

Italian Female Epistemologies beyond 'The Scene of the Crime'

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Abstract

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The crime genre, more familiarly referred to in Italian as the *giallo*, thrives in Italy and finds its origins in the late nineteenth-century popular novel or *romanzo d'appendice*. This dissertation groups together four twentieth and twenty-first century Italian novels written by women that elicit the crime genre only to then short-circuit it. Rather than placing them within the revisionist subgenre 'Feminist crime fiction,' I suggest that these novels are radical in that they stage their own withdrawal from a gendered structure of knowledge inhabited and engendered by the crime novel: an epistemology that leaves them unthought. Indeed, these novels must leave the genre behind in order to pursue the construction of a female site of knowledge and the possibility of a female knower. In creating space for alternate, experimental discourses, these narratives rethink the relation between epistemology and gender, epistemology and narrative, epistemology and the body, and epistemology and the maternal by returning to, and rewriting, stories of origin so as to begin again and know differently.

Introduction

This dissertation groups together four twentieth and twenty-first century Italian novels written by women, and in so doing creates a mini-genealogy, by way of a shared, and complicated, relationship to the detective or crime novel. While these novels each evoke the genre, none can be said to truly belong to it; indeed, they present a strange case and an odd type of “belonging” that might be better labeled a misbelonging; they seem to elicit the genre only to short-circuit it. Furthermore, not only do these novels stray from norms indicative of the traditional crime novel, but they also cannot be said to collude with the, now trendy, sub-genre frequently titled ‘Feminist crime fiction.’ My contention is that these novels are not merely revisionist, but radical in that they stage, in differing ways, a “sottrarsi” from a gendered structure of knowledge inhabited and engendered by the crime novel, its antecedents and subsidiaries. Indeed, these novels must leave the genre behind so as to pursue the construction of a female site of knowledge and the possibility of a female knower.

The crime genre, more familiarly referred to in Italian as the *giallo*, thrives in Italy and has a discernible history. Luca Crovi’s *Tutti i colori del giallo: Il giallo italiano da De Marchi a Scerbanenco a Camilleri* traces the genre’s success from its nineteenth-century manifestations within the *feuilleton* tradition up to its present day realizations in thriller comics and graphic novels of suspense.¹ Crovi highlights the literary seeds of Italian crime and suspense fiction in the nineteenth-century Sensational and Gothic *romanzi d’appendice* of Carolina Invernizio and Matilde Serao, paying homage to the genre’s, in part, female roots.² The huge success of author Andrea Camilleri’s crime novels featuring police chief Salvo Montalbano, and their subsequent adaptation into two very popular television series (*Il commissario Montalbano* and *Il giovane Montalbano*), is a good indication of the continued interest in, and growth of, the genre.³ Crovi’s

¹ Luca Crovi, *Tutti i colori del giallo: Il giallo italiano da De Marchi a Scerbanenco a Camilleri* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2002). See also, Maurizio Pistelli, *Un secolo in giallo: Storia del poliziesco italiano (1860-1960)* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2006); Fabio Giovanni, *Storia del noir: dai fantasmi di Edgar Allen Poe al grande cinema di oggi* (Roma: Castelvechchio, 2000). Publications in English include: *Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. Mirna Cicioni and Nicoletta Di Ciolla. (University of Delaware Press, 2008), *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. Giuliana Pieri. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), and Alessandra Calanchi, “Italian P.I.’s: A Survey of Female Detective Fiction.”

² Crovi is not the only scholar to recognize feminine beginnings of detective fiction motifs within the Gothic novel tradition. Beyond authorship (and beyond Italy), Maureen T. Reddy, Adrienne E. Gavin, and Lisa M. Dresner all locate early stages of female detection in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Gothic novels that feature female characters who are not merely victims. Ann Radcliff’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is paradigmatic in that it features a female protagonist who employs proto-detective methods of escape. See, respectively, *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*, “Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths” in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, and *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*. For a discussion of the Gothic novel in the Italian tradition see *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic: Encounters and Rewritings of Narrative Traditions*. Eds. Francesca Billiani and Gigliola Sulis.

³ There is even a thriving Camilleri fanclub. Other highly successful Italian crime writers who have been seen as shaping the genre include: the writing duo Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, Lorian Macchiavelli, Attilio Veraldi, Renato Olivieri, Sergio Altieri, Marcello Fois, Carlo Lucarelli, to name a few.

book makes it clear that the phenomenon is not limited to literature, but extends to the cinema, television, and radio. Importantly, crime fiction has historically been very female-friendly, in comparison to science fiction, for example: it has both a large female readership and numerous and prospering female authors.⁴ Popular contemporary female crime authors in Italy include Laura Grimaldi, Claudia Salvatori, Silvana La Spina, and Fiorella Cagnoni.⁵ It has been noted that crime fiction written by women, both in Italy and abroad, often features a female detective and tends towards treating “female” subject matter, i.e., questions of violence against women, rape, abortion, motherhood, and female sexuality. Cagnoni, for example, has published a series of five crime novels featuring “investigatrice a caso,” Alice Carta, an openly lesbian detective.⁶

Twentieth and twenty-first century crime fiction by women has become increasingly the subject of literary criticism, which tends to consider the ways in which women writers adopt and revise the quite traditional and male genre in order to deviate from its norms and make it speak to female concerns.⁷ Scholars have focused on the ways in which women writers and their female sleuths insert themselves into a genre traditionally defined by polarized and highly conservative gender roles, ideologies safeguarded by the restoration of (symbolic) order and the status quo, male defined rationality and justice, and a pervasive, and overt, misogyny. The guiding question has been to ask: how do female writers alter these norms in their adoption of the genre?⁸ This critical inclination extends beyond Italian borders and has been particularly fruitful within

⁴ See Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, “Alla conquista delle lettrici: un nuovo mercato per l’industria editoriale,” in *Scritture, scrittrici*, ed. Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (Rome: Longaresi, 1998): 125-134. Although there are a number of contemporary, female scifi writers, the genre has traditionally been more geared toward men and with a larger male readership. There is, of course, a few female-authored scifi classics, most notably by American writers Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin; see, for example, their well-known works, *The Female Man* (1975) and the *Hannish Cycle* novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), by Russ and Le Guin respectively. In Italy science fiction novels have had very limited success. Valerio Evangelisti has been one of the only critically acclaimed scifi writers; his first novel, *Il mistero dell’inquisitore Eymerich* (1996), has gone through ten editions.

⁵ Prolific and well-known writer Dacia Maraini has also published a female-centered giallo entitled *Voci* (1994), from which a film was made in 2001. JoAnn Cannon, and others, have focused on the detective novel’s privileged status as a natural paradigm for the hermeneutic act of reading, and therefore the ways in which the genre has served the goals of much post-modern fiction, including Maraini’s novel. See, for example, Cannon’s *The Novel as Investigation: Leonardo Sciascia, Dacia Maraini, Antonio Tabucchi* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). For more on *Voci* see: Bernadette Luciano, “From Novel to Film: Re-instating Patriarchal Order to Dacia Maraini’s *Voci*,” in *Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction*.

⁶ See also, Mirna Cicioni. “Loyalties and Lesbianism in the Novels of Fiorella Cagnoni” in *Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction*.

⁷ For scholarship on the tradition and norms of detective and crime fiction see: Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), and W.H. Auden, *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage International, 1989). For a narratological perspective that draws from Russian Formalists’ considerations of the detective novel see, Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1984). For a psychoanalytic discussion of the genre’s success see Robert Rushing, *Resisting Arrest: Detective Fiction and Popular Culture* (New York: Other Press, 2007).

⁸ See, for example, Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Chicago & London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001) and *Feminism in Women’s Detective Fiction*, ed. Glenwood Irons (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995).

Anglo-American literary criticism, which has pioneered the subgenre ‘Feminist crime fiction,’ leading to a number of subsidiary subgenres, including ‘Lesbian crime fiction.’ This approach approximates a feminist critical pattern beginning in the 1970’s and 80’s, visible across disciplines, in which scholars sought to make women the object of analysis: a mode of making visible and relevant women’s cultural and historical contributions. Maureen T. Reddy’s work is indicative of this approach and one of the first to focus exclusively on women writers of detective fiction. Her 1988 book *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel* shows how the subgenre borrows familiar features of detective fiction in order to “turn them upside down and inside out” exposing the genre’s essential conservatism and espousing a feminist point of view; she dedicates a chapter to “Lesbian Detectives.”⁹ For example, Reddy asserts that Dorothy L. Sayer’s *Gaudy Night* (1935) is the first feminist detective novel because of its strong female protagonist, Harriet Vane; she is independent, educated, a writer herself, and represents, through her travails, the difficulty women face in balancing their careers with their personal lives.

Importantly (and perhaps not surprisingly), a debate has ensued regarding precisely *how* feminist and subversive the subgenre and its texts really are. For example, are female sleuths just playing dress-up and becoming honorary men when they fight against crime? Adrienne Gavin, for example, follows in Reddy’s footsteps both in arguing that women writers played a major role in inventing the genre and in asserting that “woman sleuths are far more than gimmick-like stand-ins for the male detectives of a masculine genre” (269). Gavin’s evidence seems to be that through feminine crime fiction gender expectations are broken down and that their attention to issues of violence against women and questions of female identity enact a gendered protest. On the other hand, Klein and Dresner both question the actual success of the woman who assumes the role of detective, investigator, police officer, etc., and, therefore, her (and her narrative’s) power and feminist possibilities. Both scholars trace the female investigator through literary history and by way of close-readings demonstrate her frequent and debilitating flaws, her only partial successes, and even her outright failures; the gothic “semi-heroine” is almost always aided by a male counterpart, if successful the female investigator’s gender is usually covered-over or made irrelevant; the female detective’s plot is often subsumed by a more central male-dominated plot, or, as in films featuring a female sleuth, she is portrayed as mad. For scholars of this persuasion, it would seem that even when occupying the space of knower, female knowing is undercut or simply made impossible.¹⁰ Furthermore, some of the essays

⁹ See the inside cover of Reddy’s text: *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1988). For other critical texts that consider female authored crime fiction, instances of the female sleuth, and the subversive possibilities of these texts and their heroine’s, see: Lisa M. Dresner, *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2007), Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Chicago & London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), *Feminism in Women’s Detective Fiction*, ed. Glenwood Irons (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995), Adrienne E. Gavin, “Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths,” in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. C.J. Rzepka and L. Horsley (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*, 2nd ed (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), Bobbie Ann Mason, *The Girl Sleuth: A Feminist Guide* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1975), Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰ Martin Priestman in *Detective Fiction and Literature* (1991) seems to side with this viewpoint when he states that, despite female participation in creating the theory of the detective novel, the form remains highly resistant to any specifically feminist interpretation. Thus he too sees feminism and detective fiction as essentially at odds.

contained in *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction* argue that fictional female sleuths have lost the 'otherness' that a feminine approach to the genre should encourage; from this perspective (perhaps the other side of the pessimistic coin), female investigators have become too assimilatory, too much like their male counterparts and not different enough to be subversive.¹¹

In the Italian case, Carol Lazzaro-Weis wrestles with similar issues when she takes up female detective fiction's possibilities in "Cerchez la femme: Feminism and the giallo" from her book, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing 1968-1990*. In the female attempt to challenge crime fiction's inherent maleness and misogyny, Lazzaro-Weis points to a problematic doublebind; women crime writers who do not follow the rules are accused of "bad" detective fiction, whereas obeying its conventions leads to accusations of sustaining female oppression. She, therefore, posits that a truly feminist detective novel destroys the genre by showing that there is no justice: knowing the truth does not lead to justice or action. Her chapter analyzes novels by both Cagnoni and La Spina that bring out a tension inherent in the giallo, i.e., the tension between an ideal, universal justice and its real-life practice within society. In so doing, Lazzaro-Weis demonstrates the way in which these novels follow in the footsteps of works by Umberto Eco and Leonardo Sciascia; Sciascia's novels, for example, contain detectives who solve murders but cannot bring anyone to justice. In her analysis of Cagnoni's "Questione di tempo," she finds that "Like Eco and Sciascia, Cagnoni critiques a justice system that relies on stereotypical prejudices to find easy solutions...and she [Cagnoni] shows that such a system victimizes women more than men" (167). Overall, it seems that the deviations enacted by Cagnoni and La Spina's novels are rather tightly bound to divergences already set in motion by male predecessors who challenged certain crime novel conventions in order to critique society and offer new philosophical ideas; these contemporary female variations contain a feminine slant as their novels point to the patriarchal character of the system.

The four novels analyzed in this dissertation can be seen as responding to the issue tackled by feminist literary scholars regarding the ability of crime fiction to provide truly feminist accounts of knowledge seeking and acquisition from within, and via revision of, traditional generic codes. I suggest that their evocations of the genre should be read as a reaction to, and problematizing of, both the male crime novel norm *and* the female response to it contained within feminist revisions. Importantly, they cannot be said to "belong" within either and I hesitate to place them within any such detective subgenre because I take their non-belonging as part of their defamiliarizing, critical potential. Notwithstanding their specificity, I do believe these novels can best be said to partake in the quite literary, philosophical, and critical appropriations of crime fiction by Sciascia and Eco, inspired, and perhaps best represented, by Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto di Via Merulana* (1957).¹² The safe assumption of comprehension of the crime and truth attained is a generic norm that all three authors problematize through their own novelistic deviations; Gadda's novel most clearly tackles the limits of knowledge since his masterpiece *Quer pasticciaccio* frustratingly ends without

¹¹ See *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, ed. Glenwood Irons (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

¹² For more on the postmodern appropriations of the genre see JoAnn Cannon's *Postmodern Italian Fiction: The Crisis of Reason in Calvino, Sciascia, Eco, Malerba* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989). For more on Gadda's novel see: JoAnn Cannon, "The Reader as Detective: Notes on Gadda's "Pasticciaccio," in *Modern Language Studies* 10, no. 3 (Autumn, 1980): 41-50.

necessarily solving its crime of murder.¹³ The epistemological limitations enacted by the novels analyzed in this study, however, all derive, specifically, from a knotted relationship between gender and knowledge. These novels may place a woman in the role of knower who “detects” in some way, but her investigation goes off track, becomes another, and the fundamental mystery is never solved, not because she is flawed or knowing is impossible, but because in eliciting the crime genre the novels take up a norm that is structural and that describes an inextricable relationship between gender and epistemology from which she, and the novels, depart.

In proposing that the novels analyzed in this dissertation take a more radical approach with regard to their relation to the crime novel genre, I draw from feminist theory and literary analysis that exposes the gendering of epistemological structures. Barbara Spackman, in her essay “Monstrous Knowledge” draws from Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero’s theorization of the monstrosity of the neuter universal subject of knowledge.¹⁴ From within the Italian feminist “thought of sexual difference” Cavarero argues that the supposedly neutral and neuter universal subject of philosophy is, in fact, a male subject whose “sexuation” is disavowed; the subject of language and philosophy is, then, both particular and universal, neuter and male, and, therefore, fully monstrous.¹⁵ Applying Cavarero’s conceptualization, Spackman writes that “the implications for structures of knowledge are clear; the ways we know, and the ways we position ourselves as knowers are not neutral but bear the traces of those who constructed them” (297). Spackman’s essay considers the literary topos of the enchantress-turned-hag as a privileged figure of the hermeneutic model that posits truth as a hidden essence that can be revealed by drawing back the veils of a deceptive appearance. In insisting on the embodiment of the metaphor, Spackman shows the figure of the enchantress-turned-hag to rely on a scene of heterosexual seduction and, thus, a structure of knowledge that positions the knower as male, and what is unknown or to be known as female. Spackman further refers to Elizabeth Grosz’s work on “the male sexualization of knowledges, a projection of men’s sexualized bodies onto the structures of knowledges” (38).¹⁶ Like Cavarero’s neuter subject, Grosz attests to the universal as guise for a disavowed masculinity. She, furthermore (and like Cavarero) draws from Luce Irigaray’s conceptualization of the dichotomized categories governing Western reason and the privilege accorded to one term over the other in binary pairs (mind over body, culture over nature, self over other, reason over nature). The subordination of a term, here the body, must be acknowledged as the condition of possibility of the dominant term, i.e., reason; the body is still associated with women and the feminine, while reason is implicitly related to men and the masculine: “The masculinity or maleness of knowledge remains unrecognized as such because there is no *other knowledge* with which it can be contrasted. Men take on the roles of neutral knowers only because they have evacuated their own specific forms of corporeality and

¹³ The novel, in fact, ends with no proposed solution to its crimes (a theft of expensive jewels and a murder) and no guilty party detained. The standard interpretation of *Quer pasticciaccio* and its defamiliarizing ending is that Gadda viewed reality as too complex to be sufficiently explained by a single, inclusive logic. See, for example, Robert A. Rushing, “La sua tragica incompiutezza”: Anxiety, Mis-recognition and Ending in Gadda’s *Pasticciaccio*,” *MLN* 116, no.1 (January, 2001): 130-149.

¹⁴ See Barbara Spackman, “Monstrous Knowledge,” in *Monsters in the Italian Literary Imagination*, ed. Keala Jewell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ See Adriana Cavarero, “Per una teoria della differenza sessuale,” in *Diotima: Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, ed. Adriana Cavarero et al. (Milan: La tartaruga, 1987): 43-79.

¹⁶ See Elizabeth Grosz, *Times, Space, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

repressed all its traces from the knowledges they produce ” (Grosz 38). For both Spackman and Grosz, then, feminist practices that make women the objects of knowledge do not go far enough since, in order to create the possibility of new ways of knowing, the very position of knower, or subject of knowledge, must be submitted to a reorganization.

I posit that Serao’s, Cutrufelli’s, and Ferrante’s novels recognize the gendered structure of knowledge constitutive of the crime novel as essentially masculine. By invoking the crime genre, the novels are then able to stage their departure from this epistemological structure within which female knowledge is an impossibility; for these narratives, this is the only way in which to begin to conceive of female knowledges and new ways of knowing. The crime novel hero inhabits the position of knower, *is* the subject of knowledge much like Cavarero’s monstrous subject of philosophy, but denies their maleness; after all, the genre does allow a woman to be the detective, investigator, police officer, etc., who cracks the case. The problem is that regardless of the detective’s sex, and even her ability to answer the narrative’s riddle, the very means of knowledge acquisition remains structurally male and bound to what has already been determined as a discerning male gaze and intellect; indeed, the detective wrestles with the paradigm of truth versus appearance: who appears innocent, but is actually guilty? What surface clues must be “read” and interpreted in order to arrive at the real truth lying underneath? And, indeed, the Law itself promulgates a male defined and organized system of justice with delineated rights and wrongs to which women must adhere and assimilate. None of this is to say that “female” crime novels with women detectives who combat for women’s rights, for example, are useless or serve no purpose; I do not deny the value contained in these fictions, nor the criticism that takes them as female objects of inquiry. The findings of Klein and Dresner (the implicit “failures” and shortcomings of female detection and detectives) seem to me symptoms of the gendering conceptualized by Grosz and others; a certain surface reorganization is attempted in the texts they consider but their investigators and narratives run up against a more profound organization that remains in place and bars their access. For the novels contained in this study, however, to use the genre in order to put on display a woman with intellect and the ability to use rationality to find truth is still to remain implicitly tethered to a system that excludes the possibility of a truly female knowledge. Cagnoni and La Spina’s novels analyzed by Lazzaro-Weis are important in their modes of straying from the justice system as such, but they still reside within the hermeneutic model of truth seeking and acquisition. The essential norm that my novels attempt to evade is a male epistemological structure and their evasions are in the service of opening up the possibility of female knowledges; to create the possibility of an actual female knower and female knowledges the crime genre must be sloughed off in some way even as it has to be retained in some way as well.

To create a situation in which a woman can inhabit the site of knower from within a feminine discourse, each novel of this dissertation, in some way discards the crime genre it nonetheless evokes. The best figure for this process is that of a short-circuiting wherein the current (here the narrative) bypasses the main circuit because of a diversion. The mysteries initially heralded in these narratives become another and are, thus, left behind and left unsolved. In each novel, a level of doubt and uncertainty is sustained throughout the text such that there is never a mollifying or satisfying “aha!” moment. Instead, the mysteries are displaced so as to refer to other cultural crimes that are in themselves part and parcel of woman’s exclusion from knowledge; the crime genre is not so much revised or changed, as bypassed so as to make space for female gazes and self-knowledges that initiate from themselves, and from their own truths. The displacement of the initial crimes onto certain cultural crimes serves the purpose of a return

to sites and narratives of origins, primal scenes of knowledge. Each novel returns to an epistemological origin and re-scripts the coming to knowledge by trying something new; it is in this way that the novels open up for exploration those knowledges that male knowledge structurally disallows: narrative desire, the body as site of knowledge, female sexuality, relationships between women, desire among women, maternal subjectivity.

Chapter One analyzes Matilde Serao's Gothic novel *La mano tagliata* (1912) as a precursor to the more recent novels considered in Chapters Two through Four. Serao's novel employs caricatured elements of both the Gothic and detective novel and sets in motion (and anticipates) the narrative refusal to provide closure and understanding regarding what appears to be the central mystery or problem.¹⁷ In this preliminary example the refusal to solve the mystery *is* a female withholding of knowledge of a female body; this novel begins the process (picked up by Cutrufelli and Ferrante) by almost surreptitiously disallowing a male narrative desire to define and account for a female corporeal secret. We do not necessarily arrive at a full-blown female discourse, but that is, in part, because Serao's novel insists that this feminine knowledge does not yet have a site within Italian literary history and the male quest narrative that comprises and defines it; through a figural collapse of body and text Serao's novel heralds an origin point of the Italian novel, Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, in order to problematize its authority and narrative knowledges.

In Chapter Two I consider Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's *Complice il dubbio* (1992) as a "murder mystery" that subsequently backs out of its generic duties. The novel subtracts itself and its two female protagonists from "the scene of the crime" and, thus, from a gendered scene of guilt that evokes Original Sin as, precisely, an origin point of the relation between gender and knowing. The murder mystery becomes a part of a nebulous background and the odd relationship between the two women takes center stage; by slowly relinquishing their ties to the present symbolic economy, the isolated and undefined relationship of desire between the women becomes the site of an experimental discourse concerning the relationship between gender and self-knowledge that requires female corporeal mediation.

Chapter Three takes Elena Ferrante's first novel, *L'amore molesto* (1992), as setting in motion the mystery of the death of the protagonist's mother only to deny its resolution in the service of a mother-daughter relationship not defined by a male gaze of surveillance. The daughter's "investigation" of her mother's drowning is re-routed through, and taken over by, her experience of mourning; the loss of her mother's body becomes the occasion for a new self-knowledge made palpable by the experience of corporeal dispossessions and constant self-loss; a becoming other that finds its origin in the relationship to the maternal. The novel attempts a new, reciprocal gaze between mother and daughter in which both women are subject and object at once.

Finally, Chapter Four considers Ferrante's *La figlia oscura* (2006) and, in particular, its uniqueness in being a non-idealized narrative from the perspective of a mother of adult daughters. The laughable "crime" of the theft of a doll represents the cultural crime of being a "madre snaturata" capable of abandoning one's children, and, furthermore, not apologizing for the act. In this way, *La figlia oscura* both elicits and departs from its "mother-text" *Una donna*; the implicit citation of Aleramo's novel assists in my contention that both texts, and their protagonists, seek to break the ideological chain of sacrificing mothering without breaking from

¹⁷ We might also, then, consider *La mano tagliata* as a literary precursor to Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, which would require some re-scripting of Italian literary history (perhaps precisely what Serao was looking for).

their respective mothers. Interestingly, this new mother-daughter relation moves through the rapport between two women; the narrator's "investigation" of, and subsequent relationship to, Nina allows for a doubled mediation where Nina serves as both "madre simbolica" e "figlia simbolica" at once; via Nina, Leda "sees" her mother as mother from her own perspective as mother. In so doing, Leda's walking out on her daughters is retroactively maternally authorized and a new mother-daughter bond is established that must move through the breaking of Aleramo's infamous chain.

Chapter 1

Handling Narrative in Matilde Serao's *La mano tagliata*

Decades before Italian literature officially engaged the crime genre, Matilde Serao infused its generic precursors into her popular fiction. As early as her second novel, *Fantasia* (1883), Serao employed elements of the Gothic, the thriller, the supernatural, and detective fiction.¹ Traditionally, critics have focused on Serao's long journalistic career and highlighted realism, both in her fiction and non-fiction, as her true strength.² Laura Salsini, in *Gendered Genres: Female Experiences and Narrative Patterns in the Works of Matilde Serao*, describes well the way in which certain criticism sought, and still seeks, to read Serao by way of male literary traditions and authors: mainly, the veristi (Capuana, Verga) and French realists (Balzac, Flaubert). This tendency contributed to a generic approach in which critics praised Serao's early realist texts, but ignored and criticized her later sentimental works "despite (or perhaps because of) their immense success with the general public" (23).³ Indeed, Nancy Harrowitz emphasizes that Serao and her writing were for a long time forgotten, in large part because of critical prejudices when it comes to popular fiction.⁴ It is only more recently that literary scholars have shown interest in Serao's "other" generic affiliations and published on her popular fiction.⁵ In

¹ Serao's novels that most explicitly adopt from these genres are *Fantasia* (1883), *Castigo* (1883), *Il delitto di via Chiatamone* (1907), and *La mano tagliata* (1912). However, it is true that elements of these genres make their way into many other of her novels, including, for example, *Cuore inferno* (1883), which employs a type of femme fatale in the character Lalla and uses the Gothic motif of the female double.

² Earlier criticism on Serao's realist fiction and journalism includes: Benedetto Croce, *La letteratura della nuova Italia Volume 3* (Bari: G. Laterza e figli, 1921-57); Anthony M. Gisolfi, *The Essential Matilde Serao* (New York: Las Americas Pub. CO., 1968) and "The Dramatic Element in Matilde Serao's Little Masterpieces," *Italica* 44, no. 4 (Dec.1967): 433-445; Joseph Spencer Kennard, *Italian Romance Writers*. (New York: Brentano's, 1922).

³ This critical tendency, and the ways that criticism has denigrated women's writing, is very predictable given the work that feminist criticism of the 1970's did, i.e., 'gynocriticism.' See, for example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) and Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (London: Virago, 1982).

⁴ See Nancy Harrowitz, "Double Marginality: Matilde Serao and the Politics of Ambiguity," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). Anna Banti is credited with bringing Serao and her work back into the public light with her biography *Matilde Serao* published in 1965. Indeed, Banti marvels at the fact that she was ignorant of her literary predecessor for so long.

⁵ For recent criticism that takes interest in (and takes seriously) Serao's popular novels see: Ursula Fanning, *Gender Meets Genre: Woman as Subject in the Fictional World of Matilde Serao* (Dublin; Portland, Or: Irish Academic Press, 2002), "Angel vs. Monster: Serao's Use of the Female Double," in *The Italianist* 7 (1987): 63-88, "La figura femminile nel lavoro di Matilde Serao," in *Letteratura e cultura a Napoli tra otto e novecento*, ed. Elena Candela (Naples: Liguori, 2003), "From Domestic to Dramatic: Matilde Serao's Use of the Gothic," in *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic: Encounters and Rewritings of Narrative Traditions*, ed. Francesca Billiani and Gigiola Sulis (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2007), and "Sentimental Subversion: Representations of Female Friendships in the Work of Matilde

particular, these (mainly) female critics have found that Serao's fiction, through its presentation of varied female characters, confronts questions of female identity and sexuality. Feminist literary scholars have, furthermore, been faced with the conundrum of attempting to reconcile the attention given to the female subject within Serao's novels and her self-proclaimed repudiation of women found in her journalism.⁶ Harrowitz, for instance, writes,

As the lone woman figure on the journalistic front in Italy at the end of the century, she was surrounded by domineering male figures such as Gabriele D'Annunzio and her husband and harshest critic, Edoardo Scarfoglio. It seems possible to speculate that it was easier for Serao to pretend she was one of this male-dominated literary circle than to explore in depth her allegiance to other women and her own connection to the female condition (78-79).

Critics have, therefore, debated whether or not Serao can be read as a feminist writer and, if so, how and in what ways.

As the Gothic novel has traditionally been seen as a vehicle to express female anguish and rebellion, Serao's use of the Gothic has been a particularly fruitful site in which to consider a possible female politics. In general, the Gothic has been seen as a female genre able to probe questions of female identity and sexuality. The Gothic motif of the female double, for instance, has been considered in light of the difficulty for women of integrating their own sense of self with the plethora of social conventions allotted them: a culturally divided female subjectivity. Serao herself was a contradictory figure given that she wrote against women working beyond the home but was herself a highly ambitious and well-known writer, as well as the first Italian woman to found a newspaper. In particular, Ursula Fanning and Laura Salsini have addressed the importance of female relationships, including the mother-daughter relationship, within Serao's Gothic fiction (and beyond); both critics show that, often in Serao's fiction, female

Serao," in *Annali D'Italianistica* 7 (1989): 273-287; Nancy A. Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny, & The Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso & Matilde Serao* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), and "Double Marginality: Matilde Serao and the Politics of Ambiguity," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Sharon Wood, "The Sentimental Democracy of Matilde Serao (1856-1927)," in *Italian Women's Writing (1860-1994)* (London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1995); Deanna Shemek, "Prisoners of Passion: Women and Desire in Matilde Serao's *Romanzi d'amore*," in *Italiana*, ed. Albert N. Mancini, Paolo Giordano, and Pier Raimondo Baldini (River Forest, IL: Rosary College, 1988); Laura A. Salsini, *Gendered Genres: Female Experiences and Narrative Patterns in the Works of Matilde Serao* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999). Umberto Eco and Isabella Pezzini should be credited with a slightly earlier publication that addresses Serao's popular fiction and its importance for the Italian peninsula's reading public. See, Eco's introduction "Tre donne intorno al cor..." and Pezzini's chapter "Matilde Serao" in *Carolina Invernizio, Matilde Serao, Liala* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1979).

⁶ The desire to take Serao's journalism and fiction into account and consider their contradictions critically is the explicit project of Nancy Harrowitz in "Double Marginality: Matilde Serao and the Politics of Ambiguity." Also see, *Matilde Serao tra giornalismo e letteratura*, ed. Gianni Infusino (Napoli: Guida, 1981). Serao's explicit anti-feminism has been the topic of criticism by Wanda de Nunzio Schilardi, Dora Amato, and Judith Howard. See, for example, Wanda de Nunzio Schilardi, *Matilde Serao giornalista* (Lecce: Milella Editore, 1986) and "L'antifemminismo di Matilde Serao," in *La parabola della donna* (Bari, 1983): 272-305.

friendships end up supplanting the importance of heterosexual relations.⁷ In both *Cuore inferno* and *Fantasia*, for example, “the adulterous relationship is secondary to the fascination the two women exercise over one another” (Wood 56).⁸ For both Fanning and Salsini, Serao’s attention to gender allows her novels to alter certain genres and their cultural myths; “Serao challenges the hegemonic discourse of literary tenets by manipulating generic conventions” (Salsini 14).⁹ *La mano tagliata*, for instance, blends a number of literary genres together: the romance, the Gothic, the mystery and the detective story. At the same time, however, the novel coheres to many of the Gothic novel conventions, including a moral struggle between good and evil, ghostly apparitions, explanatory letters, to name a few. Although women writers have traditionally dominated the Gothic genre, Italy stands apart; because the novel form arrived belatedly to the Italian peninsula, there were few Gothic writers. Italy in fact had only a rather short-lived group of male, Milan-based Gothic writers who went by the name “scapigliatura.” What then does it mean that Serao takes up the Gothic, and what does she do to it?

This chapter uses *La mano tagliata* (1912) to consider the question of Serao’s use of the Gothic, because, I believe, the novel is about this very question and stages its own problematic “belonging” within a male genre and literary history. Although the two female protagonists of *La mano tagliata* are important characters, a mother-daughter duo who seek reunion with one another, this is not a deeply psychologizing novel that delves into either woman’s psyche. The novel does present both women’s desires and has both women act on these desires in the face of debilitating social conventions; we know who each woman loves and what she will do to be with him. Furthermore, on the surface, the novel is not mainly about a relationship between women since Maria and her daughter, Rachele, never meet within the narrative.¹⁰ The novel ends, however, with the suggestion that communication, via a letter from mother to daughter, enables Rachele to act on her desire. Beyond the existence of female desire on the level of plot, I suggest that Serao takes up a genre dominated in Italy by men in order to question literary norms, both of the Gothic, but also of its counterpart, the historical and/or realist novel. *La mano tagliata* is precisely about male narrative norms: male desire, fetishism of the female form, problematic bodies, and a type of oversight of female writing. Although popular fiction has been considered non-self-reflective, I posit *La mano tagliata* as ultimately about certain masculine narrative norms and Serao’s own place within a male-dominated literary history. The novel stages an overthrow of sorts whereby a female narrative authority gets the upper hand, but quietly and from within a seemingly conventional romance/Gothic/mystery novel. *La mano tagliata* resists a masculine narrative desire and a Manzoni-like realism in order to make room for a different type of female narrative authority and narrativity that cannot be spoken for and, thus, reflects Serao’s very position within her own literary moment and circle. On both diegetic and extra-

⁷ See also, an unpublished dissertation by Pia Lenore Bertucci, *Da lei, tutto: Female Relationships in the Narratives of Matilde Serao* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008).

⁸ Sharon Wood, “The Sentimental Democracy of Matilde Serao” in *Italian Women’s Writing 1860-1994*. Wood also notes that this attention to female friendships was new in Italian literature and should be credited, in part, to Serao and her use of the romance genre.

⁹ Serao’s genre revision is also the topic of Deanna Shemek’s article “Prisoners of Passion: Women and Desire in Matilde Serao’s *Romanzi d’amore*.”

¹⁰ It is true, however, that *La mano tagliata* employs a motif, analyzed by Shemek in her essay, whereby the daughter worships the mother-figure in scenes of prayer during which she “speaks” to her, imploring her help and guidance. This does constitute a type of relationship between them. Another strong example of a daughter’s prayers to a mother-Madonna figure is found in *Addio, amore*.

diegetic levels, a female narrative authority derives from a mystery left unanswered and a female truth unspoken.¹¹

1. Problematic Bodies and Texts

La mano tagliata questions our assumptions regarding the textual body by probing our notions of the human body. The novel's driving motif and object is a woman's hand and forearm that has been severed, embalmed, and encased in a black box; the hand becomes a fetishized object that spurs the movement of the narrative, and, specifically, the movement, desire and curiosity of the male protagonist and hero, Roberto Alimena.¹² The hand *in question* belongs to Maria Cabib, one of the novel's two female protagonists, who was put into a hypnotic trance by the novel's villain, Marcus Henner. When his experiment goes wrong and he fails to bring Maria out of the trance, Marcus cuts off Maria's hand to awaken her from a catatonia that resembles death. When Roberto meets Maria face-to-face for the first time, he, and we, learn that she somehow has *both* hands. The novel refers to this corporeal paradox, admits that it has not been accounted for, but ends without providing an explanation. The text "fails" precisely when it should "account" for the human body. I argue then that like Maria's body, the novel too is "mutilated"; the novel's lack *is* Maria's mutilation, the novel too is "missing" something (an explanation that might provide "closure" or an answer). I therefore posit a fundamental analogy between human body and textual body in *La mano tagliata*.¹³ Following this logic, it is not altogether surprising that when the narrative deals with bodily mutilation, the novel, in a sense,

¹¹ Like the earlier *Castigo*, *La mano tagliata* can be seen as Gothic novel that slides into detective fiction. I am suggesting this blending with detective fiction because of the fixation on the mystery of Maria that must be solved: the finding her and figuring out her story. The presence of a hired British detective, Dick Leslie, certainly aids in this reading.

¹² By fetish object I mean, simply, that the hand is overvalued by the novel's protagonists; it is imbued with special worth made evident immediately by the way in which it has been preserved and cared for: sealed off from vision, made secret, even hoarded. In this way, it takes on properties and signs of a relic, and, indeed, saints' hands are in certain cases religious relics enshrined and made devotional. This type of fetish object is a narrative trope of nineteenth-century novels, exemplary in *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892) by the Belgian author Georges Rodenbach; the widower, Hugues Viane, manages his grief by living surrounded by his dead wife's objects: her clothes, her letters, a length of her hair. He, in fact, keeps his wife's braid of hair in a special relic room within a crystal box that he worships daily. For a discussion of "la mano tagliata" as a type of (unholy) relic see Nancy A. Harrowitz's *Antisemitism, Misogyny, & The Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso & Matilde Serao*. Furthermore, the severed hand blatantly elicits Freudian fetishism since it recalls castration (and woman's castration, specifically) and might act as an object that stands in place of the missing penis.

¹³ A metaphoric relationship of analogy between the textual body and the human body is certainly not new here; it is a perennially evoked theme and device in literature. Regardless of the particular instances, we need only look at the rhetoric of texts to glean its corporeal tendencies. I am thinking here of language of the body used to describe texts: the body paragraph, the header and footer (or footnote), a literary corpus. In *La mano tagliata* this relationship cannot be overstressed and any difference between the two is progressively collapsed.

must mutilate itself; the novel ends without explaining how Maria's arm could have been cut off *and* yet she could still have it. A body that apparently does not conform to either a "normal" or "abnormal" human form, but rather oscillates within the uncertain and disconcerting, space between the two, results in an anti-revelatory narrative account.

Harrowitz, in *Antisemitism, Misogyny, & The Logic of Cultural Difference*, and Laura Salsini in *Gendered Genres*, speak explicitly and convincingly of the severed hand, providing provocative interpretations of its symbolic possibilities, but never mention its ontological paradox: the inconsistency of Maria's "deviant" body which both has, and doesn't have, both its hands.¹⁴ Most criticism does not address this narrative lacuna or problem. Other criticism uses the novel's participation in the Gothic genre to explain its idiosyncracies and inconsistencies; for criticism of this persuasion Serao's gothic novel is bound to fall into impossible and unresolved quandries.¹⁵

In her book, *Gender Meets Genre: Woman as Subject in the Fictional Universe of Matilde Serao*, Ursula Fanning suggests that the mystery of Maria's hand is one of the novel's many inconsistencies that Serao never cleans up:

As often in Serao's fully Gothic works, there are inconsistencies in the narrative. At one point after her dismemberment Maria is seen to have two hands. Roberto, in his letter to Ranieri, remarks on this, and promises an explanation, though it never materializes. The reader can only assume that Henner, with his Frankenstein-like gifts, has made an "arm" for her—*but we don't know this, and are thus left gothically perplexed*. The other major inconsistency centres on Maria's Jewish name: Rachele tells us that she was Sara before becoming Maria; Henner, in his letter, says that she was Miriam. What are we to believe? And what is the significance of this difficulty in naming? (272 my emphasis).¹⁶

¹⁴ Harrowitz analyzes *La mano tagliata* from the perspective of cultural and religious difference. She, therefore, looks at the severed hand as an unholy, secular relic with both the power to convert and the ability "to act out the power of semiotics," a speaking and read hand that behaves as "a trace to lead to and reconstitute meaning" (125). Salsini, on the other hand, posits that the severed hand "acts as a literary and social critique of male-constructed portrayals of female characters" (142). Salsini thus points to other critics, such as Deanna Shemek, who read the hand as an implicit critique of the poetic *bella mano* of the Petrarchan lyric tradition in general, a lyric canon that "elides woman's bodily presence and features a catalogue of abstracted, idealized parts of the female body" (142). See also, Deanna Shemek's "Prisoners of Passion: Women and Desire in Matilde Serao's *Romanzi d'Amore*."

¹⁵ Ursula Fanning in Chapter Five of *Gender Meets Genre: Woman as Subject in the Fictional Universe of Matilde Serao*, "Gothic Re-visions," cites cases of incoherence as one of the Gothic novel's nineteenth century motifs or devices. She writes, "In the nineteenth-century Gothic text a sense of incoherence also occasionally surfaced. Masao Miyoshi, although discussing poetry, puts it well when he says, 'Incoherent details were many times forcibly 'resolved' by the overall scheme, leaving a painful cacophony.' Again, the dual impulse of the Gothic text (on the one hand the reader is encouraged to identify with the characters, on the other s/he is confused by the plot) reflects its central concern with issues of unity and doubling" (211). If incoherence of details, in other words, inconsistency, is a trait of the late Gothic novel, this chapter asks if Maria's perplexing having and not-having a hand can be seen as another of these frequent gothic perplexities.

¹⁶ Ursula Fanning, *Gender Meets Genre: Woman as Subject in the Fictional Universe of Matilde Serao* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002).

Fanning's study rightfully addresses the Gothic's tendency toward discrepancy that manifests in Serao's novels and in *La mano tagliata* in particular. I would like to build upon Fanning's analysis in order to ask, more specifically, what the paradox of Maria's hand accomplishes within the context and logic of *La mano tagliata*. What is the significance of this unresolved body mystery? Based on the novel's continual return to this enigma, I posit that *La mano tagliata* does not forget to tell us how Maria both has a hand and does not have a hand, nor is it an incoherence that Serao does not bother to resolve; instead, the novel, and Serao, draws our attention directly to this paradox and purposefully leaves it unanswered. The final 150 pages or so of *La mano tagliata* consists of letters, written by the male protagonists to one another, meant to clarify the story of the severed hand: who it belongs to, how and why she was maimed, where the hand is now, and what has happened to the handless woman. Finally, the letters explicitly address the fact that Maria actually has both of her hands *and* the severed hand is definitely hers; Roberto's final letter states that he *knows* he has not yet provided an answer to this enigma, but that he will. Roberto returns to his own lapse later in the same letter in order to pass on the narratorial responsibility for an explanation to Marcus's letter; Roberto assures his reader(s) that Marcus's letter will provide an answer, which it never does. These details serve to highlight a self-awareness in the narrative that invites theoretical speculation.

I want to return to Fanning's proposed solution that, "The reader can only assume that Henner, with his Frankenstein-like gifts, has made an "arm" for her." Here Fanning draws a conclusion to the problem and in a sense makes up for a novelistic lack and a problematic body. Instead of providing a possible answer to the missing/not missing hand issue, this chapter leaves the paradox as is and asks what such omissions produce (an omission that is also a doubling or plurality: leaving the body, Maria's body, in two ways).¹⁷ I demonstrate that the novel itself portrays this normativizing instinct as masculine, but ultimately refuses to conform by leaving Maria's body without a clear explanation. To fill in the novel's missing piece is, perhaps, a type of assimilation that obeys masculine literary (but not only) parameters in an attempt to make the novel more understandable, and, simultaneously, Maria's body more comprehensible. If Fanning sees Henner as a type of Frankenstein figure capable of creating a life-like supplementary body-part, I argue that Fanning tropes Frankenstein/Henner in offering this very solution. In other words, her invention of an answer to the novel's riddle is its own prosthesis (and doubly so: a narrative prosthesis that *is* a bodily prosthesis), and Fanning takes on the role of the "detective" or "doctor" who *fills in* the gaps of a story deemed incomplete.

We might instead ask, are texts and bodies ever "whole"? What does it mean to call them "whole"? In different ways, both psychoanalysis and disability studies offer, and provoke, notions of bodily integrity. In the case of psychoanalysis, and its reliance on the male child's

¹⁷ Robert A. Rushing speaks about this analytical phenomenon in his essay, "La sua tragica incompiutezza": Anxiety, Mis-recognition and Ending in Gadda's *Pasticcaccio*," in which he specifically addresses the crime genre and its criticism. Rushing looks at criticism of Carlo Emilia Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio di via Merulana* and posits an anxiety on the part of the reader and critic who finds, to their dismay, that *Quer pasticciaccio* defies the narrative norm, particularly striking in a crime novel, of closure: that is, the murder mystery is never solved. Rushing finds a tendency to "fix" the novel's "shortcomings" in a number of essays that attempt to create an alternative ending or surmise about what really happened. Indeed, the book's film version drastically changes the narrative in order to add a new ending. In some way, then, perhaps *La mano tagliata* is one of *Quer pasticciaccio*'s unlikely and unrecognized precursors.

development by way of the Oedipal drama, the archetypal body is the little boy's body from which he makes assumptions regarding all other bodies; all bodies, male and female, have penises. In Freud's mini-drama, the little boy receives a threat of castration, which leads him to assess that women's bodies are castrated versions of male bodies. The resultant logic is a notion of the female form as a lacking, mutilated male body.¹⁸ Thus, bodily integrity *is* represented by the male body, *is* having the male member and being a woman, or having a woman's body (genitalia) is eclipsed by not being male; woman is not woman at all, she is, rather, not man.¹⁹ Literary scholars have capitalized on such Freudian logic and utilized it to locate textual logics that structurally, thematically, and rhetorically mimic and/or problematize its itinerary. Hence, a notion of bodily integrity and its others applies to notions of narrative and text.

Unintentionally, the prostheses proposed by Fanning stage a Freudian fetishistic logic whereby a female lack is covered over and the horror of mutilation displaced and postponed.²⁰

A more recent discipline, disability studies, offers a critique of the cultural approach to corporeal difference and takes as its central figure the disabled body. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, in "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor," theorize a fundamental relationship between the disabled person and literary narrative.²¹ According to Mitchell and Snyder, "Nearly every culture views disability as a problem in need of a solution" and this "perception of a "crisis" or a "special situation" has made disabled people... the primary object of literary representation" (205). Specifically, Mitchell and Snyder posit a perpetual discursive dependency upon disability that they term 'narrative prosthesis.' Literary narrative leans on the disabled body, uses it as a crutch, to enact a disruptive force. The disabled body is "a textual and cultural other – an object with its own undisciplined language that exceeds the text's ability to control it" (206). Thus, the ever-recurring disabled body is a literary force that challenges cultural ideals of the "normal," "whole" body. At the same time, however, this corporeal unruliness is recruited as an alien difference that must be dealt with, as it cannot be "accommodated within the ranks of the the norm(als)" (210). Thus, while this "deviant" body has the potential to be a disruptive force, it simultaneously metaphorizes as the strange mystery for which the story must compensate and "cure;" the disability also operates as the textual obstacle that causes the literary operation of open-endedness to close down or stumble" (207) as the disability "is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity" (210). Body and text are thoroughly linked in this theoretical model as the body becomes the necessary Other of text. Disability studies maintains, however, that this obligatory body is specifically disabled; the body only calls attention to itself "in the midst of its breakdown or repair" (215).

In both cases, psychoanalysis and the culture norm critiqued by disability studies, a "deviant" body must be brought back into line with other "normal" bodies or quickly forgotten (at the very least its deviance repressed); in both cases narrative assists. Interestingly, Maria's is most certainly a "deviant" body, but *not* only because it is maimed. Maria's body is beyond unruly in its non-conformity to either body category: abled or disabled. Specifically, its

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997).

¹⁹ See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997).

²¹ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor," in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

mutability cannot be pinned down and its vacillation between disabled – abled cannot be accounted for. We know precisely how and why her hand was amputated, but we do not know how it is both severed and still seemingly perfectly attached. Maria’s body “varies” illogically and readers are compelled to “prostheticize” by way of their own narrative explanation. If Mitchell and Snyder posit the disabled body as a prosthetic upon which narrative leans, here, we might consider narrative itself as serving a prosthetic function in its tendency to “clean up” the disabled body, whether by “killing it off” or accounting for it. Ultimately, however, *La mano tagliata* does not use Maria’s disabled body as a conundrum that gets solved; it is not Maria’s mangled body that the plot follows: it is her amputated hand itself. Furthermore, once Maria is seen with both her hands, the severed hand takes on the function of a prosthetic itself. If narrative operates as a prosthetic then, here, a prosthesis follows a prosthesis (the narrative follows the hand) and Maria’s abled/disabled body escapes them both; the narrative does not answer her body paradox and she does not need the severed hand: both fail in their prosthetic function. Here, a non-categorizable body is a textual obstacle that *enforces* a textual open-endedness.

My analysis seeks to leave Maria’s corporeal mystery unanswered and to ask, instead, what the textual logic is that produces this “problem,” but will not allow for its elucidation. To answer this question, my chapter conjugates together “Narrative Prosthesis” and Teresa de Lauretis’s “Desire in Narrative” and, thus, attempts to use feminist and disability studies as mutually informing disciplines.²² *La mano tagliata* figures a disciplining of both female bodies and the narrative body of a text, and, in turn, where these normativizing impulses overlap. The novel produces a disciplining, male, narrative desire that is ultimately resisted and overturned. If one normative narrative assumption is that a text should answer the questions that it poses, than I read the ending of *La mano tagliata* as defying this normativizing narrative impulse and leaving this mystery unanswered in the service of a female resistance to an Oedipal narrative logic.²³

2. Manhandling

La mano tagliata’s villain, Marcus Henner, is figured as an authoritarian narrator who disciplines both texts and bodies. Roberto Alimena, the male protagonist, and Marcus’s heroic counterpart, initially lacks curiosity and ambition; his desire is never fixed and he is never sure

²² See Teresa de Lauretis, “Desire in Narrative,” in *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Additionally, thinking feminist and disability studies together is already an active cross discipline. See, for example, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies,” in *Signs* 30, no.2 (Winter 2005): 1557-1587. For a recent and thorough guide to the intersection of feminism and disability see, *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011).

²³ It is interesting that the mystery left unanswered is not the traditional “whodunit?” We hear from Marcus’s own confession the mystery behind his life, but also the mystery behind the severed-hand: he admits to being responsible for the surgical removal of Maria’s hand and gives us the entire back story of how and why it happened. Thus, it is not that the “crime” is never solved, but, more precisely, that the mystery is displaced. It is the story of *her body* that is not solved.

of his trajectory: he merely comes and goes based on whims: “desiderando, così vagamente...” (6). Roberto is endowed with the luxury of unhindered movement; when the novel begins, he has suddenly, on a whim, chosen to leave Naples for Rome. His is a free-floating and random movement that has no origin in authentic desire or thought, that is, it has no guiding story with a defined purpose or goal: “Nulla era certo però: giacché nulla era mai certo nello spirito e nel desiderio di Roberto Alimena” (6). It is Marcus, and his black “cofano” containing Maria’s hand, that sets Roberto in deliberate motion, providing him with curiosity, desire, and, thus, intentionality. Roberto’s actions only become deliberate once he comes into contact with Marcus Henner.

Marcus’s obsession with the hand in the box is handed over to Roberto’s character and turns his life into a narrative. Marcus forgets the mini-suitcase on the traincar that he shares with Roberto and it changes Roberto’s life forever, it takes him over: “Roberto Alimena sentiva che, suo malgrado, navigava in pieno romanzo; e questo romanzo, egli che non ne leggeva quasi mai, cominciava a predominarlo, ora che ne diventava un personaggio” (74). Roberto has finally gained, or been invested by, desire, but has lost his will to control it. He seems caught in the cogs of narrative, not as reader, “egli che non ne leggeva quasi mai,” but as one of its characters. Possession of the hand makes Roberto’s life into a “romanzo,” the first suggestion that we might read metatextually. Roberto becomes obsessed with the severed hand and falls in love with the woman he imagines it belongs to. His telos is to find the woman with the missing hand and rescue her from Marcus: Marcus, and “his” hand, incites Roberto’s self-proclaimed “narrative” telos; both the protagonist’s desire and the narrative’s desire are masculine.

On the diegetic level, as well as in relation to the reader, Marcus incites a type of narrative seduction using hypnotism to propel characters into specific roles. He enters Roberto’s train car and, by altering Roberto’s trajectory, sets the novel in motion:

Giacché dormiva e sognava [Roberto]. Adesso, gli pareva di non essere più solo, nel suo scompartimento: gli sembrava, nel sogno, che fantomaticamente, come un soffio d’aria che attraversa un ambiente, *qualcuno* fosse entrato nella vettura e che vi si fosse fermato. Sognando, però, gli sembrava che l’oscurità dello scompartimento fosse così profonda, che egli, malgrado aguzzasse gli occhi – gli pareva mentre dormiva e sognava – non arrivava a vedere chi fosse questo *qualcuno*. In fondo, mentre dormiva, il suo sogno diventava penoso: due o tre volte si agitò sotto la pelliccia, come se volesse liberarsi da un incubo, ma non riuscendovi. Pian piano, il sogno diventava più intenso, prendeva l’aspetto di un’allucinazione.

Adesso gli sembrava vedere due occhi fissi su lui, occhi immoti, glauchi, come l’acqua di uno stagno: sentiva, nel sogno, quello sguardo senza calore, ma fisso e ostinato. Di chi era quello sguardo? Apparteneva a una persona, a una persona *viva*, o a una visione? *Di chi* erano quegli occhi che, stranamente, nelle ombre fitte di cui il suo sogno era circondato, nelle ombre fitte di cui il suo sogno era circondato... Nel sonno, e nel sogno, egli sentiva crescere la sua pena, la sua ansiosa curiosità e gli pareva che non si potesse muovere, sotto quello sguardo, che quegli occhi lo vincolassero nel sogno e nella vita, lo legassero sotto la loro ossessione (9-10).

When Marcus appears in the train car Roberto does not really see him and cannot awake enough to fully take him in. But Roberto senses that he is no longer alone. Marcus's ability to control what Roberto sees is a foreshadowing of Marcus's role in producing Roberto's desire. Marcus will be in control of what Roberto sees, what he is curious about, whom he desires. Moreover, Roberto will need to overthrow Marcus to realize that desire (he will need to rescue and kidnap Maria from him), and it is Marcus who can provide Roberto's story with closure. Already, Marcus is figured as narrative propulsion, drive, movement, and even as narrator *himself*. Marcus, then, authors Roberto's narrative. In terms of the logic of 'narrative prosthesis,' Marcus would be both responsible for the disabled body and responsible for its disappearance, which he is; Marcus amputates Maria's hand and is eventually, by way of hypnosis, her murderer.

Interestingly, this lengthy citation obsessively repeats "sogno," as if the reader might forget that Roberto is sleeping. In fact, this repetitive "sogno" acts as the word that induces a type of hypnosis, i.e., the word that keeps Roberto sleeping and, possibly, dreaming, as it simultaneously manages the narration, in turn "hypnotizing" the reader; Roberto is kept asleep by Marcus's powers of hypnosis while we are, at the same time, continuously reminded of Roberto's state by way of a word that, like a refrain, keeps our reading in the same place, stuck on "sogno." As readers we are led on a type of hypnotic journey, as if dreaming with eyes open we put ourselves in the narrator's/author's/novel's hands and suspend disbelief. Marcus as initiator of narrative propulsion manages a body and the text at the same time with the word "sogno": a bodily hypnosis is a textual hypnosis. Aside from the word "sogno," the alliteration of the "s" letter results in its own sound-driven hypnosis: for example, "Adesso gli sembrava vedere due occhi fissi su lui...come l'acqua di uno stagno: sentiva, nel sogno, quello sguardo senza calore, ma fisso e ostinato." Sounds and rhythm play a part in this literary trance, as they might in a spoken hypnosis. Human body and the textual body are aligned and Marcus oversees and disciplines both. Marcus's very ownership of the boxed hand is already a way in which he manages body and text at once. It is at this early moment in Serao's novel that Marcus's status as narrator/author literally infiltrates the text through this textual hypnosis embodied by the excessive repetition of "sogno." In other words, I read the above-cited paragraph as the edge of an inner crease or fold that begins here and internally divides Marcus's narrative from Serao's.²⁴

Alternatively, Marcus's physical description returns again and again, accompanied by the same details of his green eyes and hunchback. The novel repeats itself, as if we are not reading with enough attention. We read again and again, "gli occhi verdi", "una bocca (sottile) sotto i mustacchi biondi," "un uomo piccolo, magro," "una gobba sulla spalla sinistra," "un volto pallido," etc.²⁵ *La mano tagliata* cannot get enough of Marcus's physicality, and the words used

²⁴ I borrow, and utilize, the image of an inner crease or fold commencing from within the novel and thus enacting a splitting, or internal splintering, of the narrative, and here its voice(s), from a figure adopted by Derrida in his essay, "The Law of Genre."

