on the issue is sought of
the reader. Deledda has remained purposefully ambivalent concerning the acceptability
of the traditional family arrangement which she has reconstructed so faithfully. The
hard-hearted father, for example, will still be respected even though his shouting echoes
from the marriage chamber in "...una voce cattiva, anzi beatamente crudele."35 Here
mixed messages again recall a younger Deledda's idealization of her own father who, as
the wise patriarch, was also portrayed in Cosima as a most frightful tyrant. At best
Deledda's interpretation of a key event in a woman's life has led the reader to recognize
in "Battesimi" the truly heart-rending position of the female in the traditional family
where the wise ruling patriarch does not necessarily rule with justice or with love. Any
cry for freedom in "Battesimi" is for safety's sake, and perhaps out of a frustrated quest

35 Ibid. 71-72.
for equality, duly and dutifully suppressed.

C. Nostalgia and Its Discontents

i) Searching the Real Story

A patriarchal tradition which has engaged the support of women themselves is not easily exposed for its violence towards them nor for its truly damaging and long-lasting effects upon their lives. One of Deledda's primary and perhaps most natural of reactions to the patriarchal system is to mirror it in an equally suffocating and sadistic matriarchal counterpart. Such is the case of Nostalgia (1905), a novel describing the early years of a young woman's marriage wherein Deledda's own conditioned response to her physically and psychologically violent upbringing is played out both in vengeful retaliation and self-punishment. Regina, the heroine of Nostalgia, like Mariù in "Battesimi", is a woman still entrapped by the false allure of the rewards offered women through suffering, but, in addition now, she is a woman in search of power. Regina's is an inherited mindset which devalues personal independence while it prizes female sacrifice. Expressed in a traditional lamentela of negative responses to the general lot of living and especially to the tragedy inherent in love, women like Regina have become blinded, as it were, to any positive elements of existence. Frustration, anger, retaliation and self-punishment logically ensue. It is through her character Regina that Deledda seeks to achieve, if only vicariously, a position of control in an alternate reality in which gender roles are reversed in order to serve women rather than men.
Deledda establishes the time frame of Nostalgia as contemporary with its writing. The story opens with a description of a newly married couple travelling to Rome at the turn of the century from Regina's home town of Viadana on the banks of the river Po. On their arrival in Rome Regina meets her husband's family: Antonio's smothering and controlling mother and his two non-descript brothers, both of whom, like Antonio, work as secretaries in the Ministries of Rome. Arduina, Regina's newly acquired sister-in-law and the would-be editor of a women's magazine is a pseudo-intellectual and an incredibly ugly woman. Regina's impression of them all is decidedly negative.

The young couple begin their married life in a gloomy apartment housed in the same building as Antonio's family. Regina feels immediately depressed and confines herself to her quarters. Antonio returns to his non-descript job as "Segretario d'Intendenza". Lonely and despondent at home, Regina is nonetheless reluctant to engage in any social activity especially with Antonio's family with whom she experiences a growing annoyance. Seeking position and wealth, she gains access to Rome's aristocratic society through Arduina and meets the wealthy Principessa Makuline by whom her husband Antonio is occasionally employed. The couple begin to frequent the Principessa's social soirees and Regina meets a cross-section of Roman upper-class society.

Antonio gradually diagnoses his wife's depression as "nostalgia" for her family and home-town. But Regina's boredom seems far more profound than mere homesickness. Nevertheless, free to do so, she returns to her parents' home in the north.

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36 An administrative position in the Ministry of Finance.
to reflect. While there she becomes disillusioned with the people she had known as a child, considering them now beneath her bourgeois station as a woman of the Capital. She misses the possibilities of her new life in Rome. She writes Antonio two letters, both blaming him for her circumstances. In the first, written before her departure from Rome, she suggests that it would be best they remain apart until Antonio has made sufficient income to support them both decently. He does not respond. In her second letter she presents him with an ultimatum; he must come to fetch her in Viadana or lose her forever. Antonio obeys and they return to Rome where Regina tries again to come to terms with her unhappy life as a married woman.

Antonio soon takes on extra work in order to supplement their income. Along with his Ministry job he becomes the personal secretary of Principessa Makuline. By autumn of their first year of marriage Regina becomes pregnant. Time passes uneventfully. After the birth of her child Regina is still incapable of coping, either physically or emotionally, with life in Rome and puts her infant daughter Caterina into the care of a full-time wet-nurse. Attempting to dispel her growing restlessness, Regina visits a young student, Gabriella, who has come from Viadana in order to further her education in Rome. Gabriella is a would-be writer. One day, finding the affectionately-labelled Gabriè not at home, Regina proceeds to read from notebooks strewn on the girl's desk only to discover that the young author has been using Regina and Antonio, and others known to them, as the subjects of her work. Regina reads in Gabriella's notebooks that the character representing Antonio has been unfaithful to his wife with a wealthy and noble patron. Thus does Regina suspect that her husband has sold himself to the
Principessa Makuline in his need to make more money. She decides to confront him with her suspicions. Unable to do so, however, her thoughts waver between the doubt that her husband could debase himself and her in such a manner and the certainty that Antonio has indeed done so. Finally she challenges him. He, of course, is shocked to find that his wife does not trust him. Regina falters again, thinking that she has perhaps misjudged him. By the end of Nostalgia, despite Antonio's apparent disloyalty, but with no hard proof thereof, Regina accepts her role as the betrayed wife. They remain wedded on Regina's decision, for the sake of the child.

This, however, is hardly the whole story of Nostalgia but merely the external circumstances. The real tale lies in what can be discerned of our author's thoughts and needs beneath the surface of her text. Indeed, it is through Regina and Gabriella, both, in part, drawn from the real Grazia Deledda, that we are given a fairly accurate picture of the extent of Deledda's schizophrenia-like malady kept alive well into her first few years of marriage.

Nostalgia was begun in 1904 once Grazia and her husband were well settled in Rome. It was Deledda's most explicitly autobiographical work to date. It was also her first major attempt at a change of setting and a psychological relocation in her writing. The setting is no longer provincial Sardinia but Italy's modern capital city. The main character is not a traditionally passive or obedient wife, as in "Battesimi", but rather a modern, thinking woman. Deledda, the modern married woman with literary talent had always dreamt of living on the mainland.37 Regina, too, in Nostalgia has realized her

most coveted dream, that of moving away from her provincial and small-minded hometown to Rome, the modern capital of Italy. Consequently, as she approaches her destination, Regina's excitement grows:

Roma! Un tripudio infantile l'assaliva al solo pensiero che Roma s'avvicinava; che Roma, la città meravigliosa, lungamente sognata, la capitale del mondo, il nido di ogni delizia e d'ogni splendore, Roma stava per diventar sua.38

But the Roman city-scape in Nostalgie is described by Deledda as a hostile environment and Regina is immediately uncomfortable there. It is rain-drenched and dreary, muddy and congested. Even her new apartment offers no relief. The city is suffocating in more ways than one:

Roma poi era orribile, sotto la pioggia continua che aveva qualcosa di crudele e di beffardo. La gente passava livida in volto; le donne mostravano gli orli delle sottane infangati, il cielo stesso sembrava macchiato, e l'anima di Regina naufragava in tutto quell'umidore nebbioso e fangoso... Qui deve venire ad abitare Regina?... [in] quel-l'immensa foresta di pietra che si chiamava città... Regina disse subito che c'era poca luce, poca aria.39

We know from her introduction to Nostalgie that Deledda, like Regina, was also depressed during her early years in Rome. Before the story even begins she informs her reader in the "Preface" that: "... nei primi mesi di residenza in Roma anch'io ho sentito

38 Grazia Deledda, Nostalgie (Milano: Treves, 1914) 4.

39 Ibid. 64-65.
una nostalgia morbosa". In a letter to her French translator, George Hérelle, she had expressed a similar disillusionment with the city and with her financial condition. She admits to her colleague:

Io ora lavoro forse troppo perché non sono ricca e la vita nelle capitali è molto difficile, sebbene io e mio marito viviamo modestamente... ma spero crearmi presto una posizione migliore, ed allora conto di lavorare meno, di studiare molto e di fare allora il mio capolavoro.41

Here Deledda suggests that she is not rich enough to live respectably in Rome on her husband's scant wages. In Nostalgie Regina, writing to her husband Antonio, similarly expresses her concern over their lack of funds. Regina laments:

La vita a Roma, per me, è un martirio... io mi abituerò all'idea di vivere una vita diversa da quella che avevo sognato; e intanto la tua posizione (e chissà forse anche la mia) migliorerà... Anche una mia cugina fece così: suo marito era professore di ginnasio a Milano. Assieme non potevano vivere. Allora ella tornò a casa ed egli studiò, pubblicò, concorse, fu nominato professore di liceo...42

After this communication from his wife, Antonio naturally seeks extra work with the Principessa Makuline and when Regina begins to suspect her husband has been unfaithful she deduces too that "... eravamo troppo poveri per unirci e formare il nostro


42 Deledda, Nostalgie 1914. 124-125.
Deledda's difficulty in adapting to life in the Capital and her decidedly negative opinion of Rome were obviously well known and quite insulting to some of the local critics. After the publication of Nostalgia early in 1905, in fact, a scathing review by Ugo Ojetti appeared in Rome's Corriere della sera which recognized in Deledda's first continental novel no improvement in her style, purpose, or perspective. Ojetti comments:

... questo è il romanzo d'una provinciale e non solo ne è provinciale l'eroina ma anche la scrittrice.

Ma il racconto e i personaggi di Nostalgia sono tanto mediocri e monotonì che ogni contadino sardo nell'Elias Portolu o in Cenere vale più di loro e con un sol gesto avvince più tenacemente la nostra attenzione.

Siamo tra gli impiegati dello Stato, ottima gente, più utile di quel che nei giornalisti si dica e forse meno sciocca e meno goffa di quel che pensi in questo libro la signora Deledda. La quale, per essere moglie d'un impiegato del Tesoro, ha voluto con la scelta di quest'ambiente fare atto di modestia e continuare a descrivere quel che ha, per consuetudine quotidiana, veduto: prima gli uomini di Sardegna col cappuccio e le uose, poi quelli dei ministeri romani con le mezze maniche d'alpachà ...  

Biting as they were, Ojetti's comments did serve to reveal the transparency of Deledda's writing procedure. Unwittingly she had revealed more, perhaps, than she intended. The analytic style with which she had developed her main character Regina may well have been, at this stage in her career, merely an attempt to key into the new psychological

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43 Ibid. 124.

trends in continental writing which, concurrent with Freud's growing popularity at the turn of the century, were gaining favour among the reading public.\textsuperscript{45} By the same token \textit{Nostalgia}, as is suggested by Ojetti, was not exclusively a sign of Deledda's provincialism and bias but touched as well on her tendency to "... continuare a descrivere quel che ha, per consuetudine quotidiana, veduto". For the contemporary reader, his observations suggest, at the very least, that Grazia's entrenched thinking and lingering traditional beliefs were difficult to convert to modern expression despite her relocation or her marriage. At best, his thoughts on \textit{Nostalgia} imply through their irony, a close mirroring of Grazia's deepest desires, a wish to escape from the past and control the present.

Writing \textit{Nostalgia} seems to have allowed Deledda some release from her pent-up frustrations regarding her union with Palmiro Madesani which by 1905, and two children later, had obviously not proven the realization of all her dreams. Moving to Rome in 1900 in search of an alternative life style may have seemed justified by her marriage; but it had inspired as well an enormous amount of guilt over desertion of her remaining siblings and aging mother in Sardinia. By 1904 Deledda had neither put her past life to rest nor accepted the present as a satisfactory alternative. Her extremely negative descriptions of the players of \textit{Nostalgia}, both male and female, as well as her interpretation of Rome as a moral cesspool strongly suggest a bid, however subconscious, to punish herself for her abandonment of her Sardinian hearth and home. Even her heroine's personal desire for love and happiness are seen as punishable. None of her

\textsuperscript{45} One recalls Italo Svevo's \textit{Senilità} (1898) and \textit{Una vita} (1892).
apparent gains in matriarchal power, financial independence, substantial personal freedom or the promise of a writing career, sit well for Deledda in Rome. Rather, that instinctive quest for a happy life and for love which was so conspicuously energetic in Deledda's letters is altered dramatically with Nostalgie into an unequivocally cheerless and punitive view of women and contemporary Roman life.

ii) Entanglements

There are similar patterns of family life and reflection in the story of Regina as those we have become familiar with in Cosima and in Deledda's letters before 1900. Neither Deledda's nor Regina's new reality in Rome should still hold them prisoner. We know through Deledda's letters after her marriage, however, that the life she chose to lead in Rome was not substantially different from the one she had left behind in Sardinia. In Rome Deledda remained as home-bound as she had been in Nuoro. Regina too, in Nostalgie, restricts herself to the supervision of domestic affairs and seldom leaves her apartment. Neither one socialises. In her letters from 1901 onward we know that Deledda functioned by those same restricted daily and seasonal patterns that had characterized her life in Sardinia. Regina, too, keeps herself on a daily schedule in much the same way as a very regimented Grazia Madesani. The heroine of Nostalgie dominates her husband and is highly critical of him. We remember from her letters that Deledda began her control and manipulation of Madesani at an early stage in their relationship. Regina's attitude, moreover, reflects those same patterns of anger and
revenge, interspersed with control and affection discernible in Deledda's letters to Madesani both before and after their marriage.  Regina's fabrication of tragedy without cause is similarly characteristic of Grazia Deledda. Indeed, even falling in love, presumably the most positive episode of her life, was rendered problematic by her. Deledda had written to Madesani:

Tu mi hai fatto innamorare di te amandomi, non allontanandomi per la mia freddezza, per le mie scortesie, per la cattiveria con la quale ti ho trattato da principio. Sai quando mi sono accorta che incominciavo ad amarti? Una sera al teatro tu mi stavi vicino e mi dicevi tante cose affettuose: io ero di umore terribile, non ti rispondevo, non ti guardavo, anzi ad un certo punto volsi di là il volto... e tu, indispettito giustamente dal mio fare, tornasti al tuo posto e per tutto un atto non ti voltasti; poi sei uscito. Al ritorno ti sei voltato e mi hai sorriso; mi avevi perdonato. Ed io provai un impeto di tenerezza per te - Come è buono! pensai, e da quella sera cominciai a pensare profondamente a te.47

Here too we soon recognize the voice of Regina whose own needs are paramount in her relationship with her husband Antonio. In Nostalgie Regina immediately blames Antonio for her unhappiness in a similar vein and continues to attribute fault to him for her own bad behaviour both as his fiancee and his wife. Rationalizing, Regina explains to Antonio, as Grazia had explained to Madesani:

Sentimi Antonio; anche tu, certo involontariamente ma indubbiamente, hai avuto dei torti... Quando nelle dolci

46 See Di Pilla, 532-593 and Pellegrino, 66-72.

sere del nostro fidanzamento io ti parlavo di Roma con un tremito nella voce, tu avresti dovuto capire ciò che io stoltamente sognavo... Ricordati che anch'io, anch'io, nei primi mesi ti ho tormentato con la mia tristezza, i miei lamenti, i miei dispetti.\textsuperscript{48}

It follows that both Deledda and Regina are women who are uncomfortably insecure and suspicious so that unpleasant patterns of offense and guilt will invariably be sustained by them from past tradition.

Both women are egocentric as well. Regina's inner life is her primary concern just as Deledda's continued fictionalizing of her own thoughts through writing remains her fundamental interest and pursuit. Regina, however, has not yet found her creative outlet although she speaks of writing. In \textit{Nostalgie} Regina represents only one part of Deledda in Rome, that part of our author who occupies her time with reflecting on herself. Regina is the disturbed and entrapped part of Deledda still regulated by traditional patterns of thought and behaviour. She is self-centred and judgemental while mistrustful of everyone around her.

It is Gabriella, on the other hand, who represents Grazia Deledda's other, if not better, self. Gabriella is the enthusiastic and ambitious young writer we have seen in Nuoro, the one who will write her way to fame by heightening the drama of otherwise humdrum existences and by manipulating, if necessary, even those of her supporters who believe in her climb to success. In \textit{Nostalgie} Gabriella has maliciously begun to do just that in her notebook story of the illicit love affair of Regina's husband and the

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. 125-126.
Principessa. Regina will renew and dramatize traditional concerns, those of a husband’s sin and guilt, those of a wife’s resignation and suffering. Gabriella will break from tradition, using all the tools and people at her disposal in order to win fame and fortune. Gabriella and Regina, then, reveal both the moralistic and the paternalistic, the rebellious, creative and often cruel sides of Deledda’s personality with which we have become so familiar through the letters.

While Deledda may have realized the benefits of political neutrality and personal prudence, Nostalgie’s Regina is nonetheless cast in a less traditional register than were her Sardinian heroines. In the Sardinian novels\(^49\) young women of marriageable age are confronted with the dilemma of patriarchal rules which do not necessarily correspond to the call of the individual heart. Loves are considered illicit if they do not bow to hierarchical family loyalties linked still, at the turn of the century, to economics and Catholic ideology. But unlike the clear-cut choices which limit and simplify Deledda’s Sardinian heroines, Regina, in her new environment does have freedom and options, as well as fine examples of women in control. In fact, Regina has entered a milieu with women in charge: where they marry in order to gain social position, financial security and perhaps even fame. Her own mother-in-law, for example, rules the family into which Regina marries by dominating all its members. Principessa Makuline too, is an independent and noble matriarch by virtue of inherited wealth who takes a secondary role to no man. On the contrary, she not only employs them to manage her financial affairs

\(^{49}\) By "the Sardinian Novels" I am referring to those works which are set in Sardinia.
but, as is suggested by Gabriella, is also able to buy their sexual services. Compared to these modern women of the Capital, the men of Nostalgia are ineffectual. Antonio and his brothers, for example, are subservient to their mother, catering to her wishes as obedient children. They hold lowly positions as civil servants which bode unpromising futures. In the matriarchal society described by Deledda, gender roles are reversed: here it is men who will prostitute themselves for money.

Yet Deledda's women characters, despite their power, are portrayed as equally despicable in their matriarchy as were their former models of patriarchy. The female characters of Nostalgia are uncomely caricatures of negative female "types." Antonio's mother is a meddling, foul-breathed woman with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. The homely journalist sister-in-law, Arduina, and the Principessa Makuline, respective examples of the professional woman and the aristocrat, are tellingly both painted in grotesque strokes. The disproportionate abnormal features of Arduina, linked to her aspirations as a feminist writer, seem related to what Regina, and by association Deledda, accept as the deformity of feminist ideology. Deledda's description of Arduina, in fact, negates her femininity completely. Regina

... si degnò far attenzione alla cognata, che Antonio le aveva descritto come una scema. E a sua volta, in quella persona dal petto liscio, dal volto di legno giallognolo, sul quale i piccoli occhi lattei pieni di spavento, la piccola bocca dai denti neri, e tre riccioli d'un biondo grigio, segnavano una bruttezza unica, intui una creatura di servitù e di tristezza ... v'erano delle vittime, come Arduina,50

50 Deledda, Nostalgia, 1914. 15.
Victim of a kind of gender perversion, Arduina is deprived of breasts and sexuality in one cruel stroke. Equally repulsive is the licentiousness of the Principessa Makuline who, in Regina's mind, has been the cause of her husband's prostitution. Ironically, even Marina the maid cannot decide which of the ladies she serves, including Regina herself, is the ugliest.

Deledda's decidedly negative description of all her female characters, contrasted with their obvious power again, as in the ending of "Battesimi", casts doubt on the intent of the creator of Nostalgia. On the one hand the "new women" of the Capital, modern, successful, and well-to-do, display all those features of independence and adaptability which the term should imply. And yet they are so starkly unsympathetic in their new roles that their matriarchal empowerment in Nostalgia seems as unappealing as the worst of patriarchies.

It is difficult to discern whether Deledda intended a message of warning in Nostalgia. Might women be driven to extremes by retaining traditional values in a world where such values have become obsolete? There is no reason why any writer, male or female, should be bound to instruct the reader on the hazards of a protracted patriarchy or be morally obligated to reveal the dangers of an equally controlling matriarchy although the courageous, and perhaps the unwise, may tend to do so. The manner in which traditional gender hierarchy is surreptitiously undermined in Nostalgia might suggest that Deledda was drawn to protest, behind the protective shield of fiction, the destructive psychological effects of rigid rules of any kind irrespective of gender dominance. If such was indeed Deledda's design, then our author might best be counted among the cautious
and the wise.

Although Deledda often championed acceptance of the traditional role of women as victims, she scarcely behaved as though victimized herself. Nor did she ever successfully suppress in her writing that brewing opposition to the rule of female subservience which we have seen lying latent in her writing. The proposal of matriarchy in *Nostalgia*, however, is no satisfactory alternative for women but rather relegates them to similar positions of despotism.

The psychological disturbance of Regina, as it is painted in *Nostalgia* seems so similar to Grazia Deledda's own emotional ambivalence that even the informed reader easily confuses the one personality with the other. In *Nostalgia*, a "self-portrait," Deledda can hardly help but vent, through Regina's anger, some of her own frustration and hostility. Her writing becomes the essential therapy required to alleviate the pain of a distressing emotional bi-location. On the one hand she tries to escape. On the other, she institutes a masochistic cycle of self-flagellation which dispenses punishment for disloyalty to the clan. Writing, in effect, repeats rather than resolves the situation of a split femininity. Any sense of psychological comfort Deledda may have enjoyed in her latter years was certainly a result of her attempts to resolve inner conflict through novels like *Nostalgia*. In effect she attempted to recreate, outside herself, an alternate literary object in characters like Regina who could bear the brunt of her own affliction while shielding the real cause of her torment from the prying eyes of others.

