

**Constructing the self in language and narrative  
in the work of Grazia Deledda**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Hilary 2012

## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the presence of modernist ideas regarding identity, language and narrative in the work of the neglected Sardinian author, Grazia Deledda (1871-1936). It has the overall aim of redefining Deledda's later work as modernist for she has been disregarded by most critics and is generally classed as a minor, veristic writer. Drawing Deledda out of these restricted interpretations, this thesis demonstrates that Deledda straddles two literary modes, for she matures beyond veristic influences and looks forward to modernist ideas, particularly regarding the complex nature of the self.

The thesis approaches Deledda from an entirely new perspective in that it focuses upon the crisis of identity in Deledda's work, and its construction in the narrative of her novels, and its integral relationship with the theme of language. The theoretical framework of Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur and Adriana Cavarero enables an innovative study of identity as a linguistic and narrative construct in Deledda's work. I maintain that Deledda's characters construct, control and understand their identities through their application of language or their command of narrative perspective, voicing their inner selves through linguistic self-expression.

This study engages in a close textual analysis of three of Deledda's key texts. *La madre* (1920) and *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) illustrate Deledda's movement away from *verismo*. Their protagonists suffer a crisis of identity which is bound up in linguistic expression and/or narrative control. *Cosima* (1937), which is Deledda's most autobiographical text, displays the author's close affinity with her writing. Creating a fiction of her own life, Deledda becomes both narrator and protagonist, self and other in the exploration of her own identity, which is integrally connected to the act of writing. The very composition of this text demonstrates the construction of identity in language and narrative which is illustrated within Deledda's other works.

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This thesis is a study of modernist elements relating to identity and language, and identity and narrative in the work of the neglected Sardinian author, Grazia Deledda (1871-1936). Focusing upon three key texts from the later period of Deledda's writing, namely *La madre* (1920), *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) and *Cosima* (1937), this study demonstrates the way in which Deledda matured beyond the veristic influences of her earlier work, and looked forward towards modernist ideas relating to identity and language. This analysis proposes that Deledda engages with existential and philosophical notions that emerged in modernist writing at the turn of the twentieth century, and that her characters consequently both construct and come to understand their identities through language and narrative. The study proceeds chronologically, illustrating initially why the first two texts are considered turning points by many in Deledda's career and are therefore important indicators of the development of her work. Both novels contain echoes of *verismo* and Romanticism but nonetheless present philosophical and existential questions regarding the self and its relation to others. The thesis lastly considers Deledda's most autobiographical piece and thus examines the complicated relationship the author shares with this text. A study of this crucial text illustrates the fundamental bond between identity and language reflected in Deledda's own life story.

A close reading of the three novels is the methodological basis of this study which analyses the mirroring of the characters' gradual self-understanding in the oscillating narrative perspective and narrative voice of the texts. The study also provides a detailed examination of the connection between identity and the characters' command of language, both in spoken and written form. This methodology is informed by the identity philosophies and theories of Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur and Adriana Cavarero, whose studies propose the notion that identity is a construct, formed either by the language of the self, the language of others, or the very act of narration. By using this theoretical framework, I am able to explore the intricate relationship between identity, language and narrative in Deledda's work.

The Introduction briefly charts the parameters of the thesis, describing its aim of bringing greater critical attention to the Sardinian author and stating which texts will be considered in this analysis. An overview of Deledda's life is then given, detailing the key events in her childhood which inspired her interest in literature and particularly in writing. It also depicts the challenges Deledda faced as a woman writer from a traditional, patriarchal community at the end of the nineteenth century. I maintain that these obstacles form an important part of the author's work, for her own divided loyalties, and consequent divided identity are reflected in the stories of her downtrodden characters.

Chapter One, 'Critical and Theoretical Approaches' then establishes the critical and theoretical context of the thesis. The first section of this chapter provides a literature review which demonstrates the way in which Deledda has been interpreted by scholarship thus far. We see that most of Deledda's Italian critics have classed her as a regional, veristic author, with many drawing comparisons with Giovanni Verga, to whom she is largely considered to be inferior. I argue that, although Deledda shares certain affinities with *verismo*, she cannot be classed exclusively within that movement, as the objective depiction of reality was not her primary concern. In the following section, I consider Deledda's relation to various strands of modernist writing, a term which poses problems due to its far reaching definition. This section therefore provides a brief outline of the parameters and context of modernism, particularly considering its relation to *decadentismo* and relativism. We note that some critics align the change in Deledda's later compositions with *decadentismo*, though for many her later work is evidence of a failed attempt at 'decadent' writing. Having considered but disregarded Deledda's relationship with the branch of *decadentismo*, I then define my own use of the term modernism in relation to Deledda's work which relates to the notion of crisis, specifically the crisis of identity and the crisis of language, both of which are at the heart of much modernist literature. Situating the thesis in relation to recent criticism which has begun to place Deledda in a modernist light, I briefly look at feminist readings of her writing and other recent scholarship which supports my definition of her later writing as modernist.

The second section of this chapter then presents a discussion of the philosophies relating to the notion of identity which provide a theoretical framework for this thesis. The focal point of this study is the concept of identity as a construct, a notion which is shared by Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur. Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, and Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*, despite their very different approaches, provide a useful dialogue regarding the definition of

identity, and suggest pertinent questions and ideas for the study of identity in Deledda's texts. I examine the relationship between the self and other and compare it with the importance of self-recognition and thus self-definition. I also consider the potentially multiple nature of identity, the impossibility of complete freedom, and the inevitability of subjectivity in the formation of one's identity. The notion is therefore proposed that the self is constructed through language, be it the language of another or one's own language. Chapter One concludes with a discussion of Adriana Cavarero's *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: Filosofia della narrazione*, which is especially useful in the study of the self and narrative. Cavarero suggests that the self is constructed through the process of retrospective narration from the external perspective of an 'other', a concept which becomes evident in this study of Deledda's texts.

In Chapter Two, 'The Controlled Self: Identity and Narrative in *La madre*', I examine the way in which the characters of this novel control the identities of others and of themselves through command of the narrative perspective. The novel is first placed in the context of Deledda's writing and of literary criticism. We note that *La madre* marks a turning point in Deledda's work, as she straddles the literary modes of *verismo* and modernism. I establish the premise of the study of narrative in each of Deledda's texts, outlining the tools and terms employed in this study as defined by Gérard Genette and Paul Cobley. An analysis of the novel's changing narrative perspective then follows, tracking the relationship between narrative control and the protagonist, Paulo's, journey of self-understanding. The fluctuating narrative perspective moves between the dominating figure of Paulo's mother to the priest himself and to his lover, Agnese, illustrating the exchange of power over Paulo's identity. I maintain that the crux of this novel is the protagonist's crisis of identity, and that Paulo's endeavour to understand his own self and the influence of those around him is orchestrated by the control of the novel's narrative perspective. The chapter also examines the way in which the characters revisit the narratives of their own lives, in a Cavarerian sense, in an attempt to understand their present identities. Without the external perspective of an 'other', however, their self-understanding remains limited.

In the subsequent section of this chapter, we see that the image of the mirror is also a crucial motif in this novel for it represents the psychological exploration of the protagonist, and the consequent disapproval of his mother. I depict the significance of the mirror in gothic, Romantic and modernist writing, and then demonstrate its place in this novel as a modernist

metaphor for Paulo's self-conception and self-division. I assert that the crisis of self at the heart of this novel, which centres around the image of the mirror, illustrates Deledda's movement away from *verismo* to modernism. Furthermore, her shadowing of this theme in the narrative of the novel further demonstrates her artistic skill which has been largely dismissed by criticism.

Chapter Three, 'The Hidden Self: Identity and Language in *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*' examines the integral relationship between identity and linguistic communication in the second Deleddian novel under consideration. I begin once again by placing the novel in its literary and critical context, highlighting its identification by critics as another turning point in Deledda's writing. This novel also contains certain echoes of veristic influence, but delves further into the psychological crisis of its tormented protagonist. The textual analysis begins with a depiction of the protagonist, Cristiano's, solitary existence, where we see that he has chosen to cut himself off socially and linguistically from the world around him. The third section of this chapter then studies the changing narrative perspective and narrative voice of the novel. Therein, we witness Cristiano's gradual revelation of himself to the other characters, the reader and the narrator as we learn more about the reticent 'uomo' who is first presented. I show how Cristiano's initial distance from other characters and then his growing familiarity with them is also mirrored in the narrative. We then look at the uncertain narrative voice of the novel, for Cristiano's unstable state of mind is reflected by his occasional intervention in the narrative, addressing himself in his isolation. Indeed, we see that Cristiano's consciousness wavers between illusion and reality, leading him to question the very nature of insanity. Once again, I maintain that identity and narrative are integrally linked in this Deleddian text, and that its composition is illustrative of her modernist tendencies.

The intrinsic relationship between identity and language, and particularly, identity and silence is then considered in this novel. Silence is wielded as a means of protecting one's identity, and so the characters initially maintain a careful distance from one another. Drawing comparisons with the work of Luigi Pirandello, I examine the notion of the necessity of others in the formation of one's identity. Cristiano discovers that he cannot live in utter isolation, and is in need of linguistic communication, something he has sought for a long time without realising it. The chapter ends with an exploration of the theme of freedom in the novel, as the characters contemplate whether complete freedom is truly possible while one

remains in the land of the living. The analysis of this chapter therefore indicates that Deledda shares an interest in many relativist ideas such as those explored by Pirandello.

The fourth chapter, 'Writing the Self: Identity and Language in *Cosima*' analyses Deledda's most autobiographical text, and examines the developing identity of the eponymous protagonist. We see that by creating a fiction of her own life, Deledda becomes both narrator and protagonist, self and other in the exploration of her own identity. This chapter therefore examines both the relationship between identity and the theme of language, or more specifically, writing, and the construction of *Cosima*'s identity in the narrative of the novel. I must initially address the problematic definition of the text's genre, for its association with autobiography is complicated by its use of a third person narrative voice. Consequently, I briefly engage with certain theories relating to autobiography, particularly the seminal works of Philippe Lejeune and Karl Weintraub, and eventually denote the text an autobiographical novel for the purpose of this study. I then proceed to analyse the occasionally varied narrative voice of the novel, looking at the complex relationship Deledda shares with her protagonist. The next section of this chapter further highlights the nature of this simultaneously close and distant relationship by considering the different tenses employed, for the narrative oscillates between past and present tenses, reminding the reader of the link between the narrated *Cosima* and the present Deledda. I thus show that the notion of a divided identity is reflected in the self-doubling of this autobiographical text.

In the following section of this chapter, I chart the connection between the narrative perspective, namely the perspective of *Cosima*, and the development of her identity. We see that the narrative focuses more and more upon *Cosima* as her self-confidence and interest in writing mature. I therefore maintain that identity and writing are necessarily bound together for *Cosima*. Themes which have emerged in the study of the previous two novels are then revisited. The driving force behind the chapter is *Cosima*'s affinity with the written word, for like *Cristiano*, *Cosima* struggles to achieve freedom, and for her, this is achieved through writing. We also look at the mingling of fantasy and reality in the text, seeing how *Cosima* blurs the lines of fiction and reality within her own perception of life, once again involving the act of writing in her everyday existence. The chapter ends with an analysis of the motif of the mirror which recurs here when *Cosima* faces her own image and thus her own vision of her identity, much like *Paulo* in *La madre*. By way of a conclusion, I summarise the elements which contribute to *Cosima*'s split identity, and establish that she too is torn between her own

view of herself and that created by other people. The concept of identity is therefore of great significance to Deledda, for it plays a part in the narrative of her own life.

The conclusion draws together some of the central arguments of the thesis, illustrating Deledda's interest in the complex nature of the self and its relation to language and narrative in her works. This thesis has aimed to reassess Deledda's place in the literary canon, defining her later work in light of modernism and highlighting the talent of her narrative skill. I have illustrated how Deledda does not provide answers to the problem of identity, but engages in questions regarding its definition and the necessity of interactions with others through language. We see that the Deleddian characters that have been studied strive to free their own perception of their identities, overcoming the challenges created by others, by society, and often by themselves. They find, however, that they cannot live in complete isolation, for freedom from the influence of others signifies a life devoid of emotional fulfillment. I suggest that Deledda herself is in fact divided with regards to language, for she acknowledges both its power and its limitations.

Some potential avenues for future research are proposed here, for this thesis analyses three of Deledda's key texts amid her vast corpus of thirty five novels. It is also suggested that the study of Deledda's relationship with her work can be extended to other Deleddian texts which are considered to be autobiographical. I conclude by emphasising the way in which Deledda herself is mirrored in these three novels, even though unlike many of her protagonists, she succeeded in overcoming the barriers placed before her and married the two conflicting facets of her identity. I propose that it is Deledda's own difficult experiences with her identity and its important connection with language that is reflected in her modernist compositions.

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Emanuela Tandello, for all of her help, guidance and support in the preparation of this thesis. I am also very grateful to other members of the Sub-Faculty of Italian at Oxford for their academic guidance, particularly Prof. Guido Bonsaver and Dr Giuseppe Stellardi. I wish to thank the staff at the Taylorian Institute, Oxford and especially the staff of the Istituto Etnografico di Sardegna whose assistance with Deleddian manuscripts was crucial during my research trip to Nuoro.

This thesis was made possible with funding from the Sir John Rhys Scholarship Fund and from St Anne's College. The Celtic Department and St Anne's College provided both the financial support for my research and wonderful opportunities to expand upon my academic teaching experiences. I am very grateful for the support of many colleagues in the Celtic Department, especially Prof. Thomas Charles-Edwards, and those in the University Language Centre, particularly Dr Vilma De Gasperin. Their help enabled my combined existence as an Italian researcher and a Welsh tutor, which provided a fulfilling and valuable experience. St Anne's has been my academic home for many years, and I would like to extend special thanks to its staff. Dr Anne Mullen and my college adviser, Prof. Patrick McGuinness, have been extremely encouraging throughout my time there as a student. Grazie! Diolch yn fawr!

I am also very grateful for the help and support of many friends in Oxford and beyond, all of whom I cannot name. I particularly wish to thank Doireann and Sina, for their incredible enthusiasm, Eleanor and Paul, for their advice and strength, and Dan, Jen, Kim, Tom, Jim, Daniel and Nathan for their support and encouragement.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family. I am so grateful for the endless love and support of my parents, Anthony and Siân, my sister, Delyth, my grandmother, Doreen, and my partner, Peter, not forgetting my grandparents no longer with us who were a tremendous inspiration. I could not have done this without them.

### **List of Abbreviations**

The following list of abbreviations will be used throughout this thesis, in brackets in the main text following quotations, and in footnotes.

*Madre* = Grazia Deledda, *La madre* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2007)

*Segreto* = Grazia Deledda, *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2007)

*Cosima* = Grazia Deledda, *Cosima* (Milano: Mondadori, 1947)

## Introduction

### **My thesis**

Despite being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1926, Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) is a Sardinian author who has not been granted sufficient critical attention. Deledda was awarded this great literary accolade for her representation of the Sardinian people and culture in her writing;<sup>1</sup> however, most criticism has regarded this as a limitation rather than a quality of her compositions, and has consequently disregarded many of the most interesting and skilful aspects of her work. At the time of her writing, Deledda was therefore generally unappreciated and misunderstood by criticism, and in the years since she has been largely forgotten. The limited criticism that has been dedicated to Deledda has widely classed her work as regional, veristic writing, which unsuccessfully mimics the great authors of her time.<sup>2</sup> These short-sighted assumptions stemmed chiefly from Deledda's status as a Sardinian woman writer at the turn of the twentieth century, for it was believed that a woman with such little life experience could not bring about any artistic novelty.<sup>3</sup> Deledda spent the majority of her life in the isolated, somewhat remote countryside of Sardinia and in her writing she naturally took inspiration from her surrounding environment. Her Sardinian stories were consequently dismissed as trivial romances which were driven by the dichotomy of good and evil, with characters struggling against the temptation of sin.<sup>4</sup> Although conversely her depictions of Sardinia were the reason for her greatest literary success, for many critics this did not make Deledda a great writer. This thesis sets out to consider aspects of Deledda's writing beyond the confines of its Sardinian setting, and revive critical interest in this complex writer by exploring the

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<sup>1</sup> Remo Branca, *Il segreto di Grazia Deledda* (Cagliari: Editrice sarda Fossataro, 1971), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Deledda's work was often compared with that of Giovanni Verga and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. For example, see Giovanna Abete, *Grazia Deledda e i suoi critici* (Roma: Abete, 1993), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Michele Cantarella, 'Grazia Madesani Deledda', *Italica*, 13, (1936), 105-107 (p. 106).

<sup>4</sup> Antonino Tobia, *Grazia Deledda* (Roma: Ciranna, 1971), p. 49.

presence of modernist ideas regarding identity, language and narrative in her work. More specifically, I intend to explore the notion of identity as a construct which is inherently linked to the medium of language and to the act of narration.

Deledda's writing underwent significant development over time, a fact that posed further problems for critics who were unable to align her with a specific literary school.<sup>5</sup> Deledda was left hanging in a literary limbo between *verismo* and *decadentismo*, and consequently she has been principally associated with her earlier works, notably her 'capolavori': *Elias Portolu* (1903) and *Canne al vento* (1913). I believe, however, that Deledda's later texts deserve further critical attention, for it is here that we see the author grappling with modernist ideas relating to identity and language.

Deledda's characters are often trapped individuals who are slaves to the social expectations placed upon them, usually by those who claim to care about them the most. These troubled souls strive to reconcile their understanding of their own identities with the version of themselves created by others. The crisis of the self is therefore at the heart of Deleddian drama. Identity is of course a complex notion which can be defined in many ways. It can be constructed through different means including visual perception and social, political or religious structures. This thesis, however, focuses on the construction of identity through language, be it the language of oneself or that of others. Language is a primary method for the perception and expression of our own thoughts and consequently of our own selves. By engaging with the work of Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur and Adriana Cavarero whose studies examine the notion of identity as a construct, I aim to demonstrate that Deledda explores this modernist concept both in and through her writing.

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<sup>5</sup> Eurialo De Michelis, 'Introduzione', in Grazia Deledda, *Opere Scelte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1964), p. 31.

The identities of Deledda's characters, many of whom are reflections of Deledda's own persona, are formed and often manipulated by the command of language, and particularly the control of narrative. Her protagonists are initially silenced in the story of their own lives, being unable to voice their opinion about who they are. This silencing is mirrored in the narrative of the novels, for the narrative perspective is initially not that of the protagonists. Gradually, however, they begin to assert control. To expose the relationship between identity and narrative in this study, I intend to employ the narrative terms laid out by Gérard Genette and Paul Cobley.<sup>6</sup> As the protagonists delve into an understanding of their own selves, their narrative perspective grows stronger, and for some, their use of language in either spoken or written form becomes markedly more substantial. It is by taking control of the narrative of their own lives that these characters attempt to dictate the nature of their respective identities.

I have chosen to explore the torment of three Deleddian protagonists who strive to define and to control their own identities in a society that wishes to confine them: Paulo of *La madre* (1920), Cristiano of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) and the eponymous protagonist of *Cosima* (1936). The struggles of these protagonists most clearly illustrate the fundamental relationship between identity and language, and identity and narrative in Deledda's oeuvre. These texts are from the later period of Deledda's writing, and fall almost two decades after her eventual departure from Sardinia in 1900. Both *La madre* and *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* have been earmarked by various critics as signalling turning points in Deledda's writing career. Firstly, *La madre* notes a development in Deledda's linguistic skill, for it contains no further traces of her Sardinian dialect, the use of which was distained by many

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<sup>6</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2001).

critics.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is regarded by many as a thematic and stylistic turning point, moving away from *verismo* towards *decadentismo*.<sup>8</sup> It thus marks an evolution in her writing which is discounted by critics such as Enza Buono who declares *La madre* to be ‘l’ultima grande opera della Deledda’.<sup>9</sup> It could therefore be seen as representing the point at which many critics lost their grasp of Deledda, for she began to step beyond the veristic writing of her earlier novels. I wish to demonstrate that it is more accurate to consider the novel as presenting modernist, rather than ‘decadent’, ideas. By beginning with *La madre*, therefore, I can briefly examine the development of Deledda’s writing from *verismo* to modernism, for *La madre* contains several veristic and romantic traits as well as modernist ideas and motifs relating to identity.

*Il segreto dell’uomo solitario* has also been named as an axis in Deledda’s work. Some believe it to be a clearer example of her veristic writing,<sup>10</sup> whereas others have described it as a psychological novel.<sup>11</sup> Once again, therefore, this novel illustrates Deledda’s movement beyond *verismo*, and vivifies her engagement with modernist thoughts. Critics have certainly noted the presence of important themes in this novel, having identified its psychological nature, but I wish to explore these in greater depth.

We will see that several critics have considered the notion of a crisis of identity for some of Deledda’s protagonists, but this has usually been tackled from a feminist perspective, thus principally considering Deledda’s female characters.<sup>12</sup>

Although a feminist reading of Deledda’s work is certainly interesting and pertinent, I

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<sup>7</sup> Martha King, ‘The question of Grazia Deledda’s language’, in *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 153-165 (p. 159).

<sup>8</sup> Vittorio Spinazzola, ‘Grazia Deledda e il pubblico’, in *Convegno Nazionale di Studi Deleddiani, Nuoro 30 settembre 1972* (Cagliari: Editrice Sarda Fossataro, 1974), pp. 103-126 (p. 17).

<sup>9</sup> Enza Buono, *Grazia Deledda: saggio critico* (Bari: Tip. De Filippis, 1951), p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Tobia, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Piromalli, *Grazia Deledda* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1968), p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Hopkins, ‘Re-examining female desire in Grazia Deledda: Inheritance law, colonialism and rural Sardinian culture in “La volpe”’, in *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 111-132.

have chosen to examine two male protagonists in order to demonstrate the more universal nature of the exploration of identity.

Lastly, I have chosen *Cosima* because it is undoubtedly the most autobiographical of Deledda's texts. It is therefore the closest reflection of Deledda's own life, and the most interesting portrayal of the author's entangled relationship with her own writing. I wish to consider the significance of writing with regard to the identity of Cosima, who could be viewed as the most important of Deledda's protagonists.

In order to establish the context of this thesis, I begin by outlining the main events of Deledda's own life, for the social, personal and artistic challenges she underwent are at the root of many of her dramas. The first chapter then summarises Deledda's place in literary criticism to date, dividing critics into those who have considered Deledda as a *verista*, and those who have recently begun to redefine Deledda in light of modernist readings. With the critical context established, I am able to lay out my own interpretation of Deledda's work in a modernist light, which will emphasise her creative use of narrative and her exploration of the notion of identity. I then discuss the theories and philosophies pertaining to identity and narrative that are woven throughout this thesis, principally those of Kristeva, Ricoeur and Cavarero.

The second chapter analyses the formation of identity through the process of narration in the novel *La madre*. The protagonist, Paulo, is a priest in the small town of Aar. Having led a strictly moral life under the guidance of his dictatorial mother for many years, he begins to explore the nature of his true self by engaging in an affair with a local woman named Agnese. Paulo must battle against his mother's objections, his own conscience and his desire for physical satisfaction. The novel thus plots a journey of self-discovery for Paulo, who attempts to understand the various ties which

have been pulling on his identity. I examine the progressing narrative perspective in the novel, considering the way in which this shift is reflective of the changing dynamic of the characters. The mother asserts linguistic authority through her dominating narrative perspective as a means of maintaining control over her obedient son. As Paulo explores his own view of his identity, however, this narrative power game necessarily alters. The absence of an omniscient narrator is somewhat reminiscent of the narrative style of veristic writers such as Verga, Capuana and Falchi; however, this does not only serve to create a scientific representation of reality. It plays a crucial role in the development of the characters' understanding of themselves as the novel progresses.

The novel has thus far been largely regarded as a veristic or late romantic novel. Although there are such elements in its setting and its use of landscape, the plot and narrative structure of the novel put forth modern ideas relating to identity. I intend to strip away the superficial reading of the self-sacrificing figure of the mother who attempts to save the soul of her tempted son. We will see instead, the tormented soul of a man who is not responsible for the governing of his own life. Subsequently, in relation to the notion of identity I look at the repeated motifs of the shadow, the mirror and the continuous metaphor of Paulo's life as a prison. Given the novel's religious theme, I also briefly consider Deledda's interpretation of the Church and its role in society, for its presence here has a notable impact on the identities of Paulo, his mother and his lover.

We see that in keeping with Cavalerian philosophy, which is key to my analysis of the novel, Paulo reconstructs the narrative of his life, of his past in order to understand his identity in the present. He must revisit the events of his own narrative in order to comprehend the meaning of his current existence, and the way in which he

can lead his own life in the future. I therefore aim to demonstrate that Deledda's presentation of Paulo's crisis of self through the process of narration makes this novel much more than a realist or romantic depiction of life in a rural Sardinian town.

The third chapter examines the relationship between language and identity in *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*. The protagonist, Cristiano, leads a self-inflicted solitary life. His only interaction is a physical relationship with a servant girl, Ghiana, whose feelings for Cristiano are not reciprocated. With the arrival of new neighbours, Sarina and her mentally disturbed husband, Giorgio, Cristiano is forced to face many questions about his existence. Tormented by his secret past, and his desire to remain cut off from the outside world, Cristiano struggles with his developing feelings for Sarina. The potential of a loving relationship persuades him to confront his past, to confront himself and to understand his need for human interaction.

In this chapter, I consider the integral relationship between language and identity, and frequently in the case of Cristiano, between silence and identity. Language is a means of keeping control over one's self. In this way, Cristiano maintains his silence in order to build a wall around his solitary existence. He discovers, however, that no man is an island, and that linguistic, and eventually emotional exchanges are necessary. I track the evolution of Cristiano's interactions, and the understanding of himself that he gains through his relationships with others. After articulating the nature of Cristiano's solitary existence, I begin with an analysis of the changing narrative perspective and narrative voice, similar to that conducted in the previous chapter. I intend to illustrate the way in which narrative perspective is again used to evoke a power struggle among the characters, a struggle which occurs at times between Cristiano and his own self. I then examine the theme of language and

its relation to identity in the novel, as well as the evocation of this through the linguistic interactions of the characters.

This novel also touches upon the concept of madness, and especially the relationship between madness and the achievement of objective truth. I look again at the repeated motifs of the mirror and the shadow, and draw particular comparisons with the works of Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), a contemporary of Deledda's whose work is acknowledged to hold the modernist ideas which have been largely undetected in Deledda's own writing. Cristiano wavers on the brink of madness, searching for freedom from the past which haunts him, and striving to engage with other people in order to gain a better understanding of his own self.

The final chapter considers the intermingling of both language and narrative with identity, particularly the relationship between identity and writing in Deledda's most autobiographical piece, *Cosima*. The text traces the main events in the life of the eponymous protagonist, from the time of her sister's birth to the beginning of a journey away from her home of Nuoro. The events narrated are based on the events of Deledda's own life, though they are depicted as the experiences of the fictional Cosima. Having been raised in a traditional fashion, Cosima is destined to secure her future by marrying well and raising her own family, much as her own mother did. Her ambition, however, is to write. She wishes to travel beyond the town that she knows and loves, to break with expectation and achieve the identity she feels that she possesses.

The genre of *Cosima* is ambiguous as it vacillates somewhere between autobiography and fiction. To engage with this issue, a brief discussion of theories regarding the genre of autobiography will therefore form a necessary part of the analysis of *Cosima*. This leads to a consideration of Deledda's relationship with this

text, and with all of her fictional writing. As in previous chapters, I examine the relationship between identity and narrative in the text, once again making use of the philosophy of Adriana Cavarero. By writing about her own past, Deledda is reviewing the story of her life; she is rewriting her past in order to deduce its meaning. We will see that it is through the act of writing that Cosima's identity is both created and understood.

I also look at the relationship between identity and the theme of language in the text. The identity of Cosima, who can be viewed as most representative of Deledda, develops through her love of writing. I aim to demonstrate that it is through writing, through the medium of language and expression, that Cosima's identity is fulfilled. Like many of Deledda's other protagonists, she must battle with social expectations and with demands placed upon her by those who care for her, and endeavour to take control of her own destiny, and therefore, her own identity.

### **Deledda's life**

Deledda's status as a Sardinian woman made her ambition to write a difficult feat. She faced prejudice on several fronts, in the form of misinterpretation by critics, scandal in her local community of Nuoro, and even judgement from her own family. Nevertheless, she fought to fulfil her destiny as an author, producing an extensive body of literature and gaining admiration from readers abroad who had a greater appreciation for her artistic skill.<sup>13</sup> Janice Kozma suggests that the cold reception Deledda received from Italian criticism was largely due to 'poorly disguised sexism and in many instances incontestable misogyny',<sup>14</sup> a bias which did not influence

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<sup>13</sup> Jan Kozma, 'Introduction', in *Marianna Sirca*, trans. by Jan Kozma (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 2010), pp. 9-19 (p. 11).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

criticism from beyond the Italian frontiers. Deledda experienced first hand the many challenges of Sardinian life, particularly as a woman and most importantly as a writer.

Grazia Deledda was born in the small, rural town of Nuoro in northern Sardinia on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1871. She was born into a difficult era in Sardinian history. Sardinia had been under Spanish rule until 1720 when the region of Piedmont took possession of it. The island's population was tremendously poor and deadly diseases such as malaria were rife. Remaining geographically isolated from mainland Italy, the economy was unable to develop. Land was eventually privatised, but with a heavy tendency in favour of traditionally rich families, and as debt and desperation flourished, banditry became commonplace. The riches of the land had long since been reaped, leaving only dry, mountainous space suitable for shepherding.

Following the unification of Italy in 1861, the end of the nineteenth century was a time of change in Sardinia with regard to its agricultural industry, its economy and its politics due to the many changes seen in mainland Italy. Technologies such as railways and telephones were introduced, but the populations of the rural regions, Sardinia and Sicily remained poor and divided from their urban counterparts.<sup>15</sup> As industry expanded on the island, agriculture naturally suffered, and the gulf between the two added to the tension and economic strain on the population. Plagued by economic and social uncertainty, this was a time of crisis for the Sardinian people.<sup>16</sup>

Deledda's father, Giovanni Antonio (known as Totoni), was a land-owner of some wealth, and her mother, Francesca Combosu (known as Chischedda), was a house-wife who was twenty years his junior. Their marriage was one designed to provide a secure environment for a family, rather than based on any burning passion. It was hoped, therefore, that Deledda herself would achieve similar financial and

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<sup>15</sup> John A. Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century: 1796-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 256.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

social stability in the form of an appropriate marital match, especially given the economic struggles of the period which had forced her own family to sell some of their land.

Grazia had two older brothers, Giovanni Santo (Santus) and Andrea, and four sisters: Vincenza (Enza), who was older than Grazia, Giovanna, Giuseppina (Beppa) and Nicolina. The eldest, Santus, was an intelligent, creative individual who spent his time manufacturing mechanical creations. It was Santus that Grazia most admired, particularly when he moved away to study medicine at the University of Cagliari. Santus was able to experience the travel and acquisition of knowledge that Deledda herself dreamed of. Her brother Andrea, however, was Grazia's greatest supporter, encouraging her to read and to learn Italian and Latin independently. He took her on small adventures to the market and to see the view from Mount Orthobene, the mountain that towered above their home in Nuoro.

Sadly, both of her brothers followed treacherous paths as they approached adulthood. Andrea began to keep bad company and was rebellious. He was rumoured to have impregnated a girl in town, and he was later sentenced to ten years in prison for stealing chickens. Grazia eventually succeeded in freeing him after an appeal, but his name remained forever tainted. Similarly, Santus, who had a prosperous future laid out for him at university, returned home late one night, drunk, having wasted all of the savings he had been given. He never truly recovered from his alcoholism, and he was eventually declared insane.

Deledda experienced many tragedies in her life aside from the challenges brought forth by her brothers, and those associated with her writing. Her sister, Giovanna, died as an infant from pneumonia during an especially harsh winter when Grazia was still a child. In later years, she experienced the loss of another sister. Enza,

who was finally able to marry her childhood sweetheart, Gionmario, after years of financial difficulties, soon died after their marriage due to a miscarriage. In 1892 Deledda endured the death of her father, whom she had greatly esteemed. This loss brought mourning to her household, both emotionally and in a strict, social sense, as the women were confined to the house for several months, only able to leave in order to attend services at church.<sup>17</sup> Deledda, in her grief, was further suffocated by the expectations placed upon her by the Nuorese society of the time.

Deledda received just four years of formal education at her local school, where she chose to repeat her final year, the *quarta elementare*, because there was no other form of education offered to women in the town of Nuoro.<sup>18</sup> There she learned basic mathematics, and to read and write in her Sardinian dialect of Logudoro, as well as a small amount of Italian.<sup>19</sup> Her chosen language for her compositions, therefore, was not her mother-tongue and was not comfortably adopted for some time. Indeed, several of her first manuscripts were sent back from editors filled with corrections because of her faulty Italian. Deledda herself confessed to her difficulty with speaking good Italian in a letter to Stanis Manca: ‘l’abitudine di parlare, per forza, i nostri dialetti, sempre, sempre, fa sì che non ci possiamo mai spiegare bene in italiano.’<sup>20</sup>

She left school at the age of ten, and upon leaving she was awarded a prize for achievement above all of the boys in her school, demonstrating her academic ability in spite of the social and formative restrictions placed upon her gender.<sup>21</sup> In spite of her clear aptitude and success in the little time she spent at school, Deledda herself

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<sup>17</sup> Neria De Giovanni, *Come la nube sopra il mare: vita di Grazia Deledda* (Alghero: Nemapress, 2006), p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> Cantarella, p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Balducci, *A Self-Made Woman: Biography of Nobel-Prize-Winner Grazia Deledda* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1975), p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Amore lontano: lettere al gigante biondo (1891-1909)*, ed. by Anna Folli (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010), p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Balducci, p. 55.

felt that she learned far more from her observations of nature and the world around her. It was her curious nature that led to her explorations of the physical world of her environment and the wider literary world. She pursued her education independently through reading anything and everything she could find. For some time, she was taught Italian and Latin by a lodger of her neighbour who eventually disappeared because of unpaid debts, leaving Deledda with the wealth of his abandoned books. Deledda was an avid reader, and it is through this avenue that she developed her passion for writing. She began writing at the age of twelve and published her first story, *Sangue Sardo*, at just sixteen.<sup>22</sup>

The late nineteenth century was a restricting period for young women in most parts of the world, including Italy. In the same way, the Nuorese society of the time had very traditional expectations of its young women. ‘Women were expected to preserve and perpetuate their traditional way of life, especially important when men seemed to become “corrupted” by education, travel, military service and even prison’.<sup>23</sup> They were simply intended to marry, and certainly not to pursue an independent career such as writing. As an aspiring artist, therefore, Deledda was faced with social and cultural restrictions throughout her young life. According to Vittorio Spinazzola, Deledda was not appreciated in Sardinia because there did not exist a reading public that was worthy of that name.<sup>24</sup> In fact, ninety-five percent of the Sardinian population at the time was illiterate, including Deledda’s own mother.<sup>25</sup> This was certainly not a welcoming environment for an ambitious young writer.

Her writing was met with public shock and scandal, even by members of her own family, for this was simply considered inappropriate behaviour from a young

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<sup>22</sup> *Sangue Sardo* was first published by the magazine *Ultima Moda* in Rome in July 1888. Grazia Deledda, *Versi e Prose Giovanili*, ed. by Antonio Scano (Milano: Virgilio, 1972), p. 147.

<sup>23</sup> Balducci, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Spinazzola, ‘Grazia Deledda e il pubblico’, p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> Balducci, p. 4.

girl. According to Jan Kozma, ‘earning money by her pen was deemed the equivalent of prostitution.’<sup>26</sup> Her mother worried that this misconduct would prevent her from marrying well, and would thus destroy all happiness in her future. Even her brother Andrea was concerned that her writing created suspicion about Grazia’s own behaviour. He suggested that her love stories made her appear improper, implying that she must have been inspired by dalliances of her own.<sup>27</sup> Despite the social objections, Deledda struggled on with her writing, setting many of her stories in her own Sardinian environment and creating similar obstacles for her characters. In a letter to Stanis Manca written in 1891, Deledda describes her determination to write, and her ability to transcend the disapproval of those around her:

[M]i coprirono di maldicenze, di ingiurie, di ridicolo, arrivando persino a dire che altri scriveva nell’ombra e io non facevo che firmare, - tanto che il mio povero *Io*, piccola e fragile creatura che non aveva mai fatto male ad alcuno, provò tale dispiacere, tale disillusione da caderne quasi malata [...] Un’altra al mio posto avrebbe spezzato la penna, maledicendola [...] io invece temperai la mia penna e mentre raccoglievo la sfida del pubblico sardo tanto positivo: *diventa donna di casa ché farai meglio!*... intromettevo un bozzetto fra l’apparecchiare la tavola e preparare il caffè e fantasticavo versi davanti alla mia finestra, davanti alle montagne solitarie tinte di rosa nel crepuscolo silente.<sup>28</sup>

Although Deledda is greatly associated with her native Sardinia, she always dreamed of crossing the boundaries of this island and travelling to the glorious city of Rome. For Deledda, Rome represented the epitome of literature, art and creativity.<sup>29</sup> In a sense, this city symbolized the freedom to be who she wanted, that is, a writer. For twenty nine years Deledda never strayed beyond the boundaries of her native Nuoro, let alone the island of Sardinia. Her dreams of travel were finally realised

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Kozma, ‘Grazia Deledda: A life’, in *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 17-43 (p. 26).

<sup>27</sup> Balducci, p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> Deledda, *Amore lontano*, p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> Balducci, p. 86.

when Maria Manca invited Deledda to stay with her in Cagliari.<sup>30</sup> It was during this visit that she met Palmiro Madesani, with whom she fell in love and quickly became engaged. Following their marriage in 1900, they travelled first to Nuoro and then to Rome, where they remained for the rest of Deledda's life. Their son Santus was born soon after their move to the capital, and their second son, Franz, followed in 1904.

Living in Rome, Deledda was able to pursue her writing career with the support of her new family. Her husband took on the responsibility of her affairs, dealing with editors and translators while Deledda was free to write. This fact was ridiculed in Pirandello's depiction of their relationship in his novel, *Suo marito*, published in 1911. Although the couple are not named, the similarities between the protagonist, Silvia Roncella, and Grazia Deledda are clear, a fact highlighted by Carlo Golino's analysis of the novel.<sup>31</sup> Surprisingly little has been written about *Suo marito*, and the relationship between Deledda and Pirandello, particularly their artistic regard for one another, deserves further critical attention. The few comments relating to the text highlight its connection with Deledda and the possible ill-feeling Pirandello felt towards her.<sup>32</sup> Remo Branca believes that the composition was inspired by Pirandello's jealousy of the Nuorese writer,<sup>33</sup> a feeling which was augmented when Deledda was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1926.<sup>34</sup> Luigi Falchi is uncertain whether *Suo marito* was born of artistic differences, jealousy or a simple dislike of Deledda, but he describes the text as '[o]pera [...] tutta ingenerosa, e, in troppe pagine, incredibilmente calunniosa: in cui sono incarnati fantasmi germinati da una

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<sup>30</sup> Balducci, p. 156.

