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**Grazia Deledda (1871–1936) and Irish Women Writers:
Nation and Transgression**

PhD

April 2009

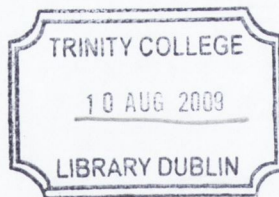
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Summary

This analysis explores the connections between Nobel Prize winner Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) and Irish women writers, many of whom despite popularity at the time have been met with critical silence. Two dominant themes emerge, both in the cultural background in Sardinia and Ireland, and in the narratives considered: nation and transgression. Engaging with these themes, chapter one introduces Deledda within the framework of cultural nationalism, and as a woman writer in the Sardinian and Italian contexts. It examines the cultural parallels in Ireland and illustrates the unorthodox voices of Irish women writers, many of whom have been occluded from literary criticism by a skewed focus on the Irish revival. Chapter two details the nuts and bolts of Deledda's Sardinia, from her focus on land, legend and language to the mechanism of crime and punishment, the recurring theme of temptation and the rebellious heroine breaking out of her mould. The subsequent close readings employ the theories of linguist and philosopher Julia Kristeva, particularly her ideas on identity and alterity. Chapter three examines concepts of national and personal identity in a comparison between Deledda, Katharine Tynan (1859-1931) and M.E. Francis (1859-1930), exploring ideas of separation and loss in the text.

The rebellious heroines of George Egerton (1860-1945) and Katherine Cecil Thurston (1875-1911) compare to Deledda's 'revolting daughters,' and posit questions about desire and gender in the text, the subject of chapter four, which alongside Kristeva engages with the philosophy of Helen Cixous. Finally, a discussion of moral trespass in Deledda and Thurston, alongside a more psychological examination of the struggle of the individual against the restrictions of society, is the focus of chapter five, which amongst other things discusses fatalism and sacrifice in the text. This investigation reveals that from the most apparent sense to a more philosophical appreciation, the themes of nation and transgression strongly connect Deledda to Irish women's writing, and are in themselves intimately related.

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For my Dad, Jack McKee

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Introduction

The body of Grazia Deledda lies in a simple, grey tomb in The Church of Solitude at the foot of Mount Orthobene. The modesty of her resting place seems fitting for a woman who lived her life somewhat removed from the world, devoting herself to her writing, and to her family. Her life had not been what was expected of a Catholic girl from the hilltop village of Nuoro in central Sardinia. More interested in getting an editor than a husband, Deledda's writing habit did not sit well with the strict code of conduct dished out to unmarried girls; she became an outcast in her own village. Being a woman writer was an affront to the norms of nineteenth century Sardinia; "earning money by her pen was deemed the equivalent of prostitution" (Kozma *A Life* 26). Even now, despite the honour of the Nobel Prize in 1926, some Sardinians react to Deledda's literary reputation with a shrug rather than with pride, and from the academy there has often been the assumption that her literary laurels were undeserved. An odd mix of the self-effacing and the outrageously arrogant as a young writer, she both rued her lack of formal education and linguistic elegance, and yet swore to become the writer of her island by the age of thirty (Scano 236). She nevertheless left the island shortly before her thirtieth birthday to settle on the Italian continent for good, leaving behind a real Sardinia for a fictional one.

Grazia Maria Cosima Damiana Deledda was born on 27 September 1871, the fourth of seven children, into a social class by her own admission "un po' paesana e un po' borghese" (Cerina *Novelle vol 1* 21).^{1*} This accident of birth meant she was uniquely placed to observe not just the genteel world of the daughter of a landowner and coal exporter, but also that of the shepherds and farmers who came to buy oil from her father's press: "while she recorded figures in the ledger

¹ "a little peasant, a little bourgeois."

* this translation and all those following are my own

she could also listen to the stories idle old men recounted to one another about bandits, lovers, ghosts" (King 29).

Deledda longed to look into the secret hiding places, into the rooms she was not allowed to enter in the *casa paterna*, her childhood house which features in several narratives. Her curiosity brought both joy and pain. On the threshold of the master bedroom, she stumbled upon the privacy of her mother and her new born baby sister (*Cosima* 15). She also intruded on the scene of her sister's death, whom she discovered in a pool of her own blood following a miscarriage. Death became part of life for the young writer; by the time she was in her twenties two sisters and her father had died. She also carried the burden of her two brothers, eventually running the family business due to their complete lack of responsibility. The eldest, Santus, who had inherited his mother Francesca Cambosu's depression, succumbed to alcoholism which ruined his medical studies and threatened the family's finances. The younger brother Andrea was also a profligate alcoholic who was fond of prostitutes; after their father's death in 1892 he ruined the Deleddas' reputation in the village through hooliganism and petty theft, and brought the family to the brink of bankruptcy (*Kozma A Life* 19-20). All of this marks Deledda's writing, which is conservative in style but probes the secrets behind conventional Sardinian life, mapping out the pains of domestic duty and the fractures within the family.

Deledda's disciplined approach to writing makes it seem like some kind of moral duty: she wrote consistently every day, even when suffering from breast cancer, which ended her life in 1936. In the real world she was a woman of few words. Her acceptance speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony was only a few minutes long; she hated public speaking. But her voice continues in the impressive opus she leaves behind -- thirty five novels, over two hundred and fifty short stories and thirty novellas (*Kozma Marianna* 10).

In Deledda, Sardinia is the *parfum de la terre natale* – a real place which is ultimately usurped by the island of her imagination. Nicola Tanda describes Deledda's Sardinia as an imaginary space in which the eternal drama of existence is played out, in a mythical, rather than a historical sense (70). Deledda's aim is not only to depict Sardinia but also to write about the human psyche, in particular

how temptation inevitably leads to sin. For Sharon Wood, Deledda's fiction is all about boundary crossing, about transgression, which in her work is "a moment of rupture, a nexus of psychological, social and historical collision" (*Italian Women's Writing* 64). This ethical dilemma of Deledda's narrative is for many the impetus of her fiction. For some these aspects of her writing are united. Attilio Momigliano sees Deledda's focus on crime and punishment as deeply reflective of the Sardinian psyche, entirely inseparable from Sardinia: "La sua tenacia morale era un dono della sua terra" (50),² just as Antonio Piromalli sees her aspiration to be a Sardinian writer as necessarily including an interpretation of the religious and moral world of her island (25).

Deledda's characters are law breakers, morally and socially; they turn gender stereotypes on their heads, all within the framework of a Sardinia gripped in the jaws of the modern world, resisted by the old generation but embraced by the new. The clash between traditional and modern ethical codes is, Paola Pittalis argues, analogous to the gulf between Sardinia and the new State (96), making moral transgression illustrative of political discord.

Deledda is not alone in this combination of the national and the transgressive, if by these terms we can mean the depiction of her island alongside moral and social trespass; this phenomenon, argues Giuseppe Marci, has characterised Sardinian literature for over four centuries, born from the writing of humanist Sigismondo Arquer (1530-1571) (*Narrativa* 12). Arquer's *Sardiniae, brevis historia descriptio* (1558) was the first systematic history of Sardinia, offering not only geographical, linguistic and historical description, but also giving a moral commentary on the law and the church; this combination instigated a literary tradition (14) within which Deledda's two dominant themes of nation and transgression sit comfortably.

Today, when one touches down in Alghero and makes the journey by car to Nuoro, there is a sense that everyone has vanished; the uncanny stillness of the countryside is another country to the Costa Smeralda and the wealthy holiday makers on Sardinia's eastern side. Describing Sardinia's interior, travel writer

² "Her moral tenacity is a gift from her country."

Michael Frank of the *New York Times* remarks upon the striking emptiness of the villages: "well-paved, vacant roads; small, provincial museums with only a handful of visitors to disturb the dust; tiny towns whose slumber is heavy and unbroken until market day or on Sundays, when bells summon everyone to church" (July 26, 1998). Three quarters of a century earlier, D.H. Lawrence wrote of the quietness and remoteness of the island in *Sea and Sardinia* (1921). He also wrote the preface to the English translation of Deledda's well known novel, *La madre* (1920), which is where the seeds of this comparison with Irish women writers lie.

La madre is the story of priest Paulu and his desire for an unmarried woman, Agnes. Set in Barbagia, Deledda's native region of Sardinia, it is a darkly Catholic drama, with landscape as mechanism, backdrop and heart. Paulu struggles with lust, a sin which is scrutinised and ultimately redeemed by his mother, Maddalena. Deledda examines a Christian conscience within the realm of the supernatural: her peasants are pagans dressed up for church, a mixture of the sacred and profane which is a strong thread in her narrative. Her characters are often --- appropriately - sardonic, and at times frightening. Both Agnes and Maddalena are remarkable heroines, an untidy tangle of traditional labels - saint, virgin, whore, temptress - they can be all or none of these things. Deledda's characters are creatures of moral and existential angst, riddled with indecision and self-doubt. *La madre* encapsulates the two dominant concerns of Deledda's fiction - the portrayal of her island and the documentary of the human heart.

Despite its setting, there is something uncannily 'Irish' about *La madre*, which is partly due to its language, both in Italian and in translation. The English translation offers simple, limpid language; it is slow, mesmeric, and yet earthy and plain, blending a choppy vernacular with a poetic timbre. Interestingly, it is one of only a handful of Italian novels translated into Irish -- *An mháthair* (1985). Its translator into Gaelic, Máire Nic Mhaoláin, talks of Deledda's simple yet subtle language, which attracted her to *La madre* as an ideal candidate for translation into Irish (*Nae* 65). The sometimes discordant - but pithy and often poetic - mix of dialect and poetry in Deledda's Italian, and the odd, striking English that

translation produces, resembles the kind of Irish English that existed – and was contrived – in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

La madre is kindred to much Irish narrative of the same period in its documentary of an island and its engagement with social and moral codes. Deledda's theatre of landscape – in particular a malevolent, untameable nature – and her sardonic pagan peasant battling with a Catholic conscience speak to contemporary Irish texts, not least *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by John Millington Synge (1871-1909), or *The Countess Cathleen* (1899) by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). Synge's play set in the west of Ireland features the murderous Christy Mahon, the anti-hero who confesses to murdering his father and is applauded by the peasants. Its focus on the Irish language and folklore combined with a theatrical backdrop are comparable to Deledda. Yeats's story of a beautiful patriot (Maud Gonne, with whom he was in love) who sacrifices herself for the good of the people, sees a fusion of the personal and the legendary (Armstrong 17). This combination is companion to Deledda's use of biography and folklore. She commented when asked about the details of her life, "you'll find them in my works. Through my works the picture of my life may seem full of events. At times it also seems like a legend to me" (qtd. in King 08).

It is tempting to embark on a comparison of Deledda and Irish revival writing, not least because of a shared interest in legend and language. Writing of the revival focused on the ancient culture of Ireland, on the Irish language and folklore in order to evoke some kind of 'national' literature. Like Deledda's attempt to collate the folklore of her region in *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna* (1894), Yeats was one of several writers to collect Irish myths, publishing *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* in 1888. The old legend, *The Countess Kathleen O'Shea* appeared in this collection, from which came *The Countess Cathleen*, performed alongside Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field* on the opening night of the Irish Literary Theatre. Yeats founded the theatre in 1899, alongside Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) and Edward Martyn, giving the Irish Literary Revival its most visible podium (Jeffares 38). Today the portraits of those key players in the revival -- some would have it an entirely orchestrated phenomenon in itself (33) -- hang in the Abbey Theatre; groups of students look impassively on

paintings of patrons and saints, from the monocled figure of Yeats to the stately Lady Gregory, writers who have formed a kind of literary catechism. The theatre today still owns something of reverence for these icons of Irish literature, continuing to perform plays that are somehow 'Irish' enough for a national theatre, its mission at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Just as there was reaction against the revival, in the form of the anti-heroic and anti-romantic short story by James Joyce and George Moore (Foster 04), there was variance and argument within these select writers. Riots ensued after Synge's *Playboy* was staged in 1907, the allusion to women's petticoats coupled with an unflattering view of the Irish peasant proving too provocative for the crowd. Twenty years later *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Seán O'Casey (1880-1964) also led to riots on its first performance, his cynical representation of nationalist heroics causing uproar. These works are in contrast to the romance and poetry found in Gregory and Yeats, typified by their co-authored play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). The drama draws on ancient imagery of Ireland as an old woman, who appears at the start of the play asking young men to make a blood sacrifice for her and earn immortality. This kind of nationalist tale was favoured by Maud Gonne, whose organisation *Inghinidhe na hEireann* (Daughters of Ireland) which she set up in 1900 (Ward 05), favoured plays that prioritised the needs of a 'mother nation' (Quinn 48).

Whilst much of this emphasis on folklore and peasantry compares well with Deledda, there is much that is problematic, particularly the lack of any immediate complexity in heroines. The walking talking dolls of Yeats, who speak of Ireland first and real women second are no match for Deledda's living breathing women who do not initially plead for a double voice to make themselves understood. Writers like O'Casey who offer a counter revival perspective employ the same kind of symbolism, leaving the female characters equally gagged. Whilst George Bernard Shaw's later socialist comedy *Pygmalion* (1916) offers a heroine similar to Henrik Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House* (1879), female characters of Irish narrative familiar from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often resonate with the Nora of O'Casey's *The Plough and the*

Stars, deserted by her husband who goes off to fight for an Ireland which is “greater than a mother... greater than a wife...” (Act II).

Trying to maintain the essential ingredients of legend and landscape whilst engaging with Deledda’s positioning of women led to the question of what little known Irish women writers have to say. Might there be a more sustainable connection to Deledda’s work? What might such a comparison reveal? Viewing Irish literature of this period as purely revival or counter revival is exceptionally limiting, argues John Wilson Foster in his 2008 *Irish Novels 1890-1940*. He talks of the ‘critical squint’ of scholars who see revival writing of this period as synonymous with Irish literature (09). Literary historians have tended to focus predominantly on what are considered revival texts – in their setting in Ireland, their use of language and folklore, or their political allegory – to the detriment of other genres, within which a large majority are women writers. Foster argues that in orthodox accounts of literature of this period, the Irish Revival dominates – and novels which assume an English connection or that are even set in England, do not conform to the criteria that implicitly guides discussion in this context. He suggests that if there is a predominant voice of the period, rather than any kind of revival or counter revival voice, it is women’s that dominates (11).

The spectrum of Irish women’s writing at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century is dizzying and disparate, and most have been critically neglected for decades. Just as in English literature, ‘great women novelists’ of this period actually entailed only four or five writers – Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Brönte sisters and Virginia Woolf (Showalter *A Literature* 07) – in Ireland a few names have dominated whilst the rest have fallen silent. Alongside Gregory, Anglo-Irish writers Edith Somerville (1858) and Violet Martin (Martin Ross) (1862-1915) are probably the best known outside Ireland both for their Big House novels, including *The Real Charlotte* (1894), and for their series of comic novels *The Irish R.M. and His Experiences* (1928). Their novels not only document the demise of a group of people who in good times belonged to both Ireland and England, and in trouble to neither, but they also “chart the slow liberation of women from Victorian strictures” (Lewis x). They have generally been examined

in one or both of these contexts, although recent readings such as Julie Anne Stevens's essay "The Art of Politics in Somerville and Ross's Fiction" (*New Contexts* 142-160) offers a new perspective on their work.

Kate O'Brien (1897-1974) is now an established name from the period known for her beautifully crafted novels which document the pain and paralysis of bourgeois Ireland. Her novels - and life - have attracted much controversy, something which is examined in Eibhear Walshe's collection of essays *Ordinary People Dancing* (1994). Likewise Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973) now enjoys a certain popularity, if perhaps not enough for a writer who in Neil Corcoran's opinion writes "some of the most voluptuous, as well as some of the most fearful, prose of the modern period, as sensuously gratifying as anything in Joyce or Nabokov" (07). Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) is an essay on identity, what it means to belong, or in the case of the nearly extinct Anglo-Irish to belong nowhere. Bowen discusses the ambiguity of being Anglo-Irish with a light and painful touch, bringing in and out of focus contrasting notions of Irish-ness and English-ness.

The Hon. Emily Lawless (1845-1913) has slipped in and out of favour in studies of Irish literature over the last hundred years, mostly because she combines nationalist sentiments with unionist politics, but still appears in many anthologies. Lawless intertwines the beauty of her surroundings and the love characters have for the land with the question of ownership and identity in *Hurriah: A Study* (1886). This is possibly her best and most famous novel (Mulkerns vii), alongside *Grania: The Story of an Island* (1892). But she also wrote a history, *Ireland* (1887), and a biography of Maria Edgeworth (1904) which were very successful (Hansson *Emily Lawless* 10). Renewed interest in her includes Heidi Hansson's *Emily Lawless 1845-1913: Writing the Interspace* (2007), which favours approaches to her work based on cultural geography and feminist studies.

These writers all compare in some way to Deledda, most particularly Lawless and O'Brien who will be touched upon in relation to the four Irish women writers chosen for their particular resonance with Deledda's themes of nation and transgression; this thesis is more interested in the *terra incognita* - or at least the

road less travelled – of these lesser known novelists, Francis, Tynan, Egerton and Thurston.

It was a shock and delight that the name of M.E. Francis (1859-1930) appeared both in Foster's account, and also in *New Contexts: Re-Framing Nineteenth Century Irish Women's Prose* (CUP 2008) edited by Heidi Hansson, whose essay "Patriot's Daughter" concerns Francis. The co-incidence was edifying, since Francis was one of the many popular authors read at random under the lamps of Early Printed Books, without the light of such recent criticism. Born August 22 1859 in Killiney Park, Co. Dublin, the second daughter of Michael James and Margaret Sweetman, Francis (Mrs Blundell née Mary E. Sweetman) started writing as a child. She published her first children's novel *True Joy* at the age of eight. As prolific as Deledda, she wrote over fifty novels and several volumes of short stories, and was referred to by D.J. O'Donoghue in *The Poets of Ireland: A Biographical Dictionary* (1912) as "one of the best known women novelists of the day."

Reminiscent of Deledda's illicit wanderings through the *casa paterna*, Francis would often run about the rambling Irish country house where she grew up, through the long corridors, tantalised about what lay behind the many doors: "I well remember the agony of my small mind on being obliged to run past rows of doors, closed upon who knew what unknown mysteries; or, worse still, partly open and revealing depths of darkness within" (Blundell 4). The mixture of middle-class sentiments and rural settings, the farm house and the pig sty alongside Victorian morality connect with Deledda's mixing of worlds, as does the note of suffering that runs through Francis's narrative.

The Catholic notion of expiation in Francis's work is due to two important influences in her life: Father Matthew Russell with whom she corresponded and Père François whom she met in Brussels. One of the lessons she learned through Père François was the necessity of pain in the religious life (Blundell 11). In her short biography it is said that even on hearing of the death of her young husband, she saw this as an opportunity to praise God with her grief. On her death bed she received the Apostolic Benediction from the Pope "in recognition of good service done with her pen" (27). Like Deledda's voluntary exile from Sardinia, Francis left

Ireland for good in 1879 to settle near Liverpool in England with her husband Francis Nicholl Blundell. And yet the political climate in Ireland and Irish-ness are themes which dominate her fiction, as is her characters' sense of alienation and estrangement.

Born the same year as Francis – although for years believing herself to be two years younger, until asked to submit her certificate for insurance purposes (Pamela Hinkson *The House of Corn* unpublished) – Katharine Tynan (1859-1931) is likewise a middle-class Catholic writer whose work bears strong similarities to Deledda. Closely associated with the Irish revival, her work sets off a connection of exile and nostalgia, regret and repentance. As prolific as Deledda, Tynan was constrained to write 'pot-boilers' to keep bread on the table; she wrote over a hundred novels, twelve collections of short stories, three plays, a number of anthologies, several articles on social issues and four volumes of memoirs.

Tynan grew up in a big house in Clondalkin, Whitehall, where she developed ulcers on her eyes at the age of seven, leaving her purblind. She attended convent school in Drogheda, after which she returned home to become the official companion of her father, who took her to recitals and performances (Rose 26). Tynan struck up an acquaintance with Christina Rossetti and her brother William, by sending them a first edition of her debut collection *Louise de la Vallière and Other Poems* (1886), a relationship discussed by Peter Van de Kamp, Tynan's official biographer, in *Wrapped in a Dream* (69). A contemporary review of this collection in *The Boston Pilot* referred to her as the "rising star of Irish song" (Tynan, *Louise* 07), and she is normally discussed in this context, publishing work in *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888), which some have called the inaugural event of the Irish literary renaissance (Rose 30). Her name is usually linked with Yeats, whom she met through the *Dublin University Review* in 1895 (Fallon 50). She brought him to his first séance sometime in 1886 (Boylan 58) and was the first to review his work. Yeats probably proposed to her on the advice of his father in 1892, and Tynan turned him down, being already engaged to Henry Albert Hinkson (Van de Kamp 68).

After her marriage in 1893, Tynan moved to Ealing, a mirror image of Deledda's exile which likewise recurs throughout her writing superficially and

more subtly. Her departure is documented in *The Middle Years* (1916): "I watched from the boat, as long as I could see it – my sight was better then than it is now – my father's figure in his whitish grey overcoat. He had walked to the end of the pier to see the last of me. I often wondered afterwards how I could have left him" (97). Interestingly, Tynan's father is the connection to Ireland in her work; she laments his death in several poems, declaring she would not mind being remembered as "Katharine the daughter" (Tynan, *Twenty-Five Years* 05).

Tynan gave birth to a still born baby in May 1894; the following year she lost another child. Following these tragedies she had three children. The joy of motherhood and the pain of loss abound in her poetry, themes central to Deledda. Rose states that Tynan accommodates herself to the definitions of a woman's role established by men, and that "hers was the feminism of a devout Catholic" (45). This is possibly the avenue her heroines take who in general tow the conservative line; however, Tynan highlights concern for women's working conditions and education (Rose 71), and in novels such as *The Love of Brothers* (1919) and *The Playground* (1930) she is sympathetic to unmarried mothers, and examines marital abuse, connecting her to Deledda's unhappy unions.

There is an autobiography of suffering and displacement shared between George Egerton and Deledda. Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne) (1859-1945) had an Irish father and a Welsh mother. She moved around a lot as a child, as her father, John J Dunne, first went to Chile and then New Zealand (White, T 09). This might explain why Egerton talks of being a wanderer, despite a feeling of being "intensely Irish" (13). Tina O'Toole suggests Egerton's background might now entail a diasporic identity (133). There are strong similarities to Deledda in Egerton's personal exile and loss; Egerton talks of being out of place in England and yet doesn't feel at home in Ireland either (*The Wheel of God* 215), echoing Deledda's relationship to Sardinia and the Italian continent. Grief struck early in Egerton's life too, she lost both her mother and sister at fourteen, and subsequently suffered the consequences of her father's gambling and alcoholism, and like Deledda was eventually forced to take the position of responsibility in the family. This perhaps explains why coming back home in later years was so

difficult for Egerton: “for George, Irish memories were too painful; certainly she came to Ireland only once in the last half century of her life” (White, T 74). She remained in England, her last years spent in London. However, despite all this, she remarked that she wished to be buried in an Irish shroud (119).

Egerton had a colourful love life, the influence of which can be found in her stories. She eloped to Norway with a married friend of her father’s, the bigamist Henry Higginson (there were reports that he was blackmailing his second wife, the subject of *A Psychological Moment at Three Periods in Discords* 1893), who turned out to be a violent alcoholic. There she met the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun, whose novel *Hunger* she translated in 1899. She subsequently married the Canadian novelist George Egerton Clairmonte. Terence de Vere White says of this second marriage “Her elopement with the hideous Higginson gave her the material for a book; her second husband, by his dependence on her, gave her the motive to employ it” (19). Much of this ‘material’ is to be found in *Keynotes, Discords* (1894) which Egerton sent to T.P Gill, a literary columnist. He commented that “the writer of these six manuscripts is possessed of a remarkable and original talent. Indeed, they even hint of genius” (22). He suggested the publishers Elkin Mathews and John Lane of London and in fact *Keynotes* gave its name to an entire new series (McCullough 205). Egerton divorced Clairmonte in 1901, the year he died, and married the young theatrical agent Reginald Golding Bright, settling for good in London.

Deledda’s rebellious heroines find a strong correlation in the women of Egerton’s short stories *Keynotes, Discords* (1894), *Symphonies* (1897) and *Fantasies* (1898) which focus on “struggling women, alone or trapped in a marriage (or similar relationship) with inarticulate, imperceptive, drunken or brutal men” (*The Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English* 216). Egerton is for many the epitome of the New Woman writer (McCullough 205), anticipating the development of a fiction of feminine self-consciousness by Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf (Pykett 61). The themes of New Woman fiction varied, dealing with such issues as women’s sexuality, their rebellion against the limitations imposed on them by society, and the institution of marriage. The New

Woman was unsettling to male authority in institutions like marriage (Heilmann 22).

Egerton is one of the main exponents of New Woman literature, but Gerardine Meaney considers Katherine Cecil Thurston (1875-1911) to be the most sensational (*Identity and Opposition* 977). Possibly the most intriguing of the authors considered here, Thurston writes dark narratives of adultery, addiction, and impersonation which speak to Deledda's dramas of conscience. There is very little biographical information on Thurston, what commentaries there are being very limited. She was born Katherine Madden in Cork 1875, the only child of Paul Madden, associate of Parnell and for a time Mayor of Cork, and Margaret Barry. She married Ernest Temple Thurston in 1901. There was a much publicised divorce case in which the fact that she was earning more money than her husband was cited as the reason for divorce. Unlike Deledda, Thurston was a lively public speaker, and attracted press attention, which was why her death in a hotel room in Cork a month before she was due to remarry in 1911 caused such a sensation; speculation abounded about suicide or murder (1043).

Thurston was described by the *Irish Book Lover* as "one of the most brilliant of the women writers of the day" (Madden-Simpson 329). Her successful novel *The Fly on the Wheel* (1908) takes its title from a fable by Aesop, the moral of which points towards a providential power beyond our imagining. The fatalistic bent of Thurston, the punishment which fits the crime and the psychological aspects of sin are what connect her to Deledda's novels of crime and punishment.

The two dominant currents in Deledda, nation and transgression, form part of the tangled web of Irish women's writing at this time. Whilst using and abusing cultural stereotypes, engaging with moral values, and at the same time wrestling with the political questions both of Ireland's independence and women's enfranchisement, the narrative of women's writing of this period is various and multifaceted. Never a simple question of representing Ireland, when that very Ireland and what it actually is composed of is under scrutiny, and never as simple as presenting a heroine, complex in her own right, since she is tied up with all

sorts of analogies and symbols, and never straightforward on issues such as sex and morality, since a woman writer must balance her reputation in the real world as well as the literary one – women's writing of this period is a glorious mine of information and an interpretive delight.

So why have so few names dominated for so long? Foster argues that there are some fundamental reasons why women novelists, including popular novelists discussed here, have been neglected. One is male bias, in literature and in criticism, well documented since the seventies in seminal texts such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1978). Then there is the tradition of the Irish epic, what Foster calls the Irish 'grand narrative,' which he argues is essentially a male one, and has no need of female novelists – especially those from Tynan or Francis's class who have a Victorian or Edwardian perspective. And why is there no mention of writers like Egerton, or of Thurston, who topped the New York Times best seller list two years running? Foster points to the anti-colonial, anti-British 'Story of Ireland' which he believes has queered the appreciation of writers outside this canon, New Woman writers in particular falling foul of such an agenda. Add to this the unpopularity of books without an Irish setting and it is easy to see why Ulster-born Sarah Grand, who sets her novels in England, or Francis who often features the north of England, find themselves out in the cold as regards criticism in the last century (14-15). It is not just work written by women that has been disregarded for its lack of currency with the revival or counter revival perspectives. Foster gives the examples of Henry de Vere Stacpoole from County Dublin, whose novels are set in the Congo and the South Seas (11), or Arthur Mason (1876-1955), whose tales of adventure likewise have no Irish setting. This also explains the absence of prolific and well travelled writer Beatrice Grimshaw (1871-1953) from literary criticism, "despite her fascinating 'New Woman' life and though a citizen of that 'greater Ireland' it is now fashionable to study" (Foster 12).

Something that many Irish women writers offer is a perspective on identity that is not confined to any one point of view, in novels which discuss the problem of belonging, and of divided sympathies between Ireland and England. Whilst the torn loyalties of Anglo-Irish writers like Emily Lawless (1845-1903), or Edith

Somerville and Ross mean ambiguity in the message of their novels (Hansson *New Contexts* 11), the same might be said for middle-class Catholic writers like Katharine Tynan or M.E. Francis, for whom identification with English Catholics, particularly in the north of England, and sympathy with the British position as regards the Irish question, leads to a similar equivocality in argument.

Irish women's writing of this time shows a departure from much of the more familiar work of the period, both in its wider focus, and often in a more tolerant attitude towards Britain. All of the women writers considered here are middle or upper class, whether Catholic or Protestant. Foster argues that the further up the class ladder one climbs, the less religious differences matter. Perhaps it is because of a certain double perspective on the Irish question that has led to these writers' omission from a discussion of the period; as Haberstroh puts it, in Irish women writers "equivocality is too often seen as a defect" (03). This is in contrast to writers such as Yeats, who escaped the criticism of their class by "incorporating into their cultural nationalism an extravagant and eloquent championship of the peasantry" (Foster 12). Over time, many Irish women writers disappeared from the literary curriculum, since middle and upper class writers – Protestant and Catholic – were seen as "inimical to the nationalist project which swelled to claim all attention and loyalty" (13).

It is hard to ignore the conditions under which women write during this period. In contrast to men writers, gender is always an issue for women writers at this time (Hansson *New Contexts* 10), since the reputation to be guarded in society is first and foremost as a respectable woman; often their subject matter is restricted to things thought suitable for a woman writer, and the strategies employed for circumventing these restrictions makes for – amongst other things – ambiguous and intriguing heroines. Hansson urges a change of context in which to examine Irish women writers (12), whilst Haberstroh and Christine St Peter talk of the need for a scholarly work of recovering lost texts, "to valuable debates over the ways in which literature by women might demand an expansion of the boundaries of genre and of established criteria for evaluations" (02). This comparison provides this change of context, both for Irish women writers and for Grazia Deledda, opening fresh ground for exploration through the lens of nation and transgression.

There is a vast body of criticism on Deledda, something that might make a researcher hesitate; but Sharon Wood in *Italian Women's Writing* (1995) believes there is still ground worth exploring, in particular "her very ambition to become the creator and writer of the Sardinian popular epic" (60). Her recent publication *The Challenge of Modernity: Essays on Grazia Deledda* (2007) adds to the growing interest in Deledda. Margherita Heyer-Caput's *Grazia Deledda's Dance of Modernity* (2008) stresses the point that the work is in English, opening up Deledda's less known novels to an Anglophone audience, something which is fundamental to this thesis, and which lends credence to another investigation into Deledda's work despite the abundance of material available in Italian. Even so, any original investigation of Grazia Deledda needs new blood, one which is provided by the fresh territory of Irish women's writing in this period. From its inception this thesis was pioneering, motivated by a desire to write about voices largely silent, and about themes original in perspective. If some of that originality has been diluted, having been overtaken to an extent by Foster's beautifully crafted and witty exposition of the period, and by the recent publication of *New Contexts: Re-Framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose* (2008), much of the discussion in these recent volumes has lent credence to the arguments in this comparison, whilst still leaving much material that is entirely original.

The following chapter sketches the literary and cultural background from which Deledda and her Irish contemporaries write, engaging with the two dominant themes of this discourse, nation and transgression, in the broad contexts of cultural nationalism and women's writing in both traditions. Chapter two examines the machinery of Deledda's prose, in an overview which familiarises an Anglo-phone reader to the most apparent motifs of nation and transgression in her narrative. It focuses on Deledda's depiction of folklore, landscape and peasantry, revealing her detailing of Sardinian life, from the telling of spells to antipathy toward continental justice. It documents Deledda's focus on crime and punishment, the weakness of the human will, the individual struggling against society – and most crucially, the heroine breaking out of her mould.

The exiled writer is no foreign picture; banishment for the artist has almost been *de rigueur*, the imagination fruiting on different ground. From Joyce to Kate O'Brien, from Dante to Luigi Pirandello there is no shortage of literary outcasts and ex-pats. The adolescent of Deledda's autobiographical novel *Cosima* is no different; wild with ambition, her arms out-flung to the sea she is a prophecy of what Deledda's future as a writer will hold, a life—and death—in Rome. Exile is common ground for the writers in this study, actual and metaphorical. *Cosima* dreams of forsaking her maternal country for a paternal Rome, a motif evident in Deledda from the earliest of stories to the most psychological of dramas. Deledda polarises Sardinia and Italy, and yet searches for a home in both. For Tynan, exile is equally important, nostalgia as sore, "like a wolf in the heart" (Tynan, *The Love of Brothers* 266); for Francis, the question of belonging, whether in the context of religion, class, or nationality (and often all three) is uppermost in her narrative. In Tynan and Francis the trope of a maternal Ireland and a patrician Britain sees a similar ambivalence towards each, from the more evident theme of cultural displacement, to the more complex engendering of psychological estrangement.

Deledda's 'revolting daughters' have much in common with the wry heroines of Egerton, their attempt to break free of convention bound on every side by cultural preconceptions and social barriers. They often exhibit 'masculine' attributes, just like their heroes are sometimes effeminate and ineffectual; this is even more the case for Thurston's characters, who swap gender, identity and circumstances. Deledda's positioning of the couple as the locus of sin, her focus on the human will enslaved to passion and the inevitability of transgression is twin to Thurston's doomed characters, poisoned by ambition or greed, propelled towards destruction.

Deledda and our writers share the themes of nation, in its apparent and metaphorical sense, and transgression, whether moral, social or sexual. The intricate *vicoli* of these concepts are connected by the theories of linguist and philosopher Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's most accessible work, *Nations Without Nationalism* (1993), speaks to today's problems of social integration, from the perspective of the emigrant (herself being a Bulgarian settled in France), and the

community; she addresses the spontaneous fear/hatred of the outsider as the 'other', as the foreigner in our midst.

The idea of the 'other' within is for Kristeva a model for all subjective relations. This concept stems from her seminal work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), in which she first outlines the distinction between what she calls the 'semiotic' (*le sémiotique*, distinguishable from *la sémiotique*, meaning semiotics) and the 'symbolic', in the formation of identity --- of what she calls the speaking subject --- a linguistic philosophy she develops in later work *Desire in Language* (1980) and *Powers of Horror* (1982).

In its very basic sense, the semiotic consists of drives as they discharge within language. It is linked to the preverbal experience in the womb, to an 'unspeakable', dark origin (*Revolution*, 95). The symbolic is the world of language and signs, within which the semiotic is contained. Kristeva constitutes the semiotic as the inarticulacy of music, memory, love, and the physical drives; it is different from the world of sign and language—the symbolic—but is also integral to its existence: "We understand the term 'semiotic' in its Greek sense...distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sigh, proof, engraved or written sigh, imprint, trace, figuration" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 93-95). Both, in Kristeva's theory, are essential for communication. As Kelly Oliver explains succinctly in *Kristeva's Revolutions* "Without the symbolic element of signification, we have only sounds or delirious babble. But without the semiotic element of signification, signification would be empty and we would not speak; for the semiotic provides the motivation for engaging in signifying processes" (xv).

The process of becoming a *sujet en procès* -- to all extents and purposes becoming a functioning individual within society -- requires in Kristeva's model an abandonment of the metaphorical maternal/semiotic in favour of the paternal/symbolic: in her words the subject must *abject* the figurative mother. In the process of abjection the individual rejects the mother, disgusted and repulsed by the semiotic, whilst simultaneously being drawn back towards it, in a process which Kristeva calls an 'oscillation' of semiotic and symbolic. Abjection for Kristeva "is above all ambiguity," an ambiguity of acceptance and rejection, a kind

of fascinating yet horrifying boundary, like the umbilicus which both separates and unites mother and child (*Powers* 24).

Kristeva's model of the emergent speaking subject, of the individual's entry into language, mimics the experience of the exile; the individual undergoing the painful separation from the figurative mother, the deeply personal exile from the maternal continent mirrors that of the real emigrant from the mother country. The ambivalence towards both the semiotic and symbolic in Kristeva's model is parallel to the emotional and psychological tug of war evident in Francis and Tynan towards Britain and Ireland. In his *Later Letters*, Yeats writes the famous words: "I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser, and to Blake ...and to the English language in which I think, speak and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate" (qtd. in Ramazani 38). This ambivalence is shared by Tynan and Francis in their narrative, which features estrangement within the community, the foreigner in our midst and the hostility and ostracism felt by the outsider. A comparative reading of Deledda, Francis and Tynan in the light of Kristevan philosophy - in particular in relation to her theory of the abject and abjection - asks how 'nation' or the subjective experience of nation might be articulated. It uncovers metaphors of separation and loss in the narratives, something removed from any parochial concept of nation, leading to complex ideas on identity and maternal function in the texts.

The beauty of Kristeva's model of abjection is its resonance with other theories. Kristeva's paradigm of the emergent speaking subject, in particular her focus on otherness, engages with Hélène Cixous, whose theory of alterity forms part of the discussion of chapter four, which compares perspectives on desire and perspectives on gender in Egerton, Thurston and Deledda. Both Egerton and Thurston's overt discussion of desire and gender, and Deledda's implicit argument for female autonomy, sexual and otherwise, engage not only with currents in contemporary New Woman fiction but also with twentieth century ideas on gender and identity, in particular with Cixous. What Cixous began in her work in the seventies - "a questioning of the presence of women in literature, on

what sexuality signifies, what the body signifies in literature" (Sellers xxvii) has been much debated over the last few decades, but might be applied to the writers in this discussion. Deledda's women are a primary presence and sexually aware, Egerton's women ask directly about their role as women and their sexual desires within a new and subversive style, and Thurston bravely questions all of these things, consistently interrogating subjectivity in her novels.

It is a paradigm of sexual difference that is used here, rather than an argument for sexual difference *per se*. Whilst Cixous sees sexuality as important—being a woman in her opinion offering a possibility of alternative perspectives to those of being a man—the words 'masculine' and 'feminine' are terms that are merely markers: in the case of "femininity" Cixous entails an opening, questioning attitude, whereas "masculine" denotes a defensive, conservative position (Sellers xxviii). In "The Newly Born Woman," Cixous talks of the obliteration of the 'other' in a system which has come to polarize masculine and feminine in such a way as to preclude any acceptance of difference. In general, Cixous argues that women, more so than men, are open to an acceptance of 'other,' more willing to embrace the 'masculine' than men are to embrace the 'feminine,' in a model of what she calls 'bisexuality' (42). New Woman philosophy, in tandem with Cixous's model of bisexuality is employed in this chapter which asks just how new the women in Deledda, Egerton and Thurston really are. A comparison between Deledda and Thurston in chapter five examines the moral impetus to their narratives, within the dual framework of Christian ethics and psychoanalysis. The individual trapped within the mechanism of society, the sinner caught in the nets of temptation are the focus of this exploration, which, like the close comparisons it follows employs Kristeva's concept of abjection, which she argues persists in monotheistic religions as "exclusion and taboo" (Powers 243). The gel in these close comparisons, Kristeva's theory is used as a common denominator between multiple writers and themes, which on some level appeal to the concept of exile, real and metaphorical. As Kristeva puts it in *A New Type of Intellectual* (1977), "How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile" (298).

1. Cross currents: nation and transgression

The question of nation is important for Deledda and Irish women writers, who write at a time when people over Europe are questioning who they are, or who they might become. Sardinia is no different. The long history of the island's occupation reads like a genealogy from Marquez, a list so long Sardinians have a poem to remember it. Beginning with the Nuraghic people—the *nuraghi*—in the second millennium B.C. it has had its coasts plundered by Phoenicians, been fought over by Carthage and Rome, been colonised by one city state after another from the Catalans to the Spanish, from Austria to Piedmont, ending finally with its incorporation into the new Italian state in 1861 (Floris 48). For Deledda however, the uncomfortable relationship between island and coloniser in her novels has its roots in Sardinia's more recent *fusione* with Piedmont in 1847, which meant a single government and judiciary in Turin, and the island's later absorption into the Italian state. Both of these events led to mismanagement of tax policies and disastrous agricultural reform leading to a resurgence of nationalist sentiment at the time she writes.

That Deledda's characters are often mute on political issues doesn't mean they have nothing to say. She shows the tradition of a pastoral Sardinia and the encroachment of the modern world which threatens its existence forever. Piedmont did not understand the basic facts of the Sardinian way of life or economy, which was based on extensive agriculture and cooperation between farmers and shepherds. In Deledda the shepherd is seen wandering the large pieces of land populated with olive trees, called *tancas*. But a move towards modernisation tried to put an end to this wandering lifestyle, with the ill fated decree on enclosures (*Editto della chiusura*) in 1820, a policy which led to riots, murders of new landowners and banditry (King 03). There then followed worse legislation from the new government in Turin, including high and unfair taxes on farmers and shepherds—called the *adempriovi*. These resulted in riots throughout

Sardinia, where people demanded a return to the old order—to *su connottu*. These higher taxes meant that landowners—mostly farmers—struggled financially and ended up leasing the land to shepherds, totally defeating the purpose of the measure, which was to promote settled farming. There were more serious consequences; taxes on grain meant that Sards starved, many dying of hunger (Wood *Italian Women's Writing* 61).

Like Piedmont's *fusionne* with Sardinia, the unhappy union of Ireland with Great Britain in 1800 promised an end to the punitive Penal Laws which prevented Catholics from entering public life or owning property. However, with the exception of the industrial north-east which flourished, for most in Ireland the union led to "hopes disappointed, grievances unremedied, liberties denied, with poverty, backwardness, and above all with the catastrophe of the great famine" (Moody 229). Some Penal Laws remained; Catholics still couldn't be judges, hold high rank in the army, civil service or sit in parliament (White 205).