The significance of *Nostalgia*, then, must also be sought in the very nature and motivation of its writing. In a communication to Antonio Scano, Deledda had written of
her novel:

Pochi possono capire quel libro: se poi Ella vorrà scriverne
Le sarò gratissima se vorrà smentire quella stupida frase
che io non ho mai pronunziato che fa giro dei giornali,
colla quale avrei detto "pretendendo da me sempre dei
romanzi sardi mi avete condannato a domicilio coatto!"
Non l'ho mai detto, tanto è vero che questo autunno conto
di visitare qualche regione sarda ancora non conosciuta da
me per scriverne un nuovo romanzo.\footnote{Grazia Deledda, "To A. Scano" 13 May 1905, Grazia Deledda, Versi e prose giovanili, ed A. Scano (Milano: Edizioni Virgilio, 1972) 259.}

Here, quite defensively, Deledda seems to have protested too much not to have exposed
her own uneasiness about the content of Nostalgia. It is precisely the kind of caveat with
which we have become familiar throughout her letters as a counter-criticism defense
mechanism. It would seem from her remarks to Scano that she felt relegated by him to
literary inferiority because she was a provincial writer and a woman. Such a presumption
both hurt and angered her. And yet she had won considerable attention and favour
among some of the more formidable contemporary critics such as Luigi Capuana and so
should surely have considered herself by now to have impeccable credentials as an
author. Although she may have had every reason to be confident because of her proven
success prior to 1905, her pre-defence of Nostalgia nevertheless betrays a certain doubt
concerning it, a fear perhaps of having revealed too much about the real Grazia Deledda.

It does appear that she was at least partially aware of the dangers of her perhaps
too autobiographical foray into the world of the modern novel. Exposure of her own
inner conflict regarding her new life and her marriage seems to have given her some real
cause for caution. Even before its publication, in fact, she showed considerable misapprehension about releasing the work at all. Consequently in the introduction to its first printing Deledda qualified Nostalgia as follows:

Narrazione semplice, ho detto: tanto semplice che la critica la troverà una prova mancata della mia capacità narrativa, spiegatasi finora solo nel raccontare le passioni e le miserie d'una società primitiva.  

Pre-empting the critics in this instance is surely an indication of her doubt and fear. It is also interesting to note that the original issue of the 1905 edition of Nostalgia carried a dedication to her husband, Palmiro, which was omitted from any of the following editions. Even more telling is the fact that this original dedication was omitted entirely from those preliminary copies sent before publication to interested parties, among whom were some of the more formidable critics of the day such as Roux, Segré, Pirandello, Cena, Oliva, and De Gubernatis. The original message of that suppressed introduction recognized Madesani as Deledda's "caro compagno di lavoro e di esistenza" whose "attività intelligente" had resulted in the realization of almost all their dreams. By repressing this statement Deledda might have wished to camouflage any link between her husband and Antonio of Nostalgia who had proven such a disappointment to his wife. Palmiro Madesani was also a civil servant, like Antonio, and handsome as well. But

52 Deledda, "Preface" Nostalgia 1905, VII.
53 Deledda, "To Scano", 4 April 1905, Scano, Versi e prose giovanili 258.
Palmiro had obviously not lived up to Deledda's expectations, as her letters imply, despite her flattering comments here. Written early in her marriage, *Nostalgia* was, after all, a tale of newlyweds undone by reality. The dedication of the first edition of *Nostalgia*, had it not been removed, could easily have been an admission to the critics that some of their suppositions regarding Grazia and Palmiro Madesani were indeed true. Deledda's use of her husband as a business manager was already common knowledge. Might the more intimate details of their marriage, because of *Nostalgia*, also have become glaring?

iii) Il *fatto* abominevole: Deledda's Sexual Pathology

... dal fondo dell'incosciente le risaliva nitida l'impressione angosciosa di quell'ora lontana. Che cosa era accaduto, allora? quale fenomeno patologico, presentimento o suggestione, l'aveva dominata? Forse, nell'ora del sogno, era avvenuto il *fatto* abominevole?... Ella ricordava d'aver letto esempi in qualche modo rassomiglianti al suo.  

Deledda's attitudes toward sex were not unusual for a woman raised in a 19th-century traditional fashion. Associated with mystery and, more ominously, with sin, the sexual act itself was replete with dark and illicit connotations. Regina's feeling of doom when faced with matters of a sexual nature then, is understandably included and, indeed, a significant part of *Nostalgia*. Regina, though on the surface a modern woman,

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55 Deledda, *Nostalgia* 1914. 231.
undergoes the same loss of sexual sanity as we have seen in Deledda's own imagined love life revealed in her letters. In Nostalgie a subconsciously distressed attitude toward sex has been reawakened and committed again to paper. For Regina "il fatto abominevole" refers to her husband's transgression but defines as well her own negative interpretation of the sexual act itself. Her fear of a physical liaison which trespasses the traditional precept of marital exclusivity evokes in Regina typical symptoms of denial. She acts as though she has only read of such things! But that, indeed, is in part, the point. The reader of Nostalgie too is only reading about such things. There seems to be a tacit understanding that these things occur only in a work of fiction. Literature then, distances reality, not because what it relates is false, but because it is painfully true.

The sexual theme in Nostalgie is processed no differently from most of Deledda's other work, that is by evasion. With Nostalgie she continues to write her own truth even after her "escape" from her limiting rural fetters into what was to have been the liberating and cosmopolitan milieu of the Eternal City. "Tutto il mondo" as she seems to be resigned in saying, is indeed "paese" in both its wider and more intimate senses. Thus in Nostalgie, as elsewhere, she continues to inject those same cautions, tabus and tensions around sex which had grounded her first Sardinian novels. Transgression, the necessary element of the drama, remains the driving force of the plot. The resolution of the tension in plot occurs, following still the Sardinian pattern, only when sin has been exposed, when acceptance and repentance have cleansed the transgressor, when suffering has visited the loyal transgresee. Yet the modern world of Nostalgie cares less about archaic moral practice outside the context of provincial mythology. Modern urban society may
relish frivolous scandal but it is not likely to give it moral weight. And since Deledda's procedure in her urban novel mismatches a familiar morality by displacing it into an inappropriate framework, Deledda must have Regina exhume the past from memories of former female sacrifice. Thus, recalling her mother, Regina

... pensò alla serenità, alla bellezza della vita di quella donna che compiva il suo ciclo come lo devono compiere tutte le donne giuste, fra l'amore dei figli e per amore dei figli ... perdonare, dunque, perdonare più che mai.\(^{56}\)

The woman's decision to conform or not to conform to traditional beliefs, to "forgive and forget," however, arises only after Regina has weighed, at some length, those contemporary standards which she would so like to make her own and yet which keep eluding her. Even though she has no sound proof of her husband's infidelity, only his sin can engage that traditional reflex of guilt and repentance required to give Deledda's heroine, and herself, significance and value. The result is that she must censure her husband be he guilty or not. In the final analysis those who attempt escape from a mindset which fervently believes that infraction will ultimately lead to salvation, cannot help but champion the judgement of tradition. Those who conform to the rule of their forebears will find comfort in submission. Deledda too, through Regina, vicariously enjoys the comfort afforded by a woman's self-immolation to family values. Human happiness, after all, is insignificant when pitted against the fulfilment achieved in possessing the virtue of being able to suffer and be unconditionally loyalty to the strict

\(^{56}\) Ibid. 231.
traditions of the clan. "Bisogna rispettare la propria casa, come il sacerdote rispetta l'altare dove celebra la messa. La famiglia è sacra".\textsuperscript{57} If Antonio has committed no sin, what good can Regina's martyrdom achieve, what redemption can her sacrifice accomplish? The sin must be assumed to be true by moving directly to the pardoning of it: "... perdonare, dunque, perdonare più che mai".\textsuperscript{58} Regina must create her own truth about her husband, and does.

Whether within the confines of legal marriage or, as in this instance, in the realm of an illicit love affair, the issue of sex for Deledda is a difficult theme to develop for it is a topic rendered virtually unspeakable. \textit{Nostalgie}, in this respect, is perhaps typical of Deledda's ambiguous need to simultaneously keep present and yet obfuscate what Regina describes as "... le ripugnanze dei primi giorni di matrimonio".\textsuperscript{59} Accordingly in \textit{Nostalgie}, her text is interrupted as the sexual moment approaches.

\textit{...Regina ed Antonio erano troppo giovani, troppo sani, troppo amanti per non dimenticare, come gli uccelli, il recente inverno e cantare un inno di letizia... Dalla parete l'occhio di sole pareva guardasse placido e compiacente.}\textsuperscript{60}

Like Dante's "Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante" (Inf. V. v. 138) where he describes Paolo and Francesca's first sexual encounter, Deledda's evasive and idealistic

\textsuperscript{57} Deledda, \textit{L'incendio nell'oliveto} 146.

\textsuperscript{58} Deledda, \textit{Nostalgie} 1914. 275.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. 4.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. 206.
description here is modestly 13th-century as well. Reference to sexual couplings, in as much as they are central to the development of Deledda's stories, are either absent or terribly guarded. Although this evasion is understandable given 19th-century mores it is not the prudence of certain accounts that surprises but rather the negative connotations of more sullen sexual allusions. Where love scenes are sometimes idyllic, Regina's comment concerning the repugnant nature of her first days of marriage conjures up any number of troublesome possibilities of sexual initiation as fearsome, painful or perhaps even forced. Absence of a minimal elaboration of her meaning renders the possibilities even more disturbing. In Nostalgia Regina's fleeing Rome to return to her native Viadana early in her marriage is linked to feelings of nausea and suggests, as does the title of the novel, a yearning for a previous state of sheltered childhood and uncomplicated virginity. Regina, indeed, shows signs of pathology on this account. She is described in her matrimonial bed thus: "Sola nel gran letto duro, gelata, rannucchiata, ella sentiva una pesantezza, un umidore, una tristezza indicibili." What Deledda expresses through Regina, even though it is "indicibile", seems more serious than simple post-coital depression. "Non so vincere il passato, la nostalgia," Regina laments, "e ho paura dell'avvenire". Fear of the sexual requirements of marriage which include the bane of childbirth also recall those more disturbing sexual trials of the women in Cosima where madness, abortion and death result. Codified in her works as inevitable, female suffering in any of its natural manifestations, is rarely a source of satisfaction, even less

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61 Deledda, Nostalgia 1914. 79.

62 Ibid. 82.
of delight.

In the first pages of *Nostalgie* Antonio symbolically soils Regina's white dress with a drink at a reception given by the Principessa Makuline. The episode is a clear harbinger of the blemish marriage visits on the female psyche and the consequent need to cleanse it somehow with suffering. And because the sexual act would be more or less a constant in marriage, the symbolic soiling would also be a steady psychological presence. Consequently Regina will embrace the ultimate humiliation of marital betrayal, blaming her husband for that which seems her own fault. She remains in good stead with the laws of patriarchy and accepts her self-imposed role as the saviour of her family's purity. Magnanimously she professes:

... per la prima volta pensò che non per sé, per l'ultima vanità di sacrificio, non per lui, la cui anima sarebbe rimasta sempre macchiata, ma per la loro bambina, ella doveva ritrarre Antonio dal fango.63

Characteristically Regina, at Deledda's behest, transfers her thwarted perception of sexuality inherited from her strict upbringing, onto the next generation. The children of legal and morally chaste unions must be saved from the mire of sensuality through maternal sacrifice. It is a familiar perception of the clan, one from which Deledda was not immune in her own upbringing and one which she passes on to the detriment especially of the female reader. Her message then is one of purification through sacrifice, the only way of coping with the repugnant enigma which is sex:

63 Ibid. 273.
This fantasy of fleeing from the mire of sexuality seems to echo Deledda's first flight from Sardinia provoked in part by the disgrace of her family situation. In Deledda's youthful experience her brother Andrea had dishonoured the family by his associating with prostitutes. She has also mentioned her father's affair with Nanna, the maid. It is interesting how here, in Nostalgie, her heroine Regina refers to her husband in terms of prostitution as well. Interpretations of sexuality drawn in terms of immorality, of purity defiled, of filth, of victimization and of flight are, as we have seen, characteristic of the abused. While they tend to dwell on sexual discourse they are generally prone to mistrust sexual partners. Often negative in attitude and depressed, they resign themselves to emotions they cannot change. In general they are, like Regina, emotionally defeated.  

iii) Writing in Perpetuity

Deledda's subconscious need in writing Nostalgie seems to have been to reconstruct the distressing place to which the victim must return for the continued

64 Ibid. 221.

65 Herman, Trauma and Recovery 110-114.
flagellation of the guilty self and others. As part of this process the author must recreate her elders and rejuvenate their belief system. Sexual issues, those revolving about purity and proprietorship are resuscitated, as it were, so that neither time, distance, nor physical freedom can alter former behaviour or bring about positive change. Even Regina's existential rationalizations, which constitute the final 100 pages of Nostalgie, do little to channel Deledda's thinking into more reasonable or modern conclusions regarding problem-free sex. Deledda's solution for herself and for Regina, as a result, is appended in Nostalgie rather than logically drawn. In the final pages we read:

... Un antico pensiero le ritornava in mente: - Tutte le ore arrivarono: anche questa è giunta ed altre ed altre ne arriveranno... fino alla morte. Perché tormentarci tanto? La nostra vita, d'ora in avanti sarà come un vestito lavato, si, come questo, - aggiunse, raccogliendosi attorno ai piedi il lembo del vestito bianco smacchiato... Ebbene? vuol dire che la porteremo più sdegnosamente, ma anche più comodamente, senza tanti riguardi.66

Traditional beliefs, represented by Regina's white dress, may become soiled but might always be "smacchiato." Apparently, however, things will never substantially vary. The image itself belies the nature of the past. The dress will be re worn and perhaps restained with a sense, too, that there is a certain pride in the process.

Despite her closing words in Nostalgie the very logic of Deledda's text prevents any real sense of certainty concerning her beliefs or an effective closure to her story. Signs which might confirm a husband's guilt, for example, a key point around which the

66 Deledda, Nostalgie 1914. 297.
entire drama revolves, are totally absent from her story. Regina never finds proof of Antonio's affair because he is not, in effect, the entire cause of her distress. Deledda, in fact, even draws the "husband" figure as faultless and even attractive. It is Deledda who throws Regina's own doubts into question when she has Antonio retort to implications of his infidelity:

Tu ragioni troppo, Regina, e questo mi spaventa...
Perché se davvero tu avessi creduto alla mia colpa non avresti parlato così come parli. Tu parli così perché non credi... ancora! Se fra me e te esistesse davvero un... dramma, la fine che tu vuoi dargli non sarebbe logica.67

Through the figure of the husband, Deledda echoes her own memories recalling a familiar criticism from Stanis Manca. While Deledda's literary template would require that sexual transgression be somehow expiated, there is never any definitive proof of its having occurred. The pattern for transgression is rather drawn from Regina's day-dreaming. Regina

... rivedeva dunque un uomo seduto davanti ad un camino acceso: quest'uomo teneva i gomiti sui ginocchi, il viso fra le mani, e piangeva, piangeva mentre una donna si curvava su lui, posandogli una mano sulla testa calva. L'uomo era il padre dissipatore, la donna era la madre paziente di Regina. Era il ricordo di un sogno, o la realtà dell'infanzia ignara, lontana, dimenticata? Ella non sapeva; ma in quel momento nell'ombra del suo spirito parve rosseggiare una luce, quasi il riflesso del camino acceso nello sfondo di

67 Ibid. 303.
Here the reader is led back to the memory of a dream, or to a memory from childhood. Regina is conveniently not sure which. It is a scene, however, which does not recall the tone of Cosima and one wonders if it is a memory omitted from that autobiography for the sake of prudence. It a version of an episode from youth likely witnessed by Deledda in the paternal home but repressed. In Nostalgia, however, she exhumes it presenting an idealized image of her father Antonio as well as a mother figure who is not unloving or verging on insanity but one who shows affection, a consummation Deledda dearly would have wished. Deledda invokes such a moving scene in order to fulfill some of her long-repressed childhood fantasies. In the opinion of Charles Hanley

When viewed from a multifaceted perspective the function of art can be recognized to include not only catharsis but also, as in the play of children, the quest for maturation, reparation, restoration, and psychic integration.

Through her writing of Nostalgia Deledda redraws the self, reenacting past and repressed desires in a kind of second-hand existence lived vicariously through her own imagining.

68 Ibid. 304.

69 It is curious that Deledda's relationship with Andrea Pirodda, a very significant episode in her young adult life, was also entirely omitted from Cosima. Deledda's feelings of guilt in his regard were likely the cause of this exclusion. The idealized image of her own father and criticism of her unaffectionate mother in Cosima, in a related manipulation of reality, contrasts sharply with this parental episode in Nostalgia which is unlikely to have been taken from childhood memory.

Indeed if any of Deledda's female characters seem on the verge of madness it is certainly Regina as she strives to satisfy her own desire to be sound.

Having been deprived of affection as a child and unable to express an unguarded version of love in adulthood, Deledda's neuroses around motherhood inevitably carried over into her relationship with her own offspring but was also mirrored in her writing. The degree of her psychological stress is perhaps nowhere as evident as in those scenes in Nostalgia which deal directly with children. After the birth of her daughter Cristina, Regina does not rejoice, for example, as might be expected. Rather she reacts negatively. What should be a selfless, giving, unfettered event of pure joy is described in loveless, sorrowful terms:

... diede alla luce una creatura esile, moribonda, una bambina che pareva un gattino, nera, pelosa, con una testa enorme... nei primi giorni, vedendo quel mostricino, la giovane puerpera piangeva di ripugnanza e di dolore.  

This description in particular recalls the dark, almost mad behaviour of Deledda's mother on the death of her daughter Giovanna as described in Chapter II. Both are most disturbing scenes where the infant, the living symbol of marital love is vilified; here by Regina in her disgust of her newborn Caterina, and earlier by Deledda's mother in her description of the dead child Giovanna as an animal sacrifice. Moreover, considering the possibility of what might currently be recognized as post-partum depression, Regina is

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71 Deledda, Nostalgia 1914. 189.
72 Chapter II, 58-60.
depicted as being as distant as Deledda's mother had been with her own children. She rarely touches her infant daughter just as Grazia was rarely touched by a disturbed and spent Francesca Cambosu. Regina's own life takes precedence over her grotesque offspring. The infant is placed in the care of a wet-nurse as Deledda's own children had been consigned to hired help. We know that she herself displayed little affection towards her infant sons, both of whom were left with wet-nurses in her husband's home town of Cicognara in 1902 and 1904 while she returned to work in Rome.\(^{73}\)

As a toddler Regina's child is disciplined with slaps which also recall those unjustified cuffings described in Cosima which Deledda suffered at the whims of her sisters and brother and which she herself renewed in her disciplining of her sons Sardus and Franz. Moreover Deledda paints a grim scene of Regina's harshness towards her daughter in Nostalgie. Hardly yet speaking, Caterina is taught to interact with her mother in terms of possession and reprimand as is evident in this interchange:

\[\textit{Questo è tuo?} - \text{tradusse Regina.} - \text{Si è mio, si! E questa piccola Caterina di chi è? È mia; non è vero, tutta mia? Ed anche un pochino di papà; ma pochino pochino, perché papà è cattivo... s'agìò e diede con la manina aperta un gran colpo sul viso della madre... Cattiva che altro non sei!} - \text{esclamò, afferrandole la manina e dandole dei colpettini.} - \text{Va' via, non ti voglio più vedere... Non ti voglio più bene.}\(^{74}\)

The shame to which Regina subjects her child, while disturbing, is nonetheless familiar.

\(^{73}\) Grazia Deledda, "To Antonio Scano", 8 Aug. 1904, Di Pilla 257.

\(^{74}\) Deledda \textit{Nostalgie} 1914. 271-272.
Deledda's recycling of such behavioural patterns fit her own pathology well. Children who have been abused, as we have seen, tend to be abusive with their own offspring. The child Caterina, at age two, has already learned to strike back in anger. Clearly, "repetition is the language of the abused child."\(^{75}\)

While Deledda's preoccupation with the rules governing sexuality remains a constant theme, her negative views on the topic form an important recurring element in her writing. One can perhaps logically deduce that what we read of women's plight in Cosima, "Battesimi" and Nostalgie reveals more about our author than she may have intended, that it suggests more than it entertains, that it exposes Deledda's doctoring of psychological wounds more clearly than has hereto been apparent. Nostalgie in particular has led us to consider the reverse effect fiction may have in disclosing the personality of its author, a disclosure which could broaden our base for critical interpretation. In her writing Deledda herself has clearly drawn our attention beyond the replication of the physical facts of her personal history to a revelation of the more guarded aspects of her sexual pathology. It remains to be seen whether psychoanalysis and semiotics may be further engaged in analyzing Deledda's other works which, perhaps too often, have been unjustly characterized as shallow, uninteresting or obvious.

\(^{75}\) S. Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men Women and Rape (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1975) 358.
Chapter IV: The Business of Writing

The financial downfall of the Deledda family, as we have seen in Chapter II, had given Grazia considerable cause for concern regarding her economic future. In Cosima, she had attributed her father's death directly to her brother's financial irresponsibility. The disgrace of Andrea's petty thievery had mortally wounded their father Antonio, the sole bread-winner of the family. Antonio Deledda...

... si accorò talmente che, fatto ogni più grave sforzo per salvare il figliuolo si accasciò e si ammalò. Furono mesi e mesi di dolore rodente, quasi di disperazione. Finché l'uomo saggio e giusto, soccombette, e la famiglia rimase come l'umile erba tremante all'ombra della quercia fulminata.¹

Even though Deledda tended to idealize the men in her family, it is clear that on the practical level of economic survival, heretofore assured by her father, her male siblings posed an actual threat to her financial security in the present and could not provide for her future. It became obvious too that Andrea, as head of the household, was neither successfully managing nor contributing to the family inheritance left to his care after his father's death. Grazia notes that Andrea "... ne profitava largamente, in modo che rimaneva appena il tanto da sopravvivere negli studi l'altro fratello, e da pagare le tasse."²

Santus, "l'altro fratello", incapacitated by the effects of his alcoholism and unemployed,

¹ Deledda, Cosima 49.
² Ibid. 49-50.
created a serious drain on the family coffers as well. Consequently it is very likely that the Deledda brothers did not inspire a great deal of confidence in their still unmarried sister, the would-be writer. Neither Andrea nor Santus was an inspiring model of traditional manhood who could protect their sisters or support them financially as their father had done.