<sup>31</sup> Carlo L. Golino, 'Pirandello's least known novel', *Italica*, 26. 4 (December 1949), 263-268.

<sup>32</sup> This topic could provide an avenue for possible further research.

<sup>33</sup> Remo Branca, 'Perché alla scrittrice nuorese il Premio Nobel 1926?', *Frontiera: Rivista Mensile Illustrata della Sardegna*, 4 (1971), 573-575 (p. 573).

<sup>34</sup> Pirandello was later awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934.

immaginazione malata di livore.<sup>35</sup> Sharon Wood similarly believes that the novel illustrates a prejudice and snobbery towards the Nuorese writer which is typical of most literary criticism written about Deledda to date.<sup>36</sup>

Despite her new freedom to write, Deledda was not easily accepted into the literary circles of Rome. She came across famous figures such as Pirandello himself, Sibilla Aleramo and Matilde Serao,<sup>37</sup> but she was incredibly shy. Her timid character meant that she did not socialise often, and this behaviour was heightened by the sensation that she was not accepted, a fact that was illustrated by Pirandello's scathing portrayal.

According to her son, Franz, Deledda needed solitude and silence in the household in order to compose her fiction.<sup>38</sup> She was a meticulous writer, fashioning precisely four pages a day, during a specific period of the afternoon. She never rewrote anything, but rather worked everything out in her head before writing it down. This description is supported by the manuscripts I viewed at the *Istituto Etnografico della Sardegna* in Nuoro, which were neat and contained very few corrections.

When in Rome, Deledda adapted her writing by setting several stories in the capital city, rather than in Sardinia.<sup>39</sup> In truth, until then Deledda had chosen to set the majority of her work in Sardinia because this was the only reality that she knew. In a letter to Adolfo Orvieto of 1904, Deledda admits precisely this:

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<sup>35</sup> Luigi Falchi, *L'opera di Grazia Deledda* (Milano: La Prora, 1937), p. 101.

<sup>36</sup> Sharon Wood, 'Locations, relocation and dislocations: (dis)placing Grazia Deledda', in *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 1-11 (p. 6).

<sup>37</sup> Nicolino Sarale, *Grazia Deledda: un profilo spirituale* (Roma: Logos, 1990), p.77.

<sup>38</sup> Janice M. Kozma, *Grazia Deledda's Eternal Adolescents: The Pathology of Arrested Maturation* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> For example, *Cenere* (1904) is set partly in Rome, and *La danza della collana* (1924) is set in the suburbs of the capital. Grazia Deledda, *Cenere* (Milano: Mondadori, 1961); Grazia Deledda, *La danza della collana* (Milano: Mondadori, 1982).

Della Sardegna, poi, me ne importa fino a un certo punto. Io non ho mai preteso d'illustrarla [...] Ho collocato i miei personaggi a Nuoro, perché i primi uomini e le prime donne che mi si sono rivelate le ho conosciute a Nuoro: scriverò ora un romanzo che si svolge a Roma perché ora conosco anche della gente – più interessante dei pastori sardi, - che vive a Roma.<sup>40</sup>

The troubles of her characters were not merely a reflection of the people of Sardinia, but a representation of the plight of human kind. As Licia Roncarati stresses:

Non la Sardegna, ma il mondo interessa Grazia, non i sardi ma tutti gli uomini indistintamente; l'ambiente isolano sarà sfondo e materia per esprimere alcuni dei drammi che travagliano l'umanità, mentre una realtà vasta universale trapelerà sempre dalle vicende di paese in cui, con particolari accenti e determinazioni, si esprimerà quel travaglio umano cui il tempo e il luogo, le diverse leggi, i vari costumi daranno vari atteggiamenti e caratteri ma senza mai cambiare il valore etico universale.<sup>41</sup>

The social and personal conflicts endured by Deledda's characters, the crippling questions about identity and relationships with others stretch beyond the boundaries of the island that inspired her, and represent the universal nature of human existence.

Through writing, Deledda was able to cross many of the boundaries laid around her. Aptly, therefore, many of her characters struggle with similar restrictions, and are trapped by much more than the geographical confines of Sardinia. Despite the difficulties Deledda faced with language, society, her family and her gender, she succeeded in pursuing the writing career she dreamed of. In total, she produced thirty five novels and twenty two collections of short stories, as well as poetry, essays and articles published in many magazines and newspapers. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1926<sup>42</sup> and was the second Italian,<sup>43</sup> and the second woman to

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<sup>40</sup> Deledda cited in Carole C. Gallucci, ed., 'I dream of perfection': Grazia Deledda to Adolfo Orvieto', *Italianist*, 21-22 (2001-2002), 184-191 (pp. 187-188).

<sup>41</sup> Licia Roncarati, *L'arte di Grazia Deledda* (Firenze: G. d'Anna, 1949), p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> In 1926 it was decided that none of the candidates met the criteria laid out in the will of Alfred Nobel to win the prize. In such a case, the award can be held back for an additional year. Deledda was therefore awarded the Nobel Prize for 1926 in 1927.

<sup>43</sup> The first Italian to win the Nobel Prize in Literature was Giosuè Carducci in 1906.

win it.<sup>44</sup> She is one of only six Italians, and twelve women to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature during the one hundred and eleven years it has existed.

In 1927, Deledda was diagnosed with breast cancer. In a further example of autobiographical writing, her own trials with the disease are mirrored by the experiences of Maria Concezione, the protagonist of *La chiesa della solitudine* (1936). Deledda underwent two unsuccessful operations in an attempt to cure her breast cancer, one of which rendered her left arm nearly useless. She died peacefully on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1936. She was buried in Rome and her remains have since been moved to Nuoro, and were laid to rest in the aptly named ‘Chiesa della Solitudine’ at the foot of Mount Orthobene. Deledda’s final literary work, *Cosima*, was found after her death and was published posthumously in 1937.

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<sup>44</sup> The first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature was the Swedish author Selma Otilia Lovisa Lagerlöf in 1909.

## Chapter One: Critical and Theoretical Approaches to Deledda

### **Deledda and Criticism**

When considering the vast nature of Deledda's oeuvre, the critical output dedicated to her work is relatively small. The author was given most attention during the time of her writing and in the years following her death, with some publications to follow in the 1960s and 1970s. These few critics who have commented on Deledda have generally categorised her as a regional, veristic writer, unable to disassociate her with her native Sardinia. Janice Kozma has pointed out that 'One of the ironies of Deledda's career was that for a variety of reasons she was scorned by Italian literary critics, while her work was highly respected by reviewers abroad'.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it is the more recent publications from Britain and America which have proved most pertinent in my own analysis of Deledda's work. Furthermore, many of the critics at the time of her writing were unable to look past her status as a woman. She was pigeon-holed into the figure of a romantic woman writer, whose stories revolve around the petty dramas of Sardinian couples. Criticism has thus characterised her fiction with a tendency towards moralistic, fatalistic plots and an interest in romantic themes linked with temptation, sin and punishment.

Deledda herself denied the literary affiliations which were allocated to her by critics. In a letter to Pirro Bessi of 1907 she wrote:

[I]o credo che non vi sia stato uno solo dei critici italiani che abbia letto tutti i miei libri dal primo all'ultimo, rendendosi conto della lenta ma innegabile evoluzione del mio pensiero. Tutti mi hanno costantemente e monotonamente lodato come autrice regionale, e hanno parlato della Sardegna e dei sardi più che dei personaggi da me creati. Così han detto che io imitavo in qualche modo il Verga, del quale conosco solo due o tre cose, tanto diverse dalle mie, e han tirato fuori autori tedeschi, francesi, inglesi che io non conosco affatto. De' russi non si parli. Io ho letto i

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<sup>45</sup> Kozma, 'Introduction', *Marianna Sirca*, p. 11.

romanzi russi solo dopo l'insistente paragone che i critici ne facevano [...] L'uomo è, in fondo, eguale dappertutto.<sup>46</sup>

Deledda's work was dismissed by many as a complete failure: artistically, thematically and linguistically. Giancarlo Buzzi summarises these criticisms in his own disparaging assessment of Deledda:

Scrittrice incolta, dunque: persino nelle opere migliori, della maturità e della vecchiaia, il difetto si svela, con ingenuità addirittura comiche, con la mancanza di proporzioni, con la sciattezza del discorso, oltre che, più generalmente, con la eterogeneità dei tentativi. Che la Deledda scriva male, tutti i critici hanno concordemente riconosciuto, purtroppo però limitandosi ad avvertire una manchevolezza di lingua, senza affrontare il problema nella sua interezza, senza scendere alle radici del difetto.<sup>47</sup>

Buzzi's harsh critique continues by dismissing Deledda's writing as superficial and mediocre,<sup>48</sup> categorising her stories as romantic, pessimistic and lacking in any firm moral guidance.<sup>49</sup> Even those who are in favour of Deledda's writing seem to point out her limitations. In her study of 1949, Licia Roncarati emphasises the significance of Deledda as an artist who represents more than the people of Sardinia; however, Roncarati also states that Deledda's frequent descriptions of landscape in her works are testimony to the weakness of her art.<sup>50</sup> In an article of 1936, Michele Cantarella conveys the assumption of many critics at the time of Deledda's writing, that is, that she lacked originality, and succeeded only in mimicking other great writers: 'La Deledda, come le sue consorelle, in arte non fu un'innovatrice, ma seguì la scia dei grandi.'<sup>51</sup> For example, in 1965, Giuseppe Giacalone compares Deledda with the great Giovanni Verga and finds her wanting: 'Verga è un caposcuola e un grande poeta, la

<sup>46</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Lettere e note autobiografiche della Deledda*, ed. by A. Momogliano (Roma, 20 maggio 1907). Cited by Anna Dolfi, *Grazia Deledda* (Milano: Mursia, 1979), pp. 71-72.

<sup>47</sup> Giancarlo Buzzi, *Grazia Deledda* (Milano: Bocca, 1952), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Roncarati, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Cantarella, p. 106.

D. è una seguace e un più modesto poeta.’<sup>52</sup> He therefore regards her as an inferior *verista*, rather than considering her work in a wider literary context. By comparing Deledda with the *veristi* of her time, the modernist aspects of her writing which emerged in her later texts were disregarded, and so the intrigues of her narrative skill and philosophical musing were not appreciated.

Again, in 1968, Antonio Piromalli, who praises Deledda’s accurate portrayal of Sardinian reality, dismisses the proposition that her work is in any way ‘decadent’ for she does not penetrate the depths of the modern soul<sup>53</sup> and describes her attempts at innovation in these harsh terms:

La dissoluzione dello schema narrativo dal romanzo al frammento, alla fiaba, al lirismo non è l’annunciazione di un’arte nuova ma il segno di un minore vigore di vita, di una stanchezza artistica che non può rigenerarsi in un clima che non esiste più.<sup>54</sup>

Pancrazi, in similar terms, claims that Deledda will never reach the great heights of her contemporaries such as Pirandello and Panzini<sup>55</sup> and that, although she has written some beautiful pieces, she lacks the essential attainment of a ‘capolavoro’.<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, I intend to demonstrate that, although Deledda and Pirandello differ in their stylistic approaches, they share many similarities in their interest in relativist concepts regarding identity, madness and freedom.

Deledda has therefore been dismissed by many as a minor author whose work is unremarkable, unoriginal and uninspired. McDonald Carolan attributes these limited criticisms to an inability to comprehend and appreciate Deledda’s work in a patriarchal system, for the fact that she was female created difficulties and led critics

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<sup>52</sup> Giuseppe Giacalone, *Ritratto critico di Grazia Deledda* (Roma: Ciranna, 1965), p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Piromalli, p. 116.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>55</sup> Pancrazi cited by Antonio Piromalli, *Grazia Deledda* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1968), p. 153.

<sup>56</sup> Piromalli, p. 153.

to dismiss her work as naive.<sup>57</sup> Deledda was also significantly restricted linguistically, as she was not a native speaker of Italian. In an article of 2007, Martha King depicts the linguistic challenges Deledda faced as a Sardinian, showing that it was initially necessary for Deledda to think in her dialect, Logudoro, and then to translate this into Italian, causing her use of language to appear unnatural and disjointed.<sup>58</sup> Although her Sardinian origins brought Deledda to international fame, the island also thus created significant prejudice against her. According to Sharon Wood, Deledda's use of language was often denounced as inferior, filled with grammatical mistakes and 'sardismi'.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in her article examining Deledda's use of language published in 1992, Cristina Lavinio cites several critical comments about Deledda's dialectal errors. For example, G. Dessì refers to her 'forma sommaria e sciatta' and 'sgrammaticature e improprietà',<sup>60</sup> and M. G. Secci regards her 'sardismi' as 'imperfezioni linguistiche'.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, her work received greater appreciation abroad than in her own home because the apparently clumsy elements of her language were eliminated in translations.<sup>62</sup> Sharon Wood aptly points out that the so-called weaknesses of Deledda's writing should in fact be regarded as her creative strengths:

If the high literary Italian tradition has dismissed Deledda for being regional, popular, folkloric and female, we might argue that these characteristics on the contrary are her strength. Deledda offered a powerful analysis of Sardinian social and economic realities, still suffering the consequences of colonial (mis)rule, with a particular emphasis on the psychological and economic situation of women.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Ann McDonald Carolan, 'Icon, Intercession and Insight: The Madonna as Interpretative Key to Grazia Deledda', *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 20.1-2 (1999), 103-117 (p. 113).

<sup>58</sup> King, p. 154.

<sup>59</sup> Wood, 'Locations, relocation and dislocations', p 2.

<sup>60</sup> Cristina Lavinio, 'Primi appunti per una revisione critica dei giudizi sulla lingua di Grazia Deledda', in *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. by Ugo Collu (Nuoro: Consorzio per la pubblica lettura S. Satta, 1992), p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>62</sup> King, p. 160.

<sup>63</sup> Wood, 'Locations, relocation and dislocations', pp. 6-7.

Indeed, it is the inspiration of Sardinian settings that brought Deledda to critical attention, and her depictions of the trials of solitary life, and of individual rebellion against established social structures are the foundation of her inspiring writing.

Deledda has indeed been overlooked and misunderstood due to her status, her use of language, and largely due to her gender. There are some critics, however, who do acknowledge the neglect and disregard Deledda has received over the years, and rather, praise her artistic skill. In an early example of such praise, in 1928, Federigo Tozzi wrote a short article about Deledda's development as a writer, with a particular focus on her novel *Marianna Sirca* (1915). Here he declares that Deledda does not receive sufficient critical praise for the originality and universality of her art. Indeed, Deledda is far more than a Sardinian writer.<sup>64</sup> Tozzi suggests that he would agree with the negative assessments of her work had she not progressed beyond her early publications, but given the evolution of her writing, he believes that her work must not only be revisited, but rediscovered: 'Riparlare di lei non vuol dire insistere o ripetere; vuol dire riconoscere alla fine un valore che appunto per la sua vastità ci sfuggiva.'<sup>65</sup> He focuses on the rich and detailed characters of *Marianna Sirca* who mirror the emotions and experiences of all peoples, not just those of its Sardinian setting. Describing Deledda as a 'grande scrittrice', Tozzi thus announces that 'è tempo ormai di riconoscere che molti, quasi i più, dei personaggi della Deledda non hanno confini geografici o altre limitazioni, ma spettano all'ordine umano che è universale.'<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, another noted literary critic, Attilio Momigliano, similarly praises Deledda's writing, but like Tozzi his comments about the Nuorese writer are

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<sup>64</sup> Federigo Tozzi, 'Per l'arte di Grazia Deledda: A proposito di Marianna Sirca', in *Realtà di ieri e di oggi* (Montebelluna: Amadeus, 1989), pp. 273-283 (p. 273).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

brief. Momigliano composed a very short article entitled ‘Intorno a Grazia Deledda’ which was originally published in the newspaper ‘Corriere della sera’ in 1945, and later republished in the collection of Momigliano’s critical articles, *Ultimi Studi*, in 1954. Momigliano’s praise differs from that of Tozzi, however, for he underlines the importance of the ‘carattere prepotentemente sardo’<sup>67</sup> of her writing. Like many other critics, he identifies her as a regional writer, but his article places great emphasis on the moral foundation of her work, an aspect which distinguishes her from veristic authors such as Verga and Serao.<sup>68</sup> Although he draws on Deledda’s association with Russian writers, principally due to their shared experience of primitive societies, he believes that she stands alone in the literary canon. He describes her as ‘estranea alla tradizione letteraria. Cioè, non si riattacca a nessuno e non si contrappone a nessuno’.<sup>69</sup> Her compositions offer a unique contribution to the literary world, and to our understanding of human nature, and Momigliano thus describes her as a truly great writer: ‘nessuno dopo il Manzoni ha arricchito e approfondito come lei, in una vera opera d’arte, il nostro senso della vita.’<sup>70</sup>

This thesis intends to expand upon the underappreciated nature of Deledda’s writing highlighted by these critics. In particular, it will examine the universality of her work identified by Tozzi, by exploring her engagement with the nature of man. I will now address Deledda’s connection with Naturalism and *verismo* before considering her classification as a ‘decadent’ or modernist writer.

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<sup>67</sup> Attilio Momigliano, ‘Intorno a Grazia Deledda’, in *Ultimi Studi* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1954), pp. 79-94 (p. 80).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>70</sup> Attilio Momigliano cited by Giovanna Abete in *Grazia Deledda e i suoi critici* (Roma: Abete, 1993), p. 93.

Original source: *Letteratura Italiana*, vol. III, (Milano: Principato, 1950)

### **Deledda within the sphere of Naturalism and *Verismo***

As I have stated, most critics have classed Deledda as a veristic or naturalist writer whose aim was to present a true depiction of Sardinian life.<sup>71</sup> *Verismo* and Naturalism are distinct literary movements but they are often mistakenly blurred because of their analogous objectives and approaches. Both movements are similar in their aim to accurately depict reality, enabling the story to tell itself rather than via the interpretation of the author or the interference of an audible narrator. I will first consider Deledda's relationship with Naturalism, which can be regarded as the predecessor of *verismo*.

Although no fixed dates can be applied to the movement, it is acknowledged that it first began in France in the 1860s, spread to Germany and Italy in the 1890s, and stretched on in America into the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> Much like the realist movement that preceded it, Naturalism aimed for the objective representation of reality in literature. As described by Furst and Skrine: 'What the Realists and the Naturalists have in common is the fundamental belief that art is in essence a mimetic, objective representation of outer reality (in contrast to the imaginative, subjective transfiguration practised by the Romantics).'<sup>73</sup> Naturalism is regarded by many as a more extreme version of Realism. Its intention was the application of scientific theories to literature in order to achieve an accurate, detached depiction of reality. Fictional characters were experiments, placed in specific contexts in order to examine their predetermined behaviour. Naturalist writers were therefore interested in heredity, determinism and fate. The notion was put forward that people's characters, and in turn, their actions, are determined by their biology rather than free

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<sup>71</sup> For example, see Antonio Floris, *La Prima Deledda* (Cagliari: Castello, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

will. Furthermore, the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution spurred an interest in man's animalistic tendencies, seeing the link between modern man and the bestial creature from which he has evolved. For this reason, many naturalist authors were accused of being amoral, for their characters were allowed to follow instinctual urges, leading them along dark, sexual and often violent paths. This was viewed as an utter disregard for social and moral codes, rather than the experiment as which it was apparently intended:

Just as the machine that produces vitriol is not intrinsically better or worse than that which makes sugar, so the evil man is on the same plane as the good: neither is responsible for what he is, both have been conditioned by forces beyond their control. Here in essence is that amorality for which the Naturalists soon became notorious.<sup>74</sup>

Although Deledda does represent the reality of Sardinian life, she does not depict it in a scientific, objective manner, as was the aim of naturalist writers such as Zola and Maupassant.<sup>75</sup> Her characters are contemplative and at times philosophical, questioning the meaning of the challenges they face, and the nature of their very selves.

Other critics such as Antonio Floris and Salvatore Floro Di-Zenzo have classed Deledda as a veristic writer, rather than a Naturalist, due to her pessimistic view of the moral and social hardships of Sardinian life.<sup>76</sup> Like any other literary movement, it is difficult to confine *verismo* to a specific period of time, but as Naturalism came to an end in France at the close of the nineteenth century, its influence continued in the form of *verismo*.<sup>77</sup> The social and political context of *verismo* made its works more pessimistic than those of Naturalism. As described by Giulio Carnazzi: 'Nella assai più arretrata situazione italiana il narratore naturalista

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<sup>74</sup> Furst and Skrine, p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Floris, p. 89; Salvatore-Floro Di Zenzo, *Il narrare visivo di Grazia Deledda* (Napoli: Libreria T. Pironti, 1979), p. 55.

<sup>77</sup> Mario Pomilio, *Dal naturalismo al verismo* (Napoli: Liguori, 1966), p. 85.

esprime una pronunciata carica di pessimismo e di sfiducia: rimane testimone spassionato e apparentemente neutrale di una realtà che gli appare imm modificabile.<sup>78</sup>

In Italy, industrialization had brought depression and suffering to the poorer classes, and unification was seen as a broken promise of change. Veristic writers such as Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana therefore depicted a miserable reality which did not share the same aspirations for the future as the French Naturalists.<sup>79</sup>

Deledda can be associated with veristic writing because she is interested in the plight of the struggling people of Sardinian society. She evokes the solitude of rural life and bases her characters on the people that she encountered in Nuoro, ranging from servants and bandits to priests and landowners. We are presented with religious rituals, social traditions and the difficulties encountered when attempting to cross social strata.<sup>80</sup> Deledda presents the reality of their Sardinian existence to the wider reading world, which is the principal reason for her winning the Nobel Prize. During his speech of 1927 at the ceremony in Stockholm where the prize was awarded to Deledda, Henrik Schück declared that Deledda had been chosen as its winner for her interest in the human life in the environment of her island:

Alfred Nobel volle che il premio di letteratura venisse dato a chi con le sue opere letterarie avesse donato all'umanità quel nettare che infonde salute ed energia di vita morale. Conformemente a questa volontà, l'Accademia Svedese ha aggiudicato a Grazia Deledda tale premio 'per la sua potenza di scrittrice, sostenuta da un alto ideale, che ritrae in forme plastiche la vita quale è nella sua appartata isola natale, e che con profondità e con calore tratta problemi di generale interesse umano.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Giulio Carnazzi, *Verismo* (Milano: Bibliografica, 1996), p. 35.

<sup>79</sup> Luca Clerici, *Invito a conoscere il verismo* (Milano: Mursia, 1989).

<sup>80</sup> Grazia Deledda's works *Elias Portolu* (Torino: Casa Editrice Nazionale, 1903), *Marianna Sirca* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2007) and *La madre* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2007) are clear examples of the religious and social structures of Sardinian society depicted.

<sup>81</sup> This quotation is taken from the speech given by Henrik Schück at the award ceremony in Stockholm on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1927. I found extracts of this speech printed on the wall of the 'Museo Deleddiano' during my research trip to Nuoro.

In her depiction of Sardinian life, the subjects of temptation, sin and guilt are often identified as the central feature of Deledda's writing. In 1971, Antonio Tobia's analysis identifies the ongoing battle between good and evil that is only resolved with death as the principal theme of her work.<sup>82</sup> The following year, the article contributed by Giorgio Barberi Squarotti to the *Convegno Nazionale di Studi Deleddiani* highlights that this 'malattia morale', the struggle against the temptation of evil, strikes characters in every class of society.<sup>83</sup> He believes, therefore, that regardless of their social standing, the trials of a moral life impact on all of Deledda's characters, and form the focal point of her writing. In a more recent study of spirituality in Deledda's work, Nicolino Sarale also identifies the author's main themes as 'la tentazione, il peccato, il bene, il male'.<sup>84</sup> Sarale refers to the pessimism that reigns in Deledda's writing,<sup>85</sup> though he does distinguish Deledda from the veristic movement of Giovanni Verga.<sup>86</sup> This thesis aims to show that it is not only sin and temptation which drive Deledda's characters, but the battle to understand one's place in the world. Her characters do not simply strive to place themselves in the moral structure laid out by society and the Church, rather they attempt to understand why they wrestle with these demands. Deledda does not represent a moral authority, suggesting that her characters must unquestioningly obey their elders and deny themselves all that they desire. On the contrary, she allows them to examine their consciences, to explore the motivation behind their desires and to question whether they should be allowed to control their own destinies. These are not the moral preachings of a pessimist, but the musings of a modernist.

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<sup>82</sup> Tobia, p. 49.

<sup>83</sup> Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'La tecnica e la struttura del romanzo deleddiano', in *Convegno Nazionale di Studi Deleddiani, Nuoro 30 settembre 1972* (Cagliari: Editrice Sarda Fossataro, 1974), pp. 127-154 (p. 151).

<sup>84</sup> Sarale, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

In associating Deledda with *verismo*, critics have naturally compared her work with that of Giovanni Verga. Indeed, Deledda has been compared more frequently with Giovanni Verga than with any other Italian writer. According to Massimo Pittau, Deledda and Verga share a common bond in their discordant relationship with the Italian language: ‘nel Verga esiste il problema dei rapporti fra la lingua italiana ed un suo dialetto, nella Deledda invece esiste il problema dei rapporti fra la lingua italiana da una parte e la lingua sarda dall’altra.’<sup>87</sup> Their linguistic ties to their respective native islands are therefore seen as a causal link in their congruous approach to a depiction of social reality in their own environments. Stylistically, both authors employ the narrative device of *free indirect style*, which is used by naturalist and veristic writers alike to leave the reader unaware of an interfering narratorial presence. Its aim was to create the illusion of an objective depiction of reality. Elise Magistro, however, notes the absence of the choral nature of Verga’s writing in Deledda’s works.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, it is the perspective of a few central characters that is conveyed through the narrative of Deledda’s novels, rather than a representation of Sardinian society as a whole. Furthermore, Deledda’s use of *free indirect style* has different ends from those of naturalist and veristic authors, for Deledda employs it as a device in the gradual revelation of her characters’ hidden selves.

From a thematic point of view, Neria De Giovanni highlights the importance of fate in both authors’ works, noting that Verga’s characters are driven by economic fate, whereas those of Deledda are guided by a moral fate. Verga portrays the miserable existence of Sicilian characters who are steeped in poverty and endeavour

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<sup>87</sup> Massimo Pittau, ‘La questione della lingua in Grazia Deledda’, in *Convegno Nazionale di Studi Deleddiani, Nuoro 30 settembre 1972* (Cagliari: Editrice Sarda Fossataro, 1974), pp. 155-173 (p. 159).

<sup>88</sup> Elise Magistro, ‘Forging an art: The early novels of Grazia Deledda’, in *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 57-85 (p. 76).

to save themselves from the cruel hand of fate.<sup>89</sup> For Deledda's characters, however, the main battle is that against the restrictions of other people upon their identities, rather than against the financial destitution of a dying agrarian society. As we have seen, the turn of the twentieth century was indeed a time of change in Sardinia,<sup>90</sup> for the unification of Italy and the development of more modern industries threatened the traditional, agricultural way of life. Many of Deledda's novels are in fact set in rural Sardinia at this time, but the characters focus their attention on their struggle for freedom in an individual sense, rather than on a socio-political level.

Deledda's work certainly begins with *verismo*, employing aspects of its narrative style, and sharing in the aspiration to present the reality of life, but her work moves beyond this movement and engages with modernist ideas. She is not only concerned with the reality of Sardinian life, but of the struggle of humanity as a whole, focusing on the inner turmoil of individuals rather than the economic and social challenges of Sardinian communities. As suggested by Giuseppe Petronio: 'E la grandezza della Deledda, allora, è proprio questa: che essa, grazie a Dio, non è una sarda che ha scritto per i sardi, ma un uomo che ha scritto per gli uomini.'<sup>91</sup> Deledda's portrayal of Sardinian people is representative of the trials of all humanity, and her interest in the formation of one's identity leads to introspective writing that does not coincide with the objective approach of Naturalism and *verismo*.

### **Deledda and Modernism**

The aspiration held by Naturalism and *verismo* to objectively represent reality in literature proved to be flawed. Many acknowledged that science and art cannot be

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<sup>89</sup> Giovanni Verga, *I malavoglia* (Milano: Treves, 1881).

<sup>90</sup> See footnote 15.

<sup>91</sup> Giuseppe Petronio, 'Interventi', in *Convegno Nazionale di Studi Deleddiani, Nuoro 30 settembre 1972* (Cagliari: Editrice Sarda Fossataro, 1974), pp. 237-241 (p. 241).

merged, for art in essence must be an imitation of reality rather than a documentation of it, a subjective rather than an objective representation of it: '[T]he eye of the observer was not an inanimate photographic lens, the picture of reality in each naturalistic work is recognizably individual. The portrait of reality which the Naturalists purported to give soon proves on examination to be a vision of reality.'<sup>92</sup> The mistrust of reality consequently inspired 'modernist' writing, a term which can incorporate several distinct strands including *decadentismo*, relativism and futurism.<sup>93</sup>

These divergent, modernist literary movements appeared around the turn of the twentieth century, at a time when the certainty of reality itself and the way we perceive it, and ourselves within it, was called into question. Michael Levenson describes the move into modernist literature in precisely these terms:

Much of the activity of the modern novelistic imagination and much of its anxiety, was to establish a secure basis for individuality ... It is a recurrent thematic concern, the struggle to wrest a figure of the self from the snares of its milieu, and it is an urgent formal issue, the need to define the contours of character.<sup>94</sup>

The self and society seemed completely intertwined and writers sought to portray the nature of an individual self, distinct from the definition of the society which surrounded it. It is therefore understandable why the notion of identity and individuality became of such interest in 'modernist' literature. The dawn of feminism and the traumatic conflict of the First World War were also contributing factors in the changing face of society, and thus to the new methods of thinking brought to the fore in literary circles. '[T]hese inescapable forces of turbulent social modernization were not simply looming on the outside as the destabilizing context of cultural Modernism;

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<sup>92</sup> Furst and Skrine, p. 71.

<sup>93</sup> A discussion of futurism is not pertinent to a reading of Deledda's writing. For further information on the futurist movement see Judy Rawson, 'Italian Futurism' in *Modernism, 1880-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 243-258.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 128.

they penetrated the interior of artistic intervention.<sup>95</sup> It was an era of dramatic change which inspired a ‘modernist’ approach to the world and the way it was artistically represented.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Deledda’s work also displayed significant changes, which many critics have attempted to align with *decadentismo*. The name *decadentismo* is linked to a sense of an ending, of descent away from reality, and the movement thus sought to escape the disappointment of reality by retreating into the fictive world of art. Sandra Avincola describes the ‘decadent’ reaction to crumbling modern society as a ‘tendenza a vedere nell’Arte un’alternativa totale a un mondo che si avverte sempre più estraneo e incomprensibile’.<sup>96</sup> Writers aspired to create art for art’s sake, focusing on the beauty of the artistic creation rather than the imperfect world which it represented. The movement engendered an obsession with aesthetics and with artificial beauty replacing that of nature. This was epitomized in the quintessential ‘decadent’ work of J. K. Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (1884) which saw its protagonist, Des Esseintes, closing himself off from the world into a solitary environment made up of man-made replicas of nature.<sup>97</sup> According to Adriano Seroni the principal aims of *decadentismo* were to intensify one’s own existence, to elevate one’s thoughts and to exalt one’s art.<sup>98</sup> *Decadentismo* therefore encouraged the placement of art above all else and a rejection of the natural world.

Critics such as Enza Buono and Antonio Piromalli believe that Deledda’s work spans a time of transition in Italian literature from the schools of *verismo* to *decadentismo*. In 1951, Buono’s critical essay places Deledda between these two camps, claiming that she does not successfully achieve the objectives of either

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Levenson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1- 8 (p. 4).

<sup>96</sup> Sandra Avincola, *Il Decadentismo: la coscienza della crisi* (Roma: Nuova Omicron, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>97</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

<sup>98</sup> Adriano Seroni, *Il Decadentismo* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1964), p. 21.

movement.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Piromalli (writing in 1967) and Spinazzola (writing in 1968) point out that Deledda begins to examine notions of existence and the nature of human consciousness, a feature that classes Deledda's writing as utterly 'decadent' for Spinazzola.<sup>100</sup> According to Piromalli, however, her examination of these ideas does not extend to the necessary depths to be classed as 'decadent' writing.<sup>101</sup> Rather, Piromalli believes that she is a prime example of a writer whose themes are part of the merging of *verismo* and *decadentismo*.<sup>102</sup> Eurialo De Michelis similarly describes Deledda as being 'a cavallo anche lei fra il naturalismo dei fatti e il musicale decadentismo dei simboli'.<sup>103</sup> I do not believe Deledda failed to achieve the heights of *decadentismo*, for her writing should not be classed as 'decadent'. Although she responds to the changes in society and engages with many modernist ideas emerging at the time, she does not look to aesthetics and to artificiality in her writing; her interest lies in more relativist ideas, namely the nature of man, the exploration of the self and its connection with others, with society and with language. Her interest in the makeup of the human mind, as highlighted by Spinazzola, is a modernist rather than a 'decadent' attribute of her writing.

Relativism, which took a different approach from *decadentismo*, endeavoured to explore the uncertainties and inconsistencies of reality and of man within that reality. The doubt, created by Naturalism, in the ability of writing to recreate an objective view of reality led to the uncertainty of perceiving reality at all, giving rise to the relativist notions of writers such as Luigi Pirandello.<sup>104</sup> The question was raised that if the author's voice is always tainted with subjectivity, is not the perception of

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<sup>99</sup> Buono, pp. 12-13.

<sup>100</sup> Vittorio Spinazzola, 'Introduzione', in Grazia Deledda, *La madre* (Milano: Mondadori, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>101</sup> Piromalli, p.116.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>103</sup> De Michelis, Introduzione, *Opere Scelte*, p. 31.

<sup>104</sup> Pomilio, p. 169.

every individual similarly obscured? As a result, is not our perception of ourselves also subjective and therefore not accurate? Pirandellian characters seek freedom in madness and death, rather than the uncertainty of reality. I will examine these relativist notions relating to identity in my chapter on *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*, particularly in comparison with Pirandello. I intend to demonstrate that, although Deledda falls into the path of naturalistic and veristic writing in some ways, her later works, notably the three I have chosen to examine in this thesis, also explore the relativist questions which arose following these movements.

Critics such as Peter Bürger argue that these distinct schools, in this case *decadentismo* and relativism, must not be clustered together under the term 'modernism' for they have their own poetics and their own very different attitudes to innovation in literature.<sup>105</sup> Others, however, such as Peter Collier and Judy Davies believe that the notion of 'modernism' is sufficient to group together the various modernist strands for parallel analyses. Similarly, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane point out that, in spite of their variations, the modernist movements are bound together by a sense of crisis: 'what is clear is that there is in nearly all of these versions a sense of Modernism as an historical evolution coupled with a notion of crisis and a notion of a point of culmination.'<sup>106</sup> I do not wish to fall into the trap which Michael Levenson describes of '[making] the many Modernisms into one thing, and then [placing] that one thing into a single chapter within a tidy narrative'.<sup>107</sup> I fully acknowledge that different literary movements surrounding the turn of, and leading into the twentieth century are precisely that: different. For my exploration of

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<sup>105</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>106</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', in *Modernism, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 19-55 (p. 36).

<sup>107</sup> Levenson, *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, p. 7.

modernism in Deledda, I intend to employ Bradbury and McFarlane's definition of modernism as a movement that is 'coupled with a notion of crisis', principally aligning the term with the branch of relativism, rather than *decadentismo*. I intend to examine the presence of this sense of crisis in Deledda's works, the crisis which Levenson also admits defined the historical and thus literary context of the twentieth century.<sup>108</sup> I am particularly interested in Deledda's exploration of the notion of personal and existential crisis, and the uncertainties about the self and reality that emerge from this.

This emerging doubt in the nature of the self and its place within the world derived from philosophical thinking towards the close of the nineteenth century. Robert Gordon describes how the works of figures such as Darwin, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer 'tended to challenge certainties and decentre received wisdom about the self, humanity, God and the world around us',<sup>109</sup> and these ideas consequently permeated literary compositions of the time. Writing thus became more introspective as authors explored the contours of human identity, seeking meaning and understanding from within.

Judy Davies identifies Luigi Pirandello and Italo Svevo as clear examples of modernist authors precisely due to their interest in the crisis of self. They 'share the sense of individual alienation and the spirit of scepticism that makes them so distinctively "moderns".' According to Davies:

They have in common an abiding curiosity about the mind's activities, and they are fascinated in particular by its tendency to distort perception in order to function more adequately in an alien external world: both cast doubt on the ability of the intellect to know itself.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Levenson, *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Gordon, *An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Literature: A Difficult Modernity* (London: Duckworth, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>110</sup> Judy Davies, 'Following the Strange: Narratives of the Self in Svevo and Pirandello', in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. by Peter Collier and Judy Davies (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 132.

The crisis of self at the centre of this modernist writing is therefore filled with doubt, for writers depict characters in a state of perplexity, searching for the meaning of their identities. They contemplate the notion that they may not be capable of knowing themselves, or indeed, of knowing anyone else. Deledda's own characters face these same quandaries, and through a battle with those around them, and often with their own selves, they attempt to fathom who they are.

The crisis of language is also a crucial feature of modernist writing, for artists began to question the very medium through which these uncertain concepts were expressed. As the capability to know the world and the self within the world was cast into doubt, so too were the means of expression and perception that allowed access to them. According to Peter Collier,

Once referential language is distrusted, once it is admitted that language only ever operates obliquely, hinting at a transcendental world which it can never describe, nor even directly symbolize, then its only possible functions are to suggest what it cannot grasp, and to question its own sublunary procedures.<sup>111</sup>

Coupled with an examination of the knowability of one's identity, therefore, was a consideration of the limitations of language itself. 'It was a defining characteristic of the Modernist movement to scrutinize and question its own forms of expression.'<sup>112</sup>

Writers consequently questioned the capabilities of their own art form, seeing language itself as potentially flawed. Deledda also explores the problem of language, notably in her novel *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*, where her characters question the boundaries of their own expression and the human need for linguistic interaction.

Deledda does not challenge the boundaries of writing itself as Pirandello does with his

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Collier, 'The Unconscious Image', in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. by Peter Collier and Judy Davies (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Collier and Judy Davies, 'Preface', in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. by Peter Collier and Judy Davies (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 1.

theatrical compositions,<sup>113</sup> rather she engages with its capacity to liberate and its integral relationship with identity.

In the last few years, some critics have attempted to re-examine Deledda's place in the literary canon by considering her in a modernist light, specifically from a feminist perspective. These critics astutely point out that Deledda's status as a female Sardinian meant that many of the most important elements of her writing have been overlooked. By looking beyond the narrow interpretations of Deledda's work, several interesting themes emerge, many of which are linked to her position as a marginalized writer and woman.