Just as in Sardinia, it was dire mismanagement of the land question in Ireland that precipitated riots and a swell of nationalist sentiment. High rents—often the result of absentee landlords and subsequent rack-renting—unsustainable by Irish peasants, resulted in forced evictions. By the late eighteenth hundreds, these problems and, crucially, the environmental conditions similar to those which caused the great famine of 1849 (poor weather conditions, increasing population and crop failure) led to the foundation of the Irish Land League by Charles Stewart Parnell. This in turn led to the "land war" of 1879-82, the greatest mass movement in modern Ireland (Moody 238). The romantic figure of Parnell was for many the last hope of constitutional reform. He championed the Home Rule movement which asked for a devolved parliament in Dublin. He is a hero for many Irish women writers in reality and in fiction, not least Katharine Tynan (Foster 30). After his dramatic fall (appropriately in puritanical Ireland after a romantic scandal), the Irish Party led by John Redmond took the Home Rule Bill to success, but not to fruition. Passed in January 1913 it was suspended on the outbreak of the First World War.

The bloody events of the 1916 Easter Rebellion, and the subsequent Irish Civil War put an end to this avenue, and the partition of Ireland in 1921 heralded a new generation of division. Division, whether between Protestant or Catholic, Home Rulers or Unionists, Irish or British and the distinction and ambiguity of those terms is something which concerns many Irish women writers, whose narratives embrace the differences with more alacrity than more familiar texts.

The lonely shepherd on the *tanca*, the wind in the reeds, the moonlit plain – these are the arresting images of Deledda's fiction. This pastoral theme, alongside a focus on landscape, legend and the Sardinian language show Deledda agreeing with many elements of what Marci calls the "spiritual revolution" (*In presenza* 216) in Sardinia. Dolores Turchi suggests that this cultural revival was a bid to affirm some sort of cultural homogeneity at a time of great social and economic instability in Sardinia (Turchi *Tradizioni* 21). Whilst this may be true of the cultural nationalist movement to an extent, far from cultural homogeneity Deledda's narrative investigates the idea of nationality – of *sardità* – with a modern ambiguity. On the one hand, she dips into the stereotype of Sardinia and the Sardinian, and indulges in full scale romance with the past, but on the other she posits characters grappling with personal identity in an existential fog, mirroring the question of identity on a bigger scale – what does being Sardinian mean? The answer to both appears to be philosophically complex, the realisation of 'other' a journey of discovery that most of her characters take.

From the beginning there is an idea of Sardinia's otherness in Deledda; she sets it apart, physically and psychically from the mainland. The *madre amata* in Deledda's prose sees an early representation of her island as maternal, feminine. This coincides with a representation of Rome as the Jerusalem of art, the destination for the young artist where she might be free to express herself through her writing, un-gagged and free from the restrictions of puritanical Nuoro.

In *La madre*, Paulu's mother is visited by the demonic ghost of the previous parish priest, her unquestioning belief in the apparition mirroring a Sardinia still in thrall to its pagan past. The past is always present in Deledda. That she saw Sardinia as changing, but wanted to hold on to the island of her childhood, the one

she experiences most vividly in memory rather than reality, is evident from her correspondence to the translator of her work into French, Georges Hérelles on 21 July 1913:

The past remains, it is true; and this is what I want to remember in my next book with everything beautiful and poetic vibrating in my memory. I am thinking of writing the story of my childhood, of the things I lost and will never find again outside myself, but remain inside me, in my interior world. (qtd. in King 139)

This interior world is often hidden in Deledda's novels, an underlying rhythm in her language, a transposition of a folktale, so that in her best work, Sardinia is submerged like an unconscious belief, something that this analysis will argue is a link to the semiotic voice in the text.

This is not to say that Deledda's prose is all about subliminal imaging of her island. On the contrary, to some extent there is an illusion of a 'true' Sardinia, evident from Deledda's freeze framing of the moment, endlessly repeated as the shepherd on the plains, the pilgrimage up the mountain, the emigrant sailing away. In later, more psychological work such as *Il segreto del uomo solitario* (1921) or *Il paese del vento* (1931), the central characters are haunted by spectres of their past in an allegory of a Sardinia in transition from old to new. Further, despite wanting to chalk new images of the Sardinian, to counteract the usual picture of the Sard as thief and bandit which she felt had given Sardinia an unfair reputation (Turchi *Tradizioni* 24), Deledda's stories, with their emphasis on Sardinia's remoteness agree with one of the main stereotypes of romantic nationalism in Sardinia at this time, which drew on the popular image of isolation and Sardinian resistance.

This popular idyll dwelt on a golden period in Sardinia's history, in particular the time of the *nuraghi*, "when a culture very distinctive to the island emerged and provided an archaeological unity and identity" (Dyson 43). This gave rise to the attractive notion that all Sardinians were descended from these chieftain societies, a reassuring vision of a singular nation of one homogenous group of people (67). This was coupled with pride in ancestors who were sufficiently expert and ingenious enough to build the famous conical towers, the

nuraghe (54), those ancient dwellings and fortresses which populate Sardinia's landscape like moles on the body, embedded and vernacular.

The stereotype of Sardinia and the Sardinians, employed both by the island's detractors and its champions goes back as far as the Romans, who not only named Deledda's region 'Barbaria' (King 01), but also proliferated the idea of the Sardinian slave as worthless, the phrase *sardi venales* –Sards to sell– becoming proverbial for anything cheap and valueless. This image of primitivism has persisted of the inhabitants of Nuoro and the surrounding area, Barbagia, of a people unconquerable and unchanged, stubborn in the face of other cultures. There is a notion that the 'true' Sardinia is inland, the coastal areas reluctantly conceded to invaders whilst in the mountainous areas 'real' Sardinians lived, fiercely holding on to their traditional culture and language. This has remained part of the scholarly as well as the popular image of Sardinia, archaeologist, historian and scholar Giovanni Lulliu's publications emphasising the resistance of Sardinians to outside influences (Dyson 12-14) alongside the recurring motif of Barbagia as "un'isola nell'isola" (Turchi 10).

Deledda is guilty of both engaging with these stereotypes and refuting them. On the one hand she dedicates *La via del male* (1896) to the anthropologists Niceforo and Sergi who belonged to the positivist philosophy of the late nineteenth century. Their belief in genetic roots for criminal behaviour caused them to formulate their ideas of Sardinian degeneracy in the 1890s. However, there were also attempts at this time to romanticise the Sardinian bandit (Clark 86). Deledda does both of these things throughout her narrative, posing characters who are predisposed to certain behaviour, whilst showing the reverence and admiration felt for the bandit amongst the ordinary people, for example in *Marianna Sirca* (1915).

Adjectives pertaining to Sardinia (which admittedly this thesis has occasion to use), such as insular, primitive, wild, and desolate, recur with monotonous regularity in commentaries on Deledda in relation to her island. In these descriptions, Sardinia is the inarticulate semiotic to Italy/Rome's cultured symbolic. Marci refers to these kind of labels, in the preface of *In presenza di tutte le lingue del mondo* (2006) as terms which "fissano ciò che é mobile, schematizzano ciò

che é vario, introducono semplificazione dove c'è complessità di fenomeni" (11).³ As will be further examined in chapters two and three, Deledda takes these stereotypes and uses them to advantage, an apologist for the bandit, arguing for the 'primitive' and making an essay out of solitude.

Deledda's focus on Sardinia's past through her use of folklore points to her discipleship of her predecessor, Enrico Costa (1841-1909), writer of historical novels, an influence that Deledda testifies to herself, in a letter to Angelo De Gubernatis on 14 October 1893 (Strömberg 108). But Marci indicates Deledda's departure from Costa's popular romanticizing of Sardinia's past—since Deledda writes not only of Sardinia's greatness, but also of its failures (Marci *In presenza* 243). Deledda seems quite modern in this portrayal of Sardinia, for she not only praises those things she thinks separate and different from Italy, but she is also quick to point out the flaws of both the colonised and coloniser.

Having been revered, Rome is also reviled in Deledda. *Elias Portolu* sees one of Deledda's first emigrants return – from a continental prison. Deledda contrasts both the strength of Sardinian men with the 'men of cheese' from the continent and laments the injustice that sends an innocent man to prison; yet there is something of the grandeur of a Roman adventure in this novel, something that continues in later narratives such as *Sino al confine* (1910). This is not the first novel to showcase a miscarriage of the Italian justice system, as Deledda often has a thread of bitterness in her narrative toward a distant and uncomprehending government. She does this to great effect in *Il nostro padrone* (1910). The woeful apathy of Sardinians towards the exploitation of natural resources by the central government is the background to this novel, which asks—to misquote the aphorism—not what Italy can do for Sardinia, but what Sardinians can do for themselves. Deledda shows how a united Italy is merely continuing the genealogy of exploitation, fathered most recently by Piedmont. As King puts it in her biography of Deledda: "a united Italy had done nothing more positive for Sardinia than had the Kingdom of Piedmont; exploitation in the form of taxes and usurpation of natural resources went on as though there had been no change of government" (06).

³ "fix that which is mobile, categorise that which is various, introduce simplification where there is complexity."

Deledda's use of language engages with the renewed interest in the Sardinian language at the time. Ozieri Matteo Madau (1723-1800) proposed the creation of an 'illustrious' Sardinian, "Ripulimento della lingua sarda" which he believed would be testimony to a submerged culture, one which demanded a voice. Giovanni Spano (1803-1878) compiled the *Vocabolario sardo-italiano ed italiano-sardo* (1851-52) and *Ortografia sarda nazionale, ossia grammatica della logudorese paragonata all'italiana*, to prove the historical and cultural dignity of Sardinia. Deledda might be considered part of this trend to raise awareness and interest in the Sardinian language. Her incorporation of Sardinian into her second language of Italian is no accident; *sardismi*—Sardinian words with no easy translation—are studded through the text. Her use of Sardinian word order, and the misappropriation of Italian words subvert the dominant discourse, and give her narrative a unique voice, a language that is Italian, but Sardinian in essence. But just like her use of folklore, it is the more subtle indications of Sardinian in the text rather than any intentional use of dialect that leads to a deeper understanding of Sardinia in the text, another link to a semiotic Sardinia discussed in chapter three.

Cultural nationalism in Deledda's period also focussed on medieval Sardinia, when there emerged the autonomous domains called *giudicati*—the judicate—of Torres, Gallura, Arborea and Cagliari. There is no more potent figure of this period than Eleonora d'Arborea, considered a kind of Mother of Sardinia. The stereotype of the strong Sardinian matriarch has something to do with her quasi mythical status on the island. The champion of equal rights in the middle ages, Eleonora d'Arborea (1347-1404) issued the *Carta de Logu* in 1392 which remained in effect until 1827 (Floris 289). Written in the Sardinian language, the charter affirmed equal rights and equal legal status of all women and men. The charter is idealised in much the same way as is the Magna Carta and yeoman independence in England (Dyson 192).

It is hard to separate the real Eleonora from the legendary one. As Turchi points out, "La sua nascita, come pure la sua vita, é circondata dalla leggenda" (177);⁴ she relates some of these legends in her book *Leggende e racconti popolari*

⁴ "Her birth, just like her life, is surrounded by legend."

della Sardegna (1984). The huge statue of Eleonora in the square of Oristano was erected in the nineteenth century. Dyson points out that this symbol of freedom and unity combined medieval nostalgia with local Sardinian's nationalist aspirations for independence (216). The invention of history, the manipulation of historical figures into island heroes, in particular this cultish interest in Eleonora D'Arborea is a large part of nineteenth century cultural nationalism argues Dyson, exemplified in the fake *Carte d'Arborea* circulating on the island during the nineteenth century, which appeared to preserve early historical information about the island, but which were denounced as forgeries later in the 1870s (09).

However, the concept of a Sardinian matriarchal society is really a myth. Whilst it is true that in the past Sardinian women were water diviners, could at some points in history own property and had positions of some power such as the witch doctor—the *medichessa*—their domain was the house and home, and in general Sardinian women were not allowed to penetrate into any other arena. Sebastiano Satta in *The Day of Judgement* (1979) is to point to the sad domestic minutiae of a woman's so-called power, her authority merely slavery dressed up as royalty (47). As King points out, the fact that when Deledda writes, women can't go out of the house alone, or even look across the road at a man passing by, is evidence enough of a patriarchal society (33). Perhaps all of Deledda's women are like Eleonora - both powerful and enslaved. This dichotomy of matriarch/slave is something that Deledda examines in her older heroines, whilst she shows her younger women trying to break free from these restrictions.

There is nothing more transgressive about Deledda than the fact that she wrote in the first place, and there is no more transgressive heroine than her autobiographical (or at least only half-fictional) self, *Cosima* (1937). It is still almost inconceivable how a woman from Deledda's world managed to write in secret, continue her work amid the horrible reactions of friends and family, prevail against harsh criticism and eventually win the Nobel Prize. As Wood puts it in her essay, "For a woman to claim to represent her land to the world was deemed an affront; for a woman to earn money from writing was to kick sand in the face of tradition and bring unforgivable shame upon her family" ("Locations" 02).

But what of other Sardinian women writers? King talks of the relatively few Sardinian men who made a name for themselves within a limited literary circle – in particular Enrico Costa, and later Sebastiano Satta – but comments that no woman’s name might be added to the list of Sardinian writers before Deledda: “Before Deledda no Sardinian woman ever had the opportunity or the audacity to put her thoughts and imaginative daydreams on paper, or if she had she would never have considered trying to get such an unheard of activity published” (19). In the academy, the question of Sardinian women writers in the nineteenth century has been met with an intellectual shrug; there weren’t any. But this simply is not true.

Placing Deledda in a tradition of Sardinian women’s writing has not yet been attempted, since the task of collating biographical and publication details has only begun, in the bibliographical source book *Donne: Due secoli di scrittura femminile in Sardegna (1775-1950)* (2001). The introduction by Laura Pisano indicates the variety of Sardinian women writers—journalists, educators, poets, historians, linguists, philosophers, anthropologists—contained in this pioneering work. This gives a valuable basis to what might be the start of an investigation into Sardinian women’s history and writing, particularly in the nineteenth century, about which there is little information, even more limited than the scarce material about their counterparts on the Italian peninsula. With regard to a possible tradition of Sardinian women’s writing, Pisano points to two things. Firstly, that there is a period of many years after Deledda before another female Sardinian writer emerges with anywhere near similar popularity or success (Maria Giacobbe). Secondly, no other Sardinian woman writer rose to such prominence as Deledda (15).

Why is this so? Did Sardinian women, with limited education, simply not write at all? This appears to have been the main view until recently; three out of the forty writers in Marci’s *Narrativa sarda del novecento* are women. Of those contemporary with Deledda there is only one, Maria Delogu (1882-1954), whose salon was a centre for discussion and of high literary and social value, and who, unlike Deledda and most of her contemporaries had access to education (Marci 85). Her diary *Cor meum*, talks of a civilised milieu, of lustrous wealth and

beautiful houses, elegant life amongst friends in the nobility. As Marci comments, this is quite a different view from the usual pastoral one offered of Sardinia and is in complete contrast to Deledda (86). But she also writes of natural beauty, when she talks of repose and quiet, of poetry without limit, the reflection of the water and the church hidden in the heart of greenness (88), in a kind of vision not so dissimilar from Deledda's descriptions of pilgrimages in her short stories. Much later, there is Maria Giacobbe, Deledda's successor and author of her biography *Grazia Deledda: introduzione alla Sardegna* (1974).

But what of the rest? It seems a miracle that Deledda wrote at all, considering the exclusion and hostility she experienced, not from only from her village but from members of her immediate family. Since Deledda's early stories dealt with risky themes for a young unmarried woman, her two aunts burnt the pages of her story published in *Ultima moda*, despite being unable to read themselves (*Cosima* 63). The success of her first book, *Fior di Sardegna* (1892) was for Deledda "un disastro morale completo" (78).⁵ King refers to the difficulties for a female writer in Sardinia, which were even more acute than in Italy. And yet despite Deledda's career being so startling, it raises the question if perhaps other writers battled with the same obstacles in their artistic path, but without the same good fortune.

Pisano cites Gubernatis's foundation of *Cordelia* in 1881 as integral to the publication of women's writing in Italy, and in particular in Sardinia, giving self-educated writers like Deledda the chance to publish articles, stories and translations (09-11). She mentions Gemina Fernando (1892-1972), who like Deledda translated Eugénie Grandet in 1951 (11), and wrote short stories with titles not dissimilar to Deledda: "La nonnina delle fiabe," and "Leggende di Sardegna." She cites Amelia Melis Devilla (1882-1956) who contributed to magazines such as *Il Tempo* and *Il Giornale d'Italia* with stories and articles with a Sardinian argument (11). She mentions the extensive production of Mercedes Mundula (15) whose work includes a translation and introduction to Flaubert's *Lettere alla Musa*, and articles on Deledda and Maria Delogu.

⁵ "a complete moral disaster."

This bibliography, says Pisano, restores women's names to a historical record that until now has largely forgotten them (30). The deeper evaluation of these articles, fiction and non fiction, is the work of another thesis, which not only would add to the understanding of Sardinia and its recent history, but would also show Deledda not as "a monument in the desert" within Sardinian literature as Marci puts it (*In presenza* 12), but part of a Sardinian women's tradition of writing—whose work lives in periodicals and journals, and anywhere that could be a forum for writers who had no formal education, and who faced open hostility and ostracism if they were to embark on any kind of full time literary career.

As Pisano argues, there is scarce information about the details of Sardinian women's lives, particularly in the nineteenth century (08). Wood points to surveys of the time which suggest that there might be something in the notion that the Sardinian wife and mother was held in higher regard and with more respect than in some other parts of Italy (Wood *Italian Women's Writing* 05). The cultural nationalist point of view of Sardinia's matriarchal past is sometimes cited as a reason for this increased esteem and importance of the woman in the family. But as Maria Giacobbe points out (39), and Pisano notes (30), even though the innermost zones of Sardinia still ascribed to a kind of matriarchy within the family, evident from many of Deledda's novels, which feature morally and emotionally strong women (39), whilst this may have been true within the walls of the house, outside the woman was deprived of the rights of movement and association: she was accompanied at every step by a guardian or chaperone, unable to talk unsupervised with any young man (Caesar 29).

For some, Deledda is not an island, nor does her writing support such an isolationist view; De Michelis argues for a more inclusive appreciation of Deledda, arguing against an approach which focuses primarily on her depiction of Sardinia as a region of Italy, choosing to regard her in a broader Italian and European context (11-35). Others agree, associating her with the idealism of Antonio Fogazzaro (1842-1911) (De Chiara 11, Kozma *Grazia Deledda* 29), whose novels of the tortured individual conflicted between passion and duty resound with Deledda's dramas of conscience. In this moral aspect, many see the influence of

Russian writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in Deledda's novels of crime and punishment (Anedda xi, De Giovanni 52), and contrary to the widely held opinion that Deledda didn't read these Russian writers until her own career was well underway (Piromalli 27), others disagree (Kozma "A Life" 21).

Deledda acknowledges European influences, both in truth and in fiction. Despite the truncation of her formal education at the age of fourteen, she acquired "a sophisticated grasp of European art and literature through her reading" (Kozma "A Life" 30). Laura in *Fior di Sardegna* wishes for the pen of Victor Hugo, whilst the authors cited in Deledda's letters are most often French or Russian: Hugo, Sue, Dumas, Balzac, Chateaubriand, Bourget, Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Tolstoy (King 29).

Deledda's translation of *Eugénie Grandet* (1833) by Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) (which has been suggested is the work of her son Sardus) intimates her esteem for the novelist and playwright, whose belief that human existence was revealed through particulars (Brooks 21), his sharp observation of detail and unromantic view of society make him for many the founder of European realism. Realism's heir, naturalism, is a more pessimistic take on this kind of documentary writing, believing that human behaviour is inextricable from the environment. Emile Zola and Gustaf Flaubert are the most famous examples of naturalism (although Flaubert despised the term). This movement strongly influenced Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) and Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), exponents of a style known in Italy as *verismo*, and with whom Deledda is said to resonate.

The hardship of life for many in Sardinia is evident from Deledda's letter to editor and friend Epaminonda Provaglio: "Many on this island cry at the birth of a new creature thinking of the sad events of life" (Balducci 109). Her documentation of poverty, injustice, unemployment, and misery is linked to the *veristi* Verga and Capuana early in her writing career (Kozma *Marianna* notes (03) 167). Deledda agrees with this detailing of life in all its truthfulness. In her letter of 23 December 1913, Deledda praises her friend the poet Marino Moretti's novel *Guenda* for its symbolism, but adds: "I love life as it is: naked, terrible and beautiful in its nakedness: the most profound symbol of life is in its nakedness, I believe" (King 141).

This terrible beauty of life is what for some Deledda is all about. Whilst some critics have regarded her as predominantly concerned with Sardinia, others concentrate on transgression in the text, seeing Deledda's preoccupation with sin, temptation and punishment as the most significant aspect of her work (Deledda's view on sin and retribution will be examined in the following and later chapters in some depth). According to Momigliano, *verismo* is far removed from the moral crises of Deledda, something which he believes is at the heart of her fiction (*Ultimi studi* 79-82). Likewise, Bice De Chiara believes that the moral nucleus of Deledda's narrative separates her from Italian realism (09). Deledda is as concerned about the interior world as she is about the detailing of Sardinia, its social conditions, and the question of class and status. Nicola Tanda testifies to this, quoting from Deledda's correspondence with Maretti: "È vero quello che lei dice, il tempo, gli anni i giorni non esistono se non per le vibrazioni della nostra vita interna; tutto quello che è di fuori non esiste" (42).⁶

Anna Dolfi agrees that moral trespass is central to Deledda, but other forms of boundary crossing are equally important, most especially the social barriers that are crossed, leading to what she calls *comunanza* in Deledda's prose – a mixing of worlds (Preface 17). The boundaries of class, crucially important in Deledda's Sardinia, are often transgressed, bringing mistress and servant, servant and master together, most often in an illicit coupling. There are incestuous overtones to some of her narratives, such as *L'edera* (1908) in which step brother and sister have a covert sexual relationship, or in *Il segreto del uomo solitario* (1921) when the hero has oedipal desires for his mother. Dolfi also draws attention to the boundaries surrounding women (and men) in their choice of partner, what she refers to as *donna/denaro*; the choice of husband (or wife) is inextricably bound with a woman's dowry, and Dolfi believes this is the central component of the transgression of Deledda's protagonists, who struggle to marry outside of the social group (*Del romanzesco* 10).

In 1916 Federico Tozzi urged critics to read more into Deledda than a revelation of Sardinia: "non si può sostenere più, troppo all leggera, che la Deledda è una scrittrice sarda...tutta la ricchezza di sentimento, di cui è colma

⁶ "It is true what you say, time, years and days don't exist save for the vibrations of our inner life; everything that is external does not exist."

l'anima di Marianna Sirca, non è forse una analisi forsennata anche di noi stessi?" (Fanning 219).⁷ *Marianna Sirca* (1915) is an exemplary Deleddian heroine, a rebellious daughter placed within a traditional, restrictive society. Women are central to Deledda, whether as traditional matriarchs or as disruptive daughters, a transgressive presence that until recently has been overlooked (Hopkins 111). Susan Briziarelli argues that Deledda's women identify with the other marginal group in Sardinia—the bandit: "It is clear that she aligns her strong women ideologically with the socially outcast group, finding in them the common denominator not only of courage and rebellion, but also of transgression against society" (qtd. in Somigli 113).

The boundary crossing of Deledda's heroines has led to recent discussion about the possible feminist aspect to her work, within the context of Italian women's writing. Whereas the possibility of a tradition of Sardinian women's writing has only just been outlined, the tradition of Italian women's writing (with all due acknowledgement to the problems associated with a canon, alternative or otherwise) was first undertaken in English by Sharon Wood, whose *Italian Women's writing* (1995) is a comprehensive overview of Italian women's writing, following work in Italian such as Anna Nozzoli's *Tabù e coscienza* (1978) and the compilation of essays, *La parabola della donna* (1983). Wood's subsequent collection of essays *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (2000) builds on this work. In this compilation is an essay by Lucienne Kroha, who states that between the completion of Unification in 1871, to the onset of Fascism (1922) in Italy, there is "a conscious attempt to renegotiate and extend the parameters of female identity, both personal and literary" (174).

Unification was the catalyst for the women's movement in Italy (Wood *Italian Women's Writing* 11). During the revolution women carried weapons, hid fugitives, suffered imprisonment and exile. However, part of revolution, women were not part of the new order; the new Civil Code drawn up and published in 1865 left Italian women much worse off than others in Europe (Wood 06). They

7 "it can no longer be maintained, too thoughtlessly, that Deledda is a Sardinian writer...Surely the depth of feeling with which Marianna's soul is filled is also a frantic analysis of ourselves?"

were relegated once more to the private sphere, serving their country, as Kroha points out, by “educating their children in the virtues of patriotism and by providing the material and emotional comforts of a home for their husbands” (166).

After unification, many female participants turned their experiences towards the women’s movement. Two leading figures of the Italian women’s movement were the socialist Anna Kuliscioff (1857-1925) and Anna Maria Mozzoni (1837-1920). Kuliscioff saw a link between emancipation for the working classes, and what she believed would be the subsequent, inevitable liberation for women. Mozzoni (who translated J.S. Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women* in 1870) wanted to unite women of all political and social backgrounds in the bid to win the vote. The various voices of Italian feminism were united in some fundamentals; winning the vote, opening up the professions, maternity leave, regulation of working conditions and the closure of brothels (Wood 10). The First World War halted the suffrage movement, and women became active in war work, taking on men’s jobs. However, following Mussolini’s rise to power in 1922, the role of women once again became dominated by the domestic image, similar to that of the Risorgimento (Wood xii). Universal male suffrage was granted in 1912, whilst Italian women did not win the vote until after the Second World War.

There wasn’t a specific Sardinian women’s movement; what activity there was being largely influenced by the Italian movement, which in itself had relatively little support. Maria Manca, admirer of Grazia Deledda and director of the magazine *La donna sarda*, inspired the tentative (and unsuccessful) beginnings of the women’s movement in Sardinia, in tandem with l’Associazione femminile italiana (Pisano 13). On the 15 February 1899, the magazine published the news of the formation in Rome of a Commission for women, led by writer Sibilla Aleramo, which had a referendum on the condition of women. The magazine published the questionnaire which was distributed amongst middle-class women, who gathered to form the Sardinian section of the Commission. Nadia Spano, anti-fascist activist and politician, collaborated with the weekly Sardinian *Il lavatore* and was one of the most prominent voices urging Italian and Sardinian women to be part of a new political order (28). However, the vast majority of Sardinian women were

estranged from politics. It wasn't until 1915 that the Sardinian branch of the *Unione Femminile* was formed at Cagliari, after which various political women's organisations sprang up, whether from a Catholic or Socialist base.

It is hard to know to what extent the women's movement influenced Deledda. She was veiled on the subject herself. Deledda never declared herself or her writing feminist. However, she attended the First National Congress of Italian Women, held in Rome in 1908 alongside Sibilla Aleramo. Her participation in the "Inquiry into Feminism" appeared in *La nuova antologia* on July 01 1911. To the question of the value of feminism, Deledda gave a typically masked answer, saying that a satisfactory response would require "a profound understanding of humanity's principle social problems, and a lengthy preparation concerning the great civil and economic problems. I write novels and short stories: that is my specialty. I consider it just as right for a woman to *think, study, and work*" (King 125). Her declaration seems a rather clear summation of women's rights at the time.

In contrast to Deledda's coyness on the subject of feminism, Aleramo's novel *Una donna* (1906) was an intense argument for feminism, and probably the most notorious narrative of any Italian women writer of the time (Kroha *Strategies* 123). And yet despite its explosive plot, as regards its central themes, Deledda's novels are not so different. *Una donna* features a girl who is raped at fourteen, then trapped in a marriage where she is beaten and abused by her husband. She ultimately faces the dilemma of staying in the marriage, or abandoning her child, the law offering her no protection or likelihood of custody. Shockingly for an Italian audience, she leaves, in a way that has been compared (although superficially) to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (Kroha 134). The themes that the novel raises—the helplessness of the woman in marriage and the question of women's autonomy—including sexual autonomy—are central to Deledda's writing—despite her reticence on her stance on women's rights. As Janice Kozma puts it, despite Deledda's silence about her political views on feminism, she "incorporated into her prose a road map to women's rights that is still convincing a century later" (Introduction 19).

Whether or not Deledda openly advocates women's rights, her texts support strong, opinionated women who are sexually aware. This has led some to focus on the sexual dominance of her heroines, in particular Neria De Giovanni in *Il peso dell'eros: mito ed eros nella Sardegna di Grazia* (2001), whilst Maria Piano focuses on the importance of female authority and the figure of the mother in *Onora la madre* (1998). New Woman's preoccupation with sex, marriage and maternity within the context of women's emancipation finds an unlikely exemplar in Deledda, whose subversion of gender stereotypes runs parallel with the movement's philosophy. Janice Kozma points to Deledda's gender bending in *Grazia Deledda's Eternal Adolescents* (2002) which looks not only at the dominance of Deledda's heroines in the sexual relationship, but also at her infantilised, effeminate males. Deledda's exposition of marriage, from claustrophobia to pain, from a loveless union to sexual frustration sits comfortably with aspects of New Woman writing, many of whom wrote of the monotony and injustice of the institution for women. One thinks of the cloistered Silvana in *La giustizia* (1899), struggling with sexual desire, or the bitter, sad frustration of Naomi in *Canne al vento* (1913). Yet, at the same time Deledda shows the old order, the grandmothers and mothers who keep the family together, who rule with ancient laws in mind, like the *nonna* in *L'incendio nell'oliveto* (1918).

The question of whether or not Deledda might be considered a feminist writer has been raised by Kroha and Wood within the context of Italian women's writing. They draw attention to the resonance and dissonance between Deledda and writers who share some common ground, in particular Neera (Anna Radius Zuccari) (1846-1918) and Matilde Serao (Maria Antonietta Torriani-Torelli) (1856-1957). There are some strong links between Neera and Deledda, not least in the influence of *verismo* which freed Neera to write more openly about sexual desire; Kroha sees her themes of adultery and punishment as anticipatory of Deledda (*The Novel* 168). But if Deledda's positive view of feminism might have been hinted at, Neera distinctly distanced herself from the movement, even going as far as to discourage women writers, denigrating the work of George Sand and George Eliot. Nevertheless her novels tell a different story, indicating that her public voice was distinct from her private opinion (169). Like Deledda, the prolific Matilde

Serao (Maria Antonietta Torriani-Torelli) (1856-1957) (who was also nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1926) wrote novels that were regarded both as regional and influenced by *verismo*, examining the moral and social problems of her native Naples (Kroha *The Early Matilde* 99/100). Like Deledda, women take centre stage in her novels. But as regards feminism, Deledda and Serao part company. Despite her own independent lifestyle, Serao wrote against votes for women, and disagreed—at least publicly—with women’s empowerment. And yet, Serao’s *La virtù di Checchina* (1884) shows an unhappy marriage every bit as much—if with wry humour—as Deledda’s more somber arguments for divorce, such as *Dopo il divorzio* (1902).

Deledda appears to risk what many Italian women writers—including Neera and Serao—didn’t: she figures independent, free-thinking rebellious women. Perhaps the issue is reputation. Since Deledda had already faced ostracism from her community, criticism from the literary world and opprobrium from her family, in a way the worst had already happened: this might have given her a little more freedom, with not much else to lose.

For the Irish women writers in this study, woman and nation are closely knit. The union of Ireland and Britain has long been allegorised as one between male and female in a trope of coloniser and colonised, and this feminising of Ireland, alongside the juxtaposition of a paternal Britain is parallel to Deledda’s polarisation of a maternal Sardinia and a paternal Rome. There is a long tradition of presenting Ireland as feminine. From the *aisling* of Gaelic Ireland, which features the apparition of Ireland as a beautiful woman pleading rescue, to the Hag of Beare, identified with the earth goddess of Celtic mythology, later to become the sorrowful old woman of Patrick Pearse’s poem “*Mise Éire*” (1912), a feminine Ireland has deep roots in the island’s literary history. In the nineteenth century the feminizing of Ireland mutates into a more political animal, used by both British and Irish to caricature the stereotypes prevalent in the perspective of each. *Punch* cartoons from the era show polarised images of Ireland and Britain. One shows a doctor (as the British John Bull) consoling the maiden Hibernia, protecting her from Frankenstein’s monster (representing the nationalist agrarian

Fenian movement) in the background—a case of rescuing the Irish from the Irish (Innes 12). Innes points in particular to the focus on Hibernia as helpless and passive (13). Another shows a beautiful dark haired Erin, and an ugly, matronly Britannica.

Alongside such imagery linking the feminine to Ireland, in politics the real woman question is hopelessly entangled with the national question (Ward “Suffrage” 22). In the early years of the twentieth century there was criticism not of women’s suffrage *per se*, but of Irish women seeking the vote from an alien government (Owens 103). This was one of the reasons for the formation of the IWFA (Irish Women’s Franchise Association) set up in 1908, modelled on the Pankhurst’s British Women’s Social and Political Union (Connolly 197). Its secretary, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, wrote in *Bean na hÉireann* in November 1909, “It is for Irishwomen of every political party to adopt the principle of Sinn Féin in the true sense of the word” (302), and urged the priority of enfranchisement over national independence. The women of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* (Daughters of Ireland) on the other hand were more concerned with nationalism than with the suffrage issue, and supported the use of physical violence to attain Irish freedom (Luddy 301). So whilst one argument ran that there could be no free nation without free women, the other made the point that “neither can there be free women in an enslaved nation” (Owens 108).

There were various groups, both nationalist and unionist, that helped politicize women, from the late eighteenth hundreds through to the 1916 Rebellion. Irish women took part in agrarian disputes throughout the nineteenth century, leading women only mobs and election riots (Coulter 15). The Ladies Land League, led by Anna Parnell, formed when members from the original Land League, led by her brother Charles, were in prison (with incidentally a more radical agenda than their male counterparts). Both the Ulster Volunteers—set up to defend the union with Britain when Home Rule looked likely—and the Irish Volunteers had women’s sections to raise funds and supply first aid: The Ulster Unionist Women’s Council formed in 1911, and *Cumann na mBan* (The Irish Women’s Council) in 1914 (Ward 22). Kathleen Clarke was a founding member of *Cumann na mBan*, selected to take charge of the Irish Republican Brotherhood if the

Supreme Council were imprisoned. She was arrested after the rebellion and imprisoned along with Constance Markievicz and Maud Gonne (Coulter 18).

There were some notable figures in the Irish rebellion, notably Countess Markievicz, whose words on feminism resonate with the socialism of Anna Kuliscioff: "I have no difficulty in imagining a time when the two great world problems of woman and labour shall fuse into one...when the (political) shouting and the tumult has died down the two world forces of feminism and labour will again emerge and dominate the situation" (Owens 94). She urged Irish women to see themselves as doubly enslaved to Britain and to the patriarchy, and echoed the words of one of the leaders of the rebellion and supporter of women's rights, James Connolly, leader of the Irish Citizen Army, who famously referred to women as the "slaves of slaves" (104).

The Proclamation which accompanied the Rising of 1916 pledged a commitment to universal Irish suffrage (Owens 113), and in some senses this was honoured: women gained full equality of citizenship in 1922, six years before British women (Connolly 197). But Irish women who had been politically active during the Rebellion and partition were driven back into the domestic sphere. The new state introduced further restrictions on the rights of women, including discriminatory legislations relating to employment, marriage and contraception (Coulter 26), and famously restricted women to motherhood in Eamon de Valera's constitution of 1937, which insisted on women's duties in the home.

Movements of the Irish revival did not initially admit women, testified by Maud Gonne in her autobiography, who commented after her attempt to join various nationalist organizations that there was no place for women in the national movement (Ward *In Their Own Voice* 05), which led her to set up *Inghinidhe na hEireann* in 1900. Paradoxically this group which was formed in reaction to the exclusion of women from nationalist societies was immediately drawn into controversy about the representation of women in Irish drama, which perpetuated the importance of a figurative feminine Ireland over real women, and an ideal of Irish womanhood, re-iterating nationalist stereotypes (Quinn 41).

J.M Synge's play, *In The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), prompted Maud Gonne to exit from the premier. The play, based on a folk tale Synge heard on Inis Meain, features a husband who pretends to be dead in order to catch his young wife with her lover: the woman is abandoned by her lover, and she elopes with a tramp who has witnessed events. Gonne protested "against the personal displacement of the woman-nation's troubles and their replacement by the personal distress of Synge's Nora Burke" (Quinn 48). Nora, in her adulterous passions, was an affront to puritanical nationalists, adultery a touchy subject, considered a "libel on womankind" (49). In contrast, Gregory and Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, in which Maude Gonne had a starring role, privileged the woman nation over real peasant women. This climate, and the reaction to Synge's play – which *The United Irishman* reviewed as being "no more Irish than the Decameron" – might explain that whilst in Italy, *A Doll's House* was met with shock, in Ireland Ibsen's play was received with indifference; there was chattering among the audience (49).

From Gaelic symbols to nineteenth century iconography, from Jonathon Swift's *Story of an Injured Lady* in the eighteenth century, to Seamus Heaney's poem "Act of Union" in the twentieth, woman and nation have been closely tied. This is an act of union that women writers are later to find crippling, as Eavan Boland attests to in *A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition* (1989); she acknowledges that Irish women writers have gone from being poems to poets in a short space of time. If such symbolism is unavoidable, there is the question of whether women writers manipulate and subvert those symbols.

But this is also to limit the question, for whilst acknowledging the position of woman as unfixed and in transition, it does not equally engage with the idea of nation as equally ambiguous. Hansson talks of this problem in her Introduction to *New Contexts*, pointing out that whilst Boland argues for a re-possession of nationalist icons of femininity in order to restore real women's experiences, she does not question the idea of nation to the same extent (03), suggesting that the idea of a fluidity of identity has been slow to take hold in Irish literature. She argues that an essentialist concept of identity means that feminist issues and questions of nationalism and colonialism have been uncomfortably connected, proving great obstacles in the creation of a tradition of women's writing in Ireland

(03). Exactly this fluidity of identity is shared by the writers in this study, approaching the subject from a variety of perspectives.

In the essay "Patriot's Daughter," Hansson points out that the contributors to *Irish Monthly* (amongst whom are Tynan and Francis) express on the one hand deep love of their country, but on the other concerns that a nationalist struggle will lead to social disruption and political instability (114). *Irish Monthly* was a journal published by Father Matthew Russell which favoured the hope of a "union and reconciliation" with Britain (Murphy 60), and most of its contributors were middle/upper class Catholics, including a contemporary of Tynan and Francis, Rosa Mulholland (Lady Gilbert) (1841-1921). Just as Deledda tries to explain Sardinia to the Italians, Mulholland attempts to explain Ireland to the British, to "advance a version of Irish Catholic life acceptable to Victorian sensibilities" (239). Yeats included the short story "The Hungry Death" in his collection *Representative Irish Tales* (1891) arguing that it contained "little of the intense Catholic and nationalistic propaganda so prevalent in most of her fiction" (11). Mulholland spent time amongst the islanders of the west of Ireland after the death of her father (Wade 11). This story draws on the myth now familiar from the revival, which inspired Yeats's much better known play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892). Tynan also uses the story in her poem of the same name, from the volume *Ballads and Lyrics* (1891), which she dedicates to Mulholland. Perhaps it is not as sentimentally nationalist as other work, but it still has all the familiar ingredients from the cultural revival—its use of an Irish myth, the brooding landscape, the focus on the peasantry and the metaphor of Ireland as a beautiful young woman.

Mulholland shows the kind of split loyalty mentioned by Hansson in the novel *Marcella Grace* (1885), in which a Catholic heroine inherits an estate during the tensions of the land wars. Mulholland examines each style of management, from rackrenting to the liberal, and her heroine is subject to suspicion and a plot on her life by the Fenians. Despite sympathy for Irish tenants, the novel ultimately argues for a kind of "benign paternalism" common among the contributors to *Irish Monthly* (Murphy 65).

Francis's *Miss Erin* (1898) tackles the land question in a similar vein to Mulholland; the niece of a wealthy landlord is brought up by Irish Catholic

peasants, then later inherits her uncle's estate. Francis in much the same way as Deledda engages with stereotypes of Irish-ness and English-ness, both conforming to the trope of a feminine Ireland in the heroine Erin, and a patrician Britain in her lover Mark, whilst manipulating those same clichés to great effect. In this novel Francis writes about land agitation and Home Rule in the context of a love relationship – but she also implicitly advocates women's suffrage in a subtle feminist reading, within a seemingly nationalist tale.

This duality of voice is most surprising in Francis, whose conservative style and proper tone belies quite brave analyses of identity. Dealing with the national question and the land question, she faces sectarianism face on, particularly in *Dark Rosaleen* (1915). Foster cites her as one of the few writers brave enough to tackle the question of sectarianism in Ireland at this point (139-142). Like Tynan, Francis lived in England, something which Foster points to as influential in “an assertion of difference coexisting with the assumption of similarity” in their narrative, mentioning in particular Francis's intimate knowledge of England, the frequent settings of her novels there, and her publication by English publishers (35).

A fellow contributor to *Irish Monthly*, Tynan regarded herself as a Parnellite and a nationalist, although she was seen as neither nationalist enough for one set of friends, and too radically so for another (Foster 30). Patricia Boylan describes Tynan and her husband as being “pro-British, pro-landlords, and Castle Catholic” (59). In Tynan there is the sense of that tug of war familiar from Deledda's positioning of Sardinia and Italy. Her ambiguity towards the political questions in reality are reflected in her writing. So whilst her sons are fighting in the trenches, she can write the Irish perspective on the 1916 rebellion, particularly in *The Golden Rose* (1924), and yet she writes war poetry, romancing the British boys at the front, mourning the duty of every Englishman. This from the writer of the lyrics to the song most associated with Ireland, “The Londonderry Air,” her song entitled “Would God I were the tender apple blossom” (Audley 205).

In contrast to Deledda's language in which she cannot help but *sardeggiare*, for Tynan no such natural linguistic hybridity is possible. English is not her second language—Irish is, and her attempt to “Hibernisise” her prose is problematic. She displays the opposite characteristic to Deledda in that her Irish-

isms and attempt at local dialect could be criticised for inauthenticity. Fallon hints at this in her reference to Tynan's poem "Shameen Dhu" (*Poems and Ballads* 40-43), referring to Tynan's own country accent, and how she writes the poem in what she believes to be Irish dialect (60). However, *Cuckoo Songs* (1894) sees Tynan experiment with translated poems from Irish, such as "The Oak Said to the Eagle," and opens with a miracle play. Yeats's praise is unstinting. In his essay for *Bookman* in October 1895 "Irish National Literature, III" he says that "no living Irish poet has learned so much from the translators as Mrs Hinkson, and the great change this knowledge has made in her verse is an example of the necessity for Irish writers to study the native tradition" (Frayne 382). Foster points to passages of descriptive prose-poetry in Tynan's *A Cluster of Nuts, Being Sketches Among my Own People* (1894) which anticipate Synge, but which "do not have the syntactical sinew of his writing" (Foster 32).