²⁵ I should add that this repetition of vocabulary is also a characteristic of the 'romanzo popolare,' which assumes a certain linguistic 'poverty' on the part of its reader. For more on this see Umberto Eco, *Il superuomo di massa* (Milano: Casa editrice Valentino Bompiani, 1978). Although he does not discuss *La mano tagliata*, in his short introduction to *Carolina Invernizio, Matilde Serao, Liala* entitled, "Tre donne intorno al cor..." Eco nominates Serao as holding a privileged position among female writers of the 'romanzo popolare.' Based on Eco's definition, *La mano tagliata* certainly adheres to many traits and devices of the 'romanzo popolare.' It is important to note, though, that I am commenting not only on the repetition of certain words, but, here, on the repetition of the description of Marcus's appearance, his

to paint that physicality. When Marcus visits the home of Mosè and his daughter, Rachele Cabib, in hopes of convincing Rachele to be his, there is an extended description of Marcus in all his deformed glory (Mosè and Rachele are also protagonists over whom Marcus asserts his control; we find out that Maria was Mosè's wife and Rachele's mother). The passage ends with a familiar refrain: "e infine quegli occhi verdi, verdi, verdi come l'acqua verde, gelidi, fulminei talvolta e talvolta semplicemente vitrei. Il corpo era deforme: una gobba sulla spalla sinistra contorceva quel torace enorme su quelle gambe corte, sottili, ignobili. Era orribile" (123). In addition to the repetitive description of Marcus's horrifying physicality, and the fact that it closes a lengthy, almost Petrarchan (blason) rendering of his body, this citation repeats "verdi, verdi, verdi" to depict Marcus's eyes, his most often recurring trait. The hovering on "verdi" mimes in micro-form the textual hypnosis by way of body parts, here Marcus's. Thus *his body* becomes part of the narratorial hypnosis. I write *his* with emphasis because the use of Marcus's body signifies a foreshadowing of a resistance from within: a textual resistance to *his* use of hypnosis and another level of hypnosis that, instead, *works on him*. If we read Marcus's powers of hypnosis as a marker of his potential as narrator/author, then the hypnotic textual refrain of his physical form suggests the presence of another narrator, somewhere, somehow, and/or another narratorial strain. I return later to this "second" narrative strain and analyze it in depth.

Like an omniscient narrator, Marcus is rarely actually seen but acts, instead, as a presence everywhere. He is a "*qualcuno*" who hovers among the characters, infiltrating and controlling their daily lives. When a character thinks they have seen him they are almost always unsure of their own eyes. When Roberto first discusses his encounter with "l'ignoto" he refuses to call him a man and insists on using the word "fantasma."²⁶ When asked if he has seen his enemy Ranieri states, "Visto? No. Intravisto: apparso per un minuto secondo dinanzi a me, poi scomparso" (104).²⁷ Neither Roberto nor Ranieri can definitively claim to have *seen* Marcus. All definitions of "intravedere" cast the act of seeing in doubt: the object glimpsed is too far away, escapes being seen, or is disguised, as if covered over by a thick fog. The difference between "vedere" and "intravedere" is important for my argument, because the latter is used in many of Marcus's "appearances" and associated with his unique powers. He seems to have a presence and an effect on characters without always appearing and "behaving" as a traditional character would. His presence is often ephemeral, felt but intangible.

At times Marcus's voice is heard among a crowd, or as an immanence erupting out of the landscape; his voice is often disembodied, as if carried along by a gust of air, rather than tied to his bodily presence and location.²⁸ During "carnivale," when Roberto and Ranieri are at the

corporality. Taken together, the repetition of his appearance by way of nearly identical terminology has a particular effect on the reader that I am describing as hypnotic: it affects our reading experience.

²⁶ See pages 24-26 when Roberto reveals his curious traincar encounter to Héliane Love.

²⁷ Ranieri is Rachele's love who is framed by Marcus as cheating on her and then stabbed by Marcus, who frames Roberto for the attack.

²⁸ We should ask how Marcus's, often times, disembodied voice is related to his horrifying physicality. It is as if Marcus's grotesque body loses its human-ness the more it is described. Marcus is after all, perhaps more so than Maria, *the* disabled body of *La mano tagliata*: his appearance is horrifying and monstrous, and his distinctive difference is his hunchback, which, unlike Maria's hand, is always there. I would suggest that Marcus's deformed physicality constructs him as unbearably different and, thus, less human, or Other. The ability to disconnect body from voice is a power that his status as "not exactly human" allows, but also continues to reinforce. In her forthcoming dissertation, "From Disability to Superabilità: Theorizing the Communicable in Italian Narrative," Kate Noson locates a literary and cultural tendency

“Corso dei fiori” parade they hear a voice emanating from the crowd; it is impossible to pin down from where it derives. This perceived voice responds to their intimate conversation. Thus, not only does this *somebody* speak from an unknowable location and identity, but he *hears* a private conversation, as if standing among the characters in dialogue. His is a privileged site of “knowing.” While discussing the strange coincidence of both having “un rivale ignoto” who seems to follow them, an unknown voice interrupts: “*Non tanto lontano*, -- parve che dicesse una voce stridula, tra la folla, accanto a loro... Ma non potettero sorprendere che visi voltati in aria o teste chinate di gente che lanciava fiori o che ne riceveva: nessuna faccia sospetta era intorno a loro” (104). And then again they hear, “*Non la troverai*, -- fu un soffio di voce che passò fra i due amici... passando rapida.” (106).

Marcus’s perceived, yet transient and ethereal, presence (of body and voice) mimics an omniscient narrator’s presence/non-presence in a work of fiction (Here, I refer to a narrator who is unknown or not explicitly specified). In general, *La mano tagliata* has an unseen and unknown narrator whose act of narration is never made explicit; s/he is not tied to a single location or speaking subject, but is, instead, knowledgeable about various people, in various locations, at different and overlapping moments. Using Gérard Genette’s terminology in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, *La mano tagliata* employs an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic paradigm in the 3rd person wherein the narrating instance is never made explicit.²⁹ As readers, we are thrown immediately into the events and the narrating instance is hidden. From within this heterodiegetic instance, Marcus is figured as homodiegetic narrator because he is present as a character in the narrative he seems to propel. This is not to say that we “watch” Marcus in the narrating act, but, rather, that his character is endowed with powers that mimic a type of narratorial command. For example, both Roberto and Ranieri feel that they are being followed at all times, that they are never alone, yet neither man truly “sees” his persecutor. Just as we never “see,” nor are able to grasp, any explicit indication of a narrative voice in *La mano tagliata*, Roberto and Ranieri cannot ascertain the presence and voice that seems to envelop them and interrupt their private worlds. The possibility of being both within and without the diegetic level produces a slipperiness and layered narrative complexity that the very role of narrator brings to light and that Marcus inhabits quite irregularly as he is not a first-person narrator, but an actual character. Marcus’s double role would be more readily comprehensible if he was the novel’s “I.” Nor am I saying, however, that Marcus is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective (focalization). Instead, I posit that Marcus is figured as a diegetic narrator because of his relation to the other characters and to the object of the hand. Another example is the very way in which characters speak of him; Marcus’s nickname is “l’ignoto” and characters state that he knows all: “sa tutto.” The characters, and readers, know who Marcus is, but he is given the title ‘the unknown’ suggesting a quality that renders him beyond comprehension; he can never be fully ascertained, nor known. Lastly, he knows, and knows all; a certain omniscience, or perception of omniscience, resides within him.

to assign super-human, or extra-human, abilities to disabled people; for example, she finds that in Dacia Maraini’s *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* Marianna’s deafness is related to certain psychic abilities. Noson employs this tendency as a theoretical move, which she terms “superabilità,” implying both a lack to be overcome and a superhuman power. Marcus does seem to fit the disabled-super-abled mold and I go on later to discuss the logic and purpose of his monstrosity.

²⁹ See *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* where Genette defines the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic paradigm as one in which “a narrator in the first degree tells a story that he is absent from” (248).

I read in Ranieri's description of being secretly followed a character's positioning in relation to the authoritative possibilities of a narrator who implicitly lives within, and among, its personages. Ranieri states,

Io avverto un fenomeno curioso. Vi è mai successo di penetrare in un ambiente assolutamente oscuro e di *intendere* che lì dentro vi è qualcuno? Voi non vedete e non udite nulla: ma avete la sensazione che vi sia qualcuno... in qualunque stato, in qualunque momento, io *sen*to che *egli* è attorno a me, non so dove, ma poco lontano! (105).

Here, Ranieri describes a particular sensation of presence that he cannot account for. We know that Ranieri explains Marcus's strange and incomprehensible presence that has taken over both his, and Roberto's, life: a type of being stalked. This unperceived but felt presence seems to depict an aspect of the complex relationship between narrator and character; in other words, Marcus's form of persecution is figured precisely as a type of unseen, omniscient narratorial presence. Ranieri's curious phenomenon is, then, reminiscent of Roberto's sensation that his life feels like a "romanzo" and he a character in a dramatic intrigue.

It is by way of Marcus's most prized possession of the boxed hand that his role as authorial narrator is concretized only to be pulled out from under him. As author/narrator figure, Marcus rules over, what at first seems, the novel's primary disabled body, Maria; Marcus keeps her prisoner in a locked room and he takes her severed hand locked in a box with him wherever he goes. His loss of the box can be read as the moment in which he loses control of both body and text and is, thus, a foreshadowing of Maria's escape and a certain narrative escape. The centrality of the box to *La mano tagliata*'s narrative movement prompts the following attention to its figurative possibilities.

At first Roberto feels that it would be improper to open a suitcase belonging to a stranger and this impropriety is rendered sexually obtrusive. The box is described as "la scatola misteriosa" that lies on the table of Roberto's hotel room like a reclining woman: "giaceva...sotto la luce di un candelabro (18). It is as though we are interrupting an intimate encounter; Roberto has closed the blinds for privacy: "Senza toccarla...egli la guardò meglio" (18); "con gli occhi attaccati a quella pelle nera che non portava nè cifra, nè segno, nè nulla; il tempo passava e Roberto Alimena ardeva di curiosità" (19).³⁰ Roberto's curiosity is a burning desire in the face of the untouched, virginal skin lying before his eyes. Here, a curiosity to know overlaps with a sexual desire to touch and possess. Eventually, Roberto abandons all decency; he must succeed in breaking open the perfectly, hermetically, sealed box:³¹ "Senza pensare più a

³⁰ If one were to analyze the question of race in *La mano tagliata*, one would have to address the fact that the box's "pelle" is black. And although the body part contained inside is immediately gleaned as white and pure, its apparent owner Maria is Jewish by birth, and thus religiously and ethnically other.

³¹ Roberto's observation that the box is hermetically sealed is another nod in the direction of its sexualization: "Non si comprendeva come fosse avvenuta la connessione perfetta fra il coperchio e la scatola: ma essa era ermetica" (29). There is an entire historical, literary, and rhetorical genealogy that can be traced in regards to the sexualized and metaphorized usage of "hermetic" as in "hermetically sealed." Here, it suffices to gesture towards its use in orientalizing travel narratives whereby an "outsider" (be it a racial, national, or differently gendered outsider) desires to enter a harem; this desire is both epistemological and erotic as it suggests a crossing beyond the sealed walls of the harem in order to know what takes place within. The prohibition to enter is further figured by the veiled faces and bodies of the

nulla, obbedendo a un istinto invincibile, egli cercò qualche cosa e non trovò che una stecca di avorio per tentare l'effrazione" (29). As crass, and perhaps sarcastic, as it may be, one is prompted to read the "stecca di avorio" as the male member, which fails in its initial attempt and is partially injured in the process: "Ma fu inutile...e, a un certo punto, la punta della stecca si ruppe" (29-30). The ivory stick is retired and Roberto tries to force the lock with many other instruments. Eventually, he reverts to breaking off the hinges from the box's backside: "E armandosi di tutti quei piccoli strumenti che aveva, egli cominciò il lavoro di scardinamento...Quando ebbe risolto uno dei cardini, cercò di penetrare con la stecca nell'apertura; ma trovò una resistenza molle... Come un malfattore, egli si affaticava a un'opera oscena, violando la proprietà altrui, violando il segreto di uno sconosciuto... la violazione era fatta" (30-31). Once he reassumes the "stecca," and re-penetrates, he finds a feminine resistance opposing his will, i.e., "una resistenza molle."

Roberto's cracking open of the box is portrayed as the sex act itself wherein narrative desire cannot be separated from access to, and possible authority over, a woman's body. This resistant obstacle is precisely de Lauretis's female boundary that must be overcome by the Oedipal hero in order to fulfill his destiny and continue forth *his narrative desire*. The forceful penetration of an opposing mystery is depicted as a blatant sexual violation. This scene's exaggeration and obviousness cannot be ignored. I propose that, in this instance, Serao's novel caricatures, and tropes, a narrative desire that *is itself* obvious and crass; Serao makes fun of how transparently narrative itself relies on masculine parameters of knowing and desiring. I believe this scene is both highly self-conscious (a literary quality that Eco and others insist the 'romanzo popolare' lacks) and exposing. In other words, this scene is intensely meta-textual, not just because the boxed hand is figured as text (as I go on to show), but because Serao tropes an inherent misogyny, emphasizing the way *narrative itself* relies on a male desire to conquer a female mystery. Here I assume Judith Butler's position that parody is, not only critical, but inherently denaturalizing.³² In other words, Serao's parody is subversive in that it exposes by way of performance (an over-the-top one) a type of narrative taken for granted as the norm, or as natural; Serao puts on a show (we might even say a drag show).³³

More subtly, Roberto's handling of the box links it thematically and rhetorically to a text, and specifically, perhaps, to this text. Thus, it is not just the secret of a female body that the box

women contained within. Important for our purposes, the hermetically sealed harem metonymically extends to the female bodies contained within, as they too are sealed off from intruders; the Oriental women in the harem belong to the Sultan and are forbidden to the curious, and aroused, foreigner. There is a clear, discursive relationship between this instance of the feminized space of the harem and the preoccupation with the virgin whose hymen is still intact, and more desirable because barred. This is one obvious way in which the colonizer's work is explicitly masculinized and eroticized as a figural rape of virgin lands. To return to Roberto and the "cofano nero," it is difficult to read the word "hermetic" and not think of a female body: "un desiderio immediato lo colpì, ardentissimo: quello di aprire la scatola: un fiotto di sangue gli fece bruciare la fronte" (29).

³² See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

³³ Sharon Wood seems to be taking a similar stance in her reading of Serao's *Fantasia* when she writes about the femme fatale's, Lucia's, language of love within a traditional triangular love scenario; "If Caterina has no words to express any emotion other than placid contentment, Lucia has an abundance of them; she is even, it seems, writing a novel, and Serao almost seems to be mocking the romance genre, although she nevertheless concedes to its superficial conventions" (55 of "The Sentimental Democracy of Matilde Serao).

constitutes and contains, but also the secret of a narrative text, and, I suggest, the secret of *this very text*, i.e., *La mano tagliata*. The suitcase is problematic because of the type of lock that seals it shut: “Era un fermaglio a linguetta serrata, evidentemente, in una serratura a cui mancava la chiave o il segreto” (29). The clasp is “a linguetta serrata.” A “linguetta,” according to the Cambridge Italian Dictionary is the “flap of the lock of a trunk” (444). But one notices immediately the “lingua:” both tongue and language in the feminine diminutive form. The first definition of “linguetta” is, in fact, “wagging tongue;” one who talks or divulges a lot could be said to have a wagging tongue. The box, then, contains something that its locked tongue will not reveal. The suggestion is that the box could speak and reveal through language. If Marcus, as original possessor of the box, is enactor of narrative movement then his coveted object that he fashions and controls is likened to a text whose mouth is presently closed upon what may be a wagging tongue. As already noted, Roberto resorts to opening the box by breaking its “cardini” or pintles/hinges. “Cardine” also has a figurative meaning that relates to speech and/or text: “pivotal part of an argument.” That Roberto does not open the box by way of the “fermaglio a linguetta serrata” suggests that even though the text is opened and the narrative will continue forth, the secret towards which the contents of the box gesture, a female hand and a text, will not be spoken, will not be divulged in this novel. That the “cardine,” the pivotal part of an argument, is what is broken also suggests that the novel’s own logic is disturbed.

These examples are a foreshadowing of the narrative’s ultimate withholding of its secret, which is the hand’s secret. That the hand’s secret *is* the novel’s secret is another way in which I read a mapping onto one another of the two and posit that the hand be considered a textual hand, that is, a hand that writes and narrates; the “mano tagliata” signifies a writing hand as it is where body and text collide. Finally, the hand is gendered, hence the secret too is gendered female, belonging to a woman and to her location as a speaking and writing subject. The box and Maria may ultimately be “broken” (I refer here to Maria’s eventual murder), but their mutual destruction also disrupts the novel’s own textual logic, i.e., the mystery of the severed arm and of Maria’s body die with her. In this way, I suggest that Maria’s narrative resists Marcus’s; it is Maria’s “writing hand” that resists giving up its secret even from within an exaggerated masculine narrative desire that attempts to dominate it.

To speak of the severed hand, then, is to speak of a female narrative that, at least for now, seems contained within Marcus’s “romanzo” that Roberto lives out. Based on my reading of the boxed hand as a text that will not divulge its female secret and thus stands in for this very novel (a *mise-en-abyme*), I posit that the novel itself suggests a rhetorical nesting of “mano” in “romanzo;” thematically and rhetorically “mano” and “romanzo” stand in a relationship of mutual signification where to speak of one is to speak of the other.³⁴ This relationship makes obligatory that “mano” appear in the novel’s title: that which announces the novel, must also, and at the same time, announce a hand: *La mano tagliata*. Furthermore, the subtitle or generic designation, “un romanzo d’amore” contains another hidden “mano” or “man” within the novelistic designation “romanzo.” Here, as in the novel, a “mano” is found within a “romanzo” and again the hand in the box-text refers to, and is, the hand of a novel. Again, the hand is a writing hand, and the box containing the hand is a “romanzo” within Serao’s “romanzo,” but one

³⁴ It is important to note that etymologically “mano” and “romanzo” are unrelated terms so that I may argue that it is, indeed, the novel itself that points to a paronomasia between the two. “Mano” derives from the Latin “manus” meaning “hand” or “fist” or, less commonly, “a band of men.” While “romanzo” derives from the old French “romanz” (romance), which stems from the Latin expression “romanice loqui” meaning “to speak in the Roman way.”

that continues to signify *La mano tagliata*. The divided title contains, and seems to signal preemptively, the presence of two novels, and, thus, two writing hands: a novel divided by, and within, itself, i.e., at its own hands.

Importantly, Marcus and Roberto do not operate alone in their dealings with the hand. Instead, early on, there is a female mediation of Roberto's desire to know what is in the box that suggests a subversion of a purely male narrative desire; he does not open it until his friend Héliane Love emphatically tells him to. In fact, at first, Roberto claims to have no interest whatsoever in opening the box. When he tells Héliane the mysterious box, she is the one who immediately demands to know what it contains:

Héliane disse subito:

- E che vi è nella scatola?
- Non lo so.
- Come, non lo sai?
- È chiusa.
- Dovevi aprirla.
- Aprirla?
- Ma naturalmente. È la prima cosa che io avrei fatta.
- Tu sei donna.
- Non solo le donne sono curiose.
- Io non sono curioso.
- Va là, che tu fremi di sapere che vi è dentro.
- Io? no.

Already suggested is a female mediation of a male desire to know. Marcus may be the bearer of the box that changes the course of Roberto's life, he may be the explicit hypnotizer of Roberto's character, but it is a woman that suggests to Roberto the possibility of uncovering what is inside. In addition, Héliane is an explicitly desiring female subject whom Roberto finds vulgar; she has a male partner, but flirts freely with whomever she wants. Héliane is the first female character (and body) that Roberto cannot seem to control. Even Héliane's desire to open the box is interpreted by Roberto as sexually devious. Her desire to get Roberto to desire turns into a ploy to go to his hotel room or to entice him to return home with her; in other words, inciting his desire is really only in the service of her desire. She suggests, "Vuoi che venga con te, all'albergo, ad aprire la scatola? — diss'ella, con un tono di civetteria" (22) and then, "Andiamo all'albergo, tu entri in camera, porti via la scatola e andiamo a casa mia ad aprirla" (23). In both cases, Roberto deems Héliane overly desirous and thus inappropriate. Even to Roberto, who has been depicted as a "liberal" bachelor, Héliane's desire to know what is inside the box is inseparable from a sexual vulgarity that he cannot tolerate: "A un tratto, Héliane Love sembrò enormemente volgare a Roberto Alimena" (23).

We may also want to ask if this differing approach, a gendered approach to the box and its contents, might be useful in thinking about differing approaches to text in regards to both the "romanzo" that Roberto's life has become, because authored by Marcus, and *La mano tagliata*. For example, Roberto's initial curiosity has to do with "who" the box belongs to, while Héliane is preoccupied with "what" it contains. These conflicting approaches connote a differing hermeneutics, differing ways of handling and reading a textual object. From the male perspective the "what" is less important than the "who," i.e., whose is it? Or, who authored it?

3. Who Converts Whom?

Conversion is a central theme of *La mano tagliata*. The most obvious form of conversion is religious, as it is the two female protagonists, Maria and Rachele (mother and daughter) who both convert from Judaism to Catholicism to be with the men they love. In both cases, the conversion to Catholicism is strongly opposed by men: Maria's husband and Rachele's father, Mosè Cabib, and Marcus Henner, both of whom are Jewish. In both instances, the change of faith preempts a name change: Maria's Jewish name was Sara and Rachele becomes Grazia when she enters a monastery. Late in the novel, Marcus's letter of confession admits that he used his powers of hypnosis to ruin the lives of as many Christians as he could; he sought to punish them as a vendetta for their persecution of Jews. Marcus's power of hypnotism may also be viewed as a tool that attempts to convert. He is a doctor figure who cures ailing bodies through hypnotic trances, but it is, above all, in his relation to Maria and Rachele that we find him trying to affect their desires. Marcus captures Maria and controls her life for fifteen years. Specifically, he seeks to force first mother and then daughter to want him; Marcus would like to enforce a normative female desire, i.e., that they desire what he desires. Marcus uses hypnotism on Maria in an attempt to coerce her to love him, but it never works. Maria is never completely hypnotized; she never responds the way he wants her to. Marcus's attempt to convert Rachele into loving him also fails. Rachele escapes Marcus's persecution by hiding in a convent and becoming a devout nun. In the convent, *Le sepolte vive*, women attempt to shed an old life to become an entirely new person: a person who is more or less dead to the world beyond its walls. Roberto and Marcus also undergo types of conversions. Roberto changes from a man with no desire or direction to a man with a clearly defined purpose and goal; he falls in love with the woman who has lost her arm and swears to rescue her from her captor. Even after her death Roberto claims that he will remain dedicated to Maria and to the memory of her (to her hand?) (is it Marcus or the hand that converts Roberto?). Roberto is a changed man and he depicts himself as such in his confessional letter to Ranieri. Marcus too, in part, converts, and also by way of a written confession; his letter enacts an absolving act of confession; he confesses his life story, confesses to murdering Maria by way of hypnosis, and expresses deep remorse for having killed her. His letter is a plea for forgiveness as in going to confession, which, in a sense, figures him as converting to Catholicism. Interestingly, the two male conversions of *La mano tagliata* are contained within narrative, confessional form while this is not the case for Maria and Rachele.

If Marcus seeks to control bodies and texts, I posit that he, and his narrative, fail specifically when it comes to Maria, as it is her body, and her text by way of her hand, that he most explicitly attempts to dominate. Maria is a slippery character whose many inconsistencies (perhaps mini-conversions in themselves) make her uncontrollable; she cannot be "pinned down" by the diegetic level of the narrative, i.e., by Marcus's novel. Maria converts to Catholicism and changes her name from Sara to Maria, but at one point in the novel we read of a third name, Miriam; it is Marcus who in his letter refers to Maria as once having the Jewish name Miriam: "Ella si chiamava Miriam, ma aveva trasformato il suo nome in quello della madre di Gesù, per un suo capriccio" (404). For Fanning this mis-naming is one of the novel's many inconsistencies, but I would argue instead that this inconsistent naming be read as an example of Maria's slipperiness that Marcus cannot manage or control. In other words, it is not *La mano tagliata* that cannot keep things straight, but Marcus in particular who refers to her as Miriam

and in so doing displays an inability to relate and manage her story. Maria is not only the agent of her own decision to convert and change her name, but it is her voice that Rachele hears while in prayer that tells her to convert, thus authorizing her disobedience to her father's Jewish laws. It is, furthermore, Rachele's adherence to her maternal genealogy that brings her "back to life" at the novel's end when Rachele escapes the symbolic death of the *Sepolte vive* after receiving a letter from Maria. It is not only that Maria resists Marcus's attempts to convert her, but that she is an agent of Rachele's various conversions, even if mother and daughter never come into physical contact for the entirety of the novel.

In general, the male characters of the novel are hardpressed to give a clear account of Maria; the desire to clean up her story and make it legible is distinctly masculine, but, ultimately, the novel at large does not behave, nor conform. Mosè's descriptions of her life are never clear: "spesso le aveva ripetuto che sua madre era morta giovane, seppellita in un cimitero di Germania, nella loro fuga dalla Polonia. Ma due o tre volte, Mosè Cabib, sconvolto dai ricordi, aveva fatto delle confessioni ambigue...aveva parlato di Sara Cabib come se fosse sparita e non già come se fosse morta (66). It is true that in this instance it is Rachele who wants to understand what happened to her mother, but it is her father, as the one who could clarify her mother's story, that proves unable or unwilling; Mosè is, in fact, completely controlled by Marcus and obeys his every command; any information on Maria would come from Marcus. Her story is difficult, in general, for characters to narrate and a number of male characters can only attempt it. Her loyal servant John, when pressed to tell her story, describes it as "un romanzo!... Una storia così lunga, così triste, così tetra!" and when commanded to explain it says, "Come volete che mi spieghi?... Non posso" (280-281). John is a longtime employee of Marcus's who seems trapped within his world of narration in the sense that he refers to Maria's life as a long, dark novel, but one that really cannot be fully narrated. Roberto's letter to Maria imploring her to allow him to help her escape continues to pose questions about the mystery of her life that he is desperate to grasp. Rachele is perhaps the most desperate to know about her mother's life, what happened to her, if she is actually dead, and, if alive, why she has not come to find her. Rachele continuously poses these questions both directly to her father and within internal monologues, but does not get any straight answers in the course of the novel. It is only at the novel's end that Rachele receives a letter from her mother that, supposedly, gives her Maria's real story; the contents of the letter are never given over to the reader.

It is true that Marcus's final confession tells, in part, Maria's story. But it is a strange story replete with greed for luxury, adultery, and a daughter whose father is put into doubt. In other words, this is not the angelic, victim, Maria whom we have come to pity. We do not learn clearly when Maria converted to Catholicism or why; Marcus describes it as a "capriccio" but also allows the possibility that she wanted to be with another man, Jehan Straube, who may or may not be Rachele's biological father. Maria's character is malleable and tends towards conversion(s): various names, men, locations, and religions.³⁵ Overall, Marcus's letter does not make her story particularly clear, or linear. It is precisely this type of woman that Roberto finds overtly distasteful. He wants women to be straightforward, one thing and one thing only:

³⁵ Fanning discusses Maria's unusual ability to travel and change locations, although she attributes that movement to Marcus's movement and his control over her. See Fanning's *Gender Meets Genre*. I think, however, that Maria's incomplete story portrays her as moving from country to country long before she is captured by Marcus.

“Poi, a me piacciono le situazioni nette, con le donne: una signora onesta è una signora onesta, una *cocotte* è una *cocotte*, un’avventuriera è un’avventuriera; e queste tre professioni non si debbono mescolare, mai; e ognuno deve farla limpidamente, la propria professione” (224-225).

Ironically, for Roberto this is exactly what Maria is not; she is not a woman who can be pinned down, but she is the woman he falls in love with.

Roberto’s confession, his final letter to Ranieri, confirms that Maria has both her hands, “*Maria, la prigioniera, la vittima di Marcus Henner, aveva ambedue le mani!*” (360), and that the severed hand is hers: “Quella mano troncata alla metà dell’avambraccio era proprio di Maria” (382) and,

Fu più tardi che io seppi il segreto di quella mano tagliata. Quella mano era la sua! io non ve ne dirò il perchè, la mia lettera è già troppo lunga. Sono stanco...ho esausto le mie forze...D'altronde, nella confessione di Marcus Henner, che vi unisco, strana e lugubre confessione, voi saprete anche col *suo* segreto, il segreto della mano tagliata (382-383).

Roberto’s letter never reveals Maria’s secret, but turns in circles making excuses, never actually divulging what he claims to have an answer for. Roberto passes the onus of telling her secret onto Marcus, although when we read Marcus’s confessional letter it is never given over.

It is striking that men’s stories of confession take up the last 100 or so pages of *La mano tagliata* and that the female characters do not participate in this form of disclosure; Maria’s letter to Rachele never appears in the text and this withholding is an important example of Serao’s authority: Serao chooses not to include her letter within the novel while we read the letters of Marcus, Robert, and Ranieri. We do know that Maria’s letter makes its way to Rachele and enables her to act on her desire, to leave the monastery and find Ranieri, who Marcus took from her; her’s is a maternally mediated and enabled desire. I suggest that this omission of female confession, which we are told exists, is a way in which Serao allows women to escape a certain narrative disciplining: a way in which their stories, their truths, cannot be wholly revealed through, or contained by, narrativization. The mystery of Maria’s hand that she both has and does not have is a part of her story *that only she can tell*, and is never told once she is killed. This secret disturbs the telos of Roberto’s life-novel, as shown in a conversation with his hired detective Dick Leslie:

-- ...E se quella mano non fosse sua (di Maria)?
-- Ebbene, che accadrebbe?
-- Accadrebbe il crollo di tutto il mio romanzo (296).

The fact that the text never answers the question of her hand is a problem for the Oedipal narrative and its hero: it will crumble. It is this “mutismo” that was always Maria’s defense, and rebellion, against Marcus as sustainer of male narrative desire: “il mutismo con cui mi trattava Maria” (410).

Here I want to connect Maria’s powerful and active silence to Serao’s authorial agency. In his letter to Ranieri, Roberto claims that he does not have to explain the secret of Maria’s hand because Marcus’s letter does so; Roberto has, therefore, already read Marcus’s letter and will not

repeat what it clarifies. I read this awkwardness (this insistence that never materializes) as revealing Serao's narrative authority; if Roberto has read the answer to the hand mystery but what we read of Marcus's letter gives no such answer then part of Marcus's letter has been withheld. Serao exercises her narrative authority by negating part of Marcus's letter, by a silencing. Maria and Matilde (Serao) double up by way of a silence or silencing with regards to the hand mystery: the silence of Maria's writing hand is the same silence of Matilde's writing hand; it is here that Maria and Matilde enact an authoritative doubling and Maria's withheld "truth" is Serao's authorial agency, which in turn links Maria's resistance to Marcus to Serao's triumph over Marcus as authoritative narrator: the rebellion of Maria's hand is Serao's narrative rebellion.³⁶

For the male discourse of *La mano tagliata*, to know and make sense of Maria's lifestory is connected to literally handling her body and the ability to make sense of her body through language and writing; Marcus's letter states, "una voglia di possedere quel bellissimo corpo" and "io mi faceva raccontare minutamente tutta l'esistenza di Maria, sino ai particolari più intimi" (408). Above all, the male characters seek an answer to the most striking inconsistency of her hand(s), specifically, to her mysterious status of simultaneously abled and disabled. Marcus's letter both never answers the mystery of Maria's body status and confusingly refers to Maria first with only one hand and then with two; his letter itself vacillates between these two versions of her body (see p. 393-395). The wish to tell her story, to be able to contain it in a coherent narrative form, is much like the desire to hold on tightly to, and maintain as theirs, her idolized hand, which is precisely what could maintain her as mutilated. Marcus, as narrator, needs a disabled body, a narrative prosthesis, for his narrative to lean on and he needs to provide closure to this body by accounting for it or getting rid of it. Once Maria is established as problematically being both disabled and not, Marcus then needs to account for this discrepant body. In a way, Marcus as narrative authority get caught in the bind described by narrative prosthesis of both needing the disruptive body and needing to tame it by whatever means possible. He may succeed

³⁶ It is an interesting coincidence that Maria's old name is Sara and that these two names echo Matilde Serao's initials. This alliterative doubling assists my argument that the primary female double of the novel is Serao and Maria. The motif of the female double is, of course, a Gothic convention that Serao employs in other novels. In her first novel *Cuore inferno* (1881), for example, the Gothic good versus bad double manifests in the juxtaposition of the two female protagonists, Beatrice and Lalla. For a discussion of this novel and its use of the female double see: Sharon Wood. "The Sentimental Democracy of Matilde Serao (1856-1927)" in *Italian Women's Writing* and Ursula Fanning. "Angel vs. Monster: Serao's use of the Female Double." Scholars have argued convincingly that although Serao's female doubles often function from within a conventional triangular romance (as is the case in *Cuore inferno* where the two women are with the same man) they result in narratives that have more to do with the relationship between the two women; one gets the sense that Lalla uses Beatrice's husband to get closer to Beatrice. See also, Ursula Fanning's "Sentimental Subversion: Representations of Female Friendships in the Work of Matilde Serao" in which she argues that friendships between women either supplant or enrich heterosexual relations seen as unfulfilling. Nancy Harowitz in "Double Marginality: Matilde Serao and the Politics of Ambiguity," like Fanning, posits the motif of the female double found in Serao's works as an inherent female condition of division of the self: a condition that Serao herself experienced as a woman writer. While there is certainly a type of female doubling taking place between mother and daughter in *La mano tagliata*, I am suggesting a female doubling that crosses the textual boundary, such that Serao as author is doubled by Maria; this doubling enforces a meta-textuality into the Gothic convention.

in killing Maria, but that Marcus's confession fails to provide a coherent explanation of Maria's story and body marks a final failure on his part as figure of narrativity.

I maintain that Marcus's incomplete letter signals the collapse of the novel that Roberto's life has become. The very existence of Marcus's letter within *La mano tagliata* demonstrates a diminishing of his authorial role, as his narrative gets re-contained within the novel as one of its characters. Of particular importance is the fact that Marcus's letter announces his suicide. That *La mano tagliata* goes on without him and maintains its, and Maria's, truth of the "mano tagliata" are both ways in which Serao's "romanzo" thwarts Marcus's "romanzo." Marcus's very depiction of his desire to end his life can be read as a transfer of authorial control onto Maria. Initially, it seems that Marcus succeeds in controlling Maria's body, since, even though she (and her hand) escapes with Roberto, Marcus is considered responsible for her fatal jump off the balcony. We learn that in her last night "vi è stata una lotta fra lei (Maria) e una volontà ignota" (387), in which eventually the "volontà ignota" wins. Ironically, it is precisely because "ignota" that we know it is "l'ignoto" who hypnotizes and forces her to leap to her death. But I suggest that Marcus's decision to take his own life inverts this logic of corporeal dependency. Marcus describes a dependence on the living body of Maria: "Morirò perchè la mia esistenza è finita nella sera che io ho uccisa Maria" (396) and "per lei io muoio" (429). Marcus must die because Maria is dead; it is now her body that determines his: he cannot live without her. Since Marcus's role as narrator is associated with his ability to control bodies, I suggest that this reversal in which his body depends on the status of Maria's body figures Maria, instead, as the holder of narrative power and authority over Marcus. In fact, at a certain point in his confession Marcus drops his pen: "e la penna mi cadeva dalle mani" (405), while Maria is described as an avid letter writer: she is depicted as writing to her lover Jean Straube and then to her daughter (see pages 404- 411). Meanwhile, Marcus's narrative is divulged while Maria becomes more and more "inenarrabile" (421). If Maria figurally and structurally takes over for Marcus as narrator, then her death, the end of her narrating body and voice, signals Marcus's eventual end: he goes down with her. This figural narrative authority that oversees bodies and their stories further connects Maria to Serao.

To employ "Narrative Prosthesis" in my analysis of Serao's novel leads me to question the absence of gender in Mitchell and Snyder's essay *and* to consider a fetishism inherent in it. Mitchell and Snyder insist that this obligatory body is disabled and in so doing rightfully de-universalize the human body. But to not take into consideration the gender of the disabled body results in its partial re-universalization: to insist on one difference seems here to overlook another (whereas, the novel disrupts the abled-disabled binary by reinforcing the sex binary). *La mano tagliata* portrays a prosthetic operation of narrative that is specifically masculine and forces us to take into account a possible gendering of 'narrative prosthesis' itself. Roberto and Marcus are ambassadors of a narrative logic that both seeks to "fix" the female mutilated body *and* must maintain it as castrated. In essence, Roberto wants to reconstitute Maria's body, make it "whole" again, by reuniting its pieces, conquering her sexually, and learning her story of mutilation. The story of Maria's disturbing body must be accounted for, must be cleaned and sutured, at the same time as its severed-ness maintained so that the fetishism can be sustained; if Maria isn't missing her limb then the "mano tagliata" loses its fetish value and Marcus and Roberto's narrative collapses. Roberto insists on the existence of an explanation, a story that can account for both body versions: Marcus, as figure of narrative itself, is handed the responsibility of elucidation and he also is responsible for killing her off.

The explanation that could maintain the male fantasy of narrative prosthesis, that could sustain both versions of Maria's body, is never given. *La mano tagliata* eliminates the male accounting of the female "problematic" body and then refuses to engage the question at all. A male fetishizing, sustained by a clear account of how Maria is both mutilated and not, is hijacked by a female narrative authority that maintains that secret and refuses to engage a narrative logic that speaks of the body as whole versus unwhole, abled versus disabled. So what then to make of Marcus's deformed body? His is, after all, "gobbo." If *La mano tagliata* overthrows Marcus's narrative prosthesis it does so by deforming (dis-abling) the normative, privileged site of power and knowing; normative narrative is deformed and Marcus as figure of narrativity undergoes the deformation. The tables are turned, and our originating body-text collapse sustained, as narrative authority itself is dis-abled while the surviving "romanzo" is left with an extra circulating hand: a form of monstrosity perhaps, but one produced by an excess rather than a lack.

La mano tagliata needs its two hands, both the severed and non-severed doubling of a hand, beyond its subversive withholding of a definitive narrative solution to its mystery and its refusal to let men and their narratives manipulate the female form. The doubling of Maria's hand should be read as the two enduring hands of *La mano tagliata*, whereby the collapse of Marcus's "romanzo" leaves two remaining female writing hands: that of Maria, who needs her hand to write her final letter to her daughter before she dies, and whose hand in some sense survives her death by way of the legacy of the letter: its arrival in Rachele's hands and the subsequent work that it accomplishes; and the remaining authorial agency of Serao's writing hand; this is why the severed, textual hand *both is and is not Maria's*. The triumph of Maria's writing hand over Marcus's is doubled by Serao's authoring hand that keeps Maria's, and the novel's, secret and overthrows and re-writes a male narrative desire to conquer and know.

4. (Un)Making its Mark

The doubling of the hand is representative of an insidious doubling operative in *La mano tagliata* that creates a sort of mise-en-abyme of narratives and hands and authors that can at times be difficult to pull apart. Jacques Derrida's essay, "The Law of Genre" is helpful in considering the complex relationship between texts and hands and in theorizing further the continual meta-workings of the novel at large, i.e., the relationship between the two "romanzi:" the relationship between Serao's authorial agency and the internal "romanzo" of male desires that it seems to produce. The first half of Derrida's essay speaks to his suspicion concerning the category of genre, and Genre Theory as its own classificatory system. One challenge to what Derrida terms the "Law of Genre," is his claim that every "literary" text has the possibility of, consciously or unconsciously, marking their belonging to a particular genre. It is this very mark that in signaling a trait of belonging or inclusion ironically "does not properly pertain to any genre or class" (65):

The re-mark of belonging does not belong. It belongs without belonging... I submit for consideration the following hypothesis: a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic, and unclassifiable productivity, *but because of the trait of participation itself*, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself (my emphasis 65).

His leading example, which sustains our study in more ways than one, is the novelistic genre. Whether it is explicitly designated in its own subtitle, or quietly re-marked elsewhere, “this designation is not novelistic” (65). Thus, in the very moment in which a text marks its belonging it unmarks itself, its inclusion undoes itself “in the blink of an eye... Putting to death the very thing that it engenders... at that very moment, degenerescence has begun, the end begins” (65-66). In a sense, this mark of the law of the law of genre, both subtends and cancels the law: it puts the law itself at stake (see p.63).

Derrida circuitously arrives at a close reading of *La Folie du jour* by Maurice Blanchot; he reads it as a text that, rather than being written within the limits of genre, is precisely about those limits and aims at upsetting them. Derrida’s analysis of the short story centers on its self-marking with the word *récit* in order to name its theme. *La Folie du jour* designates itself as a *récit* only to dramatizes the impossibility of providing that very *récit* of which it claims to be. The text is itself the *récit* of an impossible *récit*. Derrida thematizes this theme stating, “It is even less feasible for me to relate to you the story of *La Folie du jour* which is staked precisely on the possibility and the impossibility of relating a story” (67).

Derrida’s essay offers more than one useful point of entry into *La mano tagliata*’s complex status of “belonging.” As mentioned, Serao’s novel marks its genre explicitly in the subtitle “romanzo d’amore.” Additionally, *La mano tagliata* names an intertext, Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*, and in so doing seems to mark itself in relation to another subgenre, the historical novel, as well as to this particular, canonical instantiation of it. The novel within the novel motif whereby Serao’s novel overrides and re-writes Marcus’s novel refers specifically to *La mano tagliata*’s relationship to *I promessi sposi*. Manzoni’s novel makes a literal appearance as a text within *La mano tagliata*; Rachele surreptitiously reads it. Already we have a mise-en-abyme of text, within text, within text: Rachele reads Manzoni’s novel and is a character in Marcus’s intrigue and he a character in *La mano tagliata*. I do not propose, however, that this division between novels can be strictly maintained, but that, rather, like a disorienting, repeated mirror-image, this mise-en-abyme results in a maddening, repetitious chain from which it is hard to locate an origin or original; thus, which text works on which? The reference to Rachele’s reading of *I promessi sposi* posits it as a forbidden, possibly corrupting text. When Mosè hears that Rachele is reading *I promessi sposi* he expresses exclamatory disappointment: “Un libro? Che libro?...Che romanzo?...Compra dei libri! Dei romanzi! Ha dei denari! Dio mio!...Che è, questo libro dei *Promessi sposi*? Lo hai letto?...Io, neppure. Sarà uno di quei brutti libracci di questi cristiani!” (42-43). It is not clear which aspect disturbs Mosè most: that she found money to convince his employee to secretly purchase it for her, that she is reading, that he imagines it as

a book that promotes Christianity, that it is a novel, or all of the above.³⁷ In all cases, Rachele disobeys her father's authority by reading *I promessi sposi* and this citation of Manzoni's novel has it stand in as "the fatal book," a literary topos employed heavily in the nineteenth-century novel.³⁸ Not only is Rachele the reader of *La mano tagliata*'s intertext, but her life begins to mimic its essential plot: her life too becomes a novel. We want to ask, then, what possible relationship there could be between Marcus and Manzoni? Already, here, Rachele's life becomes Manzoni's novel and she is a character preyed upon by Marcus as authorial figure: structurally, Manzoni and Marcus are aligned.

There are numerous ways in which *La mano tagliata* cites, and re-works, the plot of *I promessi sposi*. Quite simply, Rachele Cabib and Ranieri Lambertini are in love and desire to wed. Their love is forbidden first by diverse religious backgrounds: Ranieri is Catholic and Rachele Jewish.³⁹ Mosè forbids his daughter to be with Ranieri because of religious difference. Second, Marcus is determined to make Rachele his and does anything he can to keep the lovers apart. In one of many criminal acts, Marcus attempts to kill Ranieri and frame Roberto for the near-fatal stabbing. In these references, Rachele and Ranieri echo Manzoni's "promessi sposi," Lucia and Renzo, whose wedding is drastically postponed when the powerful, local baron, Don Rodrigo, decides Lucia must be his and frightens into submission the priest and all others who would help the couple wed. What ensues in both novels is an overarching plotline that begins with the desperate separation of lovers who endure many hardships, misunderstandings, and tests of devotion before finally reuniting in the story's final pages. Other parallels include a similarity between the second, evil baron of *I promessi sposi*, the "Innominato," and Marcus, referred to as "l'ignoto." As Marcus is the sole, and all-powerful, villain of *La mano tagliata* he inherits from both leading evildoers of *I promessi sposi*.

Another citation occurs when Rachele seeks refuge from Marcus in the Neapolitan convent *Le sepolte vive*.⁴⁰ Marcus's all-knowing powers are nearly inescapable, and Rachele is

³⁷ Lucia Re's chapter, "Passion and Sexual Difference: The Risorgimento and the Gendering of Writing in Nineteenth-Century Italian Culture," from *The Making and Remaking of Italy*, discusses the culturally illicit and provoking nineteenth-century image of women reading. Re makes the argument that this image of a woman reading (in both paintings and texts) was considered dangerous and problematic because it often suggested the possibility of women writing. The act of reading leading to writing relates to the mother-daughter continuum present in this novel.

³⁸ The topos suggests that a book has the ability to ruin one's life merely by being read. The classic Italian example comes much earlier in Dante's *Inferno* in the infamous Canto 5 known for its protagonists, Francesca and Paolo, whose adultery occurs because they were reading the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere from the *Knights of the Round Table*.

³⁹ *La mano tagliata*'s relationship to the subgenre of historical novel may have something to do with its portrayal of religious difference in Italy and Europe. Marcus's character and story in particular speak to the image of the European Jew that will, as we know, become critical shortly after the publication of Serao's novel.

⁴⁰ The convent is a topic Serao deals with in depth in her realist novel, *Suor Giovanna della Croce* (1901) and in *Per monaca* (1885) (or *La storia di una monaca*). *Suor Giovanna della Croce*, for example, looks at the government's decision to reduce the power of the Church by confiscating lands and buildings belonging to religious orders and, in particular, what happens to the women who had spent decades 'buried alive' within the convent, now forced back into the world. The story of Rachele inverts the experience from world into convent, albeit it within a less realist context. Scholars have considered Serao's use of the female convent as a place in which she can explore female identity and relationships unencumbered by men, i.e., a place of female bonding.

moved from convent to convent in search of protection. Marcus has also tricked her into believing that Ranieri has betrayed her and she is convinced of having no reason to stay in the world. The convent promises “una clausura assoluta, non solo, ma persino che le suore portassero sempre il velo abbassato, quando escivano dalle loro celle” (187). Furthermore, once a nun takes the sacred oath she commits to never step outside the walls of the convent again, and to never see anyone from outside the convent ever again; the convent is hermetically sealed. Similarly, in Chapter 9 of *I promessi sposi*, Lucia is hidden away in a convent where her safety is entrusted to the Nun of Monza. *Le sepolte vive* reads as an exaggerated, almost farcical, version of Lucia’s shelter, and perhaps rightfully so; Rachele is indeed out of harm’s way, while Lucia is eventually kidnapped from the convent. Marcus never succeeds in reaching Rachele, while Don Rodrigo hires the robber baron, L’Innominato, to blackmail the Nun of Monza in order to kidnap Lucia and lock her up in a chamber in his castle (this again echoes Marcus’s hand in sealing off various women, or their parts: the hand in his coffin-like box, Rachele in the tomb-like convent, and Maria in her room within a room inside Marcus’s home). It is from within the Unnamed’s chamber that Lucia implores God to save her and vows to take the veil if she survives. In essence, this oath means that Lucia will be unable to marry Renzo. Meanwhile, within her convent, Rachele desires to take a vow that would forever separate her from Ranieri. Ranieri, and others, attempt to reach Rachele and dissuade her from this vow. For both Lucia and Rachele, the taking of the vow, and, thus, chastity, is a cumbersome hurdle towards the telos of union and marriage.

Significantly, the theme of conversion touches both novels. The Unnamed famously converts to Catholicism, and undergoes a total transformation from Evil to Good, the morning after Lucia makes her promise. This religious, and personal, conversion are taken as the turning-point of the mammoth novel wherein order slowly begins to be restored, and Lucia and Renzo begin to make their way back to one another. Critics have drawn parallels between this novelistic tipping point of l’Innominato’s conversion and the historical conversion of Manzoni himself. Thus, it is not only that *La mano tagliata*’s theme of conversion elicits a theme of *I promessi sposi*’s plot: it also summons Manzoni himself who converted to Christianity. If Marcus mimicks l’Innominato who mimicks Manzoni, this serves as another way in which *La mano tagliata* aligns Marcus and Manzoni. Religious conversion also affects Maria and Rachele who both convert from Judaism to Catholicism. That Rachele’s conversion to Grazia upon entering the convent is a choice that upholds a maternal genealogy foreshadows her later decision to leave the convent and find Ranieri. In the novel’s closing act, we are authorized to assume that something in Maria’s letter to her daughter prompts this change of heart, this re-birth or reincarnation.

Borrowing from Derrida, but in relation to intertext, I suggest that *La mano tagliata* marks itself with *I promessi sposi* and, in the very same instant, unmarks itself: it engenders it in the exact moment in which it figures its own departure both from it. I see this occurring, tellingly, in the novel’s opening scene: Roberto departing on a train. Reading retroactively, we find a subtle reference to, and abandoning of, the marriage that culminates the tortuous plot of *I promessi sposi*. Essentially, the telos of Manzoni’s novel is to reunite and successfully wed Renzo and Lucia. While Rachele and Ranieri’s drama repeats this basic narrative arc, *La mano tagliata* seems to tell us in advance that its very mimicry comes by way of a departure, enacting its own critical distance in the act of summoning. I read Roberto’s train departure as a

complicated moving with and away from *I promessi sposi* because of its inclusion of a wedding procession, and Roberto's reaction to it:

Un corteo di nozze si agitava fra gaiamente e malinconicamente, intorno a lui: il treno delle due e cinquantacinque è famoso per questa partenza di sposini. Era uno spozalizio borghese, ma ricco: la sposa, malgrado il suo elegantissimo vestito della *Ville de Lyon*, aveva degli orecchini di brillanti troppo grossi per una signora che viaggia, e lo sposo si sprecava in troppi abbracci e baci ai suoi amici e parenti, chiamando : *caro zio.... caro compare.... Caro Ciccillo*. Con un po' di sorriso sulle labbra, Roberto Alimena guardava questo corteo. La cosa che più lo faceva ridere, nel mondo, era il matrimonio (7).

If *I promessi sposi* puts into play the contours of the classic marriage plot, *La mano tagliata* begins where *I promessi sposi* ends, ushering in the aftermath of the wedding (we have missed the wedding proper and have no prior connection to the happy participants) only to make fun of it and, in so doing, leave it behind. A wedding procession, with its newlywed couple finds its way onto the platform, and into our novel, even before we have a description of our protagonist. It does, however, serve to introduce us to Roberto's character. Roberto is represented as the ultimate loner with no ties to anything; he does not stay long with any woman and has no family. We learn that he is an orphan who lost his parents at the age of fifteen; "Giammai egli aveva sognato il focolare domestico, non avendone mai posseduto. E rideva del matrimonio come di varie altre cose serie dell'esistenza" (8). Roberto's derisory attitude towards the wedding scene (and the family unit ideology that it heralds) is a mini-departure in itself, at the very least a parodic mood (both a parody of the wedding, Roberto's character, and his relation to the scene) that creates a gap of possible distance, from the conservative, nationalistic enterprise of *I promessi sposi*. It, furthermore, takes a distance from a literary genre and form that move by and for ideology (that are constituted by and constitutive of ideology). The wedding procession is depicted as over-the-top, obscene in its decadence: the jewelry too much, the groom too extreme in his affect. The wedding itself operates at a certain parodic distance from the simple sanctity of its depiction in *I promessi sposi* (even if Manzoni's novel must in many instances also be recognized as melodramatic). Indeed, Serao's novel plays off the very melodrama inherent in Manzoni's novel, but pushes it further, mainly by way of class difference and sarcasm, and in so doing robs it of some of its sincerity. The high bourgeois aspect of the wedding renders it excessive and gauche, and represents a removal from the agrarian, working-class origins of Renzo and Lucia, and from a certain humbleness, and authenticity, of feeling.

Another distancing can be found in Roberto's lack of drive or intention. By and large, *I promessi sposi*'s characters are moved by clearly delineated desires, fears and goals. Roberto is distinctly not driven, but moves based on whim and comfort; it gets too cold in Naples and he feels like a change of location. We might even read Roberto's brand of internationalism as part of a distancing from the disciplining Italian nationalism of Manzoni's novel; Roberto is surrounded by foreign, i.e., non-Italian items: a Russian cigar, he stays at the *Grand Hotel* and the *Hôtel d'Europe*, he reads the *New York Herald*, he drinks cognac, and has a "stanza da toilette" in his hotel suite.⁴¹ My intention is to bring out from *La mano tagliata*'s opening pages

⁴¹ It is also important to point out differences in historical moment between *I promessi sposi* and *La mano tagliata*, because this too contributes to a different sense of class and a cosmopolitanism operative in the latter novel. *La mano tagliata* takes place in post-unification Italy and this accounts for the novel's

a layering of critical distance(s) from its intertext, and to suggest that its distance(s), or departure(s), are by way of citing and its citing by way of departure and distancing: its summoning enacts a loosening.

Thus, *La mano tagliata*'s departure is a complex leaving that speaks to the complexity of Serao's relationship to her literary forefather, Manzoni. The actual departure of the train literalizes *La mano tagliata*'s departure from the wedding scene, and, thus, signals a distancing from Manzoni's novel. The train is also where, and when, Marcus will "part with" his novel, metaphorized by box and its hand. In other words, two narratives are summoned concurrently and then simultaneously moved away from: two departures staged in tandem. Marcus loses his box, which I read as the clairvoyant moment when Maria's narrative slips out from under his grip, and Serao's novel takes some sort of distance from a certain type of intertext. That Maria's narrative slips out from under Marcus's grip authorizes my analysis by gesturing towards another authorial division. In other words, the authoritative doubling that occurs between Serao and Maria is doubled by the authoritative doubling of Marcus and Manzoni. The Maria – Marcus: Matilde – Manzoni alliterative mises-en-abyme is surreptitiously operative from this first chapter. In this way, *La mano tagliata* contorts a given power dynamic and logical chain of influence. The tendency to read novels written in the aftermath of *I promessi sposi* as underneath the umbrella of its paradigm and influence is a consequential, and chronological, logic that *La mano tagliata* problematizes. *La mano tagliata* hints that it is not driven by Manzoni's novel, but instead acts upon it. *I promessi sposi* is aligned with Marcus's novel-within-the-novel, which is hijacked both by Maria and Matilde, and what initially poses as the two hands of *La mano tagliata*, Marcus/Manzoni, is almost immediately replaced by Maria/Serao. Importantly, the structural alignment between Marcus and Manzoni, and their narratives, points to the creation of a dual sign of the word "mano."⁴² Thus, I suggest that the "mano" that is initially Marcus's "romanzo" heralds Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* and, in so doing, semantically and rhetorically signals Manzoni.