The earliest of these studies is Bruce Merry's article of 1990 that considers the relationship between Deledda's female characters and their male relatives, particularly their fathers and brothers. The women are obedient, socially inferior characters, always accompanied, led and dictated to by men. Deledda's female characters are restricted by the domination of male figures, whose own pleasure dictates the paths of both of their lives:

Grazia Deledda advances the cause of the disinherited sex cautiously, by showing that contemporary women had a longer memory, better skills at dissimulation and tighter strategies for coping with adversity than their brothers, husbands and fathers. This may be little, but at a time when most male Italian novelists forged female characters who were either eccentric aristocrats or working-class dupes, Deledda's portrayal shows in a systematic counter-proposal that men had in fact, as always, moulded women to suit their fantasies.<sup>114</sup>

Merry's analysis provides useful insights into the relationships between Deledda's male and female characters, highlighting feminist tendencies in Deledda's thinking

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<sup>113</sup> Pirandello toys with the boundaries of theatre as he merges the dramatic performances with 'reality' offstage, notably in his plays *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921) (Milano: Mondadori, 1993), *Ciascuno a suo modo* (1924) (Milano: Mondadori, 1968) and his final, most radical play, *I giganti della montagna* (1936) (Milano: Mursia, 1972).

<sup>114</sup> Bruce Merry, "Dolls or Dragons": the problem of the depiction of women in Grazia Deledda's novels', in Bruce Merry and Giovanni Cecchetti, *Women in Modern Italian Literature: Four Studies Based on the Work of Grazia Deledda, Alba De Céspedes, Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini* (Townsville, Australia: Department of Modern Languages, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1990), p. 35.

due to her evident objection to the established patriarchal structure. In the introduction to an English translation of *Marianna Sirca* (1915), published in 2006, Janice M. Kozma points out the feminist message of this protagonist's restricted social position:

During her entire professional life Deledda never made a clearly supportive public statement on the matter of women's rights. There was no need. Her novel, *Marianna Sirca* (1915), says it all. Offering this astonishingly modern protagonist to her early twentieth-century readership spoke volumes about Grazia Deledda's atavistic stance vis-à-vis women's inherent rights, desire for personal freedom, and the need to control their own lives. Perhaps because she was the living embodiment of Marianna Sirca's fictive life, Grazia Deledda had an uncanny ability to espouse literarily what the extraordinarily vociferous feminists were championing at the barricades throughout Europe and the Americas. Deledda transferred many of those serious concerns to a fictional character who would act out the desiderata, thus forcing the author's voice to be heard as well.<sup>115</sup>

Deledda herself never truly identified as a feminist, but as McDonald Carolan aptly points out, she did recognise a woman's right to study and work, and was therefore aware of the limitations placed on women during her lifetime. McDonald Carolan quotes Deledda's opinion of feminism in an inquiry of 1911:

Per rispondere adeguatamente alle due domande sul femminismo, occorrebbe che io avessi una profonda coscienza delle principali questioni sociali che agitano l'umanità e una lunga preparazione sulle grandi questioni civili ed economiche. Io scrivo romanzi e novelle: questè la mia specialità. Trovo giusto e bene che la donna pensi, studi e lavori.<sup>116</sup>

According to Kozma, there was no need for Deledda to openly declare her affiliation to feminism, as her message was clear enough from her fiction, 'where her proto-feminism bubbles to the surface in the subtlest of ways'.<sup>117</sup> Rebecca Hopkins believes that it is the presence of these feminist concepts in her treatment of Sardinian life that makes Deledda much more than a veristic writer:

The psychological and socio-economic complexity of Deledda's examination of her characters' oppression moves her interpretation beyond the confines of *verismo* (to which Deledda herself denied

<sup>115</sup> Kozma, Introduction, *Marianna Sirca*, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> McDonald Carolan, footnote 57, ("Un'inchiesta," 123) (p. 116).

<sup>117</sup> Kozma, *Eternal Adolescents*, p. 45.

allegiance) and critics' traditional categorization of Deledda as a 'regional' writer. Deledda deserves to be read as both a proto-feminist and anti-colonial writer whose feminism rests in her subtle and revolutionary appropriation of rural Sardinian culture.<sup>118</sup>

There are numerous female protagonists whose restricted positions in society have been viewed as a representation of Deledda's underlying feminist tendencies. For example, Ursula Fanning's article of 2007 examines the nature of enclosed existences for Deledda's female protagonists, particularly the eponymous protagonists of *Marianna Sirca* (1915) and *Cosima* (1937). She draws on the images of caged birds seeking flight which proliferate throughout both texts, as a means of representing the desire for freedom of expression and choice in a patriarchal social system. According to Fanning, it is this attempt to define oneself in conflict with society which makes Deledda a 'writer with strikingly modern concerns'.<sup>119</sup> These trapped Deleddian women desire freedom, and this often constitutes the freedom to choose their own path in life and therefore to adhere to their romantic and sexual desires. The search for freedom also constitutes an important aspect of my own analysis. It does not, however, stem from a feminist reading of Deledda's work. Rather, I intend to consider the way in which the identities of a number of Deledda's characters, both male and female, are intrinsically bound up with language and narrative.

In recent years there have been two studies published which propose to redefine Deledda as a modernist writer. In 2007 a volume of essays dedicated to modernist aspects of Deledda's writing was published, entitled *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*. The collection emphasises the reasons for her neglect by literary criticism thus far, and considers her work in a new, modernist light. In an article which considers Deledda's early novels, Elise Magistro examines the presence

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<sup>118</sup> Hopkins, p. 112.

<sup>119</sup> Ursula Fanning, 'Enclosure, escape and the erotic: shadows of the self in the writings of Grazia Deledda', in *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 215-236 (p. 234).

of social and sexual taboos in Deledda's writing, and aptly identifies the psychological crises of Deledda's alienated characters as a reason for considering Deledda's work as modern within the scope of its nineteenth-century conception.<sup>120</sup> She describes Deledda's struggle to align her own aesthetic views with the principles of *verismo*, suggesting that this was a marriage which was ultimately doomed to fail.<sup>121</sup> Magistro argues that the provincial setting of Deledda's novels, with the emphasis on social structure and the presence of gossip and scandal is a suitable environment for the spiritual crisis of the protagonist, rather than a blanket depiction of a real society.

In a similar study, published in 2008, Margherita Heyer-Caput expands on her article from the aforementioned collection and considers the presence of modernist notions in Deledda's oeuvre. According to Heyer-Caput, 'Grazia Deledda, not unlike Svevo or Pirandello and beyond the reductive "isms" of Italian canonized cultural history, is an integral part of the critical debate on the cultural crisis of modernity.'<sup>122</sup> Heyer-Caput assigns Deledda's acute awareness of existential tensions and questions relating to the modernist crisis to her experience of marginalisation as a Sardinian woman. She believes the author was caught between her position as a Sardinian and as a European, and equally between the influences of Naturalism and *decadentismo*, and consequently transposed this sense of exclusion, of marginality to her writing.<sup>123</sup> It is these geographic, gender-related and literary tensions which breed Deledda's interest in the questions relating to the self which she examines in her novels.

Heyer-Caput's study focuses on four of Deledda's texts, charting the evolution of modernist ideas in the author's work from its early signs in *La via del male* (1896),

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<sup>120</sup> Magistro, p. 76.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>122</sup> Margherita Heyer-Caput, *Grazia Deledda's Dance of Modernity* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 7-8.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

through to its development in *Cenere* (1904) and its stronger presence in both *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* and *La danza della collana* (1924). Beginning with the earliest of these texts, Heyer-Caput argues that the changes Deledda incorporated into the three different published versions of *La via del male* illustrate the author's movement from Naturalism to modernism. She believes that an analysis of the changing language in the three versions of the novel demonstrates Deledda's 'constant preoccupation with the linguistic problem of "questione della lingua" in post-unification Italy, in which Sardinia played an extremely marginal role.'<sup>124</sup> This is just one example of Deledda's interest in matters beyond her native Sardinia, which contradicts the common opinion that Deledda only wrote about her familiar environs. It is the questioning of social morality, however, which Heyer-Caput emphasises as the foremost modern quality of *La via del male*. The novel depicts the crisis of Sardinian society in the light of modernity, as the characters realise that no single truth exists.<sup>125</sup> Moral and social authorities are consequently questioned, for '[i]n the philosophical and scientific thought of modernity, the notion of truth is replaced by the hermeneutic search for multiple truths that encompass different levels of temporality and different facets of reality.'<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the concept of madness is introduced in later versions of the novel, as well as the motifs of the mirror and mask, all of which are central to my own analysis of *Il segreto*. Heyer-Caput thus highlights the introduction of several important modernist notions in Deledda's early work, although I maintain that their presence is not significantly evident until the composition of *Il segreto* in 1921.

The subsequent chapter which is dedicated to *Cenere* focuses on the theme of silence and its implications for the characters. Heyer-Caput points out that '[t]he

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<sup>124</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 41.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

silencing of the mother, unmarried, with an illegitimate child, is represented by her narratological erasure from the text, just as in the restrictive Sardinian culture of that time such a woman is banished to the margins.<sup>127</sup> In a sense, therefore, it could be argued that this text presents a similar link between narrative and power, a connection that I will highlight in my analysis of three of Deledda's later novels. Heyer-Caput is certainly correct to examine the text as a form of *Bildungsroman*, as the protagonist undergoes a journey of maturity and self-discovery. She further asserts that Anania's quest for his mother is a search for power, but I would describe it rather as a search for self-understanding. In a Cavarerian sense, Anania returns to his origin in order to understand his present self.

Heyer-Caput's analysis of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* considers the novel in light of Nietzschean philosophy and underlines important modernist concepts relating to madness and the absence of objective truth, which first appeared in *La via del male*. I will consider this study once again in more detail in the chapter of this thesis dedicated to an analysis of *Il segreto*. Her final chapter then draws upon the relationship between Schopenhauer and Deledda's *La danza della collana*. According to Heyer-Caput, Schopenhauer's philosophy presents art and music as a means for liberation from the illusions and suffering of the phenomenal world.<sup>128</sup> It is only through accepting suffering that one can be freed of it, and art provides an opportunity for this release. Heyer-Caput believes that these philosophical concepts are clearly evident in *La danza della collana* for 'this theme of renunciation and self-effacement in the quest for happiness that transcends human constraints' is 'deeply ingrained' in the novel's narrative. Heyer-Caput engages with Schopenhauer's philosophy once again in order to discuss the theme of the double in the text, highlighting the division

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<sup>127</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 97.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

between the phenomenon and noumenon as identified by Kant; that is the level of appearance of an object and the deeper level of the object itself. Schopenhauer's philosophy provides a suitable discourse for Heyer-Caput's exploration of these ideas in the novel, rather than proving Deledda's knowledge and understanding of Schopenhauer's work. Nevertheless, interesting ideas emerge from the analysis of *La danza della collana*. Most importantly, Heyer-Caput aptly points out that the shared name of the two protagonists, both named Maria Baldi, introduces the central theme of identity and the double, a concept which will emerge in my study of *La madre*. The elder Maria watches as her niece, the younger Maria, engages in a romance based on a false beginning which was caused by their mistaken identities. Throughout the novel, therefore, the search for truth and self-understanding is crucial, a search that is symbolically represented in the quest for the necklace of the novel's title.

Heyer-Caput's study, therefore, relates Deledda's novels to philosophical ideas in order to depict her modernist tendencies. She presents a rigorous argument for the re-classification of Deledda's work, and touches upon many themes which will play an important part in my own analysis of the relationship between identity, narrative and language in Deledda's texts.

This thesis intends to support and expand upon the re-examination of Deledda's work done by recent critics which places her in the light of modernist thinking. Several critics have noted the presence of psychological and spiritual crises in Deledda's writing. In my reading, the crisis experienced by these characters is a crisis of identity which is intrinsically bound up with language and narrative. Deledda engages with philosophical questions relating to the self, pondering how we are perceived by others and by ourselves, who is responsible for the definition of identity, and who *should* be endowed with the control over a person's identity. She explores

the limitations of the medium of language, enabling her characters to assert control over themselves and each other through their command of language, and of the narrative perspectives of her novels. I suggest that Deledda's interest in the nature of identity and its expression, and construction, through language and narrative illustrates her place as a modernist writer.

### **Identity: philosophical and narrative approaches**

Identity is a complex notion with many possible definitions. In order to engage with this topic in Deledda's writing, therefore, it is necessary to discuss philosophies of identity and set the parameters of my own definition. I will make particular use of Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), and Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* (1990). The ideas pertaining to the intricacies of identity explored in these studies have been most interesting and useful with regard to my own thesis. Although Kristeva and Ricoeur present different ideas regarding the definition of identity, both share in the concept of identity as a construct. For both, identity is constructed through language and through narrative, for it is intrinsically bound up with interaction with the self and/or the other. This of course makes the literary object particularly suited to their discussion, and in turn makes it possible for their observations and analyses to inform a discussion of identity as found in literature. I am led to consider pertinent questions such as who is responsible for the definition, or rather construction, of one's identity, and furthermore, who *should* be responsible for that construction.

The definition of identity is an ongoing topic of debate which lies at the heart of what is loosely deemed 'modernist' literature. Writing has become more introspective since the advent of psychoanalysis, with a particular emphasis on the

workings of the human mind at both the conscious and the unconscious level. According to Donald Hall, the beginning of the modern era was marked by a change of focus.<sup>129</sup> Writers were no longer concerned with searching for meaning outwards but rather searching inwards. Writers have consequently pondered the question ‘What is it to be human?’

In his study of identity in narrative *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur notes that the definition of identity must begin with identification:

To identify something is to be able to make apparent to others, amid a range of particular things of the same type, of *which* one we intend to speak. It is along this path of identifying reference that we encounter the person for the first time, considering this term in an equally modest sense as globally distinguishing this entity from physical bodies. At this elementary stage, identifying is not yet identifying oneself but identifying ‘something.’<sup>130</sup>

Identity in a most basic sense, therefore, is the label put upon something identified, something which is being pointed out, spoken about. It is the subject of attention or discussion.

From this definition many questions arise, as we attempt to refine the parameters within which something has its own individual identity. An identity which is assigned in such a way can be a name, that is, ‘a single name, among all the list of available names, permanently designat[ing] a single individual in opposition to all others of the same class.’<sup>131</sup> We must then wonder, however, what links this name to the object it is naming. Recalling Saussure’s structuralist theory of language, a signifier and a signified, that is, a name and a thing named, are only arbitrarily and artificially linked by a linguistic system created by man.<sup>132</sup> A subject therefore gains

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<sup>129</sup> Donald Hall, *Subjectivity* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>132</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, ‘Course in General Linguistics’, in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 1-14.

its identity through a process of differentiation. The identity of  $x$  is defined by the fact that it is different from  $y$ , but what is it that makes  $x$  different from  $y$ ?

Ricoeur also references two established methods of defining identity. These are numerical and qualitative identity. Something has a numerical identity if it is a singular as opposed to a plural, one and not many. There can therefore be many things,  $a$ ,  $b$  and  $c$ , which are all alike, but they are distinct from one another in that they are separate, individual things. They are numerically identical. Something has a qualitative identity if it possesses certain characteristics, qualitative properties which are observed rather than measured. If  $x$  and  $y$  are the same thing but are described with different names then they are qualitatively identical.

Ricoeur subsequently defines 'character' as 'the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same. By the descriptive features that will be given, the individual compounds numerical identity and qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time. In this way, the sameness of the person is designated emblematically.'<sup>133</sup> Identity to Ricoeur is therefore both numerical and qualitative. This quotation also raises the issue of time and continuity. According to Ricoeur, a person's identity distinguishes them from others both numerically and qualitatively and thus defines them in a certain way consistently and continuously throughout time. Ricoeur himself questions whether or not an identity can embrace changes and yet remain the same. Does a person have the same identity at the beginning and the end of their life even though they have undergone many emotional and physical transformations? Ricoeur here emphasises the importance of self-identification: 'One has only to compare two self-portraits of Rembrandt – it is not the sameness of my body that constitutes the selfhood but its

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<sup>133</sup> Ricoeur, p. 119.

belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body this is.<sup>134</sup>

A further problem lies in the role of the identifier, and for that matter, the identity of the identifier itself. We have been concerned with the person who is spoken about, but the person who is speaking is also relevant to this discussion. Donald Hall cites Thomson who argues that the search for the identity of the *I* is always pointless since it is inevitably tainted by subjectivity.<sup>135</sup> The *I* who is being defined is defined by an *I* who cannot have an objective viewpoint. We are therefore prey to the subjectivities of ourselves and of others.

As we have seen, Ricoeur emphasises the importance of self-identification. He also explores the importance of the relationship between the self and society:

To a large extent, in fact, the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, *in* which the person or the community recognizes itself. Recognizing oneself *in* contributes to recognizing oneself *by*.<sup>136</sup>

A person, therefore, identifies themselves in relation to the identities of people which have already been established in society. An identity enters into a pre-established context in which it must place itself.

Is the established context of society fixed, however? Are not the identities of those around us also constantly in flux? Identity in relation to the other is also an important element emphasised by many theorists and philosophers, principally Hegel in the nineteenth century<sup>137</sup> and more recently Kristeva. In her musings on identity and the relationship between the self and the other, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva

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<sup>134</sup> Ricoeur, p. 129.

<sup>135</sup> Hall, p. 27.

<sup>136</sup> Ricoeur, p. 121.

<sup>137</sup> Hall, p. 51.

proposes the notion that ‘the foreigner lives within us’,<sup>138</sup> that without the other, the self is in fact empty and devoid of meaning. Kristeva states: ‘Free of ties with his own people, the foreigner feels “completely free.” Nevertheless, the consummate name of such a freedom is solitude. Useless or limitless, it amounts to boredom or supreme availability.’<sup>139</sup> This freedom is in fact a state of nothingness. Kristeva rightly questions: ‘I do what *they* want me to, but it is not ‘me’ – ‘me’ is elsewhere, ‘me’ belongs to no one, ‘me’ does not belong to ‘me’... does ‘me’ exist?’.<sup>140</sup> Can an identity exist independently, that is, through self identification alone?

The relationship with the other is far from simple, however, according to Kristeva:

Strange indeed is the encounter with the other – whom we perceive by means of sight, hearing, smell, but do not ‘frame’ within our consciousness. The other leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them.<sup>141</sup>

We are left uncertain about our own perceptions of ourselves. The way in which a person views themselves and the way in which they are viewed by others will therefore often differ and clash and we are left to wonder which is more accurate, if either.

Furthermore, Donald Hall states that no individual is free and is consequently constrained by interaction with the other, with others.<sup>142</sup> Everyone must submit to social, political, religious, familial and legal expectations. Society dictates our placement to a large degree, and these various social categories contribute to the multi-layered nature of an identity. An identity is not one aspect, one quality or one characteristic; it is an amalgamation of many details, making identity itself multiple.

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<sup>138</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf: 1991), p. 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>142</sup> Hall, p. 105.

Kristeva argues further that the self ‘shows itself to be a strange land of borders and othernesses ceaselessly constructed and deconstructed’.<sup>143</sup> Identity, according to Kristeva, is therefore flexible, changeable, both defined and challenged by the other and the self.

The question of identity remains, therefore, a question, or rather, a series of questions. Is identity singular or multiple? Is a person defined by themselves or by others or by both? Does an identity remain constant or can it embrace changes? Can an identity remain constant *and* embrace changes? In this thesis I do not propose to bring a conclusion to these questions. Instead I intend to examine the way in which Deledda explores these questions through her characters and the ways in which the characters construct and conceive of their own identities through the narrative they portray. Some of these questions about identity are explored and potentially answered by the notion that identity is constructed through narrative, a notion which is the central focus of the work of Adriana Cavarero. This philosophy will be my next consideration before continuing to explore such notions specifically in Deledda’s texts.

In order to consider the implications of narrative perspective in relation to the portrayal of identity in this novel, I will be making use of the narrative theories already mentioned (Kristeva and Ricoeur), but also of a study in Italian poetics regarding the construction of identity in narrative. Adriana Cavarero is a renowned Italian feminist philosopher. Born in Bra, Italy, she is now professor of political philosophy in the University of Verona. She is known for her writings on feminism, political philosophy and theories of narration. It is her writings on the latter which I have found particularly inspiring. Her theories about the construction of identity

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<sup>143</sup> Kristeva, p. 191.

through narrative provided pertinent ideas for consideration in relation to Deledda's novels.

*Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: Filosofia della narrazione* (1997) analyses the way in which identities are constructed through narrative, through the process of story-telling and thus through the presentation of the self to another listener. Similarly, Ricoeur notes that it is through narrative that identity is constructed: 'The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.'<sup>144</sup> For Cavarero, however, the story must be told by an other, by an external narrator who has an overall view of the story so far.

The study stems from a story by Karen Blixen which tells of a man who struggles through the night to find the source of the noise which is disturbing him. He scrambles around his garden and in the morning he sees that he has traced the image of a stork onto the ground. It is only after the night's events are completed and he views the result of this from an external perspective that he can see the pattern he has created. In the same way, Cavarero claims that the meaning of a life is only revealed after it has finished, when another narrator is able to view it in its totality and explain its meaning.

Il significato del racconto sta infatti proprio in questo semplice *risultare* che non consegue ad alcun progetto, e nell'*unità* figurale del disegno. Detto altrimenti, il disegno – non dei tratti confusi, ma l'unità di una figura – non è ciò che guida fin dall'inizio il percorso di una vita, bensì ciò che tale vita si lascia dietro, senza poterlo mai prevedere e neanche immaginare. La cicogna si vede solo alla fine, quando chi l'ha tracciata con la sua vita o altri spettatori, guardando dall'alto vedono le orme *lasciate* sul terreno.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ricoeur, pp. 147-148.

<sup>145</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: Filosofia della narrazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997), pp. 7-8.

The stork, symbolising the meaning of a life or a story, can only be seen at the end, as the product of actions. It cannot be detected or understood while the story is ongoing. Furthermore, ‘la storia può essere narrata solo dalla prospettiva postuma di chi non partecipa agli eventi.’<sup>146</sup> The protagonist cannot understand the meaning of their own story themselves. They cannot see the shape they have created without the input of an external observer.

Detto altrimenti, chi cammina sul terreno non può vedere la figura che i suoi passi si lasciano dietro, gli è necessaria un'altra prospettiva. Non a caso, colui che comprende il significato della storia è soprattutto il narratore che, tracciando la cicogna sul foglio, accompagna col disegno il racconto.<sup>147</sup>

A character must, therefore, gain an understanding of their own identity from the interpretations of those around them. Moreover, a character can only comprehend the meaning of their identity when they are retold or when they retell the story of their lives from an external perspective at the end of key events.

Cavarero applies this theory to the tale of Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother without knowing the nature of their relation to him. Oedipus's story begins with his birth, but it is only when he is told the narrative of his life and he learns the truth about his birth and heritage that his life can take on meaning: ‘Edipo qui non compie alcun viaggio introspettivo all'interno di se stesso, bensì viene a conoscere la sua identità dal racconto *esterno* che altri gli fanno.’<sup>148</sup> The implications of his actions only manifest themselves to him when he is told the story of his life from an external perspective. His story is in fact polyphonic, for it is recounted by Giocasta, the pastor and *il messo di Corinto*. The important element is: ‘sono gli altri a raccontare a lui la *sua* storia.’<sup>149</sup> Cavarero notes that the telling of the story does not

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<sup>146</sup> Cavarero, p. 8.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

change the events which have occurred; rather it is their meaning which has altered.<sup>150</sup> By revealing the tale to him from an external viewpoint, Oedipus has a greater understanding of his own life, and consequently of his own place within it. Indeed, according to Cavarero, a desire for self-knowledge is at the root of all narrative.<sup>151</sup>

The relation with others is therefore crucial in the process of narrating an identity. In a Pirandellian sense, one cannot know the life one is living while still living it: ‘Chi si espone, infatti, non può conoscere chi sta esponendo perché non si vede.’<sup>152</sup> This notion is proposed in Pirandello’s novella ‘Di sera, un geranio’, where the protagonist stands on a bridge and contemplates the meaning of his life while symbolically watching the river flow below him. He is unable to obtain lucidity until he contemplates suicide, for only by approaching death can he partly gain the clarity of understanding achieved in death. One cannot see oneself and continue to live for the act of seeing gives life a form which prevents its natural flow.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, Cavarero quotes Hannah Arendt who declares that appearing to others and actively showing oneself to others are two different things.<sup>154</sup> One can consciously project an image of oneself but this image differs greatly from the objective image which others would perceive without a conscious intervention. The role of the ‘other’ in the construction of one’s identity, therefore, is once again seen as crucial, for it is only from the external observation of an ‘other’ that the meaning of one’s identity can be obtained. These ideas pertaining to the creation and definition of identity by the self and by others, through language and through narrative will be central in this study of Deledda’s texts.

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<sup>150</sup> Cavarero, p. 22.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>153</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Novelle per un anno* 3 vols (Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1994), III, 2276-2277.

<sup>154</sup> Hannah Arendt, *La vita della mente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), p. 134. Cited by Adriana Cavarero in *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: Filosofia della narrazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997), p. 33.

## **Chapter Two: The Controlled Self: Identity and Narrative in *La madre***

In this chapter I intend to explore the relationship between identity and narrative in Deledda's novel *La madre* (1920). Deledda is interested in exploring the complexities of characters' psychologies and the way in which they relate to and define each other. One of Deledda's greatest skills lies in her use of narrative perspective, a fact which has thus far been largely overlooked. The fluctuating narrative perspective often found in her works enables insight into the identities of the characters, their perception of themselves and of each other. As the narrative progresses it also mirrors the developments in their relationships and sense of self-awareness. I aim to demonstrate that the characters of *La madre* struggle to understand what forms their multifaceted identities, and that this struggle is enabled by the process of narrating. Firstly I place *La madre* in the context of Deledda's work and in the criticism written about it thus far. I then briefly discuss the notion of identity and the related ideas which were examined in the previous chapter, and which will emerge here in my analysis of the novel. I explore the narrative theories which are also relevant, and I therein define the terms which I use in my own analysis. Finally I analyse the ways in which these theories of narrative and identity are present in *La madre*.

Many of Deledda's novels explore the development of female identities, examining their battle with social constraints as well as the more generally applicable issue of modern self-consciousness. *La madre*, however, differs from the very outset since its struggling protagonist is male. The greatest influences on the protagonist's life, however, are female, and he endeavours throughout to gain an understanding of his own identity while being torn between the desires of his mother and lover. The novel's title implies that the protagonist of *La madre* is Paulo's mother, or that her relationship with her son is its focal point. This relationship, however, is not a positive

one. As the story unfolds, we bear witness to Paulo's toil with the disciplined, enclosed existence of clerical life, made even more difficult by the controlling presence of his mother. Through rebellion, he attempts to break free but is soon brought back to the fold by the moral preaching of his mother. In this chapter I will analyse the way in which narrative perspective and the creation of identities are intertwined, the notion that identity is in fact constructed through the process of narration, and exactly what multifaceted forms the identities of Paulo, his mother and his lover, Agnese, take.

### ***La madre* in Deledda's work**

*La madre* is not generally considered to be one of Deledda's masterpieces. It was written in 1919 and published in 1920 by Treves, in the second half of her writing career. At this point, Deledda had already struggled through familial and social obstacles to publish over twenty texts, including both novels and collections of *novelle*. She had already produced the novels which are generally considered to be her *capolavori*, *Elias Portolu* (1903) and *Canne al vento* (1913). When writing *La madre*, she was married with children and living in Rome, away from the creative restraints of her Sardinian existence. It therefore appears in a more mature period of her writing, where she has begun to move away from the romantic tales of her early works.

The novel opens with a dramatic scene where the protagonist, Paulo, attempts to sneak out of his home undetected by his watchful mother. He successfully reaches the house of the woman we soon discover to be his lover, Agnese, a fact rendered scandalous by the detail that Paulo is a priest. His mother is unable to stop him on this occasion, but Paulo soon realises that she knows all about his affair and is driven by fear to stop it. As the narrative progresses we learn about the history which led *la*

*madre* to a strict moral attitude and consequently to Paulo's enforced devout way of life. Paulo wrestles with temptation, oscillating between a desire to please Agnese and his mother, and finally decides to turn his back on Agnese altogether. Not satisfied with this decision, Agnese threatens to reveal their affair to the congregation at mass, leaving Paulo and his mother steeped in anxiety. The final scene ends with a twist as the tension mounts towards Agnese's declaration but hits a premature climax as *la madre* collapses from the strain of awaiting this revelation.

### **Critical views of *La madre***

Amid the small amount of criticism written about Deledda, very little focuses on *La madre*. I believe that this dismissal of the novel is due to a fundamental misinterpretation of its nature. It is regarded by many critics as a deeply religious and moral novel. The novel's plot is simplified into a battle of good and evil, whereas it is more a 'dilemma fra il fascino dell'amore-redenzione e il fascino della libertà-peccato'.<sup>155</sup> There is good and evil in both choices set before its protagonist. The veristic reading of this text that has been accepted by many critics, therefore, divides the characters into clear cut roles of hero and villain, priest and jezebel. From this reading, Paulo's feeble character is tempted to sin by the dark and dangerous Agnese and is only saved by the brave sacrifice of his mother who gives her own life in an attempt to save her son from damnation.

Critics have viewed the character of the mother as central to the novel, representing a moral foundation and point of guidance in the life of her now misled son, Paulo. In an analysis of Deledda's oeuvre published the year after her death (1937), the prominent Sardinian critic Luigi Falchi pays little attention to *La madre*.

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<sup>155</sup> Eurialo De Michelis, *Grazia Deledda e il decadentismo* (Firenze: La Nuove Editrice, 1938), p. 127.

What he does write, however, emphasises the moral nature of the mother: ‘Se Paulo non giunge che a sfiorare il peccato, egli deve la sua salvezza alla madre, che riscatta la libertà morale del figlio col sacrificio della sua vita.’<sup>156</sup> Falchi views her death as the culmination of a life of dedication and love for her son driven by religious and moral strength. Similarly, in a critical work which also gives an overview of Deledda’s work and which was published in the following year, Remo Branca describes the mother as ‘una figura eroica che vuol salvare la vocazione del figlio prete.’<sup>157</sup> These critics interpret her as the heroine who carries the moral message of the novel, while Paulo is a rebellious youth who must be corrected. As we shall see, however, this is the way in which the mother intentionally portrays herself through her narrative perspective. Her saintly veil is removed as we progress through the narratives of the other characters.

In her analysis of all of Deledda’s work, published at a later date (1965), Tettamanzi shows a greater appreciation of the novel, describing it as a potential *capolavoro* for the author: ‘Il romanzo – breve, raccolto, intenso – è tra i più belli dalla penna di Grazia Deledda’.<sup>158</sup> Tettamanzi, however, identifies the portrayals of the characters as ‘nitidi, senza sfumature, psicologicamente precisi.’<sup>159</sup> They are simple, one-dimensional characterisations, neatly split into good and evil. She goes on to label the mother as ‘una povera donna, ma è ricca di fermissima volontà’,<sup>160</sup> Paulo as an immature youth, Agnese as a symbolically black image of temptation, ‘creatura di tenebra’ and Antioco as an innocent child amid the unfolding scandal who stands firmly by his call to a religious vocation. Though Tettamanzi does note Deledda’s skill at unveiling the history which led the characters to such identities, she does not

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<sup>156</sup> Falchi, p. 79.

<sup>157</sup> Remo Branca, *Bibliografia Deleddiana* (Milano: L’eroica, 1938), p. 166.

<sup>158</sup> Maria Tettamanzi, *Grazia Deledda* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1969), p. 120.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

explore the depth of their characteristics. It is the revelation of troubled pasts which makes the psychology of these characters so interesting, and far more multifaceted than Tettamanzi's interpretation would have us believe. She regards the novel as a failure because it does not demonstrate a positive side to Paulo's character, conveying him as a purely weak, flawed individual. On the contrary, we see that Paulo is more than a mere one-dimensional character, for he examines his conscience and consciousness at great length. Although initially weak, he cannot be regarded as exclusively so.

In an introduction to an edition of *La madre* first published in 1967, literary critic Vittorio Spinazzola interprets the novel as a melodrama, '[n]ovella lunga piuttosto che vero e proprio romanzo.'<sup>161</sup> Though he locates Deledda in the veristic movement, he identifies this novel as the beginning of a change in her work: 'già il realismo deleddiano si stempera, tendendo ad assumere il carattere visionariamente sacrale che informerà sempre più l'ultima produzione della scrittrice.'<sup>162</sup> He points out that 'la crisi dell'esistenza' is at the root of her best writing, an interpretation which could be applied to Paulo's crisis of identity in this novel.<sup>163</sup> Spinazzola rightly identifies the dramatic tension between the three principal characters as the most important aspect of the novel. The tension is created, suspended and escalated right up until the conclusion where the tension is resolved by the mother's inability to overcome the same pressure that Paulo could, that is, waiting for Agnese's revelation.<sup>164</sup> I wish to demonstrate, however, that there is a more significant purpose to the 'effetti ritardati'<sup>165</sup> employed by Deledda than just postponing the conclusion

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<sup>161</sup> Spinazzola, Introduzione, *La madre*, p. 12.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

and creating suspense. As we will see, the steps taken back into the characters' pasts serve to aid their self-explorations.

In a critical overview published later still (1971), Sacchetti also praises Deledda's writing in this novel, correctly analysing Deledda's narrative skill, which I will elaborate upon later in this chapter:

La scrittrice riesce con pochi tratti e solo all'inizio della scena a mantenere nel lettore la sensazione della presenza vigile e tesa della madre, senza bisogno di ulteriori parole, fino alla tragedia finale: un miracolo che può essere compiuto solo da un grande narratore.<sup>166</sup>

This refers to the closing passage of the novel where Deledda succeeds in evoking the imposing presence of Paulo's mother with very few direct references in the narrative. In spite of this accurate judgement, my contention is that Sacchetti misidentifies the overall tone of the novel, for she describes it as 'profondamente morale e di intima religiosità'.<sup>167</sup> Sacchetti is right to highlight that the novel has a religious theme, given that the protagonist is a priest who is struggling with his vocation. The notion of morality is also present as the mother imposes her strict moral code onto her own life and that of her son. To describe it as a moral and religious novel, however, implies that Deledda encourages such notions, whereas she is critiquing them, or at least bringing their intricacies into discussion and debate. The vocation of a priest is not a simple life choice, as Paulo discovers. What is more complicated is the fact that this choice was not his in the first place, rather it was a choice made by his mother as the result of expectations placed upon her by society.

In 1979 Salvatore-Floro Di Zenzo published a study of Deledda's work with particular focus on her use of narrative. This analysis of *La madre* is more convincing as it considers the relationship between Paulo and his mother as one which determines

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<sup>166</sup> Lina Sacchetti, *Grazia Deledda: Ricordi e testimonianze* (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1971), p. 99.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

both of their characters. Paulo is a weak character whose existence is entirely dependent upon his mother: ‘E Paulo è forte soltanto della forza della madre, egli in fondo è un prete non dissimile dagli altri preti deleddiani, che non sono mai cattivi, ma sono tutti deboli, tragicamente deboli.’<sup>168</sup> This description implies that Deledda intentionally portrays priests as feeble characters, criticising their position of authority in society. Though this is an interesting point, it also does not acknowledge the multifarious nature of Paulo’s character in enough depth.

Di Enzo correctly identifies the closed nature of the mother’s character, as her life is defined by her relationship with her son:

La madre invece è tutta in risalto, benché non si veda, non esista ormai più come donna, anche nel suo passato non è mai esistita, sposata a quel vecchio zio scemo e poi vissuta sempre nell’ombra. Ma si vede, esiste come madre, nel pensiero suo che è sempre attaccato al figlio, colla sua fantasia che sempre la porta a lui: alla parrocchia di Aar, che è la sua; al suo peccato, col quale ormai Paulo si identifica. E soltanto nel momento della ultima battaglia essa compare in scena con la sua persona: soltanto allora, soltanto nella chiesa in cui entrambi attendono che la minaccia si compia, la madre si rende visibile.<sup>169</sup>

I intend to elaborate upon Di Enzo’s analysis of these characters, particularly with regard to the influence of the narrative perspective on the portrayal and formation of their identities.

The English twentieth-century author D. H. Lawrence took an interest in Deledda and particularly in *La madre*, and his comments of 1926 can be found in an introduction to an English translation of the novel published in 1987. During his voluntary exile from England which began in 1919, following the traumatic years of the war, Lawrence spent time in much of Europe, including an excursion to Sardinia in 1921, during which he discovered the works of Deledda.<sup>170</sup> Lawrence, whose own

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<sup>168</sup> Di Enzo, p. 118.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>170</sup> Lawrence’s trip to Sardinia inspired his travel book, *Sea and Sardinia* (London: Penguin, 1999), which was first published in 1921.

writing explores the nature of modern life, human relationships, instincts and sexualities,<sup>171</sup> touches upon the underlying tension of the novel: that is, the tension between moral discipline and personal freedom, between society and individuality, between ‘the instinct of direct sex’ and ‘the other blind instinct of mother-obedience.’<sup>172</sup> He dismisses the novel as unsuccessful, however, for he believes Deledda ‘makes a bit of a mess of the book, because she started a problem she didn’t quite dare to solve.’<sup>173</sup> Perhaps it is for this reason that many critics have not noted Deledda’s interest in identity: it is a concept which is explored but not concluded. Paulo and his mother both oscillate in their beliefs regarding the mother’s control over his identity, though Paulo much more so, and the only possible conclusion to their conflict is the death of the mother. Her death offers a solution to his sense of division, but it does not answer the questions which have arisen along the way. Lawrence elaborates by highlighting Deledda’s tendency to vacillate in her support of her characters:

As for Grazia Deledda, first she started by sympathizing with the mother, and then must sympathize savagely with the young woman, and then can’t make up her mind. She kills off the old mother in disgust at the old woman’s triumph, so leaving the priest and the young woman hanging in space.<sup>174</sup>

He believes Deledda becomes bored with her own story and of the characters’ inability to make decisions.

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<sup>171</sup> Anne Fernihough, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>172</sup> D. H. Lawrence, ‘Foreword’, in Grazia Deledda, *The Mother*, trans. by M. G. Steegman (London: Dedalus, 1987), pp. 1-7 (p.7).

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Similarly, in his foreword to the same translated version of *La madre* written in 1987, Eric Lane designates this ‘inability to assert one’s will’<sup>175</sup> as the basis of the novel’s impact. He goes on to explain that:

The power of the book is in the emotional intensity and claustrophobia which builds up within the characters, while everything is muted in the outer world. This gives a heightened effect to the subdued dialogue and controlled exchanges of the characters with the reader sharing in their anxiety, willing them to do something and decide.<sup>176</sup>

Lawrence and Lane both note the complexities of these characters and their relationships, and are conscious of the alterations in their portrayals, but they do not explore the ways in which Deledda does this quite intentionally.