In a significant sketch, Tynan is on the Irish mail train From Euston to Holyhead en route to Dublin. She is in a ladies only carriage. Two bi-lingual Irish male seasonal farm workers returning home invade the carriage. Foster remarks:

We would nowadays be tempted to recognize Tynan's anti-Irishness as a form of self-dislike, since she feels racial or national humiliation in front of the English (middle-class) passengers. However, it is likely that the deeper ensuing emotions are wounded Irish pride and then guilt at her intolerance, followed by an unsuccessful attempt to redeem herself through benign thoughts and actions. They are a surprisingly complex few pages fittingly set in the conveniently compact and telling capsule of the Irish mail train and testify, certainly from the Irish side, to the intricacy of Anglo-Irish relations cross-hatched by class, gender, language, culture, and race. (Foster 09)

Split loyalties are not confined to middle/upper class writers like Mulholland, Francis and Tynan. The conflict of allegiance in Anglo-Irish writers like Emily Lawless, Hansson comments, reflects in particular their position as "both powerful in terms of class and powerless in terms of gender" (Introduction 11). Writing as a landowner, *Hurrish* is apparently the only novel set during the land wars by an Anglo-Irish woman writer that has a tenant as hero (Hansson *Emily Lawless* 65). The novel engages with Deledda on many levels, not least in the dramatic

landscape and the sense of alienation from British justice that has been imposed on the people of the Burren in Co. Clare.

In an echo of the solitude of the Sardinian plains, *Hurriish* opens not just with the bleakness and harshness of the Burren mentioned by Hansson but with the exquisite stillness borne of such desolation:

The stillness outside was wonderful, such stillness as could only exist in so depopulated a region – a region where there were no fields to plough, few seeds to be sown, no carriages to drive, and hardly any roads to drive them on; nothing but sea, sky, rocks, cloud, -- a stillness that was like death, broken only by the larks, which wheeled and circled overhead, pouring out their heavenly notes over those grey unfriendly rocks in a melodious and interminable cataract. (*Hurriish* 08)

Such stillness is a canvas for the troubled mind, and like Deledda there is a conspiracy of landscape which takes part in the psychological moment. Lawless douses all her depiction of landscape with metaphor and mirroring, giving the so-called hills of the Burren aspects of famine and a harshness and determination which is reflected in her characters: “They are not hills, in fact, but skeletons – rain-worn, time-worn, wind-worn, -- starvation made visible, and embodied in a landscape” (03). Lawless is as concerned with the psychic state of the locality as Synge, spending time on the Aran islands before he was born. Hansson points to this active agent of nature in Lawless (*Emily Lawless* 65).

Central to the story is the unfair eviction of the Maloneys and the subsequent leasing of the property to Mat Brady, now a traitor in the eyes of the Land Leaguers. Lawless presents both points of view – at least that of the ‘good’ tenant Hurriish and his benevolent landlord O’Brien. Some commentaries at the time were favourable. The *Dublin Irish Times* said it was a “realistic and truthful depiction of existing conditions in Ireland” and William Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, considered it essential reading for anyone who wished to understand contemporary Irish politics (Regan xxiv). However, Lawless’s portrayal of the Land League and the violence carried out in a bid to secure right to property has been criticised as one-sided. The benign character of the landlord, the thuggish portrayal of the Land League and the naivety and superstition of

Hurrish have opened the novel to criticism: "The agrarian movement is seen in the darkness of anti-national prejudice, not in the light of understanding" (Boyd 375).

Tenant and landlord each feel that their union with the land is unquestionable, that their Irish-ness is legitimate. Captain O'Brien is an example of the ironies of the Irish situation. He describes himself as "a native," (47) considering himself quite distinct from the Cockney police officer Mr Higgins, and yet is a landlord and instrument in the machine of injustice. His son, Thomond, still believes that Ireland would be better managed if things went back to how they used to be, under the lordship of the O'Briens, without any interference from England, perhaps mirroring Lawless's own sentiments:

The sense of country is a very odd possession, and in no part of the world is it odder than in Ireland. Soldier, landlord, Protestant, very Tory of Tories as he was, Pierce O'Brien was at heart as out-and-out an Irishman—nay, in a literal sense of the word, a Nationalist—as any frieze-coated Hurrish of them all (48).

The baffled, lost Captain O'Brien is a precursor to later Anglo-Irish characters, such as Lord Naylor in Bowen's *The Last September* (1929).

A fellow Anglo Irish writer and one who was equally fascinated with the peasantry and the Irish language is Jane Barlow (1857-1917) who offers less of a hybrid nature in her writing and more distance: "the Connemara peasant is portrayed respectfully and fairly knowledgably...though the note of condescension is impossible to miss" (Foster 03). Writing in the little critiqued genre of travel writing, Barlow documents ordinary life among ordinary people (Weekes 26), with as much affection and attention to detail as Deledda. Her gentle narratives of Irish village life in Lisconnel, *Bogland Studies* (1892) and *Irish Idylls* (1893), offer a less complex view of Irish-ness. *Irish Idylls* was praised at the time as being a "luminous index to young Irish authors of that world of appealing humanity which is still to be found by observant eyes in Irish local life...[She] now finds herself amongst our foremost writers, with every encouragement to go on and prosper" (Ryan 146).

Alongside Lawless, Ernest Boyd suggests there is patronage in Barlow's description of the peasantry, but that the sympathy with which she writes saves them from being offensive: "Everything she sees is softened in the glow of easy

good humour or sentimental compassion, so that a rather superficial impression is all that remains when she has told her story" (377). The humour and warmth in Barlow's peasant mirrors Deledda's Sardinian, as is her characters' disrespect for the law—but it isn't the deep, instinctual aversion of Deledda's peasants, but rather a source of comedy as in "Got the better of" (57-71).

Boyd comments that Barlow "almost never shows herself conscious of the spiritual entity concealed in these people" (377). Yeats agrees, saying she fails to capture the reality of the Irish peasant—ironic when the peasantry that Yeats writes of become figures of mystery rather than of fact (Thuente 07). Barlow on the whole has a lighter touch than Deledda, but at times her narrative runs deeper, as in the story "Herself" (72-87) in which there is real tragedy. The widow Mrs Driscoll is a pathetic, forlorn creature who is devastated by poverty and loneliness when her children emigrate. Her faded beauty brings added pathos to her misery as she pretends to herself and to others that her children are only temporarily gone from home, and will return shortly. Her land is cursed with boulders and limestone, making it difficult to farm, which ultimately leads to her eviction and to the loss of the last precious memories of her family. If her children ever come back from America, it would be to a life of destitution: "None of the childer have come back again, and it may now be hoped that they never will" (87). This resignation and pathos is sister to Deledda's despondent peasant. Barlow offered what Foster calls a vision of an 'ineffable Ireland' and quotes her description from her collection of stories, *Irish Ways* (1909), of an Ireland whose atmosphere is "elusive, impalpable, with the property of lending aspects bewilderingly various to the same things seen from different points of view" (05).

From a different perspective to the contributors of *Irish Monthly* is Jacob's novel *The Troubled House* (1938). The novel concerns the same issues as Tynan's *The Playground*, set during the War of Independence; however, Rosamund Jacob (1888-1960) was a member of Sinn Féin, and her nationalist sympathies are a different breed from Tynan's pro-union sensibilities. Within the same family Jacob has a pacifist, and a member of the volunteers; the novel questions the morality of violent resistance to British rule, and the conclusion is ambiguous. The interesting

thing about the novel is that although it is written in 1938, Jacobs presents a transgressive heroine in much the same way as New Woman fiction at the turn of the century, featuring the female artist Nix Ogilvie as an autonomous rebel:

No man with an ounce of brains could keep any illusions about her; no one could imagine her to be unselfish, soft, sweet, illusive – to possess any of the qualities men are supposed to find attractive in the female sex...She was openly selfish and cynical, she had no petty pretences (if that be a fault), she never gave herself the trouble of controlling or disguising her impulses. Certainly she never flattered a man in any way, open or subtle. ..And she cared a hundred times more for her work than for any human relations. (186)

Nix crosses every established boundary in her financial, emotional and physical autonomy: “‘She’s a new sort of woman, that’s all. There will probably be more like her, as time goes on’” (271).

There are many more New Woman writers in Ireland at the turn of the century than one would imagine, it being more readily associated as a British genre. Foster highlights some of the most interesting, including the exotic Mrs. J.H. Riddell (1832-1906), whose urban narratives are much removed from the almost exclusive rural focus of revival writing (13), or the travel writer, Beatrice Grimshaw, prolific as Deledda, born in the same year (1871-1953), her New woman lifestyle no part of the Irish story (Foster 12).

The term New Woman is used as an indicator of a trend in writing at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than a definitive label. At the time there was no united concept of what New Woman fiction was (Nelson x), and there were differences among those associated with the movement, as between Egerton and Sarah Grand (Mrs Frances Elizabeth McFall née Clarke). Grand is said to have christened the New Woman with her name in 1894 (Nelson 9), a point with which Foster agrees. However, Heilmann indicates that the expression was used as early as 1865 when the *Westminster Review* branded the heroine of new sensation novels as the “New Woman....no longer the Angel, but the Devil in the House” (22).

Grand's trilogy *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897) posed a radical challenge to society and culture at the fin de siècle (O'Toole 126). Strong women who challenged their role in society, and effeminate men, often portrayed as dandies, were for some threatening images at the turn of the century. The New Woman was depicted variously as either the symptom or the cure for cultural disintegration (Pykett 17). Grand's type of rebellious heroine was satirised in *Punch*, which ridiculed ugly or academic women often posing in men's roles (127). Like Deledda, Grand's writing "illustrates the ways in which women are bound to their social roles by a systematic process of financial inequality, physical abuse and sexual exploitation" (O'Toole 127). Grand's denial of sexual fantasy and possible 'impurity' in women, and her opposite positing of impure and improper men (Foster 300) is distinct from Egerton's focus and celebration of female desire—something that illuminates the same, if less overt, trait in Deledda.

O'Toole recognises George Egerton's short stories as transgressive, suggesting that she "deconstructs gender roles and relationships between the sexes" (127). Her most famous collection of stories, *Keynotes*, features analytical self-absorbed heroines who are sexually aware. Her perspective on desire, most particularly in what she posits as the 'primitive savage' has much in common with Deledda's women.

As Tina O'Toole points out, it is not only that New Woman writing has been usually overlooked in favour of a focus on the revival, due to its European outlook, but also the Irish aspect to the texts has been underappreciated (126). O'Toole points towards the Norwegian connection in Egerton, something which has led critics to focus on her involvement with writers like Nobel prize winner Knut Hamsun (1859-1952), so that stories with Scandinavian themes have been the ones most usually reprinted and anthologised (129).

McCullough suggests that Egerton figures the Irish in conventional terms as "sensitive, poetic, and good-humored, and thus predisposed to a higher level of compassion and empathy than the English" (214). Perhaps in some characters this is true, but more often there is a criticism of the Catholic Church and its restrictive mindset. The novel traces Mary's early life as she struggles with poverty and debt, brought about by a profligate father. Following the death of her mother and little

sister, Mary emigrates first to New York, and then after great loneliness and the death of a close friend, she returns to London. Mary refers to Irish women as “bigoted, with shrines for little conventional gods erected in their souls (and in no place are the little gods of baser metal than in snobbish Ireland)” (25). Equally, she expresses distaste for the statue of King Billy: “She had a dislike, quite unmotivated, perhaps racial, to that equestrian statue” (43).

A surprising parallel to Deledda is the way New Woman writers subverted the English language, which, as O’Toole points out, was an imperial language, with an emphasis on its correct use (for fear of the impact of indigenous languages). Amongst others she cites Sarah Grand’s references to Irish in *The Beth Book*, and in an uncanny parallel with Deledda she talks of Egerton’s use of dialect in the story “The Child” from *Discords*. She uses the same expression that Cirese used of Deledda—barbarism: “The interpolation of barbarous language and dangerous (often sexual) knowledge in their texts, and thus into the lives of their women readers, is radical in itself” (O’Toole 135). This use of subversive language runs parallel to Deledda’s use of *sardismi* in the text, disrupting the dominant discourse and threatening its legitimacy. O’Toole further points to the importance of landscape in New Woman writing, not something readily appreciated and rarely mentioned. She argues that in many of these writers there is a “fusion of Irish regionalism and a more elusive, impressionistic perspective on landscape,” alongside a particularly social Irish landscape (135), all of which resonate with Deledda, particularly her later novels where landscape becomes more abstract, such as *Il segreto dell’uomo solitario*.

In *Women and Writing 1700-1960* Geradine Meaney refers to George Egerton and Katherine Thurston as “infamous in themselves and sensational in their fiction” (769). If Deledda brings worlds together in a kind of *comunanza*, Thurston does it to an even greater extent, mixing not just class or religion, but placing her characters in totally alien circumstances. From the impersonation of a man by a young woman, the identity swapping of two men in London, to fraudulent cult leaders, Thurston’s characters all lead lives that are sensational lies.

Thurston’s heroines all engage in a bid for autonomy, whether frustrated or successful. She presents the female artist, the woman of ambition and the amoral

adulteress as equally emblematic women of the fin de siècle. As with Deledda, there is much in Thurston which resonates with New Woman philosophy. She is critical of the snares of marriage, showing that there is “nothing so convenient to the ordinary man as an ignorant wife” (*The Fly on the Wheel* 188). She writes of sexual desire and examines the difference—if any—between men and women, asking more overt questions about gender and identity in her narrative. Like Deledda’s women, Thurston’s heroines offer a similar paradox of the new woman and the old, of rebellion and resignation. Her novels anticipate later criticism of the Catholic church, such as Norah Hoult’s *Holy Ireland* (1936).

Thurston’s novels are much more adventurous than her successors – one thinks of Jacob’s *A Troubled House* which goes nowhere near so far in the depiction of a New Woman artist as does Thurston’s novel *Max*, which has a woman pose as a man throughout, demonstrating that gender is “a point of view” (323). Meaney comments that in post partition Ireland, a backlash of conservatism means that turn of the century writers often deal with more controversial subject matter in a bolder fashion (976). This is why Thurston gets away with such blatant homoeroticism in *Max*, as the ‘boy’s’ mentor falls in love with ‘him’. Contrast this to the merest hint of homosexuality in Kate O’Brien’s *The Land of Spices* (1941), where O’Brien euphemistically uses the phrase ‘an embrace of love’ leading to the book being banned.

Thurston exhibits the gods of convention that rule middle-class Catholic Ireland, and her characters’ futile attempts to disobey. *The Fly on the Wheel* (1908) is a debate between conscience and sexual desire, between better judgement and the addictive drive, set in the claustrophobic context of middle-class Irish society. In many ways, Kate O’Brien is Thurston’s successor. O’Brien, like Deledda, has been compared to Chekhov and to Balzac (Hogan xi) for the claustrophobic realness of her drama. O’Brien details Irish middle-class life with depth and subtlety. Anne Fogarty describes her characters as shaping themselves “through a quarrel with their social environment,” like Deledda focusing on the family which “acts as a commentary on the closed and hierarchical nature of Irish society in the initial decades of the Free State” (102).

O'Brien's prose is inextricable from Ireland: "Just as James Joyce may be said never to have left Dublin behind him, so too Kate O'Brien appears to be tied eternally to Mellick, the refashioned Limerick of her imagination" (Fogarty 102). O'Brien documents ordinary life in which extraordinary things happen, from illicit love and suicide in *The Ante Room* (1934) to lesbian love in *Mary Lavelle* (1936), the first of her novels to be banned "for obscenity" (Boland 13).

The *Last of Summer* (1943) illustrates O'Brien's unease with the parochialism of Irish politics and the censure of the Catholic Church. The novel is set at the brink of the Second World War, and centres on a distorted love triangle between Angèle, her first cousin Tom Kernahan and his mother Hannah. Tom's brother Martin is exasperated by the insularity of his family and community, which have barely registered the outbreak of war: "Oh God, Mother - it's 1939, even in Drumaninch!" (50). He eschews Irish newspapers, "though sometimes, in sheer wonder, he read De Valera's official newspaper, *The Irish Press*" (187). In a veiled reference to the banning of O'Brien's books Martin comments on the stringency of censorship in Ireland, declaring to Angèle that "this country is Heaven's ante-room...whether we like the idea or not" (48). The notion of heaven's ante room pervades O'Brien in the languor and honeyed paralysis of much of her fiction, and the humid and claustrophobic action of *The Last of Summer* is no exception. Fogarty makes the point that the zone of suspension that her characters find themselves sums up the insularity of Irish cultural and political life (103), a link between moral incertitude and nation. Hannah prevents her son's marriage and maintains her position unrivalled. She is a modern Cathleen Ni Houlihan, but an Ireland not of blood sacrifice and maudlin martyrdom, but of pusillanimity and suffocating demands. In the end, Angèle admits defeat: "If I had any guts I'd try to set up my illusion for him against yours. But I haven't...So you win - hands down" (239). The Ireland of church-going, neighbour watching, life-swallowing propriety triumphs over Tom's passion for Angèle.

2. Grazia Deledda: nation and transgression

Perhaps no writer combines the portrayal of her country alongside the revelation of the interior world as seamlessly as Deledda. She begins a fictionalized documentary of her island in the early novel *Fior di Sardegna* (1892), and her expression of Sardinia reaches its apotheosis in *Cosima* (1936). Her sense of moral obligation at the start of her career seems as resolute as her sense of patriotic responsibility; in a letter to a close friend, Sofia Bisi-Albini, she writes: “se scrivo storie di gente quale incontro nella vita, e, cioè, più malvagia che buona, lo fo con la ferma convinzione di far opera di moralità, condannando sempre il male” (Scano 19).⁸ Deledda writes about interior conflict, the doomed attempt to resist temptation, which leads her characters down a road to destruction: her characters trespass morally, socially and sexually. This chapter looks at the flesh and bones of Deledda’s fiction, from her use of landscape and legend to the many kinds of boundary crossing evident in her narrative.

Deledda talks about *Fior di Sardegna* in a letter to her editor at the Perino publishing house, Maggiorino Ferraris in 1891: “L’indole di questo mio libro mi pare sia tanto drammatica quanto sentimentale, e anche un pochino verista, se ‘verismo’ può dirsi il ritrarre la vita e gli uomini come sono, o meglio come li conosco io” (Scano 237).⁹ Deledda’s goal of faithful description rests with the ethos of the *veristi*. Writers like Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) take a surgical knife to fiction, offering clean sharp lines, opening up reality with the eyes of detached curiosity; Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) tells of the hopeless struggle of life, the crippling burden of poverty and the inevitability of suffering. It is common for literary criticism to place Deledda alongside such writers in their treatment of the

8 “if I write stories about people whom I meet in life, and if they are more wicked than good, I do it with the firm conviction of carrying out a moral work, always condemning evil.”

9 “To me, the scope of my novel seems to be a little dramatic and sentimental, and even a little verist, if by ‘verist’ one means the depiction of life and people as they are, or better still, as I know them to be.”

local and the wretched (De Chiara 06). Deledda shares some of these characteristics. Her focus on domestic detail in *Cosima* (1937) where the first few pages read like an inventory of the kitchen, has been cited as an example of Deledda's attention to detail, something Neera believed constituted the imaginative strength of women writers (Merry 05), and what according to some brought them within the parameters of the *veristi*, offering more freedom to write about the social conditions of women (Kroha 167-168). Deledda writes as much about shelling peas, the grating of knuckles on a washboard, the aching back that carries a water pitcher—the arduous monotony that is life for many of her heroines—as she does about the restrictions of marriage or the limitations for an artist. But she also writes about the shepherd, his simple lunch, the rituals of a lonely life.

Deledda believed that she was able to “descrivere la vita come io la concepisco, come veramente è” (Dolfi *Del romanzesco* 934).¹⁰ But perhaps there is more magic in Deledda than mundanity. Folklore, superstition and magic penetrate all of Deledda's writing, creating a timbre of legend. Her knowledge of local lore comes not only from a childhood spent listening to servant's tales around the fire, but also to her later involvement with scholar Angelo De Gubernatis. He attempted to collate folklore from the different regions of Italy, to promote cultural understanding in a recently unified nation (Turchi *Tradizioni* 21). Deledda wanted to be part of this venture. She wrote to Gubernatis, who published some of her early stories in his publication *Natura ed arte*. He later approached her to represent Nuoro in his forthcoming edition on Sardinia (22). In a letter dated 02 May 1893, Deledda asks A. Scano and G.A. Satta, directors of the most important periodical on the island, *Vita sarda*, for their help in this project: “Aiutino questa piccola lavoratrice che ha consacrato la sua vita e i suoi pensieri alla Sardegna, e che sogna ad ogni istante di vederla, se non più conosciuta, liberata almeno dalle calunnie d'oltre mare” (24).¹¹ Deledda's patriotism is both passionate and political; she wants to represent Sardinia, to clear its stereotypical

¹⁰ “to describe life as I conceive it to be, as it is in reality.”

¹¹ “Please help this little worker who has consecrated her life and her thoughts to Sardinia, and who dreams every moment to see her—if not more known—at least liberated from the calumnies of overseas.”

image. Gubernatis asks Deledda to collect *imprecazioni*, and the resulting volume *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna* (1894), is a study of curses, oaths, superstitions, funeral rites and feast days, all of which find their way into her work.

Racconti sardi (1894) is one of the first volumes to use this research. "Il mago" tells of the belief in the magic of stones, dating back to the worship of ancient stone monuments, the *betili* and *menhirs*, symbols perhaps of mother earth (Turchi *Leggende* 8). "In sartu" ("In the Fold"), has as its heroine the wild Manzéla, who is thought to be under a curse due to her violent behaviour. The *medichessa* attempts to cure her by quoting the *verbos*, magic words to be used in a variety of spells. This witch like figure appears frequently in Deledda. In the collection *Chiaroscuro* (1912), the *maga* in "La scomunica" ("The excommunication") practises a kind of voodoo. An old spinster and her servant go to visit her for a cure for toothache and the *maga* gives the old woman a wooden figure to bury under her door. Voodoo is also practised by the heroine of "Zia Jacobba," in *Le tentazioni* (1899). Another witch like figure, she has lived off leaches since the death of her husband; people say she has relations with the devil. She believes that her daughter died due to an evil spell, and a doll is planted to bring evil to the culprit. The persona of the *medichessa* is recognisable as a descendent of the pre Christian *deina*, *divina*, or *diina* in Barbagia's past. Women were the prime practitioners of water divining, which was held in high repute in an island often craving rain, and with unreliable harvests. This powerful female would only pass on her magic powers to another woman (Turchi *Leggende* 16-18). This image, of woman passing on control to woman can be noticed as a subtle strand in some of Deledda's later work, like the symbolic passing down of the keys in *L'incendio nell'oliveto* (1918) as an equivalent to this handing down of authority: a young woman inherits the most sacred thing in the older woman's possession, the keys to her house and her power.

Many of Deledda's characters are destined to travel weary. The long journey, mesmeric in its intensity, solitude and timelessness is a frequent feature. Spinazzola recognizes the journey as a device from Sardinian fable, part of what gives Deledda's prose the "lyricism of legend" (Introduction xxiv). In adolescent

poetry the journeys are dream-like and internalized. Her first short story, "Sulle montagne," from the collection *Nell'azzurro* (1890), describes a pilgrimage to a church on the slopes of Mount Ortobene, the mountain rising above her native Nuoro. Deledda details the heat and fatigue as people trudge up the mountain, she paints the *tableaux vivants* of a poor hunched man who is praying, completely immobile, and a statue of the virgin, roughly carved, but rising pristine among the flowers. This hallucinatory quality holds promise of visionary scenes later in Deledda, in the surreality of *Il paese del vento* (1931), or the dream world of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921).

In Deledda there is often a moment when a character comes to a decision or experiences an epiphany; at this point they wander off into their own metaphorical desert. On release from prison, Costantino in *Naufreggi in porto* (1920) makes the long return journey home, trying to come to terms with his wife's infidelity:

Egli andava, ma perché andava? dove andava?...Gli pareva nell'incertezza del crepuscolo che velava le lontananze, che il suo viaggio fosse inutile, vano. Egli camminava invano: non aveva più patria, né casa, né famiglia: egli non sarebbe arrivato mai, mai a nessun posto. E gli sembrava di essere smarrito in un deserto infinito e cinereo come il cielo disteso sul suo capo, dove le stelle si accendevano come fuochi di viandanti solitari, ignoti gli uni agli altri, smarriti come lui nella vana libertà di un deserto. (355)¹²

The haunting faces of human-like animals proliferate in Deledda, as they do in Sardinian legend. Mostly she recounts the legends in her collections but sometimes they find their way into her narrative. The story of the *mufflone* which Deledda hears as a young girl appears in *Cosima* (23-27). This story has a young woman form a bizarre romantic attachment to the *mufflone*, which appears only when her husband is absent; perhaps the animal is her husband keeping watch, or maybe a lover. Many of Deledda's characters form strange relationships with

12 "On he went, but where was he going and why? It seemed to him in the uncertainty of twilight that in the distance everything was under a veil of cloud, that his journey was useless, pointless. He carried on in vain: he no longer had any country, any house, any family: he would never arrive, never arrive anywhere. And he seemed to be lost in an infinite ashen desert like the sky over his head, where the stars shone like the lights of solitary travellers, unknown to each other, lost like him in the pointless liberty of a desert."

animals, and often the creatures are humans in disguise. In “La cerbiatta” (“The Deer”) from *Chiaroscuro*, an old man shoots a servant whom he thinks has killed his beloved deer—a deer whose eyes remind him of his betrayed daughter. Betrayal is also the theme of “La Martora” (“The pine marten”) from *Il fanciullo nascosto* (1916), in which a young boy steals a pine marten from a *monaca di casa* ‘nun of the house.’ The isolated woman has made a friend of the little creature, her only companion. A young boy steals the animal, mirroring how the woman was tricked in the past by a lover, who stole the only thing of value she had then—her virtue. These stories are dark, weird and savour of all the derivations over the centuries. This type of animal imagery finds its way into Deledda’s novels; her dialogue is studded with it, animals are part of spells or announce misfortune. Throughout her novels there is no barrier between the external and internal world, the boundaries between magic and reality are blurred, so that the natural world forms part of the plot; even in the voice of the nightingale there is significance, harbinger of love and pain (*L’incendio nell’oliveto* 724).

The magic of Deledda’s prose lies in its balance of the sacred and profane. On the one hand her plots have something of the Catholic morality tale of fall and redemption. However, they are intertwined with visions and spells of a conspicuously pagan origin. In this aspect, her narrative appears to mirror how early Christianity was taught on the island. Turchi tells of how early missionaries used fables to teach the basic precepts of the Catholic faith, mixing legend with the gospels, myth and parable, so that “la predicazione divenne un racconto, una fiaba” (Turchi *Leggende* 12).¹³ She mentions Francesco Boyl in the 1600s who introduced fables which were already circulating in other parts of Europe, later to be collected by the brothers Grimm (12). Christian and pagan collide in *Naufraghi in porto* (1920) (the later edition of the 1902 *Dopo il divorzio*). Following a drastic cure for a tarantula bite, Giacobbe Dejas is buried up to his neck in the ground, while eerily singing women circle his still visible head in a macabre dance. Later he is placed into an oven, and it is as if the women are intoning a funeral rite around a pre-historic corpse. At this point the priest intervenes angrily, asking

¹³ “the sermon became a story, a fable.”

Giacobbe's friend Isidoro to call a doctor. But Isidoro cannot blame himself for trying the old cures: "il suo buon senso, la sua saviezza, la sua religione, non poteva spiegarsi che male c'era se si cercava di guarire il morso della tarantola coi canti, i suoni, i riti usati dai padri e dagli avi del villaggio sin dal tempo nel quale i giganti vivevano nei *Nuraghes*" (348).¹⁴ In *La madre* (1920), the overlapping of Christian and pagan goes further, as the devout Catholic mother, Maddalena, believes that the deceased parish priest is possessed by the devil and is communicating with her. Even the building of churches in Deledda is often inspired by visions and premonitions. Christ himself appears in "L'Augurio del mietitore" ("The Blessing of the Reaper") from *Il fanciullo nascosto*. Here, Jesus is a reaper giving advice on marriage.

Perhaps the best example of the blending of pagan superstition and Catholicism is Efix, in *Canne al vento* (1913). Here the combination of the Christian and the pagan captures a world that will soon be lost forever. Efix says his Christian prayers, then goes to bed early out of respect for the pagan creatures of the night, the *janas* and the *panas*. The mixture of both a story of a Christian suffering for his sins, and the fatalism and ominous predictions of those who believe in another form of the supernatural, give the whole an atmosphere of malevolent portent.

Efix feels intensely for the land. He looks after a small-holding for his mistresses, the Pintor sisters, and he tends it with love and respect. Any time he has to leave, it causes him physical and emotional pain: "sentiva di lasciar lassú la parte migliore di se stesso, la forza che dá la solitudine, il distacco dal mondo" (12).¹⁵ Distance from the world and the strength of solitude are integral to Deledda's vision of the Sardinian cosmos, as is the human connection to the land. Deledda sets most of her novels in Sardinia, and in each there is always at least one character that is fiercely attached to the soil. As shepherd, farmer, or peasant they are tied to the seasons, to the wildness and sweetness of the surrounding countryside. Henrik Schück in his Nobel Prize presentation to Deledda in 1926

14 "his common sense, his wisdom, his religion could not explain to him the harm of trying to cure a tarantula bite with songs, sounds and rites used by his ancestors in the village from the time when the giants lived in the nuraghe."

15 "he felt as if he was leaving the best part of himself, the strength that solitude gives, the distance from the world."

remarked that it was almost as if “gli uomini appaiono come piante germogliate dal suolo stesso della Sardegna” (Di Pilla 20).¹⁶

Deledda talks of how her relationship with nature is intrinsic to her writing: “Ho vissuto coi venti...e così si è formata la mia arte, come una canzone od un motivo che sgorga spontaneo dalle labbra di un poeta primitivo” (Momigliano 86).¹⁷ There is something of the primitive poet in Deledda’s hymns to nature, lines heavy with descriptions of flowers and plants, names so numerous and colours so varied they read like ingredients for a spell. In contrast at times her prose becomes spare, exposed in images of solitude and foreboding, landscape which has little trace of the modern world upon it. Deledda images a wild, lonely beauty; hills desolated by the wind, plains savage in the moonlight. In *La via del male* (1896) the landscape almost breathes, so palpable is it within the story: “Tutto il paesaggio, del resto, pareva un deserto, mai abitato dall’uomo e vigilato soltanto da una deità selvaggia o dallo spirito di un eremita preistorico”(40).¹⁸

In some of Deledda’s stories, her description is so full of colour and light that they are hallucinatory. Aleramo in her essay “Appunti sulla psicologia femminile italiana” (1910), points to Deledda’s “strong and lucid feeling for nature, typical more of a painter than of a poet; a constant nostalgia for an earlier civilization” (Merry 01). Painter and poet, Deledda depicts a landscape that is more than beautiful; it encapsulates not just the topography of Sardinia, but what King refers to as “the spirit of place insisting on being heard, the genius of Barbagia speaking through the writings of a young girl” (*A Legendary Life* 16). There is a synergy of this “spirit of place” and the psychological moment, leading to landscape which “both reflects and participates in human vicissitudes” (Wood 63).

Landscape is all reflective in *Elias Portolu* (1900). The deathly solitude of a Sardinian night mirrors Elias’s hollow foreboding after he commits adultery with

16 “men appear like plants sprung from the very soil of Sardinia.”

17 “I have lived with the winds...and so my art has formed, like a song or melody straight from the mouth of a primitive poet.”

18 “For the rest, all the countryside seemed a desert, as if never before inhabited, and watched over only by a primitive god, or by the spirit of a prehistoric recluse.”

his brother's wife: "Elias cavalcava solo, smarrito in quel silenzio di morte" (114).¹⁹ In *La madre* (1920) nature is an active participant in another affair, liaising with priest Paulo's guilt after an illicit encounter with Maddalena. Returning from his lover the wind offers a reminder of his sin: "gli dava una sensazione di freddo, dopo il sogno ardente, e in pari tempo gl'incollava la veste addosso, e a quel contatto egli ricordava con un brivido la donna attaccata a lui nell'abbraccio d'amore" (807).²⁰

In "Padre Topes," from the collection *I giuochi della vita* (1905), nature not only echoes the psychological moment but is also complicit in the priest's rapid journey from innocence to temptation, and from guilt to death. Father Zuàne stands by the monastery window, shortly before he must leave for the annual collection of alms. Deledda asks whether he is sensitive to the pleasures of nature all around him: "Sentiva le acute fragranze del musco e delle piante aromatiche, che salivano dai boschi al cader della sera, quando la luna nuova, rossa come una ferita sul cielo violetto sfumante in rosa, in lillac, in glauco, calava sulle montagne della natia Barbagia; quando le roccie, al crepuscolo, biancheggiavano quasi di una luce propria, e tutto il bosco aveva fremiti, riflessi, mormorii arcani; e tutta la montagna pareva assorta in un sogno d'amore?" (210).²¹ It would seem unlikely that any creature could resist such luxuries of nature in bloom, and once the nicknamed Father Topes leaves the safety of his confines, he is assuaged with air thick with fertile scent, the sound of fountains, and a distinct, heady perfume of violets. The smell of violets surrounds the woman whom he asks for lodgings for the night; first seduced by nature he is now seduced by her, and Father Topes returns to the monastery minus his collected alms and with a crushing sense of guilt as he lies about having been accosted by robbers. Unwillingly, he is sent out

19 "Elias rode on alone, lost in that silence of death."

20 "It gave him a cold sensation, after his passionate dream, and at the same time blew his jacket against him and at the contact he remembered with a shiver the woman attached to him in the embrace of love."

21 "Did he smell the sharp fragrance of musk and herbs that rose up from the wood at evenfall, when the new moon, red like a wound in the violet sky fading into pink, lilac and grey-green, fell into the mountains of his native Barbagia; when the rocks, at dusk, shone nearly with a light of their own, and all the wood shivered with reflections and arcane murmurings; and all the mountain seemed wrapped in a dream of love?"

again to redouble his efforts only this time Father Topes is in fear of meeting the woman for a second time.

Complicit in his seduction, nature is complicit in his death. “Ma padre Topes cominciò a turbarsi nel respirare la fragranza del bosco: ricordava il profumo di *quella donna*; e sentiva il suo cuore stringersi, stringersi, farsi piccino come una bacca d’agrifoglio” (214).²² Terrified that he is destined to seek the woman out once more, he puts a cord around his neck and hangs himself from a tree – like Judas after betraying Christ, a collision again of the sacred and profane.

Landscape is vital to Deledda, nature inseparable from plot. Despite this, Deledda sets a number of novels outside Sardinia, the first being *Nostalgie* (1905), which provoked the criticism of Capuana: “La signorina Deledda fa benissimo di non uscire dalla sua Sardegna e di continuare a lavorare in questa preziosa miniera, dove ha già trovato un forte elemento di originalità” (153-161).²³ In a sense Deledda does as he wishes, as Sardinia is never left behind: in novels which stray from her more familiar setting, there is always a hint of the island in the description of twilight, something implicit in the slant of the rain.

Deledda’s iconic characters – the wise old man, the shepherd, the strong female, the peasant – are almost interchangeable so similar are they from novel to novel: rather than detract from credibility, this repetition increases their potency the more the blueprint is repeated. The old sage – for example Isidoro in *Naufraghi in porto*, or Zio Martinu in *Elias Portolu* – becomes magnetic as the prophet of doom. The figure of the shepherd is both part of the landscape and a vehicle for folklore, like Zio Pietro who recounts stories of his childhood and Aesop’s fables in *Il vecchio della montagna* (1899). Women in Deledda range from the pillar of tradition like the grandmother in *L’incendio nell’oliveto* (1918), to the independent heroine of *Marianna Sirca* (1915); this dichotomy in Deledda’s female characterisation is analogous to the struggle between the old and emerging Sardinia, like the strike

22 “But Father Topes began to be troubled as he breathed in the fragrance of the wood: he was reminded of that woman’s perfume, and he felt his heart tighten and tighten, becoming as tiny as a holly berry.”

23 “Miss Deledda would do well not to go out of her Sardinia and to continue to work in that precious mine, where she has already found a strong element of originality.”

for freedom made by Lia in *Nel deserto* (1911) or the repression that Gavina leaves behind in *Sino al confine* (1910). But it is with the peasant that Deledda attempts to reveal an unchanging Sardinian soul. Deledda's characters, sketched at the beginning of her literary career, and in conjunction with her departure from Sardinia,—the priest, the shepherd, the matriarch, the bandit—solidify and take on an aspect of sculpture, features and action frozen in time, yet alive to the moment. This capturing of time and place makes Deledda's Sardinia live like a biblical parable: the characters never change, the plots are timeless.

King refers to Deledda's claim to know her people as "picturesque and wretched" (*A Legendary Life* 05). In early work there might be an argument for the picturesque, in sentimental novels of family and village life such as *Anime oneste* (1896) and *Il tesoro* (1897). And in its more literal sense, this quality continues in Deledda's imaging of the *chiaroscuro* of life in a Sardinian village. But it is the "wretched" part of that claim which holds most true. Her novels show the struggle of life, the weariness of toil and the unpredictability of fortune. The poor and the destitute are at times the focus, at others peripheral, but always present. In *Cenere* (1904), among the beggars and drunks there lives a little girl, orphaned and reduced to living among the insects in the corner of a cave. Left like a dog to her own devices, she encapsulates the deprivation of a whole section of the Sardinian populace in her cry of desperation: "In quel lamento era tutto il dolore, il male, la miseria, l'abbandono, lo spasimo non ascoltato del luogo e delle persone...della gente che non mangiava, delle donne che non avevano vesti, degli uomini che si ubriacavano per stordirsi e che bastonavano le donne ed i fanciulli e le bestie perché non potevano percuotere il destino" (76).²⁴

It could be argued that Deledda's representation of Sardinian character is stereotypical. However, she takes pains to point out that she does not want to write in clichés, nor offer typical stories of revenge, of the bandit and blood lust in Sardinia. Marci points towards Deledda's complexity when it comes to writing about Sardinia, which is not limited to these stereotypical images (*Narrativa* 38). Deledda challenges the stereotype of the Sard as savage by embracing and

²⁴ "In that cry was all the pain, the evil, the poverty, the abandonment, the unheard suffering of place and person...of the people who didn't eat, the women who had no clothes, of the men who drank themselves stupid and who beat women, children and beasts because they couldn't beat fate."

transforming this image: she takes the label that the Sardinian has been known by – barbarous, savage – and makes it her own. In *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna* (1894) Deledda tries to represent the real problems of Sardinia's backwardness, social inequality and the life of crime lived by many outside the established order, describing Nuoro as "il campo aperto dove la civiltà incipiente combatte una lotta silenziosa con la strana barbarie sarda" (Cirese 42).²⁵ Here, Deledda places this "peculiar barbarism" in a favourable light, changing the positive to negative in her suggestion that civilising influences are "corrupting" Nuorese customs: "Così, gettando un'ombra sulla civiltà e un corrispettivo riflesso di luce sulla barbarie, si viene aprendo la strada per trasformare in valore il disvalore senza peraltro valicare i limiti dell'accettabilità" (42).²⁶

King refers to the unfair criticism of Deledda which pertained for many decades, citing her prose as ungrammatical, subscribing to the popular belief that she wrote badly (King *The Question* 153). She argues that Deledda encounters problems that anyone writing in a second language might, since she had to learn Italian from scratch, and was mostly self-taught. This aspect of her prose which begins as a stumbling block becomes her best asset in a style which mixes Sardinian dialect, word order and idioms with standard Italian.

Deledda only had between ten and twelve official Italian lessons, on the advice of her brother Andrea "poiché a dire il vero ella scriveva piú in dialetto che in lingua" (Cosima 58).²⁷ The dialect referred to is the Nuorese dialect of Logudorese. King refers to Deledda's first story, *Sangue sardo* (1887), and to the mistakes which were noted by Italian literature professor, Giuseppe Petronio. Deledda misappropriates some verbs, for example using the verb "rimuginare" in the sentence "Cosemo rimuginò il fuoco," which means "to mull over ideas," not to "poke around" in the fire. Petronio makes the point that the verbs Deledda has problems with have no close equivalents in Sardinian; the young writer would

25 "The open field where incipient civility competes in a silent battle against the strange Sardinian barbarity."

26 "Thus, casting a shadow on civility and a corresponding light on barbarity, the path was taken to translate positive to negative without nonetheless crossing the limits of acceptability."

27 "since to tell the truth, she wrote more in dialect than in Italian."

have simply looked them up, and chosen what she thought was the most suitable word (155). Massimo Pittau makes a similar point in "La questione della lingua in Grazia Deledda" (1972). Since many Italian words exist in Sard, but mean something quite different, unlikely synonyms are used instead. He argues that when Sardinians are bi-lingual they think "dialogically" in Sard, then translate into Italian, a point made again by King (154). This tendency in Deledda is a sublimation of her mother tongue in the text and is responsible for Deledda's unique narrative voice.