To make matters worse Deledda's prospects of marrying well were not encouraging if her sisters were any indication. Both had experienced great difficulty in forming either financially sound or happy marriages. Vincenza, marrying beneath her station, was virtually poverty-stricken and met with a tragic end.³ Grazia notes in Cosima that her younger sister Beppa, in contrast, had found herself a suitor whose wealth seemed a veritable windfall. "L'occasione era ottima,"⁴ Cosima observes of Beppa's betrothal "Si cercò di vendere qualche cosa [in order to raise an acceptable dowry], ma le offerte erano irrisorie, e d'altronde non si poteva spogliare l'intera famiglia, già tanto impoverita e quasi bisognosa."⁵ The possibility of gaining security through marriage ended in disaster with the rejection of Beppa by her betrothed on the grounds of her family's insufficient wealth.

We have also seen in Deledda's early family life that the violence of her father, the madness of her mother, coupled with the failures of her male siblings and the death of her sister had deeply affected the young and impressionable girl who was striving so

³ Vincenza's unhappy marriage has been described in Chapter III, 27-30.
⁴ Deledda, Cosima 124.
⁵ Ibid. 126.
desperately at the end of the century to assert herself through her writing. Her need for recognition seemed driven, indeed, by an inner desire to be compensated for the personal sacrifices she had made for her family during those particularly draining years of her youth and young womanhood, a time during which she had rarely been rewarded with affection from within the family or by true love from outside of it. As time passed there arose in the maturing Deledda a tacit rebelliousness safely vented through her writing about the culture she seemed simultaneously to love and hate. Her ambivalence was understandable. According to Elizabetta Rasy,

... per scrivere, una donna deve essere figlia della madre. C'è un nuovo peccato originale alla rovescia: bisogna addentare il frutto proibito senza porgerlo a nessuno, nel chiuso del corpo femminile. Il peccato originale è caduto nel sesso, vincolarsi per sempre a un genere e assumere le conseguenze. Ma se una donna vuol scrivere, le cose non debbono andare del tutto così, bisogna praticare un peccato nel peccato, trattenere l'eden, l'origine, anziché rimetterla in gioco, osservare la legge della madre.⁶

The keen intuition of Rasy concerning the inherent difficulties and contradictions of writing women well describes the unusually disturbed substance of Deledda's literary dilemma. Although inexorably bound to "la legge della madre" and all that it implied in silence, service and suffering, she nonetheless seemed unable to totally accept a system which suppressed her personal liberty. She firmly believed that "... la libertá è una cosa più grande dell'amore, la più grande della vita. Gli esseri più felici anche senza amore,

⁶ Rasy, Ritratti di signora 41.
senza richezza, senza potenza sono gli esseri liberi."  

Deledda was experienced in emotional self-defence and practical offence as well. A neutral sense of fair-play, indeed, had never existed among her siblings. What prevailed, rather, was an arena for continual argument. To her advantage she was, by nature, hardly the traditionally passive woman. Those 19th-century family values in which gender roles allotted the responsibility of family support to its men while its women, keeping their place, remained dependent, were also beginning to crumble. In Deledda's family there was, by the second generation, a serious malfunction in the traditional family, evidenced both by female strength and rebellion and by male ineptitude. It was not without a certain determination then, that Deledda faced her future struggling to maintain a veneer of that ancestral pride which the looming possibility of imminent financial collapse threatened to undermine. Marriage and literary fame might jointly assure her continued social status as well as lasting security. A steady income through her writings, as well as the financial and moral support of a husband, seemed the double-pronged solution to her future.

Deledda had shown an early understanding of the route best travelled on the road to literary success. She had been a regular contributor to the Roman "Casa Edoardo Perino" editions of "Paradiso dei bambini" as early as 1888, at age 16. She had

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7 Grazia Deledda, "Il terzo," La casa del poeta 168.

8 Deledda's story "Sulla montagna" appeared first in Perino's Paradiso dei bambini in October of 1888. De Michelis, 925 n. 1.
contributed to "Nell'azzurro," a magazine for children published by Treves in Milan\textsuperscript{9} and "Ultima Moda," a review which targeted women readers. As well her work had appeared in the short-lived "Illustrazioni per tutti, also published by Perino.\textsuperscript{10} Epaminonda Provaglio was the acting editor of Perino's publications during the years of her early contributions. It is through her correspondence with Provaglio that a precocious Grazia Deledda demonstrated not only the effects of her distressed upbringing and confused love life but the conservative strategies she tested in order to achieve her literary goals.

The presentation of herself and her literary product were remarkably entrepreneurial for her age. Her very first submissions to Provaglio were accompanied by formal courtesies through which she complimented his patience and good nature. Yet her letters were also filled with instructions for the location and best times of publication and an attention to detail and a precision which displayed a professional concern for editorial accuracy. In a letter to him she cited "un enorme sbaglio" in her poem "Il savoiardo."\textsuperscript{11} And yet she excused her tendency to be overly "esigente."\textsuperscript{12} Errors in printing, as well as errors in punctuation, were immediately brought to Provaglio's attention with accompanying words of annoyance and demands for their immediate

\textsuperscript{9} Deledda published "Sulla montagna" for a second time in 1889 in Treves's journal Nell'azzurro, and again therein in March of 1890. "Memorie infantili" was also published by Treves in April of that same year. De Michelis, 926 n. 1.

\textsuperscript{10} "Sulle montagne Sarde" was published in Illustrazioni per tutti in March of 1891. De Michelis, 935 n. 1.

\textsuperscript{11} Grazia Deledda, "To Epaminonda Provaglio", 26 Mar. 1891. De Michelis, 925.

\textsuperscript{12} Deledda, "To Provaglio", 24 April 1891. De Michelis, 932.
correction. From the outset Deledda was fastidious about the quality of the work that she wished to present to the public. Adamantly craving success, she instinctively realized that her product must be perfect.

Deledda also discerned at an early stage that self-promotion involved drawing public attention to herself. One method of gaining this attention was to link her works to those of well-known writers. She sought, on this account, to have her name included with other published authors in the "album" section of "Paradiso dei bambini" while at the same time apologising to Provaglio for her unrefined contributions. Of a poem for publication she wrote: "Non so se sarà degno degli altri versi che può contenere l'album, ma mi si perdoni: comincio da poco a far versi e la mia musa è ancor rude."13 Such justifications betray a conscious effort to win sympathy from her editor by playing the submissive role of a humble little girl, a part which would prove particularly useful with older men who wished to protect and guide her.14

In order to gain further attention Deledda became a regular contributor to "La piccola posta,"15 the letter section of "Ultima moda", thus placing herself in a lively correspondence with other writers and subscribers. She also capitalized on the effective

13 Deledda, "To Provaglio", 10 April 1891. 930-931.

14 Another such example of an older man enlisted by Deledda to promote her literary career was Count Angelo De Gubernatis, director of the Milanese editorial house Vallardi (from 1891) and founder of the Società italiana per il Folklore in Rome (1893). For Deledda's letters to Angelo De Gubernatis see Di Pilla, Grazia Deledda Premio Nobel per la letteratura 389-519.

15 Di Pilla, 924 n. 2.
tactic of creating volume through reprints.\textsuperscript{16} A poem published as "Perdono" in "Ultima moda" in April 1889, for example, reappeared with only slight variation as "Perdonate" in "Paradiso dei bambini" in May of 1891.\textsuperscript{17} A portion of her novel Stella d'oriente, published initially in serial form in Cagliari's "Avvenire di Sardegna" during 1890, reappeared as "Sull'agri" in "Paradiso dei bambini" in October of 1891.\textsuperscript{18} In effect, a basic instinct for effective self-promotion is readily discernible in Deledda even before the age of twenty. She displayed consistency in the high quality and accuracy of her literary product along with a keen understanding of the importance of regular submissions and of networking with others in the field.

Until 1890 Casa Edoardo Perino had published its reviews under the editorial direction of the Contessa Elda di Montedoro. Subsequently, however, that position was taken over by Epaminonda Provaglio. Yet even after 1890 various of the Perino journals had continued to list the Contessa as their editor. Assuming his editorial duties early in 1891, Provaglio also chose to respond to contributors under the name of his predecessor. After several submissions Deledda came to understand that "La Contessa" and Provaglio were one and the same.\textsuperscript{19} Nevertheless she continued to address her letters to her noble editor. Titles, still prevalent in Deledda's time, had retained their social prestige well after the financial demise of many a noble family. But from her experience growing up

\textsuperscript{16} See notes 7 and 8 above.

\textsuperscript{17} De Michelis, 932 n. 1.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 939 n. 3.

\textsuperscript{19} Grazia Deledda, "To Epaminonda Provaglio", 26 Mar. 1891. De Michelis, 924.
in the social hierarchy of her native Nuoro, Deledda understood the advantages of playing along with Provaglio's ruse and proceeded to exploit her association with alleged aristocracy. She requested that her short story "Il pretore" be published with a dedication "alla mia amica Elda di Montedoro," which implied an intimate association between herself and the Contessa. Provaglio complied, sending her, in jest, a photograph of himself as her friend and noble editor. Her satisfaction over the successful outcome of their secret was clearly apparent in her reply:

Per consolarti alquanto dei disturbi che ti ho dato ti dirò che ora il tuo nome [Contessa Elda di Montedoro] è più che celebre in Sardegna: lo conosceno persino i pastori, e l'altra sera un giovinotto voleva rapirmi il tuo ritratto per portarlo... alla sua fidanzata! ... Ma figurati se glielo lasciai neppure toccare! - Però quasi tutti ti credono davvero donna, una bella contessa bionda e milionaria. Un ragazzo, fratello di una mia amica, che mi fa la corte, è geloso pazzo di te!! - e una signora vuole convincermi che, nonostante il ritratto, tu sei donna e davvero contessa! ... Addio, mia cara Elda, vogliami sempre bene e ricevi i più affettuosì saluti dalla tua Grazietta20

The condescending tone Deledda used to describe the gullibility of her townsfolk on this occasion confirmed her growing realization of the possibilities of acquiring social position through her work and the intellectual distance between herself and the common Sardinian. In this letter there was a self-indulgent sense of social superiority expressed as she delighted in having forged a useful, continental, albeit false association with nobility.

Deledda's behaviour with Provaglio, who was 20 years her senior, seems also to mask in its coquettishness, the discomfort of her overly flirtatious approach. For the sake of discretion she protected herself by emphasising Provaglio's age. However, her message was undoubtedly intended as *double entendre*. It is an evasive yet alluring stance, a modest distancing of Provaglio, intended to tease the male object, while prudently sheltering the female subject. Grazietta continues:

Non mi resta di dirti quindi che se non si tratta d'altro che di considerarti per il migliore dei miei amici, per dimostrarti in qualche modo la mia riconoscenza, la cosa è già fatta. Vedi bene come ti scrivo per dimostrartelo. - Si può scrivere così se non al migliore degli amici? - Ti confesso però che se tu fossi stato più giovane non l'avrei fatto: non per tema di farti innamorare di me con le mie confidenze...e tu poi sei forse ammogliato, - ma perché i giovanotti ridonovolentieri leggendo lettere come questa o la penultima mia, per cui io mi guardo bene dallo scrivere così a gli amici che non hanno varcato almeno la trentina.  

The manner in which Deledda wields her female wiles here is quite manipulative and obviously aimed at emphasising her sexual maturity. The tactic became an effective ploy in dealing with men like Provaglio who were in a position to help her. But playing an opposite role, by the same token, would be more effective with others.

Deledda, it seems, adapted her character for purposes of endorsement. In 1891, for example, Professor Haguenin, who taught French at the University of Berlin, had written to her requesting information concerning her work on Sardinia. The professor, a potential foreign translator and international link, would require a more formal reply than

the friendly tenor of her letters to Provaglio. Consequently the response to him took on a
different tone. Deledda writes:

Come ho avuto l'idea di scrivere?
Chi lo sa?
Ho vissuto coi venti, coi boschi, con le montagne,
ho guardato per giorni, mesi ed anni il lento svolgersi delle
nuvole sul cielo sardo, ho mille e mille volte appoggiato la
testa ai tronchi degli alberi, alle pietre, alle roccie, per
ascoltare la voce delle foglie, ciò che dicevano gli uccelli,
ciò che raccontava l'acqua corrente... e così si è formata la
mia arte, come una canzone od un motivo che sgorga
spontaneo dalle labbra di un poeta primitivo.  

By the turn of the century the myth of the primitive poet had become a conventional and
useful symbol. Thus, with the French professor, Deledda presents herself in the guise of
an ancient sage, a mystical, archaic, timeless artist from a remote island answering
queries from a foreign land. Such a self-portrayal served in this instance to project to
Haguenin an image quite different in character from that of "Grazietta," the darling of
more tender hearts. Haguenin would find in this reply the model she sensed he was
looking for of archaic nobility, a strong primitive spirit burning within the provincial
writer, a type sought out with much enthusiasm by a rising middle-class readership in
Europe at the turn of the century. In order to lend her image a further aura of purity and
isolation, moreover, Deledda adds in her letter:

Tutto il paese mormorò contro di me, si disse che ero mal
avviata (perché purtroppo in molti paesi, e non della sola
Sardegna, si crede che una scrittrice sia una donna... non

Here Deledda suggests that the general opinion held of the female writer as a "loose woman" is unjust and vexatious, at least in her case. She explains to him that she herself, instead, inhabits an especially unique position. Nature offers her, a primitive poet, an alternative to social involvement, which is a man's domain. In accordance with Nature her role and function as a woman are biologically determined. Thus she leads him to the logical conclusion that she is merely a passive recorder of Sardinian cultural history rather than a free thinker.

Where Deledda's letters to Provaglio had revealed the worldly and the sensual side of her, in the letter to Haguenin she transforms herself into a serious and somewhat stereotypical woman writer. Especially after her relocation to Rome in 1900, she will find this role even more befitting her status as a married woman. Liberal or conservative, as suited her purposes, Deledda's fluctuations in character show remarkable powers of entrepreneurial dexterity largely lacking in even the most gifted of her literary contemporaries.  

Deledda always displayed shrewd financial judgment in her dealings with

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23 Ibid. 87.

24 Matilde Serao, perhaps the most worldly and prolific among Deledda's contemporaries was known to have relied heavily upon her journalist husband Edoardo Scarfaglio for the publication of her work. See L. Kroha, "The Early Matilde Serao: An author in Search of a Character," The Woman Writer in Late-Nineteenth-Century Italy (Lewiston New-York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992). 99-119. Deledda also relied on her husband Palmiro Madesani but strictly in a secretarial capacity. See De Michelis, 99-122.
Provaglio. In June of 1891, for example, she debated with him on "le condizioni per la vendita della proprietà letteraria" and the best way to be reimbursed for that "property". Her negotiations with Casa Perino, through Provaglio, resulted in her receiving 250 free copies of her first book *Fior di Sardegna* (1892), in lieu of an unknown original proposal of cash which she would have preferred. She was soon to point out to Provaglio, apparently as a threat, that a publisher in Milan, whom she failed to name, was willing to pay her in cash for her Sardinian stories rather than in extra copies. Sarcastically she indicated to Provaglio that "un editore di Milano ... me lo pagherà mille lire (altro che copie, non è vero?)."

Deledda's business letters were often an incongruous coupling of traditional morality and suggestive flirting, of innocence and astute entrepreneurial finesse. Her advertising skills, as well as her emotional manipulation of others, were quite finely honed by the early stages of her career. During the course of the 1890s she was already showing considerable experience in the literary marketplace. She was sufficiently adept, for example, to have advised Provaglio on how he might best publish the contemporary writer, Sabatino Lauriti's *La vita militare* in Sardinia. In this case Grazia Deledda, the little-known and youthful contributor to Perino's journals instructs the seasoned editor in this fashion:


\[\text{Deledda, "To Provaglio", 30 Jan. 1892. De Michelis, 943.}\]

\[\text{Deledda, "To Provaglio", 30 Jan. 1892. De Michelis, 943.}\]

\[\text{Deledda, "To Provaglio", 30 Jan. 1892. De Michelis, 943.}\]
It is interesting to note too that while Deledda is knowledgeable of the market, little of her offers of assistance to Provaglio were reciprocally beneficial to him. Promising to promote his books in Sardinia, for example, she had written to Provaglio of non-existent reviews of his work in Sardinia's leading newspaper "La Sassarese." In actuality his 1891 *Regina delle Fate* and *Mago delle sette teste* remained in Deledda's possession and received barely a passing notice in a minor review, "Vita Sarda." And yet she was successful in engaging Provaglio's attention regarding her own literary activities on the continent by exaggerating her collaboration with Rome's *Tribuna illustrata.*

Manipulating matters for her own benefit, then, was certainly not foreign to Grazia's strategy for success. As she admits to Stanis Manca:

> ... ho il sogno continuo, tormentoso, febbre della celebrità ... Perciò mi attacco, quasi insconsapevolmente, a chi mi promette di aiutarmi a farmi un nome, a chi opera qualcosa per me.\(^{31}\)

While she tended at times to understate herself in order to glean sympathy

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\(^{28}\) Deledda, "To Provaglio", 30 Nov. 1891. De Michelis, 945.

\(^{29}\) De Michelis, 947 n. 1.

\(^{30}\) Ibid. 945 n. 3.

\(^{31}\) Deledda, "To Manca", 9 Aug. 1893. Rasy, 75.
Deledda could as effectively overstate her abilities with a view to convincing her mentors of a precocious literary talent. Having read Anna Karenina, she wrote to the prominent critic Angelo De Gubernatis in 1893, that she too had thought of creating a Sardinian equivalent of the noble Lavine, Tolstoy's protagonist. She explained to De Gubernatis that saving Sardinia from financial ruin was tied to the peasants' return to the land, as had been suggested as well for Russia by Tolstoy in his famous novel. In her letter she asserts that Tolstoy, in effect, had beaten her to the literary punch.

Io avevo l'intenzione di scrivere un romanzo per dimostrare che solo l'agricoltura può salvare le Sardegna... ma poi, letto l'Anna Karenina... che non avevo ancor letto... mi caddero le braccia... circa il mio progetto. Inconsapevolmente io avevo ideato di creare un Lavine sardo... pur sentendomi altera di aver avuto l'idea del grande romanziere russo. Si sarebbe anche detto che io cercavo di imitarlo e si sarebbe riso di me, non è vero?32

Setting herself on an equal footing with one of the great writers of the time seemed neither arrogant nor unreasonable to her. For Deledda already perceived herself, at the age of twenty-two, as the Saviour of her people, if only they would be so wise as to listen to her words.

Se i ricchi sardi studiassero l'agricoltura e l'applicassero alle loro terre, ogni malanno sarebbe finito... io vorrei dire in alto queste cose, io vorrei comunicare le mie idee ai Sardi - ma riuscirei a farmi ascoltare?33

33Ibid. 453.
While she seemed genuinely concerned with the welfare of her native Sardinia, Deledda's work for the preservation of provincial culture can hardly be taken as totally altruistic. By the turn of the century the popularity of "folklore" had grown significantly among a wide-ranging, international bourgeois reading public so that the times were particularly propitious for her taking up the cause of Sardinia's cultural heritage. As a result, as we have seen, she involved herself in writing articles and organizing others in the collection of folklore material from the various regions of Sardinia for De Gubernatis's Società italiana per il Folklore. The need to be heard as a meaningful and preferably influential voice for Sardinia lingered on in Deledda's fictional work with her use of traditional customs and in her descriptions of provincial settings. Yet while her love for Sardinia often rendered the physical descriptions of her island beautifully lyrical, her interpretation of traditional social intercourse was influenced by her own experience of the culture and by those maladies which her life there had spawned. As Sebastiano Dessenay suggests,

... i problemi della Sardegna si configurano nella mente della Deledda presso a poco come si presentavano alla confusa coscienza della Barbagia. Ed è questa confusa coscienza che la Deledda rispecchia. Mancava alla Deledda, così ai suoi pastori, la consapevolezza critica della situazione storica.

Her writings, as a result, tend to reiterate in a kind of freeze-framed temporality, a

34 See note 14 above.

35 Sebastiano Dessenay, "Note per un'indagine sull'ambiente di Grazia Deledda", Ciusa, Onoranze 14.
Sardinian mythology rather than a Sardinian reality. It is a primitive mythological landscape wherein Deledda recreates a past life over which, as a writer, she may at last exercise considerable control.

By the late 1890s a mature Grazia Deledda surely understood that her need to write in perpetuity could only be carried out safely within the boundaries of a strict affiliation to the dominant culture which was still, at the turn of the century, largely reactionary and conspicuously patriarchal. It was all the more so on the island of Sardinia. Deledda's wisdom and strength lay in her ability to co-opt that very system and use it to her best advantage. There was no doubt that in order to continue writing she would have to escape the prison of her cultural background. Yet she was severely limited, despite her letter-writing, by a tradition which perceived any relationship not leading to marriage as a disgrace to the entire family. Compounding Grazia's problem was the fact that her writing was clearly seen as an aberration, a threat to accepted moral standards, an activity unbecoming a woman. Her work had consistently been perceived by her extended family as undermining her own and her sisters' chances of forming stable marriages. Consequently she suffered intense criticism for her disloyalty to a strict patriarchal code which demanded a modesty from her which was not soon forthcoming.

On a personal level Deledda was also severely curtailed in forming relationships which might lead to marriage by her own acceptance of a social hierarchy in which she herself held a privileged position. Within this world, unfortunately, men like Andrea Pirodda who were genuinely interested in her, actually threatened her future. Although he became a teacher, he was after all, from poor peasant stock and as such unlikely to ever
be able to make a name for himself. Stanis Manca, the only solvent man who met the social requirements she chose to live by, did not reciprocate her affection. Her writing had only added fuel to already raging fires by further compromising the social standing of her financially threatened family. Her dowry would not be attractive to a wealthy man. The mere fact of a woman boldly expressing her feelings, whether in letters or in fiction was considered, well into the twentieth century, foolhardiness if not downright morally unsound. Yet it was critical that Deledda continue her writing for it had become a virtual lifeline to sanity. In effect there was no life for her beyond it. Real life in Sardinia, with or without her craft, had become intolerable.