Lastly, in a much more recent publication, Janice M. Kozma does in fact explore Deledda’s complex characterization in her work *Grazia Deledda’s Eternal Adolescents* (2002). This text applies modern psychological and social theories to Deledda’s novel in order to illustrate the immature, stunted nature of Deledda’s male characters. Kozma examines the psychologies of Deledda’s male protagonists who, as a result of an unloved upbringing, fail to develop emotional maturity. Kozma thus accurately identifies Paulo as a weak, submissive character who must turn to the figure of his mother for guidance in every context:

Many of Deledda’s men are petulant, emotional weaklings. A convincing number of her heroes are what we would today call spoiled brats – juveniles who vanish as soon as difficulties arise. In *La madre* Paulo thinks of escaping with mama to avoid the scandal of a priest having a dalliance with a parishioner. This is a grown man who as a cleric is a respected pillar of the community; yet he acts like a juvenile.<sup>177</sup>

Kozma highlights the depiction of female characters as ‘pillars of strength’ who tower over ‘the ineffectually hapless male protagonists.’<sup>178</sup> Kozma’s study, though

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<sup>175</sup> Eric Lane, ‘Introduction’, in Grazia Deledda, *The Mother*, trans. by M. G. Steegman (London: Dedalus, 1987), pp. 11-16 (p. 13).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>177</sup> Kozma, *Eternal Adolescents*, p. 95.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

interesting, only focuses on the adolescent nature of the male characters. She also pigeonholes the mother into the image of a strong, maternal figure who displays ‘boundless and unconditional love for her son’<sup>179</sup> which leads to Paulo’s salvation. Kozma does not explore the multifaceted nature of these characters’ psychologies. Through an analysis of the characters, both male and female, and by examining their narratives of themselves and of each other, I intend to explore the psychologies and identities of Deledda’s characters further in this chapter.

As I have outlined in my previous chapter, in my discussion of the notion of identity in Deledda’s work, I will principally engage with the theories of Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur, examining questions relating to the definition of a person’s identity, particularly regarding interaction with others. Ricoeur highlights the importance of self-recognition and thus self-definition, whereas Kristeva insists that a person’s identity cannot exist without the perception of other people. The definition of identity is therefore ambiguous. We must consider if identity is multiple, and therefore has meaning to both the self and to the other. These notions are contemplated through the musings of Deledda’s characters. Paulo calls into question the nature of his vocation as a priest, of his role in society and of his very self. He comes to understand the impact of his mother’s influence and the extent to which he has been subdued and even imprisoned for many years. Exploring the boundaries of his own self-understanding, Paulo considers his relationship with others and most importantly, his relationship with himself.

Furthermore, in relation to the dialogue between identity and narrative, I engage with the philosophy of Adriana Cavarero who declares that identity is actually formed by the process of narration. According to Cavarero, it is only by

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<sup>179</sup> Kozma, *Eternal Adolescents*, p. 76.

reconstructing the path of one's life from a retrospective, external perspective that one can deduce its meaning. I aim to demonstrate that Deledda's characters, in this case Paulo and his mother, reconstruct the narratives of their lives in order to understand the nature of their identities in the present. In addition, I will examine the way in which characters appear to control one another's identities through the narration of the novel. I therefore intend to track the evolution of the narrative perspective as the characters delve further into an understanding of their identities.

### **Narrative Perspective**

In order to study Deledda's use of narrative, I must first define the terms which I will be employing, including that of narrative itself. To this end, I shall mainly refer to the definitions offered by French literary theorist Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse*, and those offered by Paul Cobley in his survey of narrative theory entitled *Narrative*, which to me seem the most accurate and relevant.

The initial terms we must define are the basic pieces of the telling of every novel: *story*, *plot* and *narrative*:

Put very simply, 'story' consists of all the events which are to be depicted. 'Plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked and that they are therefore to be depicted in relation to each other. 'Narrative' is the showing or the telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place.<sup>180</sup>

Most importantly for this study, therefore, I will be employing the definition of narrative as the process of telling a story, the selection of what information to reveal and in what order to reveal it. Furthermore, narrative always involves a movement from start to finish, a movement from A to B. It must, however, always include a complication: 'The progress of fictional narrative must, necessarily, be impeded; and

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<sup>180</sup> Cobley, pp. 5-6.

this is the key point. Narrative must entail some kind of delay or even diversions, detours and digressions.’<sup>181</sup>

In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette presents many useful terms as tools for the discussion of narrative. Firstly, narrative chooses the order in which the events of a story are revealed, i.e. the plot. This can be done in a linear fashion, or by employing *anachronies*, which Genette defines as discordances between the order of the story and the narrative, that is, between the chronological order of the events within the time-frame of the story and the order in which they are revealed to the reader. These *anachronies* include *prolepsis*: ‘any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later’<sup>182</sup> and *analepsis*: ‘any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment.’<sup>183</sup> For the most part, Deledda employs *partial analepsis* where an isolated event from the past is narrated out of sequence, but is not joined to the events of the present.<sup>184</sup>

The plot can then be narrated as a *singulative narrative* i.e. narrated once, or a *repeating narrative*, i.e. narrated many times from different perspectives, or an *iterative narrative*: ‘where a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event’.<sup>185</sup> *La madre* has a singulative narrative for the most part, with touches of iterative narrative when the mother is in control. When Paulo’s mother narrates the past of their lives together thus far, she employs iterative narrative to emphasise the way their lives always were, the way Paulo has always behaved and consequently to highlight the change in his present attitude.

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<sup>181</sup> Cobley, p. 12.

<sup>182</sup> Genette, p. 40.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

Another important question is the voice of who is narrating and how this is narrated. We will employ the definition of a *narrator* as the voice which projects the narrative i.e. the person who is telling the story. Deledda makes use of *free indirect speech* which is defined by Genette as the character speaking through the voice of the narrator:

[I]n free indirect speech, the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then *merged*; in immediate speech, the narrator is obliterated and the character *substitutes* for him.<sup>186</sup>

Genette also highlights an important distinction in his study between who is narrating and who sees what is happening:

However, to my mind most of the theoretical works on this subject (which are mainly classifications) suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*<sup>187</sup>

Therefore, a story can have many changing narrators, that is, many changing voices, usually jumping from one first person narrator (the perspective of ‘I’) to another, or it can have a changing narrative perspective. In Cobley’s terms, it can have one voice or many voices who speak about the story, or it can have one voice which speaks and many people who see what is happening. For clarity, we will differentiate between the *narrator*, that is, the one who speaks, and the *narrative perspective*, that is, the perspective of the one who sees. The *narrative perspective*, for the purpose of this study therefore, is the point of view of the narrative, that is, the perspective from which it is told. In *La madre* the narrative perspective oscillates from character to character in the form defined as *variable internal focalization*, where it switches from

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<sup>186</sup> Genette., p. 174.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

one character to another and then back again.<sup>188</sup> This stylistic feature is typical of omniscient narrative, however, we will see that Deledda employs this feature to enhance the thematic issue of identity in the novel. Although the narrative is not presented in the first person, it is clear that the thoughts of a specific character, be it Paulo, his mother or Agnese, are directly given and consequently dictate the narrative itself. It is the characters who appear to control the narrative, that is, what is being told and when.

What appears absent, therefore, is an *omniscient narrator*, defined by Paul Cobley as follows:

[T]he narratorial voice not only tells the reader what to think about the history and politics, but it actually orders events, choosing to narrate some and omit others. There is thus a specific narratorial device upon which ‘classic realism’ depends. This device is known as the ‘omniscient narrator.’<sup>189</sup>

The omniscient narrator is therefore a voice which is above the level of the characters possessing a God-like status within the context of the story, which enables the narrator to see everything that occurs and to design the way in which this information is put forward to the reader.

Much like the novels of the *verismo* movement, Deledda aims to convey the reality of her characters directly from their perspectives, creating a sense of immediate reality. Deledda differs, however, in her use of this narrative technique by using it to enable her characters to explore themselves, their pasts and thus the meaning of their existence. Through the telling of their own stories, both past and present, the characters embark on a journey of self-discovery as the mother questions her own moral fervour and strict motherly attitude, and Paulo undergoes a fundamental crisis of identity, struggling to align his feelings for his mother, the

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<sup>188</sup> Genette, p. 189.

<sup>189</sup> Cobley, p. 100.

church and his lover. Thematically and stylistically Deledda does not abandon *verismo* or romanticism. Indeed, I will spend some time considering the importance of the haunting presence of the wind in *La madre*, which functions as a traditionally romantic narrative device. Rather, Deledda introduces touches of modern ideas and questions regarding the self, society and human relationships and explores the ways in which narrative itself attempts to offer some answers.

With regard to the relationship between narrative and the production of meaning, Cobley presents three different theoretical views. The first of these is the ‘reflective approach’ which ‘sees meaning as residing in the person or thing in the real world; a representation such as narrative “reflects” that meaning.’<sup>190</sup> Narrative therefore enables a meaning which already exists in the narrated text; it reveals and explains the meaning. The second approach is the ‘intentional approach’ which ‘sees meaning in the control exercised by the producer of a representational form such as narrative; s/he uses representation to make the world “mean”.’<sup>191</sup> Here it is the narrator who creates the meaning. Lastly, ‘[t]he “constructionist” approach sees meaning neither in the control of the producer nor the thing being represented; instead, it identifies the thoroughly social nature of the construction of meaning, the fact that representational systems, rather than their users and objects, allow meaning to occur.’<sup>192</sup> It is narrative itself which creates the meaning. We see that Cavarero takes a ‘constructionist’ approach, seeing meaning as something produced by the process of story-telling, i.e. narrating itself.

Narrative reveals the meaning of a story, i.e. a series of events, by dictating the way in which these events are disclosed. The reason for these events and therefore their meaning is consequently given by the selective demonstration of the narrative.

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<sup>190</sup> Cobley, p. 3.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

An interpreter of that meaning is also necessary. Paul Cobley gives the example of a cat knocking over a pot and breaking it. Unless a human witnesses this event, it can have no meaning. By revealing the event through narrative to an interpreter the listener or reader can discern a meaning from its telling.

Lastly, an important concept which also arises in *La madre* is the relationship between different stories. Paul Cobley's work on narrative, which has been of great help to this study, is 'dedicated to the opposite premise: that even the most "simple" of stories is embedded in a network of relations that are sometimes astounding in their complexity.'<sup>193</sup> Every *I* who tells a story is also an *I* who is listening to other stories. These stories influence each other, give clarity of meaning to each other and often mirror or even overlap with each other. We will see that this concept too is touched upon by the existential musings of Paulo within Deledda's novel.

Applying Cavarerian notions in my analysis of *La madre*, I mean to show that narrative perspective and the construction of identity are inextricably linked. As we see in the writing of *veristi* such as Giovanni Verga, we are led to feel that there is no omniscient narrator guiding the story. The narrative perspective oscillates between that of different characters through *variable internal focalisation*, though principally it is the perspective of the mother, and later Paulo, which dominate. Deledda, however, moves beyond the aims of *verismo* and does not simply strive to portray a scientific representation of reality. As we will see, the varying narrative perspective adds to the complicated character psychologies which Deledda creates. Control of the narrative is in some ways related to control of characters' freedom and identities. Moreover, although the characters explore their own narratives, it is only when the external perspective of another is shared in this process that a clear meaning for their identities

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<sup>193</sup> Cobley, p. 2.

can be produced. As Cavarero states: ‘la memoria pretende di aver visto ciò che invece si rivela soltanto allo sguardo dell’altro.’<sup>194</sup>

The narrative perspective of *La madre* is not consistent throughout. It begins with the perspective of Paulo’s mother, later oscillates between that of Paulo and his mother, and is occasionally punctuated by that of Agnese and Antioco. On the whole, therefore, we are not aware of an omniscient narrator who controls the narrative structure overall. There is a distinct hierarchy within the narrative perspective, a fact which is reflected by the novel’s title. Paulo’s mother dominates the narrative, asserting her control over the other characters and her control of her self-portrayal. Her narrative authority diminishes and that of Paulo increases as the novel progresses, in sync with Paulo’s growing understanding of himself. Agnese is the least dominant of the three, though like Paulo, she gains volume as the narrative proceeds. She is eventually audible within Paulo’s own narrative voice, conveying the impact that she has had upon him and his identity.

### **The mother’s perspective**

The novel opens with the mother’s perspective although it is Paulo’s actions which are at the heart of the plot: ‘Anche quella notte, dunque, Paulo si disponeva ad uscire | La madre, nella sua camera attigua a quella di lui, lo sentiva muoversi furtivo, aspettando forse, per uscire, ch’ella spegnesse il lume e si coricasse.’<sup>195</sup> The assumption of ‘dunque’ must belong to *la madre* who can hear Paulo’s movements, which lead her to believe that he is preparing to go out again. We also, however, see Paulo’s perspective as he waits for his mother to turn out the light before he can

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<sup>194</sup> Cavarero, p. 57.

<sup>195</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from the text are from the following edition: Grazia Deledda, *La madre* (Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2007), p. 7. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text with the abbreviation *Madre*.

escape. She senses where he is and further imagines what he may be doing at this point: ‘Egli usciva, non c’era più dubbio, usciva. Aprì l’uscio della sua camera. Si fermò di nuovo. Forse tendeva anche lui l’orecchio ai rumori intorno’ (*Madre*, p. 9). We are privy to her inner dialogue here. She interprets that he is probably listening for her detecting him, implying her awareness of his intended deception.

The mother narrates herself as the heroine of the novel. She is Paulo’s saviour and he is a flawed son. Symbolically, when Paulo is next in church and collapses, it is his mother who sees him fall: ‘D’un tratto la madre, quando furono in mezzo alla folla, lo vide piegarsi da un lato, come stesse per cadere’ (*Madre*, p. 26). She is witness to his fall from grace because she regards it as such. The other women in the parish community, however, support her view of Paulo as a saintly, moral figure:

Quel pianto di povere donne, ch’era tutta un’espressione di amore, di speranza, di desiderio verso un bene non terreno, la madre se lo sentiva risalire dalle viscere in quell’ora di angoscia. Il suo Paulo! Il suo Paulo! Il suo amore, la sua speranza, il suo desiderio verso un bene non terreno, ecco che glielo prendeva lo spirito del male (*Madre*, p. 26).

The repetition of the nouns ‘amore’, ‘speranza’, and ‘desiderio’ evokes a chorus of women who all portray the mother’s feelings. The social role she has created for herself through her narrative is clearly a success. The other women share in her burden as a suffering mother.

The mother paints an innocent, sacred portrait of herself through the narrative with the repeated use of a religious simile. She casts herself in the role of a *mater dolorosa*, the suffering, saintly mother who watches her innocent son be tormented by the sins of others. This comparison is drawn when she tells Paulo that she knows the truth about his affair and he is bound by silence: ‘Egli taceva: pareva non avesse sentito. La madre tornò a sollevare gli occhi; lo vide alto sopra di lei, d’un pallore di morte, immobile sulla sua ombra sul muro come Cristo sulla croce’ (*Madre*, p. 42).

This is a very significant image for she portrays her Paulo as a crucified Christ, punished by the world and beyond the reach of her salvation. The mother herself, however, is far from the divine image of the Virgin Mary, for although she views herself as a devoted mother, we will see that her behaviour is controlling and manipulative. She is repeatedly described as ‘dura’<sup>196</sup> and ‘ferma’,<sup>197</sup> an image which is not in keeping with the holy image of the mother of Jesus.

Paulo also adopts the view of himself as a Christ figure. He is a tempted Christ, led to doubt his vocation and his trust in God the father. In his self-portrayal, much like Christ, Paulo is inextricably tied to an identity which has been imposed on him. It is not a life that he has chosen for himself, but a fate which is predetermined by those around him. He remembers the moment he was tempted and turned to God for guidance: ‘Egli invece ripensava al grido dell’anima sua davanti alla porta della chiesa: ed ecco che Dio l’aveva inteso e gli mandava incontro la madre stessa per salvarlo’ (*Madre*, p. 42). Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, he recalls his moment of weakness where he questions the fate chosen for him. Not feeling secure enough to make a decision for himself, he sees his mother as the guiding light which has been sent to save him. He absorbs her narrative perspective, in a sense, and continues to adopt the identity that she cast for him.

In another moment of weakness, when Agnese attempts to draw him back, he falls at her feet ‘come Gesù depresso sul grembo della Madre’ (*Madre*, p. 158). Lastly, when he is faced with the final challenge of Agnese’s appearance in church, he feels at his weakest: ‘gli parve di essere davvero nell’Orto degli Ulivi, sotto l’imminenza del destino inevitabile’ (*Madre*, p. 179). From Paulo’s perspective, this simile focuses

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<sup>196</sup> *Madre*, pp. 41, 45, 72, 168, 171.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 45, 168, 171.

on the human side of Christ. Although he is a figure of religious and moral authority that sets an example for those around him, he too is tempted and doubtful at times.

This twisted portrayal of the characters of Jesus and his mother could suggest on some level a further criticism of the Church and its rigidity. If we take the interpretation of Paulo's mother and, by implication, the view of their society and the Church at least on a local level, to be a priest is a matter of strict self-sacrifice. Paulo must abandon all other aspects of his identity in order to fully dedicate himself to God and the Church, much like Christ himself with whom Paulo is constantly compared. We see, however, that this was not an easy task even for Christ, for the human element of his identity was always present and consequently in conflict with his divine duty. Although Deledda speaks about her religious faith in her private correspondences, she does not refer to her feelings about the Church itself. Her only reference is a criticism of the strict rituals which are followed when a family member dies, such as her father.<sup>198</sup> Enza Buono refers to her vague religious beliefs as follows:

[L]a scrittrice poteva, sì, proporsi grandi temi morali nei suoi romanzi, ma poiché la sua religiosità non fu mai schiarita perfettamente nella sicurezza di una fede, quei motivi e quei temi si incarnarono in grandi figure di poesia, ma chiuse in un cerchio angusto e non potettero trovare mai la loro soluzione in una superiore legge religiosa e morale, ove ciò che di parziale e di effimero ha la giustizia e la sapienza degli uomini fosse razionalizzato ed accolto. [...] lo squilibrio patito con tanta forza e sincerità, tra il piccolo cuore dell'uomo e il grande mistero dell'universo sono essi stessi la religione e la moralità della sua arte, e l'accentuazione della sua poesia.<sup>199</sup>

However, this depiction of Paulo and his mother as Jesus and Mary, is not a dismissal of the Church's view of Christ, nor is it a criticism of priestly duties. Rather, it is a

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<sup>198</sup> Letter to Epaminoda Provaglio, Nuoro, 20 November 1892 cited in *Onoranze a Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Mario Ciusa Romagna (Nuoro 21 giugno 1959), p. 59: 'Tu non puoi immaginarti con che rigidità qui si osservi il lutto! Le nostre finestre son chiuse ed io non mi posso neppure avvicinare ai vetri. Per due o tre mesi noi donne dobbiamo stare ermeticamente chiuse in casa e poi ci sarà concesso di uscire sì, ma per ricambiare solo le visite o per andare in chiesa. Niente passeggio, - a meno che non sia in campagna, - nessuno svago, e un contegno sempre rigorosamente triste... E così per tre o quattro e magari cinque anni. Per buona fortuna io sono quasi avvezza e/a questa tetra esistenza e spero di cambiarla fra due anni al più tardi; altrimenti questo lutto artificiale, unito al lutto interno del mio cuore, mi ucciderebbe.'

<sup>199</sup> Buono, p. 102.

portrayal of the multiplicity of human identity, and of the many ties which bind us to different people and different areas of our lives. A publicly moral, respectable woman who believes her actions are enabling a secure and suitable life for her son is in fact a dictator and imposer of narrow-minded ideals. In the same vein, Paulo is publicly an obedient, steadfast religious figure, but is secretly conducting an illicit affair. He is also on the one hand weak and cowardly, and on the other tormented and confused.

The novel opens with Paulo at his strongest as he successfully sneaks out of his house and into the room of his secret lover Agnese without being stopped by his mother:

Fino a quel momento ella s'era illusa nella speranza di vederlo scendere al paesetto per visitare qualche malato: eccolo invece che correva come trasportato dal diavolo verso la casa antica sotto il ciglione. | E nella casa antica sotto il ciglione non c'era che una donna sana, giovine e sola... | Ed ecco che, invece di dirigersi alla porta come un semplice visitatore, egli andava dritto alla porticina dell'orto, e questa si apriva e si chiudeva dietro di lui come una bocca nera che lo ingoiasse (*Madre*, p. 12).

As this is narrated from his mother's perspective, we see that she views this house as an abyss of sin which has swallowed her son. The implication is that he is not visiting this girl to see to her in a time of need, but to satisfy his own desires. Beyond this bold move, however, Paulo is a weak, submissive character. He is completely under his mother's control for, indeed, even this first deceptive act of escape is haunted by the fear that his mother might catch him: 'lo sentiva muoversi furtivo, aspettando forse, per uscire, ch'ella spegnesse il lume e si coricasse' (*Madre*, p. 7).

When the narrative is told from the mother's perspective, Paulo is constantly referred to as 'suo Paulo' or 'il mio Paulo.' The implication is that his entire identity is possessed by his mother: 'E non beveva, il mio Paulo, non andava a caccia, non fumava, non guardava una donna' (*Madre*, p. 18). She portrays his personality in an almost obsessive way, reassuring herself that he has always been a good boy, just as

she intended him. Her possessive attitude is even emphasised as she displaces the subject at the end of the following sentence: ‘Adesso ha ventotto anni il mio Paulo’ (*Madre*, p. 18). When Paulo is narrated by his mother, it is she who governs his identity. He is, at this stage, her Paulo, a disobedient boy who has strayed and must be retrieved. In the following paragraph we see a particularly emphatic example:

Sette anni siamo qui, col mio Paulo [...] E non beveva il mio Paulo [...] Adesso ha ventotto anni il mio Paulo [...] Monsignor Vescovo, ci mandi via di qui; salvi il mio Paulo [...] Il mio Paulo neppure la conosceva [...] ma durante l’ultima malattia mandò a chiamare il mio Paulo; e il mio Paulo assisté fino alla morte (*Madre*, pp. 17-19).

Although he is an adult, Paulo’s mother cannot conceive of her son as being independent from her in any way. The repetition of ‘suo’ serves to emphasise her possessive attitude towards him. That is, he is her son, her Paulo and his relation to any other person is of no importance. The mother’s identity is similarly based entirely on that of her son. We are never given her name, and she is only referred to as ‘la madre’ or ‘sua madre’, that is, in relation to Paulo. She has shaped her own existence around that of her son.

In the same section we learn that every step of Paulo’s life has been shaped by his mother. She is clearly a domineering parent who has planned out Paulo’s decision to become a priest and move to this village: ‘Dieci anni la parrocchia rimase senza prete, finché venne il mio Paulo. Ed io con lui. Si trovò il paese e gli abitanti inselvaticiti, senza fede; ma tutto rifiorì, dopo la venuta del mio Paulo; come la terra al ritorno della primavera’ (*Madre*, p. 17). The isolation of ‘Ed io con lui’ in a separate sentence emphasises the importance of her coming with him. She is asserting her power over him through her narrative of his past, as well as the actions which took place. We learn that he initially showed some indication of dissatisfaction with this move, but soon ceased to voice any further objection:

Il primo anno di residenza nel paesetto, egli parlava di andarsene, di tornare nel mondo; poi s'era come addormentato, all'ombra del ciglione, tra il mormorio degli alberi: e sette anni erano passati così, e la madre non lo incitava a muoversi perché erano tanto felici lassù (*Madre*, p. 29).

He has at this point lost all sense of identity and succumbed to his mother's wishes.

He is lost in the shadows and the silence, bewitched by the words of his mother.

The motif of the shadow is evoked later in the text, where Paulo's mother is listed with his shadow as one of many things which trail him:

E in quel momento d'incertezza, mentre aveva l'impressione di essere attortigliato da un vortice, anche quel fruscio gli parlava, gli diceva che la sua vita ormai era un turbine di errori, di leggerezze, di cose vili. Tutto gli parlava; il vento, di fuori, che gli ricordava la lunga solitudine della sua giovinezza, e, dentro, la figura triste della madre, lo scricchiolio del suo passo, l'ombra sua stessa (*Madre*, p. 45).

Just as he is followed, haunted almost by the sound of his own steps and the form of his shadow, both of which denote his actions, he is haunted by his mother's tormenting presence.

Paulo once again submits to his mother's instructions when he ends his affair with Agnese, showing himself to be a weak character as Kozma has pointed out.<sup>200</sup> Without the need even for words, Paulo understands that his mother has discovered his secret: 'vide la madre seduta come in veglia funebre davanti al fuoco spento; e con un senso di angoscia che non lo abbandonò più intese subito tutta la verità' (*Madre*, p. 41). Eric Lane aptly points out that: 'The dilemma confronting the major characters is acted out inside their own mind and not with each other.'<sup>201</sup> The mother symbolically sits in darkness, before the flame of her trusting relationship with her son which has been smothered. She is in mourning for her son's soul which, in her view, has been lost to sin. The powerful ambiance of the scene conveys the influence she has over

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<sup>200</sup> Kozma, *Eternal Adolescents*, p. 95.

<sup>201</sup> Lane, p. 13.

Paulo. When she confronts him he is unable to answer, but is overcome by guilt and shame:

Desiderò piegarsi, caderle sul grembo, pregarla di condurlo subito via così un'altra volta dal paesetto; e nello stesso tempo sentiva il mento tremargli per l'umiliazione e la rabbia: umiliazione di vedere la sua debolezza scoperta; rabbia di essere stato sorvegliato e spiato. Eppure soffriva anche per il dolore che dava a lei (*Madre*, pp. 42-43).

We see that he literally trembles before her. When she confronts him, he initially objects, feeling himself being drawn back into an imprisoned existence: 'Tentò di ritirare la mano, da quella dura e fredda di lei, ma la sentì stretta in modo insostenibile; ed ebbe l'impressione di essere legato, arrestato, condotto in carcere' (*Madre*, p. 44). Despite his view of it as such, he soon succumbs and promises never to see Agnese again.

### **Paulo's perspective**

Paulo only takes control of the narrative perspective when he himself begins to take control of his identity: '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' (*Madre*, p. 38). At times, when he is narrating, questions from his mind are woven directly into the narrative: 'Perché sua madre piangeva così, dopo il giuramento di lui? Che poteva capire, lei? Sì, capiva; con la sua carne di madre capiva l'angoscia mortale del figlio, la rinuncia di lui alla vita' (*Madre*, p. 48). Paulo is exploring his own identity, particularly in relation to his mother. He persuades himself that she must understand his suffering, just as he later persuades himself that she cannot be flawed:

Piegato col mento sul petto, mosse lievemente la testa accennando di sì, di sì. Sì, la madre non s'era dimenticata di chiamarlo presto, com'egli le aveva raccomandato il giorno avanti. Sì, la madre procedeva per la sua via

diritta: non ricordava nulla delle cose della notte scorsa e lo chiamava come se tutto fosse eguale alle altre mattine (*Madre*, pp. 64-65).

The line between the world of Paulo's mind and the real world is dramatically drawn with the sound of bells: 'Quei rintocchi lo chiamavano: egli non vedeva più nulla delle cose esterne, sebbene cercasse di sfuggire alle sue cose interne; l'odore della sua camera gli dava un turbamento fisico; i ricordi lo pungevano tutto' (*Madre*, p. 65). Keen to stay in the haven of his thought, Paulo is reluctant to return to reality. The bells are persistent however and are rhythmically repeated through in the narrative: 'Quei rintocchi lo chiamavano' (*Madre*, p. 65). We can actually hear them summoning him.

When he is narrating, we see that he is aware of the effect his mother has on him. His identity has been moulded and his life quite literally narrated by his mother up until this point. Indeed, the motif of Paulo's life as a prison is one which is frequently repeated in the text.

No, non era la carne che chiedeva di vivere; bensì l'anima che si sentiva chiusa nella carne e voleva liberarsi dalla sua prigionia: nei momenti dell'ebbrezza suprema di amore era l'anima che fuggiva in un rapido volo, per ricadere tosto nella sua gabbia: ma le bastava quell'attimo di liberazione per intravedere il luogo dove sarebbe volata alla fine della sua prigionia, quando la muraglia della carne crollerebbe per sempre: luogo di gioia infinita, l'infinito (*Madre*, p. 64).

He views his entire existence as a prison, which will only be escaped in death. At a later point, not wanting to confront his feelings for Agnese, he leaves his house: 'era fuggito di casa per fuggire sé stesso' (*Madre*, p. 85). At this stage it is a different woman, his lover, who drives him from the 'haven' of his own room and inspires this sensation of restriction.

Even towards the close of the novel Paulo feels more trapped than ever:

Quando infine spalancò la finestra e vi si sparse gli parve di riaprire finalmente gli occhi alla luce del giorno, dopo l'incubo notturno; di essere finalmente uscito dalla prigionia di sé stesso e di rifar pace con le cose

eterne; ma era una pace forzata, piena di rancore nascosto; e bastò ch'egli si ritraesse, passando dall'aria calda e profumata della sua camera, perché l'angoscia lo riafferasse, ricacciandolo dentro sé stesso. [...] Eppure ecco che di nuovo aveva paura: paura di andare avanti, di tornare indietro: gli sembrava di essere, sulla pietra della sua soglia, come sul vertice di una montagna: più su non poteva andare, più giù si spalancava l'abisso (*Madre*, p. 166).

Due to this continued metaphor, previous interpretations by critics of his mother's behaviour as self-sacrificing and admirable are turned upside down. She has completely disregarded her son's unhappiness for many years and continued to impose her own agenda.

Paulo's actions are dictated by fear of discovery and of consequent punishment. We see that it is fear of other people which dictates his behaviour rather than love of God, or even fear of God. The dread of public scandal is enough to force him into an existence bereft of freedom and choice: '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' (*Madre*, p. 40). It is not God's judgement which he fears, but the judgement of those around him. We are reminded here of Ricoeur's interest in the relationship between the self and society, for a person must identify him/herself based on the choices already set out by the existing society into which he or she is introduced.<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, Donald Hall proposes that no self is truly free precisely because of these social confines which are laid out for every individual identity:

We are widely led to believe that we have the freedom and ability to create and re-create our 'selves' at will, if we have the will, but at the same time are presented with a suspiciously narrow range of options and avenues that will allow us to fit comfortably into society and our particular gendered, regional, ethnic, sexual subset of it.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ricoeur, p. 121.

<sup>203</sup> Hall, p. 1.

In a sense, therefore, Paulo's freedom was restricted even before he became aware of the social limitations which were being placed upon him. Later, Agnese also accuses Paulo of abandoning her out of fear of people: 'tu hai paura del mondo. Non è la paura di Dio che ti spinge a lasciarmi' (*Madre*, p. 149). His identity is in fact formed for the benefit of those around him, rather than his own contentment. The implication is also that his fear is unfounded, for social pressure is not a valid reason for him to give up the woman he loves. We recall Arendt's proposal that the self-conscious projection of a self and the neutral interpretation of a self are different things.<sup>204</sup> Paulo appears one way to others, but he wishes to appear a different way. The self whom he projects for the benefit of other people is not representative of his own view of himself. A comparison could be drawn here with Pirandello's *Così è se vi pare* (1917), which portrays the mystery surrounding the identity of Signora Ponza. Signor Ponza claims her to be his second wife, and Signora Frola, purporting to be the woman's mother, claims her to be Signor Ponza's first wife. Signora Ponza puts the question to rest at the close of the play as she declares: 'Per me, io sono colei che mi si crede.'<sup>205</sup> Her identity, therefore, is different for all those who perceive her, and indeed, it can only exist in the way she is regarded by others. Paulo's own view of himself differs greatly from that of other people, and at this point, his own interpretation of his identity has no bearing for he conducts his life entirely based upon the demands of others.

When Paulo opts to obey his mother and end his affair with Agnese, we not only see a continuation of the submission which dominated his previous life, but the beginnings of his inner contemplation. In a sense, it is not the affair with Agnese which signals the start of his self-exploration, rather the thought processes he is led to

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<sup>204</sup> See footnote 154.

<sup>205</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Così è (se vi pare)* (Roma: Bonacci, 1995), p. 137.

by the conflicting demands of his mother and lover. The differing narrative perspectives of his mother and lover therefore feed into Paulo's understanding of his sense of self. Only now does he truly contemplate the gravity of what he has done, both by starting and by ending this secret relationship.

When Paulo agrees not to return to Agnese's house again he consequently feels lost. He has resigned himself to the life which was chosen for him and he does not know how to function in this void:

[A]ndò qua e là senza sapere perché, aprì la finestra, immerse la testa nel vento: e gli parve di essere una delle mille foglie del ciglione protese nel vuoto, ora nel grigio dell'ombra, ora nella luce radiosa della luna, in balia del vento e del gioco delle nuvole: infine si sollevò, chiuse e disse ad alta voce: - Bisogna essere uomini. | E si raddrizzò, e gli parve di essere tutto duro e freddo, fasciato di una corazza d'orgoglio. Non voleva più sentire la sua carne, né il dolore né la gioia del sacrificio, né la tristezza della sua solitudine; non voleva neppure presentarsi a Dio per ricevere la parola di approvazione che si dà al servo volenteroso: non voleva nulla da nessuno. Solo procedere dritto, solo, senza speranza (*Madre*, p. 47).

Paulo has a heightened awareness of the natural world around him, particularly of the wind which has been a catalyst to his actions through much of the novel. The wind is a recurring symbolic presence in the text, though especially in its first half. It is a feature which recalls a romantic style of writing, for it creates a link between the natural world and the feelings of the characters in it.<sup>206</sup> Though not a prominent literary device, the wind consistently echoes in the background of the novel, or at least its beginning. We see that it guides the characters' behaviour in a way, playing as an encouraging accompaniment to their feelings, thoughts and actions.

The first time we encounter the wind in the novel's opening pages best describes its significance:

[S]i sentiva solo, di fuori, il rumore del vento accompagnato dal mormorio degli alberi del ciglione dietro la piccola parrocchia: un vento non troppo

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<sup>206</sup> The wind is also occasionally present in the novel *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*, though less so than in *La madre*. Since it cannot be considered a central feature of *Il segreto*, it will not form part of the analysis in the next chapter.

forte ma incessante e monotono che pareva facesse la casa con un grande nastro stridente, sempre più stretto, e tentasse sradicarla dalle sue fondamenta e tirarla giù (*Madre*, pp. 7-8).

It is a quiet sound, almost a whisper, which speaks to the characters and slowly tightens its grip around their lives. Enza Buono describes its role as follows:

[I]l piccolo paese di Aar, i suoi abitanti barbari e superstiziosi sono appena il pretesto su cui giganteggiano le figure di Paulo e della madre; mentre quell'altipiano sempre in preda al vento è come il respiro angosciato e ansante della loro anima.<sup>207</sup>

Indeed, later Paulo describes the sensation of the wind being a part of him: 'Tutto gli parlava; il vento, di fuori, che gli ricordava la lunga solitudine della sua giovinezza, e, dentro, la figura triste della madre, lo scricchiolio del suo passo, l'ombra sua stessa' (*Madre*, p. 45). It is a force which guides them both, encouraging the feelings they are experiencing at any given moment: 'immerse la testa nel vento: e gli parve di essere una delle mille foglie del ciglione protese nel vuoto, ora nel grigio dell'ombra, ora nella luce radiosa della luna, in balia del vento e del giuoco delle nuvole' (*Madre*, p. 47).

In a sense, the wind could represent the characters' unconscious minds as they contemplate the problems of their interactions. It is this struggle which is having an increasingly greater impact, much like the force of the wind. As Paulo sneaks out of his house the wind gives him a helping hand,<sup>208</sup> and as his angry mother follows, she is filled with 'violenza' by that same wind.<sup>209</sup> It is even described as an unholy power: 'Il vento fuori strisciava più intenso: il diavolo limava la parrocchia, la chiesa, il mondo tutto dei cristiani' (*Madre*, p. 15).

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<sup>207</sup> Buono, p. 104.

<sup>208</sup> *Madre*, p. 10.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

When Paulo first seems struck by guilt it is the wind which knocks him back into the reality of his responsibilities, contradicting its initial behaviour but in keeping with the change in Paulo's feelings:

Quando si ritrovò nel prato, dopo aver lasciato la donna, Paulo ebbe anche lui l'impressione che il vento avesse qualche cosa di vivo, di ambiguo: lo spingeva e lo respingeva; 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 (*Madre*, p. 38).

The wind has literally and metaphorically given him a shudder, a jolt of reality which draws him from the dream world of his love affair: 'Adesso la realtà del mondo esterno, e quel vento che pareva volesse denudarlo, gli portavano via il velo dell'inganno' (*Madre*, p. 39).

Unlike the image of the mirror which, as we shall see, remains consistently important throughout the novel and particularly throughout Paulo's crisis of identity, the wind is less present towards the end of the novel. Its impact appears to diminish as Paulo strengthens in his confidence and his self-understanding. When Paulo goes against his own feelings in order to please his mother and leaves Agnese, the wind is far less audible. It is mentioned, though rarely, as Paulo realises that he is neglecting himself: 'pareva si fosse dimenticato perché era lì, e ascoltasse solo il mormorio del vento fra i literni' (*Madre*, p. 105). It is mentioned one final time when he visits Agnese after her accident. Here it is a last push from his unconscious to obey his own instinct:

[P]oi fu silenzio; poi d'improvviso un uscio si sbatté violentemente, come spinto da un impeto di vento: all'urto i pavimenti ondularono, tutta la casa parve tremare; ed egli provò un senso di angoscia nel veder subito dopo il viso pallido di Agnese rigato di strisce di capelli neri in disordine, emergere dall'ombra delle stanze buie come quello di una naufraga (*Madre*, p. 144).

As we see from its diminished presence in the second half of the novel, Paulo wishes to shed his awareness of the natural world, to separate his mind from the physical world and emotional world. He feels the pain of his decision and can only conceive of continuing in a neutral, emotionless state in order to survive.

When he has thus resigned himself to the life his mother wants for him, he has a pessimistic view of human existence: ‘Ebbene, era così. Ed egli accettava la verità. Era così; ed era così perché la natura dell’uomo è questa: soffrire, amare, congiungersi, godere, soffrire ancora: fare e ricevere il bene, fare e ricevere il male: questa è la vita dell’uomo’ (*Madre*, p. 50). The repetition of ‘era così’, however, suggests that Paulo does not truly believe that this is ‘la verità’, that this is not how his life ought to be. He has accepted his mother’s dictatorship, albeit reluctantly, and he still remains somewhat doubtful.

The change in Paulo is evident to those around him. Antioco sees Paulo in a new light now that he has ended his affair: ‘gli parlava diverso del solito; non poteva dire perché né come, ma gli parlava diverso del solito’ (*Madre*, p. 80), and again: ‘Ed egli guardava nel viso, quasi lo vedesse la prima volta’ (*Madre*, p. 80). Antioco can see Paulo’s own definition of his identity, which is guided by his desires and decisions and which has now been locked up once again. Paulo’s mother also senses a change in him which is reflected by the details in his room:

Passò nella camera di lui: bianca, col piccolo letto verginale, un tempo questa cameretta era ordinata e semplice come quella d’una fanciulla: egli amava la quiete, il silenzio, l’ordine [...] da qualche tempo però non si curava più di nulla; lasciava i cassetti aperti, i libri sulle sedie, e anche per terra (*Madre*, p. 27).

She knows that this brief period of rebellion, this taste of independence and liberation has changed her son forever: ‘Le pareva ch’egli se ne fosse andato via per sempre: anche se tornava non era più il suo Paulo, era un disgraziato preso dalla cattiva

passione, uno che guardava con occhi minacciosi, come il ladro in agguato, chiunque osasse attraversargli la strada' (*Madre*, p. 84). The mother now regards Paulo very differently. She narrates him as a lost soul, one who has fallen into the trappings of sin and will never return to her.