Part of the credibility of Deledda's characters comes from their dialogue. Whereas Verga consulted books on Sicilian peasantry and dialect (Cirese 39), Deledda had only to look around her. Her portrayal is not from above but from within, and essential to this is her use of language. Possibly the first successful use of Sard expressions and vernacular is in *Elias Portolu* (1900), in which Elias's jovial father uses pithy animal imagery, lending the language much authenticity. Spinazzola praises this strand of colourful language for its rhythm and imagery, favouring this over Deledda's more obvious insertion of Sardinian dialect which he believes is awkward and self-conscious (xix). *Elias Portolu* also first sees Deledda use a blend of Sardinian and Italian. On his return from a continental prison, Elias " parlava con una certa affettazione, metà italiano e metà dialetto, con imprecazioni affatto continentali" (11).²⁸ This cross pollination happens frequently in Deledda, often after a character has spent time in an Italian prison, such as in the short story "La giumenta nera" from *La regina delle tenebre* (1902), in *La via del male* (1896) and *Naufraghi in porto* (1902). King explains the ways in which Deledda does this, arguing that she authenticates her prose with *sardismi*, that is with Sardinian words like *tanca* (grazing land) *cumbissias* (rooms built beside country churches, for people to stay during festivals), *focolare* (the hole in the ground for cooking inside the house), and in her dialogue by inverting the standard Italian word order to mimic Sardinian speech characteristics: thus, "contento è," happy he is, rather than "he is happy" (158). She goes on to make the point that most likely once Deledda has mastered the Italian language, she feels more free to use Sardinian expressions and word order. Critics more recently are aware of this

²⁸ "talked with a certain affectation, half Italian and half dialect, with quite continental cursing."

phenomenon in Deledda, and point toward her intentional use—and later refrain from—Sardinian expressions in her work as an artistic choice, not a defect.

One of the greatest stereotypes of Sardinian life at this time is the idea of vengeance, of the feud and of the outlaw. Deledda claims not to write typical stories of revenge. However, her first published story, *Sangue sardo* (1887), is nonetheless a dramatic story of a crime of passion: “oh, la vendetta!...il verme che le rodeva continuamente il cervello” (111).²⁹ It is the story of a woman scorned in love, “un’anima fiera, di donna sarda nata nei tempi beati delle inimicizie feroci e delle vendette inesorabili, capace di amare e di odiare come un uomo forte ed assennato” (24).³⁰ This story which features the stabbing of a young man, who plunges over a cliff to his death, is not typical of Deledda. Her treatment of vengeance is usually more complex, as she offers a window into the soul of the bandit and an understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state.

Deledda challenges the cliché of the Sardinian outlaw as a ruthless opportunist, cattle stealer and marauder. She offers an insider’s view of the bandit’s motivation and circumstances. In *Cenere* (1904), the widow of a bandit explains how injustice led her husband to become an outlaw in the first place. Her husband was caught associating with a *bardana*—a raiding party of bandits—and afterwards, once the police had recognised him, he had no choice but to become an outlaw. Official justice is to blame. The widow continues, in a tone of reverence: “Tu credi che i banditi siano gente cattiva?...Essi sono uomini che hanno bisogno di spiegare la loro abilità; null’altro” (204).³¹

Marianna Sirca (1915) looks at the vulnerability of the outlaw Simone whom social conditions likewise force to become a bandit. His sisters are too poor to marry; his mother is forced to sew and mend to keep the family together and his father has been beaten down by circumstances and fear, living like “una lepre nel

29 “Oh, the vendetta!...the worm that constantly gnaws in the mind.”

30 “A great and fierce soul... as capable of love and hate as a strong and wise man.”

31 “You think that bandits are bad people?...They are only men that need to show their abilities, that’s all.”

suo nido" (712).³² Deledda paints Simone and his comrade Costantino as victims of circumstance rather than heartless villains, mimicking the great bandits only by seeking out the protection of the shepherds, "ai quali in cambio offrivano più o meno tacitamente la loro protezione contro i malfattori e i ladri comuni" (732).³³

The great bandits are revered rather than reviled. Simone admires the famous bandit Corraïne, the family of outlaws where one is against the other, old people stay alive merely to avenge and where "madri che vigilavano il focolare aspettando nella notte il grido che annunciava la morte d'uno dei figli e all'alba il canto del gallo che apriva una nuova giornata di sangue" (706).³⁴ In fact, when Marianna's father learns of her betrothal to the former servant and bandit, it is the lack of status that bothers him most: "E fosse almeno un bandito famoso, fosse almeno Giovanni Corraïne!" (754).³⁵

Deledda shows Simone's adoration for the bandit Bantina Fera, and how he is torn between following in his footsteps, or giving himself over to the police for the sake of Marianna. The great bandit thinks it is weakness "pensare di una donna per cui si deve perdere la propria libertà" (775).³⁶ Deledda shows the human face of Simone's pathetic bravado, loneliness and vulnerability, in his real desire to help his family and in his devotion and ultimate sacrifice for the woman he loves.

The Nuoro of Salvatore Satta's novel *The Day of Judgement* (1979) has many parallels with the Nuoro of Deledda's narrative, particularly in relation to the Sardinian's attitude to justice, most especially as regards sheep rustling. At the time the novel is set, in the early 1900s, sheep stealing is an accepted fact of life, banditry a tolerated, even revered profession. He talks of the Corrales dynasty, one that buys the silence of the whole island; the complicity of the Sardinian populace is complete. If someone is unfair enough to steal from a peasant, a

32 "A hare in its nest."

33 "to whom in exchange they tacitly offered protection from criminals and local thieves."

34 "...mothers watched around the focolare waiting for a cry in the night that would announce the death of one of their sons and at dawn the cry of the cockerel that would open another day of blood."

35 "If only he were a famous bandit, if only at least Giovanni Corraïne!"

36 "...to think of a woman for whom you would lose your liberty."

collection will be held to replace the lost cattle. Contrarily, everyone is blind and deaf to the disappearance of a whole flock of sheep. "That flock does not exist, but above all, it has never existed. Obviously the Corrales do not have a magic wand, and a thousand sheep...cannot be stolen unless they are stolen by Sardinia as a whole. But this is the magic of the Corrales: they have made thieves of all Sardinians" (28).

There are some surprising parallels between Deledda's explanation of the code of honour in Sardinia and in Sciascia's Sicily in *Il giorno della civetta* (1968). Despite the enormous differences in style between the two writers, there is a shared connection when it comes to the sense of justice experienced by both populations on these Mediterranean islands, showing how centuries of foreign domination has warped the collective consciousness of right and wrong as pertains to the official law. Sciascia describes the concept of *l'omertà* (silence among the population about mafia crimes), the muteness and almost genetic detachment between citizens and representatives of the state. He warns the reader that the drama takes place in Sicily, where particular rules apply to interpersonal relationships, where the symbols of public and private life are measured on a scale of values that elsewhere would be completely skewed (392). By its nature the State has always abused its own power, transforming itself in the eyes of Sicilians into something foreign, to fear instinctively. In his introduction to the novel, Scialabba points to the roots of this relationship between the individual and the state as dating back hundreds of years, to the centuries of irresponsible rule which have left the island without civil society, "or the virtues it makes possible: no trust, no enterprise, no public spirit, not even simple honesty" and talks of *l'omertà* stemming from "those centuries of intimidation and defeat" and as an "immemorial inertia" (vi-x). Exactly the same code of honour operates in Deledda's Sardinia, with the same historical roots. She shows Sardinians grounded in an unofficial code of honour that operates outside any continental official justice, likewise dating back centuries to laws older than any imposed by a foreign power. *Il tesoro* (1897) features the gruesome cutting out of horses's tongues in a long running feud between rivals Alessio and Salvatore; the

auspicious words “gente tua, morte tua”(235)³⁷ appear here, a bloody cadence that plays throughout Deledda.

Deledda shows official justice as erroneous, harsh and unconnected to the local population. Deledda’s brother was sent to a continental prison after committing a petty crime (stealing chickens as part of a dare), and her characters often suffer similar miscarriages of justice, like Elias Portolu whose imprisonment mirrors her brother’s fate. In “Al servizio del re,” a calumniated Don Predu is left in prison whilst a group of bandits is released. In *Naufraghi in porto* Costantino is sent to Italy to serve a sentence for a murder he did not commit. Deledda shows Sardinians distrustful of a distant justice administered without any sensitivity to local traditions, preferring instead to take the law into their own hands. Something which encapsulates these sentiments are common curses in Deledda’s dialect of Logudorese, the most ancient of all Sardinian dialects—*justitia mala* and *justitia kurgiarra* meaning literally, “may justice destroy you” and “damned justice.”

In “La dama bianca” from *Racconti sardi* a woman wronged in love sends her new lover to kill her old, who is in turn murdered in retribution. From the same collection is a story of vengeance curtailed. In “Di notte” Deledda writes that the Sards are a people “che avevano per religione la vendetta, l’odio per Dio”(133).³⁸ In this story Elias, a man who left his pregnant lover, is threatened to be burned alive unless he can give a valid reason for his past behaviour—in which case he will be shot. Simona has dreamt of this moment: “t’odio, e da dieci anni non sogno che la vendetta” (121).³⁹ The child prevents the tale ending in a bloody finale, his entrance halting the retribution, opening up an analogy of a new Sardinia in which these codes will no longer be practiced.

A novel which seeks to address the changing attitudes towards official justice is *La giustizia* (1889), which deals with Stefano Arca’s reluctance to seek revenge. His brother has been killed by the Gonnese family with whom a bitter feud, or *faida* in Sardinian—has been raging for decades; in addition his sister has

³⁷ “your people, your death.”

³⁸ “that have as a religion vendetta, a hatred for God.”

³⁹ “I hate you; for ten years I have dreamt of nothing but revenge.”

been having an affair with Carlo's alleged murderer. But Stefano is prepared for official – rather than traditional – justice to prevail.

However, the case is surrounded by intrigue and corruption and Stefano begins to doubt his actions. As he stands outside the courthouse, he hears a young boy singing a song. The song is an old Sardinian lullaby that Stefano's mother used to sing to him: "Dove mai l'aveva udita? Forse, anzi certamente intorno alla sua culla, perché nel rapido momento d'incoscienza causato dall'improvviso ricordo, il moto della cavalla che ora camminava al passo gli diede l'impressione del dondolio d'una culla; e rivide l'antica culla di famiglia."⁴⁰

An ancestral note has been struck. The deep sense of belonging, of safety in his mother's care that this memory evokes triggers a parallel sense of belonging – to Sardinia. Stefano hears this echo of infancy and decides that he will after all take vengeance into his own hands. His sense of himself as part of a tradition, his idea of himself as Sardinian has been awakened by this one memory, and he finds himself tied to the same codes and practices as generations before him. Deledda shows a nation in transition, but one where the old law still outweighs the new.

Deledda takes the popular image of a Sardinian and explores the sensitivities of their situation. She shows a populace generally deprived of education, property and any means of climbing out of poverty. She shows them as custodians of nature, counters of stars and sensual in love. She shows the illiterate unwashed shepherd thinking in poetry, the unschooled housewife ridden with existential angst, the local beggar capable of astute political observation. The despondency and resignation towards the inevitability of destiny, or the rage against their own helplessness when confronted with their own weakness in the eye of temptation marks all of Deledda's characters: the fact that they are so similar novel to novel has the effect of dismantling one stereotype and placing her own tragic mythological character type in its stead.

⁴⁰ "another very distant but strangely distinct memory sprang up in his mind, the memory of a ninna-nanna logudorese. Where had he heard it before? Perhaps, no – in fact definitely around his cradle, because in the quick moment of unconsciousness caused by the sudden memory, the movement of the horse that was now trotting gave him the impression of the rocking of a cradle; and he saw the old family cradle once more."

La via del male (1896) exemplifies the most potent characteristics of transgression in Deledda. Dolfi describes it as the first truly Deleddian novel in its plot of crime and punishment, and as the first successful example of Deledda's *comunanza*, where characters from different social classes cross the line (Preface 17). In this her characters have much in common with the class bound protagonists of Verga's *Malavoglia* (1881), or *Mastro Don Gesualdo* (1889). In Deledda's novel the forbidden love between servant Pietro and mistress Maria is a poisoned partnership that is the cause of murder, greed and betrayal. Alongside such moral and social transgression, Pietro and Maria stray from accepted gender roles and characteristics. These are the different ways Deledda figures transgression, and often these threads are inseparable.

La via del male, like so many of Deledda's novels, is as much about stepping out of one's place as it is about illicit love. Pietro is resentful of his status, which places his desire for Maria outside accepted norms. In a pivotal scene, Pietro goes apple picking with Maria and her friend. The apple picking has a biblical resonance typical of Deledda, images that percolate through her text, often employed with great sorrow. Pietro feels just like the damaged fruit no-one wants to pick, seeing his position as base and ignoble: "cane e servo, servo e cane: è lo stesso" (32).⁴¹ In Deledda's Sardinia, where there is an acute awareness of class, Pietro rebels against his status as a servant, rejecting the common wisdom: "ciascuno al suo posto; da una parte i ricchi, dall'altra i poveri" (69).⁴² Maria becomes engaged to her social inferior, Pietro, but as soon as a proposal comes from the wealthy Francesco Rosana, she is prepared to sacrifice her passionate relationship for one of financial security and prestige.

Deledda's childhood experience in Nuoro means that her fiction often brings characters from different spheres into the same orbit. *Cosima* (1937) recounts how Deledda's brother Andrea would often take her to meet "tipi di vecchi pastori che raccontavano storie piú meravigliose di quelle scritte sui libri, e portandola in giro, nei villaggi piú caratteristici della contrada, alle feste

⁴¹ "Dog or servant, servant or dog: it is the same."

⁴² "each to their place; on one side the rich, on the other the poor."

campestri, agli ovili sparsi nei pascoli solitari e nascosti come nidi nelle conche boschive della montagna" (58).⁴³ Her novels reflect both her reasonably affluent life as the daughter of a local businessman and property owner, and also the life and language of servants, shepherds and farmers. In *Fior di Sardegna* (1892), Deledda depicts both life in a genteel family but also gives a window into the life and language of the servants. She continues in the same vein with *Il tesoro* (1897), bringing together the three strata of Sardinian society, peasants, *principali* and the bourgeoisie—in addition to the outlaw. Exactly like Verga, in Deledda's Sardinia there is an unwritten law that social classes cannot mix: "i padroni coi padroni, i servi coi servi" (Deledda, *L'incendio nell'oliveto* 661).⁴⁴ Deledda's characters break these laws, as illicit love flourishes between master and servant, mistress and bandit, *principali* and peasant, lady and illegitimate child. *La via del male* foreshadows Deledda's holistic approach to transgression; Pietro and Maria transgress codes of conduct but in doing so they also cross moral, sexual and gender boundaries.

In Deledda sin festers within the couple, putrefying what begins as a pure passion, sex usually synonymous with sin. Star crossed lovers forever stray out of the safety of their position into dangerous territory, the springboard to further transgression. Pietro kills his rival Francesco. He becomes wealthy through dubious means and proposes for a second time to Maria, who accepts. Although Maria's suspicions of Pietro's involvement in her husband's murder are confirmed, she remains silent—*omertosa*—complicit in the crime. *La via del male* ends with the couple forced to recognize their own culpability. They now live out one of Deledda's ironic punishments, together forever as they had wished—but on a bed of nails. The priest's blessing on their wedding day is ironic: "'Dio li benedica: sembrano due fiori dello stesso cespuglio'" (131).⁴⁵ But Maria's greed

43 "old shepherds who told more marvellous stories than those written in books, taking her about, in the most characteristic of the villages of the area, to the country festivals, to the sparse hovels in the solitary and hidden meadows like nests in the wooded hollows of the mountains."

44 "master with master, servant with servant."

45 "God bless them: they seem two flowers on the same stem."

and complicity, and Pietro's crime mean that they are united together on a stem of betrayal and murder, and the flower they produce is one of inexorable remorse.

Deledda's focus on the guilty conscience as its own punishment has led some to compare her to Russian writers. Momigliano compares her to Tolstoy for moral life, and to Dostoevsky for moral crises (80); a reading of the tortured conscience and interior monologue that is *Elias Portolu* (1900) finds strong echoes in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). In *Anime Oneste* (1895) are the seeds of this concept which is the hallmark of Deledda's fiction. Orphan Anna settles comfortably into the Velèna family until her feelings for Gonario, her cousin Caterina's suitor, cause problems: "sì, è così sempre. L'anima umana pecca, ma nel peccato stesso è il castigo" (133).⁴⁶

The theme of expiation is deepened in *Il vecchio della montagna* (1899), a prelude to darker novels. Pained by his son's unjust arrest, blind Zio Pietro, wants to go down to the village to hear news of his son, but he needs help navigating the descent. Servant Basilio, source of the rumours which led to Melchiorre's arrest, refuses to take him, too busy trying to get his master's girlfriend Paska into bed. Attempting the journey alone, the old man falls to his death. He has time to whisper a condemnation to Basilio, leaving the boy crippled with guilt: "sentiva che nessuna cosa al mondo, neppure l'amore di Paska, avrebbe potuto ridonargli pace" (108).⁴⁷

In *Le colpe altrui* (1914), brother Zironi reads from Saint Francis's *Fioretti*: "Imperò che è segno di grande amore quando il Signore punisce bene il servo suo di tutti i suoi difetti in questo mondo acciò che non sia punito nell'altro" (487).⁴⁸ Deledda's characters are likewise punished, epitomised in her poem "Padre nostro," published in *Giornale d'Italia* after the Nobel Prize presentation in 1926, (but supposedly written much earlier) (Piromalli 104). This poem is most definitely influenced by Giovanni Pascoli, particularly in the *novenario* metrical verse; lines of his poetry are a refrain in the novel *Nostalgie* (1905), her novel of

⁴⁶ "Yes, it is always so. The human spirit sins, but in sin itself lies the punishment."

⁴⁷ "He felt that nothing in the world, not even the love of Paska, could ever restore the peace he had lost."

⁴⁸ "I will learn that it is a sign of great love when the Lord punishes his servant for all his defects in this world, so as not to be punished in the next."

exile and estrangement, setting her more deeply in the wider Italian literary culture of her period.

E quando coi nostri ginocchi
corrosi, nel cuore l'offerta
del Figlio morente, siam giunti
al sommo dell'erta, uno sguardo
Tuo solo distrugge e rinnova
la nostra esistenza, o Signore.⁴⁹

Redemption for Deledda's characters often means a living purgatory; *Canne al vento* (1913) epitomizes Deledda's exploration of remorse and atonement. Efix, in love with his mistress Lia Pintor, helped her to run away, escaping her father's discipline, but by doing so killed him. His guilt is so strong it makes him hallucinate: he sees the faces of the three Pintor sisters and their family as they were years ago. Lia's child, Giacinto returns, bringing with him ruin for the Pintor sisters. Efix watches the Pintor sisters suffer poverty and humiliation; his attempts to bring them happiness have the opposite effect. He is entirely alone, "...nel suo deserto, nel suo mare, nel suo viaggio misterioso e terribile verso il castigo divino" (652).⁵⁰

In this novel, Deledda pinpoints the oxymoron of characteristically Christian suffering, echoed throughout nature in symbols of pain and beauty, like the bird which appears from time to time in Deledda, harbinger of sorrow: "il riso e il pianto di tutto il mondo, tremavano e vibravano nelle note dell'usignuolo" (672).⁵¹ It ends on a perfect example of expiation. Deledda describes the smiling Christ on Noemi Pintor's crucifix as she bends to kiss the moribund Efix on the morning of her wedding: "pare che sorrida, mentre gli calano giù le lagrime e il sangue" (695).⁵²

49 "And when on our corrupt knees, in our hearts the offer of the dying Son, we arrive at the summit of the steep slope, only one glance of Yours destroys and renews our existence, O Lord."

50 "in his desert, in his sea, on his mysterious and terrible journey towards divine punishment."

51 "The laugh and cry of all the world, trembled and vibrated in the notes of the nightingale."

52 "it seems as if he's smiling, while the tears and blood flow down."

Deledda's narratives appear to have some sort of Catholic impetus: sin and punishment, guilt and expiation, remorse and redemption. Yet her novels don't offer a clear cut morality. Alongside such convention there is a darker, more pagan element to her stories. In a culture where Catholicism is a meniscus over pagan waters, sin and redemption in Deledda are tempered with a sense of doom.

There is a sense of inevitability in Deledda that for many encapsulates what her fiction is all about. De Michelis mentions that the necessity of the *veristi* became the fatalism of Deledda, concepts which are similar in themselves (De Michelis 22). By this he means that by describing life truthfully, by describing human action for what it is—often unwise—and human character for what is—always flawed—there is an inevitability to the outcome of her narratives. Her stories suggest that crime invariably leads to punishment. But what is crime—what ultimately is sin? This question is raised in *L'incendio nell'oliveto* (1917): “Cos'è il peccato? E che colpa hai tu se le cose del mondo vanno così? Vanno così perché devono andare così. A volte vogliamo metterci riparo, ma è come mettere la mano contro il fiume che straripa.”⁵³

In this novel there is at times a headiness to events, an unravelling of the ordinary order of things, in particular the climatic moment when the result of secrets and lies leads to a fire in the olive grove, and the near death of one of the sons. But really, rather than chance, destiny, God, or whatever face Deledda's fatalism might show, it is rather the flawed characters themselves who mould the shape of their unhappy futures. Agus points to the supremacy of the human will over fatalism in this novel: “non siamo mai liberi. E non lo siamo perché non vogliamo esserlo,”⁵⁴ believing that this brings her in line with Christian philosophy (190).

There is a degree of truth in this. Deledda's characters are free to an extent, but still captive to their weaknesses, still slaves to circumstance. In the end, it all comes down to a fatal flaw. Deledda's characters exhibit a weakness which leads

⁵³ “What is sin? And what fault is it of yours if this is how the world works? It is like this because it has to be like this. At times we want to take cover, but it's like placing your hand against the river which floods.”

⁵⁴ “we are never free. And we are never free because we don't want to be.”

them to disaster. In *La via del male* Pietro's fatal flaw is his ambition, both in his suit for Maria and in his lust for wealth, and this leads to his downfall. His journey down the road of destruction is inevitable: "e davanti a lui si stendeva, interminabile e misteriosa come nel sogno, la via del male" (84).⁵⁵ Deledda presents Pietro as inherently prone to evil—he is simply helpless against his own nature. She dedicated *La via del male* to Niceforo and Orano, two anthropologists and apologists for a philosophy which asserts the inherent goodness or otherwise of individuals: "ho imparato ad amare le teorie della scuola positivista italiana. Per me non esiste il peccato; esiste sol il peccatore, degno di pietà perché nato col suo destino sulle spalle. La mia pietà, però, non mi impedisce di essere pessimista; e da questo miscuglio di sentimenti io credo nascono i personaggi poco allegri dei miei racconti" (Piomalli 25).⁵⁶

A novel that discusses both the idea of an unfathomable providence and the notion that people are ultimately responsible for their own fate is *Il nostro padrone* (1910). Pietro and Bruno discuss the question of free will. Pietro believes God is in control, although "non è obbligato a dar schiarimenti ai suoi servi." Bruno on the other hand argues for human agency: "Dio è nostro padrone, sì, ma un pochino dobbiamo esserlo anche noi" (113).⁵⁷ But Bruno is proved wrong as both men attempt to fight against their natures and circumstances in vain. Bruno believes he can surmount his feelings for Sebastiana at the beginning of the novel; however, despite his best efforts, he is overcome in the end by his desire. The same is true for his friend Pietro, now Sebastiana's husband, who on hearing rumours that Bruno and his wife may be having an affair is taken over by rage and decides to kill Bruno. Pietro's—and the novel's—conclusion on the subject of free will, is that it is useless to rebel against circumstances: "Il nostro destino è tutta una concatenazione di eventi di cui il più piccolo in apparenza è spesso il più importante in realtà. Inutile ribellarsi, inutile spezzare la catena, Dio sa quello che

55 "and before him lay, interminable and mysterious, as if in a dream, the road of evil."

56 "I have learned to love the theories of the Italian positivist school. For me sin doesn't exist; only the sinner, worthy of pity because born with his destiny upon his shoulders. However, my pity doesn't hinder my pessimism; I believe it is from this mixture of sentiments that the unhappy characters of my stories are born."

57 "God is our master, yes, but we have to be masters of ourselves a little too."

fa: cerchiamo di pentirci dei nostri errori e soffriamo, perchè questo è il nostro destino" (154).⁵⁸

With this knowledge a kind of despondent helplessness marks Deledda's characters, a resignation similar to the pessimism of Verga. In *Le colpe altrui* (1914) Andrea's fiancé Vittoria falls in love with his unruly half-brother Mikali, who despite his best efforts cannot control his desire for the girl. The boys' mother Marianna tells Andrea in a tone of resignation that there was nothing any one could have done to prevent the love affair. It is less a question than a statement: "Che cosa fare, contro la sorte" (526).⁵⁹ Deledda's characters are trapped, despite an apparent freedom of choice and action. There is a kind of predestination: characters are free within the limits of their natures—this is the formula to every one of her dramas of conscience. As Mikali says to his mother, "posso domare i puledri, ma non il destino" (527).⁶⁰ Thus Deledda links a kind of Catholic God with a more pagan belief in destiny, mixing as ever the sacred and profane.

Of all the boundary crossing in Deledda, none is so adventurous as that attempted by her heroines. In many ways, Deledda's transgressive heroines are New Women—and old. Her women are a paradox of the transgressive and the traditional. She presents the archetypal Sardinian matriarch as centre of the family and a domestic god. But equally, her fiction is full of heroines who rebel against the limits imposed on them by society, breaking moral, social and gender boundaries. Often this rebellion is a failed attempt, followed by retreat and resignation, as many of her heroines find it impossible to break free from convention. When it comes to Deledda's women there is no type. If on the one hand she appears to uphold marriage and the family unit, on the other she criticises its restrictions, especially for women. She both idealises motherhood and pinpoints its pain and restrictions. And throughout her narrative, whilst not explicitly writing about sex per se, sexual desire—and most often its repression—is fundamental to her heroines.

58 "Our destiny is all a chain of events, of which the least important in appearance is often the most important in reality. It is useless to rebel, useless to try to break the chain, God knows what he is doing: we should try to repent of our mistakes and suffer, because this is our destiny."

59 "What can one do, against fate."

60 "I can rule a horse, but not destiny."

In many of these things—her focus on sex, marriage and maternity—she mirrors arguments at the heart of New Woman fiction (Heilmann 53). In *The New Woman Reader*, Nelson defines New Woman fiction as being “characterized by the representation of strong heroines who rebel against the limitations placed on their lives,” novels which are concerned with marriage and its restrictions and which place a much greater emphasis on women’s sexuality (xii, x). Whilst Deledda never openly admitted her writing or herself to be feminist (Kozma Introduction 19), her plots nevertheless portray the difficulties and injustices faced by her heroines, and their struggle to be free.

Deledda’s novels show the kind of matriarch that wields some power, responsible to an extent for the domestic realm, but not permitted to encroach on any other arena. As discussed in chapter one, the romantic nationalist misconception of Sardinian women—freer, stronger, more powerful than in other parts of Italy—is partly based on the quasi-mythological figure of Eleonora D’Arborea (1347-1404). However, as Satta points out wryly in *The Day of Judgement* (1979), “in Sardinia women do not exist” (47). He refers to the “tacit cult” of the matriarch, which despite conferring a degree of responsibility made of the Sardinian woman a slave to the needs of her husband and family. He makes the ironic point that if one wants to think of the Sardinian matriarch as a queen, “the difference between queen and slave is no more than a hairsbreadth” (47).

Deledda’s older heroines are exactly like this—queens of their own small realm, but prisoners—and slaves—all the same. They are often custodians of the status quo. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the next, a time of much instability and uncertainty, it was important to preserve some form of continuity; this fell to the women, who ensured the preservation of tradition by their steadfast adherence to old customs (Turchi *Tradizioni*). In Deledda’s novels, this role often falls to the older female in the family, the figure of the Sardinian matriarch, preserver of the family’s reputation, custodian of Sardinian traditions and languages.

A novel which shows Sardinia’s traditions and old way of life under threat, and the beginnings of rebellion among the new generation against the laws of

their predecessors is *L'incendio nell'oliveto* (1917), which features the strongest example of a Deleddian matriarch and illustrates the conflict between young heroines and old. It is a story of a family in conflict, of secrets and lies and the destruction of the one person who exposes the truth, who is burned in a fire that rages in the olive grove. Juanniccu is the eldest son in the respectable Marini family, who still lives at home, fears his mother and respects the family (647). He is the voice of truth, revealing the secret life of the women in the house and their clandestine affairs. Possibly no other novel is as claustrophobic as *L'incendio nell'oliveto*, in which all the women seem trapped, despite some frantic attempts to break free.

L'incendio nell'oliveto shows a changing Sardinia. The First World War is a distant and ominous presence in this novel, which incidentally is one of Deledda's only references to World War One, despite Sardinians having the highest number of casualties amongst the troops sent to the continent (Agus 184). As ever in Deledda, the external world is a mirror to events. The fire in the olive grove destroys a great deal of the wealth of the Marini family. But Deledda uses this as a symbol for so much else; the threat to the Marini family's reputation and the ruined dreams of the two young women, Annarosa and Nina. A fire also burns on the world stage and perhaps it is no accident that the novel has such a pervasive sense of death; the conflict within the Marini family reflects that in the wider world (184).

The *nonna* is the head of the family, the archetypal matriarch of the home. Agus describes her as the "materfamilias, simbolo del matriarcato barbaricino. La protagonista dell'economia familiare, colei che si rivolge a tutti con l'autorità indiscussa, tipica delle donne use al comando" (192).⁶¹ The *nonna's* wishes for her granddaughter Annarosa to marry Stefano are nonnegotiable, despite Annarosa being in love with someone else. Annarosa describes her feelings of awe and obedience with respect to the old woman: "Dopo tutto la nonna era la cosa più sacra, per lei, la colonna più ferma della sua vita. Le parole della nonna erano tutte vere; erano la verità stessa. E quella sua immobilità, nel silenzio e nella solitudine

61 "materfamilias, symbol of the matriarchy of Barbagia. The protagonist of the family economy, the person who addresses everyone with undisputed authority, typical of women used to commanding."

della stanza quasi povera, quella sua pesantezza di bronzo, e l'aureola del fuoco le davano un aspetto di idolo domestico" (643).⁶²

The *nonna* is a pagan image: she resembles a little gold statue, sitting right in the middle of the room, immobile, a dominating presence; in her commands and thoughts she is also inscrutable and unaccountable. This image recalls the female figurines dating from prehistoric times found throughout the island, indicating the worship of a Dea madre, symbol of fertility and continuity (although this is only supposition) (Dyson 76). But the real god in this household is convention. Stefano has long been chosen as Annarosa's future husband, a marriage that would benefit the Marini family. But Annarosa is in love with a poor boy Giole, and Stefano is in love with Annarosa's stepmother, Nina.

The old woman is just as much in command of daughter in law Nina's future, lecturing her about the impossibility of a relationship between her and Stefano, cautioning her about the "bene della famiglia."⁶³ The young women in the novel are entirely cornered by the traditional codes for marriage at that time, enforced by the *nonna*; despite pushing the boundaries for a moment, they retreat, cautious of jeopardising their family's reputation.

Nina is trapped looking after her stepchildren; she will be unable ever to have a relationship of her own, under the iron will of the *nonna*. Her sexual frustration alongside her exasperation with the status quo leads her at one point to consider rebellion: "Che colpa aveva lei se la sua carne era viva ancora? Ebbe voglia di buttarsi per terra, davanti alla suocera, di sciogliersi i capelli, di spogliarsi e urlare" (676).⁶⁴ Likewise, Annarosa makes a break for freedom, calling off the engagement with Stefano. But this attempt is also thwarted. The fire that

62 "After all her grandmother was the most sacred thing to her, the firmest pillar of her life. Her grandmother's words were all true; they were truth itself. And her immobility, in the silence and solitude of the almost poor room, her heaviness of bronze, and the halo the fire gave her all lent her the aspect of a domestic god."

63 "the good of the family."

64 "What fault of hers was it if her flesh was still alive? She had the desire to throw herself on the ground in front of her mother-in-law, to pull out her hair, to tear off her clothes and scream."

breaks out, the threat to the family home, its wealth and reputation is enough to dampen any further attempt of rebellion and return Annarosa and Stefano to the *nonna's* bed. The triumph of tradition, of the *bene di famiglia* is complete, leaving the young women no further way out.

But Deledda also shows the *nonna*, despite her hardness and intransigence as equally helpless. She is just as much a victim of this preservation of tradition as the younger generation; her own physical immobility is analogous to her paralysis within the system. She stagnates in her role as matriarch. Deledda shows this in one small revelatory moment, as the old woman looks up at Annarosa with the eyes of a prisoner. She may well represent the old order, but she has less room to manoeuvre than even her unhappy trapped granddaughter.

The matriarch is present in many guises in Deledda, whether as meddling witch in *Dopo il divorzio* (1902), or pillar of the house in *Annalena Bilsini* (1927). She appears again in *Nel deserto* (1911) as Lia's aunt, a woman made "all'antica." Lia describes her in a letter to her uncle in Rome: "Se degli antichi ha la rettitudine, lo spirito di giustizia, l'istinto ospitale, tutte le buone qualità insomma, ne ha però anche tutti i difetti. Odia tutto ciò che rappresenta la civiltà e il progresso" (32).⁶⁵

Just as the *nonna* in *L'incendio*, Lia's aunt represents the old order. This time, Lia physically removes herself from her influence, emigrating to Italy. This reveals a further connection between the figure of the matriarch and Sardinia in Deledda's novels. Lia breaks free from her maternal country and goes to Rome in search of a new life. This analogous journey is echoed in other novels such as *Nostalgie* (1905) and *Sino al confine* (1910).

Bruce Merry suggests that Croce and Deledda's male critics seemed always to be looking for plots, while the writer herself was investigating the space in which her female characters "could manoeuvre in the search for survival and self expression" (35). This characterises Lia at the beginning of the novel. Deledda paints her as lonely, trapped, dreaming of freedom: "e le sembrava che anche l'uccello, solo al mondo, senza speranze, senza amore, invocasse un aiuto pur

⁶⁵ "If from the ancestors she has rectitude, the spirit of justice, the instinct of hospitality, all the good attributes in short, she also has all the defects. She hates anything that represents civilisation and progress."

disperando oramai d'esser ascoltato" (37).⁶⁶ Lia's search for financial and sexual freedom is characteristic of New Woman fiction, as is the focus of the narrative on her inner life. Her psychological journey is the whole story, from escape to resignation.

Rome represents the things her aunt despises—knowledge, art, theatre, discussion—and is an example of the polarity of Sardinia and Rome in Deledda, which is usually depicted in this trope of ancient versus modern. However, like other characters who emigrate, once Lia arrives, her life remains disappointingly solitary, despite marriage and children, which in Deledda do not always offer the solace that traditional narratives would suppose. The death of her husband gives her a degree of independence as she is forced to rent out a room to married lodger Piero, with whom she falls in love.

The book charts Lia's unsuccessful attempt to free herself from the old laws of Sardinia, to make of herself a new woman. But Lia ultimately cannot rid herself of the social and religious taboos associated with adultery. Once she has decided not to sleep with Piero, she gives up her euphemistic "youth" (i.e. her sexual life) and soon after returns to Sardinia, devoting the rest of her life to her children. In the end she too is a *donna all'antica*, unable to break free from tradition. The struggle to free herself from the nets of her upbringing, the social mores of Sardinia, shows, like *L'incendio*, an analogy of the birth of a new order, and the tenacious hold of the old.

Often there are two types of women in Deledda, one who upholds traditional values and one who challenges them. This is usually played out between the generations, the matriarchal figure representing the old order, and the daughter or granddaughter the rebellious new age. However, in *Colombi e sparvieri* (1912) it is two young women in the hero's life who are polarised in opinion and behaviour and exemplify two very different heroines—the traditional, and the New Woman.

Colomba adheres strictly to her family's wishes, leaving her lover Jorgji and marrying a much older man, a marriage that takes her far away to a solitary life in

66 "and it seemed to her that even the bird, alone in the world, without hope or love would still emit a cry for help even whilst despairing of ever being heard."

a dark and lonely house, to face the pessimism borne of adherence to the old mores. This is emblematic of the fate of many young women in Deledda, who follow the orders of their family, consigning themselves to the gloom of a loveless marriage and the isolation of sexual dissatisfaction.

Marianna, daughter of a continental dignitary, contrasts in every way, her optimism reflected in her dress—habitually white. She reads the romantic poets to Jorgji, in a model of accomplishment and spirituality common to the romantic Victorian heroine. Yet combined with this conventional image of virtue, Deledda shows her as a lover of travel and variety. At one point her comments on marriage articulate what a New Woman might have to say: “meglio morire che sposarsi, meglio morire due volte che sposarsi e rimanere tutta la vita nel paese natio” (540).⁶⁷ Deledda’s presentation of Marianna, the way in which she shows her as virginal, skilled in the “feminine arts” of sewing, keen on romantic poetry, beautiful, tender in her nurturing of Jorgji, has much in common with the tactics of some New Woman writers, who first presented a seemingly traditional heroine, promoting New Woman thinking by the back door. As Heilmann puts it, by “enveloping their characters in a feminine mystique...they sought to ‘seduce’ their readers to the New Woman’s sexual politics” (Heilmann 30). It is tempting to think that Deledda does just this with some of her young heroines, who appear like sheep but are much more predatory underneath.

So far, it is evident that Deledda’s women transgress social norms; they rebel against patriarchal rule, against the norms of society and they speak out against arranged marriage. They also transgress when it comes to sex. In this, Deledda has much in common with New Woman writing, which focused not on the portrayal of female sexuality, but rather on female sexual autonomy (Heilmann 51). This is true of Deledda, who never really writes obvious love scenes, but nevertheless is risky with her subject matter, particularly in the way her heroines experience desire. De Giovanni argues that that “In quasi tutte le vicende narrate da Grazia

⁶⁷ “Better to die than get married, better to die twice over than to marry and stay your whole life in the region where you were born.”

Deledda, l'eros sconvolgente è alla base della storia. Sempre l'attore è una attrice: la donna conduce il gioco" (*L'ora* 60).⁶⁸

Sapegno notes the sensuality of Deleddian women: "quei volti ambigui di donne, in cui palpita, repressa da una ferrea norma di costume barbarici, un'ardente ed esclusiva sensualità" (Piromalli 19).⁶⁹ Deledda's heroines are very sensual, aware of their own sexual desire, and more to the point, act autonomously upon this desire. One of the most striking images of this is Maddalena in *Elias Portolu* (1900). In love with Elias, her husband's brother, Maddalena pursues him to the *tanca* where he has gone to distance himself from her, to make him once again her lover. She is a mixture of temptress and sexually autonomous woman, something which Lyn Pykett suggests is indicative of a New Woman heroine. The New Woman was said to display "an intense and morbid consciousness of the ego" and "the sexual self-consciousness of the erotomaniac," giving the New Woman much in common with her contemporary, the *femme fatale*, another version of the threateningly sexualized woman (18). Maddalena, like many of Deledda's heroines, takes the reins in the romantic liaison.

Sexual desire, and its repression, is central to Deledda; unconventionally she usually represents sexual frustration from the woman's perspective. She presents repressed desire in her women, who are often trapped in the restrictions of single life. The most memorable example of a woman hidden away from the world, of what Salvatore Satta will call the "invisible woman," is Noemi in *Canne al vento* (1913). A woman at her sexual peak, Noemi lives the life of a nun in a closed order. Confined to the Pintor house, with only her two older sisters for company, her prospects of marriage are slight. Her youth has been spent locked up from the curious eyes of the young men of the village, an imprisonment from which her sister managed to escape. The force and illegitimacy of her attraction to Giacinto, her nephew, expresses itself in violent moods and self loathing.

Deledda does not confine her depiction of sexual desire from a female perspective to young women. In *La danza della collana* (Dolfi 811-863), the older of

68 "In nearly all the plots narrated by Grazia Deledda, an overwhelming eroticism underlies the story. The actor is always an actress: the woman leads the dance."

69 "those ambiguous faces of women in which palpitates, repressed by the rigid norms of barbaric tradition, an ardent and exclusive sensuality."

the two heroines finds herself attracted to her niece's suitor. Her sensual desires are portrayed in subtle indications of her attraction to Giovanni, an attraction which is a source of pain and embarrassment. Here, Deledda looks at the struggle of aging. There is a poignant scene as Maria combs out her grey hair that she has tried to hide. In her heart she is still ready to be youthful and laugh. She cannot quite let herself love, feeling her age as an obstacle but at the same time desperately desires it. A suitor, who is to crush a last hope of marriage, questions her: "E non lo siamo, giovani? Non lo sente, che lo siamo?" (847).⁷⁰ This depiction of sexual desire in a mature woman is quite adventurous for someone of Deledda's period. She does something similar in both *Annalena Bilsini* (1927) and *L'argine* (1934), both which feature older heroines coming to terms with illicit sexual desire.

Deledda's characters are also transgressive when it comes to the accepted norms of femininity and masculinity. New Woman fiction posited the image of a "masculine" female; one thinks of the pictures of the time of the smoking, intellectual, strong chinned woman surrounded by dandyish men, the cartoons of Punch which satirized the New Woman's bid for sexual equality and autonomy (Showalter *Daughters* ix). Heilmann refers to this phenomenon of New Woman fiction which "posited the image of the New Woman as a 'masculine' female, and the emasculated decadent as symbols of fin de siècle dissent" (Heilmann 06).

In the same way, Deledda's heroes are on the whole weak, effeminate, emasculated, and her heroines strong, dominant and independent. Deledda's heroes more often than not exhibit conventionally feminine qualities, whose indecision, melancholia and attachment to their mothers Janice Kozma refers to as "arrested adolescence," suggesting that in Deledda, "many infantile Sardinian men are indeed mama's boys" (103).

In *La giustizia* (1899), Maria's mother Maurizia is the dominant one of the family. She is described as having physically masculine features such as "il labbro superiore peloso come quello di un adolescente" (35),⁷¹ and a "grossa voce

⁷⁰ "And are we not young? Don't you feel it, that we are young?"

⁷¹ "her upper lip, as hairy as an adolescent's."

maschile" (77).⁷² At the imminent birth of her grandchild, instead of staying at home in a traditional nurturing role, looking after the expectant mother, she goes off on horseback to court, to hear a trial important to the family, leaving her husband behind in her place. This transgression of traditional gender characteristics and roles is common in Deledda, and resonates with the traits of New Woman fiction.