Not only does the novel manifest a Derridean-like genre mark by way of intertext, it seems to realize a structure already at work in *I promessi sposi*, and then divides from it. In Chapter 2 of *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* entitled, "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectic Use of Genre Criticism," Frederic Jameson locates, what he terms, a "marbled generic structure" of the novel form and, therefore, proposes a "dialectical use of genre criticism." *I promessi sposi* is one of Jameson's privileged examples when discussing generic discontinuities, which he claims lends "Manzoni's book an appearance of breadth and variety, and a totalizing "completeness," scarcely equaled elsewhere in literature" (144). Jameson reads Renzo and Lucia's separation and ensuing plotlines, as representing two generic strands: the adventure and the gothic novel. The two narrative tracks create an "eclecticism of the novel [that] can itself become the occasion for a different type of generic analysis" (143):

The plight of Lucia, for instance, gives him [Manzoni] the material for a Gothic novel, in which the feminine victim eludes one trap only to fall into a more agonizing one, confronting villains of ever blacker nature, and providing

engagement with questions of class and, specifically, its engagement with a type of upper bourgeoisie and a luxurious, often laughable, cosmopolitanism that has no place in the historically specific world of *I promessi sposi*.

⁴² I borrow "dual sign" from Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978).

the narrative apparatus for the development of a semic system of evil and redemption, and for a religious and psychological vision of the fate of the soul.

Meanwhile, Renzo wanders through the *grosse Welt* of history and of the displacement of vast armed populations, the realm of the destiny of peoples and the vicissitudes of their governments. His own episodic experiences, formally something like a *roman d'aventures*, the misadventures of a peasant Candide, thus provide a quite different narrative register from that, inward and psychologizing, of the Lucia narrative: the experience of social life as it comes to its moment of truth in the bread riots and the economic depression of Milan, the anarchy of the *bravi* and the incompetence of the state, and ultimately – going beyond history to those “acts of God” which govern it – the supreme event of the plague, and the rejuvenation of the land that follows. On this reading, then, the “novel” as an apparently unified form is subjected to a kind of x-ray technique designed to reveal the layered or marbled structure of the text according to what we will call *generic discontinuities* (143-144).

Simply put, Renzo’s narrative is characterized as pertaining to the adventure novel genre, while Lucia’s belongs strictly to the Gothic; Renzo’s adventure moves out into the social and political world, while Lucia’s moves inward towards the psychic world of the individual, yet religious soul. What is not mentioned, but needs to be taken into account, is that these diverging plotlines are, above all, gendered divisions inseparable from notions of sexual difference and its narrativizations.⁴³

Jameson’s description of Renzo’s generic mode is the more belabored. Beyond adventure, Renzo’s mode is portrayed as historically driven, and relevant as such; he wanders through the great world of history encountering and partaking in its events. The bread riots of Milan and the plague that wipes out acres of land and its people are examples of stops on Renzo’s “realistic” itinerary, tethered to a deterministic, and linear, notion of the historical process. But such stops on his itinerary are also breaks, and distractions, from the Romance novel genre: the separation of Renzo and Lucia and their myriad misadventures that lead them back to one another, with which Jameson began his analysis. Eventually, though, the marbled structure of *I promessi sposi* is subsumed by, or elevated (to stick with Jameson’s dialectical lexicon) to, the Historical novel. This is an “historical” move in criticism of Manzoni’s novel in general, but also seems, ironically, to occur implicitly in Jameson’s analysis. It is true that Jameson refers to *I promessi sposi* as a historical novel in the form of a question, but tellingly he does so on the same page in which he depicts Renzo’s narrative in historical terms, while formally labeling it a *roman d'aventures*. Jameson asks, “Is not, for instance, Manzoni’s great work, far from being a romance, rather one of the supreme embodiments of what we call the historical novel?” (143). While problematizing an attempt at global classification, Jameson inadvertently demonstrates another inherent problem. *I promessi sposi* has the status of the first

⁴³ Interestingly, the gendered division between the male *roman d'aventures* and the female Gothic novel echoes, here, the traditional difference(s) between the male and female *Bildungsroman*; the former revolving around a departure from home and movement outward and the latter defined by an inward focused psychologizing. I do not mean to collapse the difference between the various generic strands being discussed, i.e., the *roman d'aventures*, the Gothic, and the *Bildungsroman*. Rather, I am interested in a particular type of gendering that seems to carry over from one genre to the next.

Italian historical novel, as the origin point, and archetype, of the genre, and of the novel form more grandly. Therefore, not only is Lucia's gothic novel overstepped, and demoted, in the process of revering a more "totalizing" master narrative of national importance, but this historical novel belongs to Renzo, is most properly *his* story; Renzo's *roman d'aventures* is Manzonei's historical novel and a dialectical critique results not in a third-term synthesis that maintains plurality, but in a forgetting of the feminine gothic and an elevation of the male narrative track. *I promessi sposi* is remembered as *the* historical novel of Italian literary culture and it just so happens to be Renzo's narrative.⁴⁴

La mano tagliata seems to recognize the splitting of *I promessi sposi*'s narrative into two interacting genres and to echo and transgress this splitting through staging its own split from the novel; Serao's novel produces and exposes its other half. *La mano tagliata* seems to side with, by rescuing, Lucia's gothic novel, and to depart, in part, from Renzo's, and Manzonei's, historical novel. I posit that *La mano tagliata* brings to light a necessary generic 'marbled structure' of *I promessi sposi* and, in a sense, acts it out in its own gothic, and female, (con)text.⁴⁵ In bringing the gothic to light, the novel rescues Lucia from Renzo's story, just as Maria/Matilde rescues Rachele from Marcus/Manzonei's tale.

5. Mano mania

In this final section I propose that *La mano tagliata* counters a certain fetishization of Manzonei and his novel through the textual circulation of (the) "mano." If Marcus's omnipotence over the hand and his "romanzo" is thwarted by a loss of the hand and the novel's unaccountability to the hand problem, this resistance from within further occurs through an inversion of his mode of bodily control and textual hypnosis. Marcus's hypnosis works on both bodies and the text itself; in general, the collapse of text and hand means that either's manipulation signifies that of both. Marcus's hypnosis of "patients" and victims works, at times, by way of his hands, which he places, for example, on one's temples. We found, however, that Serao's novel turns Marcus's bodily hypnosis upon itself by using the description of his body as part of a narrative refrain that enacts its own textual hypnosis; and one of these refrains, that he is "gobbo," maintains his body as different, and even disabled. I want to suggest that this bodily/textual refrain is mastered by *La mano tagliata*'s near maniacal repetition of the word

⁴⁴ We should also consider that Manzonei's novel is held to be the first "real" Italian novel, it inaugurates the true novel form in the Italian peninsula and its literary history.

⁴⁵ For further scholarship on the gothic in Manzonei see: Robert S. Dombroski, "Reforming the Monster: Manzonei and the Grotesque," in *Monsters in the Italian Literary Imagination*, ed. Keala Jewell (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001); V.R. Jones, "Manzonei's Dark Ladies," *Romance Studies* 19 (1991): 37-52; Verina Jones, "Between History, Fairytale, and Gothic: The Journey in *I promessi sposi*," in *Literature and Travel*, ed. Michael Hanne (Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi B.V., 1993); Markus Bernauer, "Historical Novel and Historical Romance," in *Romantic Prose Fiction: A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*; and *The Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Ed. Michael McKeon. Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

“mano.” It is Marcus who is originally obsessed with Maria’s hand (which we have argued signifies his attempt at a type of narrative authority), but it is the novel itself that cannot stop using the word “mano.” *La mano tagliata*’s incessant repetition of the image and word hijacks and destabilizes Marcus’s control over it, and, by extension, his narrative power. Having established an alignment between Marcus and Manzoni, we can say that a weakening of Marcus’s narrative power signals a kind of weakening of the type of authorial control here represented by Manzoni. Furthermore, both subversions of narrative control occur by way of *La mano tagliata*’s employment of the word “mano.”

On the surface, the treatment of Maria’s hand seems a classic case of fetishism; it is sealed away in a protective case and takes on value that exceeds its materiality. For Roberto and Marcus, it is the thing they cannot live without, and comes to stand in for the woman they claim to love.⁴⁶ Regardless of its mutilation, it has been treated to appear alive and takes on the status of a regal object; its sexualized attractiveness covers over the castrating-like violence that it calls to mind.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the severed hand signals the supposed absence of the hand of a woman, and, thus, her status as lacking. As in Freudian fetishism, the hand both signals, and covers over, her lack. Furthermore, when Roberto see her for the first time, Maria’s seemingly “whole” body might also be initially interpreted as fetishistic, the horror of her “castration” concealed.⁴⁸ Indeed, the logic of “narrative prosthesis,” the need for a disabled body and something that covers over its horror (an explanation, its own disappearance), is, in part, fetishistic: a vacillation of sorts between two competing realities. Again, Marcus’s novel *does* follow the logic of “narrative prosthesis” by both providing an account of Maria’s mutilated body and killing her off. This normative narrative is contained within Serao’s novel, which in leaving Maria’s body

⁴⁶ Deanna Shemek analyzes the severed hand from the perspective of fetishism and writes of Roberto, “He soon develops an erotic attraction for the newfound evidence of female ‘castration’” (249).

⁴⁷ This male fetishism surrounding female severed hands is reminiscent of Gabriele D’Annunzio’s play *La Gioconda*, first performed in 1899. Serao and her husband, Scarfoglio, met and became close to D’Annunzio when they lived in Rome. Indeed, they ended up printing, in installments, his novel *L’innocente*, in their newspaper, *Corriere di Napoli*, when it was turned-down by his publisher, Treves (See Sharon Wood’s chapter on Serao in her *Italian Women Writers 1860-1994*. According to Ursula Fanning in *Gender Meets Genre*, Serao knew D’Annunzio’s work quite well. It is possible, then, that D’Annunzio’s play is another literary precursor. D’Annunzio’s melodrama *La Gioconda* is, however, a tragedy while *La mano tagliata*, again, takes a parodic distance. For more on *La Gioconda* and its fetishism of female hands see Barbara Spackman’s *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D’Annunzio*. It is also possible, although less popular, to consider Serao’s influence on D’Annunzio. See, for example, Maryse Jeuland-Meynaud, *Immagini, linguaggio e modelli del corpo nell’opera narrativa di Matilde Serao* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1986).

⁴⁸ Shemek points to a scene towards the end of the novel when, after consumating their love, Roberto cuts off a braid of Maria’s hair and saves it as a memento. She, insighfully, reads this act as paralleling Marcus’s dismemberment of Maria. Shemek analyzes Roberto’s braid fetishization as suggesting a “shared aggression against Maria’s wholeness” (251). Importantly, Shemek does speak to the scene in which Roberto first sees Maria and sees her with both of her hands; she considers Roberto’s site of a “whole” Maria as a fetishistic hallucination that allows him to deny the castration he dreads. His subsequent cutting of her braid is then a way in which he is able to “execute the castration which he denies” (251). While I agree that Marcus and Roberto function fetishistically in relation to Maria and her hand, my positing of an inner novel of male desires eventually overruled by a female narrative and body that will not reveal its secret allows Maria’s condition to be actual (i.e., not a male fantasy) *and to be hers*.

in two ways produces *its own* fetishism that thwarts the inner-novel of male desires.⁴⁹ The type of female fetishism I locate in *La mano tagliata*, however, rather than maintaining the feminine as lack, results in an extra, third, hand that, rather than an object chosen by the male fetishist, is a part of Maria's body and is what links her to Serao's authority.

Here, I add another type of "undoing" of male fetishizing by suggesting that the re-appearance of the word "mano" and its abridged version "man" works to defetishize the hand, and by extension to defetishize Manzoni. Since the "mano" is what originally signals both Marcus's narrative authority and its demise, I posit that the word "mano" and its abbreviated form "man" recruit, and stand in for, Manzoni in order to signal his authority while simultaneously loosening it. Just as Marcus has been a type of author surrogate by way of his narrative authority over the diegetic level of the novel, so too Manzoni is a type of author surrogate since *I promessi sposi* is *La mano tagliata*'s primary intertext. A loosening of Marcus's control over the boxed hand is by extension an implicit weakening of Manzoni's status and *I promessi sposi*'s novelistic primacy.

The lexeme "mano" semantically corrupts *La mano tagliata*, appearing alone, in its abbreviated form "man," and, figuratively, through expressions like "man mano." Its constant appearance functions as a trance-inducing mechanism. What follows is a sampling of how often, and in what forms, "mano" or "man" shows up. On the train Roberto is "spaurito all'idea di dover muovere solo una mano" (14); then, he is assisted with his luggage: "mentre anche lui [il conduttore] dava mano a scaricare il bagaglio di Roberto Alimena" (15); then Roberto grabs his most important bag, "cioè il sacchetto a mano" (15) and at the hotel "non trovava la scatola di pelle, con manico..." (16). His missing bag with "un manico" is what leads him to find Marcus's "cofano" there is, here, a nearly metonymical movement from hand to hand, suggesting that the presence of one "mano" leads to another and so on, creating a chain of "mani:" as in a contagion.

The scene in which Roberto discovers Marcus's case is nearly taken over by words and phrases containing "mano": "E [Roberto] la presi nelle mani" (17); "La girava e rigirava fra le mani" (17); Héliane has "la mano inguantata," (25) which is referenced numerous times. The porter who comes to let Roberto into the hotel arrives "con una lanterna in mano" (27). The description of Roberto cracking open the box repeats the word "mano" nearly twenty times in eight paragraphs (31-33). The box is open and the hand infiltrates its way into almost every other page of the novel. This spilling out all over the novel also undermines Roberto's aggressive attempt to get into the box; he is rhetorically made a fool. The final line of Chapter One states, "[Roberto] era solo, chiuso in quella stanza, con quella mano sotto i suoi occhi immobili" (33). In an interesting reversal, Roberto, a man defined by unburdened movement, is

⁴⁹ Although I do not here engage theoretical scholarship on female fetishism, there are a number of important studies. See, for example, Naomi Schor, "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand," in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*; Sarah Kofman, *L'énigme de la femme*; Elizabeth Berg, "The Third Woman," in *Diacritics* Vol. 12 pp. 11-20; Elizabeth Grosz, "Lesbian Fetishism?" in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, and Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*. I do not use these frameworks, in part, because my reading of Serao's novel does not locate a profound exploration of the female psyche or sexuality. Instead, the "unruly" female body is left purposefully undefined and on its own by Serao's narrative, which caricatures an archetypal male narrative desire. I read *La mano tagliata* as defetishizing the female body and the masculine text responsible, but leaving *her* story open and unresolved.

“chiuso” in the hotel room and his eyes are “immobili;” Roberto is made statuesque while the “mano statuaria” is unleashed from its container and moves about the novel.⁵⁰

It is not just in Chapter One that the hand is freed from its hermetically sealed box; this occurs throughout the novel, and continues at the start of Chapter Two with the first description of Mosè Cabib: “Le sue mani erano scarse...” (35); he writes “con mano incerta” (35). Rachele is also surrounded by various hands. Her loyal servant Rosa carries “una lampadetta fumosa in mano” (44). When her father returns home “gli baciò la mano” (44); Mosè removes his garments “con mani nodose” (45); Rachele sits with “le mani incrociate sulla tavola” (45). This incessant repetition does not diminish as we read on: Roberto insists, “Questa scatola è venuta nelle mie mani per caso” (81); the scientist Silvio Amati warns “Una mano e un braccio dicono tanto e non più” (84); and “La mano mantiene il segreto della sua vita fittizia (85) (here again, the “mano” stands in as *this* “romanzo” which maintains its secret). The insistence of the lexeme “mano” does not abate; see, for example, pages 372-373.

The constant repetition of the lexeme “mano” makes us read the unrelated syllable “man” as also carrying the semantic weight of “mano.” In other words, the recurrence of “mano” exerts pressure on the reader to read the syllable “man” abusively as continuing to signal “mano.” To give a few examples: Roberto states, “Mandatemi il facchino...” (17); “Manca qualche cosa?” (17); “Volete mandarmela?” (18); “Comanda altro?” (18). Later, Roberto and Héliane debate the content of the mystery box; “non è possibile che contenga nè un violino, nè un mandolino” (24); Héliane wears a “grande manica di pelliccia” (here “man” is both a syllable, but it is also etimologically related to “mano”) (25). When Roberto leaves Héliane calls after him “Ricordati che devi spiegarmi l’enigma di quella scatola domani” (27); when discussing the mystery box the syllable appears even more than usual. On his return to the hotel Roberto is “Fumando, fumando...” (27); the repetition of the syllable here recalls “man mano,” rhetorically doubling the hand. The word “domandare” (28) is often repeated in these pages. When Roberto works upon the sealed box, the repetition of the syllable suggests what he will find: “domandandosi...” (30); “armandosi di tutti quei piccoli strumenti” (30); even the nails of the hand are described as “tagliate a mandorla” (31). Rachele feels that her father is “mantenendo il segreto delle sue assenze” (44); her eyes are “tagliati a mandorla (45). One final version of the syllable “man” that warrants remembering is its embedding within “romanzo.” As *La mano tagliata* repeatedly signals its own status as novel, it simultaneously draws attention to the “mano” within every “romanzo.”

I posit that the incessant repetition of the word “mano,” its abbreviated form “man,” and its syllable “man” enact a type of rhetorical, Marxian commodity (de)fetishism. To make this claim, I borrow from Karl Marx’s second chapter of *Capital* entitled “Commodity Fetishism.” Simply put, the capitalist mode of production creates an economy that “behaves” as though value inheres in objects’ natural properties. This mystification comes by way of exchanges that create equivalencies. The individual properties of objects are replaced by their relation to one another as “equally valuable.” In modern capitalism one commodity (gold) is taken out of a barter economy of exchange and becomes the universal equivalent; all objects garner their value from

⁵⁰ Again, the “mano statuaria” recalls D’Annunzio’s *La Gioconda*; the protagonist is a sculptor, his masterpiece is a Sphinx statue that falls and breaks off its wings. There are also numerous mutilated statues in the play that are all missing an appendage. One of the female protagonists, Silvia, loses her hands when the Sphinx sculpture falls on her; her hands were always described in terms that rendered them statue-like and she is compared to Verdicchio’s sculpture, *La dama col mazzolino*, a copy of which resides in Silvia’s home.

their relation to gold, as it takes on “magic-like” qualities, seeming as though value inheres in its very materiality. Marxian fetishism refers, then, to the collective mystification whereby we attribute imaginary worth to one universal equivalent as the end and be all of value. Lastly, the capitalist practice of exchange tends to erase its own story of origins; that is, that gold or money was once an object like any other and only through capitalism is extracted from the circulation of commodities and fetishized as the embodiment of all value. Rather than understand the socio-economic process by which gold is fetishized, this effect is treated as a cause, and we are covered in its illusory fog. Based on this logic, to return gold or the money form back into circulation as a commodity like any other, to strip the universal equivalent of its sacred place of sealed-off-ness, is to defetishize it.

In *La mano tagliata*, the textual monopoly of the word “mano,” its abbreviation “man,” and its dominant syllable “man,” behaves as a refrain that rhetorically defetishizes the “mano tagliata” by putting it back into linguistic and textual circulation. A male fetishizing that idolizes by sealing off from use value is overcome by an extra-mobile hand that cannot be contained, and, instead, roams freely in the economy of Serao’s novel; an initial, and always already male fetishism, is undone by a female economy of desires and hands (Heliane’s, Rachele’s, Maria’s, Serao’s) that will not stay put and will not be defined, and by a linguistic defetishization of “mano.” I also suggest that because the “mano” functions metaphorically as a text that seemingly bestows narrative authority onto Marcus, and by extension signals the authorial hand of Manzoni, its repetition phonetically and structurally heralds “Manzoni” as the enduring hand of the Italian novel. Therefore, the linguistic defetishizing of “mano” works simultaneously to loosen Manzoni’s status as patriarch of the Italian novel. In Serao’s re-writing of *I promessi sposi* “L’innominato” becomes “Super-nominato;” the all-powerful name that cannot be named is here named over and over again, paradoxically losing its place as marker of all value. In the rhetorical economy of *La mano tagliata* Manzoni’s “mano” becomes a hand among other writing hands and not *the hand* of the Italian novel tradition.

To conclude, *La mano tagliata* seems both to comply with various generic conventions of its time, but through that very compliance stage its own problematic “belonging” and subsequent difference. The novel sets in motion a highly generic romance or quest novel driven by male desires that enforce certain narrative normativities and where they interface: a gendered fetishism and ‘narrative prosthesis’ both of which, here, initially act upon Maria’s body. I have suggested that the novel’s ultimate unaccountability to what becomes its central mystery, Maria’s abled/disabled body, is purposeful (even if Gothically legitimated) and signals a female narrative authority that resists masculine, narrative norms. Because of a highly activated metaphor between body and text, and the novel’s self-reflexivity, Maria’s body secret is one with Serao’s authority and the extra hand that both is and is not Maria’s is also Serao’s writing hand. By gesturing towards Serao as author, *La mano tagliata* becomes a reflection on its author’s own belonging within an aggressively masculine literary circle and tradition. Indeed, Marcus as villain is figured as a disciplining narrator and aligned with Manzoni and his narrative voice, indicative in *I promessi sposi*. A narrative realism, “authored” by Manzoni was the traditional form within which Serao lived and wrote and is summoned from within this instance of popular, Gothic fiction. *La mano tagliata* breaks from this tradition through its very use of *I promessi sposi* as intertext, its non-realistic ambivalences with regards to the female body, and the way in which Lucia, Rachele, Maria and Serao all get the narrative “upper hand.” In so doing, certain narrative/corporeal norms are also disrupted from within their own modes of operation: the female body evades explanation that only she could give, while a male authoring hand is

defetishized in order to make room for other narrative traditions and histories. Finally, the tables are turned such that the disabled body becomes none other than the male narrative authority that once enforced the female mutilated body that escapes narrative definition all together: all prostheses, narrative and otherwise, fall short. The very site of knowledge is made monstrous and both the female body and text break free and exercise their own logics. In some way, perhaps, Serao's novel suggests that counter to historical realism *La mano tagliata* affects *I promessi sposi* and Italian literary history may depend on her too.

Chapter 2

No Desire to Know

In its undoing of the crime novel, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's *Complice il dubbio* challenges the genre's normal relation between gender and epistemology, whereby the subject of knowledge is simultaneously male and neuter and must always conquer desire. It may even be that the novel recruits the genre *as a means to* provoke and question this relation, as a norm that exists more generally: a norm activated and cast in relief by the traditional detective novel, as well as by its crime novel offspring.

Here I adopt a psychoanalytic theoretical lens that allows for the construction of the normative model of the relation between gender and epistemology. My chapter goes on to leave this perspective behind, but for now I draw from Robert Rushing's *Resisting Arrest: Detective Fiction and Popular Culture* because it offers a compelling account of the figure of the detective in relation to the question of desire. The fundamental structure of the crime novel insists that the protagonist, whether detective, private investigator, or police officer represents what Lacan called *le sujet supposé savoir* who always already occupies a male positionality.⁵¹ To occupy a male positionality is not the same as stating, as many have, that the agent of detection is almost always a man. Rather, a psychoanalytic perspective would argue that the "subject supposed to know" occupies a symbolic position that can be traced back to Western civilization's earliest philosophical writings.⁵² Resonances between the masculine role of traditional philosopher and detective abound; they are cerebral, guided by intellect; they are mobile, both in terms of mental exploration and the ability to move freely through space in order to observe, contemplate, and discover. Both figures are engaged in "epistemic wanderings," (Rushing 47) and

⁵¹ *Le sujet supposé savoir* is an expression coined by Jacques Lacan and utilized by psychoanalytic theorists, such as Slavoj Žižek, to compare the work of analyst and detective. In his foreword to Robert A. Rushing's *Resisting Arrest*, Samir Dayal writes, "In detective novels, the chain of events that constitutes the story or mystery is always reconstructed retrospectively by the detective. This act of reconstruction is often compared to the work of the analyst, the "subject supposed to know." Thus Žižek foregrounds the detective's essential genius and agency: he (and it is usually he) is able to identify and lend significance to the odd but apparently trivially obvious element in the set of clues, the array of evidence available to all—those enfolded within the narrative and those who number among the readership are therefore external to it" (viii).

⁵² In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray demonstrates that, in order to constitute itself as a metaphysics, traditional Western philosophy must break with, and from, matter or the material. According to Irigaray, Western thought lines up, through cultural, ideological, and etymological association, a series of "female" terms, such as matter, material, mater, matrix, matrice, etc., and positions them all on one side of an oppositional structure. It is this "female" side of terms that needs to be excluded from philosophical thought in order for it to persist. Philosophy, as the master discourse of epistemological, ontological and metaphysical truths, must evacuate the feminine as its binary other, must erase sexual difference, and thus succeeds in foreclosing female access to the site of philosophical thought and reason. Man is therefore associated with the acquisition of knowledge, or, said differently, the act of thinking and garnering knowledge is securely masculinized.

epistemological space, the site of free, unhindered detecting and thinking, is figured as distinctly male.⁵³

Rushing and others have noted that, in the classic detective novel, the detective is desireless; “Classic detective fiction rigorously excludes the detective from the circuit of desire, transforming the hero into a largely asocial and asexual eccentric for whom the question of gender or sexual orientation is largely irrelevant” (77). Once again, the philosopher and the detective are aligned, here in the shared sense that the body, its pains and pleasures, are a hindrance to the “real” act of thinking. Neither the philosopher nor the detective have time to pay heed to the needs or desires of the body, which, in Platonic tradition, acts as a prison to the intellect of the mind and soul.⁵⁴ From Plato, to Girard, to Foucault, to Lacan, and, more recently, for feminist and gay and lesbian theory, desire has proven a major preoccupation within the Western philosophical tradition, one that still seeks definition, still needs to be made sense of (to be pinned down in some delineating way). The critical perspectives on desire are many and interrelated; what are its origins, its ends; is it spiritual or human; is its structure singular and invariant; is desire metaphysical or cultural; does desire work on or through us, is it an expression of the body, or that which engenders that very body; how can we speak of desire, what is its language and what desires does language bring; do narratives of desire presume certain subject positions and ways of desiring. Judith Butler interrogates the tradition itself precisely by questioning whether desire is the object of speech and study or, rather, that which impels us to speech; how can we speak clearly about desire when language is bound up with it?⁵⁵

⁵³ Walter Benjamin establishes a relation between the flâneur and the detective novel in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. In describing the literature that concerned itself with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life, Benjamin locates an inherent criminality of the masses, which the flâneur investigates, and which serves as the origin of the detective story: “In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective. Strolling gives him the best prospects of doing so... If the *flâneur* is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it accredits his idleness. He only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant... He catches things in flight... No matter what trail the *flâneur* may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime (40-41). In her essay, “Topographies of Disease and Desire: Mapping the City in Fascist Italy,” Flora Ghezzi takes up this important Nineteenth-century literary figure of the flâneur in order challenge its inherent maleness and locate a possible female counterpart, the flâneuse, whose very existence in the modern, European cityscape is profoundly disruptive. Ghezzi points out the historical, rhetorically problematic feminine version of the term “streetwalker;” the possibility of a flâneuse has thus been semantically foreclosed. I find this socio-linguistic stalwart related, if not bound, to the limits of the masculinized epistemic movements of the male philosopher and detective.

⁵⁴ It is precisely early Western philosophy’s strict denial of the body as a possible site of knowledge and as Intellect’s opposite that the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero critiques and attempts to resignify in her book *Nonostante Platone*. I am thinking specifically of her chapter “La servetta di Tracia” in which Cavarero draws attention to Talete’s (the first philosopher) inability to think and walk without losing control and ending up down a well. The real life practical need to have wherewithal over one’s body in relation to one’s surroundings is a skill unworthy of, and irrelevant to, the traditional Western philosopher. In this early and influential formulation the mind and body do not work in concert but, rather, in constant opposition, battling over and against each other.

⁵⁵ See Judith Butler, “Desire,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study 2nd Edition*, eds. Frank Lentricchia & Thomas McLaughlin, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). In this essay Butler succinctly presents a wide range of the philosophical tradition on desire as well as using it to set forth an argument regarding the complications inherent in speaking desire: “I hope to show that language is bound

Broadly speaking, and within the philosophical tradition, desire seems to be a tricky and privileged state and concept in that it transgresses any such hard boundary between body and mind; desire seems to move smoothly and frequently between the two, even binding them in such a way that it becomes difficult to distinguish when a desire is strictly one or the other: mental or corporeal. In the classic detective novel, instead, there is an attempt to enforce a rigid boundary between the mental and the corporeal and to ensure that desire resides in the latter. The detective himself is insulated “from the libidinal economy in which everyone else tends to be implicated.”⁵⁶ To infuse the possibility of desire into the figure of the traditional detective would be to weaken his mental prowess. Rushing goes on to show that the detective’s perfunctory sidekick acts as his libidinous supplement: all desire is transferred onto, and invested in, him. Consequently, the detective evolves into a somewhat bodiless, and entirely desexualized figure, *yet persists as male*.

It is hard not to hear in this model of a neuter detective who endures, nevertheless, in his maleness, Adriana Cavarero’s figure of the monstrous neuter of Western philosophic thought, i.e., the subject and object of philosophy, Man. For Cavarero, and the Italian feminist philosophy of *Pensiero della differenza sessuale*, Western philosophy, far from a neutral, universal thought, is, rather, a system in which the male subject represents himself with reference to himself. This subject of thought is only one of two sexes, but does not recognize his own partiality and finitude and thus comes to be identified with the universal. Hence, the supposedly neutral universal, Man, is actually male yet disavows its being sexed.⁵⁷ Here again, the detective and philosopher appear to collide; depicted as non-desiring, sexless thinkers, they stubbornly endure within masculine positionalities: rooted and secured sites of the socio-symbolic network. The detective may be the hero, an agent of a final conservative, domestic arrest (the crime is solved, order restored, and everyone may return safely home), but in this formulation he is simultaneously, and paradoxically, a monstrous being that disrupts. For Cavarero, the symbolic order rests on the sanctity of this monstrous figure that proceeds more or less unnoticed. In both cases, the philosopher/detective needs to (problematically) transcend the body *and* be male.

In contrast, the later hard-boiled and noir sub-genres deploy protagonists who reside firmly in the realm of desire and sexuality. Gender is, indeed, central to these modern variants and a binary opposition cast in relief: the male detective must avoid or overcome the alluring, but destructive femme fatale who threatens both literal and symbolic castration. She is an enigmatic and ambivalent character.⁵⁸ In his unpublished paper, “Seducing the Reader: The Femme Fatale and Phantasy in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination,” Greg Bonetti defines the femme fatale as characterized by a “constitutive ambivalence:” “her actions upset the phallogocentric logic of patriarchy, and yet it is through her that the perpetuation of the symbolic order is assured” (1).

to founder on the question of desire, that it is forced to seek modes of indirection, and that the writings of and on desire that we might consider are ones which seek, in the end, to cancel themselves as writing in order better to approximate the desire they seek to know...the relation of language to desire is one that has assumed the status of an apparently necessary ambivalence” (370). Butler is, then, not just adding on to the discourse of desire, but, rather, interrogating and complicating the discourse itself.

⁵⁶ See Samir Dayal’s foreword (p.x) to Rushing’s *Resisting Arrest*.

⁵⁷ See Adriana Cavarero. “Sulla mostrosità del soggetto” in *Per una teoria della differenza sessuale* found in Diotima’s *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milano: La Tartaruga, 1987).

⁵⁸ For more on representations and functions of the femme fatale in literature and film see: Mary Ann Doanne, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film theory, Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Routledge, 1991) & Mario Praz, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, (Firenze: Sansoni, 1948).

The femme fatale is all desire and is what the male protagonist (and the social order more broadly) fears he could succumb to and possibly become. Additionally, the hard-boiled/noir produces another female position that balances out the corrupting, sexual force of the femme fatale: the domesticating female (often the girlfriend or wife) who assists in bringing the detective home. We are firmly couched within the age-old Virgin Mary – Whore dichotomy, where the female must occupy one of these polarized sites. Here, both feminine positions function as place-holders, or sites of blockage, that endanger the detective's movement; the femme fatale is a possible foil to the detective's explicit project, she could thwart his forward moving progress, tempt him off his truth-seeking course; the domestic female is explicitly a place-holder, or metonymy, for the domestic, safe space of home. When the detective solves the mystery and successfully avoids the abyss of the femme fatale, he returns home to her and her hearth. She too embodies a stopping point and acts as a type of catharsis to, or break from, the detective's epistemic (and in the case of the hard-boiled, violent) meanderings. Both women, then, function in opposition, gendered and otherwise, to the male subject of knowledge and *his* pursuit of truth.⁵⁹

In both the traditional and hard-boiled varieties, desire, from the perspective of the protagonist, is avoided and/or defeated. The classic detective lives devoid of it, an emblem of pure thought, while the hard-boiled investigator must not give in to his: an uncontrolled female desire that serves as scapegoat to his own barely tethered impulses. The fear of becoming her, or at least *like her*, literalizes his fear of castration. The epistemic itinerary must avoid desire. Sexual desire is either subsumed within epistemophilia, or they are folded into one another in the case of scopophilia. This “sublimation” can be conceived of in a few ways. First, as Rushing makes explicit, the detective, like the analyst, must figure out the desire of the criminal (or analysand) and in so doing grasp the key of interpretation. We generally know what the criminal did based on the crime scene's aftermath, e.g., the criminal broke into the apartment, shot the man in the head, and stole \$50,000 worth of jewelry (even if certain details must be subsequently filled in), but ascertaining *why* he or she committed the crime is usually necessary to “cracking the case” and identifying the criminal. The logic here is that the detective can read and interpret the desire of others and that this knowledge of the truth of an other's desire allows him to reconstruct the narrative of the crime and assess the criminal's pathos like an analyst. Importantly (and fundamental to the analysis that follows), knowledge must move through, and is predicated upon, knowledge of desire. Such a trajectory rests on the safe premise that desire can be assessed and known, and, furthermore, that one is capable of speaking, or accounting, for their desires, their actions, i.e., for themselves, and for the desires of others.⁶⁰ Therefore, epistemology conquers desire by acting upon it and getting the upper hand: “I know you!” it proclaims. From this perspective, it also follows that the female, sometimes made overt in the figure of the femme fatale, as the embodiment of desire, is also a type of receptacle that can hinder, block or capture the protagonist. The protagonist, then, must overcome or *move through* said receptacle towards the acquisition of knowledge. If knowledge must master desire then the

⁵⁹ A final feminine topos that deserves mentioning is the female as the very site, and embodiment, of madness. Rushing puts emphasis on madness as a symptom of the need for detection.

⁶⁰ The fundamental inability to account for oneself, including one's desire(s), is precisely what Judith Butler formulates as the “opacity” of the subject, desire, and narrative, all of which must move through language. See “Giving an Account of Oneself,” in *Diacritics* 37, no.1 (2007) and “Desire” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* 2nd.

female positionality must be “conquered” in the process of procuring knowledge.⁶¹ Interestingly, she is necessary just as she must be overcome. Epistemological desire needs woman *and* needs to dispose of her.⁶²

Thus far we have been concerned with traditional forms of detective and crime fiction, which are certainly crucial in any theorization of the relation between epistemology and gender in the overall, mainly static, ideology of the genre. Some might object however, that, historically, women writers have contributed to detective fiction and have, furthermore, been encouraged to continue doing so.⁶³ Women such as Agatha Christie have participated in establishing the genre and, thus, have contributed in creating the theory of the detective novel, which, in certain cases, may also contain feminist content.⁶⁴ Martin Priestman, in *Detective Fiction and Literature*, grants the genre’s doubly gendered roots, but insists that, even so, the crime novel form remains highly resistant to any specifically feminist interpretation.⁶⁵ Lazzaro-Weis fundamentally agrees with Priestman and suggests that “a truly feminist detective novel destroys the genre by showing that there is no justice.” (160).⁶⁶ Lazzaro-Weis seems to suggest,

⁶¹ To treat the issue literally and crudely, the protagonist/detective can conquer his desire by both sleeping with her or not sleeping with her. It is a win-win situation. In either case, he is still the subject of knowledge and desire its/his necessary counterpart.

⁶² Such a “female” positionality that the male protagonist must move through and overcome is precisely what Teresa de Lauretis posits as the overarching structure of narrative desire and desire in narrative. De Lauretis locates an inherent maleness of narrative movement. She finds that all narrative desire, both epistemological and erotic, is masculine, and driven by a desire to “know” and “conquer” an enigma or boundary gendered as female; an “unveiling of the truth” is inevitably figured in all narrative and that process is set in motion by an Oedipal hero. All narrative movement is sustained by what she terms an *Oedipal* drive of moving through and beyond woman. See *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, (Indiana University Press, 1984).

⁶³ I am thinking specifically of the Italian context and of the existence of a feminist press, La Tartaruga Nera, established in 1984 and dedicated to encouraging the production and publication of mystery and detective fiction by women.

⁶⁴ In *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing 1968-1990*, Carol Lazzaro-Weis makes sure to acknowledge these, in part, female contributions to the genre’s origins. See Chapter 6: *Cherchez la femme: Feminism and the Giallo*. In addition to the question of female authorship, scholarship has sought to show specifically feminist content within the genre. Exemplary in this trend is Maureen T. Reddy. *Sisters in Crime; Feminism and the Crime Novel*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1988. Also see: Roberta S. Klein’s unpublished dissertation, “Agatha Christie: A feminist reassessment” (January 1, 1999) and Rosemary Erickson Johnsen, *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For a discussion of feminist themes in Italian crime fiction see Bernadette Luciano. “From Novel to Film: Reinstating Patriarchal Order to Dacia Maraini’s *Voci*” and Mirna Cicioni. “Loyalties and Lesbianism in the Novels of Fiorella Cagnoni” in *Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. Mirna Cicioni and Nicoletta Di Ciolla, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).

⁶⁵ See Martin Priestman. *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1990.

⁶⁶ Specifically, Lazzaro-Weis highlights a problematic double-bind with respect to women writers of crime fiction: “Women writers who choose not to follow the rules, including the “queens of crime,” are open to accusations of writing “bad” detective fiction. Whereas those who obey the conventions are necessarily guilty of portraying female oppression and thus directly or indirectly sustaining attitudes and structures responsible for that oppression” (160). I am much less loyal to generic specifications and, thus, have less interest in how and why a novel can or cannot fit into a particular genre or be labeled a “good”

then, that a feminist crime novel is impossible; the genre itself would have to be made other, would lose its identity. Regardless of the appropriateness of labels, one might ask what happens in the numerous instances in which the “detective” or “subject supposed to know” is a woman? Does the case of the female investigator disturb the relation we have so dutifully outlined? Does female authorship of the genre bring with it subversion of the genre’s characteristics? Clearly, it is not that simple and tenuous a set up to disrupt. Indeed, we find female sleuths from early on in the genre’s history and up to the present within recent sub-genres such as “Lesbian Crime Fiction.” The question remains, though, whether the proliferation of generic manipulations succeeds in actually subverting, in any real way, the ideological structures that serve as scaffolding to the generic operation? And, more specifically, do such novels question or complicate, in any real way, the stubborn relation between epistemology and gender, which seems to be the nuts and bolts of this scaffolding?

Kathleen Gregory Klein, in *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*, appears to be taking up this very question when she analyzes detective and crime novels, from the inception of the form all the way to its contemporary variants, in which a woman sleuths. Overall, Klein finds that when the detective is female the “anticipated pattern of successful crime solving suddenly collapses” (1). Regardless of the author’s gender, Klein argues that the female detective’s competence is consistently undercut. Advancing many examples of how such undermining is both obviously and insidiously accomplished, Klein argues that while the woman sleuth may be identified as the novel’s hero, she is never allowed to function like one; “the underlying plot in almost 300 novels denies these characters either as detectives or as women” (1). It is specifically the contradictions between “woman” and “detective” that Klein traces in order to demonstrate the “unacknowledged sabotage of these purported heroes” (1).⁶⁷ It would seem, then, that even when occupying the heroic role of detective “she” must still be “overcome” in order for knowledge to be gained; for the crime to be solved and order restored, the woman detective either loses her femaleness, her gender established as somehow incidental or “faulty”, or, if her important characteristic is her gender, she is stripped of her role as investigator and professional; she must then fail in these latter categories. In either case, *she* does not succeed in her epistemological quest; more precisely, *her failure* is constitutive of epistemology’s success.

archetype, etc. I do agree, though, that the crime novel is a difficult form to manipulate because of its constant reliance on deep cultural norms. It is a genre that inherently seems to strengthen notions of the symbolic order. It is for this very reason that I am interested in how, and to what ends, the novels in this dissertation recruit the genre.

⁶⁷ According to Klein, “the undercutting of the woman detective in one or both of her roles – is encoded in theme or structure as well as in characterization” (4) Some examples include the tendency to hide the details of the protagonist’s female existence (her name is a pseudonym, her marital position concealed, seldom is a third-person pronoun used) denying her definition in societal terms and making it easy for readers to forget that she is a woman. Simultaneously, the unusual female detective often fails even when she figures out who the culprit is: the culprit gets away and the detective does not get paid for her investigation and/or the guilty party turns out to be a woman herself so that the female detective “solves the case by *being* more than by *doing*” (23). Klein also notes instances of plot doubling: the apparently dominant plot of detection is structurally matched by the conventional marriage plot, or the dominant plot is paralleled by a competing, male-dominated detection plot; “In these works, the back-grounded plot gradually moves into the primary position, reducing its story of the female-as-detective-as-protagonist to a contributing episode” (36). Additionally, Klein notes a number of novels in which the female detective has a male partner or companion who does the work for her, or on whom her work relies, and ultimately depends.

In short, in assuming the role of detective, the female investigator becomes either an “honorary man” or a crummy detective. In neither case does her existence appear to upset, or even tamper with, the relation between gender and epistemology that the genre takes as its norm. Even if we imagined, or found, a successful female detective, one could still argue that she has merely assumed a male position: that she takes up what is already a male activity without actually questioning or disturbing its roots. Indeed, something far more radical would have to occur that exposes an origin of said rapport and then attempts to re-write, or re-figure, that relation from its inception.⁶⁸

1. What/Which/Whose Crime?

I propose that *Complice il dubbio* radically dismantles and complicates the traditional relation between gender and epistemology in two mutually informing ways; the undoing of the crime novel and the re-writing of a gendered scene of guilt are two fundamentally related operations that the novel enacts (stages) in the service of re-figuring gender’s relation to knowledge. What ensues is a new heuristics that posits desire and sexuality as practices of investigation outside epistemology, rather than “knowable,” detectable categories. In this way my reading of the novel departs from a psychoanalytic perspective since there desire and identification need one another in order to be defined and “known:” in order to define one’s desire as heterosexual or homosexual, one’s gender must be defined and known.⁶⁹ The re-

⁶⁸ This type of radicality (from a root) is evident in, and comparable to, the methodological foundation of the early Italian feminist group, “Rivolta femminile.” Founded by Carla Lonzi, “Rivolta femminile” states its refusal to fight for, or even accept, commonly held feminist claims, like the legal right to abortion. In fact, “Rivolta femminile” was anti-equal rights and anti-egalitarianism in general, since they argue that the legal system has already been structured by and for men and that the notion of equal rights rests on an economy of sameness. According to Lonzi, winning legal rights is contrary to Italian feminist goals as it assists in maintaining, and even strengthening, the misogynistic system already in place. Accepting legal rights, such as equal pay, is to give the system power, and to condone and affirm the power it already asserts over their lives. Furthermore, from this perspective, to fight for equal rights, is really to fight to be considered *like men*; because we are just like them, i.e. men, we should have the same rights as them. This model of assimilation runs counter to Italian feminist thought more broadly in that it overlooks, and even erases, sexual difference. If one could foreground the most essential difference between Italian and Anglo-American feminisms it would be the Italian insistence on the preeminence of sexual difference as a foundational, ontological category; the Italian feminist practice of “partire da sé,” or “beginning from the self,” is a personal and political practice that initiates from, and within, an anti-assimilation model. Instead, Italian feminists have argued for a radical, anarchic, uprooting of the entire socio-symbolic system that would, for example, tear down the current legal system, in order to start over from an acknowledgement, and practice, of sexual difference.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, the only instance in which one’s designated sexuality does not depend on a determined gender is in the case of bisexuality. Not only is bisexuality troubling because it will not stay still and cannot be pinned down, i.e., one can move back and forth from men to women and back again, *but* I am suggesting that it is also disrupting to the sex/gender system in that it does not originate from, or need, a

writing of a story (and perhaps stories) of origins is, in particular, a way in which the novel upsets from its roots an established, normativized relation between knowledge, sex, and desire. Finally, I suggest that *Complice il dubbio* denies such generic (and even socio-symbolic) codes, from a point of origin, in an attempt to produce a non-paradigmatic instance of female desiring selves and desire among women that is outside of patriarchy, that is *elsewhere*.⁷⁰

Complice il dubbio defies the crime novel genre in a number of ways, repeatedly citing the genre only to then deny those very generic codes. What ensues is a narrative that asks to be read as a crime novel, but then evades that very possibility within, or by way of, its own miming. Indeed, the trite label “complice del delitto” is summoned, yet altered, in the novel’s title. The crime is replaced with “dubbio,” and it is certainly doubt that pervades the novel with regards to the “murder,” but also, more broadly, with regard to whom is guilty of what and against who that crime might be. A central question arises; does *Complice il dubbio* even care about the “murder” and who is responsible for it? Rather than beginning with the crime scene’s disturbing aftermath and then reconstructing the events that lead up and into the violent scene, *Complice il dubbio* gives its readers access to the entirety of the events of the crime itself but, somehow, never allows for full elucidation of who is responsible for the man’s death. Not only is the reader profoundly left in “dubbio,” but so is the novel’s protagonist. We are, in fact, granted access to the actual “crime scene” via the protagonist’s memory of it, since she was the only person with the man when he died. The novel seems to stop caring about who killed the man as it strays from *the* crime scene and turns to other scenes of “crime” and guilt. That the novel diverts attention away from “whodunit?” and onto “whatisit?” is certainly part of its undoing of the genre.

Complice il dubbio sets itself up as a murder mystery in which the existence of an actual murder is put into question. Anna, our female protagonist, is with the man in his bedroom when he is shot and killed. I refer to him as “the man” because he never acquires an actual name for the entirety of the novel; he is always, only “l’uomo.” It is Anna’s recollection of “the crime scene” and its occurrences that we read in the narrative’s unfolding. Anna goes to the man’s apartment to meet him for an “appuntamento di notte.” She finds him intoxicated and depressed and ends up sleeping with him and spending the night. In the morning she awakes to find him waving a gun around. The description of the man’s death is extremely ambiguous and merits being quoted at length:

Le lancette della sveglia segnalavano che era già mattina. E a un tratto l’uomo si era alzato bruscamente...Si era chinato a frugare nel cassetto del comodino situato in basso...E si era rialzato con una radiosa smorfia di trionfo mostrandole la rivoltella, piccolo come un giocattolo...L’uomo la soppesava, la passava da una mano all’altra. Poi si era messo a camminare su e giù puntando l’arma contro le pareti, contro la sedia...Poi si era fermato e l’aveva

stable, fixable/locatable gender off of which it desires. Furthermore, if one looked at the question through a “queer” lens, it would not be required to “know” one’s gender in order to “know” one’s desire.

⁷⁰ “Elsewhere” is a term utilized by Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One* to describe the space inhabited by women that allows a distance from which to play with mimesis. Teresa de Lauretis produces her own inside/outside model in *Technologies of Gender* using the concept of the “space-off” taken from film theory. A number of feminists writing in the 1980s produce similar topographies that seek to define or figure a female symbolic or discursive space that exists somewhere outside or beyond phallogocentrism.

fissata...Si era avvicinato, sempre di più, mentre i loro occhi finalmente s'incontravano in un contatto senza mediazioni...Di scatto, aveva gettato indietro la testa per sfuggirle e si era buttato sopra il suo corpo...Il colpo era partito. L'uomo s'era inarcato, alto su di lei, per scivolare immediatamente giù, piegandosi di lato e cadendo di traverso sul suo seno (31-33).

This passage describes in some detail the man's actions. Yet, when we come to the actual moment in which the gun fires and he is shot, there is no evident agent behind the action. Grammatically, "Il colpo era partito" is a passive construction; the gun goes off (the shot is released) and the man falls on top of Anna. Anna eventually climbs out from under the man, gathers her things and leaves his apartment shortly after the shooting. She is clear-minded and determined not to leave any trace of her presence behind. She flees the apartment and makes her way home (stopping, of course, for a coffee), suspicious of being seen or followed. Her behavior itself is suspicious, as if she has committed a crime, yet she repeats often, and in different ways, that she is acting ridiculously since she has done nothing wrong. In fact, one of her excuses for never reporting the man's death to the police is her fear that her actual innocence will not be believed. We will return to this later, but I would merely gesture here to a sense of guilt that pervades Anna's consciousness and filters into her behavior, but is denied a direct referent; of what is she guilty and against whom has she committed a crime?

All parties, Anna, the police, and we readers, finish the novel without a suspect detained or a "guilty" character located and fixed. The police never apprehend a criminal, and thus never solve the case. And Anna and we readers finish the novel still unclear as to whether the man shot himself, on purpose or by accident, or whether Anna did in fact shoot him. In the last 50 pages or so of the novel, and specifically when Marta has angrily left Anna's apartment (I will return to the significance of this aspect later), Anna mentally re-plays and re-thinks the "scene of the crime" only to find that she really cannot settle on who shot him:

La rivoltella. Dov'era la rivoltella quando lui era caduto? La teneva ancora stretta in pugno. La memoria le disse che non era andato così. Con una fatica immensa che la spaccava in due ricostruì la scena...Dov'era la rivoltella? Certamente il colpo l'aveva scaraventata a terra. Poi rammentò di averla vista sul tappeto. L'aveva anche raccolta? Di sicuro l'aveva toccata, la ricordava liscia e fredda al tatto. Ma c'era qualcosa di falso, di sbagliato nel suo ricordo...Quasi con ripugnanza respingeva la rivoltella che lui si ostinava a ficcarle in mano per gioco...Alfine cedendo alle sue insistenze l'aveva presa, appena sfiorata. E il colpo era partito. Di schianto. Lei l'aveva ucciso. Sì, questo spiegava tutto... Ma la verità possedeva sfumature ancora più vaghe ed evanescenti...Si trattava di un'ennesima illusione...Difficile, si disse, dimostrare la propria innocenza a se stessi... Poteva essere vero. C'era una possibilità che lo fosse. Ma poteva essere vero anche il contrario (177).

Anna *may or may not* have had the gun in her hand when it went off. We never get any closer to a definitive answer. In a very real way, it does not even seem to matter what truly happened.⁷¹

⁷¹ This sustained ambiguity recalls the unanswered riddle of Maria's body from Chapter One. And, in fact, my interpretive methodology is the same; my goal is not to look for evidence that would allow me to

In fact, what actually happened to the man (and why) ceases to be what the novel is actually about or concerned with. Instead, on her way home from his apartment Anna encounters a sick woman, Marta, and brings her back to her apartment where the two “sconosciute” proceed to “hide out” and get to know one another. It turns out that both women have fled the crime scene (Marta was subletting a room in the man’s apartment) and the novel too, in a sense, moves on and leaves the “crime” behind. What ensues is the story of the relationship (albeit an odd one) between the two women; “Erano entrambe vittime del caso che prima aveva messo sulla loro strada quell’uomo e poi l’una nelle mani dell’altra” (42). In fact, the importance of the “crime,” and the “crime” itself, is displaced (even if continually evoked in a mysterious background and by way of particular discourses, e.g., the newspaper) by the evolving relationship between Anna and Marta. And the real doubt that takes center stage is the doubt and suspicion that structures their (the women’s) relation to one another and to themselves. What begins as doubt about each other’s relation to the man is eclipsed by a dubious desire between the two women.

I argue that, although the “crime” and the story of the man (or, rather, the women’s relationships to him) hover in the novel’s background, and could be seen as a type of mediation between Anna and Marta, in actuality, he and the “crime” lose all specificity and come to stand, instead, for a male symbolic economy that structures, not only women’s relationships to one another, but also a woman’s relationship to herself and her own self-knowledge(s) and desires. Anna and Marta’s strange set-up in Anna’s apartment, their hard-to-define relationship, is structured, instead, around an absence; initially they do not discuss the man at all and neither of them knows the truth of the other’s relationship to him. (Even when Marta tells Anna about renting the room from him she leaves out that she thinks she may have seen Anna leaving the apartment. In this sense, Marta’s real secret regards the body of Anna more than that of the man). This omission on both their parts reads awkwardly, particularly given that both women are, and/or claim to be, innocent. Why such mutual suspicion of one another? And if they are suspicious of the other then why do they choose to live in the same space and develop a certain intimacy? What keeps Anna and Marta united for the duration of the novel? I would like to suggest that *not* mentioning the man and his death for so long is a way in which the novel allows, or attempts to allow, for the chance of a female relationship *not* mediated by (a) man/Man. I posit that “l’uomo” comes to stand in for Man because of his lack of a specific identity: he is nameless and without defining characteristics. In fact, I argue in detail later that closing themselves up in Anna’s apartment and being relatively cut-off from the world around them (it is, after all, Ferragosto, and Rome is empty) is a way in which the two women attempt to be in *elsewhere*, outside of a male symbolic economy: it is a type of experiment, a “sottrarsi” from a scene of the crime of a symbolic that defines woman in relation to guilt, and, specifically, guilt in relation to (a) man/Man. I employ the word “sottrarsi,” meaning to back out of, or remove or subtract oneself, because it is both something less and more than a “subversion:” the women slip away from the male order, as if turning their backs on it, and thus not approaching it head on; *but in this way* they radically begin again from without the system itself, they attempt to exist beyond an ideology that insists on containing them. To quarantine themselves off in Anna’s apartment is to seek self-definition and relationality outside the symbolic order and to begin again from themselves.⁷² The novel then mimicks this “sottrarsi” in relation to the genre of the

“crack the case.” Rather, I seek to leave the novel’s very openness intact and ask what such undecidability accomplishes.