We see, however, that though it was rebellious, this affair could not be deemed a move towards independence. Paulo has in fact moved from the overbearing influence of one woman to another, for when his mother no longer controls his identity, Paulo allows Agnese to define him. Paulo associates his renunciation of love with a renunciation of life itself. Continuing to live without freedom to love signifies a form of non-existence: 'rinunziando ad amare, a possedere quella donna, era rinunciare alla vita stessa' (*Madre*, p. 50). He finds that he is completely under her spell: 'E si accorse che nel più profondo del suo cuore la pena maggiore, dopo il ritorno dall'altipiano, era stata questa: il non saper nulla di lei, il silenzio, la sparizione di lei' (*Madre*, p. 118). Indeed, he cannot conceive of life at all without her in it: 'Era questa la vera morte: ch'ella cessasse di amarlo' (*Madre*, p. 118). Again, we see that renouncing love, and thus renouncing an emotional interaction with an 'other', means renouncing life.

Towards the close of the novel, it is Agnese who has the greatest influence over Paulo:

[E]lla aveva la potenza terribile di trascinarlo in fondo al mare, di sollevarlo sull'abisso del cielo, di fare di lui un essere senza volontà. Mentre lui fuggiva per la valle e per l'altipiano, ella, chiusa nella sua prigione, lo aspettava e sapeva che sarebbe tornato (*Madre*, p. 152).

Again we see the motif of the prison as Paulo has been tempted into a different form of trapped existence. His solution is to attempt to possess control of her identity just as she controls his: 'così avrebbe voluto tenerle ferma prigioniera l'anima' (*Madre*, p. 152). He is, however, unsuccessful. Just as his mother's power was communicated

through silent recognition, Agnese's silence is more powerful than any words she could utter: 'Ed egli ebbe più paura di quel silenzio e di quell'immobilità che delle parole insensate e dei moti convulsi di lei' (*Madre*, p. 157). In a sense, Agnese is dictating the narrative here by remaining silent, for she still maintains the control. We have defined narrative as the selective action of telling a story, the selection of which elements of a story are demonstrated and in which order they are demonstrated. By remaining silent, Agnese is selecting what not to say, she is dictating what Paulo can know and consequently the way in which Paulo interprets her actions and their relationship. As Paul Cobley notes, much of the power of narrative comes from the selection of what is not said: 'Narrative mode, then, was once again demonstrably more than just a matter of accurately depicting the actions of individual characters; it was a matter of time, space, social relations and what was *not* depicted.'<sup>210</sup>

It is because he no longer has Agnese to dictate his life, and he is unable to succumb completely to his mother's wishes any longer that Paulo feels lost: 'Gli pareva che le ombre e le luci che i fuochi del ciglione sbattevano tutto intorno, sopra ogni pietra, sopra ogni stelo, uscissero dalla sua coscienza: ma qual era la verità: la bianca o la nera?' (*Madre*, p. 111). This metaphoric description suggests that Paulo has divided his choice between his mother and his lover into a black and white situation: one is good and one is evil, the white purity of a chaste, religious life and the black void of sinful temptation. Despite this categorisation, however, he is unsure which one would lead him to fulfilment and thus to the version of his identity that is pleasing to him.

As we approach the close of the novel, Paulo oscillates more and more between the two women. When news arrives that Agnese has fallen and is in need of

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<sup>210</sup> Cobley, p. 91.

his care, his mother is wary and warns him not to go: ‘Ed egli sentì ancora una volta ch’ella era come la sua coscienza che parlava’ (*Madre*, p. 139). The description of her as ‘la sua coscienza’ highlights the influence she still has upon him. He symbolically regards this indecision as follows: ‘Per qualche attimo ebbe l’impressione di dover restare così per l’eternità, davanti ad una porta chiusa di cui pure aveva la chiave’ (*Madre*, p. 137). He is once again faced with the opportunity to change his life but not the freedom to do so. In the same way, he associates his mother with the church in an image of her overpowering presence: ‘Aveva l’impressione confusa di essere come davanti a un altare, con la madre là sopra, idolo misterioso’ (*Madre*, p. 142).

Feeling cowardly and overwhelmed, Paulo expresses a desire to start again with his mother: ‘È bene svegliare mia madre, avvertirla, possibilmente partire assieme, che ella mi riporti una seconda volta con sé, come da bambino, e che io possa ricominciare una nuova vita’ (*Madre*, p. 162). His new life would begin with her, with her formative influence once again shaping his identity. Cavarero identifies birth as the beginning of Oedipus’ story and the origin of all meaning to his existence: ‘Che Edipo ignori *chi* è, perché ignora la sua nascita, fa dunque parte del racconto. Solo conoscendola egli può conoscere la *sua* storia.’<sup>211</sup> Following a similar instinct, therefore, Paulo wishes to return to his birth and start his tale again in order to have greater control over it, though paradoxically it would be his mother who would control his life once again. He seems happy for his mother to assume the role of the narrator of his existence if it does not conflict with his own narrative or that of any other character.

Continuing with this obedient instinct as identified by D. H. Lawrence,<sup>212</sup> Paulo attempts to prevent Agnese’s influence by confronting her within his mind: ‘Nascose

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<sup>211</sup> Cavarero, p. 20.

<sup>212</sup> See footnote 172.

il viso fra le mani, cercò di *vederla*, e cominciò a rinfacciarle tutte le cose ch'ella avrebbe dovuto rinfacciare a lui' (*Madre*, p. 118). He attempts to communicate with her even though she is not physically with him: 'Agnese, tu non puoi dimenticare le tue promesse' (*Madre*, p. 118). Similarly, when he cannot make her understand, he describes this as an image of physical distance: 'D'un tratto tacque. Senti ch'ella non capiva. Non poteva capire. E la vedeva sempre più distaccata da lui, come la vita dalla morte: ma appunto per questo sentiva di amarla ancora, anzi sempre più, come la vita chi muore' (*Madre*, p. 153). When Paulo obtains clarity, it is emphasised as visual and physical as well as spiritual and emotional: 'Ed egli *vedeva* ogni cosa, su dall'altare, e non aveva più speranza, sebbene in fondo il cuore gli dicesse che non era possibile che Agnese mantenesse la sua folle minaccia' (*Madre*, p. 173). He must see in order to understand. In the elevated position of the altar he is able to stand above and survey the story of his life as it unfolds before him, much like the protagonist of Pirandello's 'Di sera, un geranio'.<sup>213</sup>

### **The merging of narrative perspectives**

The narrative perspectives of Paulo and his mother are occasionally joined. This first occurs when Paulo's feeling of faintness mirrors that of his mother when she was pregnant: 'provò un senso di vertigine come sua madre sulla china della valle quando s'era accorta d'essere incinta' (*Madre*, p. 38). This serves to draw two climactic moments together as they are turning points in both of their lives. His mother was overcome with emotion when she was pregnant with Paulo and consequently turned to a life of religious devotion. He is now overcome by temptation and similarly turns back to a religious life.

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<sup>213</sup> See footnote 153.

Their perspectives also meet to demonstrate a move from one narrator to another: ‘Egli evitava di guardarla [...] Madre e figlio pensavano alla stessa cosa: alla lettera consegnata ad Agnese; ma né l’una né l’altra ne parlavano. Poi egli andò via di corsa, ed ella, ferma come una statua di legno, disse al sagrista [...] Ella rimaneva ferma’ (*Madre*, p. 70). We see here that the narrative perspective began with Paulo, was joined and then moved to that of his mother. As the narrative perspective changes more frequently, it mirrors the power struggle the characters undergo as Paulo attempts to project his own voice above those of his mother and Agnese who continually dominate.

In the final scene the narrative perspective of Agnese becomes more prominent than that of the mother, as the mother symbolically slips into the background. This represents the shift in authority over Paulo to his lover:

Non poteva andare più oltre. Un fitto velo le offuscava gli occhi. [...] Ella si fece il segno della croce, s’alzò e andò verso la porta. La serva la seguiva: i vecchi, le donne, i fanciulli si volgevano a guardarla e le sorridevano e la benedicevano con gli occhi, come la loro padrona, il loro simbolo di bellezza e di fede: tanto lontana da loro eppure in mezzo a loro e alla loro miseria come la rosa canina in mezzo al rovo (*Madre*, p. 180).

Agnese’s position of authority is even acknowledged here by the members of the congregation, who regard her as their ‘padrona’, a term which the mother has repeatedly used to describe herself earlier in the novel.

In the last few pages just following this, the narrative perspective becomes especially confusing as the whole congregation gathers to see what has happened to Paulo’s mother:

Prima di uscire, la serva le porse con le punta delle dita l’acqua santa [...] Una donna, accorgendosi dell’attenzione di Agnese e della serva, si volse anche lei a guardare [...] In un attimo tutti furono in piedi, tutti in fondo alla chiesa. / Paulo era già rientrato nella sagrestia, con Antioco [...] Un rumore confuso di voci, dapprima lieve, poi sempre più forte, saliva dalla chiesetta, Antioco sorse la testa dall’uscio e vide tutta la gente laggiù [...]

Paulo fu giù di volo [...] per guardare meglio la madre (*Madre*, pp. 180-182).

The perspective moves quickly from that of Agnese, to a servant, then another woman, then that of the whole congregation, then Antioco and finally Paulo again. This is also the first time in the novel where the reader may be conscious of the presence of an overall narrator who is in control of the characters. A conductor is needed for the cacophony of voices which emerge from the text at this stage.

During the final image, Paulo's perspective and that of Agnese join as one as their eyes meet: 'Egli intese subito ch'ella era morta della stessa pena, dello stesso terrore che egli aveva potuto superare. | E anche lui strinse i denti per non gridare, quando sollevò gli occhi e nella nuvola confusa della folla che gli si accumulava attorno incontrò gli occhi di Agnese' (*Madre*, p. 182).

As mentioned above, D. H. Lawrence interprets Deledda's decision to kill the mother as a reaction to the mother's victory.<sup>214</sup> Eric Lane, on the other hand, views it as a moment of utter defeat for Paulo: 'His mother has been taken from him, his love rejected and only his shaken vocation is left. [...] a door has been shut on his life and a kind of living death awaits him.'<sup>215</sup> Though I agree that this is a destructive moment for Paulo, I also view it as a moment of victory for Agnese. By dying the mother has conceded power, power over the narrative and over Paulo's life, both of which, as we have seen, are intertwined. The implication is that Paulo is free of his mother, and though he is under Agnese's control, this is the existence he desires and so willingly offers his identity to her. Her eyes, her gaze are the final focal point, and we imagine that her narrative control over Paulo will continue beyond the close of the novel.

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<sup>214</sup> Lawrence, p. 6.

<sup>215</sup> Lane, p. 15.

### Constructing identity through narrative

Although the plot does move chronologically overall, it is punctuated by frequent *analepses* into various characters' pasts. As suggested by Cavarero, the characters need to view the entirety of their lives from a distance in order to gain an understanding of it. The meaning is brought forwards by the process of telling the story and selecting which relevant events to display.

Paulo's mother revisits her childhood early on in the novel: 'Si rivedeva ragazzetta, orfana, in casa di parenti poveri, in quello stesso paesetto, maltrattata da tutti' (*Madre*, p. 30). We learn that she was not respected by others in the community and it appears that Paulo's social status as parish priest may enable her to obtain the respect she lacked earlier in life. Furthermore, her marriage was the result of the advances of an abusive uncle who left her pregnant. She continued to refer to him as 'Zio' even when they were married, which is indicative of the unnatural, uncomfortable nature of their relationship, and after his death, she was left to raise Paulo alone. We can now understand why such a series of trying events led to the excessive moral beliefs which govern both her life and that of her son. This is confirmed by the priest, *il parroco*, who confronts her in a dream: 'Peggio per le vostre viscere, se avete voluto venire a star qui: era meglio che gli faceva fare il mestiere del padre, a tuo figlio. Ma tu sei una donna ambiziosa: hai voluto ritornare padrona dove sei stata serva' (*Madre*, p. 35). By ensuring Paulo's future as a priest, she was bettering her past and securing their places in society. Paulo's mother cannot comprehend the reason for her actions for she is still living that role. As Cavarero states, the man cannot see the pattern of the stork while he is still drawing it.<sup>216</sup> The mother wrestles with her past and experiences moments of doubt in her determination

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<sup>216</sup> See footnote 145.

to keep Paulo in his priestly position. Ultimately, however, she appears unable to grasp the meaning behind her actions and so continues to ensnare Paulo right until the moment of her death. It may be that she is in need of a third person, an external narrator who can narrate her story so that she can truly understand her actions.

Towards the close of the novel, we are given a similar revelation by Agnese through the use of *analepsis*. This retelling of her past explains her desire to shame Paulo for his behaviour:

Sapeva bene che il castigo che voleva infliggere all'uomo col quale aveva peccato era il castigo suo stesso; [...] Tutti i suoi giorni solitari le sfilavano davanti, coi versi cantati dal suo popolo; si rivedeva bambina, poi fanciulla, poi donna, in quella stessa chiesa, [...] Ella era nata e cresciuta fra queste leggende [...] Ma appunto questo suo sentirsi padrona anche del luogo sacro le rendeva più insopportabile la presenza dell'uomo ch'era stato suo pari nel peccato e adesso le si mostrava dall'alto mascherato di santità, coi vasi sacri in mano; alto e luminoso sopra di lei piegata ai suoi piedi colpevole di averlo amato (*Madre*, p. 177).

She too was raised in a heavily religious environment and so feels a great attachment towards the church. Her love for Paulo overcame this, and allowed their relationship to take priority. When that ended, however, she became determined to destroy him for he could no longer stand as a false figure of piety in a church which she holds so dear. By revisiting her past she is able to gain a clearer understanding of her present state, though she, like Paulo's mother, is in need of an external narrator in order to obtain full clarity. It is only the reader, therefore, who has a complete understanding of Agnese's current identity.

Paulo also recalls the steps in his life which led him to his current state. During the retelling of his own story, Paulo begins to understand the events which give meaning to his life and thus to his present identity. He moves through events which led to his becoming a priest: his affair with Marielena and the days he spent at the seminary. Looking back upon the time at the seminary, he realises that he had noticed

details about the horses' legs because he was looking at the ground. He was ashamed, and can now see how that shame drove him to the pride he determinedly developed in later life:

Egli notava queste cose perché guardava per terra, un po' vergognoso di sé, un po' vergonoso della madre. Sì, perché non dirlo una buona volta? S'era sempre un po' vergognato di sua madre, perché serva, perché di quel paesetto di semplici. Solo più tardi, molto più tardi, aveva vinto questo suo istinto ignobile a furia di volontà e di orgoglio, e più s'era irragionevolmente vergognato della sua origine, più se n'era poi gloriato, di fronte a sé stesso e di fronte a Dio, scegliendo per soggiorno il miserabile paesetto, e sottoponendosi a sua madre, rispettandone i voleri più umili e le abitudini più meschine (*Madre*, p. 55).

Later, he recounts the first time he came to the village: 'Ricordava il suo arrivo al paesetto, anni avanti; la madre che lo seguiva trepida come si segue un bimbo che fa i primi passi. | "E io sono caduto davanti a lei... E lei crede di avermi rialzato, ma sono ferito a morte. Dio mio, Dio mio..."' (*Madre*, p. 111). She thought that she had saved him then, but he had already fallen far from grace.

Paulo needs to retell the story of his life in order to understand the position he now holds, that is to say, he is constructing his identity through narrative, through the process of telling his own story: 'Come il malato si contenta di conoscere almeno la diagnosi del suo male, egli si sarebbe contentato di sapere almeno perché gli accadeva tutto questo. Volle anche lui rifare tutta la strada della sua vita come la madre' (*Madre*, p. 51). As Cavarero notes, however, Paulo also needs the help of an external narrator in order to comprehend the meaning of his own life. He needs to witness the narration rather than narrate it himself. The difference between Paulo and his mother and Agnese is his self-consciousness. As we will soon see in my analysis of the image of the mirror, Paulo views himself as two people: the public Paulo and the Paulo he knows and shares with Agnese. Through this self division, he is in a sense able to become both narrator and the narrated of his life.

Furthermore, as Paulo attempts to gain a better understanding of his own identity, he is able to see the potential for its repetition in Antioco. Paulo therefore sees the story of his own life mapped out before him in Antioco, and from this external viewpoint he can see the meaning in his own. As the young boy expresses an interest in joining the priesthood, probably in order to better emulate Paulo whom he so admires, Paulo fears he is keen for the wrong reasons: ‘Il ragazzo era lì, davanti a lui, teso ardente come il ferro infocato che aspetta il colpo del martello per ricevere forma: ogni parola poteva giovargli, ogni parola poteva nuocergli’ (*Madre*, p. 129). There is the potential for Paulo to shape Antioco’s future just as his future was decided for him. Paulo’s influence on Antioco could be as great and therefore as dangerous as his mother’s on him: ‘Paulo sollevò gli occhi: di nuovo gli parve di avere fra le mani l’anima del fanciullo, come fosse di cera, e di poterla con pochi tocchi deformare: di nuovo ebbe paura e tacque’ (*Madre*, p. 131). The description of Antioco’s identity as ‘cera’ emphasises its fragility as well as its malleability. He is able to take a step back and view the story of Antioco’s life and draw comparisons with his own. In this sense, Antioco’s life is a narration of his own and has therefore allowed for a greater understanding of the formation of Paulo’s identity.

Aptly, literature has had a great effect on Paulo throughout his life. Other *stories* have therefore fed into his own:

Era ignorante; e sapeva di esserlo; la sua coltura era fatta di frammenti di libri dei quali non intendeva intero lo spirito: la Bibbia soprattutto lo aveva plasmato col suo romanticismo e il suo verismo d’altri tempi: quindi non si fidava neppure di sé stesso, delle sue ricerche interiori: sapeva di non conoscersi, di non essere padrone di sé stesso; d’ingannarsi, d’ingannarsi sempre (*Madre*, p. 63).

He can see that he is not in control of his own identity for he cannot have complete knowledge of himself. Paulo also proposes the notion that no story is independent, for no thought can be original: ‘dove aveva letto tutte queste cose? Certo, le aveva lette:

non pretendeva di pensare cose nuove. Che importa? La verità è sempre stata la stessa, eguale entro tutti gli uomini come è eguale il loro cuore' (*Madre*, p. 64). These ideas of independence and freedom must have been inspired by reading, as man is inspired by the ideas he absorbs from others. He looks for an understanding of the story of his own life from other stories he has encountered. As Paul Cobley emphasises, stories have an inevitable influence upon each other.<sup>217</sup> Paulo himself proves to be aware that his story is shaped by that of his mother, his lover and even the similar story of Antioco, as well as the many stories, fictional and real, which have influenced him on an unconscious level.

Paulo eventually realises that he can only truly understand his identity with the experience of time and retrospect: 'È che... è che da ragazzi si pensa in un modo, e tutto sembra bello e grande, - riprese, turbato, - mentre poi, con l'età, le cose cambiano aspetto. Bisogna ponderare bene una cosa prima di farla, per poi non pentirsi' (*Madre*, p. 131). The knowledge and wisdom gained with age and from the input of other people, impact greatly on the way one regards life. It is only by looking back in hindsight, blending his own perspective with those around him, that Paulo can understand the meaning of his identity, re-telling the story of his life.

### **The mirror**

As the scandal in Paulo's life unfolds, we witness his journey of self-discovery. The reason for Paulo's rebellion is that he becomes aware of the identity which has been imposed upon him. This exploration of the self is rendered visible by the repeated motif of the mirror. The mirror is of course an important image in much modern writing with regard to the self. For example, the protagonists of Luigi Pirandello's *Il*

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<sup>217</sup> See footnote 193.

*Fu Mattia Pascal* (1904) and *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* (1925) undergo journeys of self-analysis which begin with a crucial moment of scrutiny in front of a mirror.

However, the mirror is not just an image used in modernist writing. It appears in many gothic, romantic and magical works written at the end of the nineteenth century. The mirror is frequently present in Robert Louis Stevenson's gothic novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).<sup>218</sup> Here we have a protagonist who is so torn in his identity that he literally divides in two through scientific experimentation. Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871) proposes the notion of an alternative reality in the reflected world of the mirror.<sup>219</sup> The mirror is linked here to a sense of division and uncertainty in the real world. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) has the mirror image of Dorian Gray in his own portrait as its focal point.<sup>220</sup> This gothic horror fiction engages in the subject of the self, of the dangers of narcissism and sin, albeit in an ambiance which is clearly beyond the boundaries of reality.

*La madre* also embraces touches of gothic fantasy and romantic imagery as we have seen in the recurring image of the wind, references to demons,<sup>221</sup> and the interfering image of the ghostly old *parroco* who speaks to Paulo's mother.<sup>222</sup> The mirror could be seen as reminiscent of these and other similar fantastical tales, where its terrifying power leads to a moment of crisis. The mirror is in fact a representation of Paulo's psychological self-exploration. It tracks Paulo's attempt to grasp his identity from his own perspective and finally to shed the opinions of others which

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<sup>218</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (London: Penguin, 2002).

<sup>219</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan, 1898).

<sup>220</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>221</sup> Paulo is summoned to exorcise a little girl, Nina Masia, who is possessed by 'demoni'.

*Madre*, pp. 93-97.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.

have been imposed upon him. It thus appears as a metaphor for his reflection upon the conflicts in his life and his subsequent need to examine himself from the inside out.

The mirror is introduced in the opening pages of the novel as *la madre* notes it as a change in Paulo's behaviour. The mirror is a forbidden object to a priest as it represents the sin of vanity, but his mother sees that Paulo now embraces its use fully: 'Nella casa di un sacerdote non è permesso tenere specchi: egli deve vivere senza ricordarsi che ha un corpo. [...] Paulo invece era attirato dallo specchio come dalla fontana dove c'è un viso che sorride, attira e fa cadere dentro' (*Madre*, p. 28). This image is reminiscent of the legend of Narcissus who, having stared at his own image for a long time lost himself in his own reflection.<sup>223</sup> This is intended to highlight the dangers of vanity and of losing oneself in introspective contemplation, which his mother clearly fears. She fears his introspection as a means of him possibly gaining clarity and understanding the different layers of his identity, that is, his own feelings and opinions, which she has tried to keep hidden from him. His mother in fact regards the mirror as an object which is possessed by evil spirits: 'pensava con amarezza, e con una vaga derisione verso sé stessa, che lo spirito maligno era già dentro la piccola parrocchia; che beveva alla brocca del suo Paulo e si aggirava intorno allo specchio di lui appeso accanto alla finestra' (*Madre*, p. 8). The mother, therefore, depicts the mirror as an evil object which is to be feared and from which she will save him.

Paulo's behaviour during these stolen moments in front of the mirror is described as somewhat feminine:

La madre ricordava di averlo spesso sorpreso, in quegli ultimi tempi, a specchiarsi a lungo come una donna, a pulirsi e lucidarsi le unghie, a spazzolarsi i capelli che si tirava in su dopo averli lasciati crescere, quasi cercando di nascondere il sacro segno della tonsura (*Madre*, p. 8).

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<sup>223</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, trans. by A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 61-66.

The description of his behaviour as feminine implies that she regards it as something unnatural to his being. His vanity is a form of introspection as well as pride, for by attempting to conceal the hair-style which defines him, and which has been imposed upon him, he attempts to graft a new, freer identity for himself. It is as if he becomes a new person in front of the mirror: ‘Ma ecco che egli si fermava davanti allo specchio, e tutto il suo viso diventava luminoso perché le palpebre si sollevavano e nella trasparenza degli occhi castanei la pupilla raggiava come un diamante’ (*Madre*, p. 9). The glowing appearance of his features highlights that this is a positive change to his character. He is happier because he has been free to explore his desires and his own sense of self. In contrast, when his mother removes the mirror in an attempt to curb his vain behaviour she sees her own miserable reflection: ‘Ella strappò dal chiodo il piccolo specchio che rifletteva il suo viso scuro e sdegnato e i suoi occhi minacciosi: l’ira a poco a poco la vinceva’ (*Madre*, p. 28). Representing her son’s potential freedom, the mirror reflects the mother’s fear and anger for he is no longer the obedient son he once was.

Later, however, Paulo decides to confront his conflicting feelings for Agnese and his mother, and so he himself looks in the mirror again: ‘E subito sentì che la lotta cominciava davvero: ed ebbe tale sgomento che si alzò e andò a guardarsi allo specchio’ (*Madre*, p. 48). It is interesting that his first battle instinct is to look into the mirror. He must confront his own demons and his own self before he can confront others. He must gain a clear sense of self before projecting that once again to other people. It could be argued that by confronting his image in the mirror Paulo attempts to gain an external perspective of his identity. He views himself as an ‘other’, from the outside. Kristeva points out that the self can only exist in relation to the other, and although this experience can be unnerving because it causes doubt about one’s own

identity, it can also be enlightening.<sup>224</sup> On the other hand, Ricoeur argues that identity is formed by the self and that it is only through self-recognition that we can have any sense of our identity. With the use of the mirror Paulo addresses both theories, for he recognises himself as both his self and as an ‘other’. Here, however, Kristeva’s theory is more pertinent, for by confronting the other side of himself he is able to see that his identity is not simply that which his mother has dictated to him throughout his life.

The mirror holds a symbolic value even when Paulo is not present, for his other self has been encapsulated within the mirror. While tidying his room, Paulo’s mother is faced with his mirror and a haunting image of Paulo therein:

Rimise in ordine la camera la camera di lui; ma lo specchio e gli odori, pure attraverso la convinzione che tutto oramai era finito, continuavano a irritarla e inquietarla. | La figura del suo Paulo, pallida e rigida come quella di un cadavere, le appariva dentro lo specchio maledetto, e appesa al muro con la sottana, e stesa senza respiro sul letto (*Madre*, p. 73).

By putting things back in order, *la madre* attempts to reassert her control over her son. As she sees his terrifying image in the mirror, however, she realises that his identity has taken a step away from her. The effect upon her is so great that she is in fact led to question her own moral stance for the first time: ‘Ma perché i preti non possono sposarsi?’ (*Madre*, p. 73). She considers Paulo’s happiness for once, seeing his identity as he views it, rather than the way she wishes it to be. She is faced with Paulo’s narrative perspective rather than her own.

The symbolic value of the mirror is complicated further as Paulo reveals the degree to which he is ensnared by a new identity, that of Agnese’s lover. When he has decided to leave her, he is frequently tempted back and is faced with this choice even when looking at himself in the mirror: ‘si avvicinò e tosto si allontanò dallo specchio: aveva un bel fuggire; l’immagine della donna gli stava dentro come la sua nello

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<sup>224</sup> Kristeva, p. 187.

specchio; egli poteva rompersi in mille pezzi: ogni pezzo l'avrebbe conservata intera' (*Madre*, p. 65). Agnese now forms part of his identity. Shattering the mirror would not erase this image, simply multiply it. He cannot escape from the impact she now has on his existence and sense of self.

The most climactic moment arrives towards the close of the novel where Paulo truly confronts himself in the mirror:

Passando davanti allo specchio si guardò. Si vide grigio in viso, con le labbra violacee e gli occhi infossati. 'Guàrdarti bene, Paulo' disse alla sua immagine, e si scostò un poco perché il chiarore della lampada battesse meglio sullo specchio. Anche la figura dentro si scostava, pareva volesse sfuggirlo; ed egli la fissava, ne vedeva le pupille dilatate e provava una strana impressione, gli pareva che il vero Paulo fosse quello, un Paulo che non mentiva, che rivelava nel pallore del suo viso tutta la sua paura del domani (*Madre*, p. 162).

This is a very Pirandellian moment of self-realisation, for by beginning to address himself, Paulo sees his identity as divided. He is split into the superficial self that appears in the mirror and the physical self that stands facing it. However, Paulo is led to ponder whether his actual real self is the image staring back at him from the mirror. That self is desperate to break free, to express himself honestly and to shed his fears of society, the church and, most importantly, his mother. He is divided into the self that is narrated by himself, and the one that is narrated by others. This moment of contemplation shows that Paulo is finally aware of all of the various ties which pull on his fluctuating identity, and is struggling to establish his own view of himself and where that piece fits into the puzzle. The reader is left to ponder the same questions as Paulo: is his own perspective the most accurate? Does he define his identity or do others? For Paulo, the most important thing is to establish what he thinks and what he has been forced to think by others. According to Cavarerian philosophy, however, Paulo is unable to grasp his identity without the input of others. Although his heightened self-awareness has allowed for a greater understanding than that obtained

by his mother and Agnese, it is still incomplete. Paulo is torn, hesitant before the mirror until his mother's death makes the choice for him. If we recall D. H. Lawrence's words, this may be the problem which Deledda did not dare to solve. She left the question of Paulo's identity unanswered to a great extent, making the decision for him about who he should obey by killing one of the choices.

Unfortunately, his perception of his self has drowned beneath those of the two women in his life. He attempts to shut out the external world to listen to his own voice: 'Allora, a occhi chiusi, col viso affondato sul guanciale; credette di veder meglio dentro la sua coscienza' (*Madre*, p. 162). Ironically, with closed eyes he is better able to see himself. He does not need the interference of others to fathom his own identity. He hears, however, that it is Agnese's voice which overpowers his own:

Eppure devi andartene, Paulo; sveglia tua madre e partite assieme. Non senti chi è che ti parla? Sono io, sono Agnese [...] Tu credi di esserti staccato da me? Ed io sono dentro di te, sono il mal seme della tua vita. Se tu resterai qui non ti abbandonerò un istante; sarò l'ombra sotto i tuoi piedi, il muro fra te e tua madre, fra te e te stesso. Vattene (*Madre*, p. 163).

She is addressing him from within his own consciousness and is now completely inseparable from his sense of self. As Agnese herself states, she stands firmly between Paulo and himself as another narrative voice asserting her control.

## **Conclusion**

A careful analysis of *La madre* has shown us the depth of its complexities, both in terms of narrative structure and with regard to the characters' explorations of their identities and psychologies. The text cannot simply be pigeonholed as a religious novel. From a most superficial reading we see that Paulo is led to sin by the temptress Agnese and is drawn back to the fold by his devout and devoted mother. A closer reading, however, reveals that Paulo's mother turned to a life of moral discipline

following an abusive adolescence and has inflicted her strict beliefs onto her son in an attempt to better her social standing as well as his. Paulo's affair with Agnese is on one level a rebellious act against what he views as an imprisoned existence, and on another level a shift from one influential, controlling female figure to another.

Identity is an uncertain philosophical issue which continues to pose many questions. Through an analysis of Deledda's use of narrative perspective, we have seen that although no firm interpretation of identity is given, her characters undergo an exploration of their identities, aided by the very act of narrating. Paulo's identity is for many years dictated by his mother, and this is added to by her control of his portrayal through the narrative. Throughout the novel, however, we witness him grappling with his sense of self, exploring his relationship with others and with the Church, examining himself inside and out with the symbolically rich image of the mirror and, most importantly, retelling the events of his life in order to extract its meaning. His mother and Agnese both also retell their respective pasts and are thus able to create doubt in their actions, but without the input of an external narrator they cannot grasp the full meaning of their lives. In a sense, Paulo makes himself an external observer of his own story through the use of the mirror, the mirrored path chosen by Antioco and the narrative influences of his mother and Agnese. He, therefore, gains a greater understanding of his own identity than any of the other characters, but he too is unable to grasp it completely, which is why his indecision remains a constant battle throughout the novel.

Deledda's skill with the narrative structure displays steps taken beyond the framework of *verismo*. In keeping with realist tradition, we are not made aware of an omniscient narrator during the course of the novel, though a greater sense of direction and control is more evident at the very end, and thus the characters are able to present

themselves and each other to the reader. It is this dynamic use of focalisation, jumping from character to character, which enables the exploration into the psyche of each character. Language is power in this sense, for control of the narrative is equal to control of an identity, and so the suitably quick changing narrative perspectives in the closing pages of the novel convey the changes which have occurred. The mother concedes the narrative control along with her life, leaving Paulo and Agnese in a united narrative front to face the future they have grafted for themselves.

### **Chapter Three: The Hidden Self: Identity and Language in**

#### ***Il segreto dell'uomo solitario***

*Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) tells the story of a lonely man, who is haunted by the ghosts of his past and who, in his isolation, wavers on the cusp of madness. His solitary existence is a self-inflicted torment, dominated by a dark silence. His identity is intrinsically bound up in this silence, and he has cut himself off from other people for fear of further suffering. According to Kristeva:

[A]ll foreigners who have made a choice add to their passion for indifference a fervent extremism that reveals the origin of their exile. For it is on account of having no one at home against whom to vent their fury, their conflagration of love and hatred, and of finding the strength not to give in to it, that they wander about the world, neutral but solaced for having developed an interior distance from the fire and ice that had seared them in the past.<sup>225</sup>

It is this exile that is the protagonist, Cristiano's, purgatory, for although he has cocooned himself for his own emotional preservation, he slowly realises that he is now incapable of feeling anything at all. He remains neutral, without human contact, and so in a sense, he is dead to the world and to himself. By controlling his interactions with other people, and consequently the language he uses with them, he in turn maintains some control over his own self. Through silence, he attempts to dictate the extent to which others know him. They do not know his past or his secret, which gives the novel its title, and thus they cannot know his identity. This of course changes when he is tempted back into the world by the possibility of engaging in a loving relationship with a woman. The narrative, therefore, illustrates his struggle with his self, both in silence and through the medium of language.

In this chapter I will analyse the theme of identity and its relation to and construction through language in Deledda's novel *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*

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<sup>225</sup> Kristeva, p. 9.

(1921). *Il segreto* (an abbreviation I will use throughout) is different from *La madre* in terms of tone, plot and narrative construction. It explores similar modernist notions, however, pertaining to the nature of the self and its relation to others. By firstly placing the novel in the context of the literary movements surrounding its composition and its place in literary criticism thus far, we can see why this novel has been considered a turning point in Deledda's writing. The novel straddles two modes of literary expression, for, like *La madre*, it contains echoes of veristic writing but looks forward to modernist ideas. Its identification as a psychological novel is certainly pertinent, but I aim to emphasise its modernist aspects, particularly relating to identity and language.

This chapter thus explores the development of Cristiano's identity, its relation to the wavering narrative perspective and narrative voice of the novel, and its integral connection to both language and silence. Its protagonist's journey of self-questioning is similar to that of Paulo in *La madre*, though the unstable nature of his mental state is more apparent, a fact that is echoed in the ambiguous narrative voice. When Cristiano faces the prospect of having to interact with his new neighbours, he becomes especially protective of his solitary life. A door is consequently opened, in both the content and the narrative perspective of the novel, leading the reader to the quiet corners of Cristiano's existence, a quietness which he himself tries to drown out, though he may not have realised this until then. His relationship with the new neighbour, Sarina, forces him to consider the nature of his solitude and his basic human need for interaction. His journey is both psychological and linguistic, as the story considers the importance of language in his interactions with, and understanding of others and himself. As he sheds his silence, Cristiano embraces his need for communication and self-expression, risking the danger of revealing his true nature. //

*segreto* explores the notion of identity as a concept that is achieved and practised through language, something which is established through linguistic communication with others or, if necessary, with the self. It engages with the problems of subjectivity such as those explored by Luigi Pirandello, and thus questions whether we are defined by ourselves or by others, and whether it is even possible to obtain a definition by ourselves. Can we be both speaker and listener in our own lives? Employing the theories of identity discussed thus far in my thesis,<sup>226</sup> I intend to demonstrate that Deledda has cleverly woven modernist ideas into a seemingly veristic text, provoking thought in the reader while depicting the engaging anguish of a man who is close to the brink.

The events of *Il segreto* unfold within the time span of one year, though they are almost as few as those we have considered in the two day tale of *La madre*. The novel follows the experiences of its protagonist, Cristiano, who is forced out of his self-inflicted isolation by the arrival of a woman named Sarina and her sick husband, Giorgio, in a neighbouring property. The atmosphere of the area surrounding Cristiano's solitary life is quiet, almost haunting. Indeed, the people whom he encounters in his life are very few. Before the appearance of his new neighbours, Cristiano's social interactions were limited to a relationship with a married servant girl, Ghiana, whose affections for Cristiano are certainly not returned, though they resulted in a brief physical relationship between the two during the period of Cristiano's convalescence. While her husband is away, Ghiana visits Cristiano frequently with the excuse of bringing him produce from the village, secretly remaining hopeful that her affections for him will be reciprocated, but her company is rarely welcomed. She is only needed to satisfy Cristiano's sexual and practical needs,

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<sup>226</sup> That is, those of Ricoeur, Kristeva and Cavarero.

i.e. the local produce which she brings him. Her despair at his coldness finally culminates at the point where she confesses to him the possibility that she is pregnant, a fact which sends him into further isolation and causes her to flee.

Meanwhile, although initially wary of each other, Cristiano and Sarina become close, and their relationship brings to the fore secrets about both his own past and about the life Sarina leads with her husband. Their interaction is observed by Sarina's servant and by her dog, both of whom remain wary of Cristiano's presence for some time. In spite of this, their love grows stronger with time, causing Ghiana to become very jealous, and leading Cristiano to question the value of his lonely life. An important turning point occurs when Giorgio attempts to escape from his imprisonment at home and gain the freedom and solitude he desires. This failed attempt causes greater doubt in Cristiano's mind regarding his own state of sanity. He sees the likeness between his own lonely life and that of this sick man, who, in his madness, wishes to cut himself off from all those around him. Cristiano wonders whether he is also heading towards a similarly reclusive end. The strain of Giorgio's misadventure eventually leads to his death, and allows for the possibility of engaging in a legitimate relationship with Sarina, now that she has been widowed.

As their relationship begins to blossom, Sarina's sense of liberation is clear. She behaves like the light-hearted girl she was before the days of her strained marriage. This initial happiness is short-lived, however, when Cristiano is once again burdened with the guilt of Ghiana's situation. The young girl visits him, appearing pox-ridden and under pressure. Her husband, Alessandro, believes her to be pregnant with *his* child, and for the time being only *il vecchio* suspects the inconsistency of her dates. During this visit, Ghiana also suggests that she knows Cristiano's secret, fearing that their child may be cursed with the same affliction from which Cristiano

himself suffers. He confesses to Sarina about the relationship and the pregnancy, but she is surprisingly forgiving and understanding, a fact that increases Cristiano's faith in their love. She even suggests that she would be willing to adopt Ghiana's child.

The couple plan for their future together and soon intend to marry, but as the time draws nearer, Cristiano is plagued more and more by his greatest secret. Towards the end of the novel, Cristiano's doubts reach a climax as he is finally able to relieve himself of the burden of his secret. He describes for Sarina the way in which he was manipulated by his mother into marrying the rich daughter of their deceased benefactor. This marriage was unhappy and he was not able to communicate with his wife in any way. He became jealous of his mother's affection for his wife, and even more so when he discovered that his mother had a young lover. When his mother ran away to America to marry this man, Cristiano was pushed beyond the brink. He reveals to Sarina that he was accused of insanity because he apparently attempted to kill his wife. Although she is even initially forgiving of this, Sarina is startled by Cristiano's continued instability, and is frightened by the prospect that he truly might be mad. As the novel draws to a close, Cristiano discovers that his fears have been realised and his secret has driven Sarina away. Finding himself alone again, embittered and hurt, he eventually decides to abandon this solitary existence once and for all. Rather than following the frightened Sarina, however, he seeks out his child, and so his decision is to follow the only family he may have.