Nostalgie (1905) likewise sees an interesting reversal of power within marriage, in which Deledda portrays a shocking transgression of traditional gender roles. Regina is disappointed by the standard of living that her recent marriage to Antonio has provided. Antonio believes that in order to keep his wife satisfied, she must be given the lifestyle which she had initially anticipated. Regina makes such demands for material comfort that Antonio is driven to prostitution, a fate most usually reserved for an unhappy heroine. This is a power struggle in which the female has control and the man is debased and pathetic. On her discovery of Antonio's infidelity, Regina secretly rejoices in her domination of her husband: "Ma in fondo, nelle profondità più buie e misteriose della sua anima, Regina sentiva una acre soddisfazione nell'accorgersi quanto quell'uomo fosse cosa sua. Sempre e dappertutto, anche nell'errore, era lei che lo dominava" (490).⁷³

Lucienne Kroha states that "the Italian literary tradition offered women in an unhappy marriage only two choices; adultery or resignation" ("The Novel" 172). To an extent this is true in Deledda, whose rebel heroines and traditional women alike usually end up burned by their actions or stoic in the face of circumstances. But this is not to say that Deledda does not criticise marriage, its injustices and constraints. In this she also resembles New Woman writing, whose writers Heilmann argues, wanted to "convince their readers of the expediency of a far-reaching overhaul of marital relations, not to promote the more radical idea that the concept should be abandoned altogether" (Heilmann 77).

⁷² "big masculine voice."

⁷³ "Deep down, in the darkest and most mysterious depths of her soul, Regina felt a bitter satisfaction at the realisation of quite how much this man was hers. Once and for all, even in sin, it was she who dominated him."

Deledda shows that in some cases, married life offers a little more freedom than single life, but this modicum of independence comes at a price. Deledda's depiction of marriage has much in common with New Woman philosophy in that she paints women in varying degrees of dissatisfaction within a union that often leaves women in a position of physical and sexual subjugation. Marriage is seldom a sanctuary for Deleddian heroines. Some are merely dissatisfied, like Regina in *Nostalgie*, whilst others labour under domestic violence and abuse like Maddalena in *Elias Portolu*. One novel in particular examines the injustice of an unhappy union more than others, since the subject of marriage, or rather divorce, is at its centre: *Dopo il divorzio* (1902).

The novel was published the same year as Anna Franchi's *Avanti il divorzio*, a narrative which likewise deals with marriage "as sexual and economic slavery" (Wood, *A History* 22). *Dopo il divorzio* has two editions and two titles, the latter being published in 1921 as *Naufraghi in porto*, with an ending rather more bloody and less open to interpretation than its predecessor.

In *Dopo il divorzio* (1902), Deledda outlines the case for divorce, for which she was a tentative supporter. In 1911 she gave an interview with the *Tribuna* on the subject, in which she said that under extreme circumstances it ought to be an option (De Giovanni, *L'ora* 65). In this narrative she shows herself at her most political, concerned not only with the injustices of an unhappy marriage, but also with the unfairness of a continental legal system imposed on a reluctant Sardinia, since at the start of the novel the hero Costantino is arrested for a murder he did not commit.

With Costantino in a continental prison, there is now the question over whether Giovanna will remarry, since her marriage to Costantino was only a civil ceremony. Deledda outlines the lack of choice for young women in Sardinia; Giovanna either remarries, or spends the rest of her life in poverty with her mother. The voice of the modern world, represented again by Rome, is articulated through the character of the young lawyer, someone who has "attraversato il mare" (28).⁷⁴ The novel asks if, as the young lawyer believes, "l'uomo e la donna devono unirsi spontaneamente, dividersi quando non vanno d'accordo" (323).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ "crossed the sea."

Deledda's answer to this question appears to be yes, if only under extreme circumstances, which she shows in the fate of Giovanna, who remarries the alcoholic and abusive Brontu Dejas. Unfortunately this union does not lead to the wealth her mother Zia Bachisia had dreamed of, but instead Giovanna is treated like a servant by her mother in law Zia Martina, denied even the food she needs during pregnancy, insulted and humiliated by husband and in law alike. She is tortured by "la passione bruta di Brontu, l'avidità di zia Bachisia, il calcolo di zia Martina" (304),⁷⁶ showing that as a young woman she is at the mercy of family and of the law. Both older women scheme towards their own ends, showing the traditional matriarchal figure as greedy, calculating and above all indifferent to the suffering of her daughter. Thus the analogy of matriarch as Sardinia could be extended to view the island and its old codes as abusive and suffocating to women, marriage not a choice but a sentence.

Deledda offers many faces of motherhood and the maternal. Her male characters throughout her narrative have an idealised view of maternity, seeing the pregnant woman as sacred, holy and untouchable: "per il sardo la donna gravida è sacra" (*Le colpe altrui* 626).⁷⁷ But Deledda does not romanticise maternity or motherhood in this way, like some writers of the time, such as Annie Vivanti (1868-1942) who idealises maternity "as the most profound expression of femininity" (Wood *A History* 23). Whilst she does not investigate maternity to quite the same degree as Aleramo in *Una donna* she nevertheless approaches the subject with some complexity, not conforming to the idea that women find their greatest vocation in motherhood.

Ostensibly Deledda's mothers could be seen as upholding either the Catholic Church's ideal of womanhood, or that of fascism, both investing in an ideal of a devoted wife and mother (Pickering-Iazzi 103). Some view her Nobel Prize award as controversial, suspecting that Mussolini regarded Deledda as a "safer" choice than the novelist and dramatist Luigi Pirandello (Wood *A History* 58), who was later to be awarded the prize in 1936. Deledda does not show older

⁷⁵ "man and woman should unite voluntarily, and separate when they don't get along."

⁷⁶ "the brute passion of Brontu, the greed of zia Bachisia, the calculating of zia Martina."

⁷⁷ "for the Sard, the pregnant woman is sacred."

mothers in a very positive light—something which proves the misconception of Deledda as an upholder of rosy family life. Whilst it is true that Deledda's mothers are often matriarchs linked to the old traditions of Sardinia, they are often depicted negatively, as a bad influence on their daughters, promoting ignorance and greed. In *Fior di Sardegna* 1892, Lara is trapped in the stultifying atmosphere of authoritarian father and a devout, ignorant mother, whose only concern is to educate her children to be modest, honest and passive. The ignorance of Lara's mother is echoed in the innocence of zia Annedda in *Elias Portolu*, who is as "semplice e pura come una creatura di sette anni" (Sapegno *Elias* 9).⁷⁸ Greed in mother figures begins in the figure of Agada Brindis in *Il tesoro* (1897), who along with being "l'ignoranza personificata," adds meanness to hypocrisy. This trait is also evident in Maria's mother in *La via del male*, zia Luisa, who Deledda describes as "la grassa adoratrice del denaro, per la quale un uomo povero era un essere incompleta" (82).⁷⁹

So far, Deledda is a long way from New Woman's perspective on motherhood, which often saw mothers as the solution to the ills of society, as "heralds of a higher race" the future of a society which might see women as equals (Showalter *Sexual Anarchy* 45). But from the perspective of younger heroines, who find themselves pregnant, or who face difficult choices regarding their children, Deledda agrees with a different aspect of New Woman philosophy with regard to motherhood. New Women heroines often sublimate sexual desire in maternity. In their stories, "female sexuality is purged, projected, or transcended through activism" (45). Lia in *Nel deserto* is a prime example; she goes back to Sardinia, turning her back on a passionate affair to devote her life to her children. Likewise, in *Nostalgie* (1905), the birth of her daughter instigates Regina's awakening to life, offering in motherhood a purpose that she could not find elsewhere. But in this novel, as far as maternal instinct goes, Deledda does not argue that it is innate or natural to every woman. Regina is quite indifferent about her pregnancy: "Durante la gravidanza ella cadde in una specie di letargo morale; non le

⁷⁸ "simple and as pure as a creature of seven years old."

⁷⁹ "the fat adorer of money, for whom a poor man was an incomplete being."

dispiaceva il suo stato...ma l'idea della maternità non la esaltava" (457),⁸⁰ and initially she rejects her child.

Whilst Deledda does not agree with the essentialist aspect of some New Woman thinking on motherhood, where the experience of maternity is both longed for, a duty and a privilege, the visceral aspect of maternity resonates with New Woman's "primitive savage" epitomised by George Egerton ("A Cross Line" 22). The dark, primal element of birth is described in *La fuga in Egitto* (1925). The young servant Ornella is giving birth to an illegitimate child, fathered and unwanted by her master who already has forced her to abort one child. Here motherhood is far from a wondrous experience, longed for by all women. Deledda describes it as "l'odio antico della donna contro l'uomo che l'ha costretta a generare, che per il suo piacere ha lacerate le carni di lei e del suo grembo ha fatto il nido del dolore" (797).⁸¹

This chapter has laid out the anatomy of Deledda's Sardinia, from the topography of legend, landscape, and character to the different ways she figures transgression, whether as the sins of the fathers or the rebellion of the daughters. Deledda tries to breathe life into the history of her island, to convey its beauty, to shatter tired stereotypes and to show the pride and resignation of her people. At times, Sardinia seeps through her prose as an aspect of myth, a turn of phrase, or a character dredged from a world of half-fantasy. But there is more to Deledda's figuring of Sardinia than this. In a comparison with Katharine Tynan and M.E. Francis, the following chapter will argue that Deledda's departure from Sardinia is a voluntary exile that leaves nostalgia as a deep vein in her narrative. The motif of exile speaks to Kristeva's emergent speaking subject, allowing for a reading of Sardinia as semiotic, as complex and fluid, revealing the more intricate workings of its heart.

80 "During the pregnancy she fell into a kind of moral lethargy; she didn't dislike her state...but the idea of maternity did not exalt her."

81 "the ancient hate of woman for man, who has constrained her to reproduce, who for his pleasure has lacerated her flesh and of her womb has made a nest of pain."

3. Deledda, Tynan and Francis: exile and estrangement

For Deledda, Tynan and Francis, exile is the crucial connection, actual and metaphorical. Life on the Italian continent is the beginning of a mythologizing of Sardinia for Deledda, as the real island becomes replaced by a creature of her imagination. Tynan likewise engages in a writing of her country which is romanticised, beautiful in retrospect. She confesses as much in *Twenty Five Years*: “for the way with Ireland is that no sooner do you get away from her than the golden mists begin to close about her, and she lies, an Island of the Blest, something enchanted in your dreams” (159). For Francis, exile in the text lies in the dislocation and estrangement of the returned emigrant, in novels like *Dark Rosaleen* (1915).

It is nothing new to suggest that exile is a catalyst for an expression of cultural identity—Kiberd refers to exile as the nursery of nationality (*Inventing Ireland* 02)—but how may it be evinced in the texts, and is there any way of comparing such subjective representations in our writers? Here is where modern theory can at least provide a hypothesis. The process of exile can be understood as analogous to Julia Kristeva’s philosophy on the formation of the speaking subject. As the exile must bear the pain of departure, the heart-sore rejection of the birthplace in order to fulfil a need for expression, so in order to become articulate, the individual must undergo separation from the figurative mother. Boat upon the dark water, Kristeva’s *thetic* break, the separation from the figurative mother into the realm of the symbolic, is a mirroring of the exile’s departure from home to a new territory. Further, the forsaken mother—the country of origin—can be understood as being connected to, and part of, the semiotic, the unspeakable. In addition, Kristeva’s theory of the exile within—the foreigner—opens up further interpretations, offering subtle interpretations of national (and personal) identity in the texts.

"Addio, addio, Sardegna...La rivedrò forse? Rivedrò le mie pianure ondulate, le mie valli coperte di vigneti, d'ulivi, di mandorli, di pervinche dai fiori azzurri e d'alte canne sussurranti?" (*Novelle* 1 63)⁸² These are the words of one of Deledda's very first heroines in a story from the early collection of short stories *Nell'azzurro* (1890), a familiar valediction which resounds throughout Deledda's fiction and prefigures her own farewell to Sardinia almost a decade later.

It was a painful parting; having lived so long in such closeness and with such an affinity for her natural surroundings, Deledda felt she needed to give her own personal adieu to her island: "...ho voluto ancora una volta salutare le fresche valli, le selvaggie montagne fra cui s'è svolta finora la mia vita; mi sarebbe parso mancare ad un dovere se non le avessi salutate" (Momigliano 84).⁸³ Her departure may be seen as a *thetic* break, one which allows the beginning of a permeation of Sardinia in her text, of Sardinia as semiotic voice.

The semiotic, if it has a 'voice,' is inarticulate, a kind of sensory presence; one way it is evident in Deledda is through her use of folklore. Deledda's documentation of folklore for the scholar Gubernatis is followed by an explicit use of legend and myth in early novels such as *Fior di Sardegna* (1892), about which she promises in a letter to Maggiorino Ferraris (1891) to paint faithfully the everyday life of a genteel family in Sardinia (Scano 237). This and the subsequent novel *Anime Oneste* (1896) are informative rather than evocative.

In later work such folklore is used in a contrast of the ancient and the modern. In *Colombi e sparvieri* (1912) the hero is a modern thinker who has no time for superstitions. During his father's wake he is affronted by the primitive passion of the local women, who are incanting the *attitidos*, intonations or wailings performed after death (Deledda, *Tradizioni* 119): "la matrigna coi capelli sciolti coperti di cenere, in mezzo a un cerchio nero di donne fra cui Banna, Columba e tutte le vicine di casa pallide e macabre come streghe, ululava intorno al cadavere,

82 "Will I see it again perhaps? See again my rolling plains, my valleys covered in vines, olives, almond trees, periwinkles with their blue flowers and the high murmuring reeds?"

83 "I wanted to say goodbye one last time to the fresh valleys, the wild mountains among which my life has unfolded until now; it would have seemed a neglect of duty if I had failed to bid them farewell."

si batteva la testa alle pareti, si buttava per terra e urlava come un'ossessa" (478).⁸⁴ The deceased are extolled in this way only by women, perhaps because, as Kristeva puts it, "the experience of maternity enables women to consider death in the light of birth" (*Kristeva on Europe* 14).

In the autobiographical *Cosima* (1937), Antonino—the object of Cosima's infatuation—reads D'Annunzio aloud from the balcony. The canonical tones contrast wonderfully with the subsequent scene in which local women sing the traditional *mutos* in the shadow of the courtyard below, songs which are cries of passion, ancient laments. Inarticulate songs of love and mourning, the *mutos* and the *attitidos* are not aspects of the symbolic: they are implicitly attached to the drives of sex and death, and are the link to the semiotic voice in Deledda. This particular use of folklore has a correlation to the role that drives play, according to Kristeva, within language: "The semiotic activity which introduces wandering or fuzziness into language and, a fortiori, into poetic language is, from a synchronic point of view, a mark of the workings of drives (appropriation/rejection, orality/anality, love/hate, life/death) and, from a diachronic point of view, stems from the archaisms of the semiotic body" (*Desire in Language* 136).

Sardinia can be understood as a figurative maternal presence in Deledda, and operates on many levels. From the outset there is a positioning of Rome as symbolic both in reality and in fiction. *Cosima* (1937) sees the young writer approach Rome as a cultural Mecca (62). In writing *Nostalgie* (1905) Deledda was condemned for trying to write about something other than Sardinia. The novel is set alternately in Piedmont and Rome which, as we have seen, led Capuana to comment that "La signorina Deledda fa benissimo di non uscire dalla sua Sardegna e di continuare a lavorare in questa preziosa miniera, dove ha già trovato un forte elemento di originalità (*Gli ismi* 153-161).⁸⁵

84 "...my stepmother with her hair loose and covered in ash, in the middle of a dark circle of women, including Banna, Columba and all the neighbours who were as pale and macabre as witches, was howling around the corpse, banging her head against the walls, throwing herself on the ground and screaming like she was possessed."

85 "Miss Deledda would do well not to leave her Sardinia, and to continue to work in this precious mine where she has already found much originality."

Ironically however, this book taps into the very thing which informs even the most “Sardinian” of Deledda’s novels in the motivation that drives it: it is a novel of yearning for home, of displacement and of exile. The heroine Regina is plagued alternately by nostalgia and estrangement both in Rome and back home. This fluctuating nostalgia and estrangement is, in Kristeva’s analysis, the state of the foreigner: “...the foreigner is a dreamer making love with absence...Always elsewhere the foreigner belongs nowhere” (*Strangers* 271). She must come to a kind of acceptance of both Rome and Piedmont if she is to pull herself back from the edge of madness. The ability to communicate seems connected to her capacity to accept both homes, old and new.

This theme is deepened in a later novel, *Sino al confine* (1910). Here the heroine Gavina lives in a village vividly reminiscent of the Nuoro of Deledda’s *Cosima* (1937). Gavina finds herself in a constant state of denial concerning her sexual desires, and experiences crippling guilt over her encounter and brief dalliance with a trainee priest, Priamo. Her life is one of constant negation, of “non peccare”⁸⁶ in response to her overwhelming sense of remorse following her young lover’s suicide, and the subsequent death of her father, which she sees as a form of punishment for her illicit desire. Her husband to be, Francesco, thinks that Gavina is “sepolta laggiù”⁸⁷ in Sardinia, and worries that he won’t be able to pull her from “sua tomba”⁸⁸ (549). This is consistent with the idea of Sardinia as semiotic; it is buried, secret, shut off from the world of the symbolic which enters the novel like others before it in the shape of Rome.

Gavina moves to Rome with her new husband, and like Regina in *Nostalgie* must accept Sardinia and embrace Rome—the semiotic and symbolic—if she is to remain sane. Gavina’s lack of communication in this novel is linked to her sexual expression and here is where the attraction and repulsion that she feels for her new home and her old is treated in greater depth than before. Gavina walks a tightrope which is two-fold: she treads the line between attraction and repulsion towards Sardinia, and denial and acceptance of her own sexual desire. A parallel

86 “not sinning.”

87 “buried down there.”

88 “her tomb.”

exists between Sardinia, as symbol of the semiotic out of which emerge drives of sex and death, and Gavina's sexual desire: a similar ambivalence marks her relationship to both. It could be argued that as her relationship with one evolves, so does the other.

Her attraction-repulsion for Sardinia is represented in her changing attitudes towards the islanders. At first she sees the local poor as "peccatori di prima qualità" (515)⁸⁹ and can only see the outward trappings of poverty and vice. Yet later this is replaced with compassion on her return to the island: "le sembrava di vederli finalmente nel loro vero aspetto di povere creature oppresse da un melanconico destino" (601).⁹⁰ Likewise her moments of passion for Priamo can be contrasted with her subsequent disgust for living creatures: "fu ripresa dal suo odio per tutto ciò che era vivo e palpitava!" (529).⁹¹ This attraction-repulsion is precisely what characterizes Kristeva's theory of abjection—the process of splitting from the figurative mother—one which involves a fluctuating desire to return to the semiotic, and a desire to flee from it. Abjection, in Kristeva, is the fascinating yet horrifying border—like the umbilicus—which separates yet unites (*Powers* 229).

Gavina's battle with her own desires and her relationship with her country come to a head at the conclusion of the novel, when she comes face to face with her own mortality, ushering in a kind of rebirth: "Sono arrivata sino al confine: ho veduto in faccia la morte! Bisogna tornare indietro; bisogna rifare la strada... Quanto bene si può fare nella vita!" (627).⁹² The eponymous words "sino al confine" are in themselves descriptive of Kristeva's theory of the abject: "until the border," "until the limits," "until the confines," this phrase describes in effect that very borderline which Kristeva says exists for every speaking subject:

There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss

⁸⁹ "sinners of the highest order"

⁹⁰ "She believed she saw them finally in their true colours, as poor creatures oppressed by a melancholy destiny."

⁹¹ "She was seized again by her hatred for everything that lived and breathed!"

⁹² "I have come to the edge: I have stared death in the face! I must go back, must take a different path...how much good can be done in the world!"

to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—cadere, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object." (Powers 231)

Characters pull painfully away from a semiotic Sardinia to a symbolic Rome in a number of Deledda's narratives; the metaphor of Kristeva's emergent speaking subject, articulate only once a kind of umbilicus is established in an acceptance of both mother country and new environment; according to Kristeva "the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (*Revolution* 93). In Deledda this metaphor occurs not only in plots of exile, but also within mother and child relationships in her narratives.

In *Cenere* (1904), Anania's life is overshadowed by the absence of his mother Oli, who left him for his father to raise, unable to do so on her own. Gradually she begins to occupy a greater space in Anania's consciousness: "nella piccola memoria si trasformava, ma non spariva la figura fisica e morale della madre lontana" (219).⁹³ The image of Oli takes on the dimensions of a mysterious, dark continent which Anania wants to penetrate in order to reconnect with her, analogous to the semiotic: "Fuggire, passare il mare, penetrare nel regno fantastico di quel continente misterioso dove si nascondeva sua madre!" (224).⁹⁴ The longer his mother remains absent, the deeper she becomes embedded in his mind, becoming increasingly conceptualized.

The more Anania wants to find his mother, to protect her and save her from a life he imagines to be one of prostitution and poverty, the more he feels repulsed by her and what she has done and the effect it will have on his engagement to his

93 "In his young memory the physical and psychological figure of his distant mother changed but never disappeared."

94 "To flee, cross the ocean, penetrate the fantastic kingdom of that mysterious continent in which his mother was hiding!"

social superior, Margherita. Anania's conceptualisation of his mother is similar to the mythologizing of Sardinia typical of Deledda; his attraction-repulsion for Oli mimics those of the exile.

The longer his mother remains absent, the deeper she becomes embedded in his mind, becoming less and less his real mother, and increasingly conceptualised, exemplified in the use of the italicised pronoun 'she' – *ella*: "Già la terra ignota, lontana e misteriosa, ove *ella* s'era rifugiata, prendeva ai suoi occhi linee e parvenze decise, come la terra che tra i vapori dell'alba s'avvicina al naviglio viaggiante." (236).⁹⁵ Anania oscillates between attraction and repulsion, disgust and pity as he dreams of rescuing his own mother and yet at the same time is consumed with hatred and resentment: "io *sento* che è viva, e non rinunzio al mio dovere, che è quello di cercarla, trovarla, trarla dal vizio...E se si è emendate? No, essa non si è emendate. Ah, è orribile; io la odio...La odio, la odio!" (262)⁹⁶

In a sense, Anania is undergoing Kristeva's abjection of his mother – something she refers to as a "narcissistic crisis;" "Abjection is therefore a kind of *narcissistic crisis*... It is precisely at the moment of narcissistic perturbation...that secondary repression, with its reserve of symbolic means, attempts to transfer to its own account, which has thus been overdrawn, the resources of primal repression" (Powers 241). This is precisely what happens to Anania, as he becomes mentally ill, suffering from what he realises is a kind of divided ego:

"la maggior sua pena proveniva dal crudele contrasto dei esseri che formavano lo sdoppiamento del suo *io*...Uno di questi due esseri era un bambino fantastico, appassionato e triste, col sangue malato; era ancora lo stesso bambino che scendeva la montagna natia sognando un mondo misterioso; lo stesso che nella casa del mugnaio aveva per lunghi anni meditate la fuga senza compierla mai...l'altro essere, normale e cosciente, cresciuto accanto al bambino incurabile, vedeva l'inconsistenza dei fantasmi e dei mostri che tormentavano il suo compagno, ma per quanto combattesse e

⁹⁵ "Already the unknown territory, distant and mysterious, where she was in refuge, took on the aspect of clear and precise boundaries, like the land which emerges amid the mists of dawn to the voyaging ship."

⁹⁶ "I feel she is alive, and I won't neglect my duty, which is to search for her, find her, drag her from vice...And if she has mended her ways? No, she won't have mended her ways. Ah, she is horrible; I hate her, I hate her!"

gridasse non riusciva a liberarlo dalla sua ossessione, a guarirlo dalla sua follia. Una lotta continua, un crudele contrasto agitava notte e giorno i due esseri; e il bambino fantastico e illogico, vittima e tiranno, riusciva sempre vincitore.” (278)⁹⁷

When finally, Anania does find his mother, his reaction is one of fury and condemnation mixed with feelings of pity and duty. His struggle ends when he confronts Oli. His anger and violent thoughts come to the fore forcefully and he rejects her in disgust: thus he is able to complete a process denied to him before, he is able to abject his mother.

One final provoking analogy in this narrative concerns Oli's sacrifice for her son. Her gruesome suicide is an ultimate act of love, and one which in more ways than one sets Anania free. Oli garrots herself, dying slowly and in agony. Anania sees her body in a pool of blood. “Mai, come in quel momento, davanti al terribile mistero della morte, egli aveva sentito tutta la grandezza ed il valore della vita”⁹⁸ In a sense, Oli dead signifies more than she did alive; dead, she brings order and stability to her son's life releasing him from what he refers to as a split-ego in his love and revilement of his mother; his mental breakdown is over and he feels able once again to live – whole.

Kristeva's words on sacrifice allow a parallel between this novel and the representation of Sardinia. “Far from unleashing violence, sacrifice shows how representing that violence is enough to stop it and to concatenate an order. Conversely, it indicates that all order is based on representation: what is violent is the irruption of the symbol, killing substance to make it signify...” (qtd.in Oliver 41). In Oli's death can be seen the corollary; by representing Sardinia, Deledda sacrifices a real, changing island for one that lives instead in signification.

97 ...most of his pain came from the cruel contrast of the two beings that formed the doubling of his ego. One of these two beings was an imaginary child, passionate and sad, with sickness in the blood; still the same child that had descended the mountain where he was born dreaming of a mysterious world; the same that in the miller's house had for many years contemplated flight without ever accomplishing it...the other entity, normal and conscious, grown up beside the incurable child, saw the inconsistencies in the phantoms and monsters that tormented his companion, but no matter how he fought and shouted he wasn't able to free him from his obsession, or cure him of his madness. A continual battle, a cruel contrast grew night and day between the two beings; and the fantastic and illogical child, victim and tyrant always emerged the victor.

98 “Never before as in that moment, in front of the terrible mystery of death, had he felt all the greatness and the value of life.”

Deledda's treatment of mother characters turns more abstract in *Il segreto del uomo solitario* 1921. The inability of hero Cristiano to communicate is fundamental to the novel, and allows for a reading of the semiotic that offers interesting hypotheses on Deledda's idea of nation. Recluse Cristiano's solitude is shattered when a house is built next to his and a mysterious woman comes to live there. His loneliness and silence are challenged, ending in the revelation of a painful secret: Cristiano has been in a psychiatric hospital, accused of murdering his wife.

The synergy of landscape and mood typical of Deledda's novels set on the Sardinian plains is evidenced in *Il segreto* but in a more modern, open sense. In earlier texts the desolation of a moonlit night or the rumbling of a storm speaks to the inner angst of the protagonist. Here there is such a metaphorical connection of scene and mood as to make them entirely inseparable, and a mesmerism of description which resounds in echoes and is littered with shadows. Cristiano lives in a secluded hut, surrounded by a tall hedge cutting him off from the distant village. The sea cocoons the whole narrative in a murmuring presence: "Era impenetrabile, sì: sul cielo cremisi del crepuscolo pareva la muraglia nera d'una cittadella fortificata, con guglie sottili, pinnacoli e merli" (734).⁹⁹ The road down to the village is one less travelled, Cristiano preferring to follow his servant Ghiana with his eyes, as she makes her way to the village for water. Physical seclusion is a metaphor for Cristiano's psychological isolation: he is numb to any desire except that of remaining alone, his defensive hatred of the world all encompassing: "gli sembrava di essersi sepolto" (730).¹⁰⁰ Anna Dolfi suggests the house in construction beside him might symbolise Cristiano's memory that is gradually reawakening (Dolfi *Dieci romanzi* 727): the house is being prepared for occupancy, just as Cristiano's mind is beginning to re-engage with society.

There is a more abstract feel to the book than Deledda's usual narratives, particularly as there is no definite time to the story, nor no definite place, just a house, the sound of the sea and the road to the village. There is a resemblance to

99 "It was impenetrable, yes: under the crimson sky at dusk, it seemed like the dark wall of a fortified citadel, with narrow spires, pinnacles and merlons."

100 "he felt as if he were buried"

Beckett in its uncluttered symbolism, in its unending possibilities. But at its heart there lies the same characteristic relationship between the external and the internal world found throughout *Deledda*.

The enigmatic Sarina moves in next door to look after her mentally ill husband. Beautiful, serene and sorrowful, the "lady in white" is elusive, "come un'ombra... Bianca e luminosa come l'immagine stessa del crepuscolo" (738).¹⁰¹ She is the suggestion of a shade or ghost, compared often with the dusk, the half light and twilight in which surroundings take on misleading shapes and things can be perceived which in reality are not there.

Cristiano isn't quite convinced whether his encounter with Sarina was real. He doubts his own memory of the event. Later on the same day, he hears knocking at the door, which he believes to be Sarina; he opens it to find no-one there. A lonely figure standing bewildered outside his house with his gate flapping in the wind, he wonders what actually happened: "si avvide che tutto era illusione della sua fantasia....l'incontro con la sua vicina di casa gli sembrava fosse stata un'allucinazione" (739).¹⁰²

Perhaps Sarina is the ghost of Cristiano's wife, his encounter with her a psychological healing process: Sarina's insane husband could easily be a mirror image of the mentally ill Cristiano. Many incidents lead to this conclusion, most importantly in Cristiano's dream at the end of the novel, in which Sarina takes the place of his wife. But a more interesting approach is to examine her in the half-light of the semiotic. Her elusiveness is just one of the qualities which connect her to the semiotic. She can be seen rather as a bridge between the semiotic and the symbolic. Upon her arrival comes an awakening of childhood memories in Cristiano's mind: "adesso gli ritornavano nella memoria come macchie che sembrano cancellate e ricompariscono al sole e all'umido" (741).¹⁰³

These dim stains can be read as Kristeva's *mneumonic traces*, stimulated by Cristiano's contact with Sarina. These memories stir in his mind, awakening a

101 "like a shadow...White and luminous like the very image of dusk."

102 "he wondered if everything was the illusion of his fantasy....the meeting with his neighbour seemed like it had been a hallucination."

103 "now they came back to him like stains that seemed as if they had been removed but that reappeared in the sun and humidity."

desire for communication and for human contact—bringing the semiotic to the symbolic. Cristiano believes Sarina reflects his unconscious, that she mirrors his own soul in her eyes, “come in uno specchio” (748).¹⁰⁴

Connecting her again to his childhood, Cristiano suspects they have met before as young children. He has an image of himself and Sarina by the sea, by “il confine del mondo reale e il principio del mondo dei sogni.”¹⁰⁵ Their previous meeting was on the border between the real world and that of dreams, between the symbolic and the semiotic just as their present one is “tra il confine della realtà e del sogno” (774).¹⁰⁶

In contrast to the dream-Sarina, reality is represented by the servant Ghiana, her solidity and animal physicality reassuring in a realm of metaphor and symbolism. Cristiano tells her that she may be the thread to bring him back to God, or from another angle, to integration with society (788).

Cristiano’s mother is at the root of his inability to communicate. She may also be at the root of his violent behaviour which led to his incarceration. Only at the end of the novel when Cristiano reveals to Sarina that he was accused of murdering his wife does Deledda reveal Cristiano’s unusual relationship with his mother, which is implicated in his mental breakdown. As a young boy Cristiano does not distance himself from his mother in the usual way, and has a peculiarly intense relationship with her: “mi faceva dormire con lei; o meglio ero io che voleva con lei, ancora attaccato alle sue viscere, ancora un’anima sola in due corpi” (765).¹⁰⁷ His mother may be a little overprotective but he is also over-dependent. Fatherless and poor, mother and son live out their difficult lives in rooms belonging to a benefactor. On the death of her father, the benefactor’s daughter becomes Cristiano’s wife.

The marriage only takes place because Cristiano’s mother wishes it: she wants to repay the years of kindness she and her son have received from the

104 “like in a mirror.”

105 “the border of the real world and the beginning of the world of dreams.”

106 “Between the border of reality and dream.”

107 “She made me sleep with her; or rather it was I who wanted to sleep with her, still attached to her viscerally, as if one soul in two bodies.”

woman's father. It is a disastrous union, not least because in his new life of wealth Cristiano finds himself in an awkward position: he resents the efforts of the servants and feels that he is betraying his social class (794). He begrudges this marriage of convenience and grows jealous of his mother and her life in the quarters above: "arrivavo a invidiare mia madre chi era rimasta lassù nel nostro piccolo nido" (794).¹⁰⁸

However, it becomes clear that it is not just the old way of life causing his jealousy; there is something more complex in his feelings towards his mother. His love for her eclipses anything he might feel for his wife who is held up in constant comparison: "Anch'io l'amavo sempre la mia mamma, che era giovine ancora: a giorni sembrava più giovine di mia moglie"¹⁰⁹ (794). Finally he admits to himself that his mother is the only object of his affection: "Era vero: all'infuori di lei, della mamma, non amavo nessuno"¹¹⁰(794). When his mother takes a lover, Cristiano's jealousy surges, and there are intimations of incestuous love. Tanda points to the similarities between the oedipal theme in this novel and Tozzi's *Con gli occhi chiusi* (53).

Eppoi un giorno trovo dalla mamma un giovane, quasi un ragazzo, ch'ella aveva conosciuto appunto in una casa dove andava a lavorare...Non osavo scacciarlo, ma mi beffavo di lui: e quando egli se ne andava facevo scene violente alla mamma, minacciandola di chiuderla in una casa di salute se non cambiava vita. Io ero sinistramente geloso del suo giovane amico e della loro nascosta felicità; sentivo che si amavano, che si possedevano, che avevano un bene a me negato ed era questo il segreto della mia gelosia, del mio sdegno. (795)¹¹¹

108 "I ended up envying my mother, who remained down there in our little nest."

109 "I too still loved my mother, who was still young; some days she seemed even younger than my wife."

110 "It was true: outside of her, my mother, I didn't love anyone."

111 "And then one day I found a young man, almost a boy, at my mother's, that she had met at a house where she had gone to work...I didn't dare throw him out, but I made fun of him: and when he went there was a violent scene with my mother, I threatened to put her in a mental asylum if she didn't change her lifestyle. I was sinisterly jealous of her young friend and their secret happiness; I felt that they loved each other, that they possessed each other, that they had something good that was denied me and this was the secret of my jealousy, of my shame."

Cristiano continues in this ambiguous vein. "Invidiavo mia madre, sì, che non aveva cambiato vita, che mi guardava sempre allo stesso modo come quando ero bambino e dormivo ancora con lei tutti e due puri come la rosa col boccio" (794).¹¹² He is jealous that his mother is unchanged, but also angry that she is no longer a pure rose sleeping innocently with her child. Implied is his desire to return to that stage of sleeping with his mother. It is easy to see the substitution of lover for son in his mother's relationship with a younger man. But in Cristiano's relationship with a much older woman, what begins as a comparison between his wife and his mother eventually turns into a full scale substitution as he vents his confused feelings on his wife in a hot and cold barrage of desire and disgust. He explains to Sarina in this pivotal outburst:

È vero, sì! L'odiavo perché l'amavo e il mio dolore era appunto questo odio...A volte arrivavo a maledirla, a desiderarle la morte. Poi mi abbandonavo stanco, e mi pareva di aver distrutto e rotto ogni cosa intorno a me: ma dal profondo del cuore mi risaliva la passione, e io andavo in cerca di lei, la riprendevo, ricominciavo ad amarla, ad odiarla, a tormentarmi e tormentarla." (796)¹¹³

Cristiano's attraction is tempered with disgust, which leads to the assumption that he acts not on feelings for his wife, but on feelings for his mother. Kristeva argues in *Desire in Language* that through the process of abjection the speaking subject enters the symbolic. A reconnection, a re-merging with the figurative mother would mean a re-emergence of the semiotic in the symbolic – i.e. poetic language: "If it is true that the prohibition of incest constitutes, at the same time, language as communicative code and women as exchange objects in order for a society to be established, poetic language would be for its questionable subject-in-process the equivalent of incest" (104). Returning to the central theme of non-communication,

112 "I was jealous of my mother, yes, that she hadn't changed her life, that she looked at me the same way she used to when I was a little boy and still slept with her, both of us as pure as a rose bud."

113 "It's true, yes! I hated her because I loved her and my pain was exactly this hate...At times I ended up cursing her, wanting her dead. Then I would tire of this, and I would feel that I had destroyed and broken everything inside me: but from the depths of my heart passion would rise again, and I would go and look for her, I would take her again, begin to love her again, to torment myself and torment her."

Cristiano has been unable to separate from – abject – his mother; the “prohibition of incest” has not been successful, neither has his entry into society – the symbolic.

Sarina, as the embodiment of the semiotic and link to the figurative mother, offers Cristiano a second chance: she offers to sleep with him. This is the crucial moment, when he denies himself incestuous relations with his mother-semiotic. This precipitates Sarina’s sudden departure and leads to Cristiano’s desire to begin to communicate with the world once again. If Sarina is semiotic, then Cristiano has been living in her realm; the novel is his struggle to articulate, to separate sign from signifier and this is what happens once Sarina leaves, once Cristiano can sublimate the semiotic in the symbolic.

Like *Cenere*, in *Il segreto del uomo solitario* there are analogies to Deledda’s treatment of Sardinia. Like Sarina, when Sardinia is submerged in the text there is a deeper communication of *sardità*; in the same way its presence is at times like the ephemeral Sarina, on the border between illusion and reality. Ambiguity is the hallmark of this narrative, unique among Deledda’s novels; the elliptical metaphors, the merging of dream and reality, the lack of concrete time or place and the uncertainty of events combine to make it lyrical and indefinite. In its treatment of the semiotic and the “prohibition of incest,” the whole novel is a kind of poetic language. Deledda’s narrative re-merges with the semiotic – and by extension with Sardinia – bringing this analysis full circle: from separation and sublimation to a re-merging, arguably in this novel through its complete ostensible absence, Sardinia is present more than ever through the poetic language of the whole.

Like Deledda, in Tynan, it is not simply a love of Ireland but a loss of Ireland that makes for its sensory presence in her writing. After her marriage in 1893 to Henry Albert Hinkson, Tynan moved to Ealing; this departure can also be read as a *thetic* break and marks the beginning of an unconscious expression of Ireland. In the introduction to her biography, Rose talks of Tynan “gently eulogizing ‘notalgizing’ her internalised idea of Ireland” (n.pag.). Yeats said of Tynan’s poetry, “I think you are at your best when you write as a mother and when you

remember your old home and the Dublin mountains”(Rose 32). Nostalgia and the maternal are linked in Tynan. In exile she sees Ireland as a mother country she longs to return to. “The Dark Rose” is a yearning for home; *roisin dubh* in Irish, it is evocative of Mangan’s “Dark Rosaleen,” positing a feminine Ireland: “You with your mother-breast of milkiness, /Of milk and honey, that still calls me back, /My feet, my heart, on the familiar track” (*Experiences* 23). It is the inarticulate voice of the semiotic which beats through her homesickness, an Ireland that sighs within.

Your hidden glens, your singing waters call,
Allure me still at dawn and even-fall;
The wind that ruffles all your meadows grey,
Sighs in my heart at dawn and close of day –
Sighs in my heart and will not let me be.
The wind from over your mountains troubles me. (23)

This maternal Ireland she has separated from often appears in her poetry as the wind in the trees, from which one of her best received volumes takes its name, *The Wind in the Trees* (1898) which she dedicates to English poet Alice Meynell (1847-1922). At other times, such as in “The Exile,” the presence of Ireland can be felt as an inward vision. Here she writes of missing the mountains of home, even whilst in the middle of beautiful English countryside: “And I am suddenly forlorn/ Across the pastures and ripe corn/I see the mountains in my dreams” (*Innocencies* n.pag.). The picture is resonant with the Old Testament exile Ruth; the image is of a figure arrested in thought, stopped in her tracks, almost in pain. She “sees” Ireland internally; the dream-like image of mountains recurs in Tynan, a familiar representation of home. In addition she feels the pull of her island as melody and voice. In “The Irish Pipes” the voice of Ireland that the poet hears is an inward, subliminal one. Here Tynan paints the picture of Ireland as another realm—the dim and the grey and the dark of the semiotic. The enchanting mystical music of the piper entrances the poet, reminiscent of Yeats’s “The Host of the Air” (1899). “The piper drew me yearning,/ Into the dim grey lands,/ Where there is no returning/ Although I wring my hands” (*Experiences* 11).

In Tynan there is never such a clear cut polarity between England and Ireland as there is between Sardinia and Rome in Deledda. What is similar is Tynan's treatment of Ireland as semiotic, and her conception of exile. But rather than a separation from Ireland to England *per se*, and a resultant struggle to find the voice of identity, in Tynan this model is played out slightly differently. Exile is still often the fulcrum of her texts, but it is not the exile of the foreigner abroad but the exile of the community and individual at home which is considered, enmity within society, and ambiguity of nationality itself. If in Deledda characters must accept both Sardinia and Rome in order to be fully functional, then in Tynan a similar oscillation is important – of Anglo and Irish.

The *River* (1929) deals with the the Anglo-Irish. The title refers to the river in Kerry which separates Catholic and Protestant gentry, and throughout it is used as a metaphor for social barriers and religious divide. The two communities are divided not just by class and religion, but by history, violence, and most importantly by their perceptions of who they are, and to which country – which Ireland, they belong.

Tynan looks at the attitude of Catholic and Protestant in this novel, showing the heroine Kitty to be perplexed by people's attitudes towards both England and Ireland: "Most of these people she had met with since she came to Kerry had their minds made up. She was already aware of the kind who loved the country without loving the people, and those others who loved the people as a vastly inferior race" (139). Tynan shows an Anglo-Irish community on the verge of extinction, threatened and hostile to the people they live amongst. The result is a paranoid protectionism, showed most adeptly in the character of Alice Adair whose initial refusal of marriage to her Catholic lover years earlier was born out of a fear of "other."

Characters' perception of who they are in this novel rests just as much on their perception of who they are not; they do not belong to the other side of the river. But in this sense, the "other" side of the river is relative; for some it is Anglo, for others Irish. In any event, the river in this novel acts like a hyphen; this can be seen as analogous to the abject, which Kristeva describes as being like an umbilicus, something which both separates and unites. The hyphen, the river, the boundary

between the two communities is a constant in the expression of identity, and one which Kitty shows is the key to reconciliation.

Kitty brings an understanding of difference to the novel; she is best placed to do this as she is a child of a mixed marriage. Notably it is not an insider who is able to open up and fight the prejudices of generations, but an outsider, an exile. Kitty asserts her belief to her aunt Alice: " 'If I loved anyone very much,' said Kitty, and there was a high colour in her cheeks, 'I would believe that God willed it. I should cross over, however wide the river'" (87).