⁷² My language here purposefully evokes an Italian feminist theory and practice entitled “Partire da sé” or ‘beginning from the self.’ The Italian feminist group Diotima developed the notion of “partire da sé” from

crime novel in its “forgetting” about the man and not solving the case of his “murder.” In both cases this “sottrarsi” is hard to pull off and reads as an experiment with starts and stops; indeed, how does one locate an outside without reference to a constitutive inside? When Marta discovers the whole truth about Anna, that she had known the man and had been with him in his apartment at the moment of his death, she, in fact, promptly and angrily leaves. It is in this moment, when the attempt at a female relationality outside of a relation to a man, and to male norms more generally, suffers a setback that Anna returns explicitly to contemplate her innocence or guilt in relation to it. Thus, a breakdown in female relationality directly affects a woman’s own relation to herself.

within its ‘thought of sexual difference’ whose main tenet is that Western philosophy is not a neutral, universal thought, but, rather, masculine. From this perspective, sexual difference itself has not been thought, and women must take it upon themselves to become subjects of themselves, “a partire da sé.” This notion has its origins in the earlier founded feminist group, Libreria delle donne di Milano, beginning in 1966, and is at the foundation of their practice of “affidamento,” or entrusting oneself to an older, more experienced woman in order to create a female economy based on structured mediation and disparity or differences among women. This new social contract among women echoes the notion of starting from the self. In a section entitled “Doing justice starting with oneself” of their collectively authored book *Non credere di avere dei diritti: la generazione della libertà femminile dell’idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donna*, they state, “We think that there will be no justice for women as long as they know it as the thing which has been denied them and must be restored to them – as long as they do not know it is as something they can, and must, do starting from themselves and in their own relationships. Society has absolutely nothing to teach us about this” (134 from *Sexual Difference; A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*). The separatism of this practice, and others like it established by the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, resonates with the experimental set-up I analyze within Anna’s apartment and the odd relationship that ensues between her and Marta; in order to think and know herself, Anna requires the mediation of another woman. For more recent iterations and developments of the notion of “partire da sé” see: Diotima, *La sapienza di partire da sé*, (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1996), and, in particular, the collection’s first essay “Partire da sé e non farsi trovare...” by Luisa Muraro. In this essay Muraro sets forth a new philosophy, “la filosofia pratica,” that is born out of “la pratica di partire da sé.” Taking a cue from the doubled meaning of “partire” as both “lo staccarsi e il prendere inizio, il separarsi e l’originarsi,” Muraro encourages a practice of renewing the moment of entering the world as a becoming by way of a departure, and thus posits difference itself as the origin of our reality. This practice, in its continual movement away from a central location, resists the standard logic of identity: “nel tuo ragionare, guidicare, decidere, *non ti fa trovare* dove gli altri ti aspettano... Non è strano, perché gli altri si aspettano di trovarti nel posto ovvio... mentre il « partire da sé » ti situa, di volta in volta, nella traiettoria del tuo essere che cambia, si muove, cerca... È come viaggiare... uno spostamento... rinnovare il momento della venuta al mondo” (8-9). We might apply this not being where you are supposed to be to Anna and Marta’s “sottrarsi” from the Man and his “scene of the crime” since they stop being available to, and part of, his world.

2. Eve Who?

The “fleeing” of “the scene of the crime” and the decision to not return there, nor go to the police with information (and I speak here of the female characters’ choice *and* the novel’s choice), is not merely a denial of the essential scene that structures the crime novel; rather, I posit that “the scene of the crime” in *Complice il dubbio* refers beyond itself to a, and its, story of origins, a founding narrative, of the crime genre at large, a type of primal scene that assists the genre in knowing itself, in other words, the scene of the crime of the genre.⁷³ W.H. Auden in his essay “The Guilty Vicarage” depicts the Garden of Eden as a constitutive locus amoenus that detective fiction consistently evokes in its repetitive and necessary return to order that is never fully successful, insofar as the genre goes on to produce more crimes and criminals. In other words, the crime of any detective novel is a stain that threatens the sanctity of society; its resolution, society’s way of dealing with that crime and its perpetrator, is always understood as an attempt to restore itself to an Eden, a time before the corruption of humankind.⁷⁴ In a certain sense, the crime genre’s dependence on a “scene of the crime” as what makes the narrative of detection necessary parallels the “scene of the crime” of the genre, understood through a Judeo-Christian lens as the Garden of Eden and Original Sin, a structuring narrative constitutive of the genre. And, indeed, we might say that Eve’s crime represents the first and originating human crime: she steals from The Tree of Knowledge, she acts on a desire for knowledge and commits a crime against God that results in establishing and sustaining human guilt; her’s *is* the original sin. Eve’s theft and her eating of the apple is, furthermore, the act that gives birth to human modesty as it brings awareness to Adam and Eve of their bodies and nakedness. It is, therefore, an originating scene of the discourse of heterosexual desire and relationality. Simply, it is a

⁷³ I am utilizing a psychoanalytic conceptual vocabulary here, in particular by employing a concept of a “primal scene” and positing the “scene of the crime” as a primal scene that necessarily structures the subsequent narrative in both conscious and unconscious ways. It is, furthermore, a primal scene in that it brings horror to the spectator, it is a violent scene and must be, to a certain extent, repressed, but nevertheless, persists in one’s psyche.

⁷⁴ See W.H. Auden, “The Guilty Vicarage,” in *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (Vintage Books: New York, 1989). In his definition of a “Whodunit” Auden writes, “It must appear to be an innocent society in a state of grace, i.e., a society where there is no need for the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and the ethical universe, and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis (for it reveals that some member has fallen and is no longer in a state of grace” (150). In his section on *The Milieu (Natural)* he goes on to state that, “Nature should reflect its human inhabitants, i.e., it should be the Great Good Place; for the more Eden-like it is, the greater the contradiction of murder,” (151) and in *The Murder* he describes murder as the inverse, the negative, of creation, hence the reversal, or unraveling, of the creation story of Adam and Eve (152). Lastly, Auden’s essay ends with a telling paragraph: “The fantasy, then, which the detective story addict indulges is the fantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence, where he may know love as love and not as law. The driving force behind this daydream is the feeling of guilt, the cause of which is unknown to the dreamer. The fantasy of escape is the same, whether one explains the guilt in Christian, Freudian, or any other terms. One’s way of trying to face the reality, on the other hand, will, of course, depend very much on one’s creed” (158). Therefore, following Auden’s lead, if murder precipitates a societal crisis in that one of its members has fallen, i.e., is no longer in a state of grace, then Original Sin is the “primal scene” of murder novels in which humanity is deemed fallen, capable of sin. In this way, Original Sin becomes the narrative that makes narratives of murder possible.

narrative that symbolically initiates human knowledge of desire, where desire is understood to be heterosexual. The scene of Original Sin is, then, beyond the crime fiction genre, a founding narrative of Western culture more generally that structures our socio-symbolic economy. I read *Complice il dubbio*'s evocation and re-writing of this scene as precisely the type of radical uprooting that some Italian feminisms have called for and that the crime genre has been so resistant to. The novel employs the scene of Original Sin as an originating scene of the genre and of the discourse of the matrix of heterosexuality, and unhinges them simultaneously. The text employs a fall that alludes to an originary one but here gives knowledge not of heterosexual desire, but a dubious knowledge of same-sex desire.

The man is abstracted, given a more symbolic role, as he is denied a fully individual existence, beginning from the fact that he is never named. As remarked, for the entirety of the novel he is only referred to as "l'uomo" and is, furthermore, provided with very few defining characteristics that would give him a particular, unique identity. Anna considers that although they have had sex, she really knows nothing about him:

Il fatto è che lei non lo conosceva quasi, quell'uomo...Una sola notte, un fuggevole contatto...E lei non lo conosceva, non sapeva niente di lui...Avrebbe dato qualsiasi cosa, Anna, pur di poter ricostruire il suo volto, la sua immagine quotidiana: l'immagine che conservavano di lui la madre, la moglie, ma anche gli amici e perfino i vicini di casa (84).

Here, the man is relegated to an abstraction with regard to his relationship to Anna, and, furthermore, to the text. She, and thus we, have no real, everyday sense of who he is. Her inability to conjure an image of his face, to recall his individual features, deprives him of a textual subjectivity. Later, when Anna seeks information about the man and about developments in the investigation of his death from newspapers, they do not offer details about him:

Si era aspettata di trovare sui giornali notizie che le aprissero uno spiraglio di comprensione. Aveva sperato di poter intuire le vittorie e le sconfitte di *una vita* che si era intrecciata così inestricabilmente alla sua. D'imbattersi almeno qualche fuggevole impronta di verità. Invece niente. Liquidato in poche righe. Anche di morto le sfuggiva (my emphasis, 84).

Even a document made to inform society with quotidian facts does not in any way sate Anna's curiosities; she is not allowed an obituary that would provide even a minimal biography. Even a quasi-biography would restore to the text "una vita," one lived experience among many possible lives. Here too, then, the novel disposes of a literary genre, the biography, by way of the newspaper genre of the obituary; the obituary is denied the possibility of producing knowledge and subjectivity, i.e., the facts of one's life. In other words, neither Anna nor Marta gains much information that would provide the man with an on-the-ground existence among people. When Anna finds herself back in front of his home where she eavesdrops in his neighborhood, she is still unable to gather any real information about him. Anna even goes into a bakery where presumably the man bought bread; even a detail as seemingly mundane as what type of bread he liked to eat, would assist her in "knowing" him in some small way, would assist in de-abstracting him. Marta too insists that she barely knows anything about this man that she agreed to rent a room from. Any information garnered is generic and remains removed from the central narrative;

our only two facts are that he was an architect and had an ex-wife. The man never becomes an individual with whom Anna, Marta, or the readers can, or could have [had] a relationship.

Anna's relationship to "l'uomo" is not a relationship with an individual man, but figured as a relationship to a universalized man: "Ma così... La legava a lui un vincolo più forte dell'amore, una incancellabile, macabra intimità del corpo e dell'animo. Un legame eterno che aveva il sapore di una vendetta" (84). Because "l'uomo" dies, and Anna never learns more about him, their relationship remains within a symbolic realm where "un legame eterno" has already delineated the terms. His death signifies, and makes inevitable, an eternal, and uneraseable relation already written, which I read as a woman's necessary relation (a dis-relation) to a masculine symbolic order that structures her relationship to her own body and its desires. While from within this realm Anna's role cannot change (their relationship will always be what it has been), her relationship to his/this narrative (and thus, her existing relationship to the self) can be cut short if she disappears and stays quiet: Anna subtracts herself from this already written story, to a certain extent she stops engaging it by leaving and remaining silent.⁷⁵ When Anna and the novel return to considerations of what transpired in the man's apartment and what to do now, what matters most is not *him*, nor his story, but rather *her* and her story of herself. Marta too was in danger of being emptied out in her relationship to "l'uomo:" he was not interested in getting to know who she was, in allowing her story to have a place: he wanted a silent presence that reflected his needs, a mere body against which he could define himself. In keeping "l'uomo" nameless, in keeping Anna, Marta, and the reader ignorant of his daily life, and in subtracting the women from "l'uomo's" story, the text produces a *silent* resistance that leaves Man within his symbolic. It is not merely that the novel reverses patriarchy's turning woman into Woman by here turning the man into Man. Instead, I posit that the universalization produced in *Complice il dubbio* is necessary in order for the "subtraction" I describe above to take place; Anna and Marta's narrative within Anna's apartment is in opposition to the male universal and the novel stages their departure from it via the refusal to account for him or his death.

The man's unraveling resulting in his eventual death is a fall that alludes to an originary one. "L'uomo's" apartment evokes a vortex of man's desperation and suffering. His general state and apartment are described as depressing sites of human suffering: he has been left by his wife to wallow in loneliness and empty, unused space, and he is an alcoholic, made evident by the plethora of empty liquor bottles not well-hidden in the kitchen. It is, in essence, a den of man's fall. Anna's presence at that site, and what remains with her of it, is depicted as a violence inflicted upon her, a vendetta that punishes her for some sin:

D'improvviso si sentì agitata da una rivolta profonda che cancellava ogni spirito di responsabilità, e cancellava perfino la compassione – che pure aveva provato – verso quell'uomo. Lo odiava anzi per averla trascinata nel gorgo della sua più privata disperazione. Un sopruso. Una violenza che le era stata inflitta per punirla di chissà quale peccato. Ma ciò che era accaduto, in un certo senso, non la riguardava. E soprattutto non era colpa sua. Doveva convincersene. Possibile che tutto, tutto quello che accadeva nel mondo le sembrasse nascondere in qualche maniera, sempre, una sua remota colpa? (52)

⁷⁵ Here I would draw another parallel between this novel and *La mano tagliata* in their deployment of silence or withholding. In both cases there is a female disengagement, a female "sottrarsi," from a typical narrative telos that we have come to expect and insist upon.

The violence depicted above is one that pins Anna down under its weight and force. This violence is further described as an abuse of power that puts Anna in a position of possible guilt for all that happens: “tutto quello che accadeva nel mondo.” The use of the word “accadere,” used twice in the above-cited paragraph, is telling as it contains “cadere,” to fall, within it. Here “to happen” contains “fallen,” and even “damned,” semantically lodged within. It is not just guilt for all that happens, but guilt specifically for the fallen. The context I evoke of *The Fall* reinserts a Biblical charge into the term “peccato,” otherwise so common in Italian as to seem almost secularized. The man’s body that falls dead upon Anna literalizes her status of being pinned underneath his fate, and underneath, and included in, his story. Her crawling out from under him in order to flee his apartment is a part of her self-extraction from the scene of the crime and the guilt that attaches to it. Marta too flees the scene of the man’s death, which supplies her with an unwarranted, mysterious guilt. Marta confesses to Anna, “Ho avuto paura...e sono scappata come una stupida. Mi sentivo in pericolo. E in colpa, un assurdo senso di colpa...Fatto sta che sono scappata. E ora possono sospettarmi davvero perché non ho chiamato subito la polizia” (42). Marta not only leaves but “escapes,” as if in imminent danger. And even though she escapes, avoiding a foreboding danger, she still, somehow, feels guilty, as if responsible. The unspoken peril, produced by the text, is remaining within a narrative that defines her as always, somehow, at fault and thus always as the “lesser” version of man; as if by remaining in that space, physically close to the dead man, she accepts being written into “his” story, and allows herself the possibility of being accused of his downfall.

3. Complicitous Being/Seeing

Rather than a traditional investigation of this ‘scene of the crime’ of man’s downfall, *Complice il dubbio* moves on to engage the investigatory space and activity of the two women living in Anna’s attic apartment. The scenes inside Anna’s apartment evoke certain aspects of detection and investigation, but, more importantly, replace a discourse of crime investigation based on hard facts with an inverse experiential discourse, in part based on “le esigenze del corpo,” and on an undefined, unspoken language of desire, that will not produce “knowledge” or “truths” as we know them. There are many references to the traces that Marta leaves behind her, as she begins to take over Anna’s space leaving clothes and possessions astrew. Most notably, there is a description of the damp footprints that Marta leaves on the floor and which allow Anna, in pseudo-detective fashion, to trace her movements. The investigation, however, is complicit in that it evolves into a private space in which each woman observes and learns about the other mainly through a type of bodily awareness (seeing, listening, smelling, touching), never knowing much about the other woman’s actual life story. In fact, speaking is not abundant in the scenes of interaction between the women in the apartment; it is rather a simple being, a watching and being watched, a being with the relatively quiet presence of the other woman. Such presence produces a doubling (another detective novel motif) that Anna reflects upon as a being seen that forces a type of self-surveillance: a female *speculum*, to borrow from Luce Irigaray.⁷⁶ Therefore,

⁷⁶ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, (Cornell University Press, 1985).

this doubling and complicity make Anna not the only detective, not the only set of interrogatory eyes, but also forces the “detection” back onto the self; Marta’s watching of Anna forces her into a type of self-introspection beginning from a bodily self-awareness (this is not to say that Marta’s presence allows Anna to “define” what transpired with the man). If *Complice il dubbio* ‘si sottrae’ from “the scene of the crime” of Original Sin as an origin point of the symbolic order (an origin that narrates the first human crime and the gendered knowledge that results), than the re-writing or re-imagining that takes place in the sequestered apartment, not by chance, reads awkwardly. Such staging is improvisational and experimental in its attempt to produce a new female discourse and knowledge, a female economy, where *she* is both subject and object, and even both at once. Indeed, some of the awkwardness arises from the very newness and impossibility of such total extraction and the clumsiness of re-learning or starting again from an unknown beginning.⁷⁷ In this tentative new space or order, Anna begins again to learn the self and to build a subjectivity that here is figured as a process of learning from, and by way of, another woman’s body (Holmes and Watson never had this type of complicity!)

It is, indeed, an “esigenza del corpo” that initiates Anna and Marta’s first encounter. Anna sees Marta (in fact, before seeing her she hears her footsteps as she wears “tacchi”) walking unsteadily, losing her balance, and then stopping to lean against a pole: “Si era fermata vinta da un malore o più semplicemente dal caldo che mozzava il fiato e tagliava le gambe” (12). Moments later Marta vomits on the sidewalk (Here, vomiting is an exemplar bodily need, a type of necessary revolt of the body, that cannot be suppressed or disregarded: a violent and interrupting force).⁷⁸ Anna wants to quickly reach the safety of her apartment, having just fled the man’s apartment and his dead body, but she cannot help herself from turning around to check on the young woman. Anna acknowledges that, as a doctor, she did not feel the need to tend to the man’s injured body, but here instead, “Non poteva scappare davanti a una donna che, chiaramente, aveva bisogno del suo aiuto... Non era capace di lavarsene le mani: in fondo, ogni persona che stava male era in qualche maniera affar suo. E alla fine prevalse in lei il medico” (12) (In truth, and presciently, Anna will not be able to “wash her hands” of Marta). One could argue that Anna’s inability to stay and help the man, to not have a “doctorly” reaction of any sort, is evidence of her guilt, suggesting that she really did kill him. However, it is just this type of reading, an investigatory gathering of clues in order to crack the case, that I propose this novel challenges us *not to do*; *Complice il dubbio* tempts its readers to follow the familiar crime novel

⁷⁷ To borrow from Althusser, there may be no being outside of Ideology, or the outside, that untouchable space of nature, was always already inside discourse. See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, (London & Brooklyn: Verso, 1994).

⁷⁸ In the traditional crime novel the realness of the body, its very fragility, is exemplified by the murdered body found at the crime scene. However, such irrepressible corporality is given over to, and tamed by, the process of solving the crime and the giving of an accurate story that accounts for, and makes understandable, the body’s unfortunate suffering and death. Classically, the realness or literality of the body is glossed over by knowledge and truth that is narrativized. Rushing comments on this type of “intellectual aestheticization” whereby there is a conversion of blood into an intellectual problem rather than a sign of violence. Therefore, Rushing notes that oddly, the detective’s actions work to conceal the body, exchanging the corpse for a corpus of evidence and deduction, which results in a fundamental cognitive process of forgetting. My suggestion is that in *Complice il dubbio* forgetting or replacing the real body by way of knowledge seems thoroughly denied in favor of a more bodily knowing, that is, a knowledge that does not require language or verbal utterances. If Anna acts as a type of detective it is because she has no choice but to investigate Marta’s body and, by consequence, her own body, but never gains an exact knowledge of either.

method and read clues in the service of finding “truth” and placing guilt, but we can never actually get to that point and we are never satisfied enough to exclaim, “She did do it!” In this sense, the novel posits its own, new heuristics that asks us not to be defiantly (and compulsively) tethered to the “whodunit?” What stands out in this instance is, instead, a new relation between women; Anna will not leave *a woman* in need. In fact, the only other body we witness Anna tend to in the course of the novel is the body of her grandmother; Anna periodically visits her grandmother and performs mini-check-ups, taking her blood pressure, pulse, etc.

It is Anna’s role as doctor (a role that Carlo Ginzburg compares to the detective’s work) attending to a bodily outcry that initiates her first “examination” of Marta’s body.⁷⁹ She brings Marta into her office and takes stock of her body:

Era molto giovane e graziosa, un viso allungato in un ovale classico... Anna l’osservava con attenzione. Il volto senza trucco, contratto in un’espressione infantile di autodifesa... Le tastò il polso. Le scostò dalla faccia i capelli. Con un asciugamano bagnato le pulì il volto... le inumidì lievemente il collo, le braccia... Poi rimase lì a fissarla (13-14).

As Anna observes and tends to Marta’s body, it becomes a taking in of her body that activates multiple senses. She not only looks at her, but feels and touches her, “Anna le carezzò leggermente una guancia” (27), and hears her, “Anna ascoltava il respiro della giovane sconosciuta” while she falls asleep. I will return to this question of the senses, but for now note that the learning of Marta comes by way of her body and is from the start beyond merely ocular.

Before looking in detail at scenes within Anna’s apartment, in which Marta’s presence and Anna’s gaze onto her enforces a type of new self-awareness, I begin by analyzing the first scene of the novel because it establishes certain norms, which are then put into question by certain scenes within Anna’s apartment; Anna is first the object of a gaze that then mediates her own view of herself. In the first scene of the novel, Anna stops for a coffee after having fled the man’s apartment. As readers we do not yet know from where Anna has come or what has transpired to produce the strange anxiety already at work. This suspicion or mistrust without a known cause, that we later come to understand is chronologically induced, adds to my reading of this scene as both dependent on an original symbolization *and* activating a misogyny that is felt as an inherent presence taken for granted; in other words, this bar scene stands on its own when the novel is read for the first time and then depends on what we later learn to have chronologically come before. The discomfort that Anna experiences in being a perennial object of a man’s gaze does not come as a shock to readers.

The comparison between this scene and the scenes I turn to next relies on Anna seeing her reflection in the mirror that resides behind the bar. From the start Anna is uncomfortable and fearful in the bar, but we are not given a direct cause of her state. The first words of the scene, and of the novel, are “Il cameriere” who has a “tocco maestro” (1). Anna is in his space, a space that he resides over, and she feels surveyed; “Il cameriere non le levava gli occhi di dosso...e seguiva a guardarla con insistenza per provocare un commento, un’altra parola” (2) (already a refusal to speak and engage a discourse). In retrospect we re-read Anna’s awareness of being looked at as arising from her fear of being caught for her maybe “crime.” But, upon first reading, we are not necessarily shocked to find a man staring inappropriately at a woman. This

⁷⁹ See Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, translated by John & Ann C. Tedeschi, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

is exactly the type of probing and suspicious gaze that the later shower scene will recall, but then shifts and manipulates to new ends. Anna perceives the waiter staring at her and then laments her appearance as she catches sight of her reflection in the mirror behind the bar:

Lei si ritrasse un poco, a disagio...Non s'era lavata la faccia e nemmeno ravviata i capelli, rammentò incontrando la sua immagine dietro il bianco, nello specchio che correndo lungo tutta la parete catturava in fondo, sulla destra, un tratto vuoto e abbagliante di strada. Anna strinse gli occhi senza distoglierli da quello scorcio di marciapiede (2).

Anna's first reaction to the waiter's stare is to recoil and withdraw. She does not meet his gaze and she does not continue to watch him watching her. Interestingly, the waiter's gaze is quickly replaced by Anna's reflection in the mirror and her scrutinizing, critical image of herself captured by the mirror. Importantly, we should not overlook that the barman stands in between Anna and the mirror, facing and looking at her. In other words, he stands between Anna and her image and the reflection of herself that Anna observes must, in a sense, pass spatially through his gaze; ideologically, the male waiter is implicated in the gaze and picture that the mirror gives back to Anna, he stands as a mediating force; therefore, *his gaze is implicated in her vision of herself*.⁸⁰ This is precisely what this novel goes on to stray from and re-imagine. Furthermore, it

⁸⁰ This scene, and my analysis of the gazes at work within it, is reminiscent of traditional scholarship on the gaze and spectatorship. In his formative book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger and others consider the sexual difference inherent in human conventions of looking and being seen. In Chapter 3 they formulate a split in the female subjective experience whereby a woman's identity is divided into the *surveyor* and the *surveyed*; how a woman appears to others is the basis for her sense of self and her success in life. Importantly, this split within her is gendered: "...men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female" (47). Indeed, Anna's gaze at her image in the mirror moves through the barman standing in between her and her reflection; the surveyor in her is male and she sees herself with his eyes. It is precisely *this way of seeing* that initiates this novel as the norm and is then supplanted by a gaze between Anna and Marta and an attempt at *seeing oneself as surveyor and surveyed* and, thus, an implied third presence/perspective. Berger's female split is perhaps partially unified by the process and awareness gained by this additional look. Another infamous analysis of spectatorship, here via psychoanalytic film theory, is Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in which Mulvey theorizes the way in which the dominant patriarchal order structures the cinematic pleasure of looking through voyeuristic fantasy and narcissistic scopophilia. Thus, Mulvey's formulation addresses more explicitly the question of desire inherent in the pleasure of looking and considers the relationships between various levels of looking: character, audience, and director. Mulvey's essay is useful for us in that it pursues the problem of a language of desire in which the woman is merely bearer of male desire, she serves as structural support to the patriarchal unconscious, always its object on display. In the case of Anna, the scene is initiated by the barman's suggestive looking at Anna, and then Anna's perspective (she is after all our protagonist and our "spectatorial" perspective is filtered through her) as she sees herself. Again, and with Mulvey in mind, the scene is structured such that Anna's seeing is not exactly her own; when she is explicitly looking (at herself) she cannot help but adopt his stance, even if, importantly, a minor gap seems to be suggested between hers and his looks by the very fact that Anna does not share in his pleasure. In her reconsideration of her essay, Mulvey takes up the possibility of a female spectator of film who chooses to identify (not unproblematically) with the look and desire of the main male character. See Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*

is not only herself that Anna gauges by way of the mirror's reflection; she is also able to see the sidewalk outside the café. Thus, the male mediated mirror perspective travels with her beyond the confines of the café and influences how she takes in the world around her. The detail of "strinse gli occhi" adds to my suggestion that her view is mediated and restricted: it tightens her perspective and lends it a hint of "sorveglianza," calling to mind the squinting used to peer through a microscope. This masculine, investigatory gaze (or reading) is what the novel evokes only to evade and substitute.

This detecting gaze is further solidified in the following paragraph when Anna glances at her reflection again: "Tornò a fissare la sua immagine. In una sola occhiata captò i segni della stanchezza e li registrò automaticamente, quasi dovesse trascriverli sulla cartella clinica di un suo paziente. Le palpebre cerchiate, le labbra gonfie e violente nel volto sciupato dalla notte insonne" (2). It is true that there is a self-watching taking place in this instance too, but again I find the waiter's positioning and interrupting gaze that aligns with the mirror as decisively influencing Anna's self-perception, or the mode in which she views both herself and her surroundings that is similar, yet different from what Marta's role will be within Anna's apartment. Not much time elapses between this bar scene and the scenes I go on to interpret and yet Anna's self-viewing is decidedly altered when it is influenced by Marta's look; in both instances the "crime" affects Anna's self-seeing, but, as we shall see, a shower scene with Marta present and watching leads to a pleasurable self-seeing. In the above passage, Anna's "sguardo" is glossed explicitly as the observations of a doctor who reads and interprets the body's symptomantic signs leading to a diagnosis. I have already mentioned the parallels between the detective and physician's mode of gathering symptoms towards identification, analysis, and conclusion.⁸¹ By way of a masculine medical gaze, the male mediation is already within Anna,

(1946)" (1981). Once again, Mulvey turns to Freud and his theory of femininity to analyze "the unstable, oscillating difference" experienced by a woman spectator and a filmic heroine, both of whose sexual identity must move back and forth between passive femininity and active masculinity. For my analysis what becomes crucial is that Anna and Marta's "sottrarsi" serves the possibility of self-definition from without a paradigm wherein she vacillates between opposition and similarity to him and his: where her "trans-sex habit," her "second nature" would itself be challenged. It is, perhaps, for this reason, that I do not employ a psychoanalytic framework; my reading of *Complice il dubbio* locates the novel's attempt at a female sexuality *not structured* by the Oedipal, so that her desire is not defined as "tomboy pleasures." In general, the collection of essays contained in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* attempt in various ways to dislocate this masculinization of the look and to pluralize woman's current relationship to difference, made exemplary by her positionality with respect to the gaze. The collection's introduction hauntingly compares woman's current seeing status to Foucault's theory of Bentham's prison as Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*; "The dissociation of the seeing/being seen dyad and the sense of permanent visibility seem to perfectly describe the condition not only of the inmate in Bentham's prison but of the woman as well. For...she carries her own Panopticon with her wherever she goes, her self-image a function of her being for another" (14). Because Anna and Marta close themselves off within Anna's apartment, they eliminate the very possibility of their being seen by anyone else: they see each other and themselves and their being for each other is in the service of a being for themselves. The only male presence within the apartment is by way of a fleeting mention of an image of John Wayne on the television screen; thus, the women only see him.

⁸¹ See Carlo Ginzburg. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*.

she has internalized this type of viewing and knowing and here turns it upon herself.⁸² The “occhiata” that registers “automaticamente” its object seems part of the trained nature of this practice and discourse that this scene suggests is always mediated by a masculine logic. The remainder of this cited paragraph goes on to record in detail the objects and ambit of the bar and a hint of a detective’s gaze is summoned by “il vetro sporco di ditate” (3). This public scene and space is juxtaposed to the inside sphere of Anna’s apartment and Marta’s presence there. When Anna leaves her apartment and enters into public spaces she leaves the experimental space and discourse of a female symbolic and must re-engage with traditional discourses of investigation leading to facts.

Once Marta enters Anna’s apartment fully, coming up into the attic apartment, an awareness of the other woman’s body, forces upon Anna her own awareness and sense of modesty of her body. I read this growing corporeal self-awareness by way of the body of another, and an ensuing modesty provoked, as evoking the bodily awareness and sense of shame activated in and by the scene of Original Sin. There, it is Eve’s sin that results in a human shame originating in the body and its nakedness. In Anna’s apartment, we have two possible readings of Anna’s modesty when, for the first time since being with the man, she takes a shower. When she begins to undress, Anna notices a blood stain on her watchband: “Si stava slacciando l’orologio e sul cinturino metallico aveva scorto una piccolissima macchia di sangue rappreso...Una macchia” (45). The spot of blood instantly takes Anna back to the “crime scene,” to contemplating her responsibility to report his death or not, and to repercussive feelings of possible guilt. When Anna then enters the shower and sees her reflection in the mirror, not wanting to see herself naked is described as a product of the fear of finding more blood on her body, and thus more evidence of her presence at the “crime scene:”

Anna si scosse e seguì a spogliarsi. Lo specchio ora le rimandava la sua immagine: nuda, in piedi dentro la vasca. Distolse gli occhi per paura di scorgere da qualche altra parte – e questa volta impressa sul corpo – una macchia sfuggita alla sua attenzione...Non desiderava vedere ciò che l’acqua e il sapone strappavano via dalla sua pelle...Il vapore che s’alzava dalla vasca andava velando il grande specchio alla parete e riduceva il suo corpo a una sagoma incerta, una sfumatura di colore. Ormai poteva alzare la testa e specchiarsi senza temere alcunché (49).

Here the desire to not see herself, to not “specchiarsi,” is glossed as a fear of being reminded of the man’s death and her possible complicity. She does not want to see any remaining mark of the encounter on her body, “impressa sul corpo,” or what the water might wash off of her body; to quickly wash away any sign is to erase the encounter, the “scene of the crime” itself. However, the presence of the mirror and the way it functions in this scene makes this moment more complicated, since it is not just that Anna does not want to see a bloodstain on her body

⁸² For more on the relationship between female spectatorship and the medical discourse (its cause and effects with regard to the possibility of a female subjectivity), here in cinematic text, see Mary Anne Doane, “The ‘Woman’s Film’; Possession and Address,” in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp & Linda Williams (Los Angeles, California: University Publications of America, 1984). Interestingly, in her analysis of ‘woman’s films’ of the 40s Doane locates a translation of the (male) erotic gaze into a medical gaze whereas, here, we might consider Anna’s institutionalized medical gaze as supplanted by an erotic gaze onto Marta.

(she could avoid this by not looking directly at her body as she washes it) but that she wants to avoid *seeing herself see herself*.⁸³ In order to insist upon reading this bathroom mirror scene in terms of the difficulty of “seeing” oneself being seen by the self, i.e., of knowing the self as subject of the self, we have to continue reading.

The reflection of herself, that Anna is initially able to avoid because the steam from the hot water fogs up the mirror (the reflection of her body has been reduced to a blurry shape), conjures Anna’s modesty of being seen by another. Not wanting to see herself is quickly substituted by being seen by Marta who opens the bathroom door and watches Anna shower from the doorway:

La porta del bagno...era di nuovo completamente spalancata. E Marta, sulla soglia, la fissava...Troppo disinvolta. Quell’intrusione non le garbava affatto...la ragazza contemplava senza un briciolo di timidezza il suo corpo nudo...In fondo ai suoi occhi chiari s’era accesa una scintilla –un intimo cenno di riconoscimento che la inquietava (49-50).

Anna continues to shower while knowing that Marta stands there watching her:

Il seno era teso, la schiena s’incurvava. Anna avvertiva tutto il suo corpo tendersi armonioso e si sentiva piacevolmente invasa dalla consapevolezza di quell’armonia. Più consapevole adesso del suo ventre piatto, delle gambe slanciate senza un filo di cellulite che durante la notte, nei gesti

⁸³ This female difficulty is not unlike Mulvey’s female cinematic spectator attempting to identify with the look of the female protagonist on the screen and her desires. Much of feminist film criticism is, in fact, committed to this problem, first assessed by Mulvey, and seeks to complicate her findings and locate resistances to it. Mary Ann Doane’s work is exemplary in this regard; see both *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (1987) and *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (1991). The work of Teresa de Lauretis, Linda Williams and Judith Mayne is also crucial in film analyses of the woman as looker. See, for instance, de Lauretis’ *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984) and *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (1987). See also de Lauretis’ “Now and Nowhere: Roeg’s *Bad Timing*”, Williams’ “When the Woman Looks”, and Mayne’s “The Woman at the Keyhole: Women’s Cinema and Feminist Criticism” all published in *Re-Vision*. De Lauretis’ essay asserts that the fundamental question of feminist film criticism is “what about my time and place in the apparatus of look and identification...?” Williams’ essay asks what happens when a woman looks or refuses to look in the horror film, a genre that itself condemns the desire and curiosity of a woman’s look. Gaylyn Studier has, perhaps, been the most critical of Mulvey’s original thesis since she effectively questions the very type of pleasure sought and experienced by the spectator of film. In *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* Studier uses Deleuze’s *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* to replace the model related to castration, the phallus and sadism with Deleuze’s model of masochism and the masochistic scenario structured by the subject’s desire to resolve the infantile trauma of separation and to return to a symbiotic union with his/her mother. By replacing Mulvey’s model of spectatorial pleasure with a masochistic economy, Studier attempts to open the pleasures of scopophilia, fetishism and disavowal to the female spectator of cinema. While my text of inquiry is not cinematic, and my framework not psychoanalytic, I am addressing a similar set of issues in this particular shower/mirror scene and in this chapter more generally. The mirror in the bathroom that Anna avoids could be considered as a type of “screen” that provides her with a particular identificatory model or frames her in a certain way and, furthermore, might show her as a looker. Anna’s denial of this role is altered by Marta’s presence and the knowledge that she is being seen by another woman.

dell'amore...«Che hai da guardarmi?» chiese senza averne l'intenzione e con un'aggressività esagerata. «Ti vergogni?» (50-51).

Not wanting to see herself in the mirror is immediately replaced by not wanting Marta to see her (or at least an ambivalence), although the latter is not as easily avoided. Even though the novel is written in the third person, it is clearly, and from the start, focalized through Anna. At times the narration poses questions that derive from Anna's internal point of view and, in this instance, her suspicions regarding Marta: "Che cosa legava Marta a quell'uomo?" (51). Therefore, when we move from Marta observing Anna, "la fissava" to a detailed description of Anna's body and movements (of which I only quoted an abridged passage), we are still guided by the novel's use of Anna's point of view, which interestingly here takes her gaze onto herself, but as if from a slightly outside stance, as in standing where Marta stands *or* as in seeing what the mirror would, if it could, see. In essence, both perspectives, Marta's and the mirror's, occur simultaneously and align with one another such that to see oneself seeing oneself (via the mirror) is as if one sees another seeing them. A small detail is part of what distinguishes this scene from the novel's opening scene in the bar; the barman stood in between Anna and the mirror. We may not have a blueprint (or film still) of the exact layout of this scene, but Marta is either next to the mirror, in a horizontal plane with it, or, possibly, slightly behind it; she cannot be in front of it because we know that she remains in the doorway, on the threshold of the bathroom. Marta's calm, inquisitive, and knowing gaze (as if she shares a knowledge of something) that watches Anna naked leads directly to a heightened, corporeal self-awareness, "Più consapevole adesso," on Anna's part. The avoidance of seeing herself is overcome, conquered, by Marta's presence and gaze; Marta's "riconoscimento" becomes shared in that it forces upon Anna a self-recognition. Marta's presence, her investigatory, mysterious gaze, enforces a type of self-surveillance as if Anna now sees herself in the mirror and takes back from Marta, or shares with her, the role of seer. As Marta first watches she asks, "Vuoi che ti aiuti?" to which Anna aggressively responds, "Faccio da me" (50). While this question immediately elicits an audacious and sexy suggestion of Marta wanting to wash Anna's body, I posit that, more subtly, this call and response mimics the implicit movement, or passing on, of gazes from Marta watching Anna to Anna (and the novel) watching Anna. Indeed, "Anna avvertiva tutto il suo corpo" utilizes a telling verb since "avvertire" etymologically springs from the Classical Latin word "advertere" meaning "turn," "face to," and "towards" and from the Latin "vertere," and the root "ver," both meaning "to turn" and "turn around." "Avvertire" then literalizes the turning of Anna's gaze back onto herself that I suggest this scene enacts, whereby Anna borrows Marta's location and turns back onto herself in order to see herself. An avoided self-observation is "overcome," here figuratively, by Marta's watching presence.

We can now retroactively re-read the fogged up mirror as Anna being safe from *seeing herself being seen by herself*. I interpret this not wanting to see oneself being seen as, in this case, a type of self-modesty derived from a knowledge or awareness of one's own body. Here, the novel provides us with a generic excuse: it is the "crime" that gets in the way of Anna's desire to see her own body. In an auxiliary way, the "crime" covers over Anna's relationship to her own body and a type of modesty ensues. This modesty produced by a crime and its guilt-ridden aftermath is a reading in-line with the traditional genre and the scene of Original Sin (she is ashamed of her sin, which is a sin of the body) that this scene evokes and then re-writes by way of Marta's presence and alignment with the mirror such that Anna sees herself being seen by herself.

If this scene implies Anna as “looker,” it also, by extension, confers upon her a role of desirer. It is evident in this scene that Marta inhabits the site/sight of desirer as she initiates the interaction, explicitly, and immodestly, watching Anna shower. If we did not know better, and picked up the novel at this scene, we might feel ourselves to be watching a scene of lesbian erotica or pornography.⁸⁴ Here, *Complice il dubbio* seeks to eliminate what is an always implied male gaze of pornography, since as I have posited the novel is working to imagine a female symbolic *not mediated* by the male subject. In classic pornography an implied male gaze would watch Marta watching Anna. But, if Anna picks up Marta’s gaze and a type of self-watching ensues, than she also takes up, and tries on, her role as desirer that she inherits *not* from a male act of gazing, but, here, from a feminine position and act of watching and desiring. In fact, the language of the scene cited above does suggest a certain self-desiring and pleasure derived. Anna observes her breasts, how her body curves, her thin, firm legs and flat, toned abdomen, and an overall shapeliness that is pleasant to the eyes. It is a description meant to entice and both Anna and the novel take pleasure in the viewing. Anna’s body pleases and she is pleased by it: “piacevolmente invasa.” We cannot miss the odd addition of “che durante la notte, nei gesti dell’amore,” which only heightens the sexualized nature of this moment and motions towards the pleasure that her body can give and receive, here, by way of the self-surveying I point to, from itself.⁸⁵ What ensues in the logic of this scene is a self-desiring whereby Anna is both the subject and object of her own desiring and pleased gaze that, importantly, she learns from watching Marta watch her: “E tuttavia la presenza di Marta le impediva di abbandonarsi allo sfinimento, la obbligava a sorvegliarsi” (53). This scene employs a learning to desire and be desired by way of another woman. It is, indeed, a complex set and dance of gazes in which both women occupy both positions at once, hence Anna’s frequent confusion and contemplation over “Chi sorvegliava chi, in realtà?” (140). And yet Anna seems to intuit that the “other” is not only Marta when the novel states, “L’avversario non aveva il volto di Marta...Una partita a scacchi con se stessa” (44).⁸⁶ Here, the novel and Anna sense a doubling of herself that arrives by way of Marta’s presence and stance and puts Anna in relation to herself by way of a female speculum.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ This is not a foreign topic for Cutrufelli. See *Nella città poibita: quattordici racconti erotici di scrittrici italiane*, a cura di Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (Milano: Net, 2003).

⁸⁵ It is almost as if an implied masturbatory logic becomes a closed self-circuit wherein the body only really needs itself and uses itself as its own fantasy mediation.

⁸⁶ Once again, in “avversaria” we find the root “ver” and a type of turning back upon oneself that figures the self as its own other.

⁸⁷ In *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* Teresa de Lauretis attempts to rescue psychoanalysis in order to establish a model of desire (a perverse desire) that might account for representations of lesbianism in both films and texts; by utilizing Freud’s theory of sexuality as perversion, “lesbianism would no longer have to be explained by Freud’s own concept of the masculinity complex” (xii), and one might then be able to conceptualize a female sexuality autonomous from the male. My work on *Complice il dubbio* is certainly related to de Lauretis’ work, but differs in its methodology and final aim. Importantly, both my chapter and *The Practice of Love* are looking for representations of female desire and sexuality that do not rely upon a male model. However, unlike de Lauretis, I do not employ a psychoanalytic framework, nor am I looking to define the sexuality within *Complice il dubbio* as specifically, or necessarily, lesbian. While it is certainly the case that Anna and Marta experience some sort of desire for one another, I believe that the novel refuses to consummate these feelings and attractions and leaves the exact nature of their relationship (their “storia”) in doubt for the entirety of the narrative. Because nothing sexually explicit every happens between Anna and Marta, my

Although I do not adopt a psychoanalytic perspective in my approach to *Complice il dubbio*, my analysis deals with a very similar set of problems as Teresa de Lauretis's *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*. Even though I refrain from defining the relationship between Anna and Marta as definitively lesbian, my reading of their interactions and what it produces is very much in line with de Lauretis's interpretation of Sheila McLaughlin's film *She Must Be Seeing Things* (1987) both in terms of what the two women (in both Cutrufelli's novel and the film) see and how their roles as seers implicates them as desirers (of each other) and what this representation entails for the reader or, in the case of the film, the spectator.⁸⁸ According to de Lauretis, the "she" of the film's title "must" refer to both female protagonists who are lesbian lovers, since they both see things: one is a film maker, but they both make movies in their minds, and they are both subjects of fantasy; "both women 'inhabit the subject position together,' as Sue-Ellen Case suggests of the lesbian roles of butch and femme, who represent a coupled rather than split subject" (de Lauretis 86). I too am positing both Anna and Marta as seers of one another and suggesting that Anna's position of seeing and desiring depends upon her seeing Marta first as seer and then trying on that role. In *She Must Be Seeing Things* the female filmmaker, Jo, makes a film about a woman's fascination (desire? love?) with another woman and Jo and her lover watch it together (their spectatorship is made explicit then). Importantly, both my and de Lauretis's readings, place emphasis on both women being made subject and object of the gaze:

analysis focuses instead on the female ability to see and know oneself as both a subject and object of desire; the ability to occupy both sites of desire at once and to see oneself as simultaneously both, is a way in which this novel formulates a female subjectivity and symbolic outside of the current male order; I posit that in the logic of *Complice il dubbio* the presence of the other woman, Marta, is necessary for Anna's ability to accomplish this self-knowing. In this way, my analysis both agrees with, and takes a distance from, Tommasina Gabriele's article "Beyond the Shadow of a Doubt: Lesbian Desire in Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's *Complice il dubbio*;" Gabriele too insists that "both the mystery of the man's death and the mystery of Anna's desire remain stubbornly and deliberately unresolved" (1), but while her article posits that this doubled mystery remains *because* Anna cannot separate her relationship to Marta from her relationship to the man, I believe that the point of the novel is the difficulty, yet importance, of extricating female desire from male, heteronormative desire and that Anna's desire is not named or fixed *because* it is figured *beyond* the already representable. For this very reason, the novel's concern is less about how to define Anna's sexuality via her object choice and more about how a woman (whether heterosexual or homosexual) can learn herself as a sexual and desiring subject "a partire da sè," within her own symbolic economy. It is not that I do not have a vested interest in same-sex desire among women, or that I don't believe that lesbian sexuality can reside outside of male norms (I deem de Lauretis' text as highly successful); it is, rather, that I see Cutrufelli's novel as having a slightly different potential, more similar to Sarah Kofman's re-readings of Freud on female sexuality in *L'enigme de la femme: la femme dans les textes de Freud* where a certain undecidability, or bisexuality, becomes the defining characteristic of a woman; woman is defined as the absence of a stable position. In Elizabeth Berg's review of Kofman's book, "The Third Woman," she writes, "The motivating impulse behind Freud's elaboration of the theory of feminine sexuality is, then, his desire to tie to a fixed position the instability of woman, to decide one way or another on her case" (12). In a similar mode, I do not want to decide on Anna and Marta's case, nor "freeze" Anna's ambivalence. See Elizabeth L. Berg. "The Third Woman" *Diacritics* Vol. 12 pp. 11-20 The John Hopkins University Press.

⁸⁸ It should also be noted that *Complice il dubbio* was made into a film in 1999 by Emanuela Piovano entitled *Le complici*.

That is to say, just as Jo and Agatha watch Jo's film and leave the cutting room together as lovers, so does McLaughlin's film construct for both spectator and filmmaker a new position of seeing in the movies, a new place of the look – the place of a woman who desires another woman, the place from where each one looks at the other with desire; and, more important still, a place from where I, spectator, *see* their look and their desire. In other words, the film positions its spectators in a place from where the equivalence of look and desire... appears invested in two women, each of whom is both the subject and the object of that look/desire (88).

Again, *Complice il dubbio* may not settle on an obvious lesbianism, but it still accomplishes the work described above of producing a new position of seeing, a new place of the look, here, within the text itself; both Anna and Marta "investigate" one another, show signs of desiring each other via their gaze of the other woman, and these desiring looks are implicated in how they view themselves, how they know themselves; their relationality allows them to occupy roles of both subject and object of desire at once. Finally, while the position of spectator is less obviously thematized within a text, and the reader is never addressed directly in this novel, because of *Complice il dubbio*'s activation of gazes right from its first chapter, it is difficult to not in some way take stock of oneself as onlooker of Anna and Marta's very private and secretive world, especially since the reader is inevitably waiting and anticipating a scene of lesbian sex (our "spectatorial" pleasure is sustained in this way). While we never get the sex, as in the work of film, the novel is able to orient the reader's identification, aboveall with Anna, and, therefore, we as readers are implicated in her look and desire; just as Anna eventually tries on Marta's way of looking, we too may try on Anna's position and gaze. Finally, we might consider Anna as, eventually, being implicated in a sort of "cinematic" (as in outside) spectatorial position with regards first to her and Marta's relationship, but, perhaps, finally with regards to herself. This possibility will become clearer as the chapter continues and analyzes the ways in which ultimately Anna learns how to inhabit three roles at once so as to see herself in both subject and object positions at once. This stance as looker onto an already doubled self could be likened to a female spectator observing the action between two women with the attendant possibility of identifying with both women (on screen).

4. Body Gardening

In the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and its narrative of Original Sin, knowledge and the body are at odds with one another. Initially, it seems that to eat from the Tree of Knowledge is both to satisfy a physical desire and need, and to gain more understanding: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:6). As we know, Eve's belief is provided by Satan in the disguise of a snake and it goes against God's commandment and, specifically, his superiority in

possessing more knowledge than all others. Eve acts on a curiosity for knowledge and she is punished for wanting too much of it. Expressly, Eve attempts to acquire knowledge by way of eating, by way of her body. This corporeal mode of gaining knowledge is strictly forbidden and, furthermore, part of Eve's punishment is her, and all human's, acquisition of a mortal, sentient human body, one that suffers (God warns Eve that now she will suffer tremendously during childbirth). In this way, the scene of Original Sin pulls the body and knowledge apart so that they stand in a relation of opposition to one another.

In contrast, within Anna's apartment, the private, yet outdoor, space of the terrace becomes a locus of a new experimental and experiential discourse of "knowing" arising from the actual body (not a symbolically defined one) and a being with another body: here, specifically a female body from which Anna eventually gains self-knowledge or awareness. The terrace is a new garden space that re-sutures a type of knowing to the body: a space to learn to desire in relation to *only* the female self; a space where women produce their own knowledge(s) "a partire da sè." I am, in part, describing Anna's terrace as a re-imagined Eden because of its flourishing lushness and greenness with which Anna "interacts" as a way to learn and know the self. The terrace garden is "in piena fioritura" with "vasi di fiori" e "piante che nascondevano con loro disordine rigoglioso" (63); "Qualche palma nana, un mandarino che dava tanto dei frutti piccolissimi e duri e piante grasse con rami mostruosi e acuminati che restavano sospesi a mezz'aria o strisciavano per uscire dalla costrizione dei vasi" (63). There is also an area devoted to a garden of herbs: "prezzemolo, basilico, rosmarino, menta" (63) that Anna physically interacts with: "Ma era un piacere staccare una fogliolina e schiacciarla fra il pollice e l'indice per respirarne l'odore che si sprigionava forte e resisteva a lungo sulle dita" (64). It is an interesting detail we are given that Anna picks off a piece of mint to experience more potently its smell. The novel tells us explicitly that Anna does not even use the herbs for cooking; they are not practical in a generic way, she does not *need* them, rather, they serve Anna in a purely experiential way that is still tangible, still corporeal. This act of rubbing the herbs between her fingers to release their smell is explicitly a desire of the senses, of the body. Additionally, the passage describes how the odor from the mint lasts on her skin, becomes a part of her skin, and thus a part of her experience of her body, a part of how she interacts with it; a knowledge of her surroundings and a knowledge of self are brought back into relation and figured as unequivocally corporeal. Also, the smell of mint that lasts on her finger is a trace that is not visible, but still perceptible. Here the knowledge (and, I should say, the desire) is not visually driven, but relies on other senses.

In fact, Anna's interior world is aligned metaphorically with the state of her plants when we read, "E nel caldo l'angoscia fermentava, germogliava, si moltiplicava come i cactus sul terrazzo che crescevano uno dentro l'altro, uno sull'altro" (89). The novel goes on to describe Anna's work with the plants as a way of trying to know herself more intimately:

Le piaceva curare le piante, potare, sradicare, trapiantare, cambiare di vaso, spostare all'ombra o al sole a seconda delle stagioni: un po' lo stesso lavoro che faceva ogni giorni con i suoi malati. Ma si rendeva conto che in realtà su quel terrazzo lei stava tentando di coltivare, pazientemente, una pianta difficile da far attecchire nel suo animo a cui dava nomi diversi da volta in volta, poichè sempre le sfuggiva la sua più intima essenza. Dare forma alla sua solitaria vita di donna (64).

Here, a tending to the terrace plants, that Anna originally relates to tending to others' bodies, becomes a tending to the self, as a difficult and slow process of learning the self that is never quite accomplished; a sense of self that is difficult to root, or to stay rooted. Anna considers how to define oneself based on that self alone, an attempt at self-definition or self-existence, which, ironically, is already metaphorically and experientially tethered to her interaction with the plants. Similarly, and in the same space of the terrace, a discussion of self-assessing turns into a looking at, and interacting with, the body of another woman.

What is initially a relationship to her plants is supplemented by Marta's very bodily presence and Anna's interaction with that body. The site of Anna's terrace becomes the place where Anna and Marta initially survey one another's bodies, where to examine the other body is to learn to desire, to learn the self, to have subjectivity. Marta frequently sunbathes almost nude and gets Anna to join her. In one such terrace scene Anna looks at Marta's arms and calves as a possible way of trying to arrive at the truth of a person:

Anna abbassò lo sguardo sulle sue caviglie. Svelte, sottili. E anche la curva del braccio prendeva lo slancio da un polso altrettanto snello. Particolari insignificanti che non rivelavano nulla di lei. O che invece, al contrario, testimoniavano un'eleganza interiore... Anna si sentì affascinata dalla fragilità flessuosa di quel polso e di quelle caviglie: avevano il singolare potere di ridestare in lei una voglia ambigua ma sincera di sapere qualcosa di quella ragazza (65).

Here there is a sense, or an opening onto the possibility, that just by being with, and observing, the body of another one can glean or learn interior aspects of that self. There is in this passage a not unfamiliar meditation on form and content applied to the human body and psyche. Or to use detective jargon, Anna wonders whether surface clues can offer "la verità di un carattere, di una persona" (65). Out on the terrace the body becomes a revelatory part of a woman's person rather than a deceptive weakness eliciting shame. The body does not cover over a true internal essence, instead it is depicted as aiding an understanding of the other woman and thus of the self. Because I believe that this novel challenges the very existence of a locatable inner core of the self that can be fully understood and known, I think this passage instead begins to ponder and suggest *a being with the body of another* that is not wholly revelatory and cannot necessarily lead to a complete knowing of the other that is pinned down, but that is *still inseparable from* some type of "knowledge" and understanding of them and of the self in relation to them. The body itself is possibly revelatory, it *is* a way to learn about the other (and the self), but not precisely because it offers a nugget of truth about the other woman.⁸⁹ As I go on to show in depth, this learning of the other woman is specifically figured as a corporeally based learning that aids self-awareness. Here, after having watched Marta's body, her delicate wrists and calves, Anna returns to an awareness of her own body and its needs. In a scene that renders a logic of cause and effect, Anna is promptly brought back to her body; "Il mal di testa che da qualche minute s'annunciava, ancora sordo e lontano, scoppiò richiamandola alla realtà" (65). This awareness of her headache leads to the preparation of dinner, to a reminder to tend to the body and thus the

⁸⁹ This experimental, epistemological model contrasts significantly, and offers an alternative to, the 'enchantress-turned-hag' trope analyzed by Spackman in her essay 'Monstruous Knowledge.' For more on this, see my introduction and Spackman's essay.

self, and to therefore eat: “Il semplice fatto di preparare un pasto, l’idea stessa di mangiare significava in un certo senso un ritorno alla normalità, al rapporto usuale con il tempo, con gli oggetti, con le persone. Con se stessa” (67).

The plants that Anna touches and then relates to learning herself are even more explicitly substituted by Marta’s body in a later, extended terrace scene. Here, Anna again watches Marta’s body, then observes Marta looking at her own body and is eventually forced to touch Marta’s body. This scene makes more explicit the movement from being with and seeing the other woman’s body to being with and seeing one’s own body. In order to learn to see the self, Anna first learns from Marta how to observe the female other:

Marta indossava solo un paio di mutandine di cotone nero...Si massaggiava con grande cura seguendo con le dita il contorno degli occhi, delle labbra, delle guance. Dalla soglia, Anna osservava incuriosita la sapiente regia dei gesti, accompagnava con lo sguardo la carezza lenta delle dita, si scopriva ad ammirare l’abbronzatura leggera ma uniforme, i seni dorati come il resto del corpo (105).

Here, the reference to the site of Anna’s “sighting” refers to Marta’s site during the earlier shower scene; Marta then watched Anna from the “soglia” of the bathroom and now Anna takes up Marta’s position at the “soglia” to the terrace; she copies and learns this stance of seer. Now Anna watches and admires Marta’s nearly naked body. I think we could also borrow from the novel’s implied stance of the site of looking and desiring as subject as a “soglia,” a threshold site that insists on a potentiality, a becoming that might not ever be fulfilled or defined. It is as if the “soglia” remains there and does not get fully crossed, no sex, no end to what one’s desire is, always a potentiality, a type of “orlo” of desire. And, in fact, we never get sex between Anna and Marta; their potential desire is never “fulfilled” in the traditional, practical sense. This citation also forewarns that the looking will become a touching, which this scene sets up as a self-touching and knowing of one’s body, since Anna’s gaze follows Marta’s fingers as they move over herself. Even here Marta has a “sapiente regia” when she applies cream and Anna watches and learns from this type of self-knowing by way of the body.