As early as 1891 Deledda was struggling with her personal frustrations regarding her work. As she writes to Stanis Manca, the whole idea of her becoming an author was beyond her control:

È un sogno stolto, pazzo, infondato, che Dio deve avermi regalato in un momento di cattivo umore; è un sogno che io vorrei scacciare e non posso ... È il sogno della gloria: sogno folle per qualsiasi donna e tanto più per me che sono un nulla, che non potrò mai innalzarmi al di sopra delle nostre piccole montagne sarde...

The negative intonation of her words "... vorrei sciacciare e non posso", and "... sono un nulla" are a clear indication that under any dream of success are feelings of guilt and sin somehow connected to her writing and to her wish to escape Sardinia. Her persistence in writing despite all odds suggests here a kind of self-flagellation beyond her control, a

punishment akin to a curse sent by a God of "cattivo umore." Underlying her diversionary explanation of why she writes are familiar symptoms of emotional bereavement and self-demeanment which are self-imposed. Practically speaking, in order to rise above her Sardinian heritage, that legacy which would deprive her of personhood, she required a stability which only traditional religion, marriage and money could provide.

But the tragedies unfolding in the Deledda family had triggered doubt about her ability to become truly free so that she might continue to write. Tearful and angry, she had decided to give up writing completely and to return to domestic duty and her needlework. During this period of submission Deledda succeeded in tempering her pain, at least temporarily, by identifying her lot with Fate. But it became clear as time went on that any retreat could only be temporary and she soon rationalized her return to writing by turning to religion. In Cosima, she describes her own coming to terms with the forbidden desire of authorship. With a growing understanding of life's pain, Cosima's compassion for the lot of human-kind leads her to conclude "... che solo la pietà può sollevare l'anima piegata dal male degli altri, e portarla sulle sue ali fino alle altissime soglie di un mondo ove un giorno tutti saremo uguali nella gloria di Dio." The function of her writing, then, would be to teach a greater truth, noble and unassailable grounds from which anyone, but especially a woman, could write without fear of the of the censure of society.


38 Deledda, Cosima 94.
In the final analysis Deledda had recognized quite early on that her aspirations for the future could not depend on sustenance from her nuclear family nor from men who could not, or would not support her ambition to be an author. Straying too far from the path of traditional beliefs and still achieving success seemed also to be out of the question. Consequently she would be pro-active in seeking a mate who could champion her ideals and her aspirations within the confines of convention. Such a mainstay was to be personified in Palmiro Madesani.39

Deledda’s letters to Madesani, written late in 1899, just prior to their marriage in January of 1900, reveal that interplay of entrepreneurship and traditional behaviour, of rigidity and managerial skill which must have made Grazia Deledda a partner to be reckoned with. She had been conditioned to the structured format of marriage as the necessary completion for a woman. It was, to be sure, a sanctioned state of being in which she might also write in peace. Obviously frustrated with her romantic failures to date, in November of 1899, Deledda travelled to Cagliari in a conscious effort to mix business with pleasure. While there she was immediately captivated by the good looks and charm of Palmiro Madesani, a young civil servant with a bright future and a high degree of social presence. On the rebound from not one but two failed matches (Pirodda and Manca), Deledda probably saw Madesani and marriage fitting retributive justice on previous lovers: the realization of every girl’s dream. For the already mature twenty-nine year old woman it was surely a much sought-after deliverance, for she had already well

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39 Palmiro Madesani was born in Cicognara, near Padova, on April 16, 1865, and died in Rome, November 15, 1946.
overstepped the traditional time limit considered normal for initiation into marriage and childbirth. Her pressing need for stability drove the relationship with Madesani to quick consumption in a marriage which took place in Nuoro after a brief, though intense, long-distance epistolary courtship.

It was during November and December of 1899 that an almost daily flow of letters between Nuoro and Cagliari was establishing the parameters of Deledda's requirements of the relationship. Madesani fit her future projections well by virtue of his social presentability and financial stability. Of great importance too was the fact that he afforded her the real possibility of a legitimate escape from the suffocating atmosphere of Nuoro, a chance to slough off the fetters of family and provincialism. Madesani, in effect, seemed perfect in fulfilling every possible requirement she needed to feel legitimate in her ambition. Her passion for Madesani seemed genuine as well though predicated upon a mutual gift-reward arrangement and on the necessity of his loving her to distraction. "Scrivimi, scrivimi," she begs of Madesani. "Anch'io ti scriverò sempre, ti scriverò a lungo, penserò sempre a te. Sei contento così?... Amami molto intanto, e ricevi il più intenso dei baci dalla tua, tutta tua Grazia."[^40] The desperation of this outburst did not seem to exceed the romantic excitement to which the betrothed are sometimes prone. But Grazia here is expressing more than just love. She promises to think only of Palmiro fearing that she may not be able to hold him. Madesani's commitment, after all, was her final hope of salvation and the perfect foundation on which she might continue to live in a literary world of her own design. She seems

desperate not to lose him, her perfect and perhaps final opportunity for a match impeccably tailored to her marital expectations and career needs. Educated and presentable, Madesani was also well linked socially and politically. Moreover, as a Continental Northerner he offered Deledda flight to the mainland and to Rome, Italy's political, social and cultural capital. There, as an employee of the state, Madesani could provide her long-term financial security as well.

What is most striking about Deledda's pre-nuptial letters to Madesani is the inclusion of business concerns which have to do with the promotion of her writing. Barely a month after she had met him her passionate love letters incorporated not only detailed marriage arrangements but also instructions to him regarding the promotion of her work with her literary contacts in Cagliari. With her letter of December 1, 1899, for example, she sends directions for the completion of the necessary documentation required for the reading of their marital bans. But she also includes all her publications, two newspapers, a book to be passed on to a colleague and a recent article to be delivered to her Cagliari publisher.\textsuperscript{41} Her letter of December 6th is dedicated almost entirely to business matters with her own literary promotion taking precedence over nuptial details and expressions of love. In fact, Madesani's position in the relationship, rather than that of the betrothed, seemed that of support staff under Deledda's own direct tutelage. Assured and now fully in control of the relationship she writes to her beloved:

\begin{quote}
... fra un mese tutto sarà all'ordine... ora non è più possibile dubitare; saremo felici, saremo felici! Scriverò subito a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} Deledda, "To Madesani", 1 Dec. 1899. Di Pilla, 525-528.
Panzacchi, giacché tarda a rispondermi. Sai, mi scrivono che il Vecchio della montagna, di cui ti ho mandato il terzo estratto, incontra un vero successo: forse sarà tradotto in tedesco prima che finisca di esser pubblicato in italiano; sono in trattativa. Ho subito pronte le novelle: ho chiesto all'Agnelli, che le pubblicherà, mille lire, ma non me ne darà forse più della metà perché son già quasi tutte pubblicate. Mi riservo però il diritto di traduzione...

Inoltre Sofia Bisi Albini mi scrive che fra poco terrà a Milano una conferenza su di me e l'opera mia: figurati il prestigio che me ne verrà in Italia e fuori, perché sarà fatta appunto per la colonia straniera. Io spero molto dal mio avvenire, e ne sono contenta anche per te.\(^{42}\)

Clearly traditional gender roles are significantly reversed here as Deledda speaks of her work in progress and includes Madesani in her plans for future success but only as an afterthought. While information is scarce concerning their marriage, given Deledda's own prudent silence, it is likely from indications such as these in her letters to her future husband, that Grazia would not likely have played a subservient role to him. We do know that after their marriage Madesani acted as Deledda's business manager and handled much of her correspondence with foreign translators.\(^{43}\) Later, even her son Sardus played a secretarial role in attending to the needs of his famous writing mother.\(^{44}\)

Despite the legitimacy of departure from Sardinia as a married woman Deledda nonetheless suffered intense feelings of guilt from what she perceived to be the abandonment of her family. Here again Madesani was her saviour. "Tu mi fai


\(^{44}\) L. Sacchetti, Grazia Deledda: Ricordi e testimonianze (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1971) 155-156.
dimenticare il dolore passato," she writes to him, "il dispiacere per l'abbandono della famiglia." Yet it is not surprising that Sardinia where, she admits, "io ho tanto lavorato e sofferto," will remain the site of the better part of her writings for the next thirty years. The characters and situations of her novels will invariably reiterate that time of her young life so fraught with family crisis and emotional upheaval. Despite her happy exodus from Sardinia with the perfect husband and her subsequent success as a writer, Deledda returns inescapably to provincial and conservative themes of sin and suffering where Catholic morality is preferred over true love, where patriarchy wins out over social justice and where submission to the will of God overrules the sinful pursuit of Eros. Such themes rework and rebuild situations which were connected to her own early experience and behaviour so that often her stories seem interminable discussions on the possibility of change undermined by the inevitability of recapture. Such tortuous repetition and resounding fatalism lend to Deledda's fiction a lingering sense of oppression, a muted tone of dissatisfaction and recurring guilt, an undercurrent of freedom denied in characters who choose to punish themselves and who, even when given the opportunity, prefer not to flee the inequitable laws imposed on them by a blind and seemingly pitiless tradition. It is just the stuff too of what would become the highly marketable romance novel which, in the prospering new Italy of Deledda's time, played well to a growing literate and self-reliant middle-class readership.

Chapter V: Gender Wars

A. "Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa."

Deledda's female characters are unusually tortured and long suffering. As early as La via del male of 1896, Grazia had firmly established the subject matter of her future writing. The characters of this major novel, as with many of her subsequent works, are developed against a provincial, religious and social background which assures that they will never achieve true happiness. And herein lies the source of her drama. Her characters seem doomed in their natural striving for an illusive ideal of love which religion and tradition inevitably continue to deny them.¹

Maria Noina, the heroine of La via del male, Deledda's first widely successful Sardinian novel, is a young woman of Nuoro caught between her cultural conditioning and her desires; she is torn between her love for Pietro Benu and her loyalties to God and her bourgeois background. The daughter of the well-to-do Nicola Noina, a former peasant turned property-owner, Maria is a product both of the practical earthy philosophy of her father and the aristocratic sensibilities of her mother Luisa who, though of noble birth, had married beneath her station the lowly Nicola Noina for love. Consequently, Luisa's status in the community had become ineluctably and permanently compromised since her husband, though enriched by the marriage had remained a peasant at heart.

¹ Mario Aste discusses the restrictions of religious beliefs in his Grazia Deledda: Ethnic novelist 71-78.
With the passage of time Luisa, forgetting her own passion and suffering under the weight of hard work and ostracism, does not wish her daughter Maria to fall prey to the same illusion that led to her downfall. There are more important considerations than love for a woman of means. As a result, when Pietro Benu, a poor man, comes upon the scene in search of work in the Noina household, Nicola finds in him a common bond while Luisa is immediately uneasy about her daughter's eligibility and suspicious of the handsome young man.

Pietro and Maria, however seem destined for each other. Deledda describes them as "Così vicini, bellissimi entrambi, nei loro costumi caratteristici, servo e padrone apparivano, ed erano, campioni magnifici d'una stessa razza." Yet, Deledda goes on to say, "eppure una distanza enorme li divideva."2 That which divides them, of course, is social standing and money. Maria is the daughter of "principali."3 Pietro, on the other hand, comes from a formerly well-to-do local family but one whose fortune had been lost in the changing economic times. All the more so does the failure of Pietro's family bode ill for a possible relationship between the young people.

Pietro, nonetheless, is taken on as a servant and set to work on the properties of the Noina family. Sabrina, a poor cousin of the family also works for the household. Pietro soon becomes romantically interested in Sabrina and she in him. But Sabrina, wishing to marry a rich man, suppresses her feelings for Pietro and rejects his advances.

2 Deledda, La via del male 17.

3 "... un principale, cioè uno di quei ricchi paesani che formano tutta una razza caratteristica, vantano una certa nobiltà di sangue, ed anche un po' di coltura." Ibid. 130.
Angered and seeking revenge, Pietro turns his amorous attentions toward the vulnerable Maria who, unlike Sabrina, is inexperienced in matters of love. She accepts Pietro's company as a friend knowing full well, however, that she should not fraternize with staff. In time, naturally, Maria becomes sexually drawn to the young man but her upbringing turns her feelings to guilt for she senses that she has transgressed not only her religious teachings which demand chastity of body and mind, but also that she has betrayed her family as well as Pietro himself. She knows in all good conscience, that she will never be able to marry him because she must remain loyal to her superior heritage.

Non faceva già del male? Era forse bene che si amassero, così senza speranza? Finalmente ella si accorgeva d'essere in peccato; peccato di desiderio, di menzogna, di disubbidienza verso i genitori, d'inganno verso il suo inferiore.4

Distraught by her exaggerated sense of transgression she distances Pietro who is sent to work in the countryside, far from Nuoro. While Pietro is away servicing Noina properties, Maria becomes engaged to the more respectable and financially secure Francesco Rosana but finds him physically repulsive. Pietro, in the meantime is incarcerated for petty theft and while in jail plans his revenge. Maria marries Francesco in due course. A few months later Francesco is found dead, his throat slit by an unknown assailant. Pietro, at first the prime suspect, is soon found innocent of the crime, and eventually leaves the area but he returns after five years having earned a reasonable amount of money.

4 Ibid. 122.
Infatti Pietro non era più un servo, ma un negoziante che faceva fortuna; e tutti lo rispettavano, anche perché egli era un giovane serio... in tutto il vigore della sua giovinezza... allorché tutto vestito a nuovo e con l'orologio e il fazzoletto bianco in tasca, si recava alla messa di mezzogiorno, qualche ragazza benestante si degnava di guardarlo teneramente.²

Pietro’s plan, of course, is to marry the widowed Maria. Maria still finds Pietro irresistible despite warnings of his evil deeds and intentions. They marry quickly but Maria soon learns from Sabrina that her first husband Francesco was in fact murdered by Pietro. Fearful that he might kill her if she tries to leave or expose him Maria, newly enmeshed by a marriage she cannot reverse, has no alternative but to remain silent, the prey of Pietro’s controlling designs.

Deledda portrays the women in La via del male as victims of a system which has taught them to submit. Maria's mother Luisa obviously had felt herself betrayed for marrying a poor man instead of retaining her dignity and marrying a rich one. Her punishment is the humiliation of a life lived through demeaning physical toil with a husband who is neither her equal nor her soul-mate. Ironically she must also watch helplessly as her daughter Maria suffers a similar fate despite the fact that she has married the well-to-do Francesco. Mother and daughter, having chosen dissimilar roads in life, are equally pained as a result of their choices. Sabrina also had visions of improving her lot by marrying a prosperous farmer. Yet her fate was no better, destined as she was to be punished with violence inflicted on her by a boorish though wealthy

² Ibid. 274.
husband. She ages quickly bearing her much older unloved husband many unwanted children.

Maria is even given a second chance. But she too is ill-served by the system. Having first given up her true love Pietro for the wealthy, yet loathsome Francesco, Maria is soon widowed. When Pietro returns a wealthy man and she finally marries him for love, her happiness turns to fear when she discovers that her new husband has, after all, murdered her first one. Trapped, she becomes the property of Pietro who has married her not, ironically, out of love, but in order to acquire her property. The novel ends with Maria living in subservience and in fear and with a chilling conclusion: "Come nessun medico poteva guarire il loro male, nessun giudice poteva condannarli ad una pena maggiore di quella a cui erano condannati."\(^6\)

In the system of checks and balances which punishes women despite their decisions or good intentions, Deledda shows that instilling fear is an essential element in controlling them especially if it is reinforced by guilt. The ever present sense of doom and inadequacy created by the terror and guilt preprogrammed into women from infancy, are all the more effective when women are also made to feel that they deserve whatever punishment or pain is meted out to them. And finally, the ultimate humiliation, the master stroke in the strategy obtaining total submission, women are trained to believe that their suffering and pain are not only necessary and redemptive in nature, but that they should also find pleasure in this state of affairs. As Deledda explains,

\[^6\] Ibid. 329.
Una volta Maria ebbe persino paura di Pietro, perchè egli la guardava con uno sguardo quasi feroce, con gli occhi verdignoli, iridati e misteriosi; ma quella paura del maschio, del predatore violento, la illanguidiva, accresceva in lei il piacere della dedizione...7

Herein the inference of a belief that women enjoy being suppressed. Suffering itself, then, can easily be interpreted in La via del male as a female characteristic, one which actually ennobles women, a kind of perverse femininity.

As the subjects of impossible moral and religious strictures and unjust societal stereotyping, the women in this novel are clearly portrayed as silent victims. Moreover in laying bare both sides of a system which allows and even encourages them to make choices, Deledda shows too that it invariably condemns them whatever choice they may make. Luisa, Maria and Sabrina are left in unhappy, even threatening states, despite all their good intentions. Nor is there any glimmer of hope in the final lines of the novel which suggest that a life of expiation is not more satisfying or bearable than what has gone before:

Da anni ed anni essi procedevano assieme per una via grigia, vigliata dal fantasma del male; ed erano giunti ad un crocicchio, ora, intorno al quale s'aprivano altre strade, tutti uguali, tortuose e buie.

Tanto valeva l'una o l'altra di quelle vie: tutte conducevano allo stesso luogo di espiazione.8

Among Deledda's long-suffering women characters is Maria of La madre (1920).

7 Ibid. 305.
8 Ibid. 329.
Like her namesake in La via del male, this heroine bears the name of suffering itself, that of the supreme symbol of Catholic womanhood, Mary, mother of Christ. Maria, widowed early in her marriage, has accompanied her son Don Paolu back to the town where she was born, a town in central Sardinia where he has been commissioned by the church to take up parish duties many years after the death of a former pastor. After seven years of residence in the town, Maria, suspicious of her son's actions after following him one night, discovers that he has a secret lover. Deledda, then, begins the story with Maria's realization that Don Paolu has broken his vow of chastity. Immediately a dramatic synopsis of religious and cultural tabu comes under scrutiny. The vow of celibacy has been broken by a minister of Christ, the very Christ, in Maria's belief system, "Qui tollis peccata mundi," who sacrificed himself to expiate the sins of Mankind. Although Paolu has sinned against his church, it is his mother who feels responsible, for it is she who has failed in her vigilance. Moreover, the real threat to Paolu's ministry comes only after he has been found out. Indeed, discovery seems much more serious to him than the crime itself, and it is not primarily conscience but fear of condemnation by his parishioners that causes him to break off the illicit relationship. Rather than bearing the responsibility squarely on his shoulders he sends his lover Agnese a letter, through his mother no less, informing her that they must terminate their clandestine meetings. But Maria's problems do not end here.

As a mother and as a servant of the faith, Maria is duty-bound to address and to set right her son's fall. Still a strong believer in the devil and the possession of the soul by evil spirits, Maria is trapped by cultural myths as well as by the precepts of the
church. Both work together to instill in her a fear that punishment is imminent unless sin be expiated. Despite her peasant upbringing, a staunchly hierarchical feudal background, her position as the mother of the town priest had endowed her with the special respect of the community which, after seven years, she had come to value highly. Her stake in Paolu's celibacy is more than a mere wish to help save his soul, for if they are not both to be drummed out of town in disgrace, her son must make amends and return upon the path of virtue.

Retaining his station as a minister of God, then, demands not only Paolu's virginal purity in the eyes of his parishioners but also implies for his mother position and security. Maria, in effect, experiences the threat of the devil in the same way as she does the threat to her social prestige. To make matters worse Paolu has become, in the eyes of his community, nothing short of a miracle worker. Because people believe his that his predecessor had been possessed of evil spirits and had died in sin, Don Paolu, as one of their own, had been welcomed by the townsfolk as a sign of Divine Intervention. Deledda, in fact, casts his arrival in Christo-mimetic imagery with Nature herself calmed by his coming.

Passato il fiume, il vento si calmò. Tutti gli abitanti del paesetto, che aspettavano il nuovo parroco, come il Messia, si erano riuniti nella piazza della chiesa. Ed ecco d'improvviso i più giovani di essi si riuniscono in gruppo e scendono incontro ai viaggiatori fino alla riva del fiume. Vengono giù come uno stormo d'aquilotti della montagna: l'aria è agitata dai loro gridi. Arrivati accanto al loro parroco lo circondano, lo conducono in trionfo, esplodendo di tanto in tanto i loro fucili in segno di gioia.
In the throes of breaking off his affair with Agnese, Deledda reinforces Paolu's deification by the townsfolk. All the more so then is he considered a redeemer when he is called to read holy script over the child Nina, thought to be possessed by the devil. The child's uncontrollable fit is soon calmed by the priest's gentle ways. Within the context of a rural setting where myth and superstition easily take hold of the imagination, this event is perceived as miraculous and word quickly spreads that Paolu possesses the holy power of healing the sick, of casting out the devil himself.

It is not without some irony that Deledda subsequently draws her second coming of the Saviour. Paolu is pictured returning from "the Mount" on horseback, where he had been on a mission administering Extreme Unction to the dying. Again with bonfires blazing an even more devout and credulous congregation rushes to receive their priest back into its midst.

Thus does Deledda further complicate Paolu's plight by not only aggravating the fears of


10 Ibid. 132-133.
his mother but by exaggerating the general belief of his parishioners that he is their Saviour. Now only supreme shame and condemnation could result if the truth were to be known.

Agnese, the other woman in the novel, has become involved with Paolu convinced that they would run away together. Understandably devastated by his letter terminating their affair, she reacts by becoming physically ill over it. Paolu, in sympathy, pays her one final visit and attempts to convince her that, although he will always love her, they must part and he must dedicate himself wholly to his ministry. The affair is to remain their secret. Agnese, incensed, rallies and gives Paolu an ultimatum; either he leaves the town immediately or she will expose the truth of their affair as he celebrates Holy Mass the following day. Taken aback but believing that Agnese will not follow through with her threat, Paolu decides to celebrate the Mass just the same, apparently having chosen God over his earthly passions.