### **The genesis and context of the novel**

*Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* was written in 1921, at quite a late stage in Deledda's writing career since she, like her contemporary, Pirandello, had been writing

consistently from an early age.<sup>227</sup> Lina Sacchetti quotes Deledda stating that this novel, along with *La fuga in Egitto* (1925), is one which most accurately represents her: ‘sono i due romanzi che rappresentano più interamente me stessa.’<sup>228</sup>

The date of the novel’s publication in 1921 allows for its possible association with two distinct literary movements. 1921 marks the publication of modernist works such as Italo Svevo’s *La coscienza di Zeno* and Luigi Pirandello’s *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*. However, the date also falls at the tail end of the most prolific period for Naturalism in Europe. The novel hovers between these two literary movements, particularly in its narrative style. Although Deledda does present aspects of the reality of Sardinian life in *Il segreto*, such as the isolated nature of the island’s rural communities, she does not do so in the characteristically objective manner of Naturalism or *verismo*. Cristiano’s mind is opened to the reader, revealing his anxieties, his uncertainties and his questions about the world and himself. It is also true that in many ways the narrative of *Il segreto* is presented in such a way that the reader is not aware of the interference of a commenting narrator. *Free indirect style* is thus an important tool in Deledda’s narratives, as it is for many veristic and naturalist authors. For example: ‘gli parve che questi oggetti [...] avessero delle pupille che rispondevano al suo sguardo’;<sup>229</sup> ‘Aspettò il ritorno di Ghiana con una certa paura nervosa: egli non voleva sottrarsi alla sua responsabilità, ma non sapeva come, e voleva che la donna stessa glielo suggerisse’ (*Segreto*, p. 77). It is the thoughts and perspective of the characters that are conveyed through the narrative, rather than the voice of a dominant narrator. The narrative of *Il segreto*, however, orchestrates the

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<sup>227</sup> Deledda’s first publication was the collection of novelle *Nell’azzurro* (Milano-Roma: Trevisini, 1890).

<sup>228</sup> Grazia Deledda cited in Lina Sacchetti, *Arte e umanità di Grazia Deledda* (Cervia: Circolo culturale Grazia Deledda, 1981), p. 25.

<sup>229</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from the text are from the following edition: Grazia Deledda *Il segreto dell’uomo solitario* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2007), p. 14. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text with the abbreviation *Segreto*.

revelation of Cristiano's complex character, depicting much more than the simple provincial life of a man in isolation. We are let into the caverns of his psyche, engaging in existential questions as he endeavours to allow another person into his very private life. He ponders the necessity of self-interest, of relationships with other people, the limitations of freedom, and the fine line he treads between sanity and madness. The characters are also not displayed in a naturalistic way for they explore the complexities of their existences and of their own selves. Indeed, Cristiano's musings can be viewed as reflecting the relativist movement that followed Naturalism.

It could also be argued that there are bestial elements to the portrayals of the characters of *Il segreto*, which is in keeping with the naturalist interest in the relationship between humans and animals. For example, Cristiano's sexual intercourse with Ghiana is described as something purely physical, satisfying Cristiano's sexual appetite: 'E lei adesso pensava che, certo, Cristiano avrebbe comprato la gallina: adesso che lei lo aveva ancora una volta contentato' (*Segreto*, p. 19). Furthermore, Ghiana herself is described as being 'una donna ancora giovane, con qualche cosa di animalesco nelle gambe dritte e dure' (*Segreto*, 14); and Cristiano's dishevelled appearance is compared with that of an animal: 'Da lungo tempo egli non se ne curava più che l'animale non si curi del suo pelo' (*Segreto*, p. 36). The similarities between man and beast in this novel, however, serve to highlight the fundamental need to interact with others: 'un soffio antico di poesia gli saliva dal cuore e lo costringeva ad uscire fuori della sua tana come gli animali che hanno dormito tutto l'inverno' (*Segreto*, p. 156). He is called out of his hibernation to seek out human contact in the form of Sarina. This theme, therefore, demonstrates Deledda's link with naturalist concepts, but does not restrict her to them.

As I have highlighted, Deledda is also frequently associated with *verismo*, the movement that developed from Naturalism in Italy. Critics have therefore focussed on Deledda's depiction of reality in the form of Sardinian society whose impoverished people struggle with immoral temptations and economic devastation. The veristic portrayal of life is wrought with pessimism, conveying the social and economic despair of the people at the time. Verga's *vinti* are victims of a miserable era, downtrodden by fate and the hopeless socio-political situation. Deledda's characters, however, are battling for freedom and self-fulfilment. It is a personal rather than a social struggle. In *Il segreto*, we see that Cristiano has cut himself off from society. Although he lives in a rural Sardinian environment, the trial he undergoes with his own identity and his relationship with others is one which could be applied to any man. It is reality that Deledda depicts, therefore, but it is introspective, contemplative and far less objective than that of the works of Giovanni Verga.

### **Critical views of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario***

Many critics identify the unconventional nature of this novel as a transition work between two different modes of literary expression. *Il segreto* is an important novel which marks a change in Deledda's writing, though the nature of this change is not clearly agreed upon. For some, it marks the dawn of a movement towards more 'decadent' writing, but it nonetheless remains a naturalistic novel. For example, Eurialo De Michelis notes that Deledda is indeed 'a cavallo anche lei fra il naturalismo dei fatti e il musicale decadentismo dei simboli, impossibile per la Deledda risolversi senza residui su codesta strada'.<sup>230</sup> However, he identifies the

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<sup>230</sup> De Michelis, Introduzione, *Opere Scelte*, p. 31.

‘sapore particolarmente naturalistico nella qualità del segreto del titolo’.<sup>231</sup> In his estimation, therefore, Deledda has not moved beyond naturalism in this novel.

For other critics, however, it is *verismo* rather than naturalism which characterises Deledda’s writing in *Il segreto*. Amid the collection of critical essays on Deledda published in 1992, *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea*, Rinaldo Botticini points out the importance of the solitary landscape depicted in the novel as a means of portraying the nature of her characters: ‘Ne *Il segreto dell’uomo solitario* i confini della terra lievitano in orizzonti dove la solitudine e il mistero isolano il personaggio in una atmosfera direi astrale, tanto che è difficile scoprire se sia più solitario l’uomo o il paesaggio, essendo entrambi tutt’uno.’<sup>232</sup> However, he identifies this trait with the veristic movement. According to Boccioni, the only ‘ism’ with which Deledda can be associated is *verismo* but only when this is qualified by the adjective *magico*,<sup>233</sup> a term which explains the mysterious atmosphere created. In the same way, Deledda is mentioned as an aside in Giulio Carnazzi’s work on *verismo*, where he still describes her as a veristic author, though as one who incorporates myth in order to convey the reality of Sardinian life:

Al verismo si collega esteriormente l’opera di Grazia Deledda (1871-1936), che reinventa una sua Sardegna come scenario per conflitti spirituali e passioni segrete, per storie di peccato e di espiazione. Il mondo primitivo dei pastori, dei contadini, dei proprietari di terra è il più congeniale alla scrittrice, che lo trasfigura miticamente, lontana dal proposito di darne una rappresentazione documentaria.<sup>234</sup>

Antonino Tobia also talks of the veristic tendencies of the novel:

*Il segreto dell’uomo solitario* (1921) apre un nuovo capitolo nello svolgimento artistico di Grazia Deledda. L’iato letterario tra verismo e lirismo, fra descrizioni pittoriche e rappresentazioni naturalistiche, fra

<sup>231</sup> De Michelis, Introduzione, *Opere Scelte*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>232</sup> Rinaldo Botticini, “Verismo mitico e magico” nel romanzo di Grazia Deledda’, in *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. by Ugo Collu (Nuoro: Consorzio per la pubblica lettura ‘Salvatore Satta’, 1992), pp. 197-201 (p. 199).

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>234</sup> Carnazzi, pp. 84-85.

elegia ed elemento narrativo che è stato motivo di disarmonia in molti romanzi, ora trova la sua soluzione nel mondo lirico-romantico della scrittrice.<sup>235</sup>

For Tobia, therefore, the change introduced by *Il segreto* is most notable in Deledda's writing style which embraces a greater emphasis on description and the emotive and evocative nature of the landscape, a factor which he describes as essentially veristic.

For others, such as Antonio Piromalli, the novel represents a change in subject matter, that is, the ideas put forward and the analysis of the characters' lives through the narrative. He points out, 'Con *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) la Deledda abbandona la problematica morale e la realtà della Sardegna per avvicinarsi al romanzo psicologico.'<sup>236</sup> He further adds that 'la Deledda sfiorò gli echi culturali del decadentismo ma non giunse a guardare al fondo dell'abisso dell'anima e della coscienza smarrita e disperata del decadentismo europeo'.<sup>237</sup> I wish to demonstrate here that, on the contrary, Deledda does in fact succeed at exploring the complexities of the distressed modern soul. Piromalli is correct in stating that her writing style does not incorporate such a blatant form of questioning as does that of Pirandello, but the presence of similar ideas is evident nonetheless.

In her own article in the collection which she edited, *Onoranze a Grazia Deledda* (1959), Maria Ciusa Romagna similarly refers to 'il psicologismo quasi surrealista del *Segreto dell'uomo solitario*'.<sup>238</sup> Later, in 1965 Giuseppe Giacalone also identifies *Il segreto* as a psychological novel: '*Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921) segna una svolta decisiva della sua arte matura e una direzione verso un'arte fiabesca e psicologica, in cui i personaggi svaniscono in un'atmosfera musicale e in elementi paesistici, ed i problemi morali perdono la loro concretezza per ridursi a pure

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<sup>235</sup> Tobia, p. 34.

<sup>236</sup> Piromalli, p. 111.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>238</sup> Mario Ciusa Romagna, 'Carteggio Deledda-Ojetti', in *Onoranze a Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Mario Ciusa Romagna (Nuoro 21 giugno 1959), pp. 89-90 (p. 89).

sfumature psicologiche ed emotive.<sup>239</sup> Despite this definition, however, Giacalone does not regard the novel as denoting a true break from Deledda's earlier writing. According to him, although the subject matter is the psychological workings of a man on the cusp of madness, and in a sense, of life itself, the tone of the novel places it in the realm of romanticism rather than *decadentismo*:

[Q]uesta prosa magica ha indotto alcuni studiosi a credere che con questo romanzo cominci il momento del decadentismo della Deledda. Purtroppo, a noi sembra che questo lirismo musicale della maturità della nostra scrittrice sia ancora identico a quello, frammentario e indeciso, della prima maniera romantica, ma meglio intonato e più armonicamente fuso con la trama di un mondo irreal e favoloso. [...] Semmai può esser la prova di una maturità narrativa, ma non di un vero e proprio cambiamento di rotta, dal verismo al decadentismo.<sup>240</sup>

Although many critics identify the significance of the novel as a turning point in Deledda's oeuvre, few dedicate much attention to it. There are exceptions, however, in the critical works of Giuseppe Giacalone, whose work of 1965 I have just quoted, and in the more recent publications by Bruce Merry (1990) and Margherita Heyer-Caput (2008).

Bruce Merry's essay, "Dolls or Dragons": the problem of the depiction of women in Grazia Deledda's novels', examines the plight of subjugated women and explores subtle feminist tendencies in Deledda's work. In particular, he highlights the theme of unrequited love throughout Deledda's work, and notes its presence also in *Il segreto*. The heroine, according to Merry, plays 'a waiting game against the demands of the male "pleasure principle"'. This Freudian analysis brings to the fore a feminist reading of the novel, which considers the sacrificial existence both Ghiana and Sarina choose for the sake of Cristiano.<sup>241</sup> Merry's reading of the novel places it in a more modern light, albeit one which differs from my own approach to the novel. I wish to

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<sup>239</sup> Giacalone, p. 71.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>241</sup> Merry, p. 21.

stress that I am interested in the struggle of her confined individuals, but in my analysis, these difficulties are not exclusive to Deledda's female characters.

Margherita Heyer-Caput dedicates significant attention to *Il segreto* in her work *Grazia Deledda's Dance of Modernity*. This critical work is of great interest for this study since Heyer-Caput also wishes to re-categorise Deledda as a modernist writer:

I chart the unfolding of Deledda's significance in the light of modernity through a metonymical reading of her vast corpus [...] My selection of Deledda's works emphasizes the author's ability to metabolize extremely diverse and complementary cultural discourses, ranging from Positivism to nihilism, from Cesare Lombroso to Friedrich Nietzsche. In this capacity, Deledda emerges as a European writer and intellectual of modernity, far beyond the critical labels that have stigmatized her narrative.<sup>242</sup>

Heyer-Caput correctly points out that Deledda has been neglected in studies of similar, modern authors such as Tozzi and Svevo because of her 'dual marginality, as a woman writer and an allegedly regional writer'.<sup>243</sup> It is for this reason that Deledda's work should now be re-assessed and considered beyond the limitations of her gender and birthplace, in the wider context of the literature of her time, i.e. the beginnings of modern literature.

Heyer-Caput dedicates a chapter of her study to the modernist aspects of *Il segreto* through an analysis of its Nietzschean ideas. She aptly points out that *Il segreto* was published in 1921, 'i.e. in the chronological cluster 1921-2 that, according to Debenedetti, marked the beginning of the history of the "modern" novel in Italy.'<sup>244</sup> Heyer-Caput's analysis associates Deledda's modernity with her *sardità*, identifying the crisis of Sardinian identity with the crisis of the modern subject on a more universal level:

Deledda's 'sardità' as consciousness of the alienation inherent to the dysfunctional condition of the Sardinian intellectual between the old and

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<sup>242</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 6.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

the new, the margin and the centre of the unified Italian nation, turns into an existential category, into a narrative metaphor of the crisis of the modern subject. In other words, Deledda's 'sardità' has paradoxically nurtured her modernity. Therefore, the issues of geographic, cultural, linguistic, and gender marginality ingrained in her narrative situate Deledda's work at the heart of the discourse of modernity in Italian and European literature.<sup>245</sup>

Heyer-Caput explores the presence of Nietzschean ideas relating to madness, the notion of truth and freedom in *Il segreto*.

Deledda appropriates the most common and misinterpreted elements of Nietzsche's reception – solitude and madness, the overturning of moral and logical hierarchies, and the acceptance of life as the inextricable intertwining of joy and pain through the active nihilism of the Eternal Recurrence – and imbues them in *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* with the thought-provoking and disquieting interpretive openness of modernity.<sup>246</sup>

She examines the ways in which Cristiano is forced to question his own state of sanity, comparing his situation with that of 'normal' society. He is led to ponder the pressures of social expectation, the advantages and disadvantages of a life cut off from society, and ultimately the desire for death as a form of release from this web of uncertainty. According to Heyer-Caput, Cristiano's crisis of social marginality is reflective of the larger Western crisis of margin and centre. Grasping tightly to his secret past, he wavers between his longing to remain in isolation and to embrace a relationship with Sarina. Heyer-Caput highlights Cristiano's dialogue with the notions of madness and freedom, relating them to his own psyche and to his understanding of human nature. Although Heyer-Caput astutely identifies the presence of these ideas in the novel, she does not examine their significance in great depth. I intend to explore the importance of Cristiano's struggle with madness and freedom in relation to the theme of identity, an aspect which Heyer-Caput has not considered in her analysis.

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<sup>245</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 157.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

The study also identifies the relevance of the ‘mask’ in *Il segreto*. Heyer-Caput reminds us that Gianni Vattimo used the mask as a ‘guiding thread for his seminal interpretation of Nietzsche’s work in its entirety’.<sup>247</sup> The mask for Nietzsche, as for Deledda, represents the border between appearances and reality, for Cristiano and Sarina both toy with the ways in which they reveal their true natures to each other. As Heyer-Caput aptly suggests: ‘It is [...] in the spirit of modernity that Deledda’s “solitary man” links his alleged “madness” to his rejection of the mask as the superimposed image of rational and social conventions on the multifaceted and chaotic reality of the Self.’<sup>248</sup> She goes on to draw a brief comparison with Pirandello’s *maschere nude*, a similarity which I intend to discuss further in this chapter. For although the presence of Nietzschean ideas in the novel is an interesting analogy, I believe that a comparison with Pirandellian ideas, specifically relating to the multifaceted nature of identity, will bring Deledda’s modernity to the fore in a clearer way.

Heyer-Caput has touched upon the presence of ideas relating to the nature of insanity, the relationship between truth and illusion and the notion of freedom. These themes are certainly pertinent to Deledda’s ‘modern’ tendencies in her writing and I will touch upon them in my own study. My focus, however, will be primarily on an exploration of the nature of identity and its relation to language and narrative. I will therefore consider the relevance of madness, freedom and truth to the definition of identity, particularly its construction through linguistic interaction and through the narrative of the novel itself.

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<sup>247</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 176.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

### **Identity and isolation: Cristiano's solitude**

As the novel's title implies, its protagonist, Cristiano, lives a lonely, isolated existence. His home is 'nascosta da quel mazzo di alberi, circondato a sua volta da una siepe nera, alta e fitta come un muro' (*Segreto*, p. 4). The word 'nascosta' here reflects Cristiano's introverted attitude to the world outside. Furthermore, the description of the atmosphere is certainly evocative of Cristiano's intentionally solitary existence: 'La solitudine e il silenzio erano tali ch'egli sentiva le tarantole e le cavallette muoversi tra le foglie' (*Segreto*, p. 5). Indeed, we see that at the beginning of the novel, he is determined to ensure that his hedge is impenetrable, forming a boundary around his world. Having grumbled to himself about the construction being done to his neighbouring house and the possible invasion of new people, he resigns himself to the thought that 'una siepe è sempre una siepe, riparo irrisorio soprattutto quando ci sono donne e ragazzi contro la cui curiosità non ci si difende neppure con le muraglie vere' (*Segreto*, pp. 22-23). Cristiano's tone here indicates that his desire for geographical isolation in fact goes much deeper, for his bitter criticism of the curiosity of others suggests that he does not want other people to enter his emotional world. As described by Antonio Piromalli: 'La siepe è una "muraglia nera" e anche le tacenti "voci della brughiera" sono simboli della solitudine dell'uomo che ha cercato di seppellire il suo passato e il suo disgusto del consorzio umano nel grigiore di una landa.'<sup>249</sup> He has created a new realm for himself, a pocket of existence which is almost untouched by the wider world: 'L'uomo guardava ogni cosa con meraviglia: aveva quasi dimenticato che oltre il mare e la brughiera, e oltre la landa bruciata del suo mondo interiore, altri aspetti del mondo esistessero' (*Segreto*, p. 130). The image

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<sup>249</sup> Piromalli, p. 112.

of the sea is a repeated motif in the text. It marks a border, a confine around his world which often confronts him, but which he cannot overcome.

The desire to ‘nascondersi’ is a repeated motif in many of Deledda’s works (*Segreto*, p. 99). Her protagonists often seek solitude and attempt to hide themselves from other people, and particularly from the social world.<sup>250</sup> Luigi Falchi draws comparisons between Deledda and Pirandello by referring to their common thesis that ‘La stranezza nasce dal bisogno di estraniarsi dal mondo della realtà.’<sup>251</sup> Indeed, many of Pirandello’s characters similarly seek to cut themselves off from the world. The eponymous protagonist of *Enrico IV* (1921) desperately clings to a fantasy of his own making in order to escape the reality of his life. He chooses to be considered insane by those around him and to falsely live the life of a historical figure rather than return to a reality he despised.<sup>252</sup> Similarly, when Mattia Pascal is incorrectly pronounced dead in a local newspaper, the living Mattia jumps at the opportunity to flee his family and friends in order to start anew.<sup>253</sup>

We discover as the novel progresses that Cristiano’s solitude represented more than a desire to flee others, for he was also attempting to escape himself: ‘mi sentivo solo, in una terribile solitudine interiore, e invano cercavo di uscirne: un mistero inesplicabile me lo impediva’ (*Segreto*, p. 197). Feeling ashamed of his past and of the way others regarded him, that is, as a madman, he attempted to bury that aspect of his self in order to achieve some peace of mind. As we see, however, his attempt was unsuccessful for he is haunted by the presence of his wife and the impact she had on him. When reading the romantic novels from his youth, the words seem to echo those of his wife: ‘Ero io che urlavo, e mi sbattevo intorno a te con l’odio e l’ira per il tuo

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<sup>250</sup> For example, the protagonists of *L’incendio nell’oliveto* (1918) (Milano: Mondadori, 1977), and *La chiesa della solitudine* (1936) (Milano: Mondadori, 1978).

<sup>251</sup> Falchi, p. 107.

<sup>252</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Enrico IV* (Milano: Mondadori, 1993), p. 191.

<sup>253</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (Milano: Mondadori, 1993), p. 80.

tradimento. | E desideravo la tua morte e la mia' (*Segreto*, p. 44). In the same way, many of Pirandello's characters create alternate existences in order to escape from themselves. The unnamed protagonist of *Come tu mi vuoi* (1930) is caught between two possible existences in the first act of the play. She could be Elma, as she is known to Mop and Salter, or she could be Lucia, as she may be known to Bruno and his family. Feeling trapped, she wishes to escape the torment of others but also of her own mind: 'Io ho bisogno di scapparmene di qua – via da tutti, via da tutti – anche da me stessa.'<sup>254</sup> She continues by exclaiming:

Voglio? – sì, fuggire da me stessa, voglio – non avere più un ricordo di nulla, di nulla – vuotarmi di tutta la vita – ecco, guardi: corpo – essere soltanto questo corpo - lei dice che è suo? che le somiglia? – io non mi sento più – io non mi voglio più – non conosco più nulla e non mi conosco – mi batte il cuore, e non lo so – respiro e non lo so – non so più di vivere – un corpo, un corpo senza nome in attesa che qualcuno se lo prenda!<sup>255</sup>

She no longer wishes to allow others to define her. Much like Cristiano, she would rather live a non-life, be a body without a name, without an identity created by others or by her self.

It is also interesting that Deledda appears to comment upon her own attempt at finding isolation as an artist, for Sarina claims that she believed Cristiano's desire for solitude to be linked with artistic creativity: 'A dir la verità, pensavo che tu fossi un artista: è facile che un artista, a un dato momento, cerchi di segregarsi, di far la vita dell'eremita' (*Segreto*, p. 184). This could be viewed as a comment upon artists' attempts (including her own) to isolate themselves from the world in order to gain a more objective understanding of it for the purpose of their writing. Perhaps it is for this reason that Deledda described this novel as one which is closest to her.

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<sup>254</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Come tu mi vuoi* (Milano: Mondadori, 1971), p. 115.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Although artists aspire to obtain objectivity, they inevitably continue to form part of the world and so cannot maintain a completely objective perspective. As the failure of Naturalism demonstrated, the artist is in the world just as the artist is in that which he/she writes. Here we of course touch upon the theoretical debate regarding the importance or irrelevance of the author in relation to the analysis of a text. Many critics argue for the inevitable autobiographical presence of an author in his/her work, an influence originating from the author's life experience. For example, the theorist Nicole Ward Jouve argues that all texts are 'shot through with autobiography'<sup>256</sup> for 'through writing the self is invented, constructed, projected'.<sup>257</sup> Though I do not wish to argue that Cristiano's unstable character is a direct reflection of Deledda's self-interpretation, I would argue that her depictions of the struggle with social and emotional isolation are refracted reflections of her own experiences, experiences which were shared by many modernist writers of the time.<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, this artistically self-referential comment about writing is a particularly modern concept which is worth noting and is also distinctly reminiscent of Pirandello's metaplays. For example, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921), *Ciascuno a suo modo* (1924) and *I giganti della montagna* (1936) are all plays which deal with the nature of art and reality, and experiment with the set parameters of the theatre, blurring the lines between stage and audience in order to draw attention to the construction of the play itself.<sup>259</sup>

For Cristiano, as for Pirandello's Mattia Pascal, the struggle with isolation is a battle which is ultimately lost, for complete isolation is impossible. Upon reading

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<sup>256</sup> Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>258</sup> I will examine the relationship between Deledda's own social struggles in her most autobiographical piece, *Cosima*, in the next chapter.

<sup>259</sup> See footnote 113.

about his own death in a local newspaper, Mattia is struck with a sense of potential freedom. He can shed his past identity and reshape himself in any way he chooses. The novel demonstrates, however, that his liberation brought through solitude is not limitless, for by cutting himself off from other people, Mattia also denies himself many things that he desires. Mattia is not able to live completely free from social interaction and the expectations of others. Indeed, the first thing he must do when reconstructing himself is create a new social persona: ‘Chi sono io ora? Bisogna che pensi. Un nome, almeno, un nome bisogna che me lo dia subito, per firmare il telegramma e per non trovarmi poi imbarazzato se, alla locanda, me lo domandano.’<sup>260</sup> He needs a label, albeit a false one, a mask he can wear in public and with which he can be associated. He cannot simply exist in limbo, set apart from other people.

This realisation becomes clearer as Mattia is limited more and more by his isolated state. He is not able to have any companionship, even in the form of a puppy, because he is restricted by his lack of necessary social labels. Mattia discovers, therefore, that true freedom comes at a price, and that an interaction with others is necessary to enable his happiness: ‘era bella, sì, senza dubbio, quella mia libertà, così sconfinata, ma anche un tantino tiranna, ecco, se non mi consentiva neppure di comperarmi un cagnolino.’<sup>261</sup> As Kristeva states, absolute freedom results in an empty, solitary existence.<sup>262</sup>

Mattia’s new beginning is in fact a form of living death, for he is unable to develop any real connections with the people around him. In the same way, Cristiano’s state of utter isolation is repeatedly referred to as a form of death in *Il segreto*. Towards the beginning of the novel, an eerie atmosphere is described with

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<sup>260</sup> Pirandello, *Mattia*, p. 82.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>262</sup> See footnote 139.

the haunting sound of Sarina's dog barking in the night, and the dark image of his garden gate which marks the boundary of his solitary sepulchre: 'Il cane abbaiva di là dalla siepe, forse legato ad un albero: in fondo al vialetto il cancello si disegnava nero sullo sfondo del sentiero illuminato dalla luna: nero e solitario come il cancello di un cimitero' (*Segreto*, p. 37). Later, however, Sarina draws Cristiano out of this dark place: '[N]el profondo dell'anima tremava tutto di gioia, perché era la mano della donna che traeva lui dal suo cerchio di morte' (*Segreto*, p. 100). Finally, Cristiano himself admits to Sarina that he was, in a sense, dead before he met her: 'Lei mi fa risorgere. Perché ero morto... Peggio che morto...' (*Segreto*, p. 161). Without the necessary interactions with other people, he was not truly living. Sarina's servant aptly describes the setting of the novel as a 'purgatorio' (*Segreto*, p. 213). It is precisely this, a limbo, a space that hovers between life and death, for in their solitude, both Cristiano and Sarina are alive in a physical sense, but are dead in a social and emotional sense.

In *Il segreto*, Cristiano also discovers that his isolation is not a happy condition. Even in his solitude, he found necessary solutions to the lack of human company. In the absence of another human voice, Cristiano is eager to obtain a response from the objects around him: 'gli parve che questi oggetti, ancora qua e là scintillanti alla luce del tramonto, avessero delle pupille che rispondevano al suo sguardo: gli ritornò allora l'abituale impressione che essi avessero qualche cosa di vivo, e la tenerezza fisica che lo univa a loro' (*Segreto*, p. 12). By engaging in communication of sorts with the objects around him, Cristiano succumbs, perhaps unconsciously, to his need for social interaction.

Cristiano becomes truly aware of the impossibility of isolation later in the novel. Having learned of Ghiana's pregnancy, his immediate reaction is to 'isolarsi,

più completamente ancora, se era possibile' (*Segreto*, p. 76) but he soon realises that he cannot continue to live alone: 'La vita lo perseguitava fino al limite della terra' (*Segreto*, p. 77). Life is in fact based upon interaction with others, and he cannot escape either one. He eventually comes to understand that 'La prova di vivere solo era fallita: in fondo all'anima sentiva che aveva nuovamente bisogno di compagnia, di amore: era vivo ancora: e la solitudine è morte' (*Segreto*, p. 79) and that 'non basta la solitudine a purificare l'uomo' (*Segreto*, p. 177). He cannot atone for his sins by shutting himself off from the world. It is precisely an interaction with the world which makes him who he is. As Kristevan theory highlights, the self has no meaning at all when it is free from other people.<sup>263</sup>

### **Narrative perspective and Narrative voice**

As we have seen, the protagonist lives a solitary, isolated existence, linguistically and socially cut off from the outer world to a great extent: 'Non voleva far piacere a nessuno, lui; e a nessuno concedere familiarità' (*Segreto*, p. 14). Although other characters attempt to bring him back into the real world, Cristiano tries to cling to his solitude as a form of solace. This isolation from other characters is emphasised by the narrative perspective of the novel. As we will see, the protagonist's introspection is conveyed by his tendency to talk to himself, and his reluctance to reveal his identity to others is highlighted by the reticent way in which he is presented to the reader.

As I have clarified in the previous chapter, for the purpose of this study I will employ the terms relating to narrative as defined by Genette. The *narrative voice*, therefore, is the voice of the *narrator*, i.e. the voice of the one who is telling the *narrative*. The *narrative perspective*, on the other hand, is the perspective from which

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<sup>263</sup> Kristeva, p. 12.

the narrative is told. The *narrative voice* therefore, can differ from the *narrative perspective*.<sup>264</sup> It can also hold several different *narrative perspectives* during the course of a text.

The narrative of *Il segreto* is largely given by a third person *narrative voice*, which is not that of a character. This external *narrative voice* gathers and presents the perspectives of all of the characters. The *narrative perspective*, therefore, is not consistent as it jumps from character to character in the form of *variable internal focalization*.<sup>265</sup> This seemingly ‘omniscient’ *narrator* appears to be intimately part of the story being told. The opening line of the novel places the *narrator* on the same visual level as that of the characters: ‘L’uomo che abitava la casetta solitaria laggiù fra la spiaggia e la brughiera [...] vide due uomini che misuravano coi loro passi un terreno attiguo al suo giardino’ (*Segreto*, p. 7). The implication of ‘laggiù’ is that the narrator and the reader can see the house in the same way that Cristiano can. They share the same perspective as the characters, rather than viewing the story’s contents from without. The same internal perspective is conveyed a little further into the narrative: ‘Il luogo era bello, senza dubbio: [...] Laggiù, tra il verde della brughiera, appariva alcunché di rosso e di bianco’ (*Segreto*, p. 24). Again, the narrator is pointing to a particular spot amid the moor from the same visual level as that of the characters. As the narrative progresses, however, the internal presence of the narrator decreases as Cristiano’s perspective becomes more dominant. As Cristiano’s identity is gradually revealed to the reader, his presence in the narrative becomes clearer. Later in the narrative, the same ‘laggiù’ is used, but it is Cristiano’s thoughts and

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<sup>264</sup> See footnote 187.

<sup>265</sup> The use of *variable internal focalization* is the similar to that of *La madre* which was explored in the previous chapter. See footnote 188.

Once again, it should be noted that although this narrative feature is commonly used in omniscient writing, and often appears in veristic texts, its use in this novel is very different, for it serves to highlight the changing emotional distance between Cristiano, the narrator and the other characters.

perspective that are being given through the third person narration, rather than the external perspective of an omniscient narrator: 'Adesso la strada gli sembrava diversa di prima [...] Ecco laggiù la sua casa, scura fra gli alberi nudi' (*Segreto*, p. 136).

Cristiano's initially concealed identity is similarly evoked by the way in which the narrator refers to him throughout the narrative. From the very opening of the novel, we are given an indistinct, unspecified depiction of the protagonist who is initially introduced to the reader as 'L'uomo che abitava la casetta solitaria laggiù' rather than as Cristiano (*Segreto*, pp. 22-23). At this stage it seems that Cristiano's life is so private that not even the narrator is privy to his name. Indeed, we are only told Cristiano's name when he addresses himself in the first sequence, scolding himself for overreacting to the presence of two builders working on a nearby property: 'Pazienza, Cristiano: quando sei a casa tua cosa ti possono fare?' (*Segreto*, p. 8). Briefly, therefore, the narrative voice itself becomes uncertain as Cristiano addresses himself within the narrative rather than in direct speech. The ambiguous narrative voice hints at Cristiano's unstable state of mind and divided sense of self, which becomes clearer as the story unfolds.

The narrator continues to refer to him as 'l'uomo' rather than Cristiano until he is finally alluded to from another character's perspective, namely that of Ghiana the servant: 'E lei adesso pensava che, certo, Cristiano avrebbe comprato la gallina' (*Segreto*, p. 19). Whenever Cristiano is confronted with a new person, he closes in on himself once more, and is similarly distanced from the narrator. When Cristiano is angry with Ghiana for talking to Sarina about him, he retreats from her, and the narrator returns to describing him as 'l'uomo': 'L'uomo comprava la roba ch'ella portava, ma non le dava più confidenza' (*Segreto*, p. 41). When he has calmed down, the narrator once more refers to him as Cristiano, as he decides to take courage and

visit his sick neighbour: ‘Cristiano fece il giro del prato, aspettando ch’ella si allontanasse. | Il tempo finalmente si rasserenava’ (*Segreto*, p. 47). His sense of tranquillity is conveyed both by the use of his name and by the gentler weather. When he knocks on Sarina’s door, however, and is confronted with another stranger, that is, Sarina’s servant, the narrator labels him as ‘l’uomo’: ‘Dapprima guardò stupita l’uomo’ (*Segreto*, p. 48). During most of the early encounters with Sarina’s servant, the term ‘l’uomo’ is used in relation to him: ‘L’uomo esitò un momento, poi la seguì scuotendo la testa e roteando gli occhi con uno sguardo sprezzante e minaccioso’ (*Segreto*, p. 87). It is only when he has developed some confidence in a relationship that the name Cristiano is employed.

Towards the end of the novel, the protagonist is referred to more and more as Cristiano, conveying the fact that his identity has been fully disclosed to the reader. At the close of the novel, however, the narrator retreats once more to an external perspective. It is no longer Cristiano’s point of view that is depicted, and he is once more the ‘uomo’ described at the beginning:

Tutto è come prima, intorno a lui: [...] eppure egli rallenta il passo come per nascondere la sua ansia ad una persona che lo spia dentro quelle persiane. [...] egli non pensa neppure di picchiare [...] Il prato dietro la casa, sotto gli alberi, è dorato di ranuncoli; anche da quella parte la brughiera è tutta in fiore, fino all’orizzonte dove il cielo e la terra si confondono in una vaporosità azzurra sparsa di nuvolette colorate che sembrano anch’esse cespugli di rose; tutto è luce e gioia: ma l’uomo, arrivato davanti alla piccola tettoia, vede la porta chiusa, la cuccia del cane vuota, e una fredda caligine attorno (*Segreto*, pp. 227-228).

Although we learn that he does eventually decide to seek out his child, demonstrating that he has learned the need for other people in his life, he is at this stage alone once more. As the quotation indicates, everything has returned to the way it once was. The images of the horizon, flowers and light convey the open world that lies around him, but these are contrasted with the images of the closed door, the empty kennel and the

cold mist. His hopes of a happy future with Sarina have been dashed, and 'l'uomo' is left once again in his solitude. It could be argued that the novel's ending is perhaps too simplistic as it has created a neat circle of Cristiano's life, drawing him back to the state of isolation he inhabited at the opening of the novel without addressing some of the questions which arise from the narrative. For example, no reason is given for Sarina's sudden change of heart as she abandons the man she promised to love in spite of his history. Here we could recall D. H. Lawrence's assessment of *La madre* which dismisses its ending as incoherent and indicative of Deledda's inability to resolve her own plot.<sup>266</sup> The sudden change of direction towards the close of *Il segreto* could similarly be regarded as a rushed and weak conclusion to an otherwise sound composition. On the other hand, perhaps the mystery of Sarina's disappearance is in keeping with the proposition that we cannot fully know another person. Her unpredictable behaviour confirms Cristiano's fear that he should not have revealed his true self, and it is for this reason that he chooses to follow his only remaining family rather than attempting to find Sarina. Be it a clumsy closure or a planned twist in the behaviour of her characters, Deledda's clear intention is to end the novel with the familiar image of the solitary protagonist.

As Cristiano's relationships with the other characters alter, they are similarly identified by a variety of names or roles, which often creates uncertainty about which character is being referred to. For example, Sarina and Ghiana are both described as 'donna', and Ghiana and Sarina's servant are referred to as 'serva'. By reducing the women to their gender or their social function, this label places them on the same level in Cristiano's mind, indistinct from one another in their personalities and feelings. The nature of these assigned labels indicates the removed way in which

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<sup>266</sup> See footnote 174.

Cristiano regards these women. It reflects the emotional, linguistic and social distance at which he stands from them at that point in time, which occasionally includes the distance he has created from his own self.

When Ghiana first speaks with Cristiano in the story, the narrative is given from her perspective, displaying her attempts to gain his attention: ‘cercò gli occhi dell’uomo coi suoi occhi liquidi’ (*Segreto*, p. 15). His response to this, however, is cold and cowardly as he avoids her gaze, an action which we see repeated later when he meets Sarina: ‘Invano egli tentava di sfuggire a quello sguardo’ (*Segreto*, p. 15). He does not wish to see things from her perspective. Even from Ghiana’s perspective he is initially referred to as ‘il padrone’, a term which conveys his authority over her, both financially and emotionally (*Segreto*, p. 19). Ghiana only refers to him by name once they have completed the awkward, but nonetheless intimate process of sexual intercourse: ‘E lei adesso pensava che, certo, Cristiano avrebbe comprato la gallina’ (*Segreto*, p. 19). This hopeful, somewhat desperate thought further conveys her sense of inferiority with regard to Cristiano. The only gesture of goodness she can hope to receive from him after their intercourse is that he will buy the chicken she has brought for him. She, however, remains as ‘la donna’, highlighting her role in this relationship as a woman, as any woman, and not specifically as Ghiana: ‘E la donna sperò ancora una volta ch’egli le aprisse l’anima sua, che le dimostrasse un po’ di affetto e di confidenza: ma ebbe il torto di cominciare a parlare lei’ (*Segreto*, p. 19). Once again, it is he who maintains linguistic control.

This scene ends with a rather grotesque image where Cristiano dismisses Ghiana after sex. As he is unable to connect with her on any emotional or psychological level, he simply instructs her to leave the chicken but to kill it immediately: ‘Ella uscì in fretta: prese la gallina per le ali e le tirò il collo torcendolo

un po' come un tappo che non volesse venir fuori; poi l'attaccò per le zampe ad un chiodo del muro: e la cresta rossa parve un grumo di sangue sgorgante dalla testa che il dolore della morte agitava' (*Segreto*, pp. 20-21). The graphic, bloody description of the killing reminds the reader of the cold physicality of the interaction between Cristiano and Ghiana. It is also apt that we are given a detailed account of this killing, perhaps done with a touch of frustration on Ghiana's part, and yet we are told very little about Cristiano and his behaviour with the servant girl. We see, therefore, that the narrator, like Ghiana, is also only given pieces of information about Cristiano's identity. The reader and the narrator are let into Cristiano's world just as slowly as Sarina, and with the same reluctance that he showed Ghiana.