Marta invites Anna to join her outside on the terrace to sunbath and there, from closer up, Anna continues to observe Marta’s body in detail: she watches intently and the novel describes Marta’s thighs, stomach, breasts, hands, pubic hair, throat, even her sweat caught in the hairs of her armpits. Marta then begins to look at and inspect her own body: “Si asciugava e nello stesso tempo si ispezionava accuratamente la pelle controllando ogni macchiolina, ogni neo” (111). It is important to note that Anna’s watching Marta’s body becomes Anna watching Marta look at her own body. Again, Anna seems to have learned from Marta’s stance during the initial shower scene when we suggested that, although only implied, Marta was watching Anna “watching” herself. Furthermore, the earlier “macchia” of sangue that Anna washes off her own body as a marker of the “scene of the crime,” or more specifically as a marker of *her presence* at the “scene of the crime,” is washed away and replaced first by that which Anna claims is the only remaining problem or thing that links her to her “crime.” Marta: “C’era un solo neo in tutta quanta la vicenda. Un inciampo, uno solo. Quella ragazza...” (48). In other words, Anna is able to wash off the “macchia di sangue” but admits that the real problem spot that will not seem to disappear is Marta, her very presence, specifically a female presence. A removed female presence from an original crime scene of Original Sin is replaced by a female presence in Anna’s

apartment; in this way, Marta could be read as a type of double for Anna. That Marta is covered with “macchioline” and “nei” multiplies and solidifies the idea of her as a substitute marker of an undeniable female presence that is re-figured against its original Original Sin version.

But we can take our analysis a step further and read one “neo” in particular as, specifically, a marker of female difference as a signifying *presence*, rather than a female absence standing in relation to a male presence (of the male member). We have already shown that the new “neo” that Anna cannot wash away is the female presence of Marta, which subsequently becomes a marker of female presence that resides on Marta’s body. Marta shows Anna a burn scar that will never go away: “«E questo... non mi andrà via mai più.» Si toccò con la punta dell’indice una piccola macchia bianca sotto il seno sinistro. Una cicatrice? Ma non ne aveva le caratteristiche: perfettamente liscia, rotonda come una monetina” (111). Marta goes on to explain the origin of her mark: “Fumavo nuda sul letto e mi è caduto il mozzicone acceso proprio qui. Fortuna che mi è rimasta soltanto questa macchia più chiara. L’unghiata del diavolo” (111). Marta’s scar is aligned, through the repetition and play of “macchia” and “neo,” with Marta’s very female presence and thus signals Marta’s femaleness as a signifying presence, an unerasable marker that one can see and feel. Rather than a wound, a sign of female castration, and a marker of the absence of a phallus, this scar resembles more closely a coin, a signifier of value. In a move that links Freudian fetishism and Marxian commodity fetishism, what was once a difference signified by woundedness and lack, a maiming that leaves a scar signifying absence, is here re-figured and re-valued on its own terms because *in relation to another female presence* (both the presence of Anna and the presence of many “nei”). The “monetina” simile produces this female difference as marked by cultural value within the new female-economy of Anna’s apartment. Anna as once spectator to the “crime scene,” is now witness to this scene of Marta’s naked, re-signified body; she learns from, and in relation to, this “new” body in a re-imagined primal scene occurring in the liminal indoor-outdoor space of the terrace. Here, a female elsewhere becomes more properly an in between that is both inside and outside, where the inside itself is in the process of being reconstituted. Indeed, Marta as another female presence is perhaps the most substantial addition to a renewed, primal scene.

Lastly, we cannot overlook the reference to the “scratch of the devil” as that which has marked Marta’s body.⁹⁰ The devil, presiding over Hell, is certainly associated with heat and fire that like the “mozzicone della canna” will burn. But, as we read on, we find another reference to the devil, this time in the form of a snake, used by Marta to describe herself as she begins to resemble more and more her mother. Marta relates to Anna “Mi spaventano (i genitori), soprattutto mia madre... A mano a mano che invecchio, quando mi guardo allo specchio vedo, sempre più chiaro, il volto di mia madre. La stessa espressione. Forse, chissà, gli stessi sentimenti. E allora divento una vipera” (160). Working backwards, Marta becomes “una vipera” by resembling her mother; her mother thus becomes a snake that passes down both visible and invisible markers; physical and emotional expressions of sameness. To continue working backwards, and in the logic of a re-imagined Garden of Eden, the devil of Original Sin is disguised as a snake. I therefore re-read the “unghiata del diavolo” as the scratch or mark of the mother, here Marta’s mother, who is retroactively given agency over the marker of female

⁹⁰ “L’unghiata del diavolo” is also a reference to marks thought to identify witches in the early modern period. My analysis sustains this scratch as a female marker, but re-interprets its significance from the perspective of a female agency, genealogy and value.

difference as presence: a marker of female authority, “un’impronta reale” of the mother.⁹¹ I find this marker of difference, handed down from one’s mother, as another female presence of female presence that cannot be dis-imagined or overlooked, and which here replaces a female scar arising from Original Sin. This retroactive insistence on the role of the mother as a signifying, corporeal presence for the daughter also works to undo a cultural matricide that is constitutive of an absent female presence. Marta’s example of watching herself in the mirror and seeing a reflection inhabited by her mother is not accidental, nor insignificant, as it describes precisely that movement which her presence in Anna’s apartment has insinuated; to watch a female other watch you becomes a model of watching or seeing the self as a desiring subject: to not only see oneself as in a standard mirror experience, but *to see the self seeing the self*. I am suggesting the importance of reciprocity and a vector that moves in both directions, *but also* a type of third-party “out of body” (while still very much in the body) experience whereby one could stand outside the self and watch the self being seen by the self (so not just a doubling of the self, but a tripling, as in an ability to witness one’s own female speculum). Interestingly, this third-party perspective echoes a crucial scene in which Anna watches Marta getting ready in front of the bathroom mirror. It is not a coincidence that the positionality of this next scene evokes the culturally familial scene of a daughter watching her mother primp in front of the mirror.⁹²

5. From Two to Three Seers

Thus far, through our analysis of the shower scene and terrace scenes, we have found evidence of Anna implicitly trying on Marta’s stance as seer (of Anna’s own body), and then Anna explicitly watching Marta and then watching as Marta looks at her own body. In a way these prior scenes are put together in an almost dizzying simultaneity in a subsequent bathroom

⁹¹ I take “l’impronta reale della madre” from an essay by Ida Dominijanni Giglio contained within Diotima’s *L’ombra della madre*. This article cautions against over-symbolizing and therefore abstracting the maternal figure and, to this end, critiques Luisa Muraro’s *L’ordine simbolico della madre* as avoiding the question and problem of maternal desire. This makes me think, in particular, of Anna’s grandmother’s spirituality and her “sedute spiritiche” in which she seeks to elicit the ghosts of people she knew; we are told that the one person who is off-limits during these seances is her daughter, Anna’s mother, who was killed in a car accident. I read the grandmother’s refusal to bring her daughter’s ghost back as a refusal to take her out of her lived body and person. Anna’s mother will have no metaphysical presence, she is only an “impronta reale.”

⁹² Strangely, I cannot bring to mind any specific literary examples in which we find a daughter watching her mother prepare in front of a mirror. Rather, the image feels familiar based on visual media representations from television and film (but again, I do not have specific scenes in mind). The only literary example that comes to mind are scenes evoked, if not indicative, in *L’amore molesto*, the novel discussed in the following chapter. However, in this case, and in a number of scenes, the daughter who dresses or applies make-up in the mirror has both taken her mother’s place (the mother is dead) and evokes the maternal body and presence as a force that threatens to replace the daughter altogether. The learning I am describing in *Complice il dubbio* has evolved into an eerie and disorienting (co/in)habitation in *L’amore molesto* whereby bodies and identities lose specificity and autonomy.

scene. Anna enters her bathroom to find Marta putting on make-up in front of the mirror and stays to watch her from a stance that must be behind her:

In bagno, davanti allo specchio, Marta si truccava. Aveva di nuovo raccolto i capelli sulla nuca e sul collo sottile brillava un filo d'oro. Anna sedette sul bordo della vasca, affascinata e alla fine conquistata dal gioco esperto delle mani, dai gesti misurati e abili della ragazzaE che tuttavia risvegliavano in Anna la sensazione – non del tutto sgradevole ma per questo ancora più inquietante – di essere carceriera e carcerata al tempo stesso...Ma non riusciva a capacitarsi di quel desiderio di segregazione, quella voglia di alzare un recinto, uno staccato invalicabile attorno al loro rapporto...” (144).

I assume Anna's stance as residing at some distance behind Marta who stands in front of the sink and mirror because of the narrative point of view that suggests Anna's ability to see Marta's face in the mirror. Therefore, implied is that Anna sees Marta in two ways: from the back and from the front by way of her reflection in the mirror. The description of Marta's agile and studied movements compounds this role of (maternal) authority, from which Anna observes and learns, as well as Anna's positioning from a lower level since she sits on the edge of the bathtub.

In a sense, the novel tells us that Anna has lacked a female speculum in the traditional form of a mother's presence and body.⁹³ We learn that Anna is an orphan whose parents died in

⁹³ Although divergent in methodology and conclusion, my analysis here and de Lauretis's treatment of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in C.5 "The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian: The Fantasy of Castration and the Signification of Desire" of *The Practice of Love* address a similar set of questions and, thus, overlap significantly. In her chapter, de Lauretis proposes a fetishistic model of lesbian perverse desire. In pursuing the function of castration in relation to the lesbian subject, de Lauretis theorizes that "In lesbian perverse desire the fantasmatic object is the female body itself, whose original loss in a female subject corresponds...to the narcissitic wound that the loss of the penis represents for the male subject" (231). Hall's protagonist, Stephen, both desires men's clothing and other signs of masculinity *and* hates her mannish body, a body her mother has always found repulsive. Stephen's paradox with regards to masculinity *is a fetish* that signifies Stephen's desire for the (lost) female body. Through her reading of the critical mirror scene in which Stephen expresses a desire to maim (castrate) his phallic body, de Lauretis argues that the phallus is not an essential component of female subject body image. Rather, Stephen's narcissistic wound is not having a body that the mother desires. The desire for the female body is displaced onto the fetish, the fetish of masculinity (the clothes, the short haircut, etc.), which disavows castration and continues to signify it; Stephen covers over her loss of a female body with her masculinity, *which also* (via the heteronormative cultural code of gender) continues to signify it, since masculinity carries with it sexual desire for the female body. Thus, "While the relation of the subject to the mother is one of loss and lack, the relation of the subject to the other woman is made possible by the disavowal of that lack...the doubling of the originally lost object (the mother's body) by another originally lost object (the female body), and the displacement of the latter onto the signification of desire itself" (250). Both my chapter and de Lauretis's consider a female subjectivity and desire detached from the male subject of desire and his psychic project. Both of our analyses take into account the centrality of scenes of mirroring and the production of female doubles that reference the mother-daughter relation. The originally lost object of the mother's body is *real* in *Complice il dubbio* and may account for Anna's difficulty in being a seer and desirer of herself: her negative body image and more general problems of desire and sexuality. Her relationship with "l'uomo" leaves a lot to be desired, does not seem, in fact, to have much to do with her desire at all. Marta does double and stand in for a missing female presence, a missing female body whose presence alters Anna's ability to inhabit herself. Although, de Lauretis is determined to "think" a

a car accident when she was a young girl. Various feminisms, and certain Italian feminisms in particular, have sought to reestablish the primacy of the maternal and her body, and both's relationship to the development of a female subjectivity and thought. If Luce Irigaray locates an originary matricide at the foundations of both Western philosophic and psychoanalytic thought, than she and others have returned to that "scene of the crime" in order to restore a type of maternal order and to place emphasis on the existence of female genealogies that necessitate just that maternal presence.⁹⁴ With her mother's death, *Complice il dubbio* suggests a breakdown in Anna's otherwise potent maternal genealogy; we get a strong image of this genealogy when we learn that Anna's mother was born in the same bed in which her mother, Anna's grandmother, was born: it is as if the umbilical cord remains the same and intact: "una lunga catena di donne" (99) is what Anna imagines when her grandmother's housekeeper of 40 years tells her stories about her mother, and specifically recounts the ways in which her grandmother, her mother, and Anna are similar. Anna's mother's eventual death suggests a physically missing link that Marta's body comes to stand-in for (I hesitate to say "replace" as I believe that Marta's body cannot actually fill-in for a maternal body, indeed she is described as younger than Anna.). What is interesting about the female mirroring or doubling that I am reading into Anna and Marta's mutually informing presences is that it exists on a more horizontally relational plane than the hierarchical mother-daughter chain, *and* it mirrors Anna's grandmother's living situation and relationship to her housekeeper, Marisa: a horizontality that references verticality.⁹⁵ Anna's "nonna" is the original substitute for her mother and Anna's odd relation to Marta cannot not be compared to its mirror of the sealed off from the world rapport of her "nonna" and Marisa who have shared the space of the grandmother's apartment for forty-some odd years. We also learn that Anna's grandmother has spiritual and slightly paranoid tendencies that lead to a loosening of reality. Specifically, she describes a sense that her life is being invaded, taken over, by another woman, a double, "una sosia," that has the threatening potential to replace her. I believe this potential is echoed in Anna's anxiety that Marta is taking over her apartment, invading her life with all her things, and that she is slowly becoming unable to imagine her life without Marta's presence. My suggestion is, then, that this maternally invoking mirror scene may stand-in for a mother-daughter experience, or more precisely, a specific structural relation that Anna has been deprived of and that she requires for her sense of (sexual) self.

As we continue reading, Anna's gaze is made more explicit:

La guardò. Guardò il disegno netto delle sopracciglia, la linea breve del naso,
il prepotente rivelarsi del corpo agile e pieno sotto la maglietta...

specifically lesbian desire and subject, the internal monologue she ventriloquizes for her might very well apply to Anna, even though I have sought to leave her sexual orientation open: "I cannot love me, says the subject of the fantasy, because the (M)Other does not love me. I want another to love me sexually... This lover must be a woman, a woman embodied and self-possessed as a woman, as I would want to be and can only become with her love" (249).

⁹⁴ I am thinking here of many works and publications of Diotima, and specifically Luisa Muraro's *L'ordine simbolico della madre*.

⁹⁵ This is very evocative of the practice of "affidamento" although, here, the horizontality of the relationship between Anna and Marta is distinct from the already hierarchical relationship of entrustment, which perhaps more explicitly resembles the mother-daughter rapport. Once again, desire is explicitly present in the female relationship between Anna and Marta; the desire overlooked in "affidamento" is in this instance brought to the fore, indeed structures the relation and its consequences.

Avrebbe mai dimenticato? si domandò Anna continuando a fissare il volto giovane e assorto riflesso nel grande specchio dietro il lavabo... Avvicinando il volto allo specchio, Marta si passò la lingua sui denti macchiati di rossetto, estrasse da una scatola un fazzoletto di carta pulendosi... Con gesto ispirato, levò infine il tappo di sughero a un bocchettino e si sparse sulle tempie la polvere d'oro che vi era contenuta.

«Non ti sembra di esagerare?» disapprovò Anna.

«Perché non ti piaccio?»

E sorrise nello specchio voltando la testa di qua e di là, ora a destra e ora a sinistra in un balenio di scintilla. Si esibiva con una compiacenza naturale e spontanea (145-146).

Here, Anna's position in relation to Marta grooming in front of the mirror implies, first, that Anna watches Marta see herself, this time in a more direct, face-to-face manner. Rather than watching Marta look down at her own body, Anna now watches Marta look directly into her own face, thus seeing her own gaze. Importantly, she sees Marta as simultaneously both subject and object of her own gaze. What is more, Anna's position behind Marta, facing the direction of the mirror, situates Anna as approximating herself to Marta's position and experience. In other words, Anna's positioning and mixed state of admiration and fear, suggest that she could step into Marta's stance, and project herself into this learned site/sight of self-observing where one admires the self, sees and experiences the self as desirable and desiring at one and the same time (we are not speaking of vanity just for vanity's sake); this scene then figures a learning of the relation to the self as by way of desiring and gives Anna the site/sight of witnessing such speculum, with the eventual possibility of internalization. Even the implication of the possibility that Anna might be able to see her own reflection at the same time that she stands behind Marta and sees her's proposes Anna as seer of this operation of simultaneous subject-object-ness *and* as implicated within it; she is tacitly allowed to maintain her outside third party stance *and* imitate, or borrow, Marta's dual placement: to become three, to see the self see the self; or, said differently, to see the self as both subject and object of one's own gaze: "di essere carceriera e carcerata al tempo stesso."

This operation re-writes significantly René Girard's "triangular desire" from a decidedly female perspective and upon a smooth continuum that moves between female homosociality and homosexuality; first, the triangle is altered so as to have two women and one man: Anna, Marta, and "l'uomo," and I would add that initially the man is allowed to function as mediator of a possible female homosexuality (a riff on Eve Sedgwick's re-writing of Girard).⁹⁶ However, ultimately, the male mediation is overcome and replaced by a double of one of the women, as in this complex mirror scene, and desire among women becomes a possible structure of learned and practiced female subjectivity; as mentioned above, the novel suggests the possibility of a learned internalization resulting in a structurally tripled self. Rather than a male residing between the women and putting the women in a relation of rivalry to each other (rivalry being a type of doubling), *Complice il dubbio* substitutes a "third woman" in the form of a speculum to propose a model of self-learning (subjectivity) and desiring that need one another and that requires the

⁹⁶ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (California: University of California Press, 1990).

presence of another woman.⁹⁷ Furthermore, in this new triangular model vectors travel in all possible directions; the novel does not discount the possibility of real desire among Anna and Marta, it in fact continually opens up the likelihood that there is sexual desire circulating between them. But the novel refuses to pin that desire down; Anna never seems certain of what her feelings for Marta are or might be, nor does the novel offer us a consummating sex scene that might allow us to say, “See! They *are* lesbians!” Instead, the novel leaves open and moving the prospect of desire, never allowing it to be known *because part of* the process of learning and “knowing” the self, which is itself never finished or finite.

Finally, I cannot overlook the reappearance of the “neo” in this bathroom scene as a mark passed from Marta to Anna. The “polvere d’oro” make-up that Marta puts on is then used to make a “neo” on Anna; “Alla fine (Marta) raccolse sulla punta dell’indice un pizzico di polvere dorata e sporgendosi verso di lei le disegnò un neo luccicante in mezzo alla fronte” (147). This final action of the chapter seems to me a transferring, a bestowal from Marta upon Anna of the “extra” of female presence, the visible marker of presence associated with Marta’s body marks Anna just as Marta acts as “extra” female presence for Anna. If the relationality between Marta and Anna in this scene mimics that of mother to daughter, then the mark of female difference/presence that Marta “received” from her mother is further passed from Marta to Anna as her own figure of (maternal) female authority. It is as though this recognition of female difference in the form of a presence of value (what was once described as a “moneta” is now a glittering gold dot) is symbolically, yet still corporeally, passed onto, and shared with, Anna and might, furthermore, stand in for the “extra” female presence that Marta has served as, and which Anna moves towards internalizing. The transfer onto her body of this highly activated and mobilized sign (an attempted female language and economy of “nei”) seems to signal a step

⁹⁷ The title of Elizabeth Berg’s review of Kofman, “The Third Woman,” derives from Kofman’s theorization of three different possible avenues for feminine sexuality and Berg’s interest in the third possibility as the most productive: “The third woman – the affirmative woman – is the one who affirms, in spite of everything produced to persuade her to the contrary, that the penis is both there and not there, that the question is undecidable, that she may be both active and passive, both masculine and feminine. This is the female equivalent of the fetishist, who treats castration as an undecidable question. She has moved beyond the economy of truth to affirm the ambivalence of her own sexuality... The idea of the affirmative woman makes possible what had seemed theoretically disastrous – although practically essential: the penetration of women into the masculine world and the order of the symbolic. If women could be, and are, both active and passive, both masculine and feminine, there is no contradiction between the exigency of participating in masculine activity and the refusal to be assimilated to a masculine mode. In *L’Enigme de la femme* Kofman gives us a theoretical framework for reconciling two tendencies of feminism which have tended to remain in apparently irremediable contradiction: the claim for equal rights and the claim for acknowledgement of sexual difference” (13). Although I do not adopt a psychoanalytic model for my analysis of Cutrufelli’s text, and my use of a “third woman” is clearly not in relation to castration theory, I too am looking at a similar set of problems: something beyond an economy of the truth, both in relation to Anna’s knowing what happened to the man (i.e., the crime genre) *and*, as in Kofman, in relation to female sexuality as being constituted by a certain undecidability. Anna’s (and Marta’s) sexuality is, indeed, left undecided and the reciprocity whereby they are both “carciere” and “carcerate” at once implies that they each assume active and passive positions at once in relation to one another. That there might exist a possible reconciliation between my anti-assimilationist reading of the novel and Kofman’s “third woman” is perhaps akin to the reconciling theoretical framework that Berg recognizes in Kofman and that I cited at length above. Importantly, though, the sexual undecidability I locate in Cutrufelli’s novel is *between women only* as a necessary and experimental starting point.

towards this embodiment: an internalizing that is embodied and a language that, rather than spoken, is written on the body.

I believe that the novel, in general, employs Marta as having a privileged relationship to figures of “monete” or gold circular pieces. Aside from her “polvere d’oro” with which she paints Anna a “neo,” Marta has a keychain with a “ciondolo d’oro” (75). This keychain was a gift from “l’uomo” when Marta agreed to sublet the room from him; it, therefore, still stood in as a “token” of her presence, which is precisely what the man told her he needed. Marta was, in fact, only paying him a modest price so as to “pretend” to be in a true, fair economic exchange; she tells Anna that it was a “prezzo simbolico” where we could say that the actual object of exchange and worth was her very presence. Once again Marta’s value equals her actual presence and takes as its figure the gold circle. This gold keychain may initially be Marta’s link/chain to the man, but it later becomes re-valued as that which bonds Anna and Marta in their complicity of silence. Additionally, when in Anna’s apartment, Marta wears a “filo d’oro” (144) around her neck. I also think that because in this most recent scene the word “neo” is used to describe the gold dot she paints on Anna, we are authorized to go back and read the “neo” under Marta’s breast as being a part of her gold collection; it is, after all, linked to a “moneta” (not to mention the fact that her body has a plethora of “nei”). In other words, these gold circles seem to make up a wealthy, because abundant, economy of hers that she shares with, and imparts onto, Anna (a different type of economy though since I’m not sure that there is an explicit exchange). Because I read these gold “nei” as ultimately representing female difference as presence, their multiplication and now micro-circulation, from one woman to another, enacts a defetishization of that difference. For these gold circles *do circulate* in the economy of the novel. And whereas the man may be seen as a mediator of the first instance of Marta giving Anna a gold ring, the dot of gold make-up replaces and redoes that bestowal in a *new* context of female complicity, exchange and circulation. I italicize *new* because an economy of “nei” *is necessary* a new economy since “neo” is a prefix meaning “new.”

In a final mirror instance that occurs after the bathroom scene in which Marta marks Anna’s face with a gold spot, Anna sees her reflection in the large mirror of a bathroom in a Trattoria. This time, Anna is alone. This additional bathroom scene now in a restaurant, seems to me to stand out as the first real moment in the novel in which Anna looks at herself without mediation: “Il lavabo era sormontato da uno specchio senza cornice... Vi si rifletté il pallore del viso lavato dalla pioggia. Aveva assunto un’immediatezza nuova e tuttavia sfuggente, una maschera si cui lei passò le mani fredde, tastando e premendo in una cauta ricognizione” (158). The moment is fleeting, but still complex, and stands as a moment of cautious self-recognition (one that, again, may never complete itself). Even if tentative, the look and recognition occur “on her own,” or at least not explicitly with Marta, or in the presence of anyone else for that matter. It may certainly be understated and anti-climactic, but I still read it as a development; she does not turn away from her reflection and she uses her hands to touch herself and “know” her face: a face that seems to bear a newness and immediacy; she has been washed clean by the rainstorm, which forced the women into the restaurant. Anna’s new mode of seeing herself is just that, brand new, and therefore the recognition is tenuous and hard to hold on to. What has been a triangular, three party, mode of recognition and subjectivity is, here, tentatively internalized and tried on, like a mask. Anna bears witness to herself from beyond her apartment and on her own.

To conclude, *Complice il dubbio* elicits the crime genre so as to herald the scene of Original Sin as its own “scene of the crime.” This founding narrative acts as an origin point, a

root, of a current symbolic order that places epistemology and gender at odds, such that female subjectivity and knowledge are left unthought and the (male) universal masquerades as neuter. Rather than engaging the crime genre in an attempt to produce a female knowledge, the novel stages its possibility via the man's death only to subtract itself from it. The novel and its protagonists leave the man's "scene of the crime" and his founding symbolization in order to begin again from a new space of self-knowledge and desire wherein the female is a signifying presence rather than an absence of meaning. The investigating remains confined to Anna's apartment and between Anna and Marta who do not know one another and begin with a clean slate and from without (as much as possible) a male gaze that has, heretofore, structured Anna's, and women's, place and mode of seeing. The crime genre, with its reliance on an investigatory gaze and an accumulation of facts, functions as its own lens, its own microscope, through which female self-knowledge and desire is occulted and/or defined according to a male paradigm reminiscent of the traditional male philosopher who orders the world with reference to himself. Anna and Marta, by withdrawing themselves from the genre and (one of) its origins, are left to try to see and know without this model in order to forge a female model of self-definition on their own, among one another. The initial hesitancy and mistrust between them derives from a symbolic economy that puts women at odds and in competition with one another. Anna's being seen by Marta enforces a new mode of self-seeing and desiring based on the presence and body of the other woman and by the possibility of desire between them. The novel will not settle on the question of desire between Anna and Marta because it will not let them and it be pinned down, defined, in any way from without themselves; we can never settle on the "crime" and we can never know their desire. Finally, the trope of the double of the crime narrative here becomes a triple such that Anna begins to see herself as both the subject and object of desire and of her own thought.

Chapter 3

A Maternal Dispossession and Body Mourning(s)

“there is no staying inside”

Judith Butler “Giving an Account of Oneself”

1. Detecting Matricide

Elena Ferrante’s first novel, *L’amore molesto* (1992), evokes the crime genre immediately by way of its opening sentence announcing an ambiguous death: “Mia madre annegò la notte del 23 maggio, giorno del mio compleanno, nel tratto di mare di fronte alla località che chiamano Spaccavento, a pochi chilometri da Minturno” (9).⁹⁸ As in a traditional crime novel, *L’amore molesto* begins with a mysterious, unaccounted for death that has already taken place prior to the narrating instance. The work of the text, and its readers, seems to be to retroactively construct the events leading up to the startling death, in order to determine what type of death it was: an accident, a homicide, a suicide? Here, however, instead of an impartial detective or group hired to investigate the mother’s (Amalia’s) death, the character who assumes the role of “investigator” is Amalia’s daughter, Delia, the first-person narrator of the novel. In fact, the sole mention of a representative of the law occurs on the fourth page of the novel; Delia reaches out to a police officer and friend after receiving a disturbing and incoherent phone call from her mother, who was supposed to have arrived at Delia’s house hours earlier: “Solo dopo mezzanotte mi rivolsi a un amico poliziotto, che fu molto gentile: mi disse di non agitarmi, ci avrebbe pensato lui” (12). On the contrary, there is no further indication of any stand-in for the law concerning him or herself with Amalia’s death; this may, in fact, be one relatively explicit way in which *L’amore molesto* strays from the standard crime narrative. Instead, we follow the movements of Delia who becomes the primary, and seemingly singular, “investigator” of her mother’s death. This deviation with daughter as “sleuth” already changes the stakes of the “investigation” and is, thus, an initial hint that the novel might not operate from within a traditional generic mode.

I will first demonstrate the ways in which *L’amore molesto* asks to be read as a mystery novel and sketch out the customary mode in which scholars buy into this generic heuristic. I will then propose an alternate reading of the novel that, instead, theorizes the ways in which Ferrante’s novel strays from the crime genre and what this generic “failure” produces. This chapter aims to disturb a familiarizing critical approach in order to promote a different reading that brings out, instead, what is defamiliarizing about this novel. If we read along with the supposed genre we tend towards smoothing over ambiguities that have their own “deviant” logics. As I go on to demonstrate, *L’amore molesto* teases its readers, asking to be read as a crime novel but then disallows a definitive answer to its matricidal mystery; a male gendered structure of knowledge is stymied. The investigation, then, serves some other purpose, is re-routed through a different discourse.

⁹⁸ This and all subsequent references are found in Elena Ferrante, *L’amore molesto* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1999).

It is indeed difficult to avoid reading *L'amore molesto* as a crime novel. Once Delia learns of her mother's mysterious drowning she first identifies the livid body and then returns begrudgingly to her "città di nascita," Naples, for the funeral (Delia has done her best to leave Naples and an unpleasant past behind). In Naples, through a gathering of "clues" and a series of deductions, Delia begins to re-construct, in somewhat typical detective fashion, the itinerary of her mother's final days and the hours leading up to her strange drowning.⁹⁹ As expected, these "clues" determine Delia's movements through space and, therefore, serve as both sign-posts and catalysts of what seems to be a teleological narrative movement towards comprehending Amalia's death; for example, Delia finds all of her mother's long-worn undergarments (bras that have lost their shape, underwear whose elastic bands no longer expand and contract) in the garbage can of her bathroom, which makes her recall by contrast the one article of clothing on Amalia's washed-up body: an expensive, brand new lace bra, not in keeping with Amalia's wardrobe of decades. This aberration is a clue that leads Delia to the store where Amalia purchased the bra (and other expensive garments), where she seeks information regarding her mother's time there: Was she alone? What was her behavior like? Why was she buying items so out of character? As a result of her snooping, Delia has an altercation with the store's security guard who turns out to be an old childhood friend whose father, Caserta, has a volatile history with Delia's family. It is not a coincidence that Caserta's son works at the lingerie shop and Caserta becomes a suspicious subject of Delia's probing: she tries to locate him and even gets involved in a suspenseful chase scene during which she follows Caserta through the crowded, labyrinthine, city streets. Throughout, the novel is replete with clues of this type, which seem to serve as evidence that might lead to an answer to the narrative's enigma.

The novel's evocation of the crime genre with Delia as "investigator" has given rise to an interpretative trend in secondary criticism of the novel. In the most recent study of Ferrante's novel, *Corporeal Bonds: The Daughter-Mother Relationship in Twentieth-Century Italian Women's Writing*, Patrizia Sambuco writes, "The odd circumstances of this death, together with the unusually expensive lingerie that Amalia was wearing at the time of her death, urge the daughter to seek a solution to that mystery" and "Delia assembles more pieces of the puzzle of her mother's mystery..." (130).¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Gianni Turchetta, in an article for *L'Unità*, speaks of *L'amore molesto* as a "thriller" driven by suspense and anticipation. In fact, it is widely observed that in his 1995 film adaptation, Mario Martone makes more palpable the thriller aspect of Ferrante's novel, heightening its tone of mystery and potential danger. Pauline Small notes Martone's use of the *noir* genre and the narrative's employment of a quest structure with Delia as detective. Furthermore, in an article comparing novel to film, Alberto Rollo defines Ferrante's "movimento di scrittura" as "sinusoidale *detection* dell'anima" (23).¹⁰¹ In some criticism, we

⁹⁹ The stereotype of Naples as a crime-ridden, mysterious and dangerous city is exploited in Mario Martone's 1995 film adaptation of the novel. Martone's employment of a certain type of Naples speaks to a way in which his film plays up the crime genre aspect of the book and reminds us of other films such as *Napoli violenta* (1976) by Umberto Lenzi, for example.

¹⁰⁰ One of the very first scholarly essays on the novel, Giancarlo Lombardi's "Scambi d'identità: Il recupero del corpo materno ne *L'amore molesto*" proposes a similar daughterly quest telos, as does Aldagisa Giorgio's chapter on the novel in her book *Writing Mothers and Daughter: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*.

¹⁰¹ I take Rollo's metaphor to signal that the "detection" of *L'amore molesto* moves both outward into the external world (of Naples) and inward to engage in self-observing and self-knowing. I return later to the "doubled" nature of the investigation.

even find scholars explicitly troping *L'amore molesto's* detection mode, making their analyses into epistemological investigations.¹⁰² Critics, then, are quick to pick up on *L'amore molesto's* aura of mystery and its movement driven by detection; we are, according to these observations, on relatively familiar terrain and anticipate a story driven by an investigation that results in a revelation that answers the questions, “what happened to Amalia?,” “how and why did she drown?” and “who is to blame?”

Most criticism of *L'amore molesto* “cracks the case” by unambiguously stating that Delia solves the mystery of her mother’s death because she comes to understand that Amalia committed suicide. These critics take at face value Delia’s claim: “« Si è ammazzata» pronunciai con chiarezza, ma senza enfasi” (141). Here, Delia announces her mother’s suicide towards the end of the novel in an unpleasant conversation with her father. Delia’s narration suggests her mother’s suicide a second time in the final pages of the novel within an internal monologue, when Delia has returned, for a second time, to the beach where her mother drowned: “Ero già tornata in quel luogo, dopo la morte di mia madre... Mi ero chiesta perché mia madre avesse deciso di morire in quel posto” (168). Although slightly more implicit here, Delia’s narration posits Amalia’s death as intentional, “avesse deciso di morire” and wonders, instead, *why* she decides to end her life. Lastly, the novel seems to posit Amalia’s suicide when it uses “annegarsi” rather than “annegare” to speak of Amalia’s death. Critics take these mentions of suicide as Delia’s clear answer to the mystery of her mother’s death; “Delia deduces that Amalia may have felt destabilized after she had spent the night with Caserta and then, half drunk on the beach, had worn the clothes that she had bought for Delia, and committed suicide” (Sambuco 131).¹⁰³ For critics of this persuasion, the novel is a successful quest of deduction resulting in a clear answer.

¹⁰² In an essay critiquing Martone’s film adaptation, Rossella Riccobono argues that both the novel and its filmic version elicit the detective genre, thereby inviting readers and viewers to inhabit their own detective-like mode: “We may then proceed with an analysis of Martone’s potential male ‘re-appropriation’ of Delia’s [...] and Elena Ferrante’s perspectives and sensitivities in his version of *L'amore molesto*. But we will proceed in a detective-like style, the mode that the genre of the novel and film, after all, invites us to adopt” (441). Riccobono not only locates the genre, but turns her article into a type of police procedural: “We shall find the elements, the suspects, the evidence, the places, that will enable us to follow the investigation and find the culprit(s), if there are any, and a solution. Mario Martone: innocent or guilty?” (441). Riccobono’s essay does, in fact, structurally mime a sort of police report: its sections are titled *The detectives*, *The victims*, *Suspected crimes*, *The suspects*, *The witnesses*, etc. This critical troping mechanism is precisely what this chapter seeks to problematize and what I believe the novel itself implicitly complicates. Lisa Mullenieux, in “Burying Mother’s Ghost: Elena Ferrante’s *Troubling Love*,” goes as far as equating the mystery novel aspect with Ferrante’s own mysterious self; “When this “beaten woman” [Amalia] washes up in the Tyrrhenian Sea wearing only an expensive bra, the reader is plunged into a mystery by a novelist who has kept her own identity a mystery for 14 years” (246).

¹⁰³ A number of the novel’s critics state definitively that Amalia committed suicide: see Aldagisa Giorgio, Giancarlo Lombardi, Alberto Rollo & Lisa Mullenieux. Lombardi, for example, writes, “Nel ripercorrere gli ultimi giorni di vita della madre, alla ricerca dei motivi che hanno spinto la madre al suicidio...” (288). Mullenieux tries to sustain the mystery of the novel, but then reneges and suggests Amalia’s suicide: “Ferrante uses the structure of a mystery to ask questions, to present enigmas that are never truly explained or solved. Who was Amalia? her daughter wonders, but a ghost can’t speak” (247). Later in her article, she states, “Delia...boards the train for Minturno where her mother chose to die” (249) The mystery of Amalia’s death is then not one of the unexplainable mysteries of Amalia’s life. Rossella

Not only does this critical trend decide that Delia settles on suicide, but it also assumes the veracity of Delia's claim (even though Delia never finds "proof," as in a suicide note, for example) and proceeds to use Delia's "knowledge" of Amalia's suicide as an interpretive key through which to read the novel. Adalgisa Giorgio's study is representative of this critical tendency when she writes, "Amalia's suicide by drowning on her daughter's birthday communicates the wish to kill the Delia who had both betrayed her as a child and rejected her as an adult, and to give birth to a new Delia" (129). Giorgio's interpretation takes Amalia's suicide as a given and then analyzes Amalia's intentionality in order to answer this "riddle" of the novel.¹⁰⁴ I suggest that criticism of this type tends to fall into a generic trap; behaving as detectives alongside Delia, critics "solve" the crime of Amalia's death and buy into an ideology of crime fiction whereby providing an answer to death (cracking the case) restores or fixes meaning: something incomprehensible is domesticated via knowledge that, used retroactively, produces understanding.

Much of this criticism also locates a second generic strand, the Bildungsroman. Delia's return to Naples and her quest to understand her mother's final hours and days is, for them, simultaneously a way in which she gathers "clues" in order to forge a revised understanding of Amalia more generally and in so doing reformulate her own sense of self; "Delia's reconsideration of her own identity is effected through a reconsideration of the identity of her mother" (Small 301). Delia has intentionally left Naples and her family behind because of a troublesome childhood and an ambivalent relationship to her mother. We learn in many ways throughout the novel that Delia's adult identity rests on a rejection of Amalia and an attempt to establish absolute difference from her: her move to Rome, her short haircut, her displeasure regarding Amalia's visits. Thus, in addition to an attempt to clarify the events leading to her mother's death, Delia's "investigation" elicits a series of previously suppressed memories, hallucinations, and fantasies, all of which allow for a certain reconstruction of mother and daughter's shared past. In this way, Delia "comes to terms" with the ways in which both she and her mother suffered at the hands of a violently patriarchal culture; this shared victimhood and survival are cause for a deep identification between them.¹⁰⁵ The central epiphany that takes place during Delia's time in Naples is the resurfacing of a repressed childhood experience of sexual violence. Delia re-imagines herself based on this new understanding that is also a new understanding of her mother's past; Delia's repressed memory was covered over by a fantasized image of her mother's promiscuity and adultery. This is why critics rightly point to the significance of Amalia dying on Delia's birthday as signaling an itinerary of re-birth; "Delia has finally found the words to tell her own and her mother's story...the daughter has therefore

Riccobono recognizes the novel's mode of non-clarification, but then gives her opinion on what *probably* happened; "It is never clarified during the course of *L'amore molesto* whether Amalia took her own life or drowned accidentally. Nevertheless it is very unlikely that such an empowered woman might have taken her own life: so joyous was life to her despite everything. And all we know is that the last night of her existence *was* joyful" (444). Furthermore, we might notice that Riccobono's essay, when it does allow for ambiguity, leaves out the possibility of murder.

¹⁰⁴ Lombardi's essay operates similarly and goes as far as interpreting Amalia's suicide as a maternal sacrifice much like her decision to leave her husband twenty-some years earlier.

¹⁰⁵ See Riccobono, for example; "As Delia follows the clues to investigate her mother's last few days of existence, she trips in a series of coincidental encounters with men belonging to her past, and with removed memories that bring her to come, instead, face to face with herself and to disentangle the knots of her childhood violence" (441-442).

achieved a recovery of the mother...and accepted that which had troubled her” (interestingly, this “her” could be either Delia or Amalia, or both) (Sambuco 149-151). In the economy of *L'amore molesto* the daughter's selfhood is tethered to knowledge of a recuperated maternal figure and to a healed bond between them.

I suggest that this type of criticism tends to graft Ferrante's novel's participation with the crime fiction genre onto its other generic participation, thus, onto Delia's journey of self-discovery; the two genres are aligned and support each other. Therefore, much scholarship implies that Delia's ability to reconstitute Amalia's story and thus “find herself” is predicated upon her “solving” the mystery of her mother's death; a successful Bildungsroman *depends* upon a successful investigation that “solves” Amalia's death. Sambuco can be seen as representing this trend when she writes, “The mystery of the mother's death is solved, and the daughter acquires a fuller sense of herself, bringing her closer to the woman that she had rejected during most of her adult life” (131). Scholars find a particular scene of deduction towards the end of the novel (in the basement of an abandoned pastry shop) as useful in this regard since it is both the scene of Delia's revelation of her sexual abuse (it is, in fact, the exact location of that abuse from so many years earlier) and the site of her final clue gathering that allows her to formulate a narrative of Amalia's final hours. Tellingly, this type of interpretation seems to align Delia's successful self-journey to her successful investigation of her mother's death and the explanation it provides. Giorgio writes, “The daughter's investigation makes it apparent that her mother had ‘engineered’ her death to help Delia find herself” (129). Giorgio both takes Amalia's suicide as the answer to her death riddle *and* provides an answer to why Amalia commits suicide that turns it into a sacrificial, life-giving act that implicates Amalia in a belief in matricide for the sake of daughterly development. Thus criticism assists Delia's self-quest by way of its own inhabiting of crime genre norms and the way in which it solves the mystery with her. According to Giorgio, “Delia must “read” and interpret her mother's death” in order that “This daughterly narrative fulfill(s) the mother's desire to have her life interpreted through her death (128-129). Even the use of “read” marks the tendency to equate our work as readers and critics with Delia's “investigatory” work so that we too must have an interpretation of her death and, more pointedly, *we must have Delia's interpretation*. For criticism of this type, Delia's interpretation of Amalia's death must be right, she must understand what happened so as to understand her mother and “find herself.”¹⁰⁶

I suggest that critics do this grafting work, assisting Delia's self-growth through solving Amalia's death, in order to promote the novel as feminist in its working against a literary matricide. This understanding and recuperation of the maternal figure that re-unites mother and daughter counters a cultural tradition of matrophobia and matricide theorized by a host of twentieth-century female philosophers and scholars. Certain French, Italian and Anglo-American feminisms and psychoanalytic literary criticisms locate a cultural and symbolic

¹⁰⁶ I do not want to overlook or underestimate the power of these interpretations, upon which much of my own scholarship depends. I am indebted to the way in which these critics have cogently shown Delia's “mother-quest” and articulated the ways in which her selfhood needs knowledge of the maternal and an acknowledgement of a female continuum. This finding represents an important development within late twentieth-century narratives of female subjectivity and has been elaborated successfully and originally by the scholars I mention here. My concern has to do with taking the crime genre aspects at face value and using them as a measure of self-discovery for mother and daughter. In my interpretation, the crime genre is purposefully evoked *and* purposefully unsuccessful so as to allow for a different mode of self-knowledge acquisition.

matricide at the foundation of Western thought and language *and* at the root of subject formation and the very entry into language as the possibility of saying “I.” To drastically simplify a complex body of theory, critical and literary theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Luisa Muraro, and Rosi Braidotti, bring to light a constitutive matrophobia in the founding Western discourses of civilization, culture and subjecthood resulting in the mother’s exile from philosophy, metaphysics, language, and subjectivity; instead the maternal is confined to the realm of nature, matter and appearance and her generative function hijacked, metaphorized or made monstrous.¹⁰⁷ Of particular interest with respect to literary analysis is Marianne Hirsch’s *The Mother Daughter Plot*. Hirsch locates a trend within the majority of Western twentieth-century female narratives of development whereby it is almost always daughters who narrate their development with reference to their mothers, leaving mothers, and the maternal, without a discourse of its own. Hirsch argues that in feminist attempts to reimagine traditional plot and familiar structures the maternal is still that which must be left behind in order for narration to take place: “All of these variations...are based on the heroine’s... disidentification from conventional constructions of femininity. Mothers—the ones who are not singular, who did succumb to convention inasmuch as they are mothers—thereby become the targets of this process of disidentification and the primary negative models for the daughter (10-11). For Hirsch, in continuing to adopt daughterly perspectives, feminist rhetoric and its literary

¹⁰⁷ Matricide, or abjecting the mother, is for many theorists a historical event, a violent socio-cultural occurrence much like the systematic exclusion of women from Western thought, but, in this case, specific to the maternal. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* Luce Irigaray locates a philosophical break from material and maternal contiguity. In *Speculum* she develops this proposition by theorizing the ways in which philosophy “breaks” with matter in order to constitute itself as a meta-physics. For example, Western philosophy rests on the body/mind duality and a foundational exclusion of the former allows philosophy to constitute itself as such. Importantly, Irigaray points to a set of terms etymologically and conceptually aligned with matter, including mater and matrice, in order to demonstrate how philosophy covers over the maternal as origin and denies the mother as a thinking subject. Irigaray turns to grounding myths as sites that recount an originary matricide and, therefore, put on display the founding of patriarchy as a negation of female genealogies. The Italian feminist philosopher Luisa Muraro takes up Irigaray’s thesis and attempts to produce a metaphysics that does not break with material/maternal contiguity in *L’ordine simbolico della madre*. Muraro works towards a new metaphysics via an understanding of language as having metaphysical capabilities. Muraro’s main order of business then is to reverse the current symbolic order’s relationship to the mother, since there the mother is an impediment to language and must be separated from in order for one to become a thinking, speaking subject. Muraro inverts this “disordine” by showing the ways in which one’s relation to the mother and one’s relation to language structure one another; linguistic and maternal authority become inseparable. Finally, in *Nonostante Platone*, Adriana Cavarero returns to culturally founding myths in search of the traces left behind by the matricide revealed by Irigaray. By taking up the figure of Demeter, the Great Mother, Cavarero shows how the patriarchal symbolic order establishes itself precisely on the erasure of the symbolic order of the Great Mother and thus death replaces birth as the fundamental paradigm of this order. Whereas Irigaray, in *Sexes and Genealogies* used the myth of Demeter to show an interruption in feminine genealogy, Cavarero insists on its demonstration of the maternal continuum and maternal power. Demeter chooses to stop regeneration when her daughter, Kore, is snatched out of her sight; “Consequently, the maternal power to generate is coextensive with the reciprocal visibility of mother and daughter” (62). This mother-daughter gaze contains within it an understanding of complicity by way of a secret that every woman shares: she recognizes that she is of woman born *and* that she does not have to generate. Thus, for Cavarero, abortion is a “potenza materna.” For further articulations of cultural forms of matricide see: Rosi Braidotti. *Madri, mostri, macchine* (1996) and Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982).

counterparts “can be said to collude with patriarchy in placing mothers into the position of object—thereby keeping mothering outside of representation and maternal discourse a theoretical impossibility” (163).¹⁰⁸

That women’s novels of the past twenty years have taken up this problematic and sought different ways to make-up for it is by now a given. In her introduction to *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women* Adalgisa Giorgio describes “a shift from rejection of or indifference to the maternal to a desire on the daughter’s part to examine her bond with her mother...the aim of understanding the mother’s position” leading “in some cases to a reappraisal of the maternal figure as a source of positive female values” (5). As is certainly the case in *L’amore molesto*, the novels treated by Giorgio and others “portray daughters who attempt to unravel their feelings towards their mothers and to make sense of a highly conflictual relationship in which, however, their identity is grounded” (5). As already mentioned, Delia, is, even if begrudgingly, on a type of “mother-quest” in which a re-visioning of Amalia’s story and her relationship to her, are both fundamental moves towards a coming-to-terms with her own identity; “cominciai senza volerlo a raccontarmi di mia madre” (Ferrante 33). From this perspective, and as we’ve already seen in our review of scholarship, Delia’s sense of self is dependent upon her mother’s story. Claudia Karagoz, in her dissertation *Amori molesti: The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Contemporary Italian Women’s Writing*, has suggested that Delia suffers an incomplete self-development whereby “the mother, no longer a separate object, is ‘incorporated’...into the daughter’s psyche” (85). Thus, the narrative demonstrates Delia’s work of re-finding and re-telling her mother’s story, giving it its own distinct contours, and establishing Amalia as a subject in her own right. Karagoz writes that, “it is precisely because, at the end of Delia’s journey, intersubjectivity between mother and daughter has been reinstated that Delia can finally ‘be’ Amalia...By recognizing her mother as a separate object, Delia is able to identify with her, and reassert her dependence on her” (85); thus, establishing separateness paradoxically promotes contiguity. Although Delia admittedly narrates from a daughterly perspective, her discourse of self is bound to her mother’s story; while it does not strictly speaking produce a maternal discourse, Delia’s narration tells Amalia’s story and brings the maternal figure back into relation with the daughter’s subjectivity. *L’amore molesto* works to undo a literary matricide by suggesting that Delia’s own story of self *needs* her mother’s story rather than needing to repudiate it.

I agree with scholars’ attempts to locate ways in which Amalia’s narrative is needed, and indeed structures Delia’s. I too am motivated by an impetus to locate and restore a maternal narrative so that Delia’s sense of self is brought back into relation with Amalia, and in particular with a version of Amalia that is not mediated by the misogyny that has enveloped their relationship; this critical trend rightly notices this as one of the novel’s main orders of business. I am wary, however, of the unintended consequences of allowing the mystery/crime narrative and the Bildungsroman to collapse and, specifically, of letting the latter depend upon the former. In addition to its troping of the crime genre, I believe that this argument “solves” Amalia’s death by adopting Delia’s interpretation in a hopeful attempt to make-up for a literary matricide elicited by the novel’s opening sentence; in a way, Delia (and scholars) solve the real matricide so as to temper the problem of a literary matricide. I, however, believe inversely that taking up Delia’s pronouncements of suicide as evidence of her “cracking the case” allows the maternal

¹⁰⁸ Also see Susan Rubin Suleiman’s “Writing and Motherhood” in *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*. It is in this essay that Suleiman succinctly concludes, “Mothers don’t write, they are written.”

narrative to be recontained in the daughter's narrative and simultaneously recontained in a male economy of gazes, gazes of both desire and knowing elicited by the crime genre and its detective tradition, but also, importantly, by the way in which Delia's "detective-mode" is aligned with a perennial male surveillance over Amalia. In certain cases, by relying on Amalia's death as the "key" to the narrative of both mother and daughter's lives, criticism may inadvertently renew the importance of the matricide. In other words, the desire to "fix" the matricide in the name of a female/maternal discourse is problematically attempted via a male gendered structure of knowledge, i.e., the crime genre. I will suggest that things are not this easy in the narrative itself, and that, furthermore, to make things tidy in this way does not actually fix the problem of matricide. Rather, and paradoxically, I posit that, in the logic of this novel, the filling up of the maternal loss indicated by Hirsch can only be achieved by maintaining that very absence. If we look, instead, at the ways in which the novel does not definitively answer Amalia's mystery, and in so doing moves away from the crime narrative, then we can reframe Delia's "investigation" and quest as something new.

Indeed, I suggest that the mystery of Amalia's death stands as a self-aware literary and cultural matricide that is, in it of itself, the actual crime of the novel for which there can be no one criminal to apprehend. We do not end the novel with any one person to blame because Amalia's death stands as a cultural norm viewed itself as "criminal." *L'amore molesto* begins, then, from a recognition of the novelistic tendency described by Hirsch whereby the daughter's narration is made possible by a type of literary matricide. I argue that *L'amore molesto* consciously performs said matricide as a culturally founding crime that is a given and that sets in motion Delia's narration. Thus, the novel puts on display the cultural crime of matricide but will not "solve" for it since it will not allow Delia to actually, definitively solve her mother's death. I locate the novel's withholding of a definitive answer to the mystery of Amalia's death as, paradoxically, in the service of a maternal discourse that cannot be spoken by anyone else.¹⁰⁹ To not interpret death, to deny this aspect of the crime genre epistemic, opens up potential space for a discourse not yet produced or available; we do not, strictly speaking, get a maternal discourse yet in this novel, but we also do not get a discourse that is able to take its place.

The most sustained effort to offer an alternative to these critics in their attempts to "solve" Amalia's death mystery is Karagoz's dissertation chapter already mentioned. Karagoz offers an alternative in so far as she does not evoke the novel's use of the crime genre, but still works to locate a maternal discourse. Rather than explicitly differentiating herself from criticism that solves the crime, Karagoz seems to take what others interpret as clues as, what she terms, "lasciti," i.e., things that Amalia leaves behind for Delia, her own sort of legacies. Karagoz posits that many of Delia's findings can be viewed as maternal traces left behind by Amalia. Often these maternal remnants or hand-me-downs (Delia proceeds to wear some of Amalia's clothing that she finds) seem purposefully left for Delia (it turns out that Amalia's suitcase contains brand new clothing meant as birthday gifts for Delia) and allow her to piece together her mother's story and person. According to Karagoz, these "lasciti" add up to the legacy Amalia leaves behind; endowed with the possibility to signify and narrate, they allow Amalia to speak "from beyond the grave."¹¹⁰ This narrative made up of Amalia's "lasciti" is one way in which

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, for Amalia to speak the truth of her death she would have to literally speak from beyond the grave and in so doing the novel would have to resort to a gothic trope.

¹¹⁰ Karagoz continues, "The mother's legacy in *L'amore molesto* is not, however, easily interpretable: it consists of "materials" which trespass, and transgress, the codes of the dominant symbolic" (my emphasis 93). Karagoz's primary examples of Amalia's "lasciti" are her obscene words used during their

Karagoz locates a maternal discourse in *L'amore molesto*. Furthermore, although Karagoz does not say so, these maternal remnants adding up to Amalia's legacy are certainly one example of the novel altering the crime genre; these traces are not merely a means to solving the mystery of Amalia's death, but become, just as importantly, Amalia's story of self, that is, an end in itself.¹¹¹ Additionally, and importantly, Karagoz posits that even with the existence of her "lasciti" and, thus, "her active participation in Delia's work of re-telling the mothers story," Amalia *still* remains an ambiguous figure; this inability to be pinned down by others' representations and interpretations of her is Amalia's mode of subverting a dominant discourse. Amalia's "lasciti" transgress the codes of the dominant symbolic and are therefore an enigmatic bestowal that allow her to escape linguistic definition. For Karagoz, Delia seems to lose control of the narrative and this echoes, and stays faithful to, Amalia's own ambiguity and uncontainability. For Karagoz, Amalia enters the narration without being fully contained by it.

I find Karagoz's treatment of *L'amore molesto* to be the most nuanced and convincing, particularly because it uses Amalia's ambiguity as a creative and subversive force in its own right. I find her use of remnants suggestive and would like to further complicate them, and bring them to bear on what Karagoz's chapter neglects: the novel's manifestations of corporeal excrement and the mystery novel aspect. I suggest that one can use the concept of a "lascito" to consider a certain type of corporality produced by the novel, and, in particular, what the body leaves behind of itself; I connect these corporeal "lasciti" to a maternal legacy since Delia's corporeal "leavings" (tears, vomit, menstrual blood, sweat) are tied specifically to the loss of Amalia. Second, I would like to take into account the novel's evocation of the mystery/crime genre without using it as *the mode* through which to read the novel and in order to take into account what Ferrante's novel does to it. Although she never mentions the crime genre, I appreciate that Karagoz leaves Amalia's death unanswered and I want to theorize more directly how and why the novel too will not solve for it. In this way, I see Amalia's ambiguity as extending to the story of her death; Amalia's legacy, comprised of her "lasciti," does not allow Delia to answer the riddle of her death.¹¹² Thus, in a sense, the novel stays faithful to Amalia's quality of ambiguity in its straying from a final answer (which is a straying from the genre) to her death; we are left unsure and in doubt.

Part of *L'amore molesto*'s self-awareness is its asking to be read as a crime novel (setting up the telos of "solving" Amalia's death and putting its readers in alignment with Delia and her investigation) while simultaneously challenging the possibility of being read in this way by purposefully denying a clean "solving" of its mystery. As I will show in detail, the chapters in which Delia explicitly imagines and reconstructs Amalia's final days and hours is undermined by

last phone conversation, along with her signature, uncontainable "riso," and, most importantly, her blue suit "as the most eloquent expression of her creative powers" (101). Other scholars, too, posit an intentionality on Amalia's part to have, in a sense, designed and orchestrated her final days so as to communicate specific things to Delia. In particular, Aldagisa Giorgio, in *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*, depicts Amalia's mysterious disappearance and death as strategically planned and carried out by Amalia.