Maria, who has learned of Agnese's plan to shame her son publicly is panic-stricken as she sits in the last pew of the church next morning, waiting to see if Agnese will indeed appear. And appear she does. At the end of the ceremony Agnese approaches the altar to make her announcement but slips and finds herself kneeling suddenly on the bottom altar step. She is immobilized. Paolu quickly leaves for the sacristy and the threat passes with no one except Paolu and his mother realizing what has almost happened. As the congregation leaves the church, however, Maria is discovered dead in her pew and the story is brought to a dramatic and ambiguous conclusion:
Paolu fu già di volo, ancora rivestito del càmice, e s'inginocchiò, stretto dalla folla, per guardare meglio la madre distesa sul pavimento con la testa sul grembo di una donna.

"Madre, madre?"
Il viso era fermo e duro, gli occhi socchiusi, i denti ancora stretti nello sforzo di non gridare. Egli intese subito ch'ella era morta della stessa pena, dello stesso terrore che egli aveva potuto superare. E anche lui strinse i denti per non gridare, quando sollevò gli occhi e nella nuvola confusa della folla che si accumulava attorno incontrò gli occhi di Agnese.  

Like the lovers left suspended staring at each other, the reader too remains dangling in doubt. Although Agnese had been prevented from making disclosure by a chance stumbling it is by no means certain that she will remain silent in the future. Indeed the final glance of the lovers may well have been intended as a challenge. Paolu seems saved from disgrace by his mother's sacrifice but the reprieve may only be temporary. The mother dies for the sins of her son, but there may be no redemption after all. Could this imply a parody of Christ's sacrifice for mankind? Deledda would probably not have gone that far but she has drawn the Christ figure as a weak and vacillating character who has not been able to forego the call of love or tell the truth. Consequently the reader surely would doubt Paolu's ability to ward off the continued threat he now faces from Agnese without his mother's protection. Deledda's message is once more uncertain.

It is precisely in her evasions that Deledda makes her strongest case against the hypocrisy of the church and the injustices of the social order. She characterizes Maria, for example, as initially strong, an effective supporter of the laws of both church and

11 Ibid. 197.
community. But Maria lives in an environment, and by a set of religious codes, which she must die for. Although she is most willing to sacrifice herself in Christ-like fashion she questions God's law.

"Perché, Signore, perché?"
Non osava finire la sua domanda, ma la domanda stava in fondo al suo cuore come una pietra in fondo al pozzo.
Perché, Signore, Paolu non poteva amare una donna? Tutti possono amare, anche i servi e i mandarini, anche i ciechi e i condannati al carcere; perché il suo Paolu, la sua creatura, lui solo non poteva amare.12

The question remains unanswered and Deledda, with weighted irony, has Antioco the young altar-boy assure Maria that "Essi stessi, i preti più giovani avevano chiesto di vivere liberi e casti, lontani dalla donna..13

Both Maria and Agnese are adversely affected by "a savage tradition of chastity,"14 on opposite sides of the man to whom they are bound by ties of love. Maria timidly questions ecclesiastical tradition yet the reality of earthly contamination remains inevitable. Agnese, on the other hand, literally balks at the hypocrisy of religious and cultural laws which allow trespass but only if it is kept confidential. Her outrage with Paolu and his church is clear. When he comes to visit her after she has received his letter ending their affair Agnese explodes in anger:

12 Ibid. 139.

13 Ibid.

Credi di parlare con una bambina? Sono vecchia; mi hai fatto invecchiare tu, in poche ore. La linea dritta della vita sarebbe quella di continuare la tresca così, di nascosto, vero? Di trovarmi uno sposo, io; di far celebrare le mie nozze da te... e continuare a vederci, e ingannare tutti per tutta la vita? Va', va', tu non mi conosci, se credi questo. Tu ieri notte dicevi: "sì, andiamo via; io lavorerò, saremo sposi... E questa notte invece vieni a parlarmi di Dio e di sacrificio.  

Here Deledda has set forth a convincing argument for truth as the only real redemption for both men and women living in an environment where duplicity reigns supreme. While the vow of celibacy is almost, but not finally challenged here in Deledda's La madre, both women characters have at least addressed just how negatively it has affected their lives. Maria is killed by it. Agnese's fate is less sure. Certainly Deledda's ambiguous conclusion to the novel speaks more of our author's apprehensions than it does to a clear challenge to the system. Viewed, however, with these very apprehensions in mind, the final statement might be read at best as a continued defiance. Deledda hardly resolves the women's issues by the end of La madre. Rather, she leaves any possible resolution uncomfortably inconclusive. And herein lies the strength of her novel. She does not allow her readers the option of discovering what may have happened, had Agnese spoken, had the laws of church and community been exposed for their hypocrisy. Rather an impending conflict is suggested. Stronger women, such as Agnese, have emerged in a traditional though changing environment where the compensations of suffering seem less and less to be respected by a new generation. By  

15 Deledda, La madre 171.
the end of the novel we cannot be totally sure whether Agnese has been totally or just temporarily silenced.

The concept of culpability as inherently female is nowhere so strong as in Deledda's *L'edera* of 1908. In this novel Annesa, a poor foundling is taken in by Don Simone, patriarch of the noble, yet languishing Decherchi clan. Donna Rachele, Don Simone's wife, has raised Annesa as her own daughter. But as she matures the wealth of the family diminishes, the result of Don Simone's bad investments as well as his son's decadent behaviour and incompetence. Paolu, a nephew, exacerbates the Decherchi downfall by borrowing against the family name to support his personal amusement at neighbouring festas. Paolu is married to Kallina, a rich but sickly woman who bears him a daughter. The child Rosa is born terribly deformed, and when her mother dies it is Annesa who virtually raises her. All the Decherchi servants are eventually discharged for lack of funds and Annesa, reduced to the status of a maid becomes engaged to Gantine, the bastard son of Paolu's dead father. Yet Annesa truly loves Paolu. But with the Decherchi collapse, Gantine is seen as a logical match for Annesa since he now holds a similar position. Both are not quite family and both are poor. Annesa's fate is established but her feelings do not correspond: "Ella, che amava Gantine perché rassomigliava a Paolu, così come si ama il fuoco perché ricorda il sole, piangeva, taceva e lavorava."16 Depressed over his financial failures, Paolu easily takes the vulnerable Annesa as a lover.

Since the Decherchi clan find themselves in dire financial distress Paolu is sent

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out to borrow money. But the family credit is poor and he returns home empty-handed. The eldest of the clan, Ziu Zua, bedridden and on death's door, refuses to donate his rent certificates to the family cause. In an attempt to save the Decherchis from bankruptcy and Paolu from suicide, Annesa, who has been nursing Ziu Zua, suffocates him in his bed. But the certificates hoarded under his pillow prove valueless. Paolu is the first suspect of the crime but attention soon turns to Annesa who flees to Nuoro.

Again, here in L'edera, the women suffer for their choices. Initially Annesa's good fortune lands her in a well-to-do family. She is raised as a Decherchi and so acquires the security, a well as all the emotional conditioning of her adopted class. She desires Paolu with whom she was raised, not the lowly servant Gantine. Desperate that she will lose Paolu and that he will lose the family fortune she attempts to save both with murder. Paolu's inability to raise funds, in fact, justifies Annesa's committing the heinous crime, for money and for love.

Annesa's role, then, is conflicted from the outset. She is like a daughter of the family having been raised as a sibling by her benefactors but she does not have Decherchi blood. While her emotional relationship to the family is one of offspring, her unknown heritage distances her from the privileges of rank. She may serve but not marry into the family. Consequently, even when his wife Kallina dies, Paolu is still unavailable to Annesa. Deledda's construction of the drama of Annesa's situation owes much of its force, indeed, to this impossible positioning of her heroine. It must be remembered too that Deledda characterizes her as an orphan of unknown background. Some of Deledda's characters think Annesa could be the daughter of the king, some that she is from the
continent. Others again think that she may have been kidnapped. The key factor here is that no one, not even Annesa herself, knows who she really is. This surely suggests that Deledda's choice of a woman who cannot ultimately be delineated as a specific woman with known roots, could imply that Annesa's story is the story of any or, possibly, of every woman.

Deledda clearly defines the traditional belief of her culture that all women are naturally born to sin when, after her crime, Annesa runs to the mountains in order to avoid capture by the authorities. There she is intercepted by her father confessor Prete Virdis, who tries to convince her to confess her crime and gives her the words she must recite to the authorities. "Ecco, tu devi parlare così" he tells Annesa,

Io sono la colpevole: io, io che ho ucciso non per odio, non per amore, ma per interesse. Io sono il serpente e la donna, e ho strisciato anni e anni intorno all'albero del frutto proibito, e ho indotto l'uomo debole a peccare con me. E quando mi sono stancata del peccato della carne, ho rivolto i miei desideri ad altre cose: ho detto a me stessa: voglio avvincere a me l'uomo con altri lacci...  

"Altri lacci" here, of course, are the riches which tempt the female soul already inclined to sin and betrayal. Just as Eve was tempted by the apple, so too is all womankind, including Annesa, inherently tempted to the vanity of riches. Prete Virdis, then, defines Annesa as the First Woman, the ultimate temptress, the originator of sin itself. Like Eve, Annesa has betrayed her beloved and caused the fall of man from the Garden of Eden.

17 Ibid. 40-41.

18 Ibid. 180.
Paolu, on the other hand, is portrayed by Deledda as Adam, the innocent victim betrayed.

By introducing the beliefs of Prete Virdis regarding women, Deledda seems at first to have been criticizing the very origin of that particularly efficient set of counter-checks for the control of women taught by 19th-century church and state. By this theory woman is drawn as the culpable "other" in creation. It is a pre-positioning of female sin as natural to her alone. The concept functions as a form of intimate self-discipline for women for many characters who suffer in guilt and in silence.

All of the women in L'edera, indeed, suffer despite their guilt or their innocence. Donna Rachele, for example, has been the strength of the Decherchi clan amid her husband's failures and her nephew's immorality. But she does not have the decision-making power to save the family and thus must watch as her family disintegrates before her eyes. Kallina, Paolu's wife, having married her social and financial equal, as would be expected of her, dies bearing her wealthy husband a crippled child.

Rosa, perhaps the most innocent but the most betrayed of all, is condemned to hideous physical distortion. Deledda describes her pitiful appearance:

Un goffo vestito rosso, guarnito di merletti gialli, rendeva piú disgraziata la sua figurina deforme, e piú brutto il suo visino di vecchietta senza denti, schiacciato dalla fronte idrocefala smisurata e sporgente.\(^{19}\)

It is not by chance that Deledda has depicted the little girl as disfigured in body to better contrast the clarity of vision which her words convey. Speaking to Annesa of her father

\(^{19}\) Ibid. 32.
Rosa says, "Egli è il padrone, vero? Egli è tanto forte, egli può commandare a tutti, vero?... Egli può fare quello che vuole; puoi fare anche da cattivo, vero? Nessuno lo castiga, vero?" Here Deledda effectively outlines the nature of gender relations which the untrained Rosa exposes in all its raw truth. It is Rosa, indeed, who is perhaps the most clear thinking of the women in *L’edera*, as yet unbound, as are the rest, like ivy around the oak of tradition. Little Rosa may just be, for Deledda, the voice of the future emerging from the deformity born of female submission.

Annesa, trapped between conscience and love, between the laws of a distant God and Nature itself, realizes that either decision she might have made would have been equally damning. Her choice was to kill Ziu Zua in order to save the Decherchis with his money, or risk losing her true love, the already suicidal Paolu.

Annesa makes her choice and suffocates Ziu Zua. To compound her punishment it is discovered that even her crime committed out of love has been futile, for the certificates which were to save Paolu and the entire Decherchi clan are worthless. Again Deledda's

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20 Ibid. 33.

21 "... l’edera si riallacerà all’albero e lo coprirà pietosamente con le sue foglie. Pietosamente, poiché il vecchio tronco, ormai, è morto". Ibid. 223.

22 Ibid. 121.
heroine is not only caught between two dire options but is doubly trounced by having her best intentions result in a horrible failure. Consequently she suffers nothing but guilt and desperation, fearing to be found out, and what is perhaps worse, fearing that Paolu will indeed kill himself.

Yet regardless of her crime and the heavy imposition of guilt upon Annesa's psyche Deledda draws to the end of her story with a revitalized heroine having escaped to the city with the help of her parish priest. Annesa leaves the Decherchi circle and begins working independently in Nuoro. After many years of life away from former ties she feels that she has finally escaped and is hardly ever bothered by visions or dreams of her crime. She has remained unwed and has refused to return to the site of her unhappy past. But in the final chapter Deledda reverses Annesa's fate. In five final pages of what seems an after-thought, Annesa returns to her early home. She again becomes part of the Decherchi family but is now an unwanted addition. The child Rosa has grown into an angry woman, jealous of Annesa who, by her return, has threatened the young woman's position as her grandmother Rachele's favourite. The novel ends with Annesa marrying the old, ill and now unattractive Paolu.

Why does Annesa suddenly return to her past life? Deledda's explanations are unconvincing. Paolu has grown decrepit and no longer loves her. Donna Rachele Decherchi, ailing and bedridden, writes to Annesa asking that she return to care for her but Paolu insists that Annesa may never return unless she agrees to marry him. The final pages of the novel do not give Annesa a logical reason to return to a life of grief. In fact there are many reasons given by Deledda just why she should be inclined not to return.
And yet she does revert to a life of suffering.

One might suspect again that Deledda's pulling Annesa back to a life of misery in the final pages of L'edera was literally beyond her control. Plunging a successful character into misery, especially if that character is female, has been established as a recurring pattern in her writing and one which indicates, ever more powerfully with each occurrence, a psychological trap from which our author is unable to successfully extricate herself. It were as though a deus ex machina descends on Deledda's work in order to return it safely to patterns of tradition which might avert the tide of rebellion.

Deledda's female characters are effectively blinded and locked in the past. Like Maria and Agnese in La madre. Annesa in L'edera is unable to free herself from the clutches of a tradition in which she holds a position at once of guardian, of virtuous example, and of evil temptress. Her punishment in the end will be self-imposed. She will return to Paolu out of a thwarted sense of obligation and with a great deal of regret. The suffering to which Deledda's characters are linked is self-imposed by their own inability to relinquish those religious and social laws seemingly created only to entrap, wound and eternally control them.

If Deledda's novels seem to assert the difficult reality of women's traditional lot it is surely in a calculated way. Her message is often contradictory. On the one hand it may entail social or cultural criticism while on the other hand Deledda will accept and even laud that very system which causes her women such pain. It is just when her text is in the thralls of censure, indeed, that the reader is usually guaranteed a reversal in plot which reestablishes the status quo, of control over the individual. It is through this
manipulative style that we sense Deledda's own uncertainty and perhaps even a certain guilt in her writing which simultaneously upbraid traditional law while punishing women who would breach it.

In *Annalena Bilsini* (1927), for example, Deledda orchestrates a similar venue to demonstrate woman's suffering as she had in many a previous novel. Here, however, the tenets of religion have been linked to the social laws of economic hierarchy. The acquisition of money has become our heroine's driving force, the very religion of the widowed Annalena Bilsini.

After the death of a much older husband, and now under the direction of her aging Zio Dionisio, Annalena sells her modest home near the river Po in order to lease a deserted farm from a wealthy merchant, Urbano Giannini. Urged on by Zio Dionisio Annalena anticipates that if her entire family works the land they will all become wealthy and thereby gain in social status. Her plan to pursue wealth and find rich wives for her five sons, however, is compromised by the very character of the Bilsini boys. Bardo, at nineteen balks against farm labour and is interested only in the young girls in town. Baldo, the youngest, likes to spend most of his time reading. Osea, the eldest, is already married to Gina Mantovani whose inheritance from her wealthy but frugal mother does not seem to be soon forthcoming. Osea and Gina have two children. Annalena considers Osea an irresponsible father and feels she must discipline her grandchildren in his stead. Although Osea works the fields to help his mother he too, like his younger brother Bardo, is more interested in flirting openly with the local women. Giovanni, Annalena's third son, is her only real hope of bringing the lands to fruition. He is focussed exclusively on
the price of goods and services and the most expeditious way to increase cash flow. He seems to have no interest in women whatsoever and plays a minor role in Deledda's story. Annalena's favourite son, Pietro, is away serving military duty. Although she would want him at home Annalena realizes that he is not a worker and believes it would be best for the family if he made a career of the army.

A strong and conscientious mother, Annalena, "... sposata per interesse a sedici anni... non aveva mai provato né goduto l'amore". Her children grown, but still a young woman herself at forty-three, she senses a physical and emotional need for love and affection. Yet a need for propriety veneers her feelings and she clings to those compensations offered her through hard work and dedication to family. Her family, indeed, is her whole life.

The five sons of Annalena Bilsini engage Deledda in a rather complicated and dark exploration of traditional gender relationships. From the very outset, Deledda portrays Gina, for example, as the passive victim of her simple-minded yet overbearing husband Osea. Gina is the silent servant-wife of a husband who does not hide his attraction to other women. Having married Osea for love Gina "parlava poco e teneva sempre le palpebre abbassate." She has come to consider marriage "una gran brutta e sporca roba" and flees her matrimonial bed "come fuggendo un luogo di pericolo."


24 Ibid. 12.

25 Ibid. 42.

26 Ibid. 38.
Gina displays all the symptoms of a raped woman: she is angry, in denial and easily becomes victimized a second time.\textsuperscript{27} Her "occhi di sdegno e dolore" \textsuperscript{28} are only explained by Deledda in an oblique fashion but in a description of Osea's frustration with his plough, the truth of Gina's ordeal is cleverly revealed. 

\begin{quote}
... quando la terra si rifiutava ad aprirsi, simile alla donna che resiste all'atto d'amore, egli se la pigliava con l'aratro, rivolgendogli le piú schifose ingiurie; poi lo percuoteva con un suo frusto, aiutandolo però a procedere nella sua opera.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

The metaphor of the plough is understandable in any language. Gina is also victimized by her brother-in-law Pietro who, on leave from military duty, tries to rape her but fails in the attempt, interrupted by the approach of his mother. Annalena realizes that her son has attacked his brother's wife but does nothing to admonish him. Pietro out of spite pursues Gina's sister Isabella. Annalena eventually forgives Gina for having attracted Pietro, counselling her to accept her lot as a married woman.

In the meantime Baldo is secretly seeing the poor peasant-girl Piera but cannot marry her until he has served his military duty and made enough money to support her. Although he carries on a clandestine relationship with Piera, Bardo has second thoughts and admits to his brothers "...io voglio diventare ricco e felice. Col lavoro, si, ma ed

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{28} Deledda, \textit{Annalena Bilsini} 20.
\bibitem{29} Ibid. 40.
\end{thebibliography}
anche l'industria, ma soprattutto con la furberia. Voglio sposare una donna ricca e bella e buona.\textsuperscript{30} Pietro suggests to his brother that a good catch would be Lia Giannini, the daughter of their landlord. Bardo believes that Lia would be impossible to snare but Pietro haughtily boasts that if he wished he could himself easily kidnap and seduce the girl so that she would have to marry him. Pietro would then become heir to her fortune.

Lea at seventeen is a sickly girl. Her mother, already quite disturbed eventually is committed to an asylum. Lia too shows signs of serious depression. "Il piccolo viso barbarico di Lia atteggiò a un disgusto profondo" notes Deledda, "... e l'anima sua parve ricaduta nell'ombra."\textsuperscript{31} When Baldo, the serious and religious brother, asks Lia why she wants to become a closed-cloistered nun she answers, "Così. Perché sono stanca di vivere e di soffrire."\textsuperscript{32} Already Lia's friend, through their mutual interest in religious vocations, Baldo is consequently outraged when he overhears his brothers' strategies to take advantage of Lia. His immediate reaction is to want to kill them both. Instead, he tells his mother what they have said.

Lia soon disappears and a massive search is conducted. Annalena suspects Pietro and Zio Dionisio confronts his nephew. Pietro denies any involvement in the disappearance of Lia but then, as he is pressed by his uncle to confess, admits that he has kidnapped her and is holding her prisoner. Overcome with Pietro's admission of guilt, Zio Dionisio has a seizure which paralyzes him. News arrives that Lia has joined the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 134.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. 97.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
convent but the news comes too late. Zio Dionisio dies the next day. The entire family is shattered especially Pietro who now feels doubly guilty for having lied to Zio Dionisio about the kidnapping, thereby causing his death.

Except perhaps for Isabella, all the women of Annalena Bilsini are portrayed by Deledda as afflicted in various ways. Amid thwarted loves and abuse they take on the most dramatic roles in her story. Annalena, having lost her husband, for example, bears the total responsibility of her five grown sons and ailing uncle, most of whom strain her patience by their general inefficiency. Although Annalena is a strong woman she lacks sexual fulfilment. As a widowed mother she is, moreover, denied any involvement, certainly any sexual involvement, with a man. Annalena has convinced herself that "la vera religione è il lavoro," and is driven not by a desire for personal happiness with a second husband, but by worship of a new idol, money. Her work, and her chastity, are the vehicles which Annalena supposes will fulfil her.