The Golden Rose (1924) goes further in that it brings up the question not just of which tradition and culture characters are from, but of which conception of Ireland they believe in. A forerunner of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* which was first performed in 1926, *The Golden Rose* is a brave novel due to the sensitivity of the issues to Tynan's readers, both English and Irish. It deals with the exile of the individual, the stranger within our midst. Tynan shows the growing isolation of the O'Reilly family from their neighbours and friends in a small village on the West coast of Ireland during the turbulent times of the First World War and the Irish Rebellion.

Increasingly Carmel O'Reilly and her father Anthony are ostracized by the villagers. Hearing of the dire conditions for wounded soldiers, Anthony goes to the front to tend to the sick, and Carmel is left to suffer the resentment of the people on her own. Tynan illustrates how difference of political allegiance leads to hostility, suspicion and malice; she shows the suffering of the individual who can no longer understand the position of others and neither be understood themselves; she shows in effect what it means to be foreign in one's own country. Carmel's father becomes sick himself, and she and her sister go to look after him in France, where news reaches them of the Rising: "For the first time she broke down and wept wildly, for herself, for Ireland, for the Irish soldiers in the war, betrayed and deserted as they would see it, for the madness of it all and for what was going to happen" (170). As Carmel sees it, men like her father and those he was tending had been injured by the treachery of those in the rebellion. At this

juncture Tynan shows the injustice of the Rebellion seen not from English, but from Irish Catholic eyes.

Likewise in her treatment of the opinions of the pro-Rebellion Irish, she shows that for them, Anthony O'Reilly and his sons have betrayed Ireland. Rather than be greeted with a hero's welcome on his return from France, Anthony is greeted almost like a traitor. One comment for the doctor sums up the people's reaction: " 'More shame for them to be killin' better men thin themselves to plase the inimies of their country'" (177). Tynan shows how the local villagers believe that the enemy of their enemy is indeed a friend, and that for them "there was no heroism now but that of 1916" (21).

In order to have a clear idea of their identity, the villagers must reject anything that does not fit in with the purity of their ideal of Ireland; it is a case of either with us or against us. Indeed this simplified notion of what it means to be Irish is indicative of Kristeva's "cult of origins." Kristeva cites this "cult of origins" as a "hate reaction." This reaction is based on hating others who "do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally" (*Nations* 03).

Yet the villagers' rejection is a fallacy. The expression of national identity is above all ambiguous; in Kristevan terms, the abject is just this form of ambiguity, a treading of the line between acceptance and rejection. As the "other" in this sense is entirely relative—for some it is those who identify with England, for others it is those of the rebellion—the complete suppression of one disallows a full expression of national identity.

If we think of the expression of nationalism as a symbolic event, then the semiotic in the case of this novel—like *The River* before it—is differing conceptualisations of Ireland. Whichever notion that may mean for either side, one cannot exist without the other: without the oscillation of the symbolic and the semiotic there can be no true articulation.

If in Deledda there are strong parallels between mother characters and Sardinia, in Tynan there is a strong connection between her heroines—who embody various aspects of the maternal—and representations of Ireland.

The hero and heroine of *The Golden Rose* can be read as an England and an Ireland. Beaufoy has spent most of his life in England, son of an Anglo-Irish aristocratic father and English mother. Essentially, Beaufoy rejects his mother (England) in order to be with Carmel, an embodiment of an Ireland with which he has long dreamed of being reunited. Beaufoy then, as Anglo, rather than English, is searching for a home. He finds it in Carmel, who represents an Ireland common in nationalist iconography. At the beginning she can be seen very much as a young, beautiful Erin, reminiscent of the Ireland of the *aisling*; Tynan describes her like a sure footed, natural born princess, rightful heir to the ancient thrones of the Kings of Ireland. Such stereotyping has its roots in a long tradition of the feminisation of Ireland, which has perceived Ireland variously as Hibernia, Eire, Erin, Mother Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and Dark Rosaleen (Innes 2). The Gaelic poets of Ireland imagined their monarch as wedded to the land, symbolised by a beautiful woman (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 18).

But later this representation changes, as she incurs first the ostracisation of the villagers, and then the abandonment of her lover. The wedding between the two lovers must be postponed at the last minute as Beaufoy cannot get leave from the front; later, he is missing in action. Carmel bears the knowledge with stoicism and resignation. Miraculously news reaches the O'Reillys some time later that Beaufoy has returned safely, but injured, to England. Carmel waits expectantly for news, but instead there appears in the newspaper news of Beaufoy's engagement to an English heiress.

At this point Carmel's imaging changes from a youthful, beautiful Erin, to the more stately Eire, one of melancholy and sadness, also typical of nationalist iconography of the time. Alongside this nationalist image of an Ireland suffering, betrayed by her (English) lover, is an imaging of the virgin. Tynan refers to Carmel at this point as a *mater dolorosa*. Suffering has made her aware of loss and pain, and in a sense she has become the wise and sorrowful figure of the virgin. So in this model it is possible to see Carmel as Irish, betrayed by Anglo; Beaufoy has mistreated and abandoned her in favour of his English fiancée.

This imaging of Carmel is interesting on account of its subversion of an analogy familiar to the Irish Renaissance: Cathleen-ni-Houlihan. Gregory and

Yeats's play focuses on the analogy of Ireland as a mysterious old woman who calls on the bridegroom on the eve of his wedding to forsake his young bride for her, to partake in a blood sacrifice that will immortalise him and others in heroic memory. In *The Golden Rose* however, the heroine is a double-edged metaphor. It is possible to see Carmel O'Reilly both as a figuring of Ireland, as Cathleen-ni-Houlihan, and as the bride to be, forsaken by Beaufoy who abandons her on the eve of her wedding to fight for Ireland. Yet he fights not for the Ireland of revolution, but for the Ireland that fights alongside England. This familiar metaphor of the bride forsaken by her lover in favour of a greater love for Ireland is used here to reflect ambiguity; the novel asks the question: for which Ireland does Beaufoy and the other young men of the village offer their lives; the Ireland of the First World War, or the Ireland of the Rebellion?

Beaufoy comes home, not only physically, but culturally. He has left the Anglo part of his heritage behind him, left his English mother for his new mother, Ireland – symbolised in the figure of Carmel – who is transformed, in another subversion of the Cathleen-ni-Houlihan analogy, from a bride to a mother. The last passage shows her nursing him like a child at her breast: "She drew his head down on her soft bosom as though he was indeed her child as well as her lover, and held him in an embrace which would shelter him against all the ills and griefs of the world" (299).

In the conclusion of the novel, there is ultimately an acceptance of the forbidden origin, an oscillation of semiotic and symbolic; the relationship between Carmel and Beaufoy is analagous to a new Ireland, one in which foreignness in oneself is recognised, and foreignness in the other tolerated.

M.E. Francis has much in common with Deledda, not least in the modern approach to an expression of nation which lurks beneath a traditional exterior. On the one hand, Francis is a conservative, traditional writer, safe enough to be read by convent girls, or for her books to be offered as school prizes. But beneath this convention she engages in a more complex discussion of nationality. Whilst her characters often border on the purely symbolic, so heavily does she imbue them

with traits of nationalist iconography, she manipulates these stereotypes, expressing a duality and fluidity of identity.

In *Miss Erin* (1898), Francis shows a polarisation of Ireland and England that resonates with Deledda's positioning of Sardinia and Rome as semiotic and symbolic. There is a jostling of characters' perceptions of each other—and themselves—and their views on political identity, which like Deledda shows the ambiguous nature of "nation," and how any meaningful sense of identity is posited on change rather than insularity and stasis.

Francis continues a trope of feminine Ireland and masculine England common in Arnold's day (Kiberd 30), as Erin and her English lover Mark Winbourne represent the polarised characteristics commonly flaunted by both countries as national attributes. Erin is a feminised Ireland—poetic, impulsive and spiritual with a predisposition to melancholy, whilst Mark is a patrician England—logical, taciturn, and self-controlled. Here are the same general characteristics that Deledda uses in the contrast of Sardinia and Rome. Francis uses this technique to emphasise the "impassable barrier" (275) between Erin and Mark. Their politics divide them utterly; Erin is an ardent supporter of Home Rule, whilst Mark believes in Kingdom and Empire. Their possible union hinges on one or other of them reneging on their cherished beliefs.

Erin, like all of the heroines considered thus far, is both an insider and an outsider. She is orphaned and sent by a hated uncle to live among the peasant Nolan family. So whilst on the one hand she lives the life of a poor Irish Catholic, later she inherits her uncle's land, becoming landlord during the time of agitation for tenant rights (the story bears a resemblance to Rosa Mulholland's 1885 novel *Marcella Grace*). This dual perspective is typical of Francis, who despite her obviousness can offer contradictory points of view within the text. Here Erin has the experience both of tenant and of landlord. Pro-union Mark's involvement with Erin causes him likewise to challenge his perceptions of Ireland and his position on Home Rule, enough eventually for him to prioritise his love for Erin over his political principles.

This dual perspective mirrors Deledda's exiles, Regina and Gavina, who can turn a cold eye on the country of their birth— or on their adoptive city --- and in equal measure be almost willing to die for them. Seeing things from both sides might make for a luke-warm narrative, but in Francis, like Deledda, there is this obvious kind of *comunanza*, and also a more subtle subtext in which this dual perspective operates. One of the ways Francis does this in *Miss Erin* is in the contradiction between Erin's fight for Ireland's freedom, an overtly nationalist theme, and her search for her own freedom as a woman, the subtext in the narrative.

In Deledda, Gavina's acceptance and rejection of Rome and Sardinia, the oscillation of the semiotic and symbolic is analogous to her sexual autonomy. In a similar subtext in Francis, Erin's ostensible fight for Ireland's freedom mimics the fight for her own freedom as a woman. The Nolan family is evicted by Erin's uncle, sent to the workhouse and forced to emigrate. Following the death of her only remaining friend, Father Lalor, Erin is left defenceless. On the slopes of *Beanagh Mor* she baptises herself child of the nation, in echoes of Deledda's moment of revelation in *Cosima*, where she vows to write about her country: "'My mother-land, I will love *you*' cried Erin, kneeling and stretching out her arms, 'I will love you—you only. I will devote myself from this moment to you—entirely and for ever...heart and soul. Erin, my mother, I will love *you!*'" (110). Erin is both a rebellious Ireland willing to fight for her rights, and a dutiful daughter willing to sacrifice herself.

Erin's life as a peasant, bare-foot among the Nolan family typifies the kind of representation of the theatre production of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* (daughters of Ireland) set up by Maude Gonne. Erin is the romanticized *cailin*, her burden of poverty light when she has the honest delights of the Nolan's home to warm her, quite a contrast from the reality of young peasant women of the time, which was instead a "bleak and colourless life of endless drudgery" (Quinn 41). She is the young, dark, beautiful Erin, common in nationalist literature of the time. In a contemporary Punch cartoon, Erin—daughter of Ireland—is shown courageously leading a group of men resisting eviction, pictured with a stone in her hand (Innes 15); this is much like Francis's heroine who goes into the middle of an eviction prepared to risk her own life.

But whilst Erin is the traditional symbol of Irish resistance, she is also in the guise of the traditional Irish maiden—rebellious against England, but dutiful in other respects. Francis manipulates the stereotype; Erin is also a suffragette, the image of her defiance, stone in hand, is reminiscent of the English suffragettes breaking shop windows. On her way back to Ireland to help “her people” she declares to her guardians: “Do not be more angry than you can help, if you hear of my saying and doing things which seem to you unfeminine!” (314). To stop her going to the eviction, she is locked up, but breaks out, an analogy that needs no elaboration. When Mark arrives at the fracas, ready gallantly to rescue her, he finds her in the middle of the action. In the event, Erin saves Mark by throwing herself in front of a spear, in a reversal of the rescuer fantasy

Erin’s political views on Ireland in relation to England can be read as an allegory of her views on women. Refusing to give up her political principles, i.e. her belief in Home Rule, she says in relation to Mark Winbourne: “she was quite convinced that he was confident of her unshaken affection, her ultimate submission to his will. The affection, alas, was still there—she was not of those who bestow or withdraw their love easily—but the submission! On this he had reckoned somewhat rashly” (275). The political parallels are obvious; Ireland’s cordial relationship with England in the past does not entail a ready submission now. But Erin also speaks as a woman, defiantly arguing her autonomy.

Hansson talks of the surface story and the submerged plot being in dialogue with each other, “negotiating ultimately irreconcilable views” (*Patriot’s Daughter* 109). Hansson also indicates Francis’s subversion of two dominant genres, the nationalist tale and the romance. She points out that in the nationalist tale, the woman “converts” the man to “Irish-ness” if he is English—and in such a way this empowers the woman and the values she represents, implying a reversal of gender order (110). This is precisely what Carmel does in *The Golden Rose*, and ultimately what Erin does here. This is in contrast to the popular romance, which requires the woman to defer to her husband; thus Hansson argues, Miss Erin “becomes an illustration of the conflict between the demands of nation and those of gender” (110).

However, there is a further paradox, that despite an ultimately favourable outcome, one that shows Mark Winbourne converted (both to Home Rule, and in the subtext to new gender relations between men and women), Erin's keen nationalist sentiments, her devotion to her country and her refusal to marry someone unfavourable to the Irish cause shows how she prioritises the needs of Ireland above her needs as a woman. This exemplifies the kind of feminism which advocated freedom from England first, and equal rights for women second, as opposed to the "suffrage first before all else" associated with Louie Bennett (Owens 103).

Just as Deledda uses the stereotypical image of Sardinia and the Sardinian in an intelligent way, in Francis paradoxically there is a both a triumph and a subversion of nationalist stereotype. Erin sacrifices her own happiness for the greater good of her country, like the Joan of Arc she aspires to be at the beginning of the novel; this could easily be seen as the real woman losing out to the symbolic nation – as in Cathleen ni Houlihan (Valiulis 44). But in reality, by conforming to the stereotype Erin gains it all. Her political principles remain intact, and she has refused to submit in her relationship, persuading her husband of the validity of her own opinions. A clever use of obvious metaphor in Francis makes for a surprisingly subtle conclusion.

Miss Erin is a prelude to the themes of the deeper and more complex *Dark Rosaleen* (1915) which has many parallels to *Deledda*, not least in its treatment of exile and estrangement. Hector, the sheep outside the fold in this story, bears much resemblance to the confused Anania of *Cenere* in his ambivalent relationship with (a maternal-semiotic) Ireland and his feelings of hatred which threaten to destroy him.

If *Miss Erin* shows two sides to an argument, this novel looks sectarianism straight in the face, something that Foster gives Francis credit for in his discussion of the novel (139-142). The opening scene offers a metaphor upon which the whole novel turns. The doctor visits Honor Burke's house, and finds her feeding two infants, one at each breast. One is her own son Pat, the other the Protestant son of Rose and Alexander McTavish. The doctor describes Honor as "the very type of

bountiful motherhood, nourishing at the same bosom the child of her own flesh and the stranger within her gates" (11).

Francis's representation of Honor Burke as a Mother Ireland is a classic nationalist image, which Foster points to as one of the many obvious allegories in the novel. Presbyterian Hector has adopted Norah and her family as his own, rejecting his natural mother in the process: the Ulster Scot has adopted Ireland as his country and been embraced by the indigenous people. In *Dark Rosaleen* a figurative mother Ireland has usurped the real mother, which means that right from the start the maternal in this novel is already allegory; Honor also operates as a kind of figurative maternal in much the same way as Anania's mother does in *Cenere*, displaying aspects of the semiotic, essential in Hector's journey to self-awareness. Scrutinised in a similar way to Deledda's *Cenere*, through the lens of Kristeva's abject, *Dark Rosaleen* offers an interesting analysis of the foreigner, the exile within the community, and of an identity in crisis, all through the relationship Hector has with Honor Burke and her daughter.

Pat and Norah Burke have been brought up as devout Catholics and wear typical peasant dress, the *bawneen* and the *coubeen*; they are described going to church in full traditional dress: "a comely throng in their red skirts; the matrons wrapped in their long cloaks, while the girls' rosy faces looked brightly out from beneath the folds of the scarlet petticoats which they wore over head and shoulders" (14/15) (In these details of dress Francis also mirrors Deledda). In contrast, Hector the wealthy Protestant is forced to wear his new suit on Sundays, observes different religious customs and goes to a different church. Yet he eschews his own mother Rose McTavish for Honor Burke. Whilst Foster draws the inference that Rose McTavish is a *false* Rosaleen (140), one might place the emphasis on Hector, and of his adoption of Honor. From infancy Hector has played at the Burke's house, eaten the same food and been a brother to Pat and Norah. He feels for Honor all the natural affection of a son for a mother. The correlation is that if Honor is Mother Ireland, then Hector, the Ulster Scot, has adopted her as his nation. Whatever the slant of the analogy, there is a similar oscillation of attraction and repulsion towards Honor in this novel as there is for Anania and his mother in *Cenere*. First Hector accepts her—never more so in that

image of him breastfeeding---a further link to Kristeva's semiotic – then rejects her as belonging to a culture that he believes threatens his Presbyterianism. Ultimately he must go through this process of abjection if he is to save his own life.

The dark continent in *Dark Rosaleen* is Honor Burke and what she represents – Ireland and Catholicism. Catholicism, as is often the case in Francis, is mystical and unfathomable. It separates Hector from the Burkes, and Hector's father from an Ireland to which he feels he does not belong. In a sense, Catholicism here and elsewhere in Francis is Ireland. Whilst in this novel Francis looks at sectarianism and offers a dual perspective on identity, Catholicism in Francis is fixed; from one novel to the next the poetry and beauty of its rituals are emphasized, leading to an argument that even when her novels are not set in Ireland, Ireland is present through a semiotic Catholicism – just as in Deledda's *Il segreto* Sardinia is present through an entirely abstract maternal rather than in any real sense.

A pertinent example which is worth mentioning briefly at this point is *A Daughter of the Soil* (1895), Francis's novel set in Lancashire which was to launch her to success. Here, Francis's heroine Ruth displays various attributes of the Virgin Mary. She is the heavy lidded Madonna, with her "bent head...her oval cheek, her down-cast eyes with their full lids, and long, dark lashes" (63) that attract the wealthy landowner Anthony Clifford. She is the lofty queen, Maria Regina; Anthony is loath to touch her, to spoil her perfection; he worships from afar or from below. When Anthony turns out to be a bigamist – the hurried wedding and devastating realisation echo those in *Jane Eyre*, as does Anthony's quasi worship of the pure and honest Ruth – and then takes a lover, Ruth is juxtaposed with Mrs Clifton as the Mary to her Eve. Finally, Ruth adopts Anthony's child from this relationship, and in the book's concluding image of beatific motherhood, Ruth becomes a mother without sexual intercourse, the virgin mother (166). Clearly Catholicism is not unique to Ireland; but the imagery here is reminiscent of Irish nationalist iconography – the imagery of Erin and Eire (as outlined in Tynan) resonant with those of Mary in various guises. It might even be argued that the emphasis Francis places on the mystical element of Catholicism distinguishes it from its English strain. Anthony Clifford's

observations on Catholicism mirror those throughout Francis: "Catholicism is the most poetic form of Christianity – it cannot be denied. There is something very grand about the ritual of the Church of Rome. It is at once stately and emotional, mystical and artistic" (44/45).

Catholicism in *Dark Rosaleen*, personified in Honor Burke and her daughter Norah, is for Hector the figurative maternal, a semiotic Ireland. The process of repulsion and attraction familiar from *Sino al confine*, the oscillation of acceptance and revulsion of Anania for his mother in *Cenere*, is mirrored in Hector's response to both the Catholic religion, his wife, and his foster mother. Descendent from Scots Presbyterians, believing all his life that this his heritage is fundamental to his unionist identity, Catholicism for Hector is entirely alien, part of the strangeness of the Irish identity, the barrier between his culture and theirs: in this regard Catholicism displays aspects of the semiotic.

At one point, Hector escapes to the Aran Islands to avoid his father's anger. The islands are a vision of wildness, a place where a different law reigns. Here Francis compares to Deledda, revealing a superstitious people, beholden to an older pagan law. Hector's encounter with the islanders includes being approached by an old woman brandishing an iron, who is testing whether or not he is a fairy. The priest describes them as "'the best people in the world, and the simplest. Look at the way they carry on about fairies and 'omens and accidents' – everything that their catechism tells them they're not to believe in. I may preach till I'm black in the face, I may talk and explain for ever, but I can't put a stop to it'" (93). Warned all his life about the dangers of the Catholic religion Hector finds himself inside a priest's house just before mass. For his own good, the priest locks him away in an adjoining room during the ceremony. Hector looks through the keyhole and listens at the door: "Somehow or other the strangeness of it all, the hush, the mystery, coupled with the views Hector had so often heard his father express, wrought upon the lad, and his uneasiness culminated when the unexpected sound of the bell fell upon his ears... people were bending their bodies and striking their breasts at the approach of the most solemn part of the rite. Some among them even groaned and sobbed" (78/79).

There is something of the semiotic in the inarticulate incantations, which are unintelligible to Hector and yet powerfully attractive, mirroring his ambivalence to the Aran Islands. He admits to Norah, "Twas a quare place, an' I was afraid of my life most of the time I was ther, an' yet it seems to draw me" (141). So too his attitude to the Catholic religion is a model of abjection; one of horror and magnetism. Hector's ambivalence towards the Catholic religion continues, when he returns to Cloon-na-hinch thirteen years later as Pat Burke is ordained. He looks on the ceremony with "half distaste" and "an unaccountable shrinking of spirit" and yet at the same time is captivated by the beauty of Norah's face as she prays (mirroring a very similar scene in *Daughter of the Soil* 129). Though it repulses him, something in the ceremony attracts him, "the impressiveness, even the poetical aspect of the scene, struck the imaginative side of him" (130).

Extending the argument, if Catholicism is the semiotic, and the link to Irishness, then Protestantism in the form of Alexander is—as far as Hector is concerned—the symbolic. If the road that leads to the father in *Cenere* begins a process of abjection in Anania, in Francis's novel Hector's father is likewise a symbolic paternal—a patrician Britain, or perhaps Protestant Belfast to Honor Burke's Catholic Ireland. He displays the corresponding vices to the Burkes' and the community's virtues. Where they are generous, he is mean, where they are inclusive he is exclusive, where they understand, he is fearful. He is a caricature of paranoid, protectionist Presbyterianism. His disgust and fear of the Catholic religion includes a deep, irrational dread of priests; he comments to his wife "They'll be making a Papist o' the child if we don't look out" (18). Alexander takes Hector to Belfast, to bring him up in the "faith of the fathers" (53/54). Alexander is Kristeva's "law of the father," forcibly separating Hector from his mother Honor/Ireland. Alexander's decision to oust Hector and Rose from their community leaves Honor Burke stricken. The uprooted family are driven away leaving Honor keening on the road behind them, Ireland mourning for the loss of one of her sons.

There are many parallels to Deledda in this novel, not least in the collision of worlds, a *comunanza* which likewise has its locus in the couple. Hector returns to Cloon-na-Hinch as an adult, where Francis outlines Hector's estrangement and dislocation, interspersed with confused feelings of love for his foster family and old community. His distance from Honor Burke's family is encapsulated in Hector's words to Norah as he watches his foster brother Pat prepare to give his first mass: "I'm the sheep that's outside the fold am I not?" (124).

Francis offers an identity in crisis and on a subtextual level an advocacy for tolerance. Hector is the returned emigrant, the outsider and yet marries Norah, has emotional roots in the village and still harbours love for Honor and Pat. The tragedy is that from a beginning that holds the promise of a union of otherness and a reciprocal acceptance of difference, marriage between Hector and Norah becomes intolerable: in Norah's words, "agreeing to differ was a painful business." Shortly before their marriage, Hector has a sudden presentiment of what the differences of religion between himself and Norah might mean, in a night scene that echoes the psychological moment, reminiscent of Deledda's *La via del male* or *Elias Portolu*.

The distant boom of waves fell upon his ears, recalling the blissful nights at Inishmaan where he had been lulled by the same music; overhead the same moon was shining, as it had shone intermittently on the wet rocks yonder through scudding drifts of cloud, but the sound of the din was in his ears, and in his heart there was darkness, unrelieved by a single ray of light, Even the thought of Norah was wrapped about with a poignant anguish which robbed it of its sweetness. When he was at last free to clasp her to his heart would there not be recesses in her soul which he could never gauge, secret barriers which he could never cross? (243)

Like his father before him Hector's identity hinges not only on his Presbyterian religion, but also in rejecting the culture and the religion of those he has grown up amongst. Here is a further example of "the hate reaction" Kristeva says is the result of this kind of "cult of origins." As Kristeva points out, this hatred of others is also hatred for oneself: "for when exposed to violence, individuals despair of their own qualities...A defensive hatred, the cult of origins slides to a persecuting hatred" (Kristeva, *Nations* 03). This persecuting hatred falls

from father to son in *Dark Rosaleen*, as Hector turns his bile on the closest to him—his wife and family.

The third part of the novel is one which Foster praises as moving and realistic (142). The setting of Derry is grim; the fear and loathing that Norah experiences from the Protestant community is very real. Hector forbids her to pray, worried that she might be seen and recognised as a Catholic. He becomes ashamed of her, mixed with feelings of guilt and confusion. Hector responds to the uncertainty of his own origins by rejecting otherness—Catholicism (and all it represents). In a sense he abjects the maternal semiotic, just like Anania does in relation to his mother. This comes to a head when he physically expels Honor Burke when she comes to visit. Norah reciprocates by distancing herself from Hector and his political involvement in the Ulster Volunteers.

This process of rejection is encapsulated in a symbolic scene in which Hector breaks a statue of the Virgin given to Norah by her father, the last present before his death. The statue obviously represents the Catholic faith, but also Norah's link to the past, her father and her ancestors having, in Hector's eyes, an unambiguous relationship to Ireland. In return Norah throws the only picture Hector has of his late father on the fire—symbolising the faith of his fathers, and his own origins. This symbolic destruction mirrors their rejection of each other's difference. But Hector's ultimate rejection is of Honor Burke. In this there are parallels to Anania's disgust and rejection of his mother. Honor comes to visit her new grandchild in Derry. Hector has refused to honour his previous commitment to have the child baptized a Catholic and throws Honor out of his house. Metaphorically, he rejects his surrogate Irish/Catholic maternal in favour of the "faith of his fathers."

However, like *Cenere*, the novel does not end on this note of intolerance. Norah and her child escape with Honor back to Cloon-na-hinch so that Father Pat may baptize the child. Hector follows her with a gang of men, implicitly the Ulster Volunteers. In an attempt to baptize the child, Father Pat struggles to the roof. At the crucial moment, one of Hector's men shoots his foster brother and the angry crowd turn on him, beating him to the brink of death. The novel ends as it began,

the heads of the two young men rest on Honor's breast, one dead, one dying in a macabre echo of their infancy: "Once more the red head rested beside the black one on the lap where they had both been so often pillowed" (390).

Here is the obvious metaphor of Mother Ireland grieving over the loss of her sons of both traditions. This is a necessary sacrifice if there is to be a new Ireland, one represented by Norah and Hector's baby, the child of both communities: "a new Ireland that might achieve great things, though it was the child of blood and tears" (391). But the conclusion might also be read as Hector's realisation and acceptance of otherness. In his final moments he "recognises the sublimity of that faith in which Pat had laid down his life" (371) and with this recognition there opens up a future Ireland as a nation without nationalism, the child at the end analogous to cultural heterogeneity.

This theoretical analysis has brought an understanding of Deledda a long way from the nuts and bolts of her expression of Sardinia, of landscape and legend, peasant and dialect. Deledda constantly polarises a primitive Sardinia with a civilised Rome in her narrative, which on deeper analysis shows a positing of the semiotic and symbolic. The continuing metaphor of Kristeva's *thetic* break, the split from a semiotic Sardinia in order to achieve autonomy and self expression in a symbolic Rome, is carried through from explicit stories of emigration and return, to the most esoteric of psychological dramas. Sardinia and its role as the figurative maternal is mirrored in her maternal characters; mothers leave or are lost, are found again or banished, are accepted or maligned. The ambivalent relationship of mother and child is analogous to her characters' relationship with Sardinia, which penetrates even texts that are not ostensibly connected to the island – making her, in the end, exactly what she aspired to be – a writer of her country.

In Tynan there is more a paradox than a polarity; the Anglo and Irish in her texts blur lines of identity, the juxtaposition always fluctuates depending on perspective, just as in *The River* the "other side" is always relative. Fallon suggests that belonging neither to the upper classes in Irish society, nor to the people of rural Ireland, her understanding of these groups is superficial and external (127). However, what emerges is Tynan's ability to articulate both positions,

superficially perhaps not with the greatest of subtlety, but on closer examination with a complex ambiguity. Her heroines offer a semiotic-maternal that is multi-layered; she uses double edged stereotypes – as in *The Golden Rose* – that challenge preconceptions of the plot.

A theoretical examination of Francis likewise opens up a second voice in her text, one that is removed from the safe and predictable lines of the surface plot, revealing a complexity as regards national identity. If *Miss Erin* offers a clever stereotype, manipulating both the nationalist icon and the feminist ideal, *Dark Rosaleen* is quite far from the romantic nationalism intimated by its title. It is a complex view of the outcast, of the penetrating hatred and bigotry conceived out of fear. Despite an apparent naiveté of metaphor, a deeper analysis shows subtle motifs of exile and estrangement, a quite modern appreciation of the sheep outside the fold.

A Kristevan reading of our writers opens up a perspective of Sardinia and Ireland as semiotic voice – a sensory presence – and as emblems of the figurative maternal. Each writer, rather than conservative purveyors of stereotypes, in fact challenge these very clichés. They offer narratives which articulate inclusion: on a metaphorical level, otherness is accepted. In their conceptualisation of exile – actual and of the individual – they show that for true cultural expression, for a real understanding of who we are, it is essential to understand who we are not, and to embrace and recognise the foreigner: “By recognising him (the foreigner) within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself...The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners” (Kristeva, *Strangers* 264). Their narratives – at least on a subtextual level – are surprisingly internationalist, novels which advocate Kristeva’s plea for tolerance: “let us know ourselves as unconscious, altered, other in order better to approach the universal otherness of the strangers that we are – for only strangeness is universal” (Kristeva, *Nations* 21).

4. Deledda, Egerton and Thurston: transgressive heroines

Deledda's women are sexually aware, display conventionally masculine characteristics and try to break free from the restrictions of Sardinian society. Deledda's friend, the famous actress Eleonora Duse played the leading role in the film version of *Cenere* (1904), and encapsulated for Deledda a vision of the New Woman, "coraggiosa e sicura, libera di amare, di esprimersi attraverso l'arte" (67).¹¹⁴ Expressing sexual desire, arguing for autonomy and disrupting gender stereotypes, George Egerton's women have a lot in common with Deledda's heroines. But their candour on the subject of women's rights, and the platform that Egerton uses in her short stories to put across an idea of 'woman' seems quite different from Deledda's instinctive females.

Like Deledda, Katherine Thurston's realism is a long way from the proto-modern style of many New Women, particularly Egerton. However, although her style is conventional, her heroines are revolutionary. Maxine from the novel *Max* (1910) not only impersonates a man—an obvious disruption of gender roles from the outset—but within this context also questions the male gaze, offers scenes of homoeroticism, and questions preconceptions about sexual desire. As Foster comments, Maxine is a "New Woman by experience but also by temperament and principle" (281). A comparison between the three writers examines the perspectives of desire and gender, asking how new their women really are.

Deledda talks about sexual desire from the woman's perspective. In her sensual women she posits a kind of primal essence which brings her close to the idea of the primitive savage in New Woman writing. Her women are never stereotypically feminine, just as her men are never masculine in any conventional sense; this gender bending resonates with the virile females and the effeminate

¹¹⁴ "courageous and assured, free to love and to express herself through art."

males of *fin de siècle* writing. Although Deledda's heroines are never found *in flagrante* exactly—Janice Kozma points to the entire lack of love scenes of this nature in the introduction to her new translation of *Marianna Sirca* (2008) (12)—Deledda's depiction of sex, despite the absence of such scenes, is actually quite erotic. Two examples from early on in her career, one of uncontrollable lust and one of sexual frustration can be found in *La via del male* (1896) and *La giustizia* (1899).

In *La via del male* (1896) Maria is eager to continue with her sexual adventures, conscious of something quickening within: "La curiosità di sapere che cos'era l'amore l'aveva spinta verso l'uomo giovane e bello; e l'amore si era rivelata, avvincendola ma non penetrandola fino al cuore" (63).¹¹⁵ "Love" here is an expedient euphemism. Maria's purely sexual interest, devoid of romantic gloss is extraordinary for a heroine of Deledda's time. Unusual too is the restraint shown by her lover Pietro, who has to put on the brakes during their sexual encounter. Maria completely loses control, and she is submerged in her physical response, her eyes growing dark and insensate (63). Deledda goes on to describe Maria's desire in explicitly physical terms. Simulating Pietro's kisses, Maria bites her own lip; she digs her nails hard into her hand to absorb her frustration. There is nothing virtuous or spiritual about this attraction; on the contrary, it is described as a "passione fosca,"¹¹⁶ and her feelings as wicked (63). Maria is sensual, carnal, experiencing sex divorced from emotional involvement; her passion is described as elemental and essential. In her discussion of the erotic in Deledda, De Giovanni cites Maria's lust—and by extension that of Deledda's heroines—as her "essere naturale" (*Il peso dell'eros* 17).¹¹⁷ She is the first in a long line of Deledda's heroines who are alive to this kind of desire: Maddalena in *Elias Portolu* (1900) is also described as a creature of the flesh, of sensuality and violent passion (De Chiara 35). As we shall see, this "essential nature" has much in common with the primitive savage and the eternal feminine of George Egerton.

115 "The curiosity to know what love was had pushed her towards the young and attractive man; and love had revealed itself to her, enthralling her but never reaching as far as her heart.

116 "a dark passion"

117 "natural being"

There are innumerable examples of sexual frustration in Deledda. From Noemi in *Canne al vento* (1913), to Lia in *Nel deserto* (1911), Deledda's women often stifle or submerge sexual desire. But the clearest example is Silvestra in *La giustizia* (1899). She is imprisoned, albeit ostensibly voluntarily, as a "monaca di casa,"¹¹⁸ and has virtually no contact with the outside world. Her confinement is a clear analogy to her sexual frustration, trapped in "un chiostro perduto nelle vaste e desolate solitudini dell'altipiano sovrastante al paese" (99).¹¹⁹ Silvestra's desire surfaces painfully with the coming of spring. The season intimately disturbs her; Deledda describes Silvestra's sexual awakening through sights, sounds, and rhythms of nature, echoing the sounds and rhythms of Silvestra's own body. Nature gets under her skin; she is in thrall to the sound of the wind, the silence of the night, the reflection of the moon: "i silenzi delle notti di marzo le narravano cose sottili e arcane, filtrandosi nel sangue come spille di cristallo" (108).¹²⁰ Her body rebels from such long abstinence: "e l'intima ribellione cresceva di giorno in giorno, d'ora in ora" (126).¹²¹ Her attempt to control her desire only lends it more potency. She hurls herself to the ground, "battendosi la fronte e le labbra, piangendo in alto con gemiti acuti e selvaggi, percuotendosi il petto con le mani e poi stringendo i pugni fino a sentir lo strazio delle unghie conficcate nelle palme" (114).¹²² Here again Deledda shows female desire as violent and primitive: it is sexual frustration taken to the edge of self-destruction.

New Woman writing places a much greater importance on women's sexual experience—and on their sexual autonomy—than ever before. In Deledda's perspective on desire, more often than not we see the affair from the woman's eyes rather than gazing into them: Deledda puts women centre stage. As Bruce Merry puts it, Deledda counteracts the types of females written about by most Italian male novelists of the time, who turn women into strangers, featuring

118 "nun of the house"

119 "a cloister lost amid the vast and desolate solitude of the tablelands overhanging the region."

120 "the silent March nights narrated subtle and arcane things to her, infiltrating her blood like crystal pins."

121 "and an intimate rebellion grew day by day, hour by hour."

122 "beating her head and lips, crying at the top of her voice in acute and wild moans, striking her chest with her hands and then squeezing her fists until she could feel her nails digging into her palms."

female characters who are either “eccentric aristocrats or working class dupes,” revealing how “men had in fact, as always, molded women to suit their fantasies” (35). This idea is equally important in the writing of Cixous, who urges women to reclaim their own image: “By writing herself, woman will return to the body that has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display” (Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* 262). In her portrayal of sexual desire from the woman’s point of view, Deledda reclaims this stranger.

Although not on bicycles, smoking or wearing their hair short, Deledda’s heroines are in many ways New Women. She offers antidotes to the stereotyped female of her period, showing women who display conventionally male characteristics— independence, decisiveness, aggression—and who are, or want to be, sexually, financially and in other ways, autonomous. In the same breath, it could be argued that her men are even more like the infantilised men of New Woman fiction, insecure and inept, or New Men themselves with their traditionally feminine traits—sensitivity and emotional articulacy. Deledda’s narratives proliferate with virile heroines and effeminate males. This tendency not only agrees with much New Woman writing but also anticipates what Cixous is to refer to as “bisexuality.” In her essay “*The Newly Born Woman*” (1984), Cixous argues a kind of bisexuality which constitutes “the non-exclusion of difference.” She argues that woman “benefits from and opens up within this bisexuality,” encouraging difference rather than annihilating it, whilst man on the other hand has been “trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality” (41). In these terms, Deledda’s heroes—just as much as her heroines—are bisexual: they admit difference. If, as Cixous suggests, psychoanalysis “is formed on the basis of woman and has repressed ... the femininity of masculine sexuality” (41), then Deledda, rather than repressing this femininity, emphasises it.

This “bisexuality,” or New Woman gender bending, is found in many of Deledda’s heroines. A woman who is truly outside the boundaries of convention is Annessa, from the novel *L’edera* (1906). In many ways she is just like a heroine from New Woman fiction, but transposed from a modern context into one of fable like intensity. Annessa crosses the many boundaries typical of Deledda’s

comunanza: she is not only a servant but an orphan, which makes her relationship with her master Paulu doubly taboo—but their relationship as quasi brother and sister and the incestuous aspect to their relationship adds a further dimension of transgression. In some ways, Annessa is the “odd woman” of turn of the century fiction; she is relatively old yet still single, her position in the house not established as either entirely servile or completely familial. However, like the New Woman, she does not conform to this typical stereotype of a spinster. As far as the community is concerned she might be on the shelf, but she is most clearly sexually active. Again, it is from Annessa’s eyes that sex is described, her passion under scrutiny. Her actions are based on lust. Once again Deledda articulates desire from a female perspective, and shows her heroine as carnal. De Giovanni suggests that Annessa is outside Christian motivations; her ethics, she argues, are not Christian but sexual; even her name is associated with the cult of Dionysus, placing her in the realm of physical pleasures (*Il peso dell’eros* 63). Here again is New Woman’s primitive savage.

It is murder that makes a “man” of Annessa. In order to save the family from destitution, Annessa decides to kill Paulu’s uncle in order to claim the inheritance. Nowhere is an action so surprising in Deledda. She pictures the small, vulnerable form of Annessa murdering a helpless old man; the act is violent and pitiless—she suffocates him when he calls for help. Annessa operates in a kind of trance, typical, Savini argues, of the hallucinatory power of Dostoevsky’s assassins (*Premessa* 328). However, Annessa isn’t dreaming when she contemplates the murder, when she considers what actions she needs to take to save her lover and his family. Pragmatism and cold-blooded calculation are qualities conventionally perceived as masculine: Annessa is decisive, logical and most importantly autonomous. Alongside her sexual motivation, this gives a picture of a virile heroine. But Annessa defies such neat categorisation. She is both traditionally feminine—suppliant and meek with her lover—and conventionally masculine—dominant and cruel to the old man. She has a typically masculine scepticism but an entirely conventional feminine response to being in love—being prepared to sacrifice everything. This is typical of Deledda’s approach to her heroines, who are

quite simply both things at once—masculine and feminine—in a model of Cixous’s “bisexuality.”

Paulu on the contrary is rather more of a New Man, at least in his negative aspects, displaying conventionally feminine characteristics. He is indecisive, moody and relies on his physical charms to get him out of trouble. He cannot rise to the challenge to save his own family from financial ruin and resorts to prostituting himself. Paulu echoes Antonio in the earlier *Nostalgie* (1915), another novel which features the prostitution of the male. De Giovanni argues that to an extent Deledda imposes this femininity on her heroes, and is convinced of the superiority of women (*Il peso dell'eros* 100). This rings true with New Woman’s belief in the inherent superiority of women, and with the feminizing of the romantic hero at the turn of the century. Paulu is more traditionally feminine than bisexual, his character less ambiguous and arguably less defined than Annessa.

This simplification of her heroes happens frequently in Deledda, whose heroines often exhibit more complexity and greater depth to their characters than her men. At times her male characters are so dependent and indecisive that they resemble children. This tendency to feature the superiority of heroines and to infantilise the heroes is something common to writers of New Woman fiction.

One of the clearest examples of the strong and complex heroine versus the child-like man is *Marianna Sirca* (1915). Spinazzola refers to Marianna as being as fervidly feminine as she is maternally protective and possessive (*Romanzi sardi* 763). Whilst the second part of the statement is hugely important in Marianna’s relationship with her lover, she is rather more a virile female than an archetypal feminine lead. Marianna dominates not just in love but within the family, turning the tables on a patriarchal system that had her as a virtual servant in her uncle’s house in order to inherit. In her introduction to *Marianna Sirca*, Janice Kozma says that here Deledda “detonates the cliché that Sardinian women are imprisoned in their own homes, except for male-sanctioned excursions. Instead she presents us with the woman who jealously guards the keys to her own kingdom. Within Deledda’s world of supposed male dominance, a woman can fly just below the

cultural radar and actually wield power, if she is as determined as Marianna and her creator" (19).