¹¹¹ While I appreciate Karagoz's production of a maternal discourse, we must still insist that Amalia's "clues" or "lasciti" are mediated by Delia: she finds them and she interprets them through *her* investigation and *her* reconstruction of Amalia's "mysteries."

¹¹² Scholars, such as Rollo, have argued that Amalia maintains a certain ambiguity because we never know for sure *why* she committed suicide, but I think this ambiguity pertains firstly to what type of death it was in the first place: to assume suicide is to already pin her down.

a linguistic and stylistic uncertainty and indecisiveness that works to counter a gendered structure of knowledge set in motion by the evocation of the crime genre and a certain type of investigatory gaze; *this* investigation “fails”. Thus, the novel simultaneously constructs and deconstructs a story of Amalia’s death, it enforces its own ambiguity precisely as it attempts to narrativize it. This refusal resulting in ambiguity has several productive ramifications. The novel’s “failure” to know exactly what happened to Amalia allows her to escape a certain narrative disciplining, which is also a daughterly disciplining. Furthermore, the “failure” to solve the mystery signals a breakdown of the crime genre mode and a certain type of knowledge acquisition that was concurrently used to structure Delia’s self-knowing. To stray from this type of knowledge suggests the possibility of a new version of self not adherent to an already gendered structure of knowledge. What results is a new sense of self no longer riding in tandem with the solving of the crime and its version of knowing.

2. Eyeing Amalia’s Guilt...Forse...

Delia’s investigation, the mode that the novel evokes only to stymy it, is aligned with a masculine discourse (a gaze and desire) that structures Delia’s relationship to her mother. Delia’s investigation of Amalia’s mystery is initially aligned with a probing, and often aggressive, gaze of surveillance and control over Amalia that Delia takes up and inhabits early on in her life. One striking example comes from Delia’s childhood memory of being on the bus with her mother. In the present narration Delia and her uncle ride the bus and the way in which the men behave in the crowded space, “Le donne soffocavano tra i corpi maschili, sbuffando per quella vicinanza occasionale...I maschi, nella ressa, si servivano delle femmine per giocare in silenzio tra sé and sé. Uno fissava una ragazza bruna...Altri ingannavano il tempo a spiare dal finestrino nelle auto per cogliere porzioni di gambe scoperte” (61), reminds Delia of what it was like to ride the bus with Amalia as a child. The use of the word “spiare” in this passage assists in building the connection between Delia’s “investigation” and a perpetual male gaze onto her mother. Delia’s father was always convinced that men could not keep their eyes and hands off of his wife and in the crowded bus Delia admits to having taken on his stance, she too would have to ward off outside threats:

Allora mi prendeva la smania di proteggere mia madre dal contatto con gli uomini, come avevo visto che faceva sempre mio padre in quella circostanza. Mi disponevo come uno scudo alle sue spalle e me ne stavo crocefissa alle gambe di lei, la fronte contro le sue natiche...Era uno sforzo inutile, il corpo di Amalia non si lasciava contenere...O forse avveniva il contrario. Erano gli uomini che si incollavano a lei come mosche alle carte appiccicose e giallastre...Risultava difficile tenerli lontani coi calci o coi gomiti...Lui [il padre] la proteggeva dagli altri maschi con una violenza che non sapevo mai se avrebbe schiacciato soltanto i rivali o gli sarebbe anche rivolta contro uccidendolo (62-63).

Keeping Amalia sealed off from an insidious male interest and attention becomes a war-like preoccupation that Delia adopts from her father. Both father and daughter want their access to Amalia's body to be singular and complete; they suffocate her so that others will not be able to. To keep an eye on Amalia is to contain her body, to be the only one with access to her.

This gaze onto Amalia is embodied above all by Delia's father, who we learn was still keeping a close eye on her up until her final days. Delia learns that he was still "spying" on Amalia during the last weeks of her life: "mettersi a spiarla" (152) and "mio padre insistesse a spiarli [Amalia and Caserta]" (156). Even Amalia's nextdoor neighbor, Signora De Riso, is figured as surreptitiously "spying" on Amalia in order to then speak of her inappropriate behaviors (127). It is, thus, not only men that look at Amalia in a certain way: it is a culture that has adopted a certain perspective. The frequent use of the word "spy" to describe a certain type of gaze onto Amalia (and onto women more generally) is telling since it places Amalia directly as the object of an investigatory gaze that sees and knows her: that reads her body and assesses its guilt. Delia's childhood desire to contain Amalia, to see her constantly, and to know what she is doing, is related to her present mode of investigating Amalia's final days and mysterious death. We should also note the use of the word "spiare" to describe Delia's own self-viewing and thus self-perception. For example, Delia describes spying on herself sitting in the elevator cabin in Amalia's apartment building; "Ero spiata, non da quell'Amalia di mesi prima che ormai era morta, da me stessa uscita sul pianerottolo a vedermi lì seduta" (26). In this sense, the type of investigatory gaze of which Amalia is the object simultaneously structures Delia's own sense of self and mode of self-inquiry. Lastly, this type of self-spying seems to interrupt, and stand in for, Amalia's own possible gaze at Delia. I return to this interrupted gaze later on.

Delia as another primary voyeur of her mother is certainly, in part, implicated in this controlling male gaze that would like to contain Amalia, would like to know what she does, and finds her at fault since she seems unable to fully control her and who she is seen by; "Ma sospettavo, proprio come mio padre, che fuori casa ridesse diversamente, respirasse diversamente, orchestrasse i movimento del corpo in modo da lasciare *tutti a occhi sbarrati*" (my emphasis 102). Both for father and daughter, the inability to see Amalia at all times leads to a suspicion that others can possess Amalia by freely looking at her and that, importantly, Amalia is the cause of her being seen by others; her body invites this intrusion and is a sign of her promiscuity and guilt. Delia's return to Naples reinserts her into a constellation of gazes that places women, and Amalia in particular, as its object; a central anxiety is that Amalia will escape that gaze and act of her own accord, have an agency and life beyond those who watch her.¹¹³ This surveying gaze of Amalia mediates, in part, Delia's childhood gaze onto her mother. One

¹¹³ It is telling in this regard that Delia's father is an amateur painter and that his signature piece, repeated over and over with small variations, is a portrait of a gypsy who, we learn, resembles Amalia. It is not only a resemblance though, since Delia recounts her mother posing as a model for her father's paintings. Her father's paintings are, then, a way in which he both makes Amalia into an object to be stared at (visually and pleasurably taken in) and seeks to control how she is seen; he sells these portraits, so they will be seen, but at least he produces exactly what will be seen of her and how. Since Delia grows up surrounded by her father's portraits they serve as another example of the way in which her vision of Amalia is necessarily mediated by her father. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* speaks cogently and convincingly about women's presence as appearance and therefore the complex ways in which their presence is determined by various vectors (both internal and external) of surveillance. Berger looks specifically at works of art and could be used to think more profoundly about the paintings of Amalia and their function in the novel.

of the very first memory images this novel describes is the young Delia anxiously waiting for her mother to come home; not seeing her mother causes panic. Delia stares out the window waiting for her mother to appear at the end of the street. She even uses her breath to fog up the window so that she will not have to see the empty street; if she cannot see Amalia, then she will control the not-seeing her; she also proceeds to hide out in a storage closet so as to cut herself off from the anxiety produced by looking for Amalia and not seeing her. This seemingly paradoxical set-up is reminiscent of the adult Delia who both feels anxiety when her mother doesn't arrive on time in Rome *and* dislikes tremendously her mother's visits, so much so that she must erase signs of her presence even after she leaves: when her mother departs and Delia can no longer see her. One of Delia's frustrations with Amalia's visits to Rome is how sociable she is with Delia's friends and neighbors; this sociability in which Amalia laughs and talks freely is precisely what angered Delia's father to the point of violence. Delia's gaze onto Amalia, and her relationship to her, is in this way aligned with a masculine culture and gaze that works to control Amalia's very presence.

Delia is, from an early age then, implicated in a masculine gaze of surveillance of Amalia. Furthermore, her assumed stance, associated with this type of gaze, endures in the present and informs Delia's time back in Naples and her "investigation." Laura Benedetti confirms this in her book *The Tigress in the Snow*: "The first daughter of an attractive eighteen-year-old woman, Delia was so influenced by her father's obsessive jealousy that she adopted his stance. Even as an adult, defending her mother from her uncle's insinuations, Delia uneasily admits her ambiguous feelings: 'Forse non tolleravo che la parte piú segreta di me si servisse della sua solidarietà per avvalorare un'ipotesi coltivata altrettanto segretamente'" (105). Here, "la sua solidarietà" refers to her father's solidarity. In other words, Delia begins to notice the way in which she has sided with her father in order to incriminate her mother and the ways in which this view of her mother persists.¹¹⁴ Delia's investigatory itinerary in Naples, her actual positioning in space, tends to evoke the ways in which Amalia was under constant male surveillance and ocular probing. When Delia returns to the neighborhood where she grew up she enters a familiar tunnel under an overpass, one which Amalia walked through from an early age and in which she became a sort of prey:

Lei doveva percorrere quei tunnel freschi e ombrosi quando andava a consegnare i guanti...Sotto il cavalcavia Amalia era stata inseguita da sfaccendati, ambulanti, ferrovieri, muratori...Raccontava...che la incalzavano fianco a fianco, spesso respirandole nell'orecchio. Cercavano di sfiorarle i capelli, una spalla, un braccio...Lei teneva gli occhi bassi e affrettava il passo. Dopo cominciava a correre piú veloce dell'inseguitore...Mi correva nella testa...Anche mio padre l'aveva braccata per quel tratto di strada, poco piú che

¹¹⁴ Giorgio also recognizes the ways in which Delia's relation to her mother has been structured by her father and an aggressively masculine Neapolitan culture; "In *L'amore molesto*, the daughter's desire for the mother is structured by the codes controlling the female body and sexuality in Neapolitan proletarian culture...Her (Delia's) reaction to maternal otherness is shaped by a culture and a language that associate love with violence and death. She models her love for and rage against Amalia upon the obsessive jealousy and abuse through which her father tries to control his wife's mind and body" (128-9). I find Giorgio's description of Delia's desire very helpful especially because of the way in which the gaze is implicated in representations of desire.

ventenne. Amalia raccontava che, a sentirselo alle calcagna, si era spaventata (133).

Here again we have a specific location in which Amalia is encased within a web of desiring male gazes that seek to reach and touch her. She is clearly the object of the gaze and is made to avert her own eyes downwards and away; she is literally followed by gazes, by men, by words. Amalia's attempt to escape, her running, is transferred to Delia's mind, since in this very moment Delia too, in her own way, is following, searching, and chasing Amalia; Delia too sees her and follows her with a mental gaze as she attempts to retrace Amalia's own movements both of the far and near past. The tunnel serves various purposes here since it is a partially occulted space where a woman could be trapped, but is also a type of conical shape that elicits a hole through which one spies. In general, this scene and space are an example of Delia's "investigation" of Amalia being implicated in a masculine gaze that has always surrounded and controlled her.

Delia's childhood desire to contain all parts of her mother, to enforce that nothing of her mother escapes her, runs the risk of aligning with a violent male possessiveness and objectification of Amalia's body. Both as a child who intently watches her mother as a way of keeping her near and as an adult "investigator" probing into her mother's life and person, we must be wary of allowing Delia's sleuthing to become another masculine gaze that in "solving" Amalia's death re-contains and defines her as its object. Indeed, one of the novel's central revelations, Delia's revelation, is that what she believed she saw as a child (her mother committing adultery) was in fact a fantasy hallucination that stood in place of, and covered over, Delia's own sexual abuse. Delia had unconsciously lied to her father when she ratted Amalia out. This faulty information confirms what Delia's father had always been convinced of, i.e., Amalia's flirtatious nature and unfaithfulness. Even Amalia's brother had chosen to side with Delia's father's version of Amalia. Up until the moment Delia re-considers her memory a fantasy construction she has sided with a male gaze that is able to see Amalia, know what she's doing, and, thus, have evidence of her guilt.

Similarly, Delia is explicitly aligned with a male discourse of Amalia when she posits suicide since she is, in effect, agreeing with her uncle Filippo who is implicitly the first to suggest it:

Amalia – si mise a gridare – non ci pensa mai in anticipo alle conseguenze: è stata sempre così, avrebbe dovuto sedersi a riflettere e aspettare; invece s'è svegliata una mattina e se n'è andata di casa...Non lo doveva fare, secondo zio Filippo. Mi accorsi presto che voleva far discendere da quella separazione di ventitré anni prima la decisione della sorella di annegarsi (51).

From Delia's perspective, Filippo's diatribe makes it clear that he considers Amalia's drowning to have been a decision, albeit a hasty one, made and carried out by Amalia herself. According to uncle Filippo, Amalia makes wild and unreasonable decisions; she should not have left her husband of 23 years. Delia understands his critique of Amalia's abandonment of her husband to be Filippo's way of understanding why Amalia chose to kill herself. In a way, he connects these two faulty decisions and seems to suggest that Amalia's drowning was a purposeful decision with its origin in her separation from her husband. That Delia goes on to assume her mother's suicide seems to me similar to the way in which as a child she adopts her father's and uncle's

vision of Amalia as out of control and hence engaging in adultery. It is interesting that in this above citation uncle Filippo does not say outright “Amalia killed herself,” but that Delia understands him as saying such; this inference that blends her uncle’s beliefs into her own, such that we glide over it not sure exactly who believes what, contributes to this notion that Delia’s perceptions of Amalia remain tied to and at times indistinguishable from a certain discourse of Amalia already established; who is it exactly that suggests Amalia’s suicide in this quote? Delia’s “misreading” of Amalia’s actions 20 years ago in the basement of the pastry shop, her creation of a story of Amalia, is perhaps a clue that we should not take her assumption/deduction of Amalia’s suicide at face value: an inverse hint that we should not accept Delia’s story as Amalia’s; Delia’s conversation with her father during which she announces Amalia’s suicide echoes the scene from her childhood when she falsely reports to her father that she saw Amalia with Caserta because she has adopted a stance that always assumes Amalia’s guilt.

Finally, we should not overlook the ways in which Delia’s investigation is related to Caserta’s relationship to Amalia and his obsessiveness. Caserta is certainly one of the voyeurs of Amalia; he is one who eyes her. In fact, the story of Amalia and Caserta began by his eye-ing her: “Ma aveva messo gli occhi addosso a mia madre” (40). Once back in Naples, Delia learns that her mother had re-connected, and re-developed (at the very least) a flirtatious friendship, with her former pursuant. During Delia’s childhood Caserta worked with her father before becoming overly flirtatious with Amalia, being brutally beaten by Delia’s father and uncle, and then driven out of Naples altogether. Caserta is depicted as being obsessional in his interest in Amalia both during Delia’s childhood and especially considering his re-appearance after so many years and his continued courtship of her. Amalia’s “lasciti” are then, also, in part, traces left behind by both Amalia and Caserta (we learn that he was with Amalia during her final days and hours *and* that they had been spending time together regularly). In fact, some of Amalia’s “clues,” for instance, her suitcase of birthday presents (a variety of clothing: dresses, a slip, a robe) meant for Delia, reach her via Caserta; he trades these presents with Delia for Amalia’s old under garments that Delia finds in a garbage bag next to the toilet in Amalia’s bathroom. The novel even suggests that Caserta may have acquired the clothing gifts in the suitcase himself and then given them to Amalia.¹¹⁵ Likewise, in the basement of Caserta’s father’s pastry shop, the series of clues that Delia finds, including her mother’s famous blue suit dress, that Karagoz takes as Amalia’s central “lascito,” have been collected and obsessively coveted by Caserta. Therefore, this scene and these findings bring Delia’s investigatory mode of clue gathering and deciphering into relation with Caserta’s fetishism of Amalia and her body; the objects that seem to allow for Delia’s narrative of Amalia’s final days and death make up a type of creepy shrine meant to evoke her presence and represent Caserta’s desire to oversee and manage that presence; if she cannot be present in the flesh, Caserta will construct her presence himself. In fact, Caserta’s fetishism of Amalia’s suit dress and body, echoes the young Delia’s relation to this article of clothing; in times of Amalia’s absence Delia would climb into Amalia’s armoire and up and into the skirt of her suit dress. To be inside the skirt was to be with Amalia’s body. That this initial male gaze of surveillance (a type of spying) fails in the final analysis to solve Amalia’s death, allows me to theorize the attempt at a new type of gaze from Delia onto her

¹¹⁵ See C.XVIII, p.107, when Caserta’s son tells Delia to return to him all of the new clothes found in Amalia’s suitcase. Delia has just found a birthday card from her mother in the pocket of one of the garments: «È roba mia» obiettai...«Me l’ha regalata mia madre per il mio compleanno». «È roba che ha preso mio padre dal negozio. Perciò me la restituisci» rispose...Mi immaginai Caserta che sceglieva quegli indumenti per me: colori, taglia, modelli” (107).

mother. I return to this revised, alternate gaze in the final section of this chapter but note here that the attempt to re-make the “detective” gaze into something else is an example of *L’amore molesto*’s straying from the crime genre.

This male operation with which Delia and her investigation is initially aligned is conjured only to be disallowed by the novel’s undermining of its own genre; we do not get an answer to Amalia’s death even when we think we do. The novel never allows us to *know* what happened to Amalia: whether she drowned by accident, or on purpose, or was murdered.¹¹⁶ Any information surrounding Amalia’s death is purposefully made ambiguous so that the hypothetical narrative of Amalia’s death is undermined by itself. In the novel’s final chapters, beginning from Chapter Twenty Three, Delia attempts to reconstruct Amalia’s final days with Caserta and how they led to her drowning. She is aided by the abundance of objects that she finds in the basement of the candy store; she finds train tickets, a hotel receipt, and an itemized receipt from a lavish dinner, which is included in every detail in the text. There is much that Delia can deduce from these clear indicators. However, the topographic and psychological itinerary that Delia’s narration constructs for Amalia is undermined by a linguistic and stylistic uncertainty and indecisiveness. For example, the handful of pages that describe Delia’s idea of Amalia’s final days and hours repeats often “forse”; “Ripensai alle telefonate che mi aveva fatto.. *forse* non era atterrita, *forse* era solo allegra; *forse* era allegra e atterrita” (my emphasis 151). Delia here conjectures about Amalia’s state of being, but the “forse” clearly subtracts from a sense of certainty. Four pages later Delia’s narration continues to conjure various possibilities; “*forse* Caserta si era solo offerto di farle compagnia durante il viaggio, *forse* per strada lei aveva cominciato a raccontare delle nostre villaggiature, *forse*,...aveva cominciato a smarrire il senso delle cose (my emphasis 155). Suffice it to say that the “forse’s” do not stop there and that other similarly indecisive terms are used like “probabilmente” or beginning a sentence with “ma...” or “invece” so as to undo, in part, the sentence that came before. Furthermore, the word choice used in this section generally infuses a certain amount of doubt into Delia’s rendition of the story; we read numerous times things like, “dubitavo che...,” “immaginavo...,” “Era possibile che...” This section also employs verbs that show Delia as imagining Amalia rather than actually having a coherent narrative; she seems to artistically conjure or paint an image: “La vedevo,” “La sentivo,” “La pensavo” all begin sentences more than once. Delia also explicitly doubts her own ability to understand what occurred: “Non riuscivo a valutare,” “Non fui capace” and “comunque fossero andate le cose...,” etc. It may seem a simple claim, but I take the clear ambiguity of the above citations at face value, i.e., the “true,” exact story cannot be known and is certainly not known by our narrator. Even if these handful of pages write a story of Amalia’s final days and hours, the language employed disrupts the validity and univocality of the account produced. In fact, almost every other sentence aids in the construction of an imagined hypothesis, or even fantasy, that Delia spins; much of the novel is, indeed, about and made up of Delia’s fantasy constructions of Amalia that may or may not adhere to aspects of reality.

Amalia cannot be pinned down and Delia’s narrative, particularly when it attempts to give an account of the story of her death, echoes this slipperiness; “La storia poteva essere più debole o più avvincente di quella che mi ero raccontata” (165). Delia herself admits that all she can really do is choose one line of reasoning and follow it; “Bastava tirare via un filo e seguirlo nella sua linearità semplificatoria” (165). In this way, Delia’s narrative of Amalia’s story of death undoes itself and its own validity. The use of “filo” in the above citation recalls Amalia’s

¹¹⁶ Benedetti is one of the only scholars who insists on Amalia’s mystery being left unresolved. See *The Tigress in the Snow* pgs. 104-7.

work as a tailor and dressmaker and the constructing and deconstructing of Delia's narrative account summons the way in which Amalia kept the same wardrobe for decades and just altered, by taking apart and putting back together, her clothing. Karagoz also links Amalia's work as dressmaker to Delia's narrative, but she never explicitly shows the way in which Delia's narrative of Amalia's death mystery stitches a narrative line together only to take it apart as possibly untrue; a making and unmaking characterize the novel's "final" account of the story of Amalia's death (even the novel's temporality that goes alternately forwards and backwards in time seems to evoke Amalia's taking apart and then putting back together). A maternal discourse under-writes the daughter's narration we read and a clear account of Amalia's final days and hours goes down with her; her absence, then, "disables" this aspect of the narrative. The vagueness that this section provokes and sustains seems to me to retroactively authorize a real doubt regarding Delia's assumption that her mother committed suicide. This burgeoning doubt allows us to re-consider Delia's statements about her mother's suicide earlier on in the novel as part and parcel of the male mediation guiding her take on Amalia. Delia does not know what happened to her mother and neither do we when we finish reading the novel. If we fill in for the dubiousness of Amalia's death, if we give it a clear answer, we miss that the novel specifically denies the crime genre mode and makes the investigation something other; the non-solving of Amalia's death creates a novelistic rupture that stays faithful to Delia's loss of Amalia, which speaks to a structure of loss that subtends selfhood.

3. Coming Undone and the Self-Rupture of Mourning

In order to focus on, and theorize, the rupture itself, my analysis turns to the experience of mourning as a practice of self. The narrative lacuna is in the service of a type of mourning that speaks to a different model of self tied to the loss of the maternal and deriving from her body. In a revisionary mode, we will now propose that *L'amore molesto* recounts the first few days of the protagonist's mourning the loss of her mother.¹¹⁷ In this way, the daughter's mourning and investigation overlap and this intersection alters the standard crime narrative. I seek to redefine the terms of the daughter's investigation as a mourning that has no resolution or tidying effect and in so doing demonstrate the epistemological consequences that result. As noted, a common interpretation of *L'amore molesto* is that Delia goes on a "journey" in which she reconstitutes her mother's story and in so doing re-writes her own narrative of self. While the figure of her mother is certainly altered by way of Delia's "investigation" and this re-

¹¹⁷ This is not a perspective heretofore explicitly taken up in regards to this novel. In part I believe this has to do with the fact that Delia and Amalia's relationship is depicted with such ambivalence. From the start, Delia is portrayed as trying to evade and limit their interactions and intimacy. It is difficult to know with any certainty how Delia actually feels about her mother and, therefore, her mourning the loss of Amalia is not straightforward, nor easily ascertained. However, avoiding the question of mourning is similar to Delia's own impulse to deny her relationship to her mother and would be a way in which criticism might collude in the matricidal literary norm described by Hirsch. Paradoxically, to hover over the loss of the mother and the grieving that ensues *is itself* a way to counter the literary operation of matricide, and thus to use matricide against itself.

visioning affects Delia's own sense of self, I aim to complicate this set-up by re-routing Delia's investigation through her experience of mourning as a practice of self that has no arrival point, no end in sight: no final revelatory core of self.

L'amore molesto, then, strategically utilizes matricide, Amalia's actual death, to create the conditions for a female mourning (Delia's grief) that can be used to re-think and re-imagine subjectivity; a grieving that challenges the telos of the traditional crime investigation since there is no "end" to either. Some critics have noted that Amalia's death seems to lead to the daughter's "re-birth," but I am suggesting that the matricide of *L'amore molesto* is recruited in a new way; it is not that Delia can only narrate herself once her mother is left behind, but, rather, *that the loss of her mother structures her very sense of self*. Interestingly, Ferrante's novel does not avoid or erase the current patriarchal structure but, instead, uses it against itself. It is by way of Delia's mourning that selfhood, no longer bound to a gendered structure of knowledge, is re-envisioned. The break created by the loss of the mother serves as an indication of a constitutive rupture of self.

Before looking in depth at sections of *L'amore molesto*, I draw from two pages of Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* because they articulate a notion of subject-ness tethered to the experience of mourning. In Chapter One, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," Butler recruits the state of mourning as one type of *becoming undone*, and she links this loss or rupture of self to the condition of being a subject "in the thrall" of our relations with others. Butler abandons a notion of mourning as a private and temporary act from which one heals and then moves on. From this revised perspective, mourning cannot be planned or managed, but is, instead, "when one accepts the fact that the loss one undergoes will be one that changes you...possibly forever, and that mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation the full result of which you cannot know in advance" (18). According to Butler, during mourning something takes hold of us, something claims us in a way that threatens our sense of self-mastery and coherence. When we grieve we lose our composure, we fall apart, we are undone by another, or more specifically, by our relation to that other; we do not stay intact, even if we want to. Butler writes,

...in this experience something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that those ties constitute a sense of self, compose who we are, and that when we lose them, *we lose our composure in some fundamental sense*: we do not know who we are or what to do. Many people think that grief is privatizing...but I think that it exposes the constitutive sociality of the self (18).

In this way, Butler insists on the inadequacy of claiming that we "have" relations and that these relations can be looked at, assessed, and easily accounted for. Instead, she posits grief as putting on display a way in which we are "in the thrall of our relations with others...that challenges the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (18-19). Butler reminds us that if this is the case with grief, it is firstly the case with desire; rather than claiming as possessions, for example, *my* sexuality or *my* gender, these identifications are then more precisely "ways of being for another or...*by virtue of* another" (19). This laying claim to oneself, this saying "my sexuality," is simultaneously a rupture of that self, *a mode of being dispossessed* by, and in relation to, others. The emphasis here is that this rupture beyond one's control is constitutive of

identity itself and is, paradoxically, a loss of self: a loss in relation to a connection that takes one away from, and outside of, themselves.

To begin to unpack the resonances of Butler's prose in relation to *L'amore molesto* I would state the obvious, i.e., that the novel's opening sentence announcing Amalia's death allows us to read all that follows as within the purview of Delia's state of mourning; the loss of her mother threatens to disrupt almost everything and both thematically and stylistically the novel itself can be read as participating in the experience of grieving: rupture ensues, things fall apart, everything threatens to come undone. For Delia, the very city of Naples seems to come apart, "la città disciolta" (17), and to alter its topography altogether: "Avevo l'impressione che mia madre si stesse portando via anche i luoghi, anche i nomi delle vie" (17). This quote is particularly thorough in its dismantling in that Amalia's death (here, more specifically, the moment in which Amalia's coffin has been placed in the hearse and it takes off: the departure of her very body) causes a physical instability of actual sites *and* a tremulousness of language's ability to organize and define such space; the physical topography of Naples is under threat as is the linguistic topography by which Delia makes sense of space and puts herself in relation to it, i.e., by way of language's role in naming and recognition. That the loss of Amalia, more precisely her body, is represented as having the power to remove the names of the streets seems to speak to a relationship between the maternal and the meaning making of language, and, specifically, between the loss of the maternal body and language.¹¹⁸ The loss of the mother's body has the potential to loosen languages' fixity to things and therefore its powers of representation and recognition; meaning itself is under siege and uncertain. This slippage of signified from signifier, as in the literalized image of the street name detaching itself from the signpost and drifting away, is an example of a texture of non-fixedness, of an actual slipperiness, which I locate in this novel.

Additionally, because Amalia's death initiates the novel, Delia's mourning colors her depictions and memories of her mother and their relationship more generally throughout the narrative. Delia's relationship with her mother is portrayed as always having had the potential to incite a type of spatial and corporeal undoing. For example, it is Amalia's bustling around and cleaning Delia's apartment that is metaphorically linked to an elasticity and changeability of Delia's very body; "avevo l'impressione che sfaccendando mi trasformasse il corpo" (9-10).¹¹⁹ Even Amalia's habit of tidying and re-arranging Delia's apartment when she visits signals a way in which she affects Delia's very sense of a corporeal self. That Delia's body could alter itself based on the actions of another hints at a type of corporeal dispossession already active. The novel recounts Delia's attempts to re-assert herself, her autonomy and difference, by undoing her mother's ordering once she has left; "Io mi aggiravo per le stanze risistemando secondo il mio

¹¹⁸ Here it feels as though we are treading on Muraro's territory in her attempts to unite the maternal body and language in *L'ordine simbolico della madre*; language is learned through the mother and a contiguity with her body. But, here, via Butler, we are instead locating a relationship between the loss of the mother (and her body) and a way in which language is dispossessing, takes us away from ourselves, precisely when we might want to use it to root ourselves more firmly in sites of identity (See also Butler's "Giving an Account of Oneself"). In this way, my reading of *L'amore molesto* might begin to offer a way into thinking Butler and certain Italian feminisms together (Muraro, but also Cavarero) since the self-dispossession of Delia's selfhood seems first and foremost about a relationship to the maternal body that constitutes her. This point is further developed in this section.

¹¹⁹ Here, again, we see a correspondence, and perhaps slipperiness, between spaces (Naples, Delia's apartment) and bodies (Amalia's, Delia's) whereby to alter one is to alter the other.

gusto tutto quello che lei aveva disposto secondo il suo...restituivo al caos” (10). Delia’s “undoing” of her mother’s work mimics the very “undoing” that her mother threatens; if Delia attempts to undo the work of her mother and restore her spatial sense of self she does so only by re-enacting her mother’s ability to undo her by “restoring” the chaos of her apartment: the moment of self-re-composure is paradoxically an instance of de-composure, of taking one’s world apart.

I would also add that stylistically *L’amore molesto* begins to break down in a way that threatens chronology and a sense of reality; it becomes increasingly difficult to understand which moments and events are actually taking place, which scenes are flashback memories, and which are pure hallucination or fantasy. In fact, it may be that in the textual economy of the novel there is no final way to cleanly differentiate between memory, hallucination, fantasy, and even, at times, present reality and that this inability is related to the loss of Amalia and the mourning that ensues.¹²⁰ I am thinking of an early scene in the novel in which Delia hallucinates, fantasizes, or remembers walking in on her mother changing her menstrual pad in the bathroom (19), and an encounter between Delia and Amalia within an elevator that seems to combine elements of memory and hallucination (24-26). Another useful scene to consider from this perspective takes place in the Amalia’s bathroom, after the funeral, where Delia sifts through her mother’s hamper of dirty laundry and her wastebasket of discarded clothes. During this scene, Amalia re-appears, seems to come back to life, and all of a sudden is in the bathroom with Delia: “Amalia ora sedeva sulla tazza e mi guardava con attenzione mentre mi depilavo” (31). Delia goes on to wax Amalia’s legs for her, deriving some satisfaction from the pain she potentially causes. One assumes that this waxing scene is a flashback of an actual past interaction, but we do not know for certain how much of the scene is actual memory and how much fantasy.¹²¹ The abruptness of the waxing scene’s interruption into the present moment of narration makes it read like an unwanted hallucination and, thus, challenges our understanding and the smoothness of our reading; we are thrown in and out of hallucinatory memories that disturb our sense of temporality and chronology (chronological certainty seems a necessity in the reconstruction of the events leading to the crime that the detective must organize into a linear, cause and effect structure). Most important, and challenging to our understanding of events and characters, is the temporal and ontological confusions deriving from Delia’s return to her childhood haunt, “la bottega di dolci” (92), a pastry and candy shop owned by Caserta’s father, and more specifically the basement space underneath the shop. As described earlier, Delia’s re-entry into the store basement sets off a series of memories, some of which, we come to understand, *may* only have been fantasy and/or hallucinatory memory; it turns out that Delia’s memory of her mother and Caserta kissing was, *perhaps*, only a fantasy stand-in for Delia’s own sexual abuse at the hands of Caserta’s father. I draw attention to “perhaps” so as to highlight the language of the scene itself, which in more ways than one, infuses doubt into the moment of “revelation”: tutte le cose che in realtà il nonno di Antonio aveva detto e *forse* fatto a me” (163 my emphasis). It is a tricky

¹²⁰ Furthermore, I take this suggestion of an inability to differentiate the real and actual from their counterparts as a type of foreshadowing of the text’s larger inability to settle on a singular truth or version of Amalia’s death story.

¹²¹ In fact, one consequence of this novel’s tendency towards an unclear differentiation between memory and fantasy may be a consideration of the impossibility, the irreality, of sealing them off from one another. The novel seems to suggest an almost necessary contamination between the two, a mutual and “productive” inflection, i.e., that there is no memory devoid of fantasy and, vice versa, no fantasy independent of memory.

epiphanic moment that has “in realtà” immediately undermined by “forse.” Delia’s apparent memories of playing sexual games with Caserta’s son Antonio in the basement may also serve as hallucinatory stand-ins for her abuse, or as actual memory supplements for Amalia and Caserta’s real or imagined canoodling, although we never learn this for sure. This ontological difficulty seems an important way in which the novel challenges the empirical sanctity of the crime novel; if Delia’s activities are comparable to the investigatory clue gathering and deciphering of a detective, her (and the novel’s) inability to keep separate fact and fiction (a narrative strategy that affects the reader’s capacity to understand what actually occurs or occurred) certainly undermines the genre’s assumed telos dependent on deduction. I suggest that this collapse of the real and the unreal functions as a symptom of Delia’s mourning and contributes to a stumbling of the investigatory telos of *L’amore molesto*, one that seems (at least) twofold: to unravel the mystery of Amalia’s death *and* to revise Amalia’s larger life narrative in a way that allows Delia to re-imagine herself.

Above all, Delia’s mourning is linked to various bodily fluids, sweat, vomit, blood, cum, that all demonstrate that the body acts without her conscious consent.¹²² Furthermore, these normal bodily functions evoke a sensation of possible dissolution. For example, after her mother’s funeral, Delia retires to Amalia’s apartment where she violently vomits: “Lì non riuscii più a trattenere i conati di vomito e per qualche secondo ebbi paura che tutto il corpo si scatenasse contro di me, con una furia autodistruttiva” (48). Delia’s body is here depicted as capable of unleashing itself against her, of turning against her, in a self-destructive manner. The use of “scatenare,” a verb that literally refers to a chain coming unhooked, evokes a body whose connective links might lose their ligatures. Earlier, while walking between her sisters during their mother’s funeral procession, Delia’s narration links a few forms of mourning that figure the body acting on its own and losing its composure in some fundamental way: “Le mie due sorelle mi si stringevano ai lati. Ne sorreggevo una per un braccio perché temevo che svenisse. L’altra si afferrava a me come se gli occhi troppo gonfi le impedissero di vedere. Quel discogliersi involontario del corpo mi spaventò come la minaccia di una punizione” (14). One sister’s body cannot hold itself up, might lose its stability and faint, while the other sister has cried so much her eyes are nearly swollen shut; here, I consider body fluids, such as tears, as a part of the corporeal self that leaves the body, that passes the epidermal threshold, taking a part of the self away: a sort of natural auto-destruction. Parenthetically, the chain of three sisters offering support also seems to figure the self that is unhooked by, and in, its relation to others; Delia’s two sides, each sister, are dissolving, losing themselves and threatening to take Delia down in the process: the chain unleashes itself. It is as though the chronologically earlier chain of sisters evolves into the internalized metaphor of the self becoming unhooked from itself and with this succession speaks to the self-unhinging as deriving from our connections/disconnections with/from others. That the language used to depict the body during vomiting is reminiscent of the description from the funeral is also, explicitly, a way that the body’s loss of fluids remains tied to grief.

The most central and first bodily loss implicated in Delia’s mourning is her menstrual period, which initially stands in for the traditional body language of tears. (I say “first” literally,

¹²² In her recent article “Mothers, Daughters, Dolls: On Disgust in Elena Ferrante’s *La figlia oscura*” Stilianka Milkova analyzes some of these bodily fluids (found in more than one of Ferrante’s novels) from the perspective of disgust as an operative trope of motherhood, daughterhood, and the pregnant female body.

because we are on p.4 of the text and at the first sentence of the funeral scene).¹²³ It is significant that Delia gets her period during her mother's funeral, and, more precisely, as Amalia's body is being taken away.¹²⁴ The immediate link between Amalia's funeral and Delia's bleeding is part of what makes menstruation the primary body language of mourning in this novel. In the span of a few sentences, we read of Delia's inability to cry, "Non ero riuscita a versare una lacrima: non me ne erano venute," and the unexpected arrival of her period: "Durante il funerale mi sopresi a pensare che finalmente non avevo più l'obbligo di preoccuparmi per lei. Subito dopo avvertii un flusso tiepido e mi sentii bagnata tra le gambe (14) (It is also, in fact, inbetween these two references, to tears and blood, that we get "Quel discogliersi involontario del corpo..."). The surprise is twofold: the first idea of her mother being released from her thoughts seems to cause the subsequent sentence and the release of the warm flow of blood from between Delia's legs; to evacuate her mother from consciousness is to lose a part of her own body. Delia's loss of menstrual blood is, furthermore, associated with the funeral procession that follows the hearse containing Amalia's body; "A un certo punto temetti che il sangue cominciasse a scorrermi lungo le caviglie e tentai di sottrarmi alle mie sorelle. Fu impossibile. Dovetti attendere che il corteo curvasse per la piazza, si inerpicasse per via Don Bosco e si sciogliesse infine in un ingorgo d'auto e di folla" (17). Both because of the nearness of these descriptions and their linguistic similarities, Delia's flow of blood that might escape her control and pour down her legs is directly related to the movement of the procession that she cannot free herself of as it curves its way through the streets and then finally dissolves into a mass. In particular, it is the repetition of the word "sciogliere" to describe the sweeping movement and unraveling of the procession that Delia is helpless against, that recalls the "discogliersi involontario del corpo" from earlier. Both flows herald a bodily loss of control tied to the loss of Amalia.

More specifically, the act of moving Amalia's coffin, depositing it in the hearse, and the departure of the car and body, seems to lead to Delia's release of blood:

Poiché quelli che trasportavano la cassa insieme con me...erano più alti, avevo temuto per tutto il percorso che il legno mi entrasse tra clavicola e collo insieme al corpo che conteneva. Quando la bara era stata deposta nel carro e questo si era avviato, erano bastati pochi passi e un sollievo colpevole perché la tensione precipitasse in quel fiotto segreto del ventre. Il liquido caldo che usciva da me senza che lo volessi mi diede l'impressione di un segnale convenuto tra estranei dentro il mio corpo (16).

Here I highlight that Delia's period is portrayed as an uncontrollable bodily expression, almost at the hands of another (at the hands of strangers, so there's a sense of trespassing and almost a "furto" of sorts, she is being robbed of a part of her body), and one that is connected to, indeed seems to derive from, the idea and sensation of the loss of her mother, and, specifically, of her

¹²³ Delia's menstrual blood is mentioned in Mullenneaux's and Sambuco's studies of the novel, but in both cases only briefly. Furthermore, neither article connects Delia's menstruation with the memory scene of Amalia's menstruation.

¹²⁴ If I were to develop my analysis of the theme of menstruation and its relationship to mourning (specifically, the female line) within the Italian literary tradition I would link this moment of *L'amore molesto* to Fabrizia Ramondino's *Althénopis* since there the significant death of the grandmother coincides with the onset of the protagonist's first period. Giorgio mentions briefly this moment in Ramondino's novel, see p.126-127.

mother's body. The coffin is envisioned as no longer able to contain Amalia's body, and both are imagined penetrating and entering Delia's neck. This fantasy scenario allows for the double departure of mother and blood to not only be causally related, but figurally one and the same experience of a type of bodily dispossession; it is as if Delia bleeds her mother. Delia's body is brought into relation with her mother's body just as that body leaves and carries a part of Delia away with it; loss and connection become inseparable and the effect of maternal loss is likened to foreigners taking over one's body and effecting a partial, literalized, self-loss. These bodily eruptions, and most noticeably menstrual bleeding, speak to, and inform, our way of being in relation to others, that, perhaps paradoxically, comes into relief by way of losing another; specifically, a being with (and without) another that is likened to a physical self-dispossession. Furthermore, this transfer of attention from tears to menstrual blood posits this notion of self as deriving from a female corporeal experience; the gender specificity is crucial: the loss of the maternal body is linked to the daughter's loss of menstrual blood and Delia's body mourns for (or against) her (Delia).¹²⁵

The most explicit scene of menstruation in the novel further links it to Delia's mourning. Delia manages to break away from the funeral procession and to find a bathroom at a bar where she can clean up her blood. Once in the bathroom, Delia's interaction with her own "flusso di sangue" evolves into either an imagined interaction or memory of her mother changing her sanitary napkin:

Chiesi del bagno e mi infilai nel retrobottega, in uno sgabuzzino puzzolente con la tazza lurida e un lavandino giallastro.

Il flusso di sangue era copioso. Ebbi un senso di nausea e un lieve capogiro.

Vidi nella penombra mia madre a gambe larghe che sganciava una spilla di sicurezza, si staccava dal sesso, come se fossero incollati, dei panni di lino insanguinati, si girava senza sorpresa e mi diceva con calma: «Esci, che fai qui?». Scoppiiai a piangere, per la prima volta dopo molti anni (19).

This scene is striking because of how unusual it is to find a representation of a daughter seeing her mother replace a sanitary napkin (or even a daughter seeing her mother's menstrual flow so explicitly). We are getting a snapshot of a female experience we have not seen represented before and this de-familiarizing aspect needs to be considered; we too feel that we have "walked in" on something that we are not supposed to see and that we could be told to "Esci." The "sgabuzzino" is one of the many small spaces in the novel that Ferrante seems to load with the possibility of

¹²⁵ Patrizia Sambuco is the one scholar who explicitly mentions Delia's menstruation during her mother's funeral as a symbol of their bond and then briefly mentions other bodily reactions: "Delia's rigid psychological armour of pragmatic rationality is abruptly unsettled by a sudden and abundant menstruation that appears, significantly, at the moment she is carrying her mother's corpse. This event is charged with symbolism, the mother's corpse seeming to have a physical effect on the daughter's body. Menstruation functions in this sense as a symbol of that bonding with the mother from which Delia has tried rationally to distance herself, but which erupts nevertheless. Other elements in the story highlight the way in which bodily reactions disrupt the daughter's rational self" (133). Sambuco does not mention, though, that the blood leaving Delia's body mimics Amalia's taking leave of Delia; nor does she explicitly tie Delia's menstruation to her mourning. My point is that the "bond" is a self-rupture.

evoking the mother's body.¹²⁶ Delia's occupation of small spaces becomes a topos of the text that gestures towards a being in relation to Amalia's body, that is, a being both with and without her mother's body (she goes to these dark, solitary spaces to deal with her mother's absence). Importantly, these spaces and the maternal body are not idealized, even here there is something unsettling about catching her mother in the private act of changing her menstruation pad.¹²⁷ Menstruation is here explicitly an experience with and to one's body that connects, in time and space, mother and daughter.

To return to this scene of Delia seeing her mother's menstrual flow, Delia watches her mother remove her bloody pad attached by a safety pin. The detail of Delia's impression that Amalia detaches something attached to her genitals, "si staccava dal sesso, come se fossero incollati," reads as a slightly disturbing, almost violent "staccarsi dal/del corpo." [removal from, or of, the body]. Delia, having intruded upon Amalia's private act, is ordered to leave. The notion of a dispossession works well here as a "being deprived of the occupancy of something" since Delia is simultaneously made to leave a space, leave her mother, and release parts of her body. The leaving and separation *is* the loss of the mother for which Delia finally erupts into tears. Being in relation to Amalia and her body is described here as implicated in a loss of that relation bound to the experience of a corporeal loss of one's own body, now both blood and tears. It is significant that in this scene Delia cries for the first time in years and that this unexpected rarity occurs during Delia's heavy menstrual bleeding; this coincidence brings these two body releases even more strongly into relation and binds them to, and through, the act of mourning. It is as if the bleeding sets in motion the crying, and thus takes center stage in this novel's language of loss; in this figuration then, mourning and loss have a relation to one's sexuality, and by extension to one's sense of self as both sexual and reproductive. Both mourning and menstruation are then figures for selfhood resting on forms of connection structured by loss. In *L'amore molesto* the menstrual self-dispossession of mourning as a way of thinking subjecthood is an experience connecting, and handed down from, mother to daughter since here the loss of Amalia is figured as a loss of menstrual blood *and* because Delia's period is presented as an experience implicitly shared with Amalia, even if explicitly privatized and isolating. Menstruation as a private act, but one that, in fact, speaks to a shared bodily experience of loss passed down from mother to

¹²⁶ I am thinking, specifically, of the storeroom that Delia hides in to manage her anxiety regarding her mother's absences and the elevator cabin that Delia has similarly used as a secret hideout. In the way in which these spaces evoke Amalia's body we have again a connection between space and body.

¹²⁷ We should note that blood has a strong presence in crime narratives and that here its appearance is altered. It is often the victim's blood that takes center stage in crime fiction since it is often *the* marker of a violent crime and a motif of 'the scene of the crime.' Amalia, whether murdered or not, can be considered the primary victim of *L'amore molesto* or at least its first explicit victim and the only dead body of the novel. Interestingly though, Amalia's "bloodiness" is not via her dead body, which Delia witnesses and describes as "quell'oggetto livido...Presentava solo qualche ecchimosi, dovuta alle onde del resto lievi...Osservai a lungo, con disagio, le sue gambe olivastre, straordinariamente giovani per una donna di sessantatré anni" (15). Rather, Amalia is bloody because her menstruation is portrayed and because Delia's narration recalls instances of domestic violence against Amalia that leaves her covered in blood. Importantly, menstrual blood is a bloodiness shared by Amalia and Delia. It is also important that just as Amalia's dead body is not one of the bloody bodies of the novel, neither is it the grotesque or repellent body of the novel. Here, the repellent body is transferred from the dead maternal corpus onto the sexualized maternal body. A sexualized mother and maternal body is what is repellent and is what the novel insists upon. The scene of Amalia's menstruation and a later memory scene in which Amalia shows Delia her sagging "pancia" are related scenes that both insist on a grotesquely sexualized maternal body.

daughter (and is furthermore a sign of the very fertility that allows the genealogical chain to continue) reminds me, here, of Butler's claim that we have come to believe that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a brutal understanding of our "true" isolation and autonomy, while her use of mourning does just the opposite; for Butler the disruption of loss and mourning puts on display the very rupture of self at the hands of others that makes us. Thus, grief, while being an experience brought about by loss and a sense of abandonment signals connections that both compose us *and* are necessarily undoing; the connection is via the loss.

Menstruation, as a sign of fertility and mother-daughter relationality recalls Adriana Cavarero's insightful re-reading of the myth of Demeter. Cavarero points to Demeter's maternal power to cease generating when her daughter Kore is abducted; her power is both as source of life and her ability to threaten sterility. This threat of sterility forces Hades, Kore's abductor and the lord of the underworld (death), to return Kore to Demeter for a certain period of time every year; when the mother-daughter relation is reestablished and made visible to both mother and daughter (they see one another) Demeter restores fertility to earth; "the maternal power to generate is coextensive with the reciprocal visibility of mother and daughter. Demeter must see Kore and be seen by her" (60-61). Cavarero reads in this myth a recognition of maternity as the matrix of all humans: a maternal continuum that speaks to the feminine root of every being. Finally, the power of fertility shared by both mother and daughter is not an automatic or obligatory process since *she* can decide not to generate. I think Cavarero's reading of Demeter and Kore is useful here because of the way in which *L'amore molesto* uses menstruation as a link between mother and daughter, and one that the novel makes visible both to its readers, but, importantly, visible to Delia when she sees Amalia bleeding and Amalia sees her seeing her bleed. It is, then, tellingly a scene of both Delia's and Amalia's menstruation that initiates some sort of reciprocal gaze between mother and daughter, even if here it is not yet fully accomplished. Secondly, we are reminded of Delia's ambiguous reflection on her own fertility; that she is close to menopause and has chosen not to reproduce *or* has been unable to (see p.77). The suggestion here is that Delia's ability, and decision, to reproduce is affected by an inability to connect with her mother; to have completely disidentified with Amalia creates a difficulty in Delia's sense of herself as part of a female continuum with the choice to reproduce or not.¹²⁸ We should consider how this memory/hallucination produces an attempt to reconnect with this maternal origin and its bestowal of fertility as the choice to reproduce or not. More specifically, however, this feminine "power" is complexly depicted as a self-loss deriving from an experience of relationality to one's mother and a different type of *bloodline* (i.e., an alternative to patriarchy).

Another important (but not often discussed) scene of *L'amore molesto* features a body losing different liquids without its consent. In the one explicit sex scene that takes place during the present narration of events, Delia and Caserta's son Antonio retire to a hotel room where Delia can clean herself up after chasing Caserta through downtown Naples in the rain. After showering, Antonio perfunctorily initiates sex with Delia; she is neither surprised nor turned-on, but consents without resistance to a familiar performance. Interestingly, Delia's body again seems to act of its own accord, producing copious amounts of liquid that do not correspond to a very mild sensation of pleasure never resulting in an orgasm: "Ma io non avvertivo nient'altro che quel piacere diffuso, gradevole e tuttavia non urgente. Ero sicura da tempo che non avrei mai superato quella soglia" (110). While Delia reflects on her inability to reach sexual climax and

¹²⁸ This is the basis for Benedetti's reading of *L'amore molesto*, see pgs.104-107.

experience pleasure, her body behaves in its own way, and perhaps somewhat in contrast, by producing an exaggerated amount of discharge, sweat and saliva:

Inoltre ero paralizzata da un imbarazzo crescente per i liquidi copiosi che stavo versando. Anche quando da ragazza cercavo di masturbarmi accadeva così. Il piacere si diffondeva tiepidamente, senza nessun crescendo, e la pelle cominciava subito a bagnarsi. Per quanto mi carezzassi, ottenevo solo che gli umori del corpo debordassero: la bocca, invece di seccarsi, si riempiva di una saliva che mi pareva gelida; il sudore colava dalla fronte, dal naso, dalle guance; le ascelle diventavano pozze; non un centrimetro di pelle restava asciutto; il sesso si faceva così liquido, che le dita vi scivolavano sopra senza attrito e non sapevo più se mi stavo veramente toccando o immaginavo soltanto di farlo...(110).

During her sexual encounter with Antonio, and when as a girl she masturbated, Delia's body becomes so disproportionately wet with fluids that her body seems to overflow and spill out of itself; she becomes so slippery with liquids over every inch of her body that it seems that nothing can hold. Her body that might experience pleasure turns so much to liquid that nothing can establish enough friction with which she might feel the caresses and stroking; fingers slip so quickly off her body that she does not even feel them. Things seem to slip away from, and pour out of, her body; these liquids produced by Delia's body, like her sister's tears, but more importantly like Delia's menstrual blood, leave her body and, in effect, take some of her corporeal self with them. We have already mentioned the sense of slipperiness and dissolving that dominates the texture of *L'amore molesto* and it seems here that Delia's body produces so much liquid that it threatens to nearly turn wholly to liquid form; her body could dissolve, could lose itself through the sex act, and even through masturbation, literally, at its own hands; the body seems to lose itself in the precise moment in which it attempts to experience itself as a sexual being that seeks pleasure.

While on the surface this scene of sexual intimacy and the memories of masturbation that ensue have nothing to do with Amalia, I point to a possible connection to the maternal and her body. The scene caught in between the chase scene and the sex scene provides a critical link that ties the uncontrollable liquidity of Delia's (sexual) body to Amalia. Before Antonio enters the hotel room, Delia cleans herself up in the bathroom and eventually takes a shower, the sensation of which leads Delia to a new, visceral perception of the relation between mother and daughter's bodies:

Lasciai scorrere l'acqua prima di infilarmi sotto il getto...Mi insaponavo accuratamente...Mia madre, che da anni esisteva solo come un'incombenza fastidiosa, a volte come un assillo, era morta. Ma mentre mi strofinavo il viso vigorosamente...mi resi conto con tenerezza inattesa che invece *avevo Amalia sotto la pelle, come un liquido caldo che mi era stato iniettato* chissà quando (104-105 my emphasis).

Here, Amalia is figured as a warm liquid injected underneath Delia's skin. Interestingly, the reference to Amalia as having been, in part, a nag would metaphorically be a way in which she got under Delia's skin. This metaphor is literalized, and re-signified with positive connotations, in the experiential image of feeling Amalia as a liquid inside of her body. That this image occurs sequentially right before the sex scene and Delia's heavy release of fluids allows me to propose a

relationship between them; Amalia as liquid beneath Delia's skin erupts out of Delia's body in the form of saliva, sweat and discharge. Delia's profuse liquidity enacts the loss of her mother recalled immediately prior, "era morta," and specifically the loss of her mother's body, a loss that *came out of* a connection. Again, as in the loss of menstrual blood, the loss of Amalia becomes a corporeal self-dispossession enacting a loss of self at the hands of another put into relief by the experience of grief; the loss of an other threatens to undo the self. Interestingly, the paragraph in question begins with a final mention of Delia's menstruation, which seems to have abruptly ended: "Mi spogliai e mi tolsi l'assorbente interno: le mestruazioni parevano bruscamente finite" (104). This mention of the cease of blood flow allows for the transfer to water and other body fluids that evoke the loss of Amalia and act upon the body to take it outside of itself, to make it other to itself.

If grief, as an ec-static condition of being beside oneself, can be used to re-conceive of gender and sexuality as modes of being dispossessed by and for others, then we should not be surprised to find a certain type of mourning, figured earlier by Delia's loss of menstrual blood, activated in a scene of bodily intimacy. Importantly, Delia's problematic sexuality, her inability to experience pleasure, is related to an inability to identify with Amalia, and a certain fantasy of Amalia's brand of sexuality. Because Delia adopted from her father an image of Amalia as dangerously sexual (she experiences too much pleasure) and therefore bad and guilty, her rejection of Amalia and of a connection between them, leads to Delia's distancing from her own pleasure and sexuality. When Delia begins to recall the way in which she projected her own sexual experience onto Amalia, in effect being both herself and Amalia at once, she locates an essential difference; "Era Amalia a provare tutto il piacere: a me restava solo il terrore. Più le cose accadevano, più mi indispettivo, perché non riuscivo a essere «io» nel piacere di lei" (162). Delia must not be like Amalia and this disidentification separates Delia from herself as a subject of desire and pleasure; Delia has been unable to identify with her own pleasure. To reject all identification with Amalia is, in a way, to seal off the possibility of pleasure. The use of the word "soglia" in Delia's narration of her own sexuality is, therefore, extremely telling ("Ero sicura da tempo che non avrei mai superato quella soglia") since we find a similar figuration during a memory scene during which Delia describes an inability to connect with Amalia and in particular an inability to cross a threshold when it comes to her mother's sexual body. Delia recalls a few months earlier bringing Amalia into her old hiding space, the elevator, and asking her whether or not she has had any lovers since leaving Delia's father. Amalia responds sarcastically by pulling up her skirt to expose her flaccid belly and unsexy underpants; she even tries to make Delia feel her sagging stomach in order to demonstrate how unattractive and non-sexual her body is. Delia's narration makes it clear, however, that she does not believe in Amalia's proclaimed abstinence. Delia's memory of this encounter, ends with an image of a split-self; she had kicked Amalia out of the elevator and then instead of imagining Amalia out on the landing, Delia envisions herself spying on herself: "Ero spiata, non da quell'Amalia di mesi prima che ormai era morta, ma da me stessa..." (26). In the final paragraph of the chapter Delia states, "C'era una linea che non riuscivo a varcare, quando pensavo ad Amalia" (27). I draw a connection between these two scenes because they both deal with (a problematic) sexuality, first Amalia's, and then Delia's, grotesquely sexualized body, but also because of the mention and imaging of a threshold that cannot be crossed. Delia's inability to surpass a certain line of demarcation between her and Amalia is directly related to her own inability to orgasm (cross a "soglia di piacere"); the two thresholds overlap in order to suggest that Delia's non-orgasmic body is a result of disidentifying with Amalia's sexuality. In this way, the novel suggests that in

order for Delia to become a desiring subject in her own right she must, in part, identify with her mother and in so doing “become other,” be transported outside of herself; once again, subjectivity refigures as a connection via a type of self-loss: a sense of self *is* a loss of one’s sense of self; this is, strangely, agency.