Cristiano's reticent behaviour continues with Sarina. Upon first meeting her, she offers him her surname and she 'aspettò che egli dicesse il suo: ma poiché egli taceva, lo salutò con un cenno del capo e s'allontanò nel prato' (*Segreto*, p. 35). Furthermore, when Cristiano decides to call upon this mysterious neighbour she is referred to as a 'donna', just as Ghiana was referred to as such, earlier in the text. Since this generic term is applied to both women when he initially interacts with them, it creates ambiguity. This could imply that to him, at this early stage, they are both women and therefore alike in the fact that they are different from him. They are, to a point, indistinguishable from one another.

Both Sarina and Cristiano find themselves incapable of opening up to the other for fear of the pain they have suffered in the past: 'Era come se entrambi, cercando di penetrare l'uno nella vita dell'altro, si pungessero' (*Segreto*, p. 57). Therefore, the distant approach to their relationship continues on both parts, for Sarina only reveals her Christian name after disclosing some intimate information about her character. She tells Cristiano that she is no longer capable of taking any interest or, by

implication, pleasure in the world around her because of the way she feels. Together, they muse on the effects of time and age, and the fact that pain and suffering are present and equal for all. Only after sharing these thoughts does she finally offer up her name.<sup>267</sup>

Later in the text, Cristiano aptly ponders man's ability to talk about complex matters without ever talking about anything of real, personal significance. Having spent an evening with Sarina, he realises that he cannot remember what they discussed, since it must have consisted of merely superficial topics: 'Anche in un deserto, e fra due che non si conoscono si può parlare e discutere: del tempo, della guerra, di Dio, del bene e del male, di cose passate' (*Segreto*, p. 172). Furthermore, he notices that Sarina spoke only of the past: 'La donna non si faceva pregare, a raccontare le sue cose passate; anzi ne parlava troppo, evitando di parlare del presente e dell'avvenire' (*Segreto*, p. 172). The reality of the present must be too painful to share.

Although Sarina's name is offered, Cristiano does not use it until a climactic moment later in the text: '[M]entre aspettava che la donna lo raggiungesse cominciò a parlare sottovoce come s'ella fosse già seduta lì al suo fianco sull'erba tiepida. | Sarina! – Osava finalmente chiamarla col suo nome' (*Segreto*, p. 137). When Giorgio dies, she is assigned another label, 'la vedova', emphasising the end of her relationship with Giorgio, but also her state of mourning (*Segreto*, p. 147). It appears that Cristiano cannot approach her while she bears this name. Later, when this caution has disappeared and Cristiano and Sarina move towards the bedroom, she is once again 'la donna', as was Ghiana during their intercourse, highlighting her physical role in this scene rather than her individual identity (*Segreto*, p. 165). Before they

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<sup>267</sup> *Segreto*, pp. 62-63.

enter into this intimate action, however, Sarina addresses the fact that she needs to know Cristiano better.<sup>268</sup> Cristiano is fearful of this, for he believes the knowledge of his true nature will drive her away:

Vuoi sapere chi io sono. Ma se te lo dico puoi prendermi ancora per amante, mai per marito: non vorrai legarti a me, ma solo saziarti di me per poi lasciarmi. Ed io ti voglio tutta, per tutta la vita: peggio per te che sei venuta a cercarmi fino ai confini del mondo. No, tu non mi ami ancora abbastanza per dirti chi sono (*Segreto*, p. 167).

The statement seems somewhat contradictory, for Cristiano will not reveal his identity to her until she loves him enough to accept him as he truly is. We must wonder, however, how Sarina can love Cristiano if she does not know him. To which version of his identity would she be dedicating her feelings? It seems that their delayed exchange of names is furthered by the delay of revealing their fuller identities to each other.

This use of different labels is used similarly and more emphatically in a number of Pirandello's plays. The reference to Sarina by her marital status, evoking the way in which she is viewed and defined by society is similar to Pirandello's use of familial labels in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921). These nameless characters have no identity other than in relation to each other, and so are referred to as 'Il padre' 'La figliastra' etc. The girl's identity, for example, is defined by the somewhat incestuous nature of her relationship with her stepfather, and so she is named 'La figliastra' rather than 'la figlia' even though her real mother is also present.

Furthermore, the protagonist of Pirandello's *La signora Morli, una e due* (1922), Evelina, is known as Eva to her husband, Ferrante, and as Lina to her lover, Lello. This division of her name is reflective of the different ways in which she is viewed by the two men. As the play's title implies, she is two distinct women,

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<sup>268</sup> *Segreto*, p. 166.

identified by the names that they assign her, a division which she herself finds impossible: ‘Lui mi vuole per sé; tu mi vuoi per te! Non posso mica dividermi, io metà là e metà qua. Sono là e qua. Una e una!’<sup>269</sup> In a similar sense, therefore, Cristiano assigns roles to the women in his life, seeing Ghiana as a woman and a servant, and later seeing Sarina as a woman, then a widow and then specifically Sarina when he has let her into his life. This use of a proper name goes even further, for Sarina is eventually assigned a different label by Cristiano. At the most intimate stage of their relationship, he refers to Sarina by the affectionate, abbreviated form, ‘Sara’: ‘Dimmi la verità, Sara, parliamoci un poco: se non cerchiamo di conoscerci adesso forse non ci conosceremo più. Tu avevi ragione, quella mattina che sei venuta a darmi la risposta: bisogna conoscersi. In fondo, anch’io non so quasi nulla di te’ (*Segreto*, p. 183). It is apt that this nickname is used when discussing the necessity of knowing each other. Cristiano has trusted Sarina with more of himself than he has done with anyone since his mother’s disappearance. At this new level of intimacy, therefore, he has given her another name to indicate the substantial nature of his affection for her, and the new, accepting way in which he regards her. In this sense, therefore, identity is multiple, for we are all perceived in a different, individual way by every different person that we encounter. According to Kristeva, the multiple nature of identity means that no complete, true depiction of the self can be achieved, for we are perceived and so exist in a multitude of ways: ‘Without a home, [the foreigner] disseminates on the contrary the actor’s paradox: multiplying masks and “false selves” he is never completely true nor completely false, as he is able to tune in to loves and aversions the superficial antennae of a basaltic heart.’<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *La signora Morli, una e due* (Milano: Mondadori, 1970), p. 98.

<sup>270</sup> Kristeva, p. 8.

As I have already stated, Cristiano frequently engages himself in conversation, addressing emotions which arise in him and rigorously analysing his own behaviour. However, Cristiano also addresses himself directly in the narrative, adding to the ambiguous nature of the ever changing narrative perspective and occasionally the narrative voice. For example:

Allora cercò di raccogliersi, di vincersi. Vendere e andarsene, è presto detto, Cristiano. Vendere è facile: gli stessi contadini del cascinale sulla collina, dai quali aveva comprato la casa due anni avanti, adesso volevano riacquistarla: vendere è facile: il difficile è l'andarsene (*Segreto*, p. 11).

To begin with, the narrator refers to him in the third person, but then the following sentence has a direct reference to him by name, before returning to the same third person perspective in the subsequent sentence. Again, the narrator describes that he 'Riprese a parlare a sé stesso, ad alta voce, come usava sempre che voleva convincersi', openly indicating that it is a symptom of his solitary existence (*Segreto*, p. 12). As this continues, however, the division between Cristiano as character and narrator is blurred: '- E dunque resta. Se tu non vuoi neppure il diavolo entra in casa tua! | Se tu non vuoi! Perché dunque ti tendi tutto in ascolto nel sentir picchiare al cancello? Sono già gli uomini del terreno attiguo che vengono a molestarti?' (*Segreto*, p. 13). Initially we hear Cristiano's inner thoughts in a form of one-sided dialogue, but this then spills on into the narrative, continuing to question himself in the second person, addressing himself. Cristiano's inner questions often punctuate the narrative: 'Dove andare? Ricominciare a cercare un luogo solitario, sempre col rischio di aver più tardi dei vicini e dover fuggire ancora?' (*Segreto*, p. 12). Deledda toys with the expectations of the reader, highlighting Cristiano's unstable psychological state and the fragmentary nature of his identity even on the level of his own consciousness.

### **Consciousness, illusion and reality**

We see that Cristiano's unstable identity is linked to his wavering state of consciousness, which drifts in and out of dream and reality throughout *Il segreto*. When the boundary around his solitary world is first broken, Cristiano is often disturbed by the sound of the dog barking, but he begins to doubt his own senses and believes that: 'tutto era illusione della sua fantasia' (*Segreto*, p. 37). Furthermore, following that first meeting with Sarina he is unusually pleased to see Ghiana for he is concerned that: 'l'incontro con la sua vicina di casa gli sembrava fosse stata un'allucinazione' (*Segreto*, pp. 37-38). Ghiana's presence is therefore a reaffirmation of the reality he knows rather than this unfamiliar one he has been presented with. On another occasion, he is torn from a dream by the very real presence of Sarina's dog: 'ecco il cane balzargli intorno e rompere quel velo di sogno' (*Segreto*, p. 65).

The ambiguities arise when Cristiano is unsure what is real and what is not, and consequently expresses a desire to embrace dream rather than reality. With regard to his relationship with Sarina, he questions whether 'era tutto un sogno della sua fantasia?' (*Segreto*, p. 137). He admits to having 'paura della realtà' for there is no certainty in reality, and in the realm of dreams he has far more control (*Segreto*, p. 134). After all, if no truth can be found in the world of reality, why not turn to dreams: 'Sapeva d'illudersi, eppure tendeva l'orecchio. E perché la sua illusione non poteva essere realtà? [...] Niente era vero: non esisteva, di vero, che il suo sogno' (*Segreto*, p. 118). This uncertainty is reflective of Cristiano's doubts regarding his own identity. If he cannot trust the world around him, how can he possibly contextually place himself in it? Similarly, in Pirandello's *La signora Morli, una e due*, Evelina is uncertain which of her two existences is real, and consequently, which one of her personas truly represents her:

E io stessa, ora, guardandomi di qua... mi pare un sogno... vedendomi poi anche 'questa', qua... un'altra; irricognoscibile... Una qua, una là... E l'una che non ha nulla da vedere con l'altra, se non questo tormento di scoprirsi, di sentirsi 'due' veramente, fino a respingere là – com'ho fatto – mio marito, non già perché non mi sentissi viva di tutta quell'altra mia vita là; ma perché qua c'era quest'altra, che sentii, sentii ugualmente viva di tutt'intera quest'altra mia vita – così diversa.<sup>271</sup>

For Evelina, the only certainty is that she must choose, for the madness lies in the limbo of hovering between the two worlds and the two identities she possesses: 'Vedersi un'altra? È la pazzia. Sono anche quell'altra, sai? È certo! Ma non debbo più vedermi, così, qua e là, questa e quella. Basta! basta!'<sup>272</sup> Evelina, like Cristiano, eventually sees that she must abandon the existence she regards as the dream, where she is 'lontana... lontana...'<sup>273</sup> that is, the life she led with Ferrante. She chooses to embrace her life as Lina, adopting the identity given to her by Lello.

Cristiano's identity in fact balances on the edge of sanity itself. His constant drifting in and out of the real world and the world of dream, is considered a form of madness, especially considering the nature of the 'segreto' which gives the novel its title. The climax of the text comes with this very confession:

Io sono stato pazzo: così, almeno, affermava mia moglie, che mi fece prendere, mi fece chiudere in una casa di salute. Lei affermava che avevi tentato di ucciderla. Io non lo so... Io non lo so, Sarina! Ho di tutto quel tempo un ricordo confuso, come di una malattia con delirio. Sono stato otto anni, nella casa di pena: finché lei è morta (*Segreto*, p. 205).

Much like Giorgio, Cristiano was forced into an imprisoned state because of his wife's belief that he was mentally unstable. Following this confession, Cristiano quotes Sarina as having declared that: 'i pazzi sono più vicini di noi alla verità...'<sup>273</sup> (*Segreto*, p. 207). This refers to her speech earlier in the text where she proclaims her disdain for those who misjudge the insane:

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<sup>271</sup> Pirandello, *Morli*, p. 101.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Sono malattie in cui non è vero che la coscienza si spegne: rimane come sepolta sotto il cumulo di macerie dell'organismo distrutto, ma è viva, è vigile, e vede forse più che la coscienza nostra di sani. Vede e giudica tutto attraverso le sue tenebre, come i morti dall'al di là [...] Si trattano ancora i pazzi come ossessi: invece sono, ripeto, più vicini di noi alla verità. Se desiderano di morire ... perché non lasciarli morire? (*Segreto*, p. 103).

Sarina implies that the state of consciousness which is generally dubbed as 'sane' is in fact less stable than that which is 'insane'. This concept is also present in Pirandello's *Enrico IV*, where Enrico believes his insanity to be truer than the reality he has abandoned. He has embraced his insanity willingly, and is therefore in a much more 'real' position than those who have not: 'Sono guarito, signori: perché so perfettamente di fare il pazzo, qua; e lo faccio, quieto! – Il guaio è per voi che la vivete agitatamente, senza saperla e senza vederla, la vostra pazzia.'<sup>274</sup> Both Enrico and Sarina therefore imply that insanity is the closest we can get to truth. The so-called 'insane' are not clouded with the inevitable subjectivity which comes with life for they are in fact much closer to the objectivity of death. Therefore, since it is the clarity of death which they seek, why not grant it them?

This sentiment is also later emphasised as Sarina begins to believe that Cristiano himself is mad and therefore much closer to the truth: 'sentiva ch'egli come lei stessa un giorno aveva intuito, era, più che gli uomini sani, vicino alla verità' (*Segreto*, p. 222). We are led to question whether or not Cristiano was indeed mad, or whether he was driven to madness as a consequence of his wife's accusation. Once again we are reminded of *Enrico IV*, where we question whether or not the protagonist chooses to return to madness voluntarily. Indeed, Cristiano himself doubts his own state of sanity for he repeats 'Io non lo so'. This can again be associated with the notion that our identities are formed by others. According to Kristeva: 'The other

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<sup>274</sup> Pirandello, *Enrico*, p. 191.

leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them.<sup>275</sup> The fact that we are perceived in a certain way by others is itself unsettling. If a man is therefore considered to be insane, this alone may be enough to drive him to that insanity. Cristiano may only have gone mad because others believed him to be so.

Madness is yet another of the ways in which Pirandello believes objective truth may be attainable, for in madness one is at last separate from the world. Many of Pirandello's characters choose to flee the unknowability of reality through madness, as described by Falchi: 'Meglio uscire dall'angoscia o dalla menzogna: o morti o pazzi o illusi.'<sup>276</sup> It could be argued that this is the path which Cristiano chose in order to avoid facing his dreadful past. For Deledda, however, Cristiano has seen the truth as he returns to the real world *from* his state of madness. The novel closes with Cristiano once again abandoned in a state of isolation, with no one but the dog for company, but the change in him is evident as he decides to seek out Ghiana and his child. He is therefore embracing emotional interaction and rejecting his former solitary madness. The relationship with Sarina has opened up much more to him than simply the love of one person: 'E si rallegrò, anzi, accorgendosi che qualche cosa di più profondo dell'amore per la donna rinasceva da questo amore: un desiderio di umanità, la fede nei suoi simili' (*Segreto*, p. 210). He sees the need for others in order to obtain a firm grasp on his own identity.

Cristiano is in fact not the only character who teeters on the edge of madness. It is well established that Giorgio's illness is a mental malady which has led his wife to keep him locked in his own home. Moreover, Sarina's own sanity is put under

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<sup>275</sup> Kristeva, p. 187.

<sup>276</sup> Falchi, p. 107.

threat by her faithful care for him. Cristiano's pity for Sarina is so great that he is overcome by 'un senso di tenerezza, di protezione, verso la creatura sola in combattimento col mostro della follia e della morte' (*Segreto*, p. 101). Sarina confesses that she has thought about killing Giorgio and about killing herself in order to 'sfuggire alle conseguenze del mio delitto' (*Segreto*, p. 103). She too wants to escape the chains of her existence. Ironically she tells Cristiano 'Non mi creda pazza', though we later learn it is Cristiano who is actually insane (*Segreto*, p. 103). In truth, they are all battling with their relationships with other people.

Although similarities emerge between *Il segreto* and Pirandellian texts regarding the theme of madness, it should be noted that Deledda does not explore the concept in as much depth as her Sicilian contemporary. Cristiano and Giorgio's experiences of insanity are merely hinted at, but no details are offered in explanation for their tormented mental state. This could suggest a weakness on Deledda's part, for she is unable to delve into the complexities of the matter, touching upon psychological ideas without attempting to unravel them. In my reading, however, the uncertainty which hangs about Cristiano's insanity is in keeping with the mysterious atmosphere Deledda wishes to depict in this novel. As its title implies, it is the secret of Cristiano's past which torments him, and perhaps it is up to the reader to decide if he truly did attempt murder, and whether or not this drove him beyond the realm of sanity.

### **Linguistic interaction**

As Cristiano tackles the challenges of understanding himself and others, language plays a vital part. Indeed, linguistic interaction forms a power game of sorts among the characters. Nicoletta Simborowski's study *Secrets and Puzzles* considers the

significance of silences in narrative. She argues that both language and the absence of language, that is, the withholding of words, are a means of wielding control:

The utterance of words is felt to have a talismanic effect, and there is strong cultural resonance behind this idea. Rites and rituals involve the speaking of words, the calling up, with the voice, of spirits or the calling upon of deities; the naming of gods and devils can have dire consequences; words have power.<sup>277</sup>

Simborowski cites the example of the Grimm version of Rumpelstiltskin, where the naming of the eponymous dwarf robs him of his power. It was only by maintaining his silence, by keeping his true name to himself that Rumpelstiltskin was able to ensnare the miller's daughter who had promised him her first-born child. As Simborowski aptly states, '[T]he articulated word, spoken or written is indeed powerful, so powerful that its resonance spills over into silences left by us all.'<sup>278</sup>

In the opening passages of *Il segreto* language is a great tool, for Cristiano's silence could similarly be viewed as a way for him to maintain control over his identity. Kristeva states that the self chooses to remain silent, cutting itself off from the other in a bid for self-preservation: 'Silence has not only been forced upon you, it is within you: a refusal to speak, a fitful sleep driven to an anguish that wants to remain mute, the private property of your proud and mortified discretion, that silence is a harsh light.'<sup>279</sup> Much like the aforementioned Rumpelstiltskin, we have seen Cristiano's unwillingness to offer his name, and his inability to address Sarina by hers. By withholding his name, he maintains a certain emotional distance from her, not yet surrendering that element of his identity to her. Similarly, two days later he encounters Ghiana and she eagerly awaits a word from him: 'quando gli fu davanti si fermò silenziosa e rispettosa, aspettando ch'egli le parlasse; sia pure male, ma le

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<sup>277</sup> Nicoletta Simborowski, *Secrets and Puzzles: Silence and the Unsaid in Contemporary Italian Writing* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>278</sup> Simborowski, p. 17.

<sup>279</sup> Kristeva, p. 16.

parlasse' (*Segreto*, p. 37). To her it does not matter if he speaks unkindly, only that he speaks, for the value lies in the expression of the words rather than their meaning.

An emphasis is therefore placed upon the importance of linguistic interaction with others, and thus the association between language and identity. When conversing with Cristiano about the nature of Giorgio and Sarina's relationship, Sarina's maid comments that: 'Si ha bisogno di parlare, finché si è vivi: e qui finiremo col parlare alle nostre ombre sui muri' (*Segreto*, p. 90). Communicative exchanges with others are a living necessity in that they are the only way of giving meaning to the reality we live and to ourselves within that reality. As the maid declares, we would even opt to speak to our own shadows in order to continue the generation of meaning. Thus, even in his solitary state, Cristiano still chooses to engage in frequent conversation with his cat or even with himself rather than existing in utter silence. As Kristeva states, without the other, the self has no meaning: '[I]t is on the *other* that the self relies for sustenance and trust.'<sup>280</sup>

Cristiano's solitude is highlighted by the silence of his surroundings: 'ma la sua stessa voce, nel grande silenzio, gli parve un'eco, un suono che non provenisse da lui' (*Segreto*, p. 11). His voice resonates around the empty space with no one to listen to it, and so as Cristiano hears it, it seems to have come from a different person. He is divided in two: the speaker and the listener, in order to give himself a sense of self even in his solitude.

Given that Cristiano's interactions with other people are so limited, he shares a particular bond with his environment. In the beginning, it appears that the landscape around him is his only friend:

[G]li parve che in fondo al vialetto sabbioso del suo giardino, la porta scolorita della casetta gli sorridesse, aspettandolo; ma sorridesse a lui solo,

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<sup>280</sup> Kristeva, p. 120.

perché tanto essa col suo accigliato arco di pietra quanto i muri color d'arancia guasta della facciata si nascondevano, diffidenti come il padrone, sotto le ali rugginose del tetto spiovente (*Segreto*, p. 9).

Nature, it seems, has a greater understanding of Cristiano's feelings than any living person does: 'Forse la natura non è così insensibile al dolore dell'uomo come si crede: forse la sua agitazione è, a volte, prodotta dalla partecipazione a questo dolore' (*Segreto*, p. 43). When he is unable to connect with other people, he relates the absent physical contact with people to something present in the natural world:

Il grido non si ripeteva. Egli tuttavia si ostinava ad ascoltare: sporse la testa; le gocce della pioggia gli caddero sui capelli e sul collo e gli diedero l'impressione di dita fredde che lo accarezzassero. Pensò alle mani fini e tristi della donna incontrata al pozzo, e si ritrasse con un moto brusco, quasi per sfuggire davvero a una carezza misteriosa (*Segreto*, p. 46).

Indeed, in a moment where Sarina passes by Cristiano and does not see him hiding in the sand, he turns to nature in an attempt to satisfy his urge for human contact: 'Ella passò oltre: ed egli rimase qualche tempo così, a baciare la terra, coi capelli confusi con l'erba: triste e felice come se la terra fosse la donna e l'erba i capelli di lei' (*Segreto*, p. 139).

Cristiano's intimate relationship with the nature that surrounds him is distinct from the veristic use of pathetic fallacy. Here, it functions as a commentary on the human need for communication. When he is finally able to develop a relationship of sorts with Sarina, he realises that the objects which were once his treasured companions have turned their back on him: 'E questa solitudine adesso gli pesava: gli pareva che le cose intorno lo deridessero con le loro pupille misteriose; e anche il loro contatto era freddo. | Non lo volevano più, le sue piccole cose intorno: ed egli pensò di andarsene' (*Segreto*, p. 117). Having chosen to engage with the social world, Cristiano has turned his back on his solitude and on the fantasy world which engulfed him. He cannot exist in both realms of fantasy and reality, just as he cannot maintain

both solitude and society. Later, therefore, when Cristiano is challenged by Sarina to reveal his secret, he decides to preserve his silence, and retreat to his linguistic enclosure. Although he struggles with it, at heart, Cristiano sees that he is in need of human contact: ‘A volte provava un sordo rancore contro i suoi vicini: eppure in quelle interminabili sere un insolito bisogno di rivedere gente viva lo spingeva verso la casetta’ (*Segreto*, p. 69).

Cristiano is very careful with his use of words. He does not share his thoughts without great caution. When Cristiano and Ghiana have had intercourse, he does not speak to her; he does not surrender that element of his identity:

Rimasero ancora un poco assieme, in silenzio. No, egli non parlava, non avrebbe parlato mai: non aveva parlato neppure nei giorni duri di una sua malattia, quando la donna, dopo averlo trovato sul suo giaciglio, solo, abbandonato come un lebbroso, s’era fermata ad assisterlo cristianamente: e neppure dopo, quando convalescente, nei primi bei giorni di febbraio, vinto dallo sguardo desideroso di lei, l’aveva posseduta (*Segreto*, p. 20).

In the same way, when Cristiano eventually reveals his secret to Sarina, he is given the opportunity to connect with her emotionally, but once again, he returns to the sanctuary of silence:

Ecco, se la sentiva alle spalle, di nuovo alta sopra di lui; ebbe l’impressione ch’ella gli tendesse la mano sul capo, aspettando solo un’altra parola per accarezzarlo. | Una parola sola, e la vita rianimava la solitudine intorno, il deserto si copriva di fiori: ritornava ancora, per loro che ne erano esiliati, il regno di Dio sulla terra. | Ma egli non disse questa parola: ombre rosse e ombre nere lo travolsero per un attimo, come onde delle quali una lo attirava nell’abisso, l’altra lo spingeva in alto, verso la riva (*Segreto*, p. 114).

His silence in this instance is not an expression of power, but a cowardly escape. When Ghiana tells him of her pregnancy, he laments his inability to share his feelings even with Sarina: ‘neppure nelle ore di più intenso amore riusciva a dirle il suo vero pensiero: e dopo si sentiva più solo che mai’ (*Segreto*, p. 182).

The most accurate description of his behaviour is given when Cristiano explains his relationship with his wife. Their unhappiness reached the point of complete silence, for they could not communicate with each other at all:

[A]nzi, non ci si parlava, quasi: ma fra noi due cresceva qualche cosa di duro, di misterioso; come un albero basso, scuro, che copriva di ombra e di freddo e intorno al cui tronco svoltavamo di continuo per non vederci e nello stesso tempo per inseguirci, con un silenzio più tragico di ogni parola. Perché, in fondo, avevamo paura uno dell'altro (*Segreto*, p. 200).

He was afraid of her, and so he could not speak to her at all. The wall that stood between them is emphasised further by the reference once again to the motif of the shadow, and the sensation of cold that dominated their relationship. In all three of his romantic relationships with women, therefore, silence is the method whereby Cristiano can maintain control over his identity. By refusing to communicate with others, even when they are longing for him to do so, he does not sacrifice any part of his inner self to anyone else.

The use of a name can similarly be regarded as a means of exerting power over a person's identity. As we have seen, both Sarina and Cristiano are reluctant to offer their names to each other during their first interactions. When Cristiano's name has been shared, he is at times afraid of its use, intimidated by the power over him that has been bestowed on other people. On the night of Giorgio's disappearance, he repeatedly hears his name echoing in the wind: 'Ed era solo il suo nome, che la voce ripeteva: Cristiano: ma era pronunciato stranamente, quel nome: Cristiano: era pronunciato da una persona che lo conosceva solo per averlo sentito da altri. Cristiano: ecco la terza volta che lo chiama: è proprio il suo nome' (*Segreto*, pp. 79-80). The punctuation here creates a sense of crescendo, building the tension as his name is heard three times. He becomes convinced that it was the wandering Giorgio who was uttering his name, and so is filled with a need to confront him, and ask him

how he came to know his name: ‘a poco a poco lo vince il desiderio di andare a vederlo più da vicino, di scoprirgli il viso, di domandare se è stato proprio lui a chiamarlo, di là dalla siepe, e come ha fatto a sapere il suo nome’ (*Segreto*, p. 88). He is, of course, unable to do so, as the ailing Giorgio soon dies.

Even after Giorgio’s death, however, the memory of him and the use of Cristiano’s name continue to torment him. Sarina often repeats Cristiano’s name, and this reminds him of the desperate way in which she called to her husband during his darkest moments:

La voce di lei risonò chiara, chiamandolo: pareva quella di una madre che richiama il bambino allontanatosi da lei. | - Cristiano? | - Cristiano! – egli ripeté sollevandosi sui gomiti, col viso fra le mani. – Ricordo quando chiamavi tuo marito. Lo chiamavi così, come dal profondo di un abisso (*Segreto*, p. 202).

Hearing his name here is conveyed as a negative experience. He does not wish to be associated with the madman who was lost. Furthermore, the description of the maternal voice probably reminds Cristiano of the painful memories associated with his mother. Cristiano confesses to Sarina that he shared a very close relationship with his mother, though she was a controlling figure who dominated much of his past. She manipulated him into marrying the daughter of their rich benefactor after he died, so as to ensure the family’s continued financial security. This was an unhappy marriage, but his mother was unable to accept his miserable state given their financial situation. Cristiano’s description of his mother’s influence is evocative of the controlling nature of Paulo’s mother in *La madre*, and her concerns are reminiscent of Cosima’s mother in Deledda’s most autobiographical piece: ‘Solo una madre può fare questi miracoli: solo l’amore materno, che ha una continua paura dei più gravi mali per il figlio, può creare a questo figlio i più gravi mali del mondo’ (*Segreto*, p. 195). It was with the best intentions that she orchestrated his downfall into loneliness and despair. Her

eventual abandonment and elopement to America with her young lover drove Cristiano over the edge, and made him the isolated individual he was at the beginning of the narrative.

### **The role of others in one's identity**

Despite his attempts to maintain his silence and control, we have seen that Cristiano succumbs to the need to interact with others, even if this is only through an interaction with the inanimate world at first. In keeping with Kristeva's theories, therefore, we could say that Cristiano's identity is based upon his relations with others, for he cannot live a fulfilled existence when he is cut off from the world. Without an 'other' with whom he can communicate and interact he has no self at all.

It is Sarina's arrival which causes this realisation for he suddenly becomes aware of the identity that he projects to other people. Upon first meeting Sarina, he is unwilling to look at her, clearly intimidated by her presence. Once again sight is key, for he retains a perspective that is shut off from the world in a literal and metaphorical sense: 'Non osava più guardare la donna, ma la sentiva accostarsi, come un'ombra, pur così luminosa, come un pericolo' (*Segreto*, p. 33). He is ashamed to realise how he must seem to her: 'si vergognava di esser veduto col secchio in mano come un povero diavolo' (*Segreto*, p. 32). This aesthetic obsession continues awhile, to the point where he is forced to analyse his own behaviour in reaction to her:

Poi si accorse del suo intimo pensiero e si ricalcò sdegnosamente il cappello in testa. Che importavano le sue vesti? Da lungo tempo egli non se ne curava più che l'animale non si curi del suo pelo. Ma ricordò che l'istinto dell'amore per la femmina porta anche l'animale a farsi bello, a cambiare di pelo: e si propose di andar d'ora in avanti solo alla notte ad attinger l'acqua, poiché non voleva più mettersi a chiacchierare con la sua vicina di casa (*Segreto*, p. 36).

The comparison between man and beast here is reminiscent of the naturalist interest in evolution and the connection between man and his animal instinct. Beyond that, however, the comparison here highlights the very basic, superficial way in which humans perceive each other. Humanity is no different from the animal kingdom in this sense, for our desire to appear attractive to the opposite sex is linked to a deliberate attempt to project a specific identity for others. Cristiano's animal-like behaviour appears very self-conscious, for he attempts to shape the way in which he is viewed by others. Despite Cristiano's rejection of these vain feelings at this stage, he still seeks the approval of others, notably that of Sarina, much later in the novel. For example, while helping with the housework when Giorgio is ill, Cristiano asserts that this action only has value if it is perceived by Sarina. He works with 'la speranza che ella nel sentire il rumore scendesse e lo vedesse così, umiliato al suo servizio' (*Segreto*, p. 123).

Even Ghiana sees a change in Cristiano's behaviour as a result of Sarina's presence. She is astonished when Cristiano engages her in conversation even though he recently dismissed her in a fit of rage and forbade her from returning to his house: 'Ghiana restava immobile, dura, con la gonna larga che pareva di smalto turchino: lasciò ch'egli si chinasse a scegliere le uova, che le domandasse quanto voleva dei polli, che le domandasse se il marito aveva scritto: non rispondeva' (*Segreto*, p. 38). Cristiano has understood that he must change his social behaviour with others in order to attempt to relate to Sarina.

Sarina's effect upon Cristiano is so intense that she eventually forms a desire within him to return to the social world: 'il progetto confuso di ritornare definitivamente nel mondo, nella comunità degli uomini, con lei' (*Segreto*, p. 209). Her presence not only makes him want to change *how* he is, she makes him see *who*

he is: ‘Egli continuava a guardare per terra ma si sentiva guardato e scrutato da lei: e pensava che se avesse sollevato gli occhi avrebbe veduto la sua anima stessa, come in uno specchio, negli occhi che lo fissavano’ (*Segreto*, p. 62). As we have seen in *La madre*, the mirror is a modernist image associated with the concept of identity.<sup>281</sup> According to Kristevan identity theory, our selves are formed by others’ perception of us, and without this, our identities have no substance: ‘Available, freed of everything, the foreigner has nothing, he is nothing’,<sup>282</sup> whereas for Ricoeur, it is our perception of ourselves which is most significant: ‘Does not the questioning about what matters or not depend upon self-concern, which indeed seems to be constitutive of selfhood?’<sup>283</sup> The image of the mirror is pertinent to both of these theories: an identity is reflected back to us by the way we are regarded by others and by ourselves. Here we see Deledda presenting a similar idea, for Cristiano feels that he will see a true reflection of himself if he looks into Sarina’s eyes. This ‘specchio’ will reveal to him the truth about what he has done and who he is. This sensation is felt so strongly that it appears that she eventually forms a part of him, rather than creating a mere reflection: ‘egli non voleva più pensare a lei: ed ecco che lei, invece, gli stava accanto, era dentro il suo letto, era dentro di lui...’ (*Segreto*, p. 97). This moment is reminiscent of the climactic moment in *La madre* where Paulo recognises the presence of Agnese within himself as he gazes into the mirror, as we have seen in the previous chapter.<sup>284</sup> Both women have possessed the identities of their lovers and this is symbolically represented by their reflected presence within the weaker men.

Although other people play an important part in the formation of our identity, an inevitable distance remains between us and them, an idea which has been

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<sup>281</sup> See page 94.

<sup>282</sup> Kristeva, p. 12.

<sup>283</sup> Ricoeur, p. 137.

<sup>284</sup> See page 98.

highlighted in the linguistic gap created between Cristiano and the other characters. We have seen that Ricoeur defines identity as the recognition of the self by the self. In a sense, therefore, no 'other' can ever fully grasp the essence of one's identity. Although Cristiano and Sarina continue to spend much time together, a distance remains between them: 'Camminavano come due che fanno la strada assieme senza conoscersi' (*Segreto*, p. 134). Later in the text, this distance is heightened, for having confessed everything to Sarina about his apparent attempt to kill his wife and the insanity which ensued, Cristiano describes how 'le anime non s'incontrarono più: uno spazio misterioso le separava' (*Segreto*, p. 206). Just as he feared, the truth about his past is an aspect of his identity that Sarina cannot comprehend. We cannot fully know another person, for the distortion between our self-perception and their perception of us creates an insurmountable gap in understanding. Therefore, although we seek fulfillment in others we can only achieve it from within ourselves: 'la verità è che cerchiamo l'amore fuori di noi, mentre è solo dentro di noi' (*Segreto*, p. 203). Here we touch upon a central theme in many of Deledda's works which forms an important distinction between her and Pirandello, that is, love. Deledda's characters are more fearful of reentering the emotional world whereas Pirandello's characters are more concerned with separation from the social world. Cristiano remains in isolation because he is afraid of loving and therefore of hurting another and himself. In Deledda's world, life is defined by love and it is only while Cristiano shuts himself off from the possibility of love that he is an incomplete being: 'Amava la sua casetta perché ricominciava a riamare tutte le cose della vita, belle e brutte, tutte le cose del mondo, piccole e grandi: perché ricominciava ad amare' (*Segreto*, p. 136). When Cristiano opens his heart to love, he is able to embrace all of the positive aspects of

life that he has been neglecting. Giacalone describes the way in which Cristiano protects himself from emotional engagement:

[L]a paura di vivere, di soffrire, e di far soffrire la donna amata, gli smorza ogni entusiasmo e lo riconduce di nuovo nel sepolcro della sua casa solitaria, a meditare e a torturarsi quasi in un delirio senza tempo, in un mondo irreale in cui realtà e sogno si confondono.<sup>285</sup>

Therefore it is not only others' perceptions of him which make Cristiano a complete being; it is his emotional interaction with them. At one point Cristiano scolds himself for not abandoning the ghosts of his past and embracing life with Sarina: 'Va', va': è la vita stessa che ti richiama ... Puoi ritornare ad amare, ad essere amato [...] Puoi ritornare uomo' (*Segreto*, p. 109). The implication is therefore that Cristiano is not a man, is not a person at all without love in his life. These words are echoed later as Cristiano reminds Sarina that she too can return to the social world and once again become a woman, a real person who engages with those around her: 'Lei è giovane ancora, e spera e sogna ancora. [...] Resterà libera, amerà ancora, sarà riamata, potrà crearsi di nuovo una famiglia: può ritornare donna...' *(Segreto*, p. 113).

Having established the importance of other people in the formation of one's identity, we see that the self in this novel is in fact divided, multiple even. As Cristiano observes: 'sentiva di non esser più lui: e aveva l'impressione che la donna lo guardasse dall'alto' (*Segreto*, p. 33). Cristiano feels his identity has altered because she is viewing him from a different angle. Similarly, having spent a night keeping vigil at Giorgio's bedside, Cristiano feels himself overcome by an emotional change which is so profound it has altered his very being: 'non sapeva perché, non era più l'uomo di prima' (*Segreto*, p. 94). Here, Deledda touches upon the notion explored by Ricoeur as to whether identity can be a constant, fixed notion, or whether it changes over time. Ricoeur cites the example of an acorn and the oak tree that develops from

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<sup>285</sup> Giacalone, p. 76.

it. Can these be considered to be the same despite the changes they have undergone?<sup>286</sup> Although this concept is hinted at here by Deledda, it becomes a central focus in the works of the modernist authors Pirandello and Svevo. Vitangelo Moscarda, the protagonist of Pirandello's *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (1925) ponders the idea that he is not one man, but many different men, each different as every second passes. His place in the context of the world is ever changing, for the world around him is constantly changing, and consequently, he can never remain the same man to himself or to others. Moscarda presents this concept as applicable to all people, including the reader:

[U]n minuto fa, prima che vi capitasse questo caso, voi eravate un altro; non solo, ma voi eravate anche cento altri, centomila altri. E non c'è da farne, credere a me, nessuna meraviglia. Vedete piuttosto se vi sembra di poter essere così sicuro che di qui a domani sarete quel che assumete di essere oggi.<sup>287</sup>

In the same way, the eponymous protagonist of Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923) is puzzled by the notion that he has changed with the world, but that his friends may have maintained a fixed view of him throughout, without taking into consideration the changes he has undergone:

La vita più intensa è raccontata in sintesi dal suono più rudimentale, quello dell'onda del mare, che, dacché si forma, muta ad ogni istante finché non muore! M'aspettavo perciò anch'io di divenire e disfarmi come Napoleone e l'onda. [...] I miei amici mi conservarono durante tutta la mia vita la stessa stima e credo che neppur io, dacché son giunto all'età della ragione, abbia mutato di molto il concetto che feci di me stesso.<sup>288</sup>

The change that Cristiano has noticed in his own identity comes as a result of observing the similarities between himself and Giorgio. It is, therefore, through the perception of another's identity that Cristiano gains a clearer view of his own. They both opted to live in isolation for long periods of their lives, a choice which eventually

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<sup>286</sup> Ricoeur, p. 117.

<sup>287</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (Milano: Mondadori, 1992), p. 34.