Marianna rebels against her family's control over the most important aspects of her life: "Io non voglio nulla, null'altro che la mia libertà. Ma perchè non posso essere libera di fare quello che voglio?"(758).¹²³ In this bid for autonomy, Marianna is every inch the New Woman. Her youth has been spent "come un uccellino in gabbia" (700),¹²⁴ and now she realises that she is approaching a sexual twilight: "si guardava dentro, con piena coscienza di sé, e vedeva un crepuscolo, sereno, sì, ma crepuscolo: rosso e grigio, grigio e rosso e solitario come il crepuscolo della *tanca*" (701).¹²⁵ This approaching twilight mimics the scene set for many heroines of Deledda's period, who become the contemptible figure of the spinster – the *zitella*. One thinks of Calliope in Neera's *Teresa* (1896), the once beautiful woman who ends up behind a barred window shouting abuse at passersby, the fascination and ridicule of local children – or of Teresa herself whose youth dwindles waiting for her lover, a figure of tragedy. A classic example is Nanna of La Marchesa Colombi's (M.A. Torriani Torelli-Viollier) *In Risaia* (1878), whose loss of hair due to typhoid makes marriage almost impossible; for these women, being single is a curse, the term *zitella* an insult.

What sets Marianna apart from these figures is the control and choice that come with her inheritance. She is free to marry for love. Her choice of Simone, the bandit and ex-servant, is met with dismay by her family, but she remains firm in her decision. There is a dramatic role reversal; she is now the *padrona* and her father the servant. The bandit Costantino comes with a message from her lover. He wants to speak to her father but she responds angrily: "Tu non dirai nulla a mio padre, se sei uomo! Sei venuto a parlare con me, non con lui" (769).¹²⁶ She exerts her authority over her father; she is now the head of the household. In her financial independence and sexual autonomy, she is the image of the virile female.

123 "I want nothing else, nothing other than my freedom. But why am I not allowed the freedom to do what I want?"

124 "like a bird in a cage."

125 "she looked within, fully conscious of herself and saw twilight, serene, yes, but twilight: red and grey, grey and red and solitary as the twilight of the *tanca*."

126 "You will say nothing to my father, if you're a man! You came here to talk with me, not with him."

And yet, like Annessa, Marianna displays both traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics, admitting difference and complexity. On the one hand she rejoices in her dominance over Simone, cruel as a cat and as calculating. In contrast, the maternal imagery is unmistakable, she cradles Simone on her lap, stroking his head like an infant's, thinking about him with a mixture of indulgence and exasperation. Kozma points to these diverse characteristics of Deledda's women: "these emotionally immature men are attracted sexually to assertive yet nurturing women who through their own cossetting behaviour abet and encourage the self-absorbed irresponsibility of their partners and who invariably rescue the men from their problems by offering a sympathetic lap in which to cradle their heads" (100). This assertiveness combined with motherly affection is exactly like the confidence and intellectual superiority of New Woman, who combined this kind of maternal nurturance as part of a general superiority to men.

Simone is the great child-man common to Egerton's short stories. He is weak and indecisive, temperamental and sensitive—traditionally feminine qualities. He displays practically no conventionally masculine characteristics, and more of the infantile traits common to many of Deledda's men (Kozma 103). Are these the qualities that attract Marianna to Simone? De Giovanni argues that Deleddian men who inspire passion in their lovers tend to display feminine, delicate characteristics—again reminiscent of the "woman's man" at the end of the nineteenth century (*Il peso dell'eros* 100). Kozma highlights this tendency and also the child-like qualities of Simone; he rests his head on Marianna's lap like a child, he cannot make decisions, he is unable to meet the challenge set to him, he is weak, ineffectual, lost.

On first appearances, Egerton's frankness about sex seems far removed from Deledda's implied passion. O'Toole remarks that Egerton was a pioneer in the contemporary move to tell the truth about sexuality, putting her work "on a par with that of many later feminist writers" (128). And yet the primal desire in Deledda's women—Maria's predatory nature or Silvestra's very physical frustration—has a lot in common with the primitive savage, a recurring motif throughout George Egerton's short stories.

The opening story of *Keynotes* (1893), "A Cross Line" was not initially the first in the collection; the order was changed, to place the most controversial first (O'Toole 127). The bored housewife of the story encapsulates several key traits of Egerton's narratives regarding women: the essential or primal nature of woman, and what she calls the "eternal feminine" – the unchanging and superior nature of woman – alongside the weaker and less mysterious man, all set within the context of a dull and unfulfilling marriage. It also has one of the most interesting expressions of sexual desire in her women, and says a lot about Egerton's often contradictory engagement with this issue – which even in this candid portrayal of her "primitive savage" contains arguments of cultural manipulation.

The heroine indulges in a sexual fantasy of an erotic and exotic dance which she performs to a crowd of men who revel – alongside herself – in her attractiveness. The whole thing is allegorical to an orgasm in its pace and language. For Egerton, such adventurousness was verging on the explicit, and something she was asked to tone down in her 1897 volume of short stories *Symphonies*, as a direct consequence of the contemporary Wilde trials. This extract gives a sense of her candour:

She can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow, now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with a human note of passion in its strain. She can feel the answering shiver of feeling that quivers up to her from the dense audience, spell bound by the motion of her glancing feet, and she flies swifter and swifter, and lighter and lighter, till the very serpents seem alive with jewelled scintillations... One quivering, gleaming, daring bound and she stands with outstretched arms and passion-filled eyes, poised on one slender foot, asking a supreme note to finish her dream of motion. And the men rise to a man and answer her, and cheer, cheer till the echoes shout from the surrounding hills and tumble wildly down the crags. (20)

In the rhythm of the extract, in Egerton's style which is fluid and unorthodox, there is something of *écriture féminine*, something of the "articulations of the body" as Cixous is to call it, a perspective of desire that Egerton presents as essential, ancient, unfathomable, which recalls that pre-symbolic union between the self and mother, important in Cixous for this kind of "feminine" writing (*Newly Born Woman* 72).

Egerton is not shy to face the real issues about women's sexual desire, not only in this rather thinly veiled description of an orgasm, but also in the astonishingly candid implication that the heroine has not been sexually satisfied in her marriage, intimating that masturbation is presumably the only route she has had to sexual fulfilment. She is left "tremulous with excitement," hearing "the strain of that old-time music that she has never heard in this life of hers, save as an inner accompaniment to the memory of hidden things, born with her, not of this time" (20-21).

Egerton shows further complexity in her heroine's perspective on desire; she is titillated by a voyeuristic scene in which her own body arouses her. This points to a culturally manipulated woman (a recurring theme in Egerton), who has been conditioned to see her own body as sexually arousing—or possibly to a lesbian subtext. In this way Egerton anticipates Cixous's "uncanny stranger," and both replicates the so-called male gaze upon her heroine, and repudiates it in her focus on what she suggests is an essential feminine nature.

Whether or not the heroine of "A Cross Line" is aware of what she craves is disputable. The whole fantasy may be an entirely subconscious expression of desire. However, the heroine of "The Third in the House" in *Flies in Amber* (1905) is entirely conscious of her sexuality, unsurprising for a writer of erotic fiction. Here Egerton presents the female artist, a figure popular in New Woman writing. Talking to her husband the character muses on the connection between women, flowers and sex. She is entirely aware of her own—and by implication—other women's sexual allure.

Yes, wallflowers; they are as wholesome as an old-fashioned lovable woman—there's no breath of decadence in the smell of 'half summers' to give them their Irish name. Just think of the others: tuberoses, hyacinths, syringas—heavy, oily smelling blooms,

languorous, insidious, sense-stirring. I'm sure...the Virgin Mary could never have worn a tuberose! (71)

The list of flowers recalls Deledda's litany of flora and fauna – with their particular connection to sex, like the heady descriptions of flowers, and the woman dripping with the scent of violets in "Padre Topes," from the collection *I giuochi della vita* (1905).

The 'essere naturale' of Maria and Sebastiana is mimicked by the woman savage of George Egerton's narrative – whose essential nature, she argues, has been manipulated by (male) culture. The connection between Sebastiana's sexual desire and the nascent spring in *La giustizia* is echoed in Egerton's autobiographical *The Wheel of God* (1898). The new season makes Mary keenly aware of "the primitive element in her, untouched by its passage through all the centuries, keeping her sib to the earth and the things of it; closer to the forces of nature than man – genetic woman, answering to the call of the generative season" (95).

The notion that woman has a kind of original, primitive nature recurs in Egerton, who admitted that she saw gender as the prime determinant of identity. Egerton declared that she wanted to give away the unknown territory of 'woman,' which is in many ways like Deledda's aspiration of revealing Sardinia: "I realized that in literature, everything had been better done by man than woman could hope to emulate. There was only one small plot left for her to tell: the *terra incognita* of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her – in a word to give herself away, as man had given himself away in his writings" (McCullough 206). The heroine of "A Cross Line" voices key attributes of the Egerton woman: "They have all overlooked the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman. Deep in through ages of convention this primeval trait burns, an untameable quality that may be concealed but is never eradicated by culture – the keynote of woman's witchcraft and woman's strength" (22).

Lawlessness, an untameable nature, and a connection to the primeval are encapsulated in the gypsy and the witch, two frequent images in Egerton. The aspiration of Egerton's women to be free like these figures, letting loose their inner

savage, is in contrast to Deledda's heroines—who actually *are* the gypsy and the witch. As De Giovanni points out, the dark, sparkling eyes of Deledda's women are usually the instigation of some primal passion. "A Shadow's Slant" in *Keynotes* has a depiction of the gypsy/witch in Egerton, which could just as easily be a description of one of Deledda's heroines.

The story is of a marriage between an abusive husband and his long suffering wife. He says to her: "I believe you are a gipsy [*sic*]; your hair curls at the ends like a live thing, and there are red lights in its black, and your eyes have a flash in them at times and a look as if you were off in other lands!" (146). Yet this woman who so resembles a free spirit stays with her brutish husband, locked into a marriage of servitude and suffering. Real gypsies come to perform and the heroine looks with longing on the escape they might offer her.

The grace of panthers and the charm of wild untamed natural things is revealed in every movement. Colour vivacity, dirt and rhythm...What does the music rouse inside that frail frame, what parts her lips and causes her eyes to glisten and the thin nostrils to quiver? Is there aught in common between that slight figure with its jewelled hands and its too heavy silken gown, and those tattered healthy Zingari vagabonds...who knows? (146-147)

Here is someone living out the life of what Egerton suggests is the "natural" woman, whilst the culturally adapted woman looks on. The young wife is entranced but is not willing to make a move to follow. She gazes on her alter-ego, but her own gypsy nature remains trapped inside the demure demeanour of a Victorian wife.

In one important aspect, Egerton differs from Deledda, at least superficially. If Egerton's fiction is indeed trying to "give woman away" then one concept prevails: that women have adapted their true nature to appeal to the desires of men (McCullough 206). Whereas Deledda's women battle to restrain the witch inside, to restrain their primal desires—and usually fail, in Egerton's women this nature has been changed by a dominant male culture.

In *Flies in Amber* (1905), the theme of a dominant masculine culture shaping female identity persists. In "A Conjugal Episode," a female narrator is recounting

an episode in Paris to three female friends. She has been party to a marital reunion in which the estranged husband returns. His wife begs the narrator to stay in order to protect her from her husband's persuasive charms but once he is present she cannot help but respond to his advances: it is not so much her desire for him, but his for her which makes her act in such a way. She conforms to his perception of her; she dances to his tune. The narrator comments:

I have often wondered, does not the artist really create the type, rather than merely find it, and interpret it to the less discerning masses. It is certain that, once a great poet or painter has presented a new type of woman to us, and has roused curiosity or interest in her, she springs up on every side. Woman is a plastic medium for the interpretation of artistic moods. (108)

The realisation that women are culturally manipulated is the climax of "The Regeneration of Two." Typical of Egerton is the intellectual conversation between an emergent New Woman and New Man. He refers to his ideal woman, his "Rachel" whom he has been seeking his whole life but has never found. He refers to the ability of women to know how to attract a man: "When I saw how skilled they were in converting their bodies into targets for men, I said: man need not trouble to woo woman, for she can calculate to the finest point the cut of her gown on her hips, the flutter of lace on her bust" (193). As she replies, the heroine is aware for the first time of what she really thinks on the subject; she sees "woman" as a victim of culture: "You are hard on us...for perhaps we are merely the playthings of circumstances; contradictions, leading a dual life" (198). It is this dual life, she says, which leads to unhappiness for women and for men; the imposition of a masculine idea of "woman" which causes her to adapt, conform and twist her "true nature." The words of another heroine, in "Now Spring Has Come," sum it up "In one word, the untrue feminine is of man's making whilst the strong, the natural, the true womanly is of God's making" (42).

All of this finds parallels in Cixous's stipulation that a patriarchal culture has consistently figured woman throughout the centuries as purely the construct of man, as the binary opposite of "masculine" qualities. As she argues in *Newly Born Woman*: "Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread

or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection" (37).

Like Deledda's infantilised males, and strong, assured women, Egerton offers a similar portrayal of men as childlike in relation to women, who in contrast are superior in many aspects, including in a kind of glorious, supreme maternal nature. Egerton's idea of the "natural" woman and her belief in an "essential" femininity is linked to her conception of the "eternal feminine." Nelson explains that Egerton's definition of the eternal feminine has something in common with Goethe's definition of the "ever womanly," which embodies "the tender, loving, self-sacrificing, altruistic side of human nature" (177). The loving aspect is true for Egerton's heroines. In "A Cross Line," the heroine believes that affection is the "crowning disability" of her sex, and that "if it were not for that, we women would master the world." She goes on, "It is a wise disposition of providence that this untameableness of ours is corrected by our affections" (27-28).

But as well as exemplifying the loving, self-sacrificing side of human nature, Egerton's heroines exhibit a "natural" superiority to men, moral, spiritual, and intellectual. In "A Shadow's Slant," husband and wife live out a life of predator and prey, evidenced in the opening scene of part two of the trilogy when a hawk swoops to devour its prey, a little brown bird. Immediately afterwards the couple are described in the same terms: she is said to have "red-brown eyes that gleam out of the small sallow face" and he has a "nose ... like a hawk's beak" (141). But within an atmosphere of abuse, the wife remains spiritually intact. She is a model of suffering virtue exemplified in such scenes as one in which she hands him back the stick he has thrown at her (127).

She has sacrificed herself on the altar of marriage—but not through passivity. She has made the decision that her husband needs her and therefore emerges not as the victim of domestic violence, which undoubtedly she is, but as morally and spiritually superior to an inferior husband. He exclaims to her:

No, you are not afraid, you little white-faced thing, you obey because you are strong enough to endure, not because you fear me. And I know it, don't you think I don't see it. You pity me, great God! Pity me—me that could whistle any woman to heel—yes,

you pity me with all that great heart of yours because I am just a great, weak, helpless
drunken beast, a poor wreck! (145)

Egerton's female characters also have a deeper and more active inner life, and are more enlightened or at least more intuitive than men. In "A Cross Line," the heroine is sitting with her husband, pondering their different natures: "One speculation chases the other in her quick brain; odd questions as to race arise; she dives into theories as to the why and wherefore of their distinctive natures, and holds a mental debate in which she takes both sides of the question impartially." After these mental acrobatics she looks at her husband, who "is gazing dreamily, with his eyes darkened by their long lashes, and a look of tender melancholy in their clear depths, into space" (13). This provokes her to ask him what he is thinking about; the answer turns out to be a disappointing one—he is thinking about whether or not lob worms would make suitable bait. This is one example of many in which the heroine is the mentally agile imaginative character whilst the man is the plodding thinker. Egerton often places a "great woman" in a relationship with an inferior man, such as "An Empty Frame."

If Deledda's heroes are often less central than her heroines, Egerton's men are much less developed than her women, existing for the most part as foils for her heroines' philosophical ponderings. In a reversal of the cultural manipulation Egerton so condemns, men's lives are defined by women, usually in the search for love, something which in the past has been the restricted territory of the conventional heroine. Take the male protagonist in "A Little Grey Glove," who muses that "most fellows' book of life may be said to begin at the chapter where woman comes in; mine did" (91). Another example is the study of the "female of the species" by the lover in "A Cross Line," who has "an untiring pursuit of women as an interesting problem" (03). Even the presumably New Man depicted in "The Regeneration of Two" is preoccupied by his search for the perfect woman.

Like Deledda, women in Katherine Thurston take centre stage. One of her most memorable heroines is a young woman trying to break free of the restrictions of Irish small town life, whose desire for freedom and love is set against the religious mores and social conventions represented partly by the older women. Isabel in *The*

Fly on the Wheel (1908) has strong parallels to the Deleddian heroine, the rebel daughter railing against the matriarch; one thinks of Gavina's experience in the stultifying Nuoro of *Sino al confine*, the religious hypocrisy of her mother the shadow from which she longs to escape.

Isabel is foreign, beautiful and unmanageable, every bit the New Woman. Thurston describes her as primitive and hot blooded, with a "demon of insubordination" within her (63). In contrast there is the Victorian angel of the house, Daisy Carey, whom she describes as "the eternal type—the wife, the mother" (310). The wide-eyed ignorance of Daisy Carey is in direct opposition to the widely travelled and cultured Isabel. But Isabel is still victim of the rules of Irish society which say that without money, her options of a comfortable life are either marriage or the convent. The final moments in the novel, when Isabel contemplates murdering Stephen Carey, and then ending her own life show her as entirely outside her bourgeois restrictions. The novel best lends itself to a comparison of moral transgression in Deledda and will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

Isabel in *The Fly on the Wheel* is a rebel—questioning, autonomous, and although brought up in the Catholic religion, almost amoral in her attitude. Thurston goes even farther in the presentation of a transgressive heroine in her novel *Max* (1910), in which she consistently interrogates the notion of gender. She does this primarily by presenting its heroine first as a hero—a Russian princess Maxine disguised as the boy artist Max.

In an echo of Marianna Sirca's words on freedom, Max(ine) voices her drive to be the engineer of her own destiny. But she wants not just the kind of basic freedom demanded by Marianna, not only to love freely, but also to practise her art, recalling Deledda's vision of the New Woman presented by the actress Eleonora Duse: "I want more than pleasure, monsieur—more than money...I want first life—and then fame' " (63). The dream of glory, the admiration for Paris as the source of inspiration all mimic Deledda's young artist Cosima's desire for success, and her adoration of Rome. But initially, Maxine is presented as Max, and by so doing, Thurston manages to operate on two levels: on a first reading she offers a New Man—but once one realises that it is in fact a woman artist, the

dandy is transformed into an independent, artistic woman of the *fin de siècle*. The narrative is double-voiced from the start, the subtext or retro-text offering new readings as the book goes along – all part of Thurston's love of impersonation.

By impersonating Max, the female artist is free to work, and to paint what she likes. Max's life is in his art, something that would be jeopardised by a conventional life as a woman. Like the writer of erotic fiction in Egerton, or the young Cosima in Deledda, there is a mystique surrounding Max(ine), an allure that is close to Egerton's eternal feminine. Women's sexual autonomy, the perceptions men and women have about each other, and the possibility of a celibate life devoted to art occupy her intensely. But in the end, love for Blake, the County Clare man, wins out over any decision she might have made regarding her life as an artist. Foster points to this as the conservatism lurking behind Thurston's unconventional heroine (281).

If Deledda presents her heroes as displaying traditionally feminine qualities, from the indecisive Paulu in *L'edera* to the childlike and sensitive Simone in *Marianna Sirca*, Thurston takes this further in both her depiction of Blake's homoerotic attraction to Max, the full-scale impersonation of male attributes by her heroine, combined with the ostensible presentation of an effeminate male in the mysterious, delicate Max. There is always a dual perspective on gender in this novel based on the simple mechanism of impersonation, and also through a retrospective reading. Initially, Thurston presents an unacknowledged subversive homosexual relationship between an older man and an impressionable boy.

Thurston challenges perceived ideas about male companionship. Blake and Max speak to the effeminate male leads of Wilde and the model of the New Man at the turn of century. Blake, as much as Max, can be interpreted as a kind of dandy, the relationship of the artistic mentor and the protégée resonating with Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The blurring between feminine and masculine is there from the outset as Blake is thrown into confusion about his feelings for "the boy." He watches Max while he sleeps, and the sense of mystery that surrounds him, echoes the eternal feminine of New Woman philosophy: "Blake looked long and interestedly, and his earliest impression – the impression

of a mystery – flowed back upon him strong as on the night of the long journey” (135). The mystery that surrounds Max agrees with his vision of the ideal woman: “Even when the time comes and she steps into reality, mystery will still cling to her. There must always be the wonder – the miracle” (161).

Their relationship, based initially on Blake showing the young boy the delights of Paris, and initiating him into a Bohemian life style, deepens into a friendship that has more than ordinary regard. The two skirt around their illicit feelings for one another. Max questions Blake about his ideal woman: “But if it comes to pass – your miracle – you will forget me? You will no longer have need of me, is that not so?” Blake doubts himself, and his feelings, and replies defensively: “‘Boy,’ he said, sharply, ‘we’re running into deep waters. Don’t you think we ought to steer for shore? I came to smoke, you know, and watch you at your work’” (163). The intensity of their friendship embarrasses both “men.” At one point, Max seizes Blake’s hand, urging him to tell him about a piece of music that has moved them, and the sexual frisson is evident: “His touch, his excitement fired Blake’s Celtic blood” (165).

The love that both men feel for each other is not named. It is a warm regard, a feeling in the chest, but never called what it is: desire. “To the casual observer it might have seemed a scene of ideal comradeship; yet in the minds of the comrades there lurked an uneasiness, an uncertainty not lightly to be placed – not easily to be clothed in words. A certain warmth was stirring in Blake’s heart, coupled with a certain wonder at his sudden discovery of the depth of the boy’s regard; while in the boy’s own soul a tumult of feelings ran riot” (165). Blake is frightened by his physical reaction to Max; there is a definite sexual attraction which he cannot bring himself to acknowledge.

In *Max*, Thurston is explicit in her interrogation of gender, something at the heart of New Woman fiction, which “consistently problematized, deconstructed, demystified, or rethought ‘womanliness’” (Pykett 57). Max’s true identity as a woman is exposed when her friend Jacqueline discovers her putting on a wig made from her own hair. Here, Thurston reveals one of the cornerstones of the novel. Max declares to Jacqueline: “We have all of us the two natures – the brother

and the sister! Not one of us is quite woman—not one of us is all man!” (198). Max is a perfect example of what Cixous will call *tous le deux*. Derrida cites Cixous’s eponymous essay on language and identity as one of the most singular works of French grammar. Cixous’s concept of alterity, of embracing the other in the same, perfectly describes Thurston’s *Max* Derrida explains, “‘tous les deux’ can always be heard as all the ‘twos,’ all the couples, the duals, the duos, the differences, all the dyads in the world” (Foreword vii).

The pivotal question raised in the novel is explained by the portrait that Max paints, his great work that he spends time apart from Blake to execute. It is “the portrait of a woman seated at a mirror—a portrait in which the delicate reflected face looked out from its shadowing hair with a curious questioning intentness, a fascinating challenge at once elusive and vital.” The “who am I,” raised in the picture, as in the novel, is concerned with gender—am I the masculine or feminine “I,” do I give prominence to one at the cost of the other? Max(ine) is a good example of Cixous’s bisexuality, an embodiment of “the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who:—a feminine one, a masculine one, some?” (*Newly Born* 42).

Just as Silvestra in *La giustizia* encloses herself from the outside world, determined to obliterate any trace of sexual longing, Maxine determines to repress her desire for Blake and to stifle what she sees as the ‘feminine’ within her: “One must possess one’s self! And to achieve this supreme good, one must close the senses and seal up the heart, and be as a creature already dead!” (287). The consequences mirror Silvestra’s frustration and inability to communicate: Maxine is unable to paint, unable to express herself, living as one dead. Maxine initially believes that one nature must triumph over the other. She believes she must crush her feminine side in order to be complete: “I wished to see the woman in me—and to dismiss her!” (200). She refuses, in Cixous’s model, to admit difference, holding rather to the hope that one nature might triumph over the other.

Maxine prepares to meet Blake as a woman, under the guise of being Max’s sister. But she believes that by giving her body, she would somehow be sacrificing the companionship and equality of her relationship with Blake as Max. She

believes it is only the animal female in Maxine that attracts Blake. So she decides to annihilate Maxine, in order to become fully Max, to embrace entirely her masculine side. She (and Blake) must be content with the parity of comradeship they enjoyed previously. Max refuses to tell Blake where his "sister" has gone, and Blake leaves him: "It was a new Maxine who wakened to the realization of facts; rather, it was a new Max... for it was the masculine, not the feminine ego that turned a set face to circumstance in the moment of desertion—that sedulously wrapped itself in the garment of pride spun and fashioned in happier hours" (286).

Jacqueline counsels Maxine: "Madame, can one truly give the soul and refuse the body? Is not the instinct of love to give all?" (278). But Maxine is terrified that this would mean the complete annihilation of her personality: "Yes, and I refuse to be entrapped! I know love—I know all the specious things that love can say; the talk of independence, the talk of equality! But I know the reality, too. The reality is the absolute annihilation of the woman—the absolute merging of her identity" (326).

Read in the light of Cixous, Maxine's is a masculine giving, one that is interested in return (*Newly Born* 43); Blake identifies this when he tells her, "'To you, love is barter and exchange; but love is not that. Love is nothing but a giving—an exhaustless giving of one's very best'" (*Max* 326). Blake's notion of love is in Cixous's sense, feminine: "She too with open hands, gives herself—pleasure, happiness, increased value, enhanced self-image. But she doesn't try to 'recover her expenses'" (*Newly Born* 44). "When one gives, what does one give oneself?" (43). If the story of *Max*, and her journey towards a generous giving of herself resonates with Cixous's notion of the gift, then it also finds parallels with Kristeva's reconciliation with the strangeness within. Cixous talks of an inexhaustible and generous giving: "a traveller in unexplored places; she does not refuse, she approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be" (43).

The moment of revelation arrives when Max is prepared to admit this difference, this bisexuality. In *Nôtre Dame*, she experiences epiphany: "'God! God, let me possess myself!' And as if some chord had snapped, relieving the tension in

his brain, he dropped upon his knees, as he had once done at the foot of his own staircase and, crouching against a pillar, wept like a lost child" (290/291). This acknowledgement of essential difference, her acceptance of both masculine and feminine and the possibility of "giving herself away" permits Maxine to "possess herself" as a creature of Cixous's bisexuality: "To give! To give without hope of recompense, without question, without fear! That was the message of life" (*Max* 291).

This loving of Max(ine)'s, typifies the acceptance of other, much like Kristeva's oscillation of semiotic/symbolic; as Derrida puts it, "One can not love separately and one can not love but separately, in the separation or the disparity of the pair. At an infinite distance, because *incommensurable*: I will never be at the same distance—from you, as you, as you from me. No common measure, no symmetry. Infinite separation in the couple itself and in the parity of the pair" (Derrida Foreword x).

Deledda's men are sexual ditherers and her women more predatory. Her heroines are all aware of their sexual allure, all conscious of their desire and all express themselves more candidly than their partners, who search for excuses, rationalise their behaviour and grope for direction in a fog of indecision. The primal urge lies at the heart of the apple, her inscription of desire a basic instinct rather than a noble passion. Deledda offers a window onto sexual desire from a female perspective, articulating an urge located first and foremost in the body, and in this she has an unlikely resonance with Cixous's later concept of writing the body.

Egerton's candour about sex, her fluid descriptions of sexual desire in her heroines exemplify the kind of perspective associated with Cixous's *écriture féminine*. Yet whilst her description of sexual desire is quite frank, the primitive savage of her stories is really rather polite. Whilst the gypsy in Egerton remains something buried within her civilized heroines, who struggle to reclaim this "natural" woman, the witch-woman in Deledda is all too real; her heroines struggle to subdue a primal nature under the guise of civility.

If Deledda and Egerton share a direct approach to sexual desire in their women, there is a subtle departure from a focus on sex in Thurston, whose

language is more concerned with love. In *Max*, Thurston presents a man who then turns out to be woman; this device allows her much more freedom for her character to express physical desire than any of Deledda or Egerton's women. However, she is reticent with such details, preferring instead to focus on the poetry of longing rather than the language of the body. Paradoxically, despite the apparent frankness of Thurston's approach to sexual attraction, she scuttles away from the bare bones of desire.

Heilmann suggests that Egerton's "celebration of the 'eternally feminine' principle replicated rather than challenged patriarchal thinking about women" (45). Yet within a seemingly constrictive notion of "woman" Egerton constantly refers to the "unknowableness" of woman. Egerton's women are ever enigmas, the *ewig weibliche* ("A Cross Line" 21), an insoluble riddle. Her depiction of "woman" is a paradox. By essentialising woman she is asserting a definitive category which limits her, and yet by including in this category her "unknowableness," woman "drifts and dodges all attempts to capture her" (Alcoff 378). Whilst Egerton insists on the cultural manipulation of woman's true nature, in some ways, she cripples her characters with this concept of the eternal feminine by inflicting on her heroines a more insidious code of virtue than that prescribed by society. And whilst on the one hand she dismantles cultural pre-conceptions of women, she posits generalisations about men in their stead.

Deledda does not offer such an arguably essentialist view of woman. And yet, her heroes are often not as intriguing as her heroines. Whilst the majority of her men display conventionally feminine characteristics, to the exclusion of traditionally masculine attributes, her heroines in contrast are all things, displaying vulnerability and aggression, motherly affection and cold blooded pragmatism, leading to the conclusion that Deledda's women are the key players on her stage.

Thurston's questioning of identity – including her interrogation of male and female roles, of the cultural preconceptions of masculine and feminine engage not only with Kristeva's idea of accepting alterity but also with Cixous's idea of a similar kind of acceptance as regards gender. Cixous does not ask "who am I?" but rather "who are I?" (Preface xvii) and in this, Thurston anticipates discussions

on subjectivity a hundred years after she poses them most succinctly in *Max*. Deledda is less conscious than Thurston in her articulation of what it means to be either feminine or masculine. Whilst Maxine argues intensely that gender is a matter of perception, Deledda in her depiction of masculine females and effeminate males perhaps illustrates the point with more subtlety. Ultimately, all three writers appear to agree with Blake's question at the end of *Max*, as he asks what it means to be feminine or masculine: "What is it, when all's said and done, but a point of view? And a point of view is adjusted much more quickly than you think" (*Max* 322/323).

5. Deledda and Thurston: a question of morality

Just like *Max*, Katherine Thurston's narratives are all about masks and self deception. What would happen if one were to change identity, gender, circumstances? She takes her characters out of their worlds, and places them in alien territory, whether from woman to man in *Max*, from rags to riches in *The Circle* (1903), from poor man to politician in *John Chilcote M.P.* (1904) or from good girl to addict in *The Gambler* (1906). Her mixing of worlds is more overt than Deledda's *comunanza*, but the principle is the same—her novels are a discovery of the self in the alien. These boundaries—social and sexual—are in a greater framework of moral trespass. Characters, just as in Deledda, seem compelled to act the way they do, persecuted by temptation and unable to restrain themselves due to a fatal weakness.

There are interesting connections in how the two writers engage with moral trespass. In Thurston there is a strong psychological element to her dramas of impersonation, such as *John Chilcote M.P.* (1904); within this novel there is a hint of both a religious schema of sin and redemption, and a more modern, cerebral analysis of lawbreaking; fatalism in Thurston is a mixture of the religious and the psychological. Likewise in Deledda, there is unmistakable biblical imagery in her texts alongside the recurring idea of Catholic expiation; she couples this with a psychological interrogation of her characters' motivations, narrating the interior dialogue. How to examine aspects of moral transgression in each writer?

Foster suggests that a discussion of Christian philosophy in the texts of nineteenth century writers was at the time—and might still be—taboo in itself, intellectual debate influenced by the enlightenment and more abstract approaches to literature shying away from something so orthodox (16). An analysis of both the religious metaphors in the narrative of these writers, combined with a psychoanalytic exploration of these same motifs, engaging once more with the

theory of alterity that has been a vein throughout this thesis, serve as devices to reveal the complexity of moral trespass in Deledda and Thurston.

There is a synchronicity of Christian philosophy and psychoanalytic theory in Deledda's conception of transgression. Narratives which scrutinize the *minutiae* of temptation, the crisis of conscience so typical of Deledda, have roots in Augustine philosophy. But there are also parallels with Kristeva's theories of the other, the abject and sacrifice, offering an interpretation of moral transgression in Deledda that belies twisted minds as well as souls.

Engaging with these interpretative models are two novels written decades apart, but which are siblings in concept: *Elias Portolu* (1900) and *La madre* (1920). Elias has a passion which he tries to resist: his desire for his brother's fiancée Maddalena. Her constant proximity and the devastating attraction between them bring Elias to the limits of what he can endure. His loyalty to his brother urges him to swear an oath that he will resist her, even if driven to the edge of desperation. However, temptation lures Elias into a madness of desire. The old sage, Zio Martinu, is the prophetic voice of doom in the novel, his words on temptation true for Elias as for every Deleddian hero: "La tentazione si vince oggi, si vince domani, ma posdomani finisce col vincere lei, perché noi non siamo di pietra" (74).¹²⁷ The cycle of temptation begins with Elias allowing his brother's marriage to go ahead, despite his and Maddalena's obvious attraction for each other. Ultimately, Elias's will to resist temptation is defeated: "Non poteva vincer la forza superiore di cui gli aveva parlato zio Martinu" (78).¹²⁸ Augustine refers to this crisis of the impotent will as the "groove that frustrates our efforts and mocks our idealism" (West 110), a cycle of temptation and the capitulation of the weak human will integral to Christian philosophy. This is the groove into which Elias falls, in an ever increasing cycle of sin and remorse.

Freud argues that the liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization, but rather that it is the limits imposed by civilisation that can make itself felt as a

¹²⁷ "You may resist temptation today, you may resist temptation tomorrow, but the day after temptation will triumph, because we are not made of stone."

¹²⁸ "He couldn't conquer the superior force of which Zio Martinu had spoken."

desire for freedom. Kristeva suggests that Freud—and psychoanalysis—makes freedom depend on an internalization of prohibition; this is what links it to the Christian tradition: “In so doing, Freud is faithful, whether he knows it or not, to the Stoic tradition and Christianity, which, from Epictetus to St. Augustine, discovered the *interiority* of mankind” (Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis* 06). *Elias Portolu* is equally concerned with instinct versus society. The limits society has imposed frustrate Elias’s natural drives, and lead him to curtail them.

Elias’s restrictions—the laws of society—abound even more when he continues with his decision to become a priest to try to escape temptation, and devote his life to God. Seeing Maddalena and his child is unbearable. He oscillates between temptation and capitulation, a struggle which leaves him exhausted: “la lotta spesso era straziante e lo lasciava mezzo morto d’angoscia” (141).¹²⁹

Kristeva draws attention to Freud’s discovery about freedom, that the natural spontaneous freedom of the drive, once harnessed by thought and language, is caught up intrapsychically in negotiations with the death instinct, and again makes a link to Christian philosophy: “This had already been glimpsed by St. Paul, who was the first to take up the dialectic of prohibition and desire, ‘Where the law abounds, there is an excess of sin’” (05).

In fact, it is when Elias is reading St Paul’s letter to the Romans that he finds he can no longer bear his predicament, and feels himself lost, weak and fallible in the face of such strict commandments. His own thoughts echo the biblical passage: “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:15-24).

Elias is caught in a trap; the more he tries to avoid temptation—firstly by distancing himself on the *tanca*, later by becoming a priest—the greater the intensity of his attraction for Maddalena: there is no escape. Whether it is the psychoanalytic theory of the restrictions of society imposing prohibition, or the

129 “the battle was often exhausting and left him half dead with anguish.”

Christian notion of the conflict between the will and temptation, Elias's evolution in the novel rests on crossing those very same restrictions and taboos.

Deledda's epigraph to the first edition of *Elias Portolu* in 1903 (it previously appeared in *Nuova Antologia* in installments in 1900) is from Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*: "Therefore true peace of heart is found in resisting passions, not by yielding to them" (29). In *Elias Portolu* this is only partly true; it is only first by yielding, and then by resisting that the hero suffers salvation: in Deledda sin is absolutely necessary in order for characters to gain self-awareness.

Moral transgression in *Elias Portolu* incorporates two phenomena: characters come into contact with the forbidden, with "other," and they face their own weaknesses – their own alterity – through this process. This echoes Kristeva's conception of the ethical as necessitating a relationship between subject and other (Oliver, *Ethics* 01). Elias's love, his "other," is Maddalena; she embodies the forbidden, the untouchable, and at times Elias shuns her in disgust. He oscillates between attraction and repulsion, and in this sense Maddalena represents Kristeva's abject. Elias construes Maddalena as the problem: "è lei la tentazione" (128).¹³⁰ On the contrary, the source of Elias's temptation lies not with her, but with himself. He must recognise Maddalena – his "other" – in himself. Maddalena embodies Elias's own desire, his own weaknesses; being brought into contact with her, forces him – eventually at least – to acknowledge this weakness: "Chi è il demonio? Il demonio siamo noi" (120).¹³¹ By coming into contact with Maddalena, Elias has approached the "horrific borderline" of the abject which is an integral part of his journey to accept himself.

Augustine declares that what or who we love defines who we are, and that the human condition is one in which the individual desires to be freed from isolation by belonging to something outside, "other;" he refers to this love as *appetites*, or craving desire: "Strictly speaking, he who does not love and desire at all is a nobody" (Arendt 18). Again there are parallels with psychoanalysis. Kristeva resonates with Augustine in her notion of love as embracing other, and of

¹³⁰ "it is she who is temptation."

¹³¹ "Who is the demon? The demon is ourselves."

the individual becoming altered because of it. She defines love as being capable of love for this other: As Lechte summarises, "it is to be able to allow this other to become (symbolically) part of one's own self, thereby changing an identity. Love means being open to change in this sense" (32).

This is what takes place in *Elias Portolu*. At first, Elias accepts Maddalena, allows the forbidden to enter and to become part of him. Although he alternatively rejects her in disgust, and welcomes her in passion, he ultimately recognizes in her what is in himself: human frailty: "Uomini siamo, Elias, uomini fragili come canne" (75).¹³² Elias is confronted with his own weakness, and in so doing he becomes self-aware, and starts down a road Deledda figures as salvation. He has been open to change, and in the end is utterly transformed.

When he is on the knife edge of temptation and capitulation Elias is a model of Kristeva's sadomasochistic love, which she argues leads to the destruction of the self and of the other. However, in his redemption he is a model of what she defines as sublimated love. Once more there are links to Christian ideology. Kristeva details sublimation as the notion of loving ones neighbour as oneself, of "transferring the same totally to the other," and suggests that this is impossible, except in the instances of maternal love, and the mystic (Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis* 05).

In this regard, Elias's suffering positions him as a saint. His passion for Maddalena has been transformed into a self-less, chaste love. After bringing himself and Maddalena to the brink of destruction in one sense, he does it in another once his brother dies, and Maddalena is at last free to marry him. Instead of seeing this as an answer to his prayers for salvation, he instead inflicts on himself the most awful martyrdom, denying himself not only his lover, but also his child. He is even prepared to watch while another man takes his rightful place as father, and nurses his now dying infant.

Elias has channeled his love, his desire, his frustrated instinct into his religion, into the duty and sacrifice of the church. He has, as in Kristeva's model, achieved a "total, enigmatic sublimation of perverse pleasures" (Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis* 05). Kristeva cites both forms of love, sadomasochism, and

¹³² "Men we are Elias, men fragile as reeds."

sublimation as leaving the place of the other blank. "What is left of our fellow creature, or even God himself, in this *jouissance* in which the same is transferred totally to the other? The saint, like the writer, is alone, in the absolute of *Hilflosigkeit* (helplessness), awaiting the help of no one, on the edge of melancholy or ...atheism. These are the dire straits of sublimation" (05). Elias suffers on the edge of melancholy, of inarticulacy and of disbelief for much of the novel, having transgressed that borderline. And yet, in the death of his and Maddalena's child, there appears to be a way out for Elias, if not for Maddalena. The child dies, Christ-like, in an emblem of sacrifice and redemption. An offering to God, this death redeems Elias, just as it utterly destroys Maddalena.

La madre (1920) is likewise a narrative that deals with the restrictions of society, the individual's desire for freedom, and the moral crisis this implies. There is also the characterization of the would-be saint and the sadomasochist. If truly loving one's neighbour as oneself is impossible for Kristeva, except for the mother and the saint, then *La madre* offers this kind of maternal love. In her depiction of the mother, Deledda takes this narrative towards a deeper examination of redemption.

Like his predecessor Elias, Paulo is a priest without a vocation. His mother, once a servant herself, has sacrificed all her life in order to send him to be trained. From the outset, it is clear that Paulo's life has been one of restriction; he has been in a moral prison throughout his youth. The limits of civilization that Freud talks of are in full effect as is Paulo's consequent desire for freedom. Instinct frustrated is a key motif of the novel. Paulo's altar boy, Antioco, has been free to make his own decisions about entering the church, and Paulo compares this to his own life: "Ed egli lo guardò quasi con invidia: e in fondo alla sua coscienza approvò quella madre che lasciava libero il figlio di abbandonarsi al suo istinto" (839).¹³³

Paulo's attraction to Agnese, a noble woman living a solitary life, is evidence of a frustrated sexual drive; he believes that his fierce attraction is due in part to a delayed adolescence: "la sua carne addormentata dalla lunga astinenza, o

133 "And he looked at him almost with envy: and at the bottom of his conscience he approved of this mother who let her son be free to abandon himself to his instinct."

meglio chiusa ancora in una specie di prolungata adolescenza, s'era d'un tratto svegliata e tendeva a quella perché era la più affine a lui, anche lei non più giovanissima eppure ancora ignara e priva d'amore, chiusa nella sua casa come in un convento" (811).¹³⁴ Paulo suffocates in his role as priest: "poiché non poteva abbandonarsi all'istinto soffriva" (816).¹³⁵

Agnese likewise has been imprisoned by the rules of society; as a woman of some wealth she cannot mix with men from the lower classes, neither is there any one from her own circle she can associate with. She is completely alone: "Ella era nata e cresciuta fra queste leggende, in un'atmosfera di grandezza che la separava dal piccolo popolo di Aar, pur lasciandola in mezzo ad esso, chiusa in esso come la perla entro la rozza conchiglia" (857).¹³⁶

That the two rebel from their ties is unsurprising. Deledda shows how the characters' actions are influenced just as much by the restrictions of civilization—the censorship of the community—as by religious constriction. Paulo admits to himself that the fear of scandal is more powerful than his fear of God: "Disse a se stesso che, più che il terrore e l'amore di Dio, e il desiderio d'elevazione e la repugnanza del peccato, lo atterriva la paura delle conseguenze d'uno scandalo" (808).¹³⁷

Agnese seems to be the only one who is not a hypocrite in this regard. She knows what she is doing is against the law of society, but sees it for what it is. After a passionate encounter the evening before, and having been discovered by his mother, Paulo goes to break things off with Agnese. Agnese's words ring true, for it is not the law of God that has frightened Paulo the most, but the fear of society: "Perché non parlavi così ieri sera? Perché la verità era allora un'altra. Adesso qualcuno ti ha scoperto, forse tua madre stessa, e tu hai paura del mondo.