4. A New Way of Seeing

In numerous ways, then, Delia’s selfhood occurs by way of being comported outside of herself; her agency lies precisely in this mode of being other, and the resultant possibility of *seeing with another’s eyes*, and, in particular, with Amalia’s eyes. This operation of being taken outside the self in order to see with another’s eyes is, in this novel, ultimately in the service of establishing a mother-daughter gaze that is not mediated by, or detoured through, the male gaze of Delia’s father, her uncle, Caserta, and a culture of patriarchy. It is also, simultaneously, a way of making Amalia a seeing subject, no longer merely the object of a web of gazes. Once the investigatory gaze is denied or undermined by the lack of an answer to Amalia’s death, space for a different type of daughterly gaze opens up and onto her mother, but, importantly, Amalia too is a seer and sees Delia. I believe that the itinerary of *L’amore molesto* becomes the attempt to constitute a new gaze between mother and daughter that does not take root in, nor detour through, a masculine gaze of surveillance and knowing. Furthermore, this male gaze onto Amalia that Delia inherits has structured her own gaze onto herself. We are brought back to the question of *Bildung* here since Delia must learn how to see herself differently. I believe that this experimental itinerary of seeing the self differently can be observed in the two scenes in which Delia looks at herself in a mirror and seems to also be evoking her mother’s presence; she seems to speak to herself and her mother at once. A revised investigation allows for the possibility of a different type of gaze onto the self that, here, moves through a restored gaze between mother and daughter. The obvious question remains: how can the novel re-make a mother-daughter gaze when Amalia is dead?

The ability to construct a reciprocal gaze between daughter and mother without the physical presence of Amalia accounts for some of the odd moments of the novel in which Delia “makes herself into” Amalia. I seek to interpret the final scene of the novel as an attempt to construct a mother-daughter gaze via Delia’s inhabiting of both roles simultaneously; she must be both women at once. In this final moment, Delia returns for a second time to the beach where Amalia drowned and, this time, she is dressed in Amalia’s signature dress suit. Delia found her mother’s *tailleur* hanging in Caserta’s fetishistic basement hideout with Amalia’s undershirt, bra and underwear pinned inside of it; it seems that Caserta had reconstructed a copy of Amalia by way of her clothes and for Delia this reproduction feels imbued with life. Importantly, this use of clothes to construct a body and to, in fact, make “a double,” is a creative act attributed first to Amalia by way of her work as a tailor and dressmaker.¹²⁹ Amalia’s act of sewing dresses is

¹²⁹ Interestingly, Amalia’s “doubling” also re-writes the topos of “the double” in detective/crime fiction. Often the crime genre “double” “enables the crime writer to engage us in the nervous center of the genre where an uncomfortable identification merges into recognition of an appalling otherness, an otherness that is a dangerous potential for the self, its carnival mirror image” (p.14 from T. Hilfer. *The Crime Novel: A*

figured by young Delia as a way in which she makes “doubles;” “Oh, ero affascinata dalla sua arte di costruire un doppio. Vedevo crescere l’abito come un altro corpo...Mi incantava che da ordito e trama del tessuto lei sapesse ricavare una persona (154). That Delia takes the suit off the hanger and puts it on enacts a stepping into not merely Amalia’s clothing, but her person, as if Delia puts on Amalia’s body, just as Delia felt as a child when she would get into the armadio and climb under and into her mother’s skirt: “rivestendome?”: dressing herself with her mother’s body? (154). Furthermore, in putting her clothing on, Delia symbolically “tries on” Amalia’s “arte”: her methodology of doubling.

At first it may seem that Delia simply, and a bit obsessively, tries to “become” Amalia. After all, “being” Amalia was one of the ways in which young Delia managed her fear and anxiety of abandonment: if she was identical to Amalia then nothing of Amalia would escape her. However, Delia’s final actions on the beach productively complicate this metamorphosis or game of dress-up. Once at the beach Delia (inhabiting Amalia within her suit dress) takes her identification card out of her wallet and proceeds to study her own photo; “Fissai la foto a lungo, studiandomi di riconoscere Amalia in quella immagine” (171). Delia looks at the photo trying to find ways in which she resembles her mother. Then she brings the resemblance out herself by drawing on top of her photo in order to make her image look like Amalia. Mainly, she draws Amalia’s hairstyle from the 50’s over her short haircut: “Con un pennarello... disegnai intorno ai miei lineamenti la pettinatura di mai madre... Mi allungai i capelli corti... gonfiando due ampie bande che andavano a chiudersi in un’onda nerissima, levata sulla fronte. Mi abbozzai un ricciolo ribelle sull’occhio destro... Mi guardai, mi sorrisi” (171). This is a strange and complex moment during which I want to suggest that a number of things are taking place. First, before altering her I.D. photo, Delia as Amalia looks at herself in the photo, suggesting that Delia’s sense of self is now being thought in relation to seeing herself by way of Amalia’s eyes. But it also seems important that the I.D. photo too has a set of eyes that look back at their viewer; Delia then looks out from her photo at Delia as Amalia. This threesome is then altered when Delia’s photo is drawn over to look like Amalia. Now the same thing happens simultaneously from both sides: Delia as Amalia looks at, and is looked at by, Delia as Amalia. In this way, Delia’s dress-up and sketching enables a doubling of both mother and daughter (each woman doubled in herself and doubled by the other), so that both women can be simultaneously the subject of a gaze onto the other *and* the object of the other’s gaze: both women inhabit both roles at the same time so that the gazes move in both directions at once. Furthermore, this construction allows both women to also look at themselves so that each of them is the subject and object of their own gaze onto themselves. Importantly though, this operation is not identical to looking at oneself in the mirror, since in this scene to see oneself is to be other and to see with another’s eyes *and* to see oneself as other. Finally, I read this doubled subject and doubled object of gazes to be a way of creating a closed system that short-circuits any possible interruption or mediation. In a way, Delia already establishes a mode of non-interruption between herself and Amalia by inhabiting both roles; but she needs to do this twice in order for the doubled gaze between them to take place in which both mother and daughter occupy subject and object roles at once and through the other.

Deviant Genre). Thus far we have located a constitutive otherness derived from the loss of the maternal body that is not made monstrous, nor idealized, but becomes instead the very possibility of knowing oneself as constantly comported outside and beyond. As I go on to show, Amalia’s act of “doubling” becomes a mode by which Delia reclaims a reciprocal mother-daughter gaze that then allows her to be both subject and object at once.

It is one thing to be herself and to imagine being her mother when Delia describes confounding who did what with whom in the basement many years ago; “Ero io ed ero lei. Io-lei ci incontravamo con Caserta (160). But something is different in the book’s final lines that condenses this earlier phrase. The novel ends immediately after Delia has drawn over her photo with, “Amalia c’era stata. Io ero Amalia” (171). It is not that Delia no longer has a self, as this final line might at first seem to suggest, that she *is* Amalia, but rather this final line behaves as a linguistic representation of what takes place in this final scene that binds it to the logic of the novel more broadly; Delia’s being both subject and object at the same time comes from doing what Amalia has already done; Amalia had made herself into both subject and object at once by way of “making herself into” Delia. Amalia was the first to put this game into play and then Delia mimicks Amalia’s “mimicry;” “Amalia c’era stata. Io ero Amalia” enacts this mother-daughter chain that now has Delia in Amalia’s spot, doing what Amalia did. Earlier in the novel Delia finds sand in the pockets of one of the new clothing items that Amalia was going to give her for her birthday. This makes Delia believe that Amalia had worn this gift when she was on the beach before drowning; in this way, Amalia had dressed-up as Delia. Furthermore, we cannot forget that this final I.D. photo moment copies an earlier moment when Delia finds that someone has drawn her own image over Amalia’s I.D. photo with a pencil; “La donna della foto non era Amalia: ero io” (72). The novel never reveals who it was that drew over Amalia’s photo I.D. card, but I believe that the novel’s ending demonstrates Delia’s belief that it was Amalia who did the drawing. In other words, it seems like Amalia was the first to dress up as the other (Delia) and to then alter her photo to look like Delia; Amalia makes herself into the subject and object of a gaze through inhabiting Delia. Even though the novel never discloses this information directly, it seems to be Delia’s understanding and “Io ero Amalia” refers to Delia copying Amalia’s copying operation. Delia learns to *see herself* by “becoming” Amalia based on Amalia’s having done just that with Delia’s “self”; so this final scene of doubling both women is a double in itself. Delia first “sees” herself as doubled because she imagines what Amalia first did on that very beach. Amalia, then, initiated this reciprocal circuit of their mother-daughter gaze and Delia continues it. We might also note the way in which this sketching of the other woman interrupts the perennial reproduction of Delia’s father’s gypsy painting, which is really a sexualized depiction of Amalia that makes her into the frozen object of a plethora of gazes. That Delia sketches Amalia onto herself based on Amalia’s sketching of Delia seems to re-align Delia’s profession as cartoonist with Amalia’s “arte di costruire un doppio” rather than with her father’s work as an amateur painter.

To conclude, the crime narrative with daughter as “investigator” is overcome by Delia’s process of mourning the loss of Amalia, such that a male mediated gaze and way of knowing is substituted by figures of selfhood (mourning and menstruation) as a corporeal dispossession (self-loss), a being taken out of oneself, that is handed down from mother to daughter. The very loss of her mother is what re-structures Delia’s sense of self and constitutes the possibility of a new way of knowing herself. Delia’s mourning comports her outside of herself so that she must see herself with another’s eyes, i.e., her mother’s. Delia inherits a new way of seeing from Amalia that both establishes a non-mediated gaze between mother and daughter (or a gaze that’s only mediated by one another) and, therefore, structures the way in which Delia sees and knows herself. Rather than an investigation that builds a coherent story, Amalia’s very absence, the grief that ensues, and a structure of self-loss are the modes through which a maternal discourse (a maternal knowledge and seeing) replaces a criminal matricide and re-writes the female subject and her subjectivity.

Chapter 4

Breaking Bonds

In 2006 Elena Ferrante published her third novel, *La figlia oscura*. Like *L'amore molesto*, but less obviously, *La figlia oscura* assumes aspects of a crime novel. Instead of a mysterious death, the novel opens onto a strange car accident caused (we think) by a mysterious injury to the narrator, Leda's, side: "Cominciai a sentirmi male dopo meno di un'ora di guida. Il bruciore al fianco riapparve, ma per un po' decisi di non dargli peso. Mi preoccupai soltanto quando mi resi conto che non avevo le energie sufficienti per tenere il volante (5)."¹³⁰ Leda's car ends up against a guardrail and she wakes up in the hospital with only one serious injury, an inexplicable lesion to her left side. Leda lies to friends and family, saying that the crash was due to sleepiness; "Ma sapevo bene che la colpa non era del sonno. All'origine c'era un mio gesto privo di senso del quale, proprio perché era insensato, decisi subito di non parlare con nessuno. Le cose più difficili da raccontare sono quelle che noi stessi non riusciamo a capire (6). The short, first chapter ends here, with this abstract gesture to the real culprit of Leda's crash, her own so-called "gesto privo di senso," the novel's apparent mystery, which remains in suspense, and for which we must read on. The use of "la colpa" surreptitiously assists in the creation of a sense of the criminal. The guilty party is, then, Leda herself and, more specifically, a particular act that incriminates her and which she finds difficult to understand and, therefore, explain. We have, then, by page two, the establishment of a mystery and a sense of suspense propelling the narrative and, our reading, forward; what is Leda's "gesto privo di senso" that causes her injury and, thus, causes her crash? What leads to, and might help account for, this senseless act of hers?

The narrative opens with threats of bodily harm, first by way of Leda's mysterious side injury, which leads to her car accident, but also within a sort of flashback or fantasy scene. Before driving into the guardrail, Leda spaces out, "dimenticai persino di essere alla guida" (5), and has the impression of being at the beach, standing at the shore, scared to enter the seemingly calm water because of a red flag indicating dangerous conditions. We learn that this image is part of a recurring scene from Leda's childhood and that the threat of drowning was repeatedly issued by her mother; "Mia madre, da piccola, mi aveva spaventata molto, diceva: Leda, non devi mai fare il bagno se c'è la bandiera rossa, significa che il mare è assai agitato e puoi affogare" (5). In Leda's current fantasy, she is scared to enter the perfectly still water, "non osavo immergermi, ero in ansia," (5) and her mother reappears in order to admonish and, thereby, scold her for even contemplating entering the water: "Solo a tratti mia madre compariva in cima alle dune e mi gridava come se fossi ancora bambina: Leda, che fai, l'hai vista la bandiera rossa?" (5). That the subsequent sentence has Leda awakening in the hospital after her crash allows for a sense of cause and effect whereby Leda disobeys her mother's warning and gets hurt. Interestingly, the threat of danger is maternally issued and Leda's bodily harm seems a result of defying her mother's words; it is as if Leda had gone into the water and almost drowned. Leda defines this image transferred from her childhood as "una fantasia d'allarme

¹³⁰ This and all subsequent citations from Elena Ferrante, *La figlia oscura* (Roma: edizioni e/o, 2006).

durata” (5); this fantasy of alarm endures and, retroactively, sets the tone of the novel. It may be that the fantasy and subsequent crash are chronologically the novel’s final events, but, importantly, they are what we read first and what initiates a sensation of fear and dread. The threat of drowning that inaugurates *La figlia oscura* ties it to *L’amore molesto*, and its first line of the announcement of the mother’s drowning. This resonance assists in the assertion of a generic overlap of mystery and crime, but it also draws attention to another mutual belonging: the mother-daughter plot. Rather than being the subject of the drowning, however, as in the case of Amalia, here the mother is (at least initially) the speaker who announces its potentiality and, thus, establishes the narrative tone.¹³¹

The fantasy of alarm, issued by the mother, speaks to a tone of the novel at large that some readers have defined as noir-like.¹³² Leda, a woman in her late 40’s, finds herself, for the first time in many years, alone and able to devote herself to her work as a professor of English literature in Florence. Her two daughters, both in their twenties, have moved to Canada where their father, Leda’s ex-husband, now lives. It is the summer and, on break from teaching, Leda decides to go on vacation, renting a small apartment on the Ionian coast where she will have the peace of mind to read, write, and plan upcoming courses. However, this idyllic sense of freedom and calm is undermined from the start by an impression of foreboding; on the drive south, while filling the gas tank, Leda begins to feel anxious about her vacation: “mi venne improvvisamente ansia...Feci il resto del percorso con un filo di malumore e l’idea che a casa mia avrei potuto lavorare comodamente tutta l’estate” (9). This bad feeling that her trip wasn’t a good idea continues with a few, perhaps superstitious, adverse signs. Upon arrival, Leda finds the rental apartment to be cozy and quaint, but this appearance is diluted by a few details; the shining tray of fruit that looks perfect as a still life turns out to be just that, “natura morta,” too rotten to eat; finally, before falling asleep, Leda finds a squished, almost dead bug in her bed and reacts with intense repugnance. These details act as signs that alert us, and Leda, that something bad might happen. Leda comments that “Non bisognerebbe mai arrivare di sera in un posto sconosciuto, tutto è indefinito, ogni cosa passa facilmente il segno” (10); Leda admits that it’s hard not to attach meaning to every single thing and to let it spill over into exaggerations; even she feels undefined and not able to be contained, “Ero senza contorni” (10).

This strange sense of foreboding and alarm is more or less continuous throughout the novel, but becomes centered on, and defined by, Leda’s interactions with a large Neapolitan family that is vacationing in the same small town and that occupies daily the same stretch of beach. Leda intends to work at the beach, but ends up almost exclusively watching the large family. Leda’s interactions with the family are from the start defined by a form of voyeurism; she becomes a type of investigator who constantly surveys the family and attempts to analyze their dynamics: a sort of detective trying to understand their inner-workings. The family, which she refers to often as “il clan,” is loud and, at times, aggressive. Leda overhears their dialect with which she has various familial associations (since Leda, too, is Neapolitan), some sweet and some vulgar and abrasive. From the start, the clan connotes something a bit out of control and perhaps dangerous:

¹³¹ I also note that the mother who speaks on this opening page also announces the narrator’s name for the first time in the novel and in so doing names her. Importantly, this is also the case in *L’amore molesto* where the narrator’s name is not given until a few chapters into the novel and is given to us by Amalia’s voice during a flashback.

¹³² See, for example, <http://www.mangialibri.com/node/652>, an online review that describes the novelistic style as “un piglio da romanzo gotico, da noir.”

feci appena caso a un gruppo un po' chiassoso di napoletani, bambini, adulti, un uomo sui sessanta dall'espressione cattiva, quattro o cinque ragazzini che si combattevano ferocemente in acqua e all'asciutto... Erano tutti imparentati... Si chiamavano per nome con grida strascinate, si lanciavano frasi esclamative o complici, a volte litigavano (14).

The use of the word “clan” and the language used to describe their behavior creates a sense that the group is a forceful mass that positions itself against the other beachgoers and could unleash itself again Leda. In one instance, the clan gangs up on a foreign couple, unable to even understand their demands, and insists that they move to another set of beach chairs so that the group can accommodate more people and create a “trincea,” which depicts the family as soldiers during a war. The clan is pushy and even aggressive and Leda is convinced to use her knowledge of English to help them attain what they want from the couple. Leda is successful, but regrets what she has done and feels an accomplice of a crime; “Mi venne il dubbio che ero stata senza volerlo la messaggera di quel marasma prepotente, che avevo tradotto in un'altra lingua la sostanza di una villania” (23).¹³³ Leda resentfully turns on the family and refuses to move from her own beach chair. When she leaves the beach that evening Leda senses that she is being followed through the pinewoods on the way to her car and is all of a sudden struck in the back; “Mi arrivò un colpo nella schiena, violento, come se mi avessero colpita con una palla di biliardo” (27). She imagines a pinecone being maliciously launched by a member of the clan hiding in the woods. That she imagines the blow being as dangerous as if coming from a billiard ball, and describes it as a “pugno” coming from “loro,” adds to the sense of threat and violence emanating from the clan.¹³⁴ Leda never finds out exactly what hit her or how (another mystery the novel sustains), but the potential threat of the Neapolitan family never goes away and Leda's involvement with them only deepens.

Above all, Leda's voyeuristic observation of the clan centers on a mother-daughter duo. In fact, although she notices mother and daughter subsequent to her awareness of the family at large, the chapter begins with them and it is clear that they are Leda's principal interest; “Della giovane madre e di sua figlia mi accorsi tardi... Un giorno sollevai lo sguardo dal libro e le vidi per la prima volta, la donna giovanissima e la bambina” (13-14). The young mother and daughter take center stage and seem to stand out in relief from the “marasma prepotente” to which they belong. Leda looks at, and studies, them often; her gaze becomes almost permanently glued to them and their interactions: “la madre giovane, *vista* così a distanza...” (14); “presi l'abitudine di *guardare* ogni tanto dalla loro parte” (15); “Una volta *notai* l'attenzione delicata con cui la [la madre] spalmava di crema. Un'altra volta mi colpì il tempo lento che madre e figlia passavano insieme in acqua” (15); “In un'occasione le *vidi* giocare insieme con la bambola (15); “Rinunciai a leggere e cercai tra la folla Nina ed Elena [madre e figlia] come se fossero *uno spettacolo* per passare il tempo. Faticai a rintracciarle...” (17 my emphases). All instances portray Leda in the act of surveying, tracing with her gaze, and investigating the relationship between mother and daughter. Nina and Elena become the target of Leda's gaze and, finally, the targets of her “gesto” or “crime;” Leda assumes, then, the roles of “investigator” and “criminal.”

¹³³ Stefania Lucamante, in her article, “L'atroce smacco della madre,” remarks on the family's stereotypical depiction and implicit mafia connection. In this way, the family is bound to a persistent form of criminality.

La figlia oscura appears to undercut a generic expectation when we think we learn what Leda's "gesto privo di senso" is at less than one third of the way through the novel; what we believed to be the novel's central mystery is revealed on page 41. Leda awakes from dozing off on the beach to find that the Neapolitan family is beside itself because unable to find Elena. The first thing Leda sees is Nina who, on the verge of breaking down, searches for her daughter; "In quella calca domenicale, come per una sorta di richiamo segreto, la prima persona che mi saltò agli occhi fu Nina" (36). Everyone searches voraciously for Elena, but it is Leda who eventually finds her. Elena is sitting in the sand, hysterical because she cannot find her doll. What was initially the potential tragedy of a missing child, becomes, perhaps ironically, Elena's tragedy of her missing doll. Furthermore, we believe Leda to be the hero of the day, but then find out, to our surprise (perhaps) that she caused the "tragedy;" Leda stole the doll: "La bambola l'avevo presa io, era nella borsa" (41). Leda appears to be the do-gooder who reunites mother and daughter, but is, in fact, the perpetrator of this ironic "crime" committed against mother and daughter; Elena will be beside herself with grief for the remainder of the novel and Nina's mothering will consequently be pushed to its limits. Leda's theft of the doll, named Nani, seems to be the act referred to as "il mio gesto privo di senso" and this is confirmed by Leda's reflection on what she did; "Scoprii che non riuscivo a ricordare il momento preciso di un'azione che ora giudicavo quasi buffa, buffa perché privo di senso" (41). By way of repetition of "privo di senso" we conclude that Leda's theft is the mystery "gesto."

The unresolved mystery of the novel now becomes how it is that Leda's theft of Nani leads to her side injury and car accident. This time we will have to read to the novel's final pages to find out. Put succinctly, Leda maintains her secret for most of the novel and she and Nina develop a sort of a companionship, whereby they identify with one another. It is not until the second-to-last page of the novel that Leda comes clean to Nina and returns Nani, at which point Nina vengefully stabs Leda with a hatpin. The novel, which ends half a page later, seems to be a parodic tragedy between two adult women, and more specifically, between two mothers. Leda does something selfish and stupid and Nina hurts Leda as punishment. From this perspective, given the pettiness of a doll theft and a hatpin stab, the crime novel seems rather tongue-in-cheek.

The actual mystery of *La figlia oscura*, the one sustained throughout the novel, and never actually "solved," seems to be why it is that Leda stole the doll in the first place; this is the novel's central question left open for debate. Leda never definitively states why she did what she did; in fact, she seems not able to clarify this act for herself. The novel's actual mystery is then a psychological one and the crime novel becomes a sort of unresolved psychological thriller. I see this unsolved psychological mystery (which may still feel trivial) to be another way in which this novel is tied to *L'amore molesto* as a sustained "maternal mystery" that goes unsolved.¹³⁵

In order to consider Leda's theft as more than a meaningless act, I posit that this "gesto" evokes another "gesto" and, in so doing, another crime that is difficult to understand and explain; *La figlia oscura* also recounts, via elicited memories, Leda's cultural crime of having abandoned her daughters almost twenty years earlier. Indeed, the novel's subplot has Leda recall, and re-live, her experience of motherhood and most profoundly the theme of being, and having been, a "bad" mother. It is not that Leda does not know how to think and talk about her problems of motherhood since this is more or less what the novel allows her character to do in depth; rather,

¹³⁵ See Laura Benedetti's section on *L'amore molesto* in her book *The Tigress in the Snow* since she points to the mystery of mother that is never given over (pages 104-7).

her true “crime” is difficult to explain because it is culturally unacceptable and lacks representation. Leda’s most palpable offense, among her maternal failings, was choosing to walk out on her family and not contact her daughters until she returned 3 years later. The novel connects Leda’s two “gesti” in a number of ways, one of which Leda establishes herself; in order to explain to Nina why she stole Nani and didn’t give her back, Leda states, “Sono una madre snaturata” (138). Leda’s remark implicitly links her cruelty toward Nina and Elena to her being a “bad” mother. The real crime that the novel wrestles with is, then, the cultural crime of being a “madre snaturata” and Leda’s act of abandonment may in this case stand as the actual origin of the theft and the real origin of this narrative: “all’origine c’era un mio gesto privo di senso.”

I argue, then, that the mystery novel, i.e., the investigation of the Neapolitan family and the intervention into their lives via the theft of Nani, is actually in the service of Leda’s experience of self as mother. As in *L’amore molesto*, the investigation of the mother/other, here Nina, who is Leda’s primary target, folds back onto self-investigation and mother-daughter relationality.¹³⁶ We have then, once again, a narrative of an attempt at self-knowing, an epistemology of self that must move through the relationship between mother and daughter, and the relationship to oneself as both mother and daughter. Importantly, in this instance, our protagonist is a mother who reflects on her experience of mothering daughters.

2. The Maternal and The Mother-Daughter Relationship

Late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century scholarship has shown increasing interest in the figure of the mother in Italian culture and literature.¹³⁷ Literary scholars, such as

¹³⁶ *La figlia oscura* seems to conjugate together *Complice il dubbio* and *L’amore molesto* since it works simultaneously on the horizontal plane of a relationship between two women and on the vertical plane of the mother-daughter relation.

¹³⁷ The principal work dealing exclusively with motherhood in twentieth-century Italy is Laura Benedetti’s *The Tigress in the Snow; Motherhood and Literature in Twentieth-Century Italy* (2007). Adalgisa Giorgio’s edited volume, *Writing Mother and Daughters; Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women* (2002), looks, instead, specifically at the mother-daughter relationship in Western European literature and includes a chapter on Italian narratives. Patrizia Sambuco’s *Corporeal Bonds: The Daughter-Mother Relationship in Twentieth-Century Italian Women’s Writing* (2012) analyzes in depth five novels by five Italian women writers that feature a daughter’s renegotiation of her relationship to her mother. Although not thematically driven by the subject of maternity, Sharon Wood’s important book *Italian Women’s Writing 1860-1994* (1995) does speak often of it in the context of Italian women’s writing and is perhaps a precursor to the scholarship listed above. Teresa Picarazzi writes about the maternal in the works of Natalia Ginzburg in *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg’s Mothers, Daughters, and Sister* (2002). More generally, Il Mulino’s series *L’identità italiana* published a book dealing exclusively with the figure of the mother in Italian culture from the start of the nineteenth-century up until the Second World War entitled *La mamma* (2005), written by Marina d’Amelia. Furthermore, scholars have also chosen to focus on specific historical moments and the representations and ideologies of the mother and motherhood active in them; see, for example, Lesley Caldwell’s “Madri d’Italia: Film and Fascist Concern with Motherhood” in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History* (1991).

Laura Benedetti, note a paradox in the limited literary space afforded to mothers as subjects given “the emphasis placed on motherhood in the Italian culture landscape” (4). Benedetti’s *The Tigress in the Snow* is the first text to treat comprehensively and exclusively the subject of motherhood in Italian literature. Benedetti traces the figure of the mother and its developments in twentieth-century Italian literature paying particular attention to historical and cultural context.¹³⁸ She finds that representations of motherhood found in Italian literature are, almost always, from the perspective of sons looking upon a mother whose only substantial aspect of personhood is reduced to unconditional devotion to her offspring (4). Laura Benedetti, Adalgisa Giorgio, and Patrizia Sambuco all note that the treatment of the mother as a one-dimensional object has not been limited to literature written by men. It is the glorified relationship between mother and son depicted in Elsa Morante’s *La Storia: Romanzo* from which Benedetti takes her title; in Morante’s novel the image of a tigress in the snow tearing off pieces of her own flesh in order to save her cubs is used as a metaphor for the self-immolating love and protection offered by a mother to her son. From this perspective, and certainly not limited to Morante’s representation, the mother is the primary object from which the son/child must separate in order to gain individuality and she is deprived of feelings and instincts beyond those uniting her to her offspring.¹³⁹

When it comes to considering the relationship between mothers and daughters depicted in Italian literature the findings have proved more complex. Notwithstanding what is at times portrayed as an almost engulfing corporeal and psychic bond, critics have simultaneously found a tendency toward the daughter’s rejection of the mother. Such a trend finds specific resonances locally within the Italian feminist scene of the 1970s, but is also visible in a wider European and Anglo-American context.¹⁴⁰ In the post-World War II cultural climate of radical transformation, many Western feminisms, including certain Italian iterations, attacked the mother and maternity as the emblem of female oppression. 1970s Italian feminism “was marked by a rejection of motherhood, perceived as a dangerous force able to draw independent and socially engaged women back into domestic oppression and a limited world. The mother was considered ‘everything one did not want to become in life’” (Benedetti 9). Based on this cultural rejection

¹³⁸ Benedetti’s introduction states, “From the turn-of-the-century rhetorical celebration of the mother as Madonna (a celebration that often ignored the very real lives of mothers working in factories and rice fields) to the Fascist regime’s demographic campaign and the feminist revisions of the maternal role, the institution of motherhood has been the site of constant negotiation” (4).

¹³⁹ Sambuco too locates particular cultural values assigned to motherhood in Italy that privileges the mother-son rapport and a particular vector of authority; “According to the historian Luisa Accati, the common social custom, which privileges the son in a dominating relationship over his mother, has been accentuated by the deep Catholic influence on culture and society. For Accati, the many paintings of *Madonna con bambino*, typical of the iconographic representations of the Madonna, portray a Son who holds power over the Madonna and acquires central importance within the family power relationships” (6). Giorgio too uses historians such as Bravo (1997) to assert that, in the Italian tradition, “motherhood has primarily meant generating and nurturing the male child” (120).

¹⁴⁰ Sambuco’s introduction gives a good sense of the attention paid to this relationship in the Anglo-American context and, not surprisingly, cites Marianne Hirsch’s *The Mother-Daughter Plot* as particularly influential. For more on Hirsch, see my discussion of her in Chapter 3. All three (Benedetti, Giorgio, and Sambuco) also pay heed to the influence of psychoanalysis in relegating the mother to a position of subjectlessness and symbolic death. Even within feminist rewritings of psychoanalysis and childhood development that places emphasis on the importance of the mother-daughter relationship for the daughter’s sense of self, the mother is still rarely presented as subject in her own right.

of the mother and the role motherhood was seen to play in the subjugation of women, it is not surprising perhaps that literary production of the twentieth-century has often neglected the theme of motherhood or treated it pejoratively as something to be shunned and kept at bay. Often, in texts of this sort, the mother figure is relegated to a dangerous, murky background. Sibilla Aleramo's groundbreaking and autobiographical novel *Una donna* (1906) is a precocious exemplar in this regard; one notes immediately that young Sibilla identifies exclusively with her father, who represents knowledge, truth and narrative history.¹⁴¹ Sibilla's mother, who early on in Sibilla's life goes mad and attempts suicide, is literally and figuratively relegated to the novel's background; eventually committed to an asylum, the mother resides textually in a space of formless darkness and obscurity: "un'ombra indefinibile" lacking narrative or voice. Sibilla distances herself both from her own mother and then later from her own role as mother in order to liberate herself from a hypocritical, patriarchal upbringing in southern Italy and, later, in order to have a career as a writer.¹⁴²

Within the recent attention given to the topic of motherhood in Italian literature, the mother-daughter relationship has had considerable notice, both because of an influx of novels in the 1980s written by Italian women featuring prominent mother-daughter themes and a special attention afforded this relationship within certain Italian feminist groups and movements. From the mid-1980s onwards, new feminist practices in Italy attempted to turn the negative value traditionally granted mothers into positive difference.¹⁴³ Libreria delle donne di Milano and Diotima are two Italian feminist groups that sought to replace a historical and cultural matrophobia with theories and practices of maternal authority in order to found a female symbolic order: precisely that which, they believe, has been necessarily covered over by patriarchy. The work of Diotima, a group of female philosophers at the University of Verona, and Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero in particular, is indebted to the work of Luce Irigaray and her notion of a female genealogy.¹⁴⁴ Both Cavarero and Muraro, in different ways, strive to

¹⁴¹ See Sharon Wood. "Breaking the Chain: Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1960)" p. 75; it is here that Wood describes the intense matrophobia evident from the outset of *Una donna*.

¹⁴² For more on the importance of Aleramo's novel in Italian literary and feminist history see Benedetti's section "A Revolution Named Sibilla" (28-32) in *The Tigress in the Snow* (2007); Sharon Woods chapter "Breaking the Chain: Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1960)" in *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (1995); Ann Caesar, "Italian Feminism and the Novel: Sibilla Aleramo's *A Woman*" (1980); *Svelamento Sibilla Aleramo: una biografia intellettuale* (1988) eds. A. Buttafuoco & M. Zancan; and Monika Antes, "*Amo, dunque sono:*" *Sibilla Aleramo, pioniera del femminismo in Italia* (2010).

¹⁴³ For more on 'positive maternal difference' see Giorgio, Chapter 4. Importantly, this revaluation of the mother as a positive female difference was given voice even earlier in what is often considered the first Italian feminist manifesto, Carla Lonzi's "Sputiamo su Hegel" (1970). Here, motherhood is "not only not rejected, but instead becomes an essential female experience, almost a marker of women's difference" (Benedetti 85).

¹⁴⁴ According to Irigaray, philosophy and the Western cultural tradition constitutes itself via a gendered meta-physics that breaks with material contiguity; this constitutive rupture further signifies a break with maternal contiguity: a cut with our relation to the/our mother(s) (See *Speculum* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977). In *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray uses psychoanalysis in order to uncover what it has excluded: an originary matricide covered over by Western culture's founding myth of Oedipus' act of patricide, which forms our understanding of the psyche. Irigaray reads Clytemnestra's murder by her son Orestes as the heralding in of a new cultural symbolic that replaces the once maternal order; the story of Orestes marks the passage to patriarchy upon which our culture depends. Irigaray's move to find narrativized and literalized mythical accounts of originary matricides is part of her attempt at

think “the imaginary and symbolic of life in the womb and the first *corps-à-corps* with the mother” (Irigaray; “Body Against Body”) as steps towards founding a symbolic female order. Enacting an Irigarayan methodology in *Nonostante Platone*, Cavarero re-reads the myth of Demeter, the goddess of fertility and agriculture, in order to demonstrate that its central theme is the power of the mother, which rests on her choice to generate or not. Furthermore, Cavarero notes that it is specifically when Demeter’s daughter Kore re-presents herself to her mother that Demeter restores fecundity to earth. The act of birthing as the origin of existence is affirmed by the visibility between mother and child (here daughter), an appearance and relational recognition that counteracts traditional Western philosophy’s privileging of the metaphysical.¹⁴⁵ Importantly, Cavarero’s work here and elsewhere, is aimed at thinking a maternal subjectivity whereby child-birth, and the generative process at large, are re-figured as subjective processes, no longer dependent on a separation of body and mind.

Luisa Muraro’s theory of ‘the symbolic order of the mother’ expounded in *L’ordine simbolico della madre* (1991) is indebted to Irigaray, but also comes out of a feminist practice of dual relationships between women (*affidamento*), founded by the *Libreria delle donne di Milano* in the early 1980s. ‘Affidamento,’ or entrustment, was aimed at combatting women’s continued sense of enstrangement and lack of value in society. Succinctly, ‘affidamento’ is a vertical relationship modelled on the mother-daughter relationship, in which a woman ‘entrusts’ herself to another woman who is more competent than herself in a particular discipline, field, or facet of life.¹⁴⁶ Importantly, this approach, not exclusive to ‘affidamento,’ but also found in the Italian feminist “*pratiche delle relazioni tra donne*,” places emphasis not on a given similarity between women, but, rather, on the specificity of each woman and on differences among women. The practice of ‘affidamento’ intends to make visible and circulate female symbolic power, specifically through symbolic, maternal mediation:

Based on the notion of a disparity between women which evokes women’s relationship with their mother, it was argued that relationships of entrustment would enable women to enter the world as two, a duality which repeats the situation at birth: just as we are born into the world with the mother, later we gain access to the world by means of female/maternal mediation. The *affidante* (the one who entrusts) is a figure of mediation enabling the *affidata* (the entrusted) to enter the exchange of female knowledge and desire, and to assert herself as a female subject from outside a patriarchal frame of reference and from within a female genealogy (Giorgio 17).

the creation of a female symbolic order. In so doing, Irigaray seeks to unearth and recover female genealogies that have been collapsed inside male genealogies. Similarly, in “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother,” she argues that a primary experience of unity with, and nourishment from, the original matrix of the womb (a metonymic language based on contiguity with the mother’s body) is replaced by the matrix of the father’s language; the very relation with the mother must be left behind as her body becomes a monstrous and dangerous site, a space of silence and death.

¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed description of Cavarero’s use of Demeter see my discussion of it in Chapter 3. Additionally, see Cavarero’s *Tu che mi parli tu che mi racconti* in which the originary gaze between mother and child is further theorized and placed within the context of narrative theory.

¹⁴⁶ For more on this see Giorgio’s Introduction, “Writing the Mother-Daughter Relationship,” in *Writing Mothers and Daughters*.

Thus, relationships among women, based on an originary female relationship of difference between mother and daughter, translates maternal power onto the symbolic plane.

In *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, Muraro seeks to counter what she labels the 'symbolic disorder' for women, whereby one acquires language and enters the symbolic on condition of separation from the mother.¹⁴⁷ Muraro's text offers a new symbolic order in which the relation to the mother, and the mother herself, would not be sacrificed and she attempts this by bringing the mother's body back into relation with the subject's acquisition of language and thought processes. According to Muraro, the relation to the mother must be understood as the place where language takes place; one learns to speak from their mother and one's relation to her mother is the structure of mediation that allows one to speak, make sense of, and signify in language, one's experience. From this perspective, the mother/daughter continuum becomes that very structure of mediation whereby one woman mediates the next woman's experience and this mediation is inseparable from language. The site of "mothering" is where substitution takes place, where one passes life, experience, and language onto the next woman and so on; mothering, and one's mother tongue, is a structure of substitution for which there is no substitute. In this way, Muraro seeks to reinstate this old relation with the mother in our adult lives in order to make her again come to life for us as the principle of symbolic authority.

Literary scholarship has utilized Italian feminist thought of this type to analyze twenty and twenty-first century women's writing that highlights the mother-daughter relationship.¹⁴⁸ Above all, scholarship of this type has shown a move from thematic and symptomatic signs of matrophobia to versions of the "mother-quest," narratives in which maternal recognition and understanding, however, strained, is necessary for the daughter's sense of self. Once deemed an obstacle to the daughter's path toward emancipation, critics have located complex ways in which female narratives and their stories of development depend upon a renewed relationship to the mother and to maternal authority.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, however, many scholars writing on this re-

¹⁴⁷ For a helpful breakdown of Muraro's argument see Barbara Spackman's article "*Puntini, Puntini, Puntini*; Motherliness as Masquerade in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna*," in *MLN*, Vol. 124 No. 5 Supplement, December 2009, pp. S210-S223.

¹⁴⁸ This is not to say that there isn't literary scholarship on the mother-daughter relationship that does not use feminist theory of this persuasion or that there is a necessary relationship of cause and effect between the theory and literature. Sambuco writes well on this temporal and thematic overlap: "The coincidence of the publication of a corpus of women's writing on the mother-daughter relationship and the development of a feminist theorization of the maternal does not necessarily imply a relation of cause and effect between feminist theories and women's writing but bears witness to a more general cultural sensibility in favour of the revaluation of this formerly neglected relationship" (6).

¹⁴⁹ Benedetti, writing on this development, states, "Over and over again, novels of the last twenty years of the century stage the move from criticism to understanding, from estrangement to empathy" (98). Giorgio's chapter, "The Passion for the Mother," treats a number of Italian novels by women from the last two decades of the twentieth century in order to tease out "the way the daughter experiences and resolves (or does not resolve) her primary attachment to the mother, and attempts to establish a textual space of interaction with her" (121). Using Fabrizia Ramondino's *Althénopis*, Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto* and Elsa Morante's *Menzogna e sortilegio*, her study highlights "the intricate nature of the two-way exchanges between mothers and daughters by which they legitimate each other both emotionally and symbolically" (122). Sambuco's text focuses on twentieth-century Italian novels in which the daughter-narrator attempts to define a female self that is outside the constrictions of patriarchal society; through narrative strategies that challenge the dominant symbolic order, the daughter-narrator re-imagines the relationship with her mother. In this way, Sambuco locates alternative forms of communication between

newed literary relationship find that the majority of twentieth-century Italian novels are still hesitant to move from the mother's point of view; the overwhelming tendency is for Italian women writers to consider motherhood from the perspective of daughters; it is for this very reason that Sambuco alters the traditional "mother-daughter relationship" to "daughter-mother" in her books title; "As the daughter-narrator, or the daughter's point of view, leads the narration of her and her mother's life, it seems more pertinent to define the relationships in these novels as *daughter-mother*" (6). In her introductory chapter to *Writing Mothers and Daughters*, Giorgio notes that in Western European narrative in general "It appears that the daughter's point of view still dominates literary representations of mother-daughter relations" (30). Giorgio's introduction ends by posing and attempting to answer the question, how far have contemporary texts gone in articulating maternal subjectivity. Speaking of her edited volume's findings in Italy and beyond, she proposes a certain logic:

When these daughters speak of themselves as mothers, they voice their fears of motherhood, which they experience as stifling and engulfing. They convey the same fearful ambivalence towards their own daughters that they experience in relation to their mothers; the balancing act between self and other. Women writers have described this balancing act extensively from the daughter's point of view, but they are still reticent in relating it from the point of view of the mother of daughters. Still in the grip of their unresolved knot with their own mother, they are unwilling to put themselves in their mother's place for fear of discovering perhaps, that they have become (like) her... Some of these narratives still predicate the daughter's autonomy upon the mother's effacement and death, whereas others give us an insight into the possibility of realising relationships of reciprocal and enabling recognition (33-34).

While noticing some progression away from matrophobia and the possibility of recognition between mother and daughter, Giorgio's introduction concludes with the reminder that more often than not, mothers do not narrate motherhood, and that when they do, they are often mothering sons. Importantly, Giorgio relates that in these rare cases mothers portray their relationships to their daughters in terms similar to those in which daughters struggle in relation to their mother. This shared or overlapping sensation experienced by both mother and daughter in relation to each other seems to imply a mutual relation, which, as I go on to show, *La figlia oscura* exploits.¹⁵⁰

mother and daughter that often partakes in the corporeal. For more on the "mother-quest" trend, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁵⁰ Benedetti's fourth chapter is entitled "Struggling with the Mother" and its main subsection is headed 'Through the Daughters' Voices.' At the end of this chapter she concludes by discussing one novel that actually employs a narrator who is both mother and daughter, Sonia from Francesca Sanvitale's *Madre e figlia* (1980). Sonia does compare her mother's mothering to her own, but she is a mother of a son. It is interesting that Benedetti's final chapter, which logically seems the place to discuss narratives from the mother's point of view, speaks instead about symbolic mothering and mother-child relationships with non-biological mothers, an "elective mother-daughter relationship where motherhood becomes an attitude, state of mind, or practice" (120). In this final section, Benedetti does provide literary examples of adult women narrating the establishment of nurturing relationships with children to whom they are not biologically related and she describes this tendency from both a literary and socio-cultural standpoint. I

As of yet, *La figlia oscura* has not been included in any texts dealing with the mother or with the mother-daughter relationship in Italian literature.¹⁵¹ One must of course take into consideration how recent a novel it is, but I would also suggest that it is not an easy novel to treat critically, in part because of its uniqueness in perspective (a mother of adult daughters) and its style and tone (blunt and unremorseful). The only scholarship on the novel is Stefania Lucamante's essay "L'atroce smacco della madre" and Stiliana Milkova's "Mothers, Daughters, Dolls: On Disgust in Elena Ferrante's *La figlia oscura*."¹⁵² Lucamante describes her reaction to Ferrante's third novel as dividing her in half; she became two readers: "l'ingenua e la disincantata" (42):

Durante tutto il tempo della lettura di *La figlia oscura*, non ho fatto altro che sdoppiarmi. Coesistevano in me due lettrici, una, quella piú ingenua, che si identificava in modo quasi urtante con i problemi, con i drammi presunti di Leda. L'altra, quella piú letterariamente svezzata, che provava una sensazione di enorme fastidio per questa donna che, pur avendo raggiunto il traguardo della propria indipendenza, professionale ed emotiva, continuava ad annasprire nel mare di cui aveva tanta paura da piccola (42).

Lucamante both identifies with Leda and her issues (motherhood, career, marriage, daughterhood, friendship) and expresses frustration with Leda's continued struggles. She finds Leda's situation banal and her "breakdown" belated and, thus, tiresome. She first compares Leda's "frantumazione," epitomized by her theft of the doll, with the meltdown of the protagonist of *I giorni dell'abbandono*, Olga, who is abandoned by her husband in the novel's first page; she finds that Leda's vacation drama pales in comparison to Olga's crisis. It is clear that Lucamante has much respect for Ferrante's writing and, in particular, for her ability to portray certain feminine "mal di vivere." However, based on the tone of her article, and the comparisons it makes, we take it that in the final analysis Lucamante sides more with the disenchanted and frustrated reader, the one who knows better. She finds Leda to be immature and selfish, and feels that Italian women deserve a more positive representation in literature, particularly literature by women:

In una società in cui si cerca la sorellanza, in cui si cerca di smussare gli spigoli del rapporto sempre difficile con la figura materna, abbiamo una narratrice, Leda, che non riesce a liberarsi, appunto, di un personaggio scomodo quale quello rappresentato da una figlia che non sa crescere, che non

am certainly curious about this twenty-first century trend and the ways in which it reflects a changing historical moment, but I want to take note of what is still missing; the subjective experience of mothers who give birth to, and raise, daughters.

¹⁵¹ All three books, Benedetti's, Giorgio's and Sambuco's, do, however, discuss Ferrante's *L'amore molesto*.

¹⁵² See Stefania Lucamante, "L'atroce smacco della madre," in *Leggendaria* (01 gennaio 2007) and Stiliana Milkova, "Mothers, Daughters, Dolls: On Disgust in Elena Ferrante's *La figlia oscura*," in *Italian Culture XXXI*, no. 2 (September 2013). Lucamante has also published on Ferrante's second novel, *I giorni dell'abbandono*, in her book *A Multitude of Women: The Challenges of the Contemporary Italian Novel* (2008). Milkova's article on *La figlia oscura* argues convincingly that the novel employs the disgusting in order to problematize motherhood and daughterhood as normative categories.

sa trasformarsi in nulla, se non in una donna sempre piú involupata nelle proprie angosce. Una figlia oscura, appunto (43).

Above all, Lucamante sympathizes with Leda's problems, but finds her mode of dealing with them infantile and non-realistic. Reaching a point of anger and even revulsion, Lucamante resorts to speaking directly to Leda stating, "Nonostante tutto, cara Leda, non voglio e non sarò mai come te (43)."

The height of Lucamante's anger and disidentification seems to be in regard to Leda's choice to abandon her daughters in order to find herself and succeed in her autonomy and career. At that point, she compares Leda and *La figlia oscura* to Aleramo's *Una donna*:

Non è realistico e verosimile però--e forse anche da questo dipende il giudizio sospeso sul libro--nei nostri anni abbandonare i figli per trovarsi. Semmai il contrario. Nel 1906 la donna di Sibilla Aleramo raccontava di come fosse stata costretta ad abbandonare il proprio figliolletto per trovare se stessa. I toni con cui Aleramo racconta l'abbandono forzato erano esaltati, appassionati, e certo dettati dal dato autobiografico. Il modo in cui Leda rintraccia le tappe e le motivazioni del suo abbandono—un topos vero e proprio dei romanzi di Ferrante--registra toni freddi, quasi come se per lei non sarebbe stato possibile fare altrimenti (43).

Lucamante objects, therefore, to what she deems the non-realistic tone with which Ferrante's protagonist narrates her decision to leave her daughters and she compares Leda's narration pejoratively to Aleramo's highly dramatic and impassioned style and tone.¹⁵³ Leda, it seems, is not emotional enough to be realistic and not realistic enough to be worth identifying with.¹⁵⁴ She concludes, "A conti fatti, è piú credibile la madre esaltata di *Una donna*" (43). Interestingly, Lucamante's response to *La figlia oscura* mimicks, in part, one of the initial critical responses to *Una donna*: a few (female) critics were shocked by the novel's ending, that is, that Aleramo chose to leave her husband and thus lose her son, considered it a selfish act bordering on criminality, and sought to disidentify from her.¹⁵⁵ While I too would like to look at Ferrante's and Aleramo's novels side-by-side, I am less concerned with which story is more credible; or more, pointedly, which mother figure more believable, or more likeable. My interest, instead, lies in the relationship between the two novels: how *La figlia oscura* seems to consciously place itself in a genealogy with *Una donna* in order to push forward the question of maternity, and

¹⁵³ One could, however, argue just the opposite: that *Una donna*'s language and style are so over-the-top as to put its sincerity into question: a performance so overdone as to render it fake feeling. This is precisely the form of rhetorical masquerade that Barbara Spackman posits in her article "Puntini, Puntini, Puntini; Motherliness as Masquerade in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna*." Spackman argues that Aleramo's florid and sentimentalizing narration is a sign of a linguistic disorder that demonstrates that the mask does not fit: a citation of a normalizing discourse of motherhood that results in denaturalizing it.

¹⁵⁴ One thing that Lucamante's article does not take into account is the fact that Aleramo's narrative describes the actual experience in a more immediate way, while Ferrante's protagonist is explicitly twenty years removed from her experience of walking out on her family; Leda's colder tone should also be considered with regards to the temporal distance of her story.

¹⁵⁵ See Benedetti's section on the novel's mixed reception, pp. 30-32 and Sharon Woods' chapter "Breaking the Chain: Sibilla Aleramo."

what its difference in tone accomplishes. As will become clearer in the following section, being frustrated with Ferrante's protagonist is certainly fair, but dismissing her credibility and, subsequently, dismissing, in part, the novel is to miss its point and the socio-political uniqueness and potential of it.

3. *Una donna* as "Mother-text"

Taking a cue from Lucamante's article, I'd like to take seriously the connection between *La figlia oscura* and *Una donna* and posit that the former explicitly employs the latter as an origin point or, what I will call, "mother-text." I use "mother-text" doubly to describe the way in which *La figlia oscura* puts itself in a direct genealogy with Aleramo's foundational novel and because it does so by way of a discourse of motherhood. Importantly, Ferrante's novel both heralds and departs from its "mother-text;" it forms a connection that *is* its own type of break. This relational mode provides a sort of paradigm through which I will later consider the relationships established and manipulated within *La figlia oscura* itself. Lucamante summons the primary thematic overlap of mothers who abandon their children in order to realize themselves as individuals, and in this way both texts center thematically on the cultural crime of being a "madre snaturata." As mentioned earlier, Leda explicitly defines herself in this way at the novel's close, but her story is more broadly the recounting of a twenty-year struggle of questioning herself as a mother and feeling that she failed at almost every turn. Each time she thinks about her daughters Leda's narration portrays a mix of "negative" feelings: jealousy, dislike, resentment, exasperation, suffocation, to name a few. Both texts and their female narrators wrestle with having committed the cultural crime of taking up a masculine position by way of putting themselves and their careers first. Sibilla's decision to leave her husband and son is complex and certainly rooted in a particular historical moment and the laws upholding it, but one of the primary reasons for her leaving stems from the inability to realize her potential as a thinker and writer, to have a flourishing and influential career.¹⁵⁶ This is certainly one of Leda's main reasons for choosing to leave her family; her "awakening" to her potential as a literary scholar is initiated by a conference in which her work is cited by a prominent male scholar (Professor Hardy) in her field and, thus, made publicly important.¹⁵⁷ This conference, her

¹⁵⁶ This is, in fact, precisely the aspect of her novel (and perhaps life) that friend, colleague, and fellow feminist Ersilia Majno took issue with. Majno finds *Una donna*'s confessions to have gone too far since they ostensibly put her career and desire for prestige and recognition above her son and his emotional well-being. Majno objects that the book itself violates what should be her "duties" toward her son. See Benedetti, p.31. For a discussion of the intense correspondence between Majno and Aleramo that took place on the eve of the publication of *Una donna* see Marina D'Amelia. *La mamma*, pps. 121-123.

¹⁵⁷ For a nuanced reading of the trope of "awakening" in Aleramo's *Una donna* and its relationship to other female "awakenings" in Alba De Céspedes's *Dalla parte di lei* and Giuliana Ferri's *Un quarto di donna* see Sole Anatrone's Chapter 1 "Waking Women" of her unpublished dissertation, *This Feeling Called Feminism: Finding Feminist Affect in Italian Literature, From Sibilla Aleramo to Rossana Campo*. While *Una donna* is chronologically an origin text for the latter two novels, Anatrone argues that "despite the distinct contexts that inform and are in turn described by the these respective novels...each is haunted

subsequent affair with Hardy, and the resultant sense of academic accomplishment that motivates her in her career, mark a turning point in Leda's development of self and initiates more explicitly the feelings that lead her to abandon her family.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, Leda's narration recalls again and again the ways in which she felt that any potential as an academic was thoroughly constrained by her mothering and childcare, often times carried out alone since her husband's career took precedence and he was often busy or traveling. Spackman points out that although Aleramo's protagonist seeks to unite her creativity as a writer with her maternal affect, making her writing and her son metaphorically one, her final revelation and abandonment of her son suggest that the two cannot be reconciled (at least not enough).

Despite this thematic overlap, *La figlia oscura* drastically breaks from *Una donna* in its style and tone. Ferrante's novel does not resort to a rhetoric of sacrifice: it does not employ florid language, it is not sentimental, nor repetitive.¹⁵⁹ Barbara Spackman, in her essay "*Puntini, Puntini, Puntini: Motherliness as Masquerade in Sibilla Aleramo's Una donna*," claims that it is much easier for readers to sympathize with Aleramo's predicament than with her over-bearing writing style; "contemporary readers may be less sympathetic with aspects of her prose that I, for one, have always found almost unbearable: the trailing off of sentences as they sink into sentimentality, the overuse of points of suspension" (210). Spackman argues that Aleramo's stereotypically "bad" "female" writing (effusiveness, sentimentality, overdramatization, ellipses that suggest the ineffable), almost always at its worst when she speaks of her son, can be read as "an adoption of motherliness by the narrator as a defense to avert the retribution she can expect for what is a double crime" (222). Here Spackman refers to the "double crime" of taking up the masculine position, both thematically and literally, and committing the cultural crime of having refused to sacrifice her ambition to her child. I find Spackman's argument convincing and, therefore, find it provocative that Ferrante's novel, while precisely about a mother who sacrificed her daughters for her ambition, seems to reside rhetorically and stylistically so far on the other

by the persistent echo of the others in such a way that disregards linear temporality so that more recent texts are haunted by their predecessors just as older texts are haunted by their successors" (1-2). For Anatrone, such inter-temporal haunting is a product of feminist affect. The trope of "awakening" is, then, another explicit thematic overlap of *Una donna* and *La figlia oscura*; both novels stage female "awakenings" as writer and individual.