<sup>288</sup> Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno* (Milano: Mondadori, 1985), p. 57.

drove Giorgio to a state of insanity. His death brings clarity to Cristiano, and frees him from the restrictions he has placed upon his own life:

Allora Cristiano sentiva un brivido di gioia; gli pareva che il suo sangue tornasse tutto indietro, nelle vene, e ricordava l'increparsi del mare al vento di ponente, in certi crepuscoli rossi di marzo. 'Cristiano,' diceva a sé stesso, 'tu rispetti adesso il morto perché egli non ha più bisogno del tuo rispetto; ieri che era vivo non lo rispettavvi. E domani? Domani il mondo avrà più spazio, liberato anche della sua spoglia, e tu berrai alla sua coppa, avrai la gioia che non ha avuto lui[...]' (*Segreto*, p. 145).

We see that an understanding of the self is vital and that self-perception plays an equally important role to that of the perception of others. Here, we are reminded of Ricoeur's emphasis on the importance of self-identification. For Ricoeur, one's identity is primarily defined by the way we view ourselves, for our perception is clearly of greater significance than that of any third party. No one else can know a person's identity intimately from the outside.<sup>289</sup> When conversing with Sarina, Cristiano ponders the importance of self-interest and consequently of self-perception:

-È che arriva un momento... – disse, guardando anche lui per terra come per cercar di vedere quello che lei vedeva: - un momento in cui non c'interessano più neppure le cose nostre interiori. | - Questo no, questo no! Non può avvenire se non quando si ha già la morte dentro (*Segreto*, p. 62).

It is interesting to note that during this conversation Sarina attempts to align her gaze with Cristiano's so that their perceptions and consequently their mutual understanding are the same. Similarly, in an earlier passage Ghiana attempts to align her gaze with Cristiano's and fails to do so. This occurs following their cold, silent sexual intercourse, when Ghiana clearly wishes to engage Cristiano in some form of emotional interaction, and Cristiano is firmly reluctant. In fact, Cristiano remains completely silent. By refusing to speak to her, he does not concede any element of his

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<sup>289</sup> Ricoeur, p. 121.

identity to her and he maintains linguistic control.<sup>290</sup> In both situations, therefore, Cristiano is unwilling to allow for his perspective to connect with that of the woman in a physical and psychological sense.

This first intimate conversation conducted between Sarina and Cristiano, where, as we have seen, each of them still does not know the other's name, states that we are always concerned with our own lives. The definition of living is to be engaged with oneself and therefore with one's sense of self. We see, however, that this is precisely the struggle Cristiano is undergoing, for by isolating himself from the world he had lost all sense of self-interest and therefore of his own identity: 'Voleva la morte, intorno a sé, perché gli sembrava di averla già dentro' (*Segreto*, p. 12). Once again we see the repeated motif of death that is associated with Cristiano's isolated existence. He wishes to create an atmosphere which is reflective of his inner being, that is, void.

Our identity, therefore, is based upon interaction with ourselves, with other people, but also with the world itself. We have seen that a number of critics highlighted the importance of the sparse and solitary landscape of *Il segreto*.<sup>291</sup> Cristiano feels his being is in harmony with the world surrounding him, not only in his desire for solitude and isolation, but in the form of his emotions too. Early on in the text his misery is mirrored in his environment: 'E questa tristezza parve d'un tratto estendersi, trasfondersi tutta intorno, nel paesaggio e nel tempo' (*Segreto*, p. 42). He later reflects upon the lost days of childhood when he was so happy: 'tutto era bello e fantastico, intorno a lui, di una bellezza di sogno, perché tutto era bello dentro di lui' (*Segreto*, pp. 158-159). This change is also noted with a more direct reference to the modern motif of the mirror:

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<sup>290</sup> *Segreto*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>291</sup> Botticini, p. 199.

Stette davanti al mare agitato come davanti a uno specchio che invero rifletteva la sua anima com'era in quel momento, piena di un tumulto grigio e ardente. | Com'erano lontane le calme mattine d'estate quando il mare lucido e morto gli sembrava egualmente lo specchio della sua quiete interiore! (*Segreto*, p. 157).

The world around us also defines us, just as we impact upon and therefore define the world. As we have already established, we cannot live in isolation from the world but only in relation to it, and the arid landscape of the novel is a further reflection of Cristiano's unhappy state of solitude. Piromalli even draws a connection between the sparseness of Cristiano's surroundings and the similar setting of Pirandello's theatrical works: 'Anche gli oggetti sono collocati per dare rilievo alla loro essenzialità e alla loro nudità ('gli alberi immobili, la casetta, il pozzo, l'erba del prato'), come in una scena di teatro pirandelliano.'<sup>292</sup> Cristiano indeed constantly sees himself mirrored in his surroundings: 'si vedeva sempre, come se il terreno fosse uno specchio e la sua ombra la sua immagine' (*Segreto*, p. 98). The shadow is also a very Pirandellian image which is associated with the conception of self. It can be reflective of the divided nature of one's identity, projecting a second image of a person's physical form, and thus the image that is perceived by others.

Cristiano's 'ombra' is referred to repeatedly throughout the text, as well as the 'ombre' of his environment. When he is confronted with Ghiana's difficult situation, a pregnancy which could mean the end of his relationship with Sarina, he tries to chase away the shadows and once again avoid the woman's gaze: 'Ombre, ombre: egli si mise a camminare attraverso la stanza per scacciarle, ma anche per non guardare più il viso della donna' (*Segreto*, p. 172). In one scene, however, it is the cat's playful game with its shadow which seems a most suitable reflection of Cristiano's own behaviour:

Anche il gatto sollevava la testa ascoltando e di tanto in tanto balzava verso la parete per tentare di acchiappare qualche cosa ch'era solamente la

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<sup>292</sup> Piromalli, p. 112.

sua ombra. [...] L'uomo ascolta di nuovo ma vede il gioco del gatto e solleva le spalle: anche lui va dietro le ombre dei suoi sogni (*Segreto*, p. 45).

This description appears towards the beginning of the novel where Cristiano is still living in isolation, grappling with his understanding of his own identity which emerged from the relationship with his wife, and failing to form a complete sense of identity. He too is grasping at a mere shadow of his fuller self.

Sarina is also haunted by the presence of a constant shadow: that of her husband Giorgio. Sarina's life has been so restricted by Giorgio's illness and his demands that her own identity has been lost in it, further emphasising the impact of others on the formation of our identity: 'Tanta ombra mi ha lasciato intorno che ancora non riesco a ritrovare me stessa' (*Segreto*, p. 163). In her married life, Sarina too has felt imprisoned, closed off from the world and other people:

Anch'io soffrivo per il distacco continuo da mio marito. Egli mi costringeva a vivere nella solitudine, mentre io non avevo che desiderio del mondo; della vita in comune con gli altri miei simili. Ho sempre avuto anch'io la nostalgia d'un luogo ove mi pare di aver vissuto e goduto e dove vorrei tornare, così, come l'acqua che tende al mare (*Segreto*, p. 204).

Here we are also presented with the recurring image of the sea, which symbolises the free open space that she craves beyond the confines of her marital home. Even after his death, Giorgio's shadow is cast upon both Sarina and Cristiano: 'Ma è l'ombra... è l'ombra... – ella ripeté guardandosi attorno: - mi pare sempre di vedere l'ombra di lui. Domani mattina verrò da lei e parleremo meglio. | Ed egli non insisté , perché anche lui rivedeva l'ombra che lo separava dalla vita' (*Segreto*, p. 164).

The darkness of these shadows in their solitary, miserable lives is juxtaposed with the light that is to be found in the outside world, a symbolic contrast which is not always conveyed in a subtle manner. When Cristiano is exposed to the touch of

Sarina's coat, he is filled with a sense of light: 'Questo contatto e il rosso vivo della giacca di lana ch'ella indossava, gli ridonarono un senso di calore, di luce' (*Segreto*, p. 70). Furthermore, Sarina explicitly invites Cristiano to abandon the shadows that torment them in their dreams, and to embrace the light of real life: 'Essi sono morti e non soffrono più perché dobbiamo tormentarci ancora con questo gioco d'ombre? Sollevati, Cristiano, guarda quanta luce è intorno a noi' (*Segreto*, pp. 204-205).

As Cristiano embraces his relationship with Sarina, he is able to confront his many demons. He is finally able to look Sarina in the eye and consequently embrace the image of light, and cross the symbolic boundary around his world that is represented by the sea:

Egli non evitava più quello sguardo che gli penetrava fino all'anima e gliela inondava di luce. Stettero così a guardarsi, per quanto tempo egli non avrebbe saputo dirlo: non sapeva più nulla: solo aveva l'impressione di essere ancora in riva al mare e di aver la potenza adesso, di andare oltre, di camminare sulle acque e sulle nuvole, di sciogliersi nell'infinito (*Segreto*, p. 161).

This new beginning is filled with positive images of spring, which are naturally associated with the concept of rebirth.

E Cristiano balzò come un bambino, corse ad aprire e gridò di gioia. Nella notte i fiori dei peschi s'erano aperti: sopra ogni fiore brillava una ghirlanda di rugiada: e fili iridescenti, collane sottilissime di perle correvano da una cima all'altra della siepe. | L'aria odorava di resina e di menta. Era la primavera. Ed egli ebbe desiderio di correre fino alla riva del mare, di avvolgersi fra i giunchi, di lavarsi con la rugiada (*Segreto*, p. 168).

Once again, the image of the coast is present, conveying Cristiano's desire to cross the confine of his lonely world.

This sense of relief and freedom is heightened by the unburdening of his secret. Cristiano feels that his identity is at last fully revealed when he shares his secret with Sarina: 'Eppure non si pentiva di aver parlato: gli pareva di essersi tolto una maschera, anche davanti a sé stesso, e di potersi finalmente stendere nudo nel suo

dolore' (*Segreto*, p. 206). As we are reminded by Margherita Heyer-Caput, the mask is also a particularly Pirandellian image, and this description is evocative of the Pirandellian maschere nude.<sup>293</sup> For example, when the identity of L'Ignota is doubted in *Come tu mi vuoi*, she fearfully questions if someone will unmask her: 'Smascherarmi?'<sup>294</sup> Similarly, in *Enrico IV*, Donna Matilde recounts the moment when Enrico's mask worn for the party became the mask of his insanity: 'Non dimenticherò mai quella scena, di tutte le nostre facce mascherate, sguajate e stravolte, davanti a quella terribile maschera di lui, che non era più una maschera, ma la Follia.'<sup>295</sup> The mask is both a physical and metaphorical form of concealment. At times, its wearer hides behind it willingly, and at others it has been placed upon them, possibly without their knowledge. For Cristiano, as for Enrico, it is a mask which he has worn willingly in order to hide from the world. Only by sharing his secret, by removing his mask and therefore fully engaging with another person can Cristiano feel truly himself. The description of himself as 'nudo nel suo dolore' is particularly emphatic with regard to his sense of self. He stands before her, naked and by implication, vulnerable, but also free, no longer restricted by the 'maschera' he has removed.

### **The search for freedom**

Since, as we have seen, utter isolation from the world and its inhabitants is impossible, complete freedom also remains unattainable, though it is something which the modern soul seeks. Falchi claims that 'Oggi, l'arte pirandelliana significa ciò che movimenti ciarlataneschi – specialmente il futurismo – hanno invano cercato di

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<sup>293</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 176.

<sup>294</sup> Pirandello, *Come tu mi vuoi*, p. 149.

<sup>295</sup> Pirandello, *Enrico*, pp. 131-132.

significare: il bisogno di cose nuove, di liberazione'.<sup>296</sup> In the same way, Deledda's characters also seek freedom and fail. Heyer-Caput briefly analyses the questions Cristiano explores relating to freedom in her study of Deledda's modern tendencies.<sup>297</sup> I wish to relate these notions to Cristiano's quest for an understanding of his identity.

Cristiano questions: 'perché davvero non si è mai soli, mai liberi, mai?', for if we cease to interact with the world, we cease to exist (*Segreto*, p. 177). Kristeva rightly states that freedom and solitude are intrinsically linked, but that an isolated existence allows for no identity at all: 'Free of ties with his own people, the foreigner feels "completely free." Nevertheless, the consummate name of such a freedom is solitude. Useless or limitless, it amounts to boredom or supreme availability.'<sup>298</sup> Complete freedom would come with isolation from associations with other people, but this cannot be achieved during life. This is precisely the discovery that Cristiano undergoes during the novel.

Even Ghiana's marital state is described as an absence of freedom. In their most intimate conversation, Cristiano admits that though he cares for Ghiana, he cannot commit to a relationship with her since she is not free: 'Se tu fossi stata libera ... forse ... Ma non sei libera' (*Segreto*, p. 75). In the same way, when speaking of his marriage, Cristiano declares that he soon realised that the change in his life meant that he was no longer free. The general surrounding and intervention of other people in his existence prevented his true freedom: 'Troppa gente intorno; ed io mi accorsi che non ero più libero, non perché avevo moglie ma perché avevo dei servi' (*Segreto*, p. 111). Ironically, although his servants are not free in a social and financial sense because they are bound to his employment, he is the one who feels trapped by his forced interaction with them.

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<sup>296</sup> Falchi, p. 109.

<sup>297</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 165.

<sup>298</sup> Kristeva, p. 12.

Life is depicted as a struggle towards freedom from interaction with the world and with others, a freedom which is only achieved in death. Sarina's sick husband, Giorgio, is portrayed as a prisoner, bound by the chains of life to an existence which he despises. Giorgio married Sarina late in life, and began to resent his time with her and regard it as a form of imprisonment: 'il malato tentava di mordere la mano che lo accarezzava. E pareva volesse farlo di nascosto, che gli altri non se ne accorgessero: ed era una specie di rivolta, muta, impotente; un rosicchiare di prigioniero alle sbarre del carcere' (*Segreto*, p. 96). In his unstable state, he is quite literally kept as a prisoner in his own home because there is a constant risk that he will attempt to escape. The chains on his window are described as 'chiusura più solida dell'inferriata d'un carcere, e che tuttavia non ha impedito la fuga del malato. Giochi della vita!' (*Segreto*, p. 87). It is interesting here that a comparison is drawn between Giorgio's successful attempt to escape, in spite of the restrictions placed upon him, and life in general. The implication may be that we are all struggling to flee from the imprisonment of life.

This same notion is also introduced in Deledda's novel *Marianna Sirca* (1915). The protagonist, Marianna, goes against the expectations of her family when she engages in a relationship with local bandit, Simone. Although this alliance for Marianna can be regarded as a struggle with sin and temptation, it is more apt, in my view, to consider it a struggle for freedom from her pre-determined social existence. The notion of liberation is indeed central to the novel, for Marianna frequently describes her life as a prison. We see an example of this in Marianna's reaction to the home she is left with when Simone has walked out on her:

[T]ornava ad apparirle come una prigioniera: non mancava neppure la guardiana inesorabile, la serva Fidela, con le chiavi alla cintura e gli occhi di spia. Del resto tutti nella vita siamo così, in carcere, a scontare la colpa

stessa di esser vivi; o rassegnarsi o rompere i muri come Simone. Verrà per tutti l'ora della liberazione e del premio.<sup>299</sup>

The implication is that true liberation only comes with death, for during her life she must abide by the rules laid out for her by others. Later when Marianna is once more trapped inside, she adds to this image as the servant, Fidela, marches away from her closed door: 'pareva davvero quello dei passi d'un guardiano di carcere.'<sup>300</sup> Again, she describes herself as feeling 'chiusa nella sua casa come in una prigione'.<sup>301</sup> Lastly, when Marianna leaves her home, she believes herself to be free of Nuoro and its voices: 'Marianna si sentiva come disfare nel silenzio, nei ricordi: aveva l'impressione che non sarebbe più tornata alla sua prigione di Nuoro: e questo, per il momento, le bastava.'<sup>302</sup> Aptly, it is only the death of Simone which can liberate Marianna, for only then is she truly united with him and free from the judgement of other people: 'Ecco, le loro nozze s'erano compiute: nozze di morte.'<sup>303</sup>

Sarina, like Cristiano, struggles with the social requirements of marriage. Although Marianna believed her happiness lay in marriage, she is never able to fulfil it, and both she and Sarina seek freedom from the views of society. Sarina regarded her life in society with Giorgio as a torment. She felt the presence of others to be so oppressive and intrusive that it dictated their behaviour:

[I]l paese dove si vive è come tutto una nostra casa, una nostra famiglia: tutti sanno i nostri affari, i nostri guai, le nostre debolezze: il giudizio di chi ci conosce così bene ci dispiace perché quasi sempre è giusto! Si è sotto tutela, sotto controllo: allora viene il bisogno di fuggire, di essere liberi. Liberi di soffrire, soprattutto, di abbandonarci al nostro dolore come ad un vizio, senza essere frenati neppure dalla pietà altrui (*Segreto*, p. 59).

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<sup>299</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Marianna Sirca* (Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2007), pp. 43-44. Further references to this edition will appear with the abbreviation *Marianna*.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

We see in this instance that identity can be governed too strongly by others and by society. As Kristeva states, one can only obtain true freedom in solitude, though this freedom may not be desirable, as Cristiano begins to see. Seeing the misery this existence has caused Sarina, and the psychological state of Giorgio, Cristiano decides to attempt to return to the real world. Sarina aptly describes the importance of the complexities of human identity when conveying her reaction to her way of life with Giorgio: ‘Adesso la natura non mi interessa più. Quando ci si è ripiegati una volta a guardare dentro l’anima nostra, tutto quello che è esteriore non interessa più: tutto è scolorito e semplice in confronto a quello che avviene dentro di noi’ (*Segreto*, p. 61). Her lonely existence with her husband has led to a colourless experience of the world, bereft of any feeling.

Giorgio, however, is beyond hope and even seeks solitude in order to obtain the utter freedom of death: ‘pareva chiedesse di lasciarlo morire solo, in pace, al buio’ (*Segreto*, p. 99) and later he succeeds: ‘Pareva aspettasse un momento in cui era solo’ (*Segreto*, p. 141). Cristiano is also overcome by a desire for death at certain moments: ‘Il cuore gli batté per la curiosità, la gelosia, il dolore di esser fuori di quella stanza, di esser fuori della vita’ (*Segreto*, p. 157). Death not only brings freedom, but a sense of truth, for in Giorgio's dying moments Cristiano comments that ‘ricordò di aver sentito dire che i pazzi quando stanno per morire riacquistano la ragione’ (*Segreto*, p. 99). In Pirandello's surrealist novella ‘Di sera, un geranio’, the unnamed protagonist narrates his sense of clarity and freedom as he is separated from his body after death.<sup>304</sup> For Pirandello too, death is one of the only ways in which to achieve total freedom. In a sense, however, Giorgio has been dead for some time. By embracing solitude he abandoned life itself and sacrificed his own identity for the

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<sup>304</sup> Pirandello, *Novelle per un anno*, III, pp. 2276-2278.

sake of a life alone. Cristiano draws this comparison with Giorgio at the latter's dying moment: 'Era un uomo vivente. E da tanto tempo ella viveva con un morto' (*Segreto*, p. 100).

Death is in fact the only certainty we have in life, for with it we leave the complications of interaction and misinterpretation. While Sarina's husband is very ill, the question of euthanasia arises and the freedom it can give to both the dying and the living:

Liberarsene; liberare i viventi dal peso inutile dei già morti. E poi? La vita passa lo stesso, e la morte arriva per tutti ed eguaglia tutte le cose. | - Ma appunto perché la vita passa presto, e la morte è la cosa più certa, perché non tentiamo di liberarci dal dolore con tutti i mezzi che possediamo? (*Segreto*, p. 105).

However, Cristiano throws further questions into the debate:

La libertà? Esiste? Sappiamo noi se dopo morti saremo liberi? Anche in vita abbiamo l'illusione di trovar libertà. Dove è? Si rompe tutto intorno a noi, si corre, si fugge, si ricade sempre nella rete che mescola gli uomini e li avvinghia gli uni agli altri solo perché sono uomini. Lei uccide un malato; ne trova subito un altro. Siamo tutti malati, tutti schiavi gli uni degli altri (*Segreto*, p. 106).

Life offers us no definite answers. Furthermore, we are all bound to one another, unable to function if not in a community. We are all sick, all crazy, trundling through the imprisonment of life, fully dependent on each other for any sense of meaning in an unreachable world. We see that in life there is no obtainable objective truth, and for Deledda's characters this means that they are caught 'fra l'ubriachezza dell'infinito e la paura dell'abisso' (*Segreto*, p. 167).

## **Conclusion**

As we can see, *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* explores many facets of the notion of identity. For Deledda, identity is conveyed as divided and multiple, being formed both by the self and by others' perception of it, but more importantly, and distinctly from

Pirandello, by emotional interaction with others and with one's environment. It is by preventing this interaction, and by denying himself the possibility of loving another that Cristiano is forced into his illusory state of madness, and only by allowing it once again can he enter the real world.

The reader, the narrator and Sarina experience Cristiano's reawakening into the world simultaneously. His identity is unfolded in the narrative as illustrated by the alternating references to him as 'l'uomo', 'il padrone' and 'Cristiano'. For a long period he keeps utter control over his own identity by cultivating silence. He does not share his name, even with the omniscient narrator, and he refuses to engage with anyone linguistically and therefore emotionally. The narrator, reader and characters are all kept at a suitable distance from him. As the novel progresses, however, he witnesses the potential dangers of a life of solitude in the experiences of Giorgio and Sarina. Choosing, rather, to embrace linguistic interaction and consequently the uncertainties of revealing oneself to another person, Cristiano engages with Sarina. As we learn of his own difficult past relationships with his mother and wife, however, his own sanity is brought into question much like that of Giorgio, and his identity remains as uncertain as it did at the outset of the novel.

The novel creates a surreal dialogue between dream and reality, madness and sanity, a dialogue which rests on Cristiano's wavering perception. His character puts forward many of the relativist, existential and artistic questions which were raised at the time regarding the obstacles of subjectivity. Through his interaction with Sarina, Cristiano ponders the inability to understand fully another person or indeed to know one's own self, the impossibility of complete freedom, the failure of language as a means of expression, the ineffability of reality and the possibility of overcoming these

subjective barriers through the freedom of so-called insanity. Antonio Piromalli describes Cristiano's modernist explorations as follows:

Cristiano è un altro vinto per mancanza di fede, per impossibilità di superare la nera siepe in cui si era chiuso, simbolo della coscienza che non può ritornare serena dopo l'offuscamento e l'errore. Con tale conclusione si rimane nell'ambito di un sottile tentativo di creare, distrutto il personaggio, un mondo lirico-psicologico assai vicino ai tentativi con cui il teatro esprimeva, in quegli stessi anni, una dimensione diversa dell'uomo, la sua angosciosa disperazione nello scambiare le parti della realtà e della finzione.<sup>305</sup>

We see that Deledda does not distort the reader's expectations in such an extreme, Pirandellian way. Instead, she sets her ideas in slightly more conventional narratives, without challenging the reader so directly, making the appearance of such topics all the more surprising. She does not disregard the expressive possibilities of writing entirely but engages with the idea of how far words can go to convey meaning, and therefore convey and control the nature of one's identity. She challenges socially accepted definitions of madness and considers the various facets which constitute identity, but she does not seek to embrace objectivity in her writing, as was the intention of naturalist and veristic authors. Subjectivity is still of great value to Deledda as can be seen in the beauty of her narrative descriptions, but she is also keen to contemplate many of the issues which arose from the modernist crisis. It is the harmonious blend of these two worlds which takes her writing beyond the conventions of *verismo* to which she has been tied.

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<sup>305</sup> Piromalli, p. 116.

#### **Chapter Four: Writing the Self: Identity and Language in *Cosima***

The notion of identity produces many problems and questions for Deledda's characters. Its construction and its conception in language prove to be important themes in the novels I have considered in the previous chapters, *La madre* and *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*. There we have seen that some characters are controlled by the narrative of others, namely Paulo, while others, such as Cristiano and Sarina, attempt to maintain power over themselves by dictating the degree of linguistic interaction undertaken. In this chapter, I wish to explore the way in which Deledda constructs an identity, particularly in relation to writing. I will, therefore, analyse the theme of identity in her most autobiographical work, *Cosima*.

*Cosima* is Deledda's final novel. It was completed during her lifetime but was published posthumously in 1937. The work narrates the story of Deledda's own life, beginning with the birth of her younger sister, Giovanna, and ending at the advent of Deledda's marriage to Palmiro Madesani. The genre of the text, however, is a source of ambiguity for it is narrated in the third person, and the narrative focuses on the life of a protagonist named Cosima, rather than Grazia. Deledda thus chose to assign her own middle name to this somewhat fictional character. Indeed, Mario Casu chooses to employ the term self-portrait rather than autobiography because of the self-interpretative nature of the text.<sup>306</sup> Although the genre of the work in question causes some uncertainty because of the autobiographical nature of its content and the fictional nature of its style, an issue I will address later in this chapter, for the sake of clarity I will refer to it as a novel throughout this thesis.

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<sup>306</sup> Mario Casu, 'Discussione su Grazia Deledda donna scrittrice: Funzione delle similitudini nell'autoritratto narrativo di *Cosima*', in *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. by Ugo Collu (Nuoro: Consorzio per la pubblica lettura di S. Satta, 1992), pp. 231-235 (p. 231).

The novel portrays Cosima's development as an individual, as a woman and, particularly, as a writer. We are given accounts of her relationships with various family members through the unfolding of several key childhood events. We witness her brother Santus' development into a bright student and his fall from grace as a result of his alcoholism. The deaths of Cosima's sisters, Giovanna, and later Enza, and the death of her father mark supreme tragedies for the family, which weigh particularly heavily on the protagonist's mother. Like many of her protagonists, Cosima is repeatedly confronted with the arduous realities of the world which contrast starkly with her ideals. She is caught up in a number of failed romantic attachments, succeeding only in her relationship with her reading public. Most importantly, the novel bears witness to Cosima's interest in literature and knowledge. The realm of the written word opens many doors for her, and leads her to discover her calling as a writer.

In short, *Cosima* depicts the formation of an identity that is closer to Deledda than any other of her characters, particularly with regard to its relationship with writing and language. We have seen in the previous chapters that Deledda employs language as a means of constructing and controlling the identity of many of her characters. Language is power, and for many, such as the eponymous mother of *La madre*, and for Cristiano in *Il segreto*, language signifies power over one's own or another person's identity. In Cosima/Deledda's case, as we will see, her identity is constructed through the process of writing itself, through the writing of her characters, and through the writing of her own life in literary form. She too, therefore, gradually gains power over her own identity through the medium of language.

In considering the integral relationship between identity and language in *Cosima*, I address two forms of language. Firstly, I analyse Deledda's use of

language, or more specifically narrative, in the novel and its relation to the notion of identity. Engaging once again with the philosophy of Adriana Cavarero, I explore the implications of Deledda revisiting the narrative of her own life through the writing of an autobiographical novel, showing how, by removing herself from the story of her life and narrating it, she is able to construct its meaning. I analyse the complex relationship between the narrator and the protagonist particularly with regard to the narrative perspective and narrative voice of the novel, and the varied use of tenses. The divide between Deledda, the creator, and Cosima, the created, reveals the way in which Cosima's identity is both formed and understood by the act of narrating.

Secondly, I consider the relationship between identity and the theme of language, particularly focusing on the concept of writing, which is such a central aspect of Cosima's development as an individual. Deledda is in fact doing more than recounting the events of her life: she is writing about herself as a writer. Like many of her other protagonists, Cosima has to battle against social restraints and familial expectations in order to form her own identity. For many of her characters, love affairs and illicit relationships are a means to attain self-fulfilment by expressing their desires and their inner selves. For Cosima, this rebellious love affair is one with the written word, for through writing fictional affairs in her novels she liberates her restricted self through the medium of language. Cosima's self-perception grows more confident as she pursues her aspiration to become a writer, following her own dreams rather than the dictated path set out for her by society. I therefore analyse the ways in which Deledda's identity is shaped through her relationship with writing in the novel. Drawing on the same philosophical questions relating to the definition of identity considered in previous chapters, I look at Cosima's struggle to align her sense of self with others' views of her. The novel explores the notion of authority over one's

identity, the division of identity between self and other, the importance of self-perception and self-projection, and the role of society in defining one's identity. As the previous chapters have centred upon male protagonists, it is important to consider briefly the significance of Cosima's position as a woman, and the possible notion that the silencing of her creative self is intrinsically linked to her gender. Although feminist ideas are not central to Deledda's work, and my study does not emerge primarily from a feminist reading, a discussion of the relationship between language and female identity is also pertinent in this chapter.

### **The context of the novel**

The novel was first published by the journal *Nuova Antologia* as *Cosima, quasi Grazia* in September-October 1936 and was later published by 'Treves' as *Cosima* in 1937.<sup>307</sup> Patrizia Guida notes that 'No biographical information exists regarding the last period of Deledda's life and the circumstances surrounding the writing of *Cosima*, since the writer lived in complete isolation.'<sup>308</sup> We simply know that the bound manuscript was found after Deledda's death by her son Sardus without a title and without a signature.<sup>309</sup> The first published title is very telling with regard to the relationship between the author and her protagonist. It highlights the close nature of their connection, reminding the reader that they are similar yet not exactly alike. The events and characters which form the narrative of *Cosima* mirror those of Deledda's own life. By narrating this story in the third person, however, she has chosen to distinguish herself from Cosima, though she maintains a certain connection by

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<sup>307</sup> Giovanna Cerina, 'Il favoloso apprendistato di Cosima', in *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. by Ugo Collu (Nuoro: Consorzio per la pubblica lettura di S. Satta, 1992), pp. 203-230 (p. 203).

<sup>308</sup> Patrizia Guida, 'Cosima quasi Grazia: A Novel, Almost an Autobiography', in *Across Genres, Generations and Borders*, ed. by Susanna Scarparo (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 38-55 (p. 53).

<sup>309</sup> Folli, p. 13.

bestowing her own middle name on the character. In this regard, the first version of the novel's title conveys more accurately its fictional and autobiographical aspects.

The novel depicts the story of Cosima's life from childhood to womanhood, tracking her struggle with the challenges of social expectations, romance and self-fulfilment. As the novel's plot spans many years, it offers a selection of specific events which are of importance to Cosima or to the other members of her family. Although these appear to be in chronological order, they do not follow a clearly linear narrative for the lives of various family members are woven into the story of Cosima's own life.

The novel begins by setting the scene of Cosima's upbringing, conveying to the reader several important events that occurred in and around her home. Initially, however, Cosima remains an observer, describing her impression of the world and conducting her own private explorations without yet taking an active role in the family's drama. The first of these significant events is the birth of Cosima's sister, Enza. Following this initial joyful occasion, however, the family is plagued by several tragedies. Her sister Giovanna dies during a cold winter, an event which has a great impact upon her mother, driving her further into quiet reclusion. Her brother Andrea, who seems to favour Cosima, is accused of stealing from their father, and is interrogated and scolded in a grim scene; and her more studious brother, Santus, brings greater disappointment to the family when he falls into alcoholism, destroying his hopes for the future.

The family endures several deaths during Cosima's young life, including that of her *nonna*, who is described as a fairy-like woman, and that of her father, a man who was small in stature but great in public regard. Both deaths are only mentioned very briefly in the novel, but the rigid, formal mourning which is imposed upon the

women of the family after the death of Cosima's father is an indication of Cosima's repressed status as a female in traditional Sardinian society.<sup>310</sup> Later, following a struggle to marry her poor sweetheart, Gionmario, Cosima's sister, Enza, dies of a miscarriage. It is this most dreadful tragedy that inspires Cosima to write.

Woven amongst these dramatic developments are descriptions of Cosima's inquisitive nature: 'Cosima voleva, voleva *sapere*.'<sup>311</sup> She pursues her own adventures as she develops a keen interest in reading and the intrigues of nature. Having lost faith in formal education, Cosima strives to teach herself about the world through her reading and exploring. Andrea enables a climactic moment of inspiration for her when he takes her to see the sea for the first time from the top of the nearby Monte Orthobene. This experience provokes a longing in Cosima to travel, to experience the world beyond the confines of Nuoro and its people.

When Cosima begins to write, the novel focuses more on the events of her own life. We witness her development as a woman and as a writer as she engages with romances, literary success and public scandal. She becomes infatuated with one of Santus's friends, Antonio, and later experiences her first kiss with a suitor named Fortunio. Feeling torn between her physical desire and sense of moral and social guilt, we witness the inner turmoil of a passionate woman in a restrictive environment. Despite this time of heartache, she continues with her creative ambitions, successfully publishing some of her work. She is asked to produce a photograph of herself for the publication, and is consequently forced to face her self-image, a reflection that she does not favour.

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<sup>310</sup> This reticent approach to death is similar to that of Natalia Ginzburg in *Lessico familiare* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963), an autobiographical novel which bears many resemblances to *Cosima* that I will consider later in this chapter.

<sup>311</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from the text are from the following edition: Grazia Deledda, *Cosima* (Milano: Mondadori, 1947), p. 31. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text with the abbreviation *Cosima*.

Her literary success continues to grow as she is interviewed by a journalist, but local opinion of her writing is continually negative. She is saddened to overhear her mother and the servant Elia discussing their concern that she will probably never marry, and therefore decides that she must move away from her home in order to bring some hope and contentment to her mother. Once again, she is divided by her familial loyalty and her own ambition. Elia is a former criminal who was welcomed into the family as a servant years ago by Cosima's father. When Elia saves a local boy from drowning, he falls ill and is cared for by Cosima and her mother. Wishing to help the family that has shown him such mercy, he confesses to Cosima that he has some money hidden, a fact that she questions given Elia's murky past. Meanwhile, Cosima's sister, Beppa, becomes engaged to the local schoolteacher who asks for a greater endowment than the family can afford. Cosima is consequently tormented with the idea that these funds could be of great financial help to the family, but she cannot tell Elia's secret. The situation is soon resolved when Beppa's fiancé dies and she is released from this costly engagement.

Cosima's own financial situation improves when she is paid for her writing, and she decides to take a trip to the city of K\*\*\* where a friend has invited her to stay. This is Cosima's first real adventure as she travels beyond the confines of Nuoro. Overwhelmed by all that she sees, Cosima feels as if she is in a dream, happier than she has ever been before. It was on this trip that Grazia Deledda met her husband Palmiro Madesani, who proposed very soon after meeting her.<sup>312</sup>

According to Remo Branca, Deledda's family were outraged when *Cosima* was published because it depicted certain elements of the family's past in a negative

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<sup>312</sup> Balducci, pp. 156-158.

light.<sup>313</sup> Deledda had to further her own education and her writing career in secret, stealing money by selling the family's supply of olive oil in order to fund her publications. Her work was met with public scandal as well as the disapproval of most of her immediate family, for the sinful romances of her works were regarded as taboo by society.<sup>314</sup>

Patrizia Guida's article of 2004 explores the critical debate as to whether *Cosima* may be incomplete, for according to Guida: 'We have absolutely no information regarding the author's plans for it, whether it was intended for publication, for example, or whether it was considered to be finished, and, therefore, intentionally covering only a specific period in Deledda's life.'<sup>315</sup> The text does not include many important events in Deledda's later life such as her marriage to Palmiro Madesani, her move to Rome, or her time of success as a writer, particularly her winning the Nobel Prize. Given the absence of this later period of the author's life, Guida proposes the possibility that Deledda may have died before completing the text.<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, the manuscript was left without a title and without the usual word 'fine' with which Deledda sealed all of her other works, and as Guida emphasises, the manuscript was not corrected and edited by the author herself.<sup>317</sup> These distinct features suggest that the manuscript was therefore incomplete at the time of Deledda's death in 1936.

On the other hand, many of the distinct features of this manuscript could be explained by its autobiographical nature and the particular relationship Deledda shared with it. According to Carolyn Balducci, the script was in fact finished and ready for publication before Deledda died, but she wanted it to be published

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<sup>313</sup> Branca, *Il segreto di Grazia Deledda*, p. 108.

<sup>314</sup> Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), pp. 62-63.

<sup>315</sup> Guida, p. 42.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

posthumously and so intentionally hid the script.<sup>318</sup> Furthermore, many of Deledda's other manuscripts remained unedited for the author would usually compose her work in one sitting. Guida notes that 'Evidence of the text's closeness to completion can be drawn from a statement made by Deledda: "Se un testo non mi riesce bene subito, lo distruggo, perché non ho la pazienza di rifare le cose."'»<sup>319</sup>

In my reading of the text, *Cosima* stands as a complete work for it examines a specific period of Deledda's life, namely the time of her struggle as a young writer. Remo Branca notes that it is interesting that Deledda believed the drama of her life had come to an end once she had become engaged.<sup>320</sup> It could be that this romantic attachment signalled the beginning of a new life for her. Elsewhere her dreams could be realised and she would no longer be restricted by the disapproval of those around her. Perhaps with her engagement to Madesani secured and a future away from Sardinia ahead of her, Deledda finally saw an end to the conflict she endured with the society that rejected her creative talents. Guida aptly describes Deledda as being 'ahead of her times in her way of conceptualising the position of women and rejecting the over-restrictive traditions of her world. Without giving up her role as a wife and mother she succeeded in freeing herself from an inferior position.'<sup>321</sup> The event that closes the narrative of the novel, therefore, marked an end to her conflict of identity as she was finally able to marry the two aspects of her self. She could fulfil the role expected by her family and society, and the role she had set for herself. By marrying Madesani, who was a great admirer of her writing, she could be both a wife and a writer.

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<sup>318</sup> Balducci, p. 190.

<sup>319</sup> Guida, p. 53.

<sup>320</sup> Branca, *Il segreto di Grazia Deledda*, p. 109.

<sup>321</sup> Guida, p. 50.

### Critical views of *Cosima*

Due to its autobiographical nature, and because it is the last of Deledda's works, *Cosima* has received greater critical attention than any of the other texts I have considered. Some critics have highlighted certain central themes which are of interest to my own study, namely the fictional dimension of the autobiography, the themes of love and writing, the blend of fantasy and reality, and especially, images of enclosure and flight. I will briefly consider these critical analyses before beginning my own exploration of the notion of identity and language in the text.

In his study of Deledda's work published in 1971, Antonino Tobia identifies the autobiographical element that ties Deledda's works together, claiming that she has woven aspects of her own life and experience into her fictional novels, reflecting her own identity in those of her characters. Tobia believes, however, that *Cosima* itself is not intended as an accurate autobiography. Unable to disentangle fiction from reality, Deledda gives a clearer glimpse of her own life in this novel, but does not fully abandon the realm of fantasy in so doing. Indeed, it is by writing in the third person that she is able to create some distance between herself and *Cosima*, creating a fiction of her own life: 'La scrittrice traccia la sua biografia ideale a cominciare dalla fanciullezza, ma la prima persona, adottata nel *Paese del vento*, è stata abbandonata, forse per quel senso di pudore che le ha suggerito di nascondersi sotto il suo secondo nome di battesimo.'<sup>322</sup> As we have seen, the tendency to hide is a common trait for many of her characters.<sup>323</sup> Frightened by the prospect of defining themselves rather than relying on the perspectives of other people, they often choose to withdraw from others and from themselves. Deledda's choice to hide behind the name