But Annalena is moved by the attentions of Urbano Giannini, her landlord and secret admirer, who is still encumbered by his insane wife, Lia's mother. Although Annalena is attracted to Urbano she still feels that love is the "... fonte di ogni male." Moreover Ubaldo is simply not available to Annalena as long as his wife is alive. To complicate matters she feels a divided loyalty to her sons but especially to Pietro, her favourite, even though she considers him "l'unico storto rame della famiglia." She

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33 Ibid. 79.
34 Ibid. 103.
35 Ibid. 10.
loves him best, it seems, because he is her retribution sent by God for some past and unspecified sin. Thinking of Pietro far from home serving his military duty Annalena muses: "Il mio cuore è con te Pietro perché sei la parte cattiva della mia vita, la piaga che bisogna curare, Pietro amore mio."\textsuperscript{36}

While Annalena is not a passive victim a major part of her quest for wealth and her lingering moral values curtail any possibility of a more fulfilling life. She has been conditioned to believe that only personal affliction gives a woman her value. In Deledda's 19th-century setting it is particularly important for a woman that any process toward financial success not be self-seeking but rather accomplished for others. The dignity of humble female work, like religious piety, is considered its own reward. Breaching the law of female modesty, humility, obedience and service, even in a period of waning religiosity, still requires social submission to the service and to the control of patriarchy. Consequently, despite her strength and her assets, Annalena restricts herself to a life which gives little relief or comfort from the rigid requirements of proper female behaviour.

It is in this same light of travail that Gina, Annalena's only daughter-in-law, is depicted in the better part of Deledda's story. Unlike her sturdy mother-in-law, however, Gina is described as a passive victim. She feels herself an oppressed slave. She is assaulted more than once by the men of the Bilsini family whom she would have expected, rather, to protect her. In the end she will remain silent on Annalena's good council and abide by the rules of her womanhood bearing Osea a third child.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 11.
It is interesting to note that Isabella is drawn in sharp contrast to her sister Gina. "Bellina" is a lively and well-adjusted woman. She is not fooled by the tactics of the Bilsini men and, if anything, participates ably in the game of flirtation and coupling. But engaged to Pietro, it is understandable that Bellina's future as his wife bodes ill for her. Pietro admits to his brother Bardo that if he marries Isabella "l'accoppo a bastonate fin dal primo giorno: anche cosi come siamo, liberi ancora, mi viene spesso voglia di prenderla a schiaffi." Moreover, in disgust over the prospect of marrying Isabella, Pietro confides in a visitor that he is going to have to marry "quella civetta." Through Pietro's attitude to his future wife, Deledda foreshadows the dark fate of a seemingly liberated, outgoing and vocal woman, one who will also, most likely be as exploited, ultimately, as her introverted sister Gina.

While the Deledda women of *Annalena Bilsini* are portrayed in all the stark reality of their difficult lives and not without some substantial anger against the system, Deledda again remains cautious in the outcome of her novel. The conclusion of *Annalena Bilsini*, in fact, again betrays its author's real sense of propriety. Although she has clearly outlined a traditional 19th-century system of gender relations, focusing especially on the malevolence of the male characters and the suffering of the women, by the end of the story she will neutralize the effect of what she has previously described with such zeal. With the death of Zio Dionisio the women characters fall back into conventional positions. Where she had intimated considerable suffering of the women

37 Ibid. 136.

38 Ibid. 182.
by abusive controlling men it is evident that, as the story had become more complicated and perhaps more realistic, Deledda could not openly expose the ultimate truths to which her intimations would have logically led. Lia, the would-be nun, could not be kidnapped or violated. Annalena's quest for the fortune of her sons could not be dashed by their obvious ineptitude. Sons, indeed, could not but be shown as saved and successful. The previously abused Gina is happy with her new daughter and has accepted her husband's domination. Isabella awaits an unknown fate but for the time being is satisfied to become the godmother of Gina's baby. Annalena herself, from a position of strength and independence, looses her grasp as the head of the household in a final traditional scene where the men are at table being served by their women. Her final statement "i miei figlioli saranno sempre sottoposti alla madre" is met with mocking and peals of laughter. While ambiguous and evasive, here, as elsewhere in the novel, Deledda shows clear signs of resentment both for the men who will dominate and for the women who silently serve.

Deledda's fictional characters as they are portrayed in these three novels might well demonstrate Shakespeare's maxim that "conscience does make cowards of us all." When confronted with the implications of revealing female abuse, however, Deledda cannot but be judicious in the content of her stories and in the way she expresses female reality. Her fight against injustice and against the self endures in the peculiar twists of her narrative style. While she will not openly make judgemental statements about her women's submissive actions neither does she condone their victimization even if it is self-inflicted. Yet the fact that her women rarely succeed in freeing themselves from

hardship is not a condemnation of their effort nor an acceptance of their suffering as warranted. If anything Deledda's telling such stories at all highlights 19th-century women's plight as a significant theme in Italian literature. Her women invariably return to passive behaviour. Yet in her descriptions of their suffering and their anger we discern a festering rebellion just beneath the surface of the text. Deledda's women may retreat but they retreat only because they have dared to advance. They may serve but they do so with a growing resentment.

If Deledda's message is one of female rebellion it is a subtle message indeed and one which she herself was surely reluctant to emphasize overtly. There continue to emerge, however, long-suffering heroines who exude a repeated image of discontent with the laws which they accept partially through conscience and partially through coercion. It is indicative too that Deledda constructed her stories around those very issues of religious morality and social hierarchy which would necessitate the portrayal of actions running contrary to the values which she herself seems to uphold so adamantly. Narrative conflict, indeed, requires opposition. Deledda's conflict in such stories as these reflect her own subversive railing against those very precepts of morality and a gender hierarchy which had so blatantly discredited her ardour for writing.

B. "Scribo, Ergo Sum"

Author encroachment into text has characterized the covert yet often evocative quality of Deledda's stories. Even though she deemed herself a realist writer in the
tradition of Giovanni Verga, Deledda's verismo, while it demanded she be an author absent from text, was hardly realised in her writings. Illustrations of this very close relationship between the life of our author and her text are apparent from Deledda's earliest works. The young Grazia, for example, slipped frequently from third-person omniscient author to the blatant insertion of herself as the narrator. In Fior di Sardegna (1892) she not only bears a striking physical resemblance to her heroine Lara but, in an unexpected personal appearance boldly announces to her inexperienced audience just where the divisions of her story will fall with "Qui finisce il prologo e comincia la prima parte della nostra storia." The presence of the narrator might well have been attributed to a lack of writing experience. None of Deledda's early editors seemed overly concerned with it. Interjections such as these, in fact, were not always challenged by her early critics. Nor were they altered by our young story-teller herself who, as we have seen from her letters, seemed so meticulous in her preparation of work to be presented for publication. One can only suspect that editors accepted Grazia's personal appearances as intentional and that she herself felt them acceptable. It is clear, however, that such a style was not purely verismo.

Subsequent signs of author intrusion continue into Deledda's mature production so that her choice of a narrative technique seems to have had much to do with finding a vehicle through which she might convey her own ideas while remaining in the neutral free zone of omniscient author. The kind of reader manipulation which seeks to offer the narrator's opinion or knowledge through the vehicle of a character arises unquestionably

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40 Deledda, Fior di Sardegna 41.
in Efix, the peasant hero of Canne al vento (1913). In this novel Deledda gives Efix a vision, and thus a narrative power beyond that which he might logically possess as a "realistic" character, a player who should not know more than the external events of the story permit. Yet Efix is well informed, especially concerning the significance of popular beliefs and traditions. From the very opening pages of the novel, in fact, he gives the reader important background information concerning the mythological spirits of Sardinian popular tradition. As he walks from his hillside hovel to the home of his patrons at night Efix feels the presence of spirits in the shadows, the sounds of nature and the creatures of the night who are conveniently elaborated upon through Deledda's own knowledge.

Efix sentiva il rumore che le panas facevano nel lavar i loro panni giù nel fiume... Era il suo passaggio che destava lo scintillo dei rami e delle pietre sotto la luna... e i nani e le janas, piccole fate... ballavano all'ombra delle grandi macchie di filìrea...

Specialmente nelle notti di luna tutto questo popolo misterioso anima le colline e le valli: l'uomo non ha diritto a turbarlo con la sua presenza.  

Efix, then, is merely the vehicle through which Deledda introduces the background information on Sardinian folklore essential to her story. Indeed, to create added tension she concludes quite forcibly with her final direct statement on the rule of the night which does not permit invasion by man. Similarly does the author employ day-dreaming

41 Neria De Giovanni, Come Leggere "Canne al vento" (Milano: Mursia, 1993) 85-86.
42 Deledda, Canne al vento 10.
sequences to present Efix's patrons, the Pintor sisters, who exemplify the last remains of a decaying Sardinian nobility. On viewing a statue of "La Maddalena" Efix is transported to the past:

Efix la guarda e sente, come sempre davanti a questa figura... un capogiro come se fosse egli stesso sospeso in un vuoto nero misterioso... Gli sembra di ricordare una vita anteriore... Le donne cantano, gli uccelli cantano; donna Ester sgambetta accanto al servo... Donna Noemi è giovanissima, è fidanzata a don Predu...\(^43\)

The visions of Efix, hardly verismo, could not be accessible, no less transmitted by a characterization drawn solely by the action of the story. Here, however, Deledda has cleverly manipulated her text for control presenting through Efix an ideal view of the past. In effect, she dominates the psyche of her character. She has allotted Efix her own powers as narrator of the story and has herself entered the mind of her character and taken the reader with her.

The choice of style is significant in our understanding of how writing itself may have provided Deledda something beyond mere creative expression. Her characters, as we have seen initially with Efix, do not always speak for themselves, but frequently bear the voice of their creator. In Elias Portolu (1900), for example, the author speaks directly to her characters as might an oral story-teller to children to whom she wishes to teach a moral lesson. Deledda teaches her characters and her readers perseverance.

\(^{43}\) Ibid. 35.
bianchi muri, i rossi tetti si avvicinarono. Coraggio, la salita si fa aspra ed arida, attaccatevi bene alla vita di Elías, zia Annedda! La cavalla è stanca, tutta lucente di sudore; il pulederino non ne può più. Coraggio.

And again in L'incendio nell'oliveto (1917) Deledda appears to express her own thoughts. With more than half her story told Grazia's voice is heard suddenly in the tenth chapter of the novel. Her heroine, in love with a poor man, is betrothed against her will to a well-to-do relative. The novel has arrived at the point of crisis as the heroine must decide whether to breach her duty and run away with her beloved or remain with a man she does not love. Annarosa,

... cercava di risolvere il problema. Eccola di nuovo seduta sul suo letticciolo basso, come la notte della lettera di Giole. Fino all'ultimo momento ha recitato anche lei coraggiosamente la sua parte; adesso è li, piegata sul suo spavento, mille volte più turbata.  

Up to this point Deledda has related her story in a straightforward narrative fashion so that her interjections at this juncture are particularly eye-catching. With disconcerting demonstratives she demands the attention of her reader. The style is photographic. With "eccola" and "adesso è li" she urges the reader to gaze upon and consider deeply the plight of her heroine. As attending director of her story, Deledda forces the reader to linger upon an important philosophical juncture of the text. Annarosa must decide and so Deledda freezes the moment.

Such interjections seem surprisingly out of place for the already accredited and

44 Deledda, L'incendio nell'oliveto 157.
skilled author with almost thirty years of writing experience behind her. Deledda's implementation of such a style while she simultaneously professes to be a realist writer may suggest motives beyond those of literary emphasis. Indeed her frequent and continuous insertion of self is surely indicative of her own need to propose and to stress personal issues. Charles Hanley has aptly noted that

... art, in order to achieve its affect, must be able to get us to treat its illusion as "true" for the time being... the creation of art, although not enlisted in the task of changing the world to make it better serve ourselves, may be enlisted in the task of changing the world ourselves in order to make us better able to serve ourselves and the world ... To be sure, discharge and improved homeostasis are present. But there is also the exercise of defense mechanisms and the building up of psychic structure by means of trial identifications and the search for pathways for sublimation, all of which are part of the ongoing struggle for maturation.45

By drawing attention in such an overt fashion to Annarosa's plight as victim of an arranged marriage, we are alerted by Deledda to a patriarchal tradition where women, denied personal freedom, find themselves virtually unable to escape. For the author, entrenched still in a traditional mindset, writing becomes a venue for personal sublimation and a long awaited maturity. Hanly goes on to note that for the writer

... the demand for gratification is satisfied within the bounds of an aesthetic, imagined experience that, at its best, cultivates the self by reducing the ego's need to maintain defences against the memories of the experiences

out of which it was itself formed.\textsuperscript{46}

We are already familiar with those frustrations and fears which were present in Deledda because of her upbringing and which remained with her all her life. These fears gave rise to physical symptoms of which Deledda speaks repeatedly in her letters when she complains "Io sono sempre malatticcia."\textsuperscript{47} A healthier way in which Deledda tried to resolve her conflicts was by expressing them in her many novels. Her urge to write came also from a much deeper need than her desire for fame or financial security. Her literary drive, rather, displayed all the hallmarks of intimate psychological necessity in its obsessive repetition of themes which were identical to her own labours through the rigours of her upbringing. Where purity and service were the only positive rewards for women, while guilt and damnation the consequences of vacillation therefrom, Deledda, trapped in the mind set of patriarchy, required some means of disclosure or "discharge". Beyond the call of art alone her writing attempted to redefine an image of her own life, one which rewrote a difficult past and projected a more controlled future.

C. Cross-Gender Dressing

Amid the rigid requirements of 19th-century gender separation Deledda's sensibilities would have seemed particularly male oriented. Attitudes such as personal

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. Hanley.

\textsuperscript{47} Deledda "To De Gubernatis", 18 July 1893. Di Pilla, 425.
confidence, social awareness and ambition formed a good part of her character as an unconventional though still strongly traditional woman. A familiarity with the violence of patriarchy had led her instinctively to protect herself by expressing a traditional femininity while assuming masculine privileges. Though she wore the costume and played the part of a proper woman her desire to capitalize upon the benefits of masculinity involved a certain manipulation of the men in her life, as we have already seen in her letters to suitors and colleagues. By such behaviour one might easily conclude that there occurred in Deledda's development a breach in her own acceptance of the cultural norms of gender separation which were to become an integral part of her writing aesthetic as well.

While patriarchy undoubtedly commandeered Deledda into reinforcing traditional values it did not, however, prevent her from subversively testing party line. It is often her male characters indeed who do not fit the requirements of patriarchy and Deledda is skilful in developing them so that they might be read in two ways; as good, though mostly elderly or simple-minded men worthy of sympathy, but also as men who have had the courage to do the right thing despite gender, custom or religion. Stefano in La Giustizia (1899) and Zio Portolu in Elias Portolu, for example, are Deledda's standard depiction of the rugged traditional male character bound to convention. They are masters of their families, feared and obeyed. From a reader's viewpoint they fit a standard mould and are usually the least developed or interesting of Deledda's characters. Zio Portolu sets the traditional standard for his sons when he tells them... "io non voglio vedere gente
debole attorno a me, voglio vedere dei leoni, voglio vedere delle aquile."

"Siamo uomini noi non siamo bambocci di formaggio fresco." A real man's attitude to women must be strong. "Si può vivere anche senza le donna", he instructs his sons, and it is a disgrace for a real man to behave like a little girl or a silly woman. By the same token zio Portolu possesses the standard description of the perfect female. "Una rosa, un gioiello, una palma! Essa cuciva e filava, essa buona massaia, essa onesta, bella buona benestante." Praising his future daughter-in-law Maddalena zio Portolu advises his son Elias, however, not to behave like a "femminuccia" or a "donnicciuola".

But various of Deledda's heroes exhibit that unusually traditional female gentleness, sensitivity and submission which were anathema in a man. As we have seen from Efix in Canne al vento, his relationship with the Pintor sisters is far too intimate and sensitive for 19th-century male standards. In a bid for female freedom and justice, Efix in his youth assisted Lia, the youngest daughter of his patrone, to escape her family in order to find true love outside the conventional system of arranged marriages. His actions cause considerable difficulty among the remaining Pintor sisters whom Lia has disgraced by her flight. Efix continues to serve and protect the remaining woman as

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49 Ibid. 36.
50 Ibid. 66.
51 Ibid. 33.
52 Ibid. 40.
53 Ibid. 44.
would a mother figure after they have lost both parents. After many years when Lia's grown son Giacinto returns to the exclusively female Pintor clan, it is Efix who effects the boy's acceptance back into the family fold. A man, in effect, is shown to be even more forgiving and understanding than an entire family of women. Traditionally, indeed, it is the function of women to reunite divided families.

Mastro Giuseppe, too, the hero of *Fuga in Egitto* (1925) demonstrates Deledda's expanding androgynous spectrum. Like Efix, Giuseppe is unusual for his emotional sensitivity towards women and children, a bonding more commonly accepted as traditional female behaviour. But Giuseppe, like Efix, assumes the protection of the mother as well. He takes on parental responsibility for Antonio, the illegitimate child of a deceased lover. At the same time Giuseppe nurtures Ola, Antonio's young illegitimate daughter, as would a grandmother. It is interesting to note that neither Efix nor Giuseppe, however, are related by blood to the individuals they are self-appointed to love and nurture. Deledda's excuse for such behaviour seems to be that such men are particularly religious and that they behave more like women as they age. Both Efix and Giuseppe are pro-active in their spirituality and moralistic outlooks. Efix, who has caused the death of his patron Don Ciaccinto and consequently the downfall of the noble Pintor sisters, seeks expiation of his sin through service to the ailing and the destitute. Bold yet guilt-ridden, Giuseppe too lives a life of reparation for past sin. Having caused the death of his lover, and after years of guilt, Giuseppe attempts to expiate his sin of fornication by taking responsibility for his illegitimate offspring. Thus it is particularly in characters like Efix and Giuseppe that we begin to see a crossing over of roles where
the tradition of gender separation is elaborated into a spectrum of both male and female qualities in the same character.

Juanniccu in *L'incendio nell'oliveto* (1918) is, however, perhaps the most blatant example of Deledda's neutralizing gender spectrum. The eldest remaining son of a peasant family Juanniccu is considered the simple-minded offspring of the widowed and aged Agostina. For his mother Juanniccu, in his fifties and still child-like, is "la parte marcia della famiglia ... il verme nel frutto della casa...nulla era vero delle sue parole." Deledda's heroine Annarosa is the only member of Agostina's blended family who understands zio Juanniccu as far more sane and logical than the rest of her traditional family who are economically programmed in coupling. Annarosa, the eldest grandchild of Agostina is engaged against her will to a wealthy relative, Stefano. Yet she loves the poverty-stricken Gioele. Annarosa's still youthful step-mother Nina, conversely, is in love with Stefano, Annarosa's betrothed. Both of these women are excruciatingly unhappy with their relationships which clearly are subject to the laws of patriarchy.

Ironically, however, only the simple-minded zio Juanniccu, more clearly than his intelligent relatives, sees the insanity of dividing true lovers for the sake of money. But when he states the obvious, urging the family to allow Stefano to marry Nina and allow Annarosa her Gioele, all are incensed. Annarosa is the only one who realizes that what zio Juanniccu has said is "in fondo tutto era vero."\(^{54}\)

While Nonna Agostina, the matriarch of the family, attempts to ratify a marriage contract between Annarosa and Stefano, Juanniccu keeps his place attempting to calm

\(^{54}\) Deledda, *L'incendio nell'oliveto* 159.
and console the distraught Nina who is guilt-ridden over her feelings for Stefano. In a delicate manner Juanniccu, unlike either the traditional patriarch or the controlling matriarch, speaks to Nina with understanding and compassion.

Cos'è il peccato? E che colpa hai tu se le cose vanno così? Vanno così perché devono andare così... Così a te è piaciuto quell'uomo perché eri donna, e ti sei trovata sola con lui, in momenti nei quali ti pareva ancora lecito di guardarlo; perché ti pareva un uomo libero e tu una donna libera. Invece non siamo mai liberi. E non lo siamo perché non vogliamo esserlo. Se tu volevi esserlo potevi prendere quell'uomo; e Annarosa si prendeva il suo ragazzo e così stavate contente tutt'e due.\(^5^5\)

Juanniccu's obvious sensibilities in female affairs, however, are to no avail and he is duly punished by a beating at the hands of his nephew Agostino who locks him in a hut far from town. In his attempt to escape Juannicu sets fire to the hut and himself and becomes, unintentionally though symbolically, the martyr of true love. He dies for the cause of suffering women. Deledda comments on the grim outcome of Juanniccu's insurrection through Annarosa who, day-dreaming, imagines him still alive:

... mi pare di sentire il passo del cavallo di Agostino. Sale, sale nello stradone bianco, e riconduce a casa il povero zio Juannicu. Non è cattivo, il povero zio Juannicu, solo ha il difetto di dire la verità, come nessuno più osa dirla; e anche Christo fu ucciso per aver detto la verità.\(^5^6\)

Certainly here Deledda's triumph of truth surpasses any judgement of either male

\(^{55}\) Ibid. 119

\(^{56}\) Ibid. 211.
or female sensibility. Rather it speaks to a genderless ideal of compassion for the desires of both sexes.

The depiction of male characters estranged or diverted from the rules of gender separation like Efix, Giuseppe, or Juanniccu, suggest, if they do not openly proselytize, that our author visualized a psychological growth in both men and women which tended naturally toward a wider spectrum of thought and behaviour previously categorized as either masculine or feminine. It is significant that all three of these men who have shown unmasculine sentiments and who have even attempted to assist in the emancipation of ideas regarding women, are themselves severely punished. Yet in all three cases Deledda depicts them as sympathetic characters, portraying them as upright, authentic, and devoted to what may seem a new cause.

Because any departure from traditional gender behaviour was considered an aberration in Deledda's era, it is not difficult to conceive that our author would have exercised great caution in suggesting that the lines of demarcation between the sexes might well be clouded. It is certainly Deledda's wariness, and perhaps even feelings of guilt, which have led her to manipulate these three particular characters in such a way that there emerges only a suggestion of diversion from patriarchal norms rather than an outright division from the rule of gender separation. Consistently with her other novels these too end with the triumph of tradition.

As we have seen in Cosima Deledda continued to justify the necessary pattern and the moral basis of traditional family life. It is a thinly veiled Grazia, indeed, who experiences a guilt-ridden responsibility to retain family values despite her desire for
fame. After a few years of writing "... in fondo si sente tutta scossa, ha coscienza di aver sbagliato strada, decide di ritornare davvero al chiuso esilio del suo vero destino." But Cosima, quasi Grazia, was neither able to sacrifice her writing nor to abandon deeply rooted patterns. Even after her marriage she continued to be as tied to family convention in Rome as she had been tradition-bound in her Sardinian youth. Obsessions attached to location, in effect, were not eradicated when location was changed. However, in all locations of her writing, including alternate psychological sites of male or female persuasion, there continue to surface recurring signs of repressed contrary attitudes.