¹⁵⁸ It may seem disappointing that Leda's "awakening" is heralded by a man "using" her work for his own prestige, and that she needs him to make her work known. However, we (and she) go on to learn that Professor Hardy gained access to her unpublished essay by way of a woman named Brenda whom Leda had met briefly while on vacation with her family some years earlier. Leda had looked up to Brenda as a sexually, and otherwise, liberated woman. She is a role model because Leda meets her after Brenda has walked out on her marriage. Leda gives Brenda a copy of her essay before they say goodbye and it is via Brenda that the essay ends up in Hardy's hands. So while it at first seems that Leda needs male mediation in order to thrive (or even just survive) in her career ambitions, it turns out that the mediation was initially female. It should also be mentioned that, in a move almost identical to the case study analyzed in Joan Riviere's important essay, "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929), Leda ends up beginning an affair with Hardy the very same day in which he publicly esteems her essay. The question then is whether Leda's "awakening" via Hardy is simultaneously both intellectual and sexual (when she leave her family begins a relationship with him) and/or whether she simultaneously "makes up," and repents, for her gender bending intellectualism by masquerading a certain sexual femininity: a defensive strategy of sorts.

¹⁵⁹ Spackman's essay is the first to theorize the rhetoric and style of *Una donna* as not merely bad writing, but as a type of performance aimed at averting retribution for being a "madre snaturata."

side of the spectrum; it is almost as if Ferrante's novel purposefully resists the rhetoric of *Una donna* and in so doing stands as its inverse counterpart. *La figlia oscura* is unfiltered, to the point, and non-apologetic in its language and tone; there is no effusiveness or sentimentality when Leda describes her daughters or her relationship to them. In particular, Leda's "confession" to Nina and her sister-in-law, Rosaria, regarding having walked out on her daughters is as non-dramatic and unapologetic as can be; when Rosaria asks Leda what her daughters were like when they were little, Leda responds "Ricordo poco o niente" (65). Rosaria's apparent shock seems normal (or dare I say, natural) to us, since only a "madre snaturata" would not remember her children's infancy. But Leda doesn't stop there; "Tacqui un attimo, dissi pacatamente: «Me ne sono andata. Le ho abbandonate quando la più grande aveva sei anni e la seconda quattro... Ero assai stanca... Certe volte scappare serve a non morire»" (65-66). In other words, she left her children to save herself; she did it *for* herself. This matter-of-fact confession to near strangers stands in stark contrast to *Una donna*'s heroine, who spends pages agonizing over the possibility of losing her son and even manages to depict her final decision to leave as *for him*. While Aleramo's protagonist seemingly ends her role as sacrificing mother by finally leaving her husband and son, *Una donna* remains caught up within the ideology of sacrifice when she dedicates the book we read to her son. Spackman writes, "the book itself is, we learn at its end, addressed to that abandoned child, is written "per lui," to pay him back as it were, to compensate him for her departure. This is still a kind of sacrificial structure; she writes not for herself, but "per lui," and her breaking of the chain [of maternal sacrifice] has to be represented as, at bottom, "per lui" as well" (214). When Leda goes into more depth, in a private conversation with Nina, about her choice to leave her daughters she does not falter in depicting it as a self-motivated decision. Furthermore, and shockingly, she even describes her decision to return to her daughter's three years later as, again, for herself:

«Allora sei tornata per amore delle tue figlie».

«No, sono tornata per lo stesso motivo per cui me n'ero andata: per amor mio».

Si adombrò di nuovo.

«Cosa vuoi dire».

«Che mi sono sentita più inutile e disperata senza di loro che con loro» (116).

Both Leda's abandonment of her daughters and her decision to return to them is stated clearly as *not* about self-sacrifice. Her return to her daughters is still about putting the self first; she did it for herself. Leda is, in this sense, guilty of not feeling guilty.

Part of what readers may find unattractive, and even cruel, about Leda and her narration is that it does not idealize maternity, and this makes it defamiliarizing. Leda's narrative does not employ a rhetoric of maternal sacrifice (nor does she show remorse or ask for forgiveness for not sacrificing herself), but it does speak of motherhood as necessarily self-sacrificing because, as she puts it when describing the experience of pregnancy, "la carne pulsa di una vita rotonda che è tua, la tua vita, e però spinge altrove, si distrae da te pur abitandoti la pancia... la tua vita vuole diventare di un altro" (33). One is, literally, transported beyond themselves, made *ekstatic*.¹⁶⁰ One's life is necessarily no longer her own. Rather than claiming that everything she does is and has been for her daughters, Leda's story is more about describing the incredible psychological, emotional, and even somatic weight that comes with being a mother, the way in which that

¹⁶⁰ See my description of Judith Butler's discussion of dispossession in chapter one of *Undoing Gender*.

responsibility and weight often feel suffocating and even obliterating. We learn from Leda that life both with and without her daughters is constituted by self-loss. When describing how she felt during her three years without them, she tells Nina, “Stavo come una che si sta conquistando la sua esistenza, e sente una folla di cose contemporaneamente, tra cui anche una mancanza insopportabile” (115). Likewise, when Nina asks how things were when Leda returned to them, she responds, “Mi sono rassegnata a vivere poco per me e molto per le due bambine: piano piano mi è riuscito bene” (117). In many ways, the experience of self-loss set forth in my third chapter via *L'amore molesto* and Butler, comes to bear, here, specifically on the experience of being a mother, such that maternal subjectivity is marked by a continual loss of control over one's own selfhood, a way of being for and by way of others. In this way, Leda's “confession,” and the novel in general, is just as much about her truth regarding the experience of mothering as it is about having abandoned her daughters; Leda's incriminating confession, and the novel's true cultural crime, is *not idealizing motherhood* or remaining within an ideology of maternal sacrifice, even as motherhood is depicted as self-sacrificing. Leda's story of leaving her daughters is not presented as a tragedy the way in which it is in *Una donna*, but it represents an aspect of her complex and, at times, painful experience of maternity that is difficult to recount or share at all. She admits this after having strangely confessed her abandonment to Rosaria and Nina; “Adesso ero molto arrabbiata con me stessa. Non parlavo mai di quel periodo della mia vita, non lo facevo nemmeno tra me e me” (66).

While the depictions of motherhood, and the language used to recount the choice to abandon one's children, are substantially divergent, both *La figlia oscura* and *Una donna* deploy the image of a chain to describe a certain type of mothering. I take *La figlia oscura* to be referencing and linking itself to Aleramo's novel via this chain, one of the most powerful and well-known images of *Una donna*. Many scholars focus in on an infamous passage in which Aleramo condemns the institution of motherhood and its ideology of maternal sacrifice as an enslaving chain between mother and daughter whereby the daughter reproduces the self-sacrifice learned from her mother with her own child:

Perché nella maternità adoriamo il sacrificio? Donde è scesa a noi questa inumana idea dell'immolazione materna? Di madre in figlia, da secoli, si tramanda il servaggio. È una mostruosa catena. Tutte abbiamo, a un certo punto della vita, le coscienze di quel che fece pel nostro bene chi ci generò; e con la coscienza il rimorso di non aver compensato adeguatamente l'olocausto della persona diletta. Allora riversiamo sui nostri figli quanto non demmo alle madri, rinnegando noi stesse e offrendo un nuovo esempio di mortificazione, di annientamento. Se una buona volta la fatale catena si spezzasse, e una madre non sopprimesse in sé la donna, e un figlio apprendesse dalla vita di lei un esempio di dignità? Allora si incomincerebbe a comprendere che il dovere dei genitori s'inizia ben prima della nascita dei figli, e che la loro responsabilità va sentita innanzi, appunto allora che più la vita egoistica urge imperiosa, seduttrice. Quando nella coppia umana fosse la umile certezza di possedere tutti gli elementi necessari alla creazione di un nuovo essere integro, forte, degno di vivere, da quel momento, se un debitore v'ha da essere, non sarebbe questi il figlio?” (182).

The monstrous chain of servitude passed down from mothers to daughters represents, for Aleramo, a disrupted logic; when the daughter realizes at a certain point how much of her own self her mother has surrendered in order to raise her, Aleramo notes that instead of repaying this debt that she owes *to her mother*, the daughter makes up for this debt by giving herself away to her own child as compensation for the guilt; thus, a reproduction of self-immolating mothering takes place. The only way to interrupt this vicious genealogy is for a daughter to break the monstrous chain and not repeat her own mother's self-annihilating mothering. Sibilla ostensibly breaks this chain by sacrificing her son for herself and leaving him in order to find her independence.

In both novels the protagonist's mother (and the female line more generally) is represented as a darkness, a shadowy abyss, that must be averted and avoided. In other words, the "catena" of mothers evident in both texts leads backwards, and downwards, to a dangerous space of anger, madness and extinction; it is the opposite of self-possession and subjectivity. From the start of *Una donna* the father figure is surrounded by a bright sunlight that stands for knowledge, intellect, freedom, and individuality. Sibilla's mother is, instead, an opposing and dark force, defined as "un'ombra indefinibile," something difficult to make out because too enveloped in darkness and depression (she, in fact, rarely leaves her bed); "il viso materno non si distingueva bene fra i cuscini e le coltri" (22); to be like her is to fall into nothingness, to lose the possibility of a self.¹⁶¹ Likewise, Sibilla's life as wife and mother is depicted as falling into a well; "avevo l'impressione di ripiombare in un pozzo angusto, soffocante" (72). Sibilla's adult life is marked a reproduction of her mother's dark and isolated life; her being "locked-up" and cut-off from the outside world resonates with her mother's depiction as the "Cenerentola della casa." Furthermore, there is a parallel between Sibilla's incarceration and descent into a type of "madness," including a suicide attempt, and her mother's move to an asylum after her own attempt to take her life. Finally, when describing the asylum, in which her mother becomes "una figura spettrale" (56), Aleramo depicts a cord that ties mother to daughter; "e provavo un brivido subitaneo, quasi la sensazione di chi, smarrito su un ghiacciaio, sente le oscillazioni d'una corda che lo lega ad un compagno precipitato nell'abisso" (58). Here a metaphoric umbilical cord replaces the original and ties Sibilla to her mother's experience of "madness," confinement and disappearance. It is this "figura spettrale," likened to "un oscuro ammonimento" (56), from which Sibilla differentiates herself when she leaves her husband and son and breaks the chain of submissive, sacrificing, shadowy mothers.

Although not nearly as ideologically explicit, *La figlia oscura* uses a similar image of a chain linking mothers to daughters. Leda's female line is also represented as a chain leading backwards into obscurity. It is, furthermore, this problematic female genealogy that Leda attempts to break with. Once having confessed to Rosaria and Nina her abandonment of her daughters, Leda experiences turmoil. She regrets having told them and considers the shock that she purposefully caused the women. Above all, Leda feels remorse because of the way in which she sensed Nina withdrawing from her. By way of an internal monologue with herself, Leda attempts to justify her behavior of twenty years earlier; "Che avevo fatto di terribile, infine. Ero stata, anni prima, una ragazza che si sentiva persa, questo sì. Le speranze della giovinezza parevano già tutte bruciate, mi sembrava di precipitare all'indietro verso mia madre, mia nonna,

¹⁶¹ Parenthetically, but worth noting, the women in Sibilla's family, even her mother-in-law, are shown to grow more and more silent, small, and shadowy. They become lost and lose themselves; "Mia suocera aveva cessato di brontolare... veniva a trovarmi, piú piccola e sfinita nell'abito di lutto... era sempre piú curva, piú silenziosa: quali ombre di pensieri amari dovevano svolgersi nella mente? (71).

la catena di donne mute o stizzose da cui derivavo. Occasioni mancate” (68). Here, Leda’s narration produces her female genealogy as a chain of angry and silent women who represent missed opportunities, since they remained bound to one another, falling backwards down the chain, rather than moving forward into future hopes; as in Aleramo, one woman follows in the next woman’s footsteps. In *La figlia oscura* the chain reaction results in unhappy mothers who rather than taking their lives into their own hands and putting their own happiness first, get angry and often displace that anger onto their children. This is ostensibly a justification and reason for which Leda left her daughters; she does not want to repeat the female chain of irritability and missed opportunities, she does not want to become *like them*. This description of the backward moving chain leads to a memory of Leda’s unraveling when she is unable to reconcile motherhood and her academic ambitions. Specifically, she recalls trying to write and being physically distracted by her daughter Bianca who wants to play with her. Leda erupts in anger at her daughter, slapping her repeatedly with “violenza vera” (70), ends up breaking a large glass door in fury and scaring herself and her daughters. This is precisely the type of irritability, the being “stizzosa,” that Leda blames her mother and grandmother for: the recurrent breakdowns that she watched her mother suffer when “al primo conflitto la maschera non reggeva e...aderiva...a violenza” (22). Leda’s explanation connects her decision to leave her daughters to her desire not to remain bound to, and repeat the mistakes of, her embittered female family line.

In both narratives the need to escape a darkness represented by the maternal model in order to gain selfhood is threatened by the possibility of a metaphorical drowning; “io sentivo naufragare la mia volontà, la mia persona” (Aleramo 85) and “Napoli mi era sembrata un’onda che mi avrebbe annegata” (Ferrante 85). As in *L’amore molesto*, although less obviously, the city of Naples and the maternal figure are elided and, at times, come to stand in for one another. Leda describes wanting to flee her Neapolitan past and family in general; however, importantly, we never learn about Leda’s father, nor do we get any real details regarding any other individual family member apart from her mother and grandmother. Leda’s “parenti” take on the quality of a clan-like mass, similar to her sense of the Neapolitan group on the beach as a “marasma prepotente.” Thus, the fear of drowning in Naples is very related to Leda’s fear of becoming like her mother and her mother’s mother. The Italian north-south divide is another thematic overlap of the two novels; specifically, and in both cases, the protagonist’s liberation is an escape from a backwards and suffocating south to a more northern, intellectual and modern city.

In Leda’s case the desire to flee the fate of her mother and grandmother extends to her daughters, since she desperately wants them to be different from her female line. When after their parents’ separation and Leda’s return, Bianca and Marta seemed to be slipping behind in their schoolwork, Leda uses her mother and grandmother as negative models:

Per qualche anno Bianca e Marta sono andate male a scuola, evidentemente erano disorientate. Le incalzavo, le sollecitavo, le tormentavo. Dicevo: che volete combinare nella vita, dove volete finire, volete tornare indietro, degradarvi, abolire tutti gli sforzi che abbiamo fatto vostro padre e io, tornare a com’è vostra nonna, che ha solo la licenza elementare...Le vedevo deragliare entrambe...e c’è stato un periodo in cui mi sentivo bene solo quando sapevo che si stavano dando una disciplina, a scuola cominciavano ad avere successo, le ombre delle donne della mia famiglia si dissipavano (87).

Here, Leda fears that her daughters could fall backwards (again this movement “indietro” recalling the chain leading back into Leda’s female descendance), could revert to being like the women before her, her mother, her grandmother. The passage also implies that Leda has worked hard to be different, to *not be like* these women, and to mold her daughters into something different by way of a different maternal model. Finally, we are given another striking image of female shadows, the obscurity surrounding, and formed of, Leda’s female line; when Bianca and Marta start doing well the lurking, dangerous shadows of their female line dissipate: the chain loosens and they break free from it. Leda, in fact, tells us that her worst fear when she abandoned her daughters was that her husband would bring them to Naples and leave them with her mother; “Soffocavo d’ansia, pensavo: che ho combinato, io sono fuggita, però lascio che loro tornino lì. Le due bambine sarebbero sprofondate piano piano nel pozzo nero da cui venivo, respirandone i modi, la lingua, tutti i tratti che mi ero cancellata di dosso quando era andata via dalla città” (85). This quote is telling in that it blurs the distinction between Leda’s two departures; leaving Naples at 18 to study in Florence and walking out on her family years later to pursue her own desires: in essence, leaving her mother and leaving her daughters. More generally, to speak of one of these departures inevitably leads to thoughts about the other and, therefore, suggests that the two are implicated in one another; to leave her daughters is another version of breaking from her maternal line since it guarantees not remaining in self-sacrificing anger and depression, and providing a different maternal model for her daughters. It is clear that leaving her family and “finding herself” is a way to not repeat the chain of angry and mute women/mothers. Leda does not want to be *like* her mother and she does not want her daughters to be like her either.

Thus, in both novels, the decision to abandon her child(ren) has to do with each woman’s relationship to her mother; Sibilla and Leda do not want to become *her*, they want to do something different, and be a different type of mother, even if that means leaving their child(ren) for an indefinite period of time. Leda’s investigation of the Neapolitan family, and her confession of having abandoned her daughters, seems to inevitably lead to contemplating her mother and her relation to her. She recalls how her mother desired to be different from her Neapolitan relatives, but that this attempt never lasted long:

Mia madre si vergognava della natura plebea di mio padre e dei parenti, voleva essere diversa, giocava, dall’interno di quel mondo, a fare la signora ben vestita e di buoni sentimenti. Ma al primo conflitto la maschera non reggeva e anche lei aderiva ai comportamenti, alla lingua degli altri, con una violenza non diversa. La osservavo meravigliata e delusa, e progettavo di non assomigliarle, di diventare io diversa davvero, e dimostrarle così che era inutile e cattivo spaventarci con quei suoi non mi vedrete mai mai mai più, bisognava cambiare sul serio invece, o sul serio se ne doveva andare di casa, lasciarci, sparire (22).

Leda’s memory of her mother’s behavior, and specifically of her mode of interacting with her three daughters, results in conscious planning to be different. The intention to “non assomigliarle” is immediately followed by an insertion of her mother’s threatening refrain, “you will never ever see me again!” Her mother’s mode of mothering, in particular her repetitive issuing of threats to disappear, is what Leda vows never to repeat; her mother should have changed her behavior, stopped scaring her daughters with threats of her departure, *or* actually

left. From this perspective, Leda was different: she left without saying a word; “Lei non ci lasciò mai, pur gridando celo; io invece lasciai le mie figlie quasi senza annunciarlo” (97). In this way, Leda’s leaving is tied to *not being like her mother* and this in itself constitutes a rejection of her.

In neither narrative, however, Leda’s or Aleramo’s, is it a simple case of rejection of their mothers. Rather, I posit that in both narratives the action of leaving one’s child(ren) functions as an activation of the mother’s desire that *is* an acting out (a performance) of her words. To make her words into acts becomes part of repaying a debt to her through obeying her authority; thus, I argue that, in both cases, the abandonment of their children *is for their mothers*. In this way, both texts, and their protagonists, attempt to break the chain of maternal sacrifice without breaking from the mother; rather, the breaking of the chain becomes a way of adhering to a maternal authority and voice. Both narratives are ultimately in the service of creating a new mother-daughter bond (or female genealogy), which takes into account the breaking of the chain; the novels attempt both at once in order to constitute a new relation. Similarly, *La figlia oscura*’s break from *Una donna* is its own type of bond.

I have already mentioned an inherent contradiction operative in *Una donna*; Sibilla claims the need to exorcise, and break from, the maternal ideology of sacrifice (this is, after all, her justification for leaving her son), yet her narrative proceeds to employ, structurally and rhetorically, that very discourse. I posit that this contradiction occurs because Sibilla, while writing her “coming-of-age” story, actually deploys her own mother’s narrative (one that included much sacrifice, and perhaps sacrificial language as well), thus giving voice to a silenced female autobiography (or at least what she has of it) through the production of her own: a sort of biography and autobiography at once. In this way, Sibilla’s narrative mimicks her mother’s narrative voice in order to produce her own personal narrative of motherhood. *Una donna* works through citation, a mode of producing language that is tied to her mother’s voice and can account for some of the excessiveness in its literary style.¹⁶² Sibilla, and *Una donna*, reenacts a maternal discourse of sacrifice.

Reading retroactively, Sibilla’s discovery of her mother’s unsent letters (a discovery that takes place towards the end of the novel) accounts thematically and stylistically for the maternal discourse produced and simultaneously rejected. Sibilla discusses the discovery of her mother’s letters, and gives literal voice to them through citation, immediately prior to her claim that daughters should be aware of a debt to be paid to their mothers:

Un giorno trassi da una cassetta alcune vecchie carte di lei, consegnatemi dalla mia sorellina prima della sua partenza dal paese. Non avevo mai avuto il coraggio di scorrerle. Eran lettere di parenti, note di spese, appunti disparati, abbozzi di ciò ch’ella scriveva ai genitori, alla sorella, al marito; qualche poesia sua, anche, degli anni giovanili, sentimentale, romantica, e tuttavia vibrante d’una tragica sincerità. Lo spirito materno mi si mostrava in quei fogli sparsi, quale l’avevo riscostituito penosamente colla sola istituzione nei giorni della sua rovina.

¹⁶² Sibilla reclaims her mother’s mode of speech through her very act of mimicry; Sibilla’s mother’s voice is one that copies, through recitation, the texts of others: she recites poetry and literature, she prays and has Sibilla do the same: “la mamma, sí, ripeteva ogni tanto qualche strofa carezzevole e nostalgica, o modulava colla voce appassionata spunti di vecchie romanze,” (3) and, “La mamma mi faceva pregare ogni sera” (7). Indeed, a voice that replays previously existing texts is already, in part, her mother’s voice and style.

E una lettera mi fermò il respiro. Datava da Milano: era scritta a matita, in modo quasi illeggibile, di notte. La mamma annunciava a suo padre il suo arrivo per il dí dopo; diceva di aver già pronto il baule colle poche cose sue, di essere già stata nella camera dei figliuoli a baciarli per l'ultima volta...

“Debbo partire... qui mi impazzisco... lui non mi ama piú... Ed io soffro tanto che non so piú voler bene ai bambini... debbo andarmene, andarmene... Poveri figli miei, forse è meglio per loro!...” (192).

It is through these letters, tragic and sentimental, that Sibilla restores and re-writes her mother's past. *Una donna* cites the voice and language contained in them and repays her mother with her own narrative and history never before made available. Her mother's writing is itself vulnerable, written in pencil and rushed, nearly unreadable, smudged handwriting. If Sibilla does not make permanently visible her mother's narrative it will disappear without being heard or read.¹⁶³

Sibilla's narrative replicates her mother's self-narration, reenacting, both thematically and stylistically, the mother's narrative and voice in an act of restitution. Within this batch of writings are her mother's love letters, written in an adolescent, sentimental style. Sibilla replicates this form and manner of writing in the love letters that she and her husband exchange prior to their engagement, echoing the sentimental writing style she finds in her mother's writing in various passages of *Una donna*. The direct citation of her mother's letter written during a night in which she planned on abandoning her family is a literalized and concentrated example of the text's overall citation of the maternal, and therefore particularly telling. The brief citation, not even four full lines, contains six instances of elisions, *puntini*, which are dispersed abundantly throughout the novel. Read retroactively, these *puntini* are a way in which Sibilla's text directly and stylistically cites her mother's letters. Lastly, the direct citation of her mother's letter resonates with countless nights in Sibilla's own narrative and foreshadows the night when she will leave her son and husband never to return. In this sense, the mother's narrative is needed in the construction of the daughter's narrative; Sibilla uses her mother's narration and puts her words into action for her: she will leave her family and, just as her mother's letter projects, she will go north to live with her father. It may seem disappointing to readers that Sibilla escapes her husband only to end up back within the personal and symbolic patriarchy of her father's house. Through this reading, however, we may view this detail as an instance of the narrative debt owed and repaid to Sibilla's mother; Sibilla carries out her mother's original written plan.¹⁶⁴

In the case of *La figlia oscura* the separation between Leda and her mother is depicted quite clearly and powerfully through Leda's initial departure from Naples at 18 and then again via Leda's abandonment of her own daughters, which, as shown, is portrayed as an extension, and confirmation, of that first break. We also learn that before Leda's mother's death, mother and daughter were on particularly bad terms; Bianca and Marta did in fact spend a lot of time in

¹⁶³ It is a significant detail that the letters are handed over to Sibilla by her younger sister, in a way, further connecting the mother-daughter chain to include the younger daughter who has now aided in making public and permanent their mother's voice; the negative chain of repetitive submission and sacrifice is in some ways challenged and substituted by a chain of daughters that help reconstruct the mother's story.

¹⁶⁴ Spackman argues that *Una donna* adopts a discourse of motherliness as masquerade; I agree, and seek to show here that *Una donna* specifically employs Sibilla's mother's discursive voice.

Naples with Leda's mother when Leda left them and Leda maintains a deep resentment regarding this that she takes out on her mother:

Mia madre è stata brava, all'epoca, si è occupata di loro, si è sfiancata, ma non le ho mostrato gratitudine, né per questo né per altro. La rabbia segreta che nutrivo contro di me l'ho rovesciata su di lei. In seguito, quando mi sono ripresa le mie figlie e le ho riportate a Firenze, l'ho accusata di averle segnate malamente come aveva malamente sengato me. Accuse calunniose. Lei s'è difesa, ha reagito con cattiveria, si è dispiaciuta molto, forse è morta poco tempo dopo perché avvelenata dal suo stesso dispiacere. (86).

Leda actually owns up to wrongly blaming her mother, turning self-resentment outward and onto her. There is even a fleeting, but noticeable, suggestion that the hurt and anger caused by Leda's accusations brought about her mother's death; the one seems to lead to the other in this above citation. Leda and her mother had not truly reconciled before her death and here we get a taste of Leda's possible guilt and regret with regards to their relationship and how it ended. Leda admits of the failure to repay her mother with any sort of gratitude and the remaining sensation of a debt owed. This section of *La figlia oscura* also evokes the lost opportunity for reconciliation between mother and daughter, Amalia and Delia, in *L'amore molesto* and the resultant possibility of guilt and regret. Here, too, then, one might consider the daughter's grief and the work of mourning the mother. Indeed, I want to consider Leda's narrative as an attempt to re-work this mother-daughter relation even without the physical presence of Leda's mother.

Despite the lack of Leda's mother's physical presence during the time of narration, her voice enters the narrative on more than one occasion; we have already seen that her voice, in a sense, begins the narration by way of Leda's fantasy of alarm. We also find, by rereading the pinecone attack, that this too can be read as a threat issued by Leda's mother's mouth. The scene of the mysterious pinecone strike occurs in the pinewoods dividing the street from the beach where, on her first walk to the beach, Leda recalls her childhood and her mother eating pinenuts out of a pinecone:

Ogni scricchiolio di pigna secca o tonfo, il colore scuro dei pinoli mi ricordano la bocca di mia madre che ride mentre schiaccia i gusci, ne estrae i frutti giallini, li dà da mangiare alle mie sorelle che li pretendono chiassosamente, a me che taccio in attesa, o li mangia lei stessa sporcandosi di polvere scura le labbra e dicendo, per insegnarmi a essere meno timida: va', a te niente, sei peggio di una pigna verde (11).

The pinecone that hits Leda in the back leaves a mark (perhaps like the one Leda accused her mother of leaving on her and her daughters) that resembles a mouth: "Avevo tra le scapole una macchia livida che pareva una bocca, scura ai bordi, rossastra al centro" (27). The "polvere scura" seems transferred onto Leda's back by her mother's mouth and a threat of denying her the pinenuts becomes a real threat of bodily harm represented by the blow to her back. We have here another bodily threat issued from her mother's mouth that brands her, as if with dialect, just as Leda feared would happen to her daughters if left with her mother to acquire her dialect. Once again, her mother's verbal threat becomes literalized, actual bodily harm.

The real childhood fantasy of alarm, however, is contained in the memory of her mother's continued threats to abandon Leda and her sisters:

Ricordo il dialetto nella bocca di mia madre quando smarriva la cadenza dolce e ci strillava, intossicata dallo scontento: non ce la faccio più con voi, non ce la faccio più. Comandi, urla, insulti, un tendersi della vita, nelle sue parole, come un nervo logoro che appena sfiorato raschia via con dolore ogni compostezza. Una volta, due, tre ci ha minacciate, noi figlie, che se ne sarebbe andata, vi sveglierete la mattina e non mi troverete più. Mi svegliavo ogni giorno tremando di paura. Nella realtà c'era sempre, nelle parole spariva di casa in continuazione (17).

The passage is powerful in its imaging of her mother's words issuing from her mouth. In this way, we, as readers, see her mother's words spilling forth (like the pinenuts), commanding, screaming, unable to contain themselves: they become a reality, life stretches into them, and in them, through them, her mother is constantly disappearing. Her mother remains in her person, but is forever leaving, over and over, in her words; the novel itself seems an inverse operation, then, since her mother is present only in her words, her voice that acts as a "richiamo" in the text. I want to suggest that Leda's mother's words, her continuous promise to leave, functions similarly to Sibilla's mother's letters, and, specifically, to the cited letter in which she announces her departure. Leda does what her mother says, makes her words real by obeying them when she abandons her own daughters. Read in this way, Leda's abandonment of her daughters becomes maternally authorized. This compliance and fulfillment of Leda's mother's threat is, furthermore, one instance of an attempt to retroactively construct a link with Leda's mother that allows Leda to have her experience reflected back to her, given back to her, by her mother.¹⁶⁵ To produce a maternal authorization of her "crime" is also a form of recognition of gratitude towards her; furthermore, it re-writes the novel's opening scene in which Leda disobeys a maternal warning: here, instead, Leda carries out her mother's words for her, making the warning a reality. Such a retroactive process also suggests that in order for Leda to know herself as mother (an apparent telos of the text) she must go through "knowing" her mother *as mother*. The attempt to understand her "crime" committed against her daughters, to know herself as mother, must move through her relationship to her own mother and "knowing" her. As the final section of this chapter goes on to show, Leda attempts to "see" herself through "seeing" her mother and she needs Nina to accomplish this.

¹⁶⁵ This is, importantly, how Muraro describes the acquisition of a symbolic, i.e., the ability to have one's experience reflected back to them, and she endows the mother with symbolic authority since Muraro figures the relation to her as, precisely, the site where language takes place; it is through her that one learns to speak and, thus, have their experience given back to them via their unsubstitutable mother-tongue.

4. Tra madri e figlie

Leda's supposed autonomy established in the novel's opening pages is challenged and swiftly undone. This, at first, idyllic return to self turns out to be fraught with anxiety and this accounts for the sense of foreboding that immediately assails Leda's vacation; how does Leda know herself on her own? This question drove her flight from Naples and her abandonment of her daughters and now haunts Leda's vacation. We come to understand that the ominous feeling that clean definitions are gone, has to do with Leda being on her own and not having to think about anyone else, not having to worry about her daughters:

Per anni la ragione di ogni vacanza erano state le due bambine e quando erano cresciute e avevano cominciato ad andarsene in giro per il mondo con gli amici ero sempre rimasta ad aspettare che tornassero. Mi preoccupavo non solo di catastrofi di ogni tipo (i pericoli dei viaggi aerei, di quelli per mare, le guerre, i terremoti, i maremoti) ma delle loro fragilità nervosa, delle possibili tensioni con i compagni di viaggio, dei drammi sentimentali per amori troppo facilmente corrisposti o non corrisposti affatto. Volevo essere pronta ad affrontare richieste improvvise d'aiuto (10).

From this first night in the rental apartment, it is apparent that Leda's acquisition of self-knowledge on her own cannot be separated from knowing herself as a mother, and inevitably takes into account her relationship to her daughters. Leda's sense of being "senza contorni," no longer bound, or defined, by and in relation to others, explains her subsequent voyeurism and strange attachment to the large Neapolitan family since it is through them that Leda is brought into her past as both mother and daughter; it turns out that she is far from alone and that knowing herself requires mediation.

Leda's voyeurism and interactions with the Neapolitan clan are centered on Nina, who becomes the person through whom Leda's gains a complex set of identifications and, thus, multiple mediations; Nina comes to serve as both mother-mirror and daughter-mirror. First, looking at the family is like looking back onto the Neapolitan family that she fled; they reflect back to her her childhood perspective and past. She notes similarities the first time she mentions them: "un gruppo familiare largo, simile a quello di cui avevo fatto parte io quando ero bambina, stessi scherzi, stesse sdolcinatezze, stesse rabbie" (14). The repetition of "same" establishes a mirroring quality that only deepens, becoming more insidious, as Leda's vacation progresses:

Li sentivo, oggi, non come uno spettacolo da contemplare confrontandolo malinconicamente con ciò che ricordavo della mia infanzia a Napoli; li sentivo tempo mio, mia vita acquitrinosa dentro cui a tratti scivolavo ancora. Erano proprio come la parentela da cui mi ero tirata via da ragazzina. Non li tolleravo e tuttavia mi tenevano stretta, li avevo tutti dentro (84-85).

The familiarity and recognition admittedly go too far, working their way inside Leda and binding themselves to her. Time collapses in on itself and, rather than mere associations, the past and the present live within one another; a complete identification seems to take over and Leda starts to work *in and on* the past via the present. The family seems to swallow her up against her will

and, conversely, she feels that they are all within her, they make her. The text often links this sameness, an engulfing quality, to Neapolitan dialect, and the way in which the clan speaks. This aural intimacy is evocative in both pleasant and frightening ways, and is a relatively explicit example of Nina standing in for Leda's mother. Leda is particularly taken with Nina's voice and with its rhythm when she speaks to Elena; "Parlava alla bambina e alla sua bambola con una cadenza dialettale gradevole, il napoletano che amo, quello tenero del gioco e delle dolcezze. Ero incantata" (17). This incantation bleeds directly into a memory of Leda's mother's voice: "Ricordo il dialetto nella bocca di mia madre quando smarriva la cadenza dolce e ci strillava..." (17). Although not of the sweet persuasion, Leda's mother's voice is its own type of incantation haunting the text and often repeating things in threes as in a traditional conjuration; for example, "Una volta, due, tre ci ha minacciate" (17). Via dialect and voice, an association between Nina and Leda's mother is forged that allows Leda to identify with Elena's position. Observing the family enables Leda to look back onto her family when she was a young child among it; it is as if Leda looks back in time to observe her mother, and the relationship between her mother and her daughter (i.e., herself).

Leda's voyeuristic relation to Nina is also one of implicit desire. The first description of Nina is implicitly sexualized (and even orientalizing). Nina's body is young and beautiful and Leda describes it in detail; her slim body, slender neck, glossy hair and slanting eyes (14). When Leda learns that the college student, Gino, who works at the beach, is attracted to Nina, a shifting triangular desire is established: vectors of desire move in multiple directions since both Leda and Nina show attraction to Gino and between one another; both women use Gino to get closer to the other. Leda's desire for Nina is never made explicit, but an interest in her body as sexual and desired is mapped onto Leda's child-like perspective on her mother. This becomes evident when Leda goes looking for Nina and finds her making out with Gino in the pinewoods:

Sorprenderli mi aveva dato, non so come dire, un turbamento. Era un'emozione confusa, sommava il visto al non visto, mi causava calore e un freddo sudato... Non era una sensazione adulta, ma infantile, mi ero sentita come una bambina trepidante. Erano tornate fantasie lontanissime, immagini finte, inventate, come quando da piccola fantasticavo che mia madre uscisse di casa in segreto, di giorno e di notte, per incontrare suoi amanti e sentivo sul mio corpo la gioia che provava (90).

The site of Nina kissing Gino makes Leda feel like a confused and curious young girl imagining her mother engaging sexually with men; Leda's childhood fantasy, an image of her mother leaving the house to meet her lovers, is fulfilled with the actual sight of Nina and Gino. In this way, watching Nina becomes a way of "seeing" and watching her own mother. Leda catching sight of Nina in a sexual act captures instantly the way in which this novel brings together certain aspects of *L'amore molesto* and *Complice il dubbio*. This scene is very reminiscent of Delia fantasizing about Amalia and Caserta's sexual encounters and feeling herself to be Amalia by projecting herself into her body and experiences: learning sexuality through her mother's position. Simultaneously, though, Leda watches another woman, Nina, as a sexual body desiring and being desired, reminiscent of the reciprocal voyeurism between *Complice il dubbio*'s protagonists (later we learn that Nina also saw Leda in the pinewoods, she wasn't just seen, p.111). Both seem to occur at once in *La figlia oscura* and Leda experiences a form of pleasure based on the two women's bodies and sexuality. Importantly, in both cases, it is not simply that

Delia or Leda seeks to inhabit the other woman's place, but that they are also jealous of the men that have access to Amalia and Nina's bodies. This example is particularly useful as a bridge between the two mediating roles Nina offers; in it Nina stands in as Leda's mother, but is also a body through whom Leda feels and recalls her own desire and sexuality; Nina's tentative affair with Gino also enables Leda to reflect on her affair and subsequent relationship with Professor Hardy.

This brings us to a second type of reflection created by Leda's voyeuristic relation to Nina; Leda identifies with Nina as a younger version of herself; she sees herself through her. This is, perhaps, the more obvious mode of mirroring and there are numerous examples of Leda's identification with Nina. To start, Leda's sense that Nina stands out and is different from her other family members is both in line with what Leda says her mother imagined for herself *and* how Leda has thought about herself and her ability to break free of Naples and her family. There is a sense of refinement and elegance about Nina that pulls her apart from the family; "ma lei, la madre giovane, vista così a distanza...mi sembrò un'anomalia del gruppo, un organismo misteriosamente sfuggito alla regola..." (14-15). Nina doesn't seem, at first, to belong. Leda considers the ways in which her mother attempted to be different from her own Neapolitan clan, but was never wholly successful (87-88). Leda herself wanted desperately to be different, to be "better," than her family and surroundings; "A partire dai tredici-quattordici anni avevo aspirato al decoro borghese, a un buon italiano, a una buona vita colta e riflessiva. Napoli mi era sembrata un'onda che mi avrebbe annegata" (85). This supposed, shared difference is part of what draws Leda to Nina and affects her desire for them to get to know one another apart from the rest of the family.

It is clear that Leda is taken with Nina. She identifies with Nina *as mother* and wants to offer up her own story in order to be a role model to her. Leda expresses the desire to have time alone with Nina so that they can speak woman-to-woman, mother-to-mother; she wants to share her experiences with her. Leda fantasizes about this closeness when she finds herself alone at Nina and Elena's beach chairs: "Il caso, pensai, o un richiamo silenzioso, dovrebbe spingere Nina fin qui, da sola. Via la bambina, via tutto. Salutarci senza sorpresa. Aprire due sdraio, guardare il mare insieme, comunicarle con calma la mia esperienza sfiorandoci ogni tanto le mani" (76). It is clear that part of what Leda wants to share with Nina is what happened in her life that led her to leave her daughters since this fantasized intimacy is immediately followed by Leda's recollection of her failed attempt to discuss with her daughters the situation that led to her leaving; she wrote her daughters a letter, which she doubts they ever read, and whenever she broaches the topic they quickly evade any discussion. Leda would like to share with Nina what she has been unable to relate to her daughters, and, in this way, we have a third form of mediation: Nina as daughter-mirror. The breakdown of communication between Leda and her daughters is bookended by another fantasy of bonding with Nina; "Di Nina invece non sono la storia, Nina potrebbe vedermi persino come un futuro. Scegliersi per compagnia una figlia estranea. Cercarla, avvicinarla" (77). In this way, we can consider Nina as a daughter-figure to Leda, but one with whom closer recognition can take place. Nina is both like Leda's daughters and not; she is around their same age, but can listen and learn from Leda in a different way, she will not immediately try to distance herself in the way that daughters do from their mothers. We know that Bianca and Marta's move to Canada is part of a larger way in which they feel themselves more similar to their father Gianni (they have also chosen to pursue careers in science like his). Furthermore, it seems to be precisely Nina's identity as mother that will allow a particular form of intimacy and understanding; it is Leda's experiences as mother, and the

difficulties that it brings to her own sense of self, that she aims to communicate to Nina; this is, after all, what they discuss when they do have time alone (110-118). In this way, Nina simultaneously stands as a younger version of Leda *and* a daughter figure (these mediations are very related, but not exactly the same).

This last phrase, “Scegliersi per compagnia una figlia estranea,” sounds hauntingly like the Italian feminist practice of “affidamento” described earlier. Interestingly, though, the practice of entrustment, as depicted in Italian feminist theory, has been described almost exclusively from the perspective of the younger woman who seeks symbolic mediation from an older, more experienced woman.¹⁶⁶ Here, we have the voice of an older woman who seeks to be in the position of “madre simbolica” and looks for a younger, less experienced woman with whom she can share herself, a sort of “figlia simbolica.” While scolding herself for having bluntly told Rosaria and Nina about having left her daughters, she concludes, “Ma in realtà avrei voluto parlare di quelle stesse cose soltanto con Nina, in un’occasione diversa, cautamente, per essere capita” (68). Thus, it is not merely about helping Nina, but even more so about Leda’s need to be heard and understood, her need for mediation of her experience that she is still trying to unravel: “Mettere ordine, capire” (127). I am interested in Leda and Nina’s case of ‘symbolic othering’ because of this novel, originating from a maternal perspective. However, due to Nina’s simultaneous mediation as mother-mirror, this symbolic mother-daughter relation, *is also* a mother-mother relation, that is, an entrustment *between two mothers* regarding a shared (or divergent) experience of motherhood; the “maternità” is not only metaphorized, but is literally a relationship between mothers: an “affidamento” for mothers. Leda is the initiator and she seeks mediation through Nina; she wants Nina to know her story, her “crime,” *and* she wants her experience given back to her, reflected back to her both as mother and daughter. Nina is not just any mother, she stands in for Leda’s mother; as discussed in the third section, Leda’s experience of motherhood *needs* her own mother’s experience. This is why Leda wants to “avvicinarsi a” Nina and why she wants to implicate herself in Nina’s life; Nina becomes a stand-in both for Leda’s mother and daughter(s) at once and this allows Leda to be mother and daughter at once, and in relation to the same person.

We see this manifold role play in relation to Nina in a number of instances whereby Leda is simultaneously mother and daughter-like. In one such fantasy, Leda describes Nina putting on sunscreen and how she would like to help her (we see here how Leda’s daydreaming about Nina is another form of her voyeurism, here internalized):

...intanto la vedevo come a volte l’avevo vista in quei giorni, in piedi, di schiena, mentre con movimenti lenti e precisi si spalmava la crema sulle gambe giovani, sulle braccia, sulle spalle, e infine, con una torsione tesa, fin dietro la schiena, fin dove riusciva ad arrivare, tanto che a volte avevo avuto voglia di alzarmi e dire lascia, faccio io, ti aiuto, come, da piccola, *pensavo di fare con mia madre, o come avevo fatto spesso con le mie figlie* (67 my emphasis).

¹⁶⁶ For a thoughtful and critical reflections on ‘entrustment’ see *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference*. Eds. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, and Teresa de Lauretis’ “The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy: An Introductory Essay” in *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*.

Here, Nina, or the image of her, enables a doubled mediation moving in both directions at once. Leda would like to interact with Nina, and specifically with her body, the way in which she desired doing with her mother and the way in which she has done many times with her daughters. Nina stands in as both mother and daughter figure and this allows Leda to be daughter and mother (to Nina) at the same time. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that this passage is erotically charged and that a desire for Nina is also present in the relation. Importantly, then, *La figlia oscura*'s version of "affidamento" does not overlook the possibility of desire between women, which is also here a suggestion of the possibility of incestual desire among mothers and daughters.¹⁶⁷

Similarly, but more complexly, when Elena goes missing on the beach Leda's identification is doubled since she alternately puts herself in Elena's place, recalling how her mother told her she was always getting lost as a child, but also aligns herself with Nina's perspective as mother, remembering the panic, desperation, love and anger that arises:

Ricomparirà, pensai, ero pratica di smarrimenti. Mia madre diceva che non facevo che perdermi, da piccola. Un attimo e sparivo, bisognava correre allo stabilimento e chiedere che si dicesse all'altoparlante com'ero fatta, che mi chiamavo così e così, e lei intanto si metteva in attesa presso la cassa. Non mi ricordavo niente di quel mio sparire, avevo altre cose nella memoria. Temevo che fosse mia madre a perdersi, vivevo nell'ansia di non riuscire più a trovarla. Ricordavo invece nitidamente quando avevo perso Bianca. Correvo per la spiaggia come Nina adesso...Non sapevo che fare, ero sola con le due piccole... Un figlio, sì, è un gorgo d'ansie. M'era rimasto impresso che cercavo con lo sguardo dappertutto tranne che verso il mare, l'acqua non osavo nemmeno a guardarla. Mi accorsi che Nina stava facendo lo stesso. Frugava dovunque ma volgeva disperatamente la spalle al mare, e allora sentii un'improvvisa commozione, mi venne da piangere (37).

Watching Nina desperately search for Elena allows for a complex set of identifications. First Leda puts herself in Elena's shoes remembering what her mother told her about her own getting lost at the beach; in this case, "la figlia oscura" is both Elena and Leda who we are told was always getting lost. From this perspective, watching Nina search for Elena is a way of *seeing* and remembering her own mother, and her mother's mothering; it makes Leda a child again; "Mi sembrava di essere Elena, o Bianca quando si era persa, ma forse ero solo io stessa da piccola che stavo risalendo dall'oblio" (38). Then, in almost the same instant, Leda slides from daughter to mother and puts herself in Nina's shoes, remembering a time in which she could not find her own daughter. She describes her fright and the way she searched for her, what she dared not do and sees Nina avoiding at all costs. Leda's strong identification with Nina's experience of mothering makes Leda more emotional than perhaps any other moment in the novel; "Bianca piangeva quando l'avevano ritrovata... Piangevo anch'io, per la felicità, per il sollievo, ma intanto gridavo di rabbia – come mia madre – per il peso schiacciante della responsabilità, per il legame che strozza...(38). Ultimately, Leda's identification is such that she becomes unable to

¹⁶⁷ This is precisely de Lauretis' critique of the Libreria delle donne di Milano and the social-symbolic practice of "affidamento," i.e., that it is homophobic. See "The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy: An Introductory Essay" in *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*.

sit and watch; she joins the search and becomes the one to find Elena and bring her back to her mother. Leda is both a lost little girl (Elena, her own daughter, herself) and a mother (Elena's mother, Bianca's mother, her own mother) who has lost her daughter. There is a slipperiness to these multiple identifications that is a recurring and poignant aspect of the novel. The text seems to suggest that the two roles, mother and daughter, are difficult to pull apart. Here, through Leda's investigation of, and relationship to, Nina she is able to occupy both roles of mother and daughter simultaneously and is, therefore, able to bring into relation her mothering and her mother's mothering.

It is from this vantage point that I propose considering Leda's "criminal" act of stealing Elena's coveted doll, Nani, since stealing Nani is the strongest example of Leda making Nina into her mother and associating more thoroughly with her *as mother*. Nani functions as a symbol of Nina (Nani is, after all, also an anagram of Nina) and Elena's mother-daughter bond (and of the slipperiness of roles within that bond) that, at first, makes Nina appear as an idealized, perfect mother. This is, in fact, Leda's first impression of Nina and Elena:

Tutto il viso rivolgeva in permanenza alla madre la richiesta di stare insieme: una supplica senza pianti o capricci, e la madre non si sottraeva. Una volta notai l'attenzione delicata con cui la spalmava di crema. Un'altra volta mi colpì il tempo lento che madre e figlia passavano insieme in acqua, l'una che se la stringeva contro, l'altra che le teneva le braccia strette intorno al collo. Ridevano tra loro godendosi il piacere di sentirsi corpo contro corpo, toccarsi il naso col naso, sputarsi fiotti d'acqua, baciarsi. In un'occasione le vidi giocare insieme con la bambola. Lo facevano divertendosi molto, la vestivano, la svestivano, fingevano di ungerla con crema solare...se le stringevano al seno come per allattarla...le tenevano al sole accanto a loro, sdraiata sul loro stesso telo. Se la ragazza era di per sé bella, in quel suo modo di essere madre c'era qualcosa che la distingueva, pareva non aver voglia d'altro che della bambina (15).

Leda's most detailed voyeurism is, in fact, of mother and daughter and the way in which they spend time together on the beach. In another scene, Leda devotes substantial time to watching the way Nina and Elena play together with the doll, speaking to it in alternating voices, taking care of her as if she is their daughter. Leda admits of a certain jealousy regarding the happy relationship between them, and above all of Nina's admirable way of mothering: "Quella donna, Nina, pareva tranquilla e provai invidia" (17). Leda begins to feel uneasy when watching them, their play eventually upsets her. She starts to see Nina's spectacular mothering as a performance, a sort of showing off and her distress mounts; "Fu come quando una fitta lieve, a forza di pensarci, diventa un dolore insopportabile. Cominciai a esasperarmi" (19). It seems that Leda's growing disquiet over the seamless rapport between Nina and Elena is what leads her, without thinking, to steal Nani. She more or less arrives at this conclusion, although never states it in its entirety: "Perché l'avevo presa. Custodiva l'amore di Nina e di Elena, il loro vincolo, la reciproca passione. Era il testimone lucente di una maternità serena" (59). It is precisely Nina's perceived, tranquil motherhood and the loving bond that it brings mother and daughter that Leda manipulates by stealing Nani.

Leda's jealousy seems the initiator of her "crime" and stealing Nani is a way to take out her resentment on Nina. While stealing Nani most immediately affects Elena, who incessantly

cries and even gets sick over the loss, the real, intended victim is Nina who can no longer make Elena happy and whose seamless, special motherhood is undone; Nina is revealed as no longer a “perfect” mother. Elena’s unraveling causes Nina to break down and she begins to show signs of distress, anger, and resentment towards Elena and towards her role as mother. When Leda runs into Nina, Elena and Rosaria in town, Nina snaps angrily about the family friends who she believes stole Nani; “E Nina sbottò, con una cadenza dialettale assai più forte del solito: «L’hanno fatto apposta, sono stati spinti dalla madre per fare male a me” (62). For the first time, Nina shows intense frustration with her ability to mother, manage, and console Elena; “Sentii che stava oscillando tra pazienza e insofferenza, comprensione e voglia di mettersi a piangere. Dov’era l’idillio a cui avevo assistito in spiaggia... cercava di calmare la bambina senza riuscirci, si sentiva stremata” (63). It is as if her easy bond with Elena breaks, and the weight of maternal responsibility gets the better of her.

The effect of Leda’s manipulation is to render Nina more like Leda as mother and more like Leda’s mother as mother, i.e., not calm or happy, but suffocated and under duress. When Nani goes missing, Leda and Nina speak in private, communicating about the difficulty of mothering, the way one lives more for her child than for herself. Nina asks Leda questions about her decision to leave her daughters and then tries to express her own sense of what she calls “lo scambussolamento;” “È vero, ti si frantuma il cuore: non riesci a sopportare di stare insieme a te stessa e hai certi pensieri che non puoi dire” (117). Interestingly, it is Nina’s choice of “scambussolamento” that makes Leda think of her mother: “Mi ricordai di mia madre, dissi: «Mia madre usava un’altra parola, lo chiamava frantumaglia»” (117).¹⁶⁸ Nina’s feeling of not being able to take it anymore mimicks Leda’s own depiction of herself as a “bad mother” and her mother’s lapses of anger and repeated threats to leave. Nina’s meltdown brings her closer to Leda’s experience of mothering and her experience of her own mother’s mothering, and enables a correspondence between their individual experiences of mothering. The doubling of roles, whereby both Leda and Nina stand as substitute (symbolic) mothers for each other, facilitates Leda’s ability to identify with *her mother as mother*. If Leda acts as a “madre simbolica” to Nina *and* simultaneously places herself in the position of daughter “watching” her mother through her voyeurism of Nina, then it is as if she sees her mother’s mothering both as daughter *and* from her own perspective as mother; she is an identifying mother and daughter at once in relation to the same person. Leda’s inhabiting of both roles and the incessant shifting and overlapping that it produces, is one way in which the novel represents the roles of mother and daughter as implicated in one another, as often interchanging and difficult to pull apart.¹⁶⁹ It is as though knowing oneself as mother or daughter implies an inhabited knowledge of the other role; almost all the female characters in the novel are emphatically both mother and daughter, in ways both literal and metaphorical: even Nani is “pregnant” with a worm.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *La frantumaglia* (2003) is, in fact, the title of a collection of Ferrante’s letters and interviews.

¹⁶⁹ Nani is herself another form of mediation for Leda, another way in which Leda is no longer alone in her rental apartment, another reflection that’s doubled, making Leda into both daughter and mother in relation to Nina at once. Having Nani, taking her home and making her one’s own, is another way of inhabiting Elena’s position in relation to Nina; Leda, in fact, plays with Nani, dresses her up, speaks to her, cleans her out. But, her actions with the doll also make her “motherly” in much the way that Elena uses Nani as her baby.

¹⁷⁰ This mutual implication between mother and daughter is a way in which *La figlia oscura* may challenge Hirsch’s attempt to locate a strictly maternal discourse and perspective; this novel suggests, perhaps, that a maternal discourse must go through a daughterly one and vice versa. A daughterly

The final question we might ask is why Leda comes clean to Nina about stealing Nani and what her confession accomplishes, particularly given the fact that Nina's presence seems a mode of reconstituting a relationality to Leda's mother. I read the final scene of the novel, Leda's confession and Nina's anger and vindictive violence, as a reenactment of sorts, a way for Leda to work on her past in the present; "Di colpo mi resi conto che, giorno dietro giorno, senza volerlo, l'avevo coinvolta da lontano, con sentimenti alterni e spesso contrastanti, in qualcosa che non sapevo decifrare, ma che era intensamente mio" (67). Leda's "crime" and subsequent scene of confession create a symbolic scenario, via Nina, in which Leda's mother authorizes the breaking of the chain, Leda's cultural crime of abandonment, by finally doing what she always said that she would do; "non ce la faccio più con voi, non ce la faccio più... vi sveglierete la mattina e non mi troverete più" (17). Like Leda's mother, Nina loses her composure and slips into a threatening dialect: "mi tolse la bambola dalle mani con un gesto feroce di riappropriazione, gridò a sé stessa in dialetto me ne devo andare, mi gridò in italiano: non ti voglio vedere più, non voglio niente da te, e andò verso la porta...poi me la sentii alle spalle, sibilò insulti in dialetto, terribili *come quelli che sapevano pronunciare mia nonna, mia madre*" (138 my emphasis). Nina then stabs Leda in the side with a hatpin (a gift given to her by Leda and another way in which Leda orchestrates this scenario) and abruptly leaves, throwing the pin on the ground and taking Nani with her. Nina's overlap with Leda's mother (and her female genealogy more generally) is highlighted in her use of vulgar dialect against Leda, and I take her departure, and her announcement that she never wants to see Leda again, as a way in which Leda's mother makes the break from her daughters that she always threatened to do. The threats of bodily harm issued earlier in the novel by Leda's mother, and always given in dialect, are realized here through Nina's stabbing Leda and her nasty words. It is through Nina, through manipulating her into angrily storming out and leaving Leda, that Leda is able to "repay" her mother for a debt of ingratitude and non-recognition: a way of evening out the score since Leda has heretofore done all the leaving. In this way, Leda's abandonment of her daughters is no longer constituted by not being like her mother, but can be re-made into a continuation of her mother's own act that Leda witnesses, and experiences, as both daughter and mother, and which, - *she gives back to her mother*; it allows for the abandonment to be shared and in relation to one another's experiences of mothering. Finally, this symbolic "crime scene" of abandonment establishes a new mother-daughter bond that takes into account the breaking of the chain of sacrificing motherhood; or said differently, the breaking of the chain is now its own linkage.

discourse that moves through a maternal one is, perhaps, more easily argued since every daughter has a mother. Theorizing the inverse is not to imply that every mother must have a daughter (we know this is not the case), but, rather, *that every mother was a daughter*, and that knowledge of oneself as the latter is necessarily implicated in a knowledge of oneself as the former.

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