134 "his flesh having slept from long abstinence, or rather closed still in a type of prolonged adolescence, was suddenly awoken and was drawn towards her because she resembled him most, she too not so young yet still ignorant and inexperienced in love, closed in her house as if in a convent."

135 "because he couldn't abandon himself to instinct, he suffered."

136 "She was born and raised amongst these legends, in an atmosphere of grandiosity which separated her from the small population of Aar, whilst leaving her in the middle, closed within it like the pearl in the coarse shell."

137 "He said to himself that more than the fear and love of God, and the desire for betterment and the repugnance of sin, what frightened him was the fear and consequences of a scandal."

Non è la paura di Dio che ti spinge a lasciarmi" (846).¹³⁸ It is Freud's restrictions of civilization more than God which preoccupies.

In Paulo's relationship with Agnese there is a parallel to Kristeva's theory of abjection. Like Elias, Paulo locates Agnese as the source of temptation: "Riconosceva però ch'era stata lei a guardarlo...E a poco a poco egli s'era lasciato prendere da quello sguardo" (807).¹³⁹ He is the innocent victim being lured into sin. From the outset Agnese is cast as the temptress, the woman who "lo prende nelle sue reti" (800).¹⁴⁰ Paulo sees in himself the helpless creature: "gli sembrava di essere una grande farfalla notturna attratta da un lume" (844).¹⁴¹ To this extent, Agnese is posited, like Maddalena, as the forbidden, the "other," the abject: Paulo hears the voice of Agnese: "Ed io sono dentro di te, sono il mal seme della tua vita" (851).¹⁴²

Paulo becomes aware of his agency in the relationship through his reaction to Agnese; in this there is a resonance with that oscillation between attraction and repulsion which characterises abjection: "Anche lui sentiva, ed era un senso di disgusto e di ebbrezza insieme, che dentro di lui in quel momento nasceva qualche cosa di terribile e grande: si accorgeva, per la prima volta con piena coscienza, che amava la donna di amore carnale e che si compiaceva di questo suo amore" (807).¹⁴³ In his cycle of temptation, resistance and capitulation there is the horrifying borderline which both excites and repels; Paulo lurches from being out of control to being rational: "Cessata la crisi, riprese a ragionare" (811).¹⁴⁴

An old hermit has a story with parallels to Paulo's own predicament. He used to lay traps for wild creatures, not for food but to profit from their skins. The

138 "Why didn't you talk like this last night? Because then the truth was something else. Now someone has found you out, perhaps even your own mother, and you are frightened of the world. It's not the fear of God that is forcing you to leave me."

139 "He realised however that it had been her to look at him...And little by little he had let himself be captivated by her glance."

140 "captures him in her nets."

141 "he felt as if he were a great moth attracted by a light."

142 "And I am inside you, the evil seed of your life."

143 "He too felt, and it was a feeling of disgust and delight at the same time, that within him in that moment something terrible and wonderful was being born: he realised, for the first time in full consciousness, that he loved the woman with carnal love, and he delighted in this love."

144 "the crisis over, he would be reasonable once more."

hare caught in the trap would gnaw its own foot off in order to escape, only to survive mutilated. Paulo sees the similarities in his love for Agnese. Like the hare, he is both trapped and paralysed. Having broken off the affair with Agnese, he is convinced he has done the right thing, and yet he cannot bear to think that she has ceased to love him: “Era questa la vera morte: ch’ella cessasse di amarlo” (835).¹⁴⁵ He knows that his love is deeply transgressive, but is paralysed with conflicting feelings of desire and renunciation. Like the hunter, desire persecutes him: “È il demonio che mi ha preso col suo laccio” (835).¹⁴⁶

Likewise he feels trapped when Agnese’s servant comes to tell him that her mistress is ill, and needs him. At first, he believes she speaks with the devil’s voice, and refuses to come. But neither can he open the door to his mother’s house and leave the servant outside. His paralysis is crippling: “egli stette davanti alla sua porta con la mano sulla chiave come se questa non girasse più. Non poteva, non poteva entrare; e avanzare dove prima era avviato non poteva. Per qualche attimo ebbe l’impressione di dover restare così per l’eternità, davanti ad una porta chiusa di cui pure aveva la chiave” (842).¹⁴⁷

Caught like the hare, Paulo has to cut off the offending part, destroy his illicit sexual longings if he is to survive—but not survive whole. Like *Elias Portolu*, it is no demon that has laid the trap, for the demon is Paulo himself. Again, this resonates with the biblical notion that it is better to cut out the sinful part of the body than to remain sinful, and also with Kristeva’s notion of sadomasochism.

Sacrifice in the novel is most readily associated with Paulo’s mother, Maria Maddalena. However, she is no one dimensional figure of maternal self-sacrifice; there are chinks in her altruistic armour. The previous priest to the village visits her in a dream. He puts his finger on Maddalena’s earthly ambitions: “Ma tu sei una donna ambiziosa: hai voluto ritornare padrona dove sei stata serva. Adesso ti

145 “This was the true death: that she had ceased to love him.”

146 “It is the demon who has me in his trap.”

147 “he stood in front of the door with his hand on the key as if it would never turn again. He simply could not enter; and to go where he had just been was also impossible. For some moments he had the impression of having to stay there for eternity, in front of a closed door to which he had the key.”

accorgerai del guadagno" (806).¹⁴⁸ There is a selfish element in her love for her son; she is proud that now she can hold her head up in the village where once she was on the lowest rung of society. And worldly desires creep in again when she thinks of what a marriage to the wealthy Agnese might mean for Paulo (819); she is pained on the lack of grandchildren and sympathetic towards the rigours of celibacy.

These forgivable frailties make the otherwise saintly Maria Maddalena human, for otherwise she is a Christ like figure. In the beginning she symbolizes Paulo's conscience, the voice of God: "Ed egli sentì ancora una volta ch'ella era come la sua coscienza che parlava... (843).¹⁴⁹ At the climax of the novel she plays her biggest role, when Agnese threatens to expose her son and tell the whole church about their affair during mass.

At times, Paulo sees Agnese like the mother of Christ: "...era lì, ai piedi della donna e del dolore di lei come Gesù depresso sul grembo della Madre" (849).¹⁵⁰ And like Christ, Paulo is ready to offer himself up as a sacrifice, to save Agnese and himself. On the morning of the mass, Paulo prepares for the moment of disaster, "pensando che Agnese lo accompagnava al suo calvario come Maria Gesù: che sarebbe fra pochi istanti salita sull'altare, che si sarebbero incontrati ancora una volta, in cima al loro errore, per espiare assieme come avevano peccato assieme."¹⁵¹ He sees in this punishment an act of love, since it carries with it redemption: "Come poteva odiarla se ella portava con sé il suo castigo, se l'odio di lei era ancora amore?" (856).¹⁵² He feels in his body the physical effects of the sacrifice he is about to make.

The Christian metaphor here needs little elaboration; Paulo feels he has sinned and must suffer his own public crucifixion, in order to free himself and free Agnese. However, there is a further echo in psychoanalytic theory. Kristeva

148 "But you are an ambitious woman: you wanted to return mistress where once you were servant."

149 "And he felt again that she was like his conscience that was speaking."

150 "he was there, at the feet of the woman and of her pain like Christ at the foot of his Mother."

151 "thinking that Agnese was accompanying him on his Calvary like Maria: that in a few instants she would be at the altar, that they would encounter each other once more, at the summit of their sin, to expiate together as they had sinned together."

152 "How could he hate her if she carried with her his punishment, if her hatred was still love?"

suggests that this concept of redemption is linked to the freedom of desire, that “the subject (as Freud reveals) is free to die of it, to offer up his own flesh for the ideal of his father: the glory and the hell of redemption, through which Judeo-Christian monotheism acknowledges in a paroxysmal but nonetheless authentic manner, a universal structure of human desire” (06). Paulo has transgressed, he has broken the laws of society, is now outside the community – has acted on his instincts and is ready to offer up his own flesh. He prays, stricken with the pain and terror of his imminent destruction: “ ‘Dio mio, sia fatta la tua volontà’ gemette inginocchiandosi; e gli parve di essere davvero nell’Orto degli Ulivi, sotto l’imminenza del destino inevitabile” (857).¹⁵³ However, Paulo is not to be the lamb to the slaughter but his mother. Throughout the mass she has been ready: “Immobile e dura, ferma sulle sue ginocchia, pareva vigilasse l’ingresso della chiesa e la chiesa tutta, pronta a sostenerne anche il crollo, se fosse avvenuto” (854).¹⁵⁴ Maddalena takes her son’s place. Just as Agnese approaches the altar, and Paulo feels that the moment is at hand, his mother collapses. “Egli intese subito ch’ella era morta della stessa pena, dello stesso terrore che egli aveva potuto superare” (858).¹⁵⁵ She sacrifices herself for Paulo’s sins: she is Christ, the innocent in place of the guilty.

Christ, Kristeva suggests, is the absolute, imaginary subject. Maddalena frees Paulo from his illicit desire by representing the unrepresentable – death. Following Kristeva’s theory of sacrifice, Maddalena allows Paulo to identify with death, and thus he is able to constitute himself as a subject – become whole: “We need to put hell into the symbolic, to describe it, name all its aspects, experience it in imagination, and so constitute ourselves as subjects, with an identity. We will become...somebody – and this, through transcending nothingness: the void, the unrepresentable” (Lechte 37). Sacrifice, according to Kristeva, re-iterates the thetic moment: “The sacred – sacrifice – which is found in every society is then, a

153 “‘Dear God, your will be done’ he sobbed kneeling; and he felt as if he were really in the Garden of Olives, under the immensity of inevitable destiny.”

154 “Immobile and rigid, firm on her knees, she seemed as if she was guarding the entrance to the church and the church itself, ready to sustain even its collapse, if it were to happen.”

155 “He knew immediately that she had died of the same pain, of the same terror that he had been able to overcome.”

theologization of the thetic, itself structurally indispensable to the positing of language (Kristeva *Revolution* 79).

The *Fly on the Wheel* (1908) is the last book to be published before Thurston's rather mysterious death. Its theme of forbidden love and the conclusion of the novel have some parallels to the author's life. On April 10 1910 *The New York Times* published details of Thurston's divorce, and later in the year it published an announcement of her intended marriage to Dr Alfred Buckley Gavin, along with details of the difficulty in the marriage "owing to the fact that Mrs Thurston was a Catholic" (September 11 1911). As Janet Madden-Simpson notes in her Afterword to the 1986 edition of the novel, Thurston was found dead in a Cork hotel room the same month as she was due to remarry. Some speculated it was suicide, but it was later thought to have been an epileptic seizure (329). The novel ends with Isabel's suicide, frustrated by the hypocritical demands of a puritanical Irish middle-class society.

The title of *The Fly on the Wheel* (1908) is derived from Aesop's fable which gives the lie to the powerlessness of its characters in the grip of fate. In the fable a fly sits on the axel of a chariot wheel; he feels the chariot isn't going fast enough, so speaks to the mule, urging him to go faster lest he bite him. The mule says that he fears one greater than the fly, one who is driving the chariot, and who keeps him back with the reins or hurries him on with the whip (233).

The impotence of human action against what seems like the unstoppable force of destiny mirrors the helplessness of Deledda's characters (one thinks of the spiralling events in *L'incendio nell'oliveto*): "There are periods in the life of every man when... events loom up like a fleet of ships that, rudderless and with tattered sails, plough headlong to destruction before the hurricane of fate" (*The Fly on the Wheel* 290). And yet, like Deledda it is not really a blind fatalism that drives Thurston's narrative, but rather the weaknesses inherent in the individual—a capitulation to temptation under the right (or rather wrong) circumstances, leading to inevitable disaster. This surrender to sin in Thurston has similar consequences; like in Deledda, the punishment fits the crime. In *John Chilcote*, the morphia addict's punishment is to have more of what he craves—he has a

nightmarish vision of what hell might be: "It was a great ironic scheme of punishment by which every man was chained to his own vice" (266/267). Being careful what you wish for is essential in Thurston, who like Deledda shows that sometimes gratification of (an illicit) desire is punishment enough in itself

Like Deledda, weakness, surrender to temptation and punishment are all closely linked. In *The Gambler* (1906), Clodagh Ashhlin inherits her father's gambling bug. Just as in Deledda the sins of the father are passed down, showing a similar influence of eugenics since Thurston's characters display an innate predisposition to certain tendencies. Clodagh's habit eventually leads to her to spend her sister's inheritance, gets her into debt and leads almost to a sexual contract in order to borrow money. She, like other Thurston characters, eventually faces her true self in a moment of revelation. Going through her father's papers, she experiences a crucial realisation: "Sharply and cruelly, the glamour cast by death receded from her memory. She was Asshlin as she had seen him in life—selfish, obstinate, and yet weak. And, quick as the vision came, another followed. The vision of herself—of her own attitude towards her existence and her responsibilities" (285). Clodagh must face what she has become—a liar and a thief. She is brought literally (and metaphorically) to the brink of annihilation; she stands on the cliff edge, ready to throw herself in. She is brought to the precipice and can now observe herself candidly; this is the first step of her redemption—to recognise her own reflection.

All of Thurston's novels operate in the same way; characters cross moral boundaries, either of society or of their own making, to come to an awareness of themselves, and it is through a weakness—a fatal flaw—that this is accomplished. Often this weakness is ambition (one is reminded of Pietro's ambition, or Maria's greed in *La via del male*) as in *The Mystics* (1907). Here, John Henderson's desire to provide for his mother, to win back his rightful inheritance, motivates him to fool not only the cult of which he pretends to be the Prophet, but also the young member with whom he has fallen in love. His weakness is the guarantor of his action: "The germ of ambition fell into his soul like a seed of fire, and like a seed of fire sprang into flame" (186). It is only once his mask falls and he can stand

ashamed of his own pretence in front of his lover that he is both accepted by her — and by himself.

Likewise in *The Circle* (1903), the heroine's ambition for artistic success leads to impersonation and neglect of her family. From a modest background with an immigrant Russian father, she is tempted to leave by the forceful Jeanne Maxtead, who sees in her a kind of divine talent—showing again the solitary and difficult life for a female artist. Jeanne insists that Anna renounce her father and former identity if she is to undergo training in Paris and follow her dream of becoming a famous actress. Anna's loyalty to her roots and her father wanes as the lure of fame panders to her weakness, tempting her to reject who she was, and to embrace her pseudo identity. Initially writing unposted letters home every day, by the third year she is writing none: "Where were my resolutions and my promises to myself? With my ambition on fire and my conceit running riot, I went to my own room, locked the door, and burnt the letters one by one" (143).

The Fly on the Wheel is an essay on the restrictions of Irish Catholic middle-class life to which Thurston refers in the opening pages: "It is not an exalted class: it is a class held together by material ambitions and common ideals; but it is a section of society strong in its own narrow purpose — an outpost in the great progress" (04). The most striking thing about the novel is this narrowness, the airlessness of the action. In this regard it has much in common with the honeyed paralysis of Kate O'Brien's novels, in whose work the influence of Thurston can be felt; *The Fly on the Wheel* has many parallels to O'Brien's *The Last of Summer* (1943) and *The Ante Room* (1934) in particular.

Married Stephen Carey and exotic Isabel Costello are in love in conventional bourgeois Ireland in the late nineteenth century. The deadliness of their attraction, and the helplessness of the individual both against their own passions, and against the machinery of society have strong parallels with Deledda's *Elias Portolu* and *La madre*. Likewise, it is both a moral story of sin and redemption and resonates with psychoanalytic theory on law breaking.

It is unsurprising that there might be similarities in stories which essentially document extra-marital affairs; adulterous passion is hardly anything original. But

there are more than just passing resemblances. Take the figure of the priest in Thurston—a reflection of the arcane prophet in *Elias Portolu*—whose advice throughout is to warn Stephen—and Isabel—of what their sin will lead to in the end. His words on temptation mimic Zio Martinu's: "But that's not life, Stephen! That's not life! It's neither life nor love—but just the temptation of the flesh" (283). Like Deledda, it is a novel of more than simply illicit love. If Deledda's characters fear the condemnation of the community more than they fear God, Thurston shows her characters likewise bound and gagged by the restrictions of Irish middle-class life. Equally, Freud's model of the limits imposed by civilisation, experienced as a desire for freedom, speaks to this narrative. Thurston points to the restrictions of the community: "Life carried on under the microscope has a curiously restraining effect upon the units that compose it... This knowledge that other eyes are forever peering into his holy of holies is a factor to be reckoned with in the life of the Irish townsman; and it may be a question for the sceptic whether his indisputable moral integrity would flourish as notably elsewhere as it does in its present restricted atmosphere" (22).

This censorship of the community has everything in common with Deledda's Sardinia, and Freud's notion of the freedom of the individual frustrated by society. Like Paulu or Elias, Stephen Carey and Isabel Costello are condemned to curtail their natural desires and personalities in order to live in the society they find themselves. Stephen, although he once had ambition and a thirst for the pleasures of life, has had to bend his nature to fit in with the rules of the community. Freud recognises this "as a necessary compromise in the name of survival" (Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis* 02); Stephen says as much to Isabel: "I went under when the time came. I went under like the rest. There's a big machine called expediency, and we are its slaves. We oil it and polish it and keep it running, every man and woman of us; and if by any chance one of us puts his hands behind his back and says he won't feed the monster any more, what happens? Does the machine stop? Not at all! It's the deserter who goes under; the machine roars on louder than before. It's only by pandering to it that we live; and the man who has oiled his own particular wheel is in duty bound to see that those dependent on him learn to oil theirs" (82).

Stephen and Isabel are restricted in different ways; Stephen is confined to a life of duty and monotony, to a loveless but solid marriage, a joyless but secure job. He comments on his existence: "A man isn't a man in a place like this! What sort of a life is it? Stagnation. The same round, the same faces, the same work, autumn, winter and spring, and in the summer..." (182). Isabel's situation is the more pitiable. The restrictions imposed on a young woman in her position are unforgiving. Since Isabel has no money, the future is one where she can live on her looks for a limited period of time, until younger women come onto the stage to replace her; she then has the choice of either remaining an old maid, entering a convent, or subduing her pride to support herself, none of which appeal to a young woman of Isabel's temperament. Thurston puts it clearly: "Such women either marry or they do not marry; and in that simple statement is comprised the tragedy of existence" (224).

Against this background of confinement and censorship, the desire for freedom, the urge to act on their impulses against these rules sets the scene for a drama of temptation and transgression. Stephen Carey wants to break the rules that force him into a life of monotony; Isabel wants to flaunt the convention that says she must marry for interest. An affair between the two is inevitable and disastrous.

If this type of transgression—a desire for freedom to act outside the moral restraints of society—is a result of the limits of civilisation, in Thurston just as in Deledda, it has everything to do with the flaws of the individual. This also has a resonance in Freud, who argues that as well as being a rebellion against the limits imposed by society it "may also spring from the remains of (the subject's) original personality, which is still untamed by civilization and may thus become the basis in them of hostility to civilization. The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization or against civilization altogether" (Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis* 02).

Stephen Carey's dissatisfaction and repressed desires find an object in Isabel, whose amorality and unconventionality mark her as one of the most transgressive of Thurston's heroines—and show her as a New Woman despite the setting and plot. Isabel is outside the limits imposed by society, as she neither

subscribes wholeheartedly to religion—"her moments of devotion were usually inspired from without rather than from within" (64/65)—and neither does she feel much remorse about her affair with Stephen. Isabel asks her aunt what exactly a conscience is. Her aunt is appalled. Isabel continues, "'I remember the nuns in Dublin used to talk about people having 'qualms of conscience,' but I never really understood what it meant. Am I very queer?'" (149).

By breaking the laws of society, crossing the taboos of the community, both Stephen and Isabel cross the borderline of abjection; Kristeva makes the link between the relationship of the subject and other, to love. At the moment of their tryst in the garden, Stephen and Isabel have strayed over the line. Their love is quite literally for each "other," and like Elias in his paroxysm of temptation and resistance is an example of sadomasochism.

It is "other" that has attracted each in the first place. Isabel in particular appears the most foreign, since she is an outsider to the village and an outsider in her beliefs. Stephen's sister in law comments to the priest: "I can't explain to you. She is different from the rest of us" (191). It is this alterity that first attracts Stephen. "The word 'foreign' attracted Carey, who had been absently trying to single out his wife's red dress in the crowded room. It touched him to interest, and instinctively he turned to find the object of the description" (38). The parallels between Isabel and O'Brien's heroine in *The Last of Summer* are striking. Here too a foreigner steps in amid the strict conventions of Irish middle-class life—Angèle—an assured young woman wearing lipstick and speaking with an accent. Angèle and her first cousin Tom are in love, but the obstacle to their happiness is Tom's mother Hannah; as in Thurston, older women represent the old Ireland. Angèle's foreignness is attractive to her Irish Kernahan cousins; she has been brought up in Paris by an Irish father and a mother in the Comédie Français. She stands in contrast to the censorious Ireland of the time, representing European thought, independence, and sexual liberation. The family doctor describes Angèle as embodying sex appeal, "the very twentieth-century *essence* of it" (149).

Isabel is similarly estranged from her community, a worry for the matrons of the town since she is an entirely unsuitable match---penniless, *fast* as an Egerton

hero might say. She is totally conscious of her position as outsider, saddened and angered by the materialism she sees around her. She embarrasses one mother by putting her mind to rest about her possible intentions to marry her son, letting her know quite bluntly that she realises she is poor, and therefore out of the running. The woman leaves, and Isabel has a moment to feel the vulnerability of her position: "...long after the door had closed, Isabel stood where she had left her in the centre of the room, oddly conscious that something had chilled the warmth of the day – that, looking truly into the heart of things, she stood alone in this circle of the prosperous and worldly-wise" (222).

In the central scene in the midnight garden, just as in *Elias Portolu*, both lovers arrive at the point where they are prepared to destroy the other and themselves; they have lost anchor:

On any night the adventure would have been breathless; but to-night the elements conspired with fate in the making of an effect. As they passed into the wide roadway, the whole panorama of the sky opened before them, – the great ragged space of the heavens rent by the moon's knife; the clouds, massed in grey banks to the likeness of towers, ramparts, castles; the moon herself, alternately revealed and hidden, as the rolling veil of mist was blown over her pale face. It was a wonderful sky picture, pregnant with mystery, suggestion, peril; but Isabel, looking up from her own wild thoughts, found no fear, no menace, in its wide, wind-swept surface...Death would have come to either of them then without a tremor; for in every life there is at least one such hour as this – when physical danger and moral danger are alike meaningless, when the soul lifts to the immensity of conscious power, defying fate" (258/259).

First it is Stephen who is prepared to risk ruin for them both, if Isabel is also prepared to make the sacrifice: "Then, by God, I'd go down to hell for you!" (262). However, both Stephen and Isabel realise that there is in reality no way out; they recognise the limits of society and the impossibility of crossing them – and surviving. Thus, Stephen's choice is to return to his life as a dutiful husband, whereas Isabel chooses freedom; the only way she can do this is to free herself from the limits of society forever, through death: "There was no room in Isabel's mind for the thought of conventionality. Once and forever she had stepped

beyond its pale. She was living now as her feelings prompted—undisciplined, primitive, careless of all comment” (304).

Isabel’s suicide at the end of the novel might be seen as a clever literary sacrifice: she can’t go on living a scandalous life, so she must meet a fitting end. Foster makes the point that a woman can have a degree of independence and break convention if framed by some tragedy or sacrifice: “tragic accident may validate the forbidden or unfulfilled love but it is also a resolution by which the novelist can evade the implications of true love successfully pursued amidst social disapproval” (Foster 266). It is open to interpretation whether Thurston lets her heroine off with this kind of resolution, or rather shows Isabel as thumbing her nose one last time at the prudery and materialism that surrounds her.

However, there is another possible interpretation. At first, Isabel plans to murder Stephen by putting poison in his wine glass and then murderous intent changes to a seeming sacrifice. But this last act might alternatively be read as a metaphorical process of abjection—as a crossing of that border Kristeva says exists for every speaking subject. Recalling Gavina’s epiphany in *Sino al confine*, Isabel approaches the horrifying border that separates her from death—and crosses over; in a mirror image of Gavina she embraces oblivion in precisely the same way as Gavina chooses life—death for Isabel meaning peaceful resolution and an end to psychological conflict. In Isabel’s last thoughts as she drinks the deadly draught, there is something of the triumphant, of this last symbolic act of transgression: “The glass rattled against her teeth; the touch of the ice chilled her lips; but, looking down into the wine, her eyes caught the warmth, the redness, the glory of the sun” (327).

On 10 April 1910, *The New York Times* published details of Thurston’s divorce from Ernest Charles Thurston, in which it cites her husband as wanting to “go down to the depths of society” for the sake of his writing, declaring that his wife had a “dominating personality” and that he needed to lead his own life. Art mirrors life to a certain extent in Thurston’s most famous publication at the time, *John Chilcote M.P.* (1904). This is a story not just of a crossing of moral boundaries, but of the very borderlines of identity. There is something deliciously dark about this novel.

Its atmosphere has a tang of the science fiction of H.G Wells; its subject matter is reminiscent of Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). There is a hint of the supernatural in the gothic backdrop of a fog laden London upon which the novel opens, in which two men quite literally bump into each other—and discover to their amazement that they look absolutely identical.

This thrilling and fantastical premise offers all sorts of possibilities, and leads the men on a journey of suspense in which they agree to swap lives with one another. There is nothing particularly new in the idea of a doppelganger. The concept is found in seminal texts as varied as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) or Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846). What is interesting for this comparison is how in her treatment of the idea of another self, indeed in her questioning of what constitutes the self, Thurston like Deledda, has much in common with Kristeva's concept of alterity, and its importance in the formation of the subject.

John Chilcote M.P. speaks to Deledda's novels of temptation and sin, most particularly in its detailing of human weakness. In Deledda, a character's flaw leads them into temptation and ultimately down a road of destruction. Elias's lust proves too strong to resist, likewise Paulu's desire: both end in suffering, sacrifice and death. Likewise in Thurston, there is always a fatal flaw which leaves characters vulnerable to temptation. As Loder puts it: "I know men—and men's temptations. We are all strong till the quick is touched; then we all wince. It's morphia with one man, ambitions with another. In each case it's only a matter of sooner or later" (60). This "sooner or later" gives Thurston's novels an atmosphere of inevitability comparable to Deledda, a character's destiny founded likewise on their fallibility.

The two men may look the same, but their natures are entirely different. John Chilcote is a hopeless morphia addict; his political life, which holds many opportunities for his own advancement and that of his party, is imperilled by his bouts of lethargy and paranoia, and his relationship with his wife Eve has been deteriorating for many years. By contrast, his doppelganger John Loder is a man of principle and talent, fallen on hard times through family circumstances, living in the most humble of lodgings in London's shabbier streets.

Yet in one aspect the men are the same; they both are prey to addiction: Chilcote to morphia, and Loder to ambition. Loder has long harboured political ambitions and feels frustrated in the limited orbit of his world. His comment to Chilcote is revealing: "No man has the right to squander what another man would give his soul for" (09). One man's meat, in this instance, is really the other's poison. Chilcote longs for the anonymity and seclusion of Loder's life; Loder thirsts after the influence and power of Chilcote's situation. Each man's own existence is anathema to him. The question is, will each man forfeit his own soul to obtain what he craves?

Like Elias and Paulu, both of Thurston's characters in this novel locate temptation in the "other," and likewise need to come to an acceptance of this otherness in themselves if they are to gain peace—or sanity. It is possible to read this novel not only as a portrait of two men who swap circumstances, but as a metaphor of one man attempting to battle with weaknesses that threaten to overpower him, and to ascertain a degree of self-control.

The addict Chilcote embodies Kristeva's abject; he is the forbidden, the taboo, the disgraceful. In every sense he is the Mr Hyde to Loder's Doctor Jekyll, only it is in pathetic addiction rather than depravity that he is manifest: "In each the other saw himself—and something more" (65). The possibilities of becoming this "something more" are open to each character, as they contemplate absorbing the life of the other, ostensibly, if not in fact, becoming the other. But here lies the irony; the more Loder becomes Chilcote, the less of Chilcote there actually is; he is not becoming Chilcote, but rather is attempting to annihilate him.

Paradoxically, once Loder has inhabited the persona of the other man, once he has become Chilcote, he wishes to obliterate him. He experiences "the overwhelming, insistent desire to manifest his power. That desire that is the salvation or the ruin of every strong man who has once realised his strength. Supremacy was the note to which his ambition reached. To trample out Chilcote's footmarks with his own had been his tacit instinct from the first; now it rose paramount. It was the whole theory of creation—the survival of the fittest—the deep, egotistical certainty that he was the better man" (255).

Just like Elias's reaction to Maddalena, or Paulu's to Agnese, in Loder's reaction to Chilcote there is a parallel to Kristeva's abjection. First there is wholesale rejection and repulsion. Loder has not embraced Chilcote, or tried to understand his addiction to morphia; instead, he has recoiled, disgusted at the other man's vice, unable to recognise that he too is equally fallible. Loder remarks to Eve: "My first feeling when I saw your husband was one of self-righteous contempt; and that has been my attitude all along. I have often marvelled at the flood of intolerance that has rushed over me at the sight of him – the violent desire that has possessed me to look away from his weakness and banish the knowledge of it" (342). This bears resemblance to that horrifying and disruptive borderline of abjection.

Its American title, *The Masquerader*, gives the lie to what truly interests Thurston in this novel: deception. In Chilcote/Loder's dualism, there is something of the narcissistic personality disorder. The face which Chilcote wants to present to the world is the face of Loder; he wishes to hide what he perceives to be his own less worthy personality. He believes that people will love this projection of himself, and invests all his strength and strategy in feeding this image. As the image grows, the "real" Chilcote diminishes: "In Chilcote's actual semblance he had proved his superiority over Chilcote. For the first time he had been given a tacit, personal acknowledgment of his power" (170).

Self-deception is what characterises Chilcote/Loder's predicament, and what gives the story particular resonance with Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Stevenson believed his story to be at heart a tale of the malignant malaise of hypocrisy afflicting Victorian society. Dr Jekyll's outward good works and sobriety mask his baser desires and instincts. "A public image of sanctity becomes an alibi to the self *from* the self, a shield under which fault can breed and fester undetected" (Linehan 207). Chilcote and Loder operate in much the same way; Loder masks his hedonism and dependency by his outward displays of political acumen, whilst his pathetic alter ego can carry out his selfish rites undetected. But this wholesale rejection, or repression of this part of himself does not do well for Chilcote/Loder.

The man of ambition triumphs whilst the addict sleeps; the addict grows weaker and weaker whilst the other reaches ever new heights of success. In a Dorian Gray scenario, the more John Loder grows in esteem in the eyes of Chilcote's wife, friends and colleagues, the more Chilcote sinks deeper into the mire of dependency and illness. Just as in *Elias Portolu*, the demon rests with the self.

Both characters wrestle with their personal demons. Whilst Chilcote struggles to hide his increasingly obvious addiction from his colleagues, Loder, during the times he returns to his old lodging, battles with frustrated ambition, all the keener for having been fuelled by his spell as Chilcote. Alongside this ambition is his growing desire for Chilcote's wife, Eve; gradually he becomes enslaved to both these vices.

Like *Elias Portolu*, Loder is convinced that by confronting his temptation he will be able to overcome it: "But had the ignoring of it blotted out the weakness? Had it not rather thrown it into bolder relief? A man strong in his own strength does not turn his back upon temptation; he faces and quells it...he would no longer avoid Eve; he would successfully prove to himself that one interest and one alone filled his mind—the pursuance of Chilcote's political career. So does man satisfactorily convince himself against himself" (226). Loder not only fools others, but also more importantly does not know himself.

In Loder's treatment of Chilcote there is something of the sadomasochistic. He loves Eve to the point of destruction of himself, and of his neighbour—which in this novel are really one and the same thing. Thus, in a pivotal scene, Loder gives a desperate Chilcote an enormous dose of morphia—possibly a fatal one—that the now pathetic figure asks for; here the stronger man indulges the weaker, but at the same time indulges his own fantasies of power. Loder gives him the tablets whilst knowing what may be the effect, blinded by his own ambition, despite his misgivings that it "might be reprehensible, it might even be criminal to accede to such a request, made by a man in such a condition of body and mind" (271). At this point, Loder has thoroughly rejected the "other" that is Chilcote, absolutely denied and refused him a presence within his life; he has reached the point of utter rejection.

Loder is intoxicated by the triumph of his ambition, which has obliterated Chilcote's personality with his own: "The great song of Self was sounding in his ears as he drove through the crowded streets... It was this acknowledgment of personality that upheld him...The indomitable force that had trampled out Chilcote's footmarks in public life, in private life—in love. It was a triumphant paeon that clamoured in his ears, something persistent and prophetic with an undernote of menace. The cry of the human soul that has dared to stand alone" (320).

It is possible to perceive how one vice appears to triumph over another, how the ambition and egoism of Loder wins out against the frail selfishness of Chilcote; yet one is really a mirror of the other. Loder is trying to stifle the voice of his weaker, dependent half in the debilitated person of Chilcote, and yet his stronger half is equally, if not so despicably dependent on the satiating of his hungry ambition.

But Thurston does not leave the story with this rejection of difference; like Deledda, she ends rather on a note of acceptance—and sacrifice. Loder goes to see a play in which two men swap identities, and the wife ends up in the divorce court; recognising the threat he has posed to Eve, Loder can now see how blind he has been—and how selfish: "The longer and deeper an oblivion the more painful the awakening" (331). Loder recognises that his rejection of Chilcote is tantamount to self-deception: "I understand what the feeling meant. The knowledge came to me tonight. It meant that I turned away from his weakness because deep within myself something stirred in recognition of it. Humanity is really much simpler than we like to think, and human impulses have an extraordinary fundamental connection. Weakness is egoism—but so is strength. It will take a higher judgment than yours or mine to say which of us has been the more selfish man" (342). Loder's awakening is swift and brutal: "I have seen into my own life, into my own mind; and my ideas have been very roughly shaken into place. We never make such a colossal mistake as when we imagine we know ourselves!" (342). By genuinely recognising himself in the "other," Loder discovers who he is. By losing

himself he finds himself. Once he accepts this, he and Eve make the symbolic discovery of Chilcote's corpse.

Chicote is dead. And yet, although Loder has perhaps had a hand in his demise, he has resurrected him in himself; he has incorporated Chilcote into his subjectivity simply by identifying with him; he has finally accepted, forgiven and pitied Chilcote, and is prepared to give up Eve in a sacrifice he feels is necessary both for her and for himself. Through this acceptance, Loder has silenced the addict; by his response the real, or figurative other half lies at rest, no longer a threat to stability or happiness; he has recognised, and accepted other as part of his whole personality. Like so many of Deledda's conclusions there is an offering, a sacrifice necessary for another's resurrection.

Deledda and Thurston initially present moral trespass from slightly different perspectives. The biblical overtones of Deledda, the religious schema of sin and retribution seem diverse from Thurston's more psychological focus on law breaking. A comparison between the two shows how these aspects of transgression in the text are closely related, revealing the psychological complexity in Deledda and the religious connotations in Thurston.

Both examine the hypocritical society in which they live, and explore the causes and effects of sin that can be interpreted from both a Christian and a psychoanalytic perspective. In both Deledda and Thurston the limits of society show the frustrated instinct of the individual. In Deledda this has strong links to the Christian doctrine of the law and sin, and the analogy of Saint Paul's excess of restriction, whereas in Thurston there is a greater emphasis on the psychological ramifications, of the prohibition of the community.

Both writers figure a model of sublimation in their dramas of temptation and capitulation. In Deledda this takes the form of sublimating the self in religious devotion, as in the experience of the mystic or saint, found in *Elias Portolu* and *La madre*. In Thurston, it finds its outlet in a sublimating of the self in another, in an "other" identity, as in *John Chilcote MP*. Likewise, the notion of sacrifice is important to both authors, but expressed differently. In Deledda, this has links to Christian doctrine; an innocent subject is sacrificed in order to give others back a

sense of self. The sacrifice of the mother in *La madre*, or the innocent child in *Elias Portolu* represents the unrepresentable and is, as Kristeva puts it "theologizing thethetic." In Thurston, sacrifice is a falling into the abyss of the abject, such as Isabel's suicide in *The Fly on the Wheel*. Both ultimately are fascinated by what makes people cross the line, why temptation so often leads to destruction in what Egerton calls the "appallingly interesting hospital of creation" (*The Wheel of God* 275).

Conclusion: connections and possibilities

"Sometimes we live the wars between nations as personal events. Sometimes a private drama appears like a war or natural catastrophe. Sometimes the two wars, the personal and the national, coincide. Sometimes there is peace on one side (in one's heart) and war on the other. I and the world are never separate. The one is the double or the metaphor of the other."

(Cixous Preface xv)

A comparison between Deledda and Irish women writers has revealed not only a resonance with the themes of nation and transgression that overlap culturally, i.e. the move towards independence, cultural nationalism, and the women's movement, but also a similar subversive way of dealing with related subjects in the text: the duality of identity, both national and personal, and the autonomy of women. This analysis has not only proved a connection between Deledda and Irish women writers, but has also illuminated the connection between ideas of nation and transgression within these writers.

In Deledda, transgression and nation are linked both in literary history and in anthropology, the very idea of nation springing from moral imperatives. Nicola Tanda points to a deeply rooted sense of justice, springing from an ancient belief in a supreme being, *Sardus Pater*. This sense of justice is so deeply embedded in the Sardinian populace, he suggests, that a similar notion of nation is understandable (44). In Deledda, whether in the ethical-religious drama of her protagonists, connected to this sense of justice, or in her rebellious new women who threaten to overturn Sardinia and its ancient traditions, nation and transgression are often inseparable. What might her female Sardinian contemporaries have to say on this subject – or on any subject for that matter? This must be the most fertile ground for further research, whether in the framework of comparative literature, or in a more singular study.

A comparison between Deledda and her Irish contemporaries has allowed for a much deeper understanding of nation in their texts than a superficial

preoccupation with land, legend and language. Deledda both engages with nineteenth century stereotypes of nationality, and manipulates them, showing an understanding of nation more complex than initially suspected. The eternal polarisation of Sardinia and Rome, and a recurring motif of exile allow for a metaphor of an emerging speaking subject, an identity that is indebted to both cultures, neither one nor the other. The model of acceptance and rejection that has been detected in several of her novels shows an understanding of identity, both national and individual, that speaks to much later ideas on post-colonialism and subjectivity.

Irish women writers likewise engage with some common features of the cultural revival, whilst at the same time manipulate the nationalist stereotype of a feminine Ireland, from Cathleen ni Houlihan to Dark Rosaleen. In the texts of Tynan and Francis, Ireland is not the primary subject in any kind of fixed, one dimensional way; it is neither the *aisling* of the Gaelic poets nor the sorrowful old Hag of Beare. By drawing parallels with Deledda's metaphor of exile, illuminating motifs have been uncovered in these writers who appear on the face of it to be conventionally nationalist, but who on the contrary interrogate the idea of a fixed nationality. Through metaphors of separation and loss, Tynan manipulates nationalist stereotypes, illustrating that any sense of national identity is ambiguous. In the same way, M.E. Francis's bold approach to sectarianism speaks to a 'cult of origins' that is as relevant now as it was a hundred years ago. An exploration of sectarianism in nineteenth century Irish women's writing is a further avenue for exploration, including perhaps M.Hamilton's *Across an Ulster Bog* (1896).

In Katherine Thurston, there is a connection between the moral incertitude of her characters within the restrictions of Irish Catholic society—and their ultimate transgression of these limitations—and her critique of Irish society, in particular the hypocrisy of the middle classes and organised religion. In this there are many similarities to her successor, Kate O'Brien, with whom a comparison might prove fruitful.

Deledda and her Irish contemporaries show an engagement with aspects of New Woman fiction at the end of the nineteenth century and an anticipation of

theoretical debate on gender at the end of the twentieth. A comparison between Deledda, Egerton and Thurston shows an unlikely fluidity in Deledda's heroines. Deledda's women are in contrast to the fixed 'eternally feminine' nature of Egerton's females, and she depicts sex more openly than Thurston, who despite questioning gender overtly, shies away from the physical description of desire. Surprisingly, Deledda's heroines seem to be the most radical.

The focus on transgressive heroines in New Woman fiction in this study has not engaged to a great extent with the Irish context of their work, something that might provide valuable material for a future investigation, as would further discussion of those writers neglected until recently, such as Beatrice Grimshaw (1871-1953) or Mrs. J.H.Riddell (1832-1906), writers initially occluded from a conception of the 'Irish story' (Foster 12). Further connections arise in the New Woman novel *The Gadfly* (1897) by Ethel Lilian Voynich (nee Ethel Lilian Boole) (1864-1960), the subject of which is the Risorgimento, a movement despised in Ireland as much as the Act of Union was applauded in Italy (D'Angelo 07-12).

The final conclusion of this thesis is that in all the texts considered difference is the one constant. Kristeva stipulates that alterity is universal, that "both on an individual level and a social level we need to learn to deal with the return of that repressed alterity" (178). This repressed alterity is what bridges concepts of identity, of gender and morality in this investigation. Whether articulating nation, documenting a crime or writing a new kind of woman, ultimately in Deledda and Irish women writers it is being open to change, being open to difference, and accepting alterity that is fundamental to the limitless border crossings evident in their narrative.

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