Deledda's letters to Marino Moretti, for example, are particularly revealing of her own mixed feelings about accepted codes of masculinity and femininity. Deledda's relationship with Moretti during the years of the First World War was perhaps most significant for its singularly intimate character. Her letters to Moretti are, in fact, the least veiled among a sizable epistolary production which included the closest of her male friends. In Moretti, a young Romagnolo author fourteen years her junior, Deledda had found a rare and tormented kindred spirit. Her correspondence with this "soul-mate" is like no other for its depth of emotional candidness amid a number of diverse and unusually calculated registers. As an upcoming writer himself Marino seemed to "La signora Madesani", somewhat of a literary mentor, if not a mother figure.

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57 Deledda, Cosima 84.


59 Ibid. 13.
the other hand, while keeping a respectful distance, never failing to address Moretti formally, betrayed, in her frequent and frank letters to him, some of that same passion she had shown in her letters to the lovers of her youth. In the following communication, for example, she oversteps the boundaries of collegiality:

La ringrazio più di quanto Lei crede: m'è parso di aver camminato con Lei, ieri, lungo la spiaggia di Viareggio... e che Lei mi abbia raccontato per la prima volta tutta la Sua vita. Io credevo di conoscerla e non La conoscevo... adesso capisco la tristezza selvaggia e la diffidenza cupa e l'irrisione dei Suoi occhi, a volte, e il mistero di certe Sue parole che nella Sua bocca mite pungono d'improviso, a tradimento, come spine tra le rose: e la Sua bontà, la Sua pazienza, la Sua umanità profonda.⁶⁰

Like Deledda's earlier passions her feelings for Moretti return unabashed and unguarded. Apparently Moretti's Sole del sabato of 1913, the manuscript of Guenda,⁶¹ later that same year, and especially his 1915 novel La bandiera alla finestra had touched her deeply. She confessed to him after reading them: "M'è parso di sprofondarmi nella Sua anima, nella Sua vita viva e non nelle pagine d'un libro."⁶² Despite her use of the formal address her sentiments are tinged with love. And yet a prudent distance was maintained, the more easily because of a mutual propriety which age and social decorum dictated.

Moretti for his part lived a similar isolation characteristic of the esoteric artistic spirit which paralleled Deledda's own. Their discussions of life were consequently

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⁶¹ Guenda was not published until 1918. See Zaccaria, 6.

pessimistic and, like tragic lovers, somewhat reductive. "La vita è così, fatta di nulla," she writes, "nomi scritti sull'acqua: ma è bello così e in nessun altro modo che così."\(^{63}\)

As the more experienced in artistic suffering she obviously attempted to console and encourage the younger Moretti despite her own depression. Philosophically speaking their mutual suffering awarded them the exclusivity usually afforded truly great artists. Pleasure was to be derived not through the insipid channels of normal life but rather through the grandeur of sadness and of solitude, through introspection and through writing. There is a clear sense too, in their relationship, that even the impending worldwide catastrophe of the First Great War was nothing new in the lives of the already tormented. Just prior to its outbreak, in fact, Deledda writes,

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\text{... sono appunto le cose serene che interessano meno...}
\]
\[
\text{eppoi pare quasi un segno di egoismo o d'insensibilità, o magari di finzione, non darsi ormai per gente tormentata, gente in attesa, e in attesa di guerra, -spiriti in crisi, come se tutta la vita nostra non fosse un'attesa, una crisi continua: ma quando appunto la si accetta così, come è, e deve essere, come il filo d'erba accetta la sua sorte e se ne fa la sua serenità e la sua gioia, cessa di essere interessante anche per noi stessi.}^{64}\]

Albeit in an attempt to console Moretti here the most significant revelation of Deledda's gender frustration appears in a key letter of 1915. Having been rejected from military service due to infirmity Moretti had enrolled as a nursing assistant at the front. Envying his right to participation in the world crisis, despite his infirmity, Deledda writes

to him expressing her feelings of disappointment.

Mai ho rimpianto di non essere nata uomo come lo rimpiango adesso. A quest'ora sarei certamente con quella compagnia di sardi - di veri sardi pelliti - che meritano tutti medaglie d'oro e d'argento.⁶⁵

Here Deledda sees even the great conflict in terms of her personal restriction as a woman. Glory, indeed, was is awarded only periodically, and then exclusively to men. Deledda's desire to participate in a man's world was not new. In a 1905 letter to Consul General De Laigue she had written:

Se fossi nata uomo sarei stato un solitario; sarei vissuto in un eremo... Donna devo adattarmi a piegarmi, a vivere fra coloro che amandomi e proteggendomi completano la mia esistenza.⁶⁶

Here too all her attention is gender-focused and self-directed. Deledda speaks of her desire for free choice, the simple right to be able to determine her own space, be it solitude or participation. But as a woman, though protected and loved, she must sacrifice her individuality. While Deledda continued to cherish the love of a man, at the same time she strongly valued male privilege, power, autonomy, and fame.

As in the Moretti letters ambivalent expressions of traditional gender roles surfaced in Deledda's other communications as well. In a letter to Epaminonda Provaglio, for example, she had vauntingly suggested,


... avrò tutti i difetti del mondo, ma anche una dote: quella della francoezza... perciò mi procuro molti amici, ma anche molti nemici... specialmente, questi ultimi fra le donne che sono quelle che più di tutti... adorano la dea ipocrisia, triste e nera dea che io invece odio tanto: perciò ho pochissime amiche e tantissimi amici.  

Her stereotyping women as hypocritical serves the purpose here of convincing her male colleague of her uniqueness among her sex. In effect, she argues for the traditional patriarchal perception of women as less honest than men, while excluding herself from female ranks. What is perhaps even more revealing is the fact that she is utterly convinced of her moral, masculine-like superiority in the matter. As we have seen current issues of female equality did not escape Deledda's pen. Yet despite her apparent support of them she remained conservative in her opinions. While Deledda speaks to the issue of literary censorship in her letters to Provaglio, she remained prudently moralistic on the question. She believed that Boccaccio, for example, should rightly be held back from vulnerable young women less experienced than herself. In a protective tone she had commented to Provaglio:

Che importa se a me, avezza a leggere romanzi o volumi di storia, di filosofia, di letteratura, non ha destato interesse? Era scritto per me? No! Del resto io ti dico, o mio caro amico... che romanzi simili a quelli che vengono alla luce, degnamente sferzati dal Boccaccio... volumi immorali, racconti addiritura, schifosi... romanzi che io devo leggere per seguire l'andamento della nostra letteratura, ma che non

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Ambivalently again Deledda speaks here of sisters and female friends yet presents herself not as their equal but as would a male protector of women's virtue and children's innocence. Her participation in social issues associated with male protection of the frail and underprivileged if anything stressed her male affiliation rather than any alignment with the then emerging trend of female emancipationist thinking.

Conveniently too culturally male-oriented concerns appeared in Deledda's novels concurrently with contemporary events. She published La madre, for example, a novel which dealt with a priest's love affair, in 1920 following a piqued national discussion on the celibacy of the clergy. In Marianna Sirca (1915) she took up the then issue of banditry in those same years in which "la questione meridionale" was a recurrent news lead story in the major newspapers. Describing the drama of illicit liaisons set against a back-drop of controversial current affairs most likely advantaged Deledda's sales among both her male and female readers. Not taking a political stand, by the same token, certainly protected her from any possible accusation of un-feminine political


69 Among Grazia's repertoire of writings were stories for children submitted to Perino's children's journal Nell'azzuro. See also "Giafà: Novella" and "Le disgrazie che può causare il denaro: Favola" in Per il mondo piccolo (Roma: Sandron, 1899). Later Deledda produced the literature portion of a textbook for the National Grade Three Reader. See Grazia Deledda: Biografia e romanzo, 94-95. Deledda's children's stories were most likely written with a clear understanding of a growing young people's market in an age when literacy was becoming an important part of the Italian government's plan for national education. See Denis Mack Smith, Storia d'Italia (Bari: Laterza, 1972) 387-390.
partisanship. If broaching the pressing issues of social justice with which any vital literature is rightly concerned proved potentially threatening when addressed by a woman writer, it is natural that Deledda should have shown caution. Indeed her comments were astutely conservative and thus practical as well. Although her Sardinian roots would have presumed a compassionate attitude toward her oppressed native population, for instance, what is often perceived in her political attitude is condescension rather than liberal sympathy. In Cosima, for example, Deledda describes the poor folk of Nuoro who congregated at the family mill for heat and shelter. Among them was her own brother Santus who, depressed and alcoholic, had found some solace among the destitute. In a reactionary tone describes them as

... tutti disoccupati e poveri, ma di una strana povertà dovuta più a loro stessi che alla sorte: e venivano li a riscaldarsi, a confortarsi l'un col contatto dell'altro. Capo fila era un uomo rosicchio, che era stato ricco e aveva dilapidato la sua sostanza con le donne e il vino: poi veniva un fratricida, anche lui una volta benestante, che aveva ucciso il fratello per legittima difesa, e tuttavia era disprezzato e scacciato via dalla sua classe; poi un vecchione con la barba di patriarca, anche lui decaduto... E altri rietti, ai quali non sdegnavano di unirsi i bravi contadini e i piccoli propretari che portavano a macinare le loro olive... (Santus) camminava anche lui nella fatale scia dei miserabili compagnoni raccolti intorno al fuoco.  

Characteristic of her assessment of the fallen of her own class was Deledda's perspective of distant and morally superior observer. One recalls too that Cosima,  

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70 Deledda Cosima 91-92.
veniva a contatto col popolo, col vero popolo, laboriosa e mite, che se pur poteva, come il mugnaio, mettere le grinfie sulla piccola roba del prossimo, lo faceva con parsimonia e poi andava a confessarsene. Magari anche la confessione era un po' fraudolenta, come quella del famoso contadino che tentò d'ingannare il confessore dicendogli di aver rubato una corda, e alle insistenti inquisizioni dell'uomo di Dio finì col dire che alla corda c'era attaccato un bue... Cosima li osservava, li studiava, ne imparava il linguaggio, le superstizioni, le maledicenze e le preghiere: ... dal suo posto di osservazione.  

Certainly the intent of Deledda's social description here is somewhat suspect in its jocularity, intended it seems, to discredit even further the disadvantaged and the peasant poor from an upper-class vantage point. One recalls an early letter to Stanis Manca on this account where Deledda had commented, ironically, that her latest novel in progress, L'indomabile, subsequently La via del male, would surely be noticed because she had included in it "una leggera... tinta di socialismo." In this instance too, it would seem that the pressing issues of her day were pressing only in so far as they rendered added value to the marketability of her work rather than strength to contemporary battles for social justice. Despite her political opinion, decidedly of the right, Deledda avoided involvement in the politics of her day despite the support she could have had from her compatriots and, indeed, despite her strong character. It is ironic, in fact, that her only participation in the political arena was unknown to her. In 1909, while living in Rome, she learned that a group of Sardinian colleagues had entered her name in the race as

71 Ibid. 94.

72 Deledda, "To Manca", 1 Feb. 1894. Scano, 270.
representative to Parliament for the Region of Nuoro. Deledda read the news of her loss in her local newspaper, unaware of her candidacy.\textsuperscript{73} Except for this brush as one of the first women to have run for public office in Italian history, Deledda's involvement in political issues was truly limited, determined by her own sense of the damage it might do her career. That she did not run subsequently of her own volition is indicative of her insight into the tenure of the times which she was certain would not tolerate, as she herself would not, a woman who blatantly crossed the gender divide. For Deledda that crossing was much more successfully traversed clandestinely. Her participation in "Il Primo Congresso Nazionale dell Donne Italiane" (1908)\textsuperscript{74} was the only other recorded instance of Deledda's involvement in any political occurrence during her lifetime. It was from observation, rather than through participation that "...venne lo spunto per un nuovo romanzo; attinto dal vero: attinto come la pasta nera delle olive dalla vasca del frantuoio, che si mutava in olio, in balsamo, in luce..."\textsuperscript{75} It is clear that Deledda drew what she advertised as the bright and savory product of her writing from the raw materials of a reality which she preferred to view from a safe distance.

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\textsuperscript{73} G. Seganti, "Chiachere antifeministe con la prima candidata", Grazia Deledda: Biografia e romanzo 70.
\textsuperscript{74} "Tessera rilasciata a Grazia Deledda", Grazia Deledda: Biografia e Romanzo. 70
\textsuperscript{75} Deledda, Cosima 95.
\end{flushright}
D. Signs of the Times

Non sempre un'impronta ha la stessa forma del corpo che l'ha impressa e non sempre nasce dalla pressione di un corpo. Talora riproduce l'impressione che un corpo ha lasciato nella nostra mente, e impronta di una idea. L'idea è segno delle cose, e l'immagine è segno dell'idea, segno di un segno. Ma dall'immagine ricostruisco, se non il corpo, l'idea che gli altri ne aveva.  

Not to the discredit of traditional literary criticism but as a positive addition to it, the insights afforded us by semiotics might well serve to solve some of the enigma of apparent contradiction in the works and life of Grazia Deledda. The broad spectrum of "impressions" her works have left on critics, from her earliest naive writings to her final quasi-autobiographical Cosima quasi Grazia, rarely suggest that her "messages" have been structured as subversive communication within conventional design. With the assistance of semiotics such subversion is more easily unearthed.

The "signs of the signs" to which Umberto Eco alludes above are those communications or meanings which are accessed not solely through content but through form, by means of codes gleaned intertextually and by refraction of individual reader discrimination. In their efforts to categorize "signs" into "codes" and interpret the "signifying messages" or meaning that authors transmit in creative writing, semioticians have offered modern literary analysis a useful approach in delving for meaning beneath the surface of text.  

It is of particular importance that the unbiased approach of

semiotics, if any approach can be assumed to be totally unbiased, be applied to an author such as Deledda whose adherence to seemingly conventional codes of expression may as clearly signal disloyalty to tradition as allegiance to it.

Despite a rigid code of gender separation throughout Deledda's work there frequently surface surprising divergences from the norm in the behaviour of both her male and female characters. As well, however, there are unexpected and striking descriptions which lend themselves to further examination. While Deledda's emphasis on destiny, on "the foreseeable" and "the correct" attest generally to a high degree of control of her subject matter, she is sometimes betrayed by wording which piques the reader's interest with a hint of anomaly or disobedience. Such instances are themselves perhaps windows on Deledda's masked messages of gender frustration which carry over into her writing with an anger and a retaliation not unfamiliar to her colleagues and family.  

Deledda's hidden messages, as semioticians might postulate, are sometimes to be found beneath the signifying limits of surface content in her physical description of character. A case in point is the description of a woman in the novella "La Moglie" (see

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78 See Chapter I, 36-38.
Appendix 79 which appeared in Deledda's Chiaroscuro collection of stories in 1912.

Here she describes la moglie80 in the following manner:

Sul carro sedeva sopra un sacco di lana a righe nere e gialle una donna non più giovane: gli occhi, però, castani limpidi in un viso maschio marmoreo avevano una luce ardente di passione e di giovinezza. Vestiva il costume di Mamojada, col corsettino di broccato a due punte che dà l'idea d'un calice di rosa spaccato: teneva le mani sotto il grembiule.

The marble rigidity of a definitively male face masks the sparkling passionate eyes of an inner woman. In Deledda's era "il maschio" connoted physical strength, authority and social power. The concept of masculinity is further emphasized here by the word "marmoreo", which tends to reinforce the idea of stability, changelessness and the nobility of male superiority. "Female", in contrast, was understood to mean for the 19th-century mind, natural passivity as well as physical, mental and social inferiority, what Simone de Beauvoir has viewed as woman's "other" denomination, her "secondary" status in relation to the male.81 Traditionally the female was sheltered from the outside world by a male who protected her as a commodity, as riches for the family coffers, her virginity before marriage considered an object of trade, and her sealed motherhood

79 "La Moglie," is transcribed from: Grazia Deledda, Chiaroscuro (Milano: Treves, 1912) 279-286.

80 "La Moglie" will be used to indicate the title of the story; la moglie the character in the story.

81 Simone de Beauvoir, "Woman as Other" The Second Sex (New York: Vantage Books, 1974).
afterwards a sign of economic balance. She was expected to remain silent and hidden for the protection of the family's reputation and, unless in service to that family, controlled in her movements. Consequently in Deledda's passage the hands of *la moglie*, women's tools of domestic labour, but potentially also symbols of her creativity and perhaps her sexuality are hidden modestly "sotto il grembiale," a weighty symbol of domestic duty.

The images which are used in describing *la moglie* may seem ultra conservative. But semiotically speaking, Deledda's use of a woman's eyes peering from "un viso maschio" only masks the woman's true self. With "il costume" Deledda has introduced heavily laden and effective symbols of standardization and concealment. It expresses woman's prudence and her loyalty to ancestry by conforming the image of self to tradition while masking individuality beneath the dress and behind the mask. As well the costume and mask may also imply fear of, or aversion to change, a strong need for the protection of the group. Deledda's image of *la moglie* suggests, in short, a false facade, a protective veneer of propriety. Not only are *la moglie*'s eyes full of light and passion but her traditional dress also "dava l'idea di un calice di rosa spaccata" The idea of the rose alone runs the entire gamut of sexual suggestion. Here Deledda effectively uses the elements of traditional Sardinian dress to emphasize what semiotics finds to be "entropy", an encoded message. Costumes are easily recognizable as traditional signs of women's place. What is different about Deledda's image, however, is that it betrays an altered female state. The description of the woman's costume, in effect, while it identifies gender and social affiliation seems to suggest by "spaccata", not only that *la moglie* herself is somehow violated but that her costume is like a mature blossom
inviting harvest. Moreover, that same costume "dava l'idea di un calice". The reader's reconstruction of the idea of a chalice indicates another measure of the woman, one not merely sexual but sacred as well. The chalice, associated with religious ritual, delineates the opening of the rose, a symbol of woman's sexuality. As a noble goblet the chalice might suggest male dominance over the subject female, of sacrifice of blood. The eucharistic wine of the Catholic Mass comes immediately to mind from the various colours and shapes which Deledda employs, but her fusion of sacred goblet and sexual rose, with the additional fragmentation of both might well convey a message of existential as well as of sexual breach, a sacrilege directed as much against the human spirit of *la moglie* as against her body. Beyond the mere inner contradiction characteristic of oxymoron rests an intentional and drastic opposition, a striking anomaly of image which strongly suggests violation. For the reader such images serve to provoke, at the very least, an uneasy mood, all the more so, most likely, for Deledda's morality-bound 19th-century readership. The primary image of the rose could well have represented both virginity and vulva, an entire ambiguous spectrum. Heralded by semioticians as the sign of individual aesthetic, or entropy, such images conceived by an author would locate vital textual messages.

The stance of 19th-century women, in the good judgement of society, was one of non-resistance. *La moglie*, at fifteen, however, has murdered her husband's lover. Most unconventionally, the young girl, married to a much older man, directs the events of her own life by such an act. She initiates punishment for the crime by reporting herself to

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82 See Appendix 220.
the authorities. She serves 20 years of incarceration, returns to her community and to her
husband. Her crime, culturally speaking, is an aberration, not only because it is murder
but the more so because of the control she has taken. Traditionally "vendetta" is an
exclusively male prerogative sought for the infringement of the clan's code, usually the
rape of a sister or a wife. It is a male right to kill for honour but unthinkable, indeed, that
a woman could kill anyone. Yet here Deledda tells the story of a woman who has
satisfied her own sense of justice ignoring the silent gender mandate. Returning from
prison her husband Simone is immediately rendered sheepish by his wife's actions on his
account so that Deledda's inversion of female, rather than male revenge, and male, rather
than female guilt heralds an especially telling signal, a bold twist in the portrayal of an
old convention.

The response of tradition to la moglie's actions is perhaps best emphasized by the
screams of the servant girl on her return from prison, the voice of disbelief and horror.
But la moglie soon checks the girl's reaction to the news noting that even the girl would
have committed murder, given the occasion. The girl is silenced and partially convinced.
The cry, in effect, while it may seem a condemnation, a vocal and a written reproach of
women, who like our author herself, have dared to stray from convention, could also
signal the location of a key message. Here she alerts the reader to the successful
outcome of la moglie's insurrection. By her actions la moglie has won her revenge and
returns to take control of her life as she, not society, sees fit, with equal power in her
relationship with her husband and with equal rights. Her first mission on her return
indeed is to teach the young servant girl that she should not be afraid for "... donna sei
Given 19th-century conditions it is remarkable that, in her general literary caution, Deledda should have painted such a character and told such a story at all. The probable cause of her deviant subject matter issues directly from the mouth of her character. *As la moglie* explains to "questi uomini della giustizia: Voi non sapete cosa sia la rabbia, l'ira la gelosia, il dolore." These are clearly Deledda's own sentiments and what lies, at least in part, at the foundation of her creative motivation. In *Cosima*, a thinly veiled young Deledda is equally frustrated by her female confinement. *Cosima* echoes *la moglie*'s anger with,

... e già, per tante prove crudeli (Cosima) conosce la vita; ma la monotonia dei giorni senza speranza di notevole mutamento le gravava intorno come una ingiusta condanna,-antica condanna delle donne della sua stirpe, e lei ardeva tutta di desideri di volo, di più vasti orizzonti, di vita movimentata... Cosima piange; di rabbia e di umiliazione.\(^{83}\)

Whether consciously or sub-consciously Deledda's fills her text with signs spawned of anger so that wherever an unusual incident occurs or a tone of irony or annoyance surfaces the reader can rest assured that beneath it lies a second message.

The slaughter of the rival's cat, for example, rich in entropic warning is easily linked to a suggestion of intense anger against a completely innocent victim, is an anger we might recall from the first lines of *Cosima* when Deledda's resentment towards her newly born sister was soon turned to guilt when the baby, Beppa, died. Having

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\(^{83}\) Deledda, *Cosima* 84.
symbolized animals as children. Freud believed that guilt attached to the death of a sibling is easily transposed onto an alternate, more innocent and inconsequential victim in order to assuage the suffering of the child who remains. *La moglie's* action in killing an innocent kitten, then might well be interpreted as an indicator of author disturbance, a need for expiation. It is not coincidental that *la moglie* sees the similarity between the eyes of the cat she had killed in anger and the eyes of the servant girl so many years her junior, the girl she is teaching not to be "sciocca" or "matta" but rather to take responsibility.

Deledda was well entrenched in the belief that forbidden action carries with it its own punishment. It is that same dynamic which, in Freudian terms, is expressed by the forbidden desires if the "id" which automatically engages the self-punishment of the "super-ego". For Deledda, as for *la moglie*, the outcome is clear: women who assume for themselves male position, even in crime, will be punished by the patriarchal system as well as by the law. Temporary victory, however, may carry far more reaching consequence. "Dopo tutto", decrees Deledda's heroine with sarcasm, "io sono sempre sua moglie: e la moglie è legata al marito, come il bambino prima di nascere è legata alla mamma". Simone, the husband, is as tied as *la moglie*, but the circumstances have changed. Although we know that our heroine has paid for her crime, by the end of the novella we are left with the impression that the husband has yet to pay for his. His wife's

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final rhetorical question, another entropic moment, is meant to be ambiguous if not threatening in the mouth of la moglie whom Deledda has already portrayed in such strong strokes. As the wife is "legata al marito" so too now might the aftermath of the deed carry with it even farther reaching repercussions for the husband: "Non è vero Simone?" The rhetorical question could, in this situation, work both ways. It does not seem likely that la moglie will return to a role of female subservience, if, in fact, she had ever been enslaved. She demonstrates no binary opposition of the sexes either physically or in her actions. Though in costume, la moglie is not cast in traditional female registers. It is not difficult to envision just where Deledda's sympathy might reside and herein perhaps lies a final sign of intent, that the reader will draw the obvious conclusion.

Some of Deledda's characters, like herself, are women still tradition-bound though perhaps more through shrewdness than by virtue of total loyalty to a patriarchal system. What does seem novel here in "La moglie" is that Deledda has at least given her character a voice where she should remain silent. In order to justify her speaking at all la moglie must, it would seem, take on the mask of maleness while the husband Simone

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86 Hélène Cixous has objected to masculine writing cast in "binary opposition." Male writers, she contends, have unnecessarily segmented reality by coupling concepts and terms in pairs of polar opposites, one of which is always privileged over the other. In her essay "Sorties," Cixous has listed some of these dichotomous pairs, among which, Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Speaking/Writing. In Cixous's view such couplings find their expression in the fundamental dichotomous match of Man/Woman where man is associated with all that is active, cultural, bright and positive and where woman represents all that is passive, natural, dark and negative. See Cixous, "Sorties" The Newly Born Woman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 63-65.
must play an unconventional silent partner. In an opposing image Deledda describes him in female guise with "L'uomo andava, andava, taciturno e prudente." This certainly reflects a typically 19th-century-encoded female attitude. Prudence, to be sure, is one of the oldest and most praiseworthy of female virtues. Their looks, gestures and status are totally reversed. "Sembra che il condannato sia lui," but it is she who has served time. Irony, and the emphatic final positioning of that irony, suggests a more universal message beyond the context of the narrative. The husband surely seems condemned to his wife's domination and herein, perhaps, another entropic sign and an early inkling of 20th-century "male-bashing".

Deledda's exposure of cultural norms, subtly veiled here in "La moglie" by the shallow sympathy and ironic reversals of the narrator, speaks strongly of author resentment. The viciously feline-like behaviour of the heroine is seconded only by the unanimated statue-like comportment of the husband, both, in effect, aberrant examples of stifling and brutalizing codes of both male and female conduct. Indeed by coupling opposing images Deledda has done more than engage the reader's attention by the use of contrast. Elsewhere Deledda had suggested that "... La vita anche sotto l'illusione delle cose più belle e ricche, nasconde le unghie inesorabili." So too had she written "... la realtà è capovolta e pure prende il cuore più che la realtà vera." With these statements in mind, and with the support of semiotics, determining the extent to which Deledda manipulates and colours traditional images may reposition our perception as to the true

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87 Deledda, Cosima 132.
88 Grazia Deledda, Fuga in Egitto (Milano: Treves, 1925) 34.
intent and value of her writing. The truth, according to Umberto Eco, rests in the primary impact upon the reader, not in the imprint of the original "corpo" but in the impression of "l'idea" from which it is drawn. Readers of the past, both men and women in their separate ways, would have been conscious of Deledda's entropic signs for they disturbed the image of gender separation which was so religiously upheld by society in general.

If it is the impression of a common "idea" that the reader gleans from Deledda's story then it is also in her setting of a neutral zone that universals, rather than separate specifics rule. Deledda's setting itself draws the reader into a genderless dream wish. The opening lines of "La moglie" confirm the very commonality of the human idea to which Eco refers, as neither masculine or feminine. Deledda writes,

Un carro sardo tirato da due piccoli buoi biancastri attraversava lentamente la pianura. Ricordo come se fosse ieri; noi andavamo a piedi ad una vigna e raggiungemmo il carro, tanto questo andava con lentezza pesante... Era d'autunno inoltrato; gli alberi conservavano ancora tutte le foglie che sembravano di rame, e i vigneti vendemmiati stendevano quadretti rugginosi sul fondo verdognolo del piano; e su tutte le cose il cielo latteo versava un silenzio ed una luce quasi lunare.

"La pianura", undescribed and adjectiveless, serves as a tabula rasa for the two slow moving oxen, "piccoli" and "biancastri" which are drawing the Sardinian cart. The description is sparse and washed, accentuated in its fluidity and mystery by "il cielo latteo" and "una luce quasi lunare, a setting where anything could and has happened. The

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89 Eco, Il nome della rosa 319.
basic laws of gender separation have been breached in such a setting. "Latte" and "luna" are tied subconsciously in our author, to motherhood and lactation, a characteristic Freudian image which coincides directly with Deledda's story. Because of the murder la moglie ensures herself an extended prison term, an incarceration which will definitively curtail any chances she may have of bearing children of her own. Thus is she defeminized, neutralized in the larger landscape.

The desolate landscape, which could be anywhere and everywhere, introduces la moglie's return to the scene of her crime. The "older woman", the cause of her husband's fall and her own crime could well represent a mother figure in total possession of a husband's affections. Whether consciously or unconsciously Deledda here seems to tender Freud's Electra Complex postulated for women. Therein it is the little girl who competes with her mother for her father's affections, just as the little boy, in Freud's Oedipus Complex, competes with his father for the love of his mother. In Deledda's story it is a fifteen-year-old girl who eliminates the older rival, a woman old enough to be her mother. The rival woman is still slain for desire of the parent/lover. What Deledda has achieved here is woman's right to kill for her honour, a right which somehow subverts those patriarchal laws which give authority to men, even in crime.

The "oxen", dwarfed and not quite pure, add to the bleakness of Deledda's

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perspective. At once they maximize the neutral vastness of her space as well as the ponderousness of the cart upon which la moglie is ironically enthroned. The oxen are traditional beasts of burden and have ever represented peasant hardship, drudgery and, perhaps, even bovine ignorance. But as well they are also a mythological throwback to folklore and may suggest a sacred quality in their beastly nobility. Their sluggishness, the tradition of the ages, is further emphasized by the fact that the narrator, together with unknown companions, both male and female, have caught them up on foot. The scene is the reflection of a familiar but distant frame, a 19th-century landscape where the figures are part of, but not masters of that Nature which calls them.

Deledda's scene recalls Julia Kristeva's "monumental temporality" characteristic of "female subjectivity." It is a time undefined, a space remembered by virtue of its rhythm and cycle. Simply, "era d'autunno," a time of endings, when Nature itself rests. The description, while it carries with it a sense of nostalgia also suggests renewal. La moglie's utterance "Ricordo come fosse ieri" is also a phrase common in the mouths of the aged in their longing for a waning life renewed, for a return to the hopeful era of youth which happily offered hope and change.

While concealment of egalitarian opinion in such images was often characteristic of Deledda, she nonetheless promoted a contented image of herself as well as a moral interpretation of her works. This too was sound business practice and, for the times, "politically correct". Undeniably, however, in almost any reading of her enormous

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literary production there are clear signs which contradict that veneer of contentment, a frustration with restrictions which were superficially upheld. On a closer examination, however, her subtle evasions, even in imagery, might well be reinterpreted as logical tactics for a woman who could not openly show either ambition, power, or tragically, love.

In returning to Cosima, ultimately, there is confirmation of Deledda's life-long quest for an acceptable resolution of many a disturbing chapter in her life which stories like "La moglie" had attempted to rectify. In Cosima she returns to those same issues which, by its closing pages are still only partially resolved. The journey from Sardinia at the end of Cosima is both heartening and ominous for we now know that Deledda's emotional journey will not take her far. She will raise a family as expected. She will embark on a successful life-long writing career which will not only win her international recognition but also allow her to terminate successfully many an adverse consequence of those disturbing episodes in her early life which delayed, but did not prevent her self-realization as a leading author of her time. Her life in Rome will afford her considerably more peace than she experienced in her early years in Nuoro. Yet she will remain trapped in the image of another self, one still costumed in mourning.92

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92 A photograph taken of Deledda in 1930 shows her wearing a dour black robe-like garment with a broad sash. This was worn by women in mourning until approximately 1945. See Grazia Deledda: Biografia e romanzo 58.
moglie" had attempted to rectify. In *Cosima* she returns to those same issues which, by its closing pages are still only partially. The journey from Sardinia at the end of *Cosima* is both heartening and ominous for we now know that her emotional journey will not take her far. She will raise a family as expected. She will embark on a successful life-long writing career which will not only win her international recognition but also allow her to terminate successfully many an adverse consequence of those disturbing episodes in her early life which delayed, but did not prevent her self-realization as a leading author of her time. Her life in Rome will afford her considerably more peace than she experienced in her early years in Nuoro. Yet she will remain trapped in the image of another self, one still costumed in mourning.91

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91 A photograph taken of Deledda in 1930 shows her wearing a dour black robe-like garment with a broad sash. This was worn by women in mourning up until approximately 1945. See *Grazia Deledda: Biografia e romanzo* 58.
Deledda's instinctive stylistic strategies, her manipulation of reader bias and taste, succeeded in circumscribing well-known common denominators or shared codes which psychologically bonded the culture of her age. These strategies were cleverly called into service in order to shield as well as to communicate uncommon, and for their time, uncomfortable messages regarding patriarchy. They both secured and provoked a common readership's shared intelligence and imagination. For the conservative reader of the day Deledda's views could easily be interpreted as adhering to traditional party line with fine examples of dominant men, passive women and a religiosity which taught both genders to serve their God and culture. Simultaneously, however, Deledda's stories played to a more liberal readership as well, one inclined to consider the ramifications of suffering in Deledda's characters and the dissatisfaction with traditional values which surfaced repeatedly in her work. A growing number of middle-class women readers especially, easily related to Deledda's female characters, sympathizing with their common woes.

It is in viewing the close relationship between Deledda's traumatic childhood and the development of her various literary characters, that we can begin to discern some of the first undercurrents of 19th-century female defiance, a pointing to the facts of gender disparity which can no longer be sanctioned or justified. Through the analysis of her novels and stories we can begin to understand Deledda's hidden agenda, the muted cry of women on the brink of a courageous transformation.
Literary criticism of Grazia Deledda, as with any female author, has been coloured, though happily not subsumed, by religious, social and gender bias. Consequently it is difficult to imagine how any attempt at viewing Deledda's texts from a supposedly neutral perspective would not preclude interference from a long history of patriarchal opinion nor from more recent reactionary feminist positions which such opinion has logically spawned. Deledda's literary obsessions, her disturbing repetition of stock themes around social position and especially her preoccupations with gender and sex can now be accepted as primary indicators of unresolved psychological problems in our author. Understanding more fully how repeated patterns of guilt and expiation become primary modes of being in women's writing constitutes a vital, though not always a welcome addition to our more recent academic heritage. It may be of particular interest for future studies of Italian women writers to delve further into the inner-lives of writing women of the 19th century who seem hooded in their creativity, and to deduce from them just how they arbitrated between what was expected of them and their own growing requirements for social equality.

While I have attempted to couple the influences of Grazia Deledda's personal life with the findings of traditional criticism, psychoanalysis and semiotic investigation, I also believe that, on a more material level, the impact of contemporary economic crisis and the more practical considerations of source-of-income have proven perhaps as pertinent to an understanding of Deledda's literary production as the effects of literary, feminist or linguistic ideologies. Above all I have found that the work of Deledda is fraught with uncertainties and an ambiguous use of the written word which exposes
while it imposes the same moral message. It is precisely in these shifts, or "drifts,"\footnote{See Appendix 220.} that an added dimension in rhetoric, not always a clear or happy one for either writer or reader, might now be newly surmised. As we have seen, Deledda's personal history reveals a series of early romantic failures and family trauma to which her incongruities may be attributable. Whether her obsessing was an unconscious psychological drive to vent her anger or an inner need to come to terms with personal tragedy, or both, the social, gender and sexual issues do remain, by the end of Deledda's life, still unresolved. Like the characters in her novels our author too conformed to tradition in an irrational adherence to the past. Such actions could well be deemed signs of uncertainty and fear of change played out in a literary way in order to sustain dated and unhealthy prisons of cultural and moral law. Invariably it is a pained Grazia Deledda who resurfaces as protagonist of her own story. Author protection afforded by a buffering narrator, by the shield of literary "verismo" or by the distance of folkloric settings have not succeeded in camouflaging the presence of a suffering author purposefully reawakening and reliving personal affliction. Justification, as well as exposure of patriarchy, seem equally essential to Deledda's self-therapy as they do to her literary success. Ironically too her very success was in part possible precisely because she succeeded in processing her trauma in a dramatic way through both her male and female characters. It is through the lives and punishments of her characters that Deledda attends an inner disability and secures for herself, in so doing, public recognition and a Nobel Prize. Few of her characters, in the final analysis, however, win any real consolation or cure.
An unfettered voice would surely have taken its toll on Deledda as it had on many other women authors of her day. Protective and evasive measures equally, however, surely curtailed a sound literary talent. But such is our 19th-century literary heritage, an arduous time and an ambiguous environment for growing numbers of women writers. Deledda, like other 19th-century women wishing to write, was struck with a unique dilemma of reconciling in herself and in her work two opposing roles, that of traditional "woman", with all the rigid requirements such a title implied, with that of "writer", an exclusively male-encoded activity. How were women writers to "mediate between [their] own experience and those dominant modes of representation and discourse which constitute national literary traditions?" The results of Deledda's attempted reconciliation of opposing influences is to be found in her double-edged reaction to the dilemma itself. Whatever her deficiencies a more focused appraisal of Grazia Deledda might confirm the obvious value of her contribution to Italian literature but as well advance our formerly limited understanding of women's characteristically uneven response to the possibility of their 20th-century liberation.

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3Ibid. 5
Appendix: La moglie

Un carro sardo tirato da due piccoli buoi biancastri attraversava lentamente la pianura.

Ricordo come fosse ieri; noi andavamo a piedi ad una vigna e raggiungemmo il carro, tanto questo andava con lentezza pesante. Lo guidava un uomo alto, vestito d'un costume rosso, con una larga barba grigia-rossastra della punte attortigliate. Sul carro sedeva sopra un sacco di lana a righe nere e gialle una donna non più giovane: gli occhi, però, castanei limpidi in un viso maschio marmoreo avevano una luce ardente di passione e di giovinezza. Vestiva il costume di Mamojada, col corsettino di broccato a due punte che dà l'idea d'un calice di rosa spaccato; teneva le mani sotto il grembiale.

Era d'autunno inoltrato; gli alberi conservavano ancora tutte le foglie che sembravano di rame, e i vigneti vendemmiati stendevano quadrati rugginosi sul fondo verdognolo del piano; e su tutte le cose il cielo latteo versava un silenzio ed una luce quasi lunare.

La serva che era con noi, dopo aver fissato con curiosità la donna dal viso marmoreo, le rivolse la parola.

- Di dove vieni? Sei ammalata?

Un sorriso di gioia infantile animò il viso della donna.


- Perché mi rispondi così?-- disse risentita la serva.
- Tu credi sia una mala risposta? Eppure, è la verità.

La serva cominciò a strillare.

- Perché gridi, sciocca?—disse la donna. — Al mio posto avresti fatto lo stesso.

- Chi lo sa?

- Lo so io: perché sono donna, e donna sei tu pure.

- E che cosa hai fatto?

La donna agitò le mani sotto il grembiule, rise, guardò in alto, come seguendo con gli occhi il volo dei corvi sul fondo argenteo del cielo.

- Ho ammazzato una donna, — disse tranquillamente; e siccome la serva continuava a strillare, corrugò le sopracciglia e il suo volto si rifece duro.

- Ma sei matta? Perché gridi, figlia del diavolo? Tu mi ricordi quel gatto; sì, quel gatto aveva gli occhi come tu li hai adesso: verdi come la foglia delle canne.

Guardala, Simone.

L'uomo procedeva taciturno, indifferente; guardava lontano, davanti a sè alto e maestoso nel suo costume rosso e nero.

- Tu dunque hai ammazzato una donna? Perché l'hai ammazzata, si potrebbe sapere?

- E perché non si potrebbe sapere? Perché mi dava fastidio: era l'amica di mio marito.

- Oh!

Ecco, io avevo quindici anni, anzi ne avevo quasi sedici. Non pungere i buoi, Simone, aspetta, piano, che sentano bene, tutti questi signori. Volete sedervi sul carro? È
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Allora io pensavo di ammazzarla. E pensavo: "mi daranno venti anni di pena: tornerò a trentasei anni, ed egli ne avrà quaranta. Allora ella non sarà più fra noi, ed egli mi vorrà bene". Io pensavo così ma non so ancora se avrei avuto il coraggio d'ammazzarla, se essa non fosse venuta quasi ogni giorno a provocarmi. Sì, essa veniva a provocarmi: ora veniva con la scusa di chiedermi un po' di lievito o un po' di fuoco, perché stavamo vicine, ora con la scusa di cercare il suo gattino che veniva sempre nel mio cortile. Un gattino giallo, con gli occhi verdi, lo ricordo sempre.

- Aveva marito?

- No, non aveva marito. Era una mala donna; possibile che tu non abbi capito?

Quando la vedevo mi si annebbiavano gli occhi e tremavo tutta; non vedevo altro che lei, in una nebbia di fuoco. Sentii, un giorno venne con la solita scusa di cercare il gattino. Il gattino stava sdraiato nel cortile; anche mio marito stava al sole, nel cortile. Era una domenica dopo pranzo. Essa entrò e disse: "Ah, vengo a prendere il gatto; sei sempre qui piccola tigre?" Vedendola, il gattino balzò, incurvò la schiena e le si sfregò contro la sottana; anche mio marito s'alzò e fece quasi lo stesso. Io stavo dentro in cucina, e mi parve che elle avesse detto per me "piccola tigre". Presi il fucile carico che stava appoggiato al muro, uscii di corsa nel cortile e sparai. La donna cadde morta, mio marito urlò come un cane. Io vedevo sempre quella nebbia di fuoco, in mezzo alla quale c'era lei distesa morta, con la faccia per terra. Il gatto, invece di fuggire, continuava a
strofinarsi contro la donna uccisa; le andava in giro, e mi guardava con gli occhi verdi spalancati. Mi prese una rabbia contro quella bestiuola! Sarai anche contro il gatto, e la gente che acorreva dalla strada mi vide. E tutti cominciarono a urlare come cani rabbiosi, come volpi affamate. Venne anche un soldato; girò attorno a me, daprima un poco alla larga, poi sempre più vicino, più vicino, come la volpe che gira attorno all'uva. Poi mi mise le mani addosso. Come, le mani addosso a me: Perché? Che forse io non so che devo andare dal pretore e poi in carcere? Che bisogno c'era di mettermi le mani addosso? Lo graffiavi e corsi io stessa dal pretore; la gente mi veniva dieîm, i fanciulli lanciavano pietre. Io avevo paura che mi condannassero a trent'anni. Tornerò vecchia, pensavo ed anche lui mio marito sarà vecchio. A che servirà allora? Mi dispiaceva di aver ammazzato il gattino, si mi dispiaceva davvero. Tu ridi? Ti giuro, che io non possa arrivare a casa mia, che mi dispiaceva. Che colpa aveva quell'animale innocente? Da vent'anni a questa parte, ti giuro, ogni tre notti vedo in sogno quella povera bestiuola. Si, - prosegui dopo una breve pausa, --nel dibattimento tirarono fuori anche la storia del gatto, ed il publico ministero disse che io ero crudele. Crudele! Mi fanno ridere questi uomini della giustizia! Io dissi; "Provatevi voi, monsignori, provatevi voi ad esser traditi e provocati, e vediamo che cosa fate! Ah, voi parlate li, dal banco, seduti, calmi: ma voi non sapete cosa sia la rabbia, l'ira, la gelosia, il dolore. Si, anche quel gatto mi ha fatto rabbia; ora mi pento di averlo ammazzato; ma in quei momenti non si vede più nulla. E il soldato, poi, perché veniva a mettermi le mani addosso? Non sapevo io il mio dovere? Era il re, e doveva arrestarmi, sì, ma io sapevo il mio dovere e sapevo che Dio doveva assistermi." E così mi presi venti anni di reclusione. Adesso ritorno. Ho passato il mare,

Non è vero, Simone?

- Ma l'uomo andava, andava, taciturno e prudente, e la serva sventata disse:

- Mi pare che il condannato sia lui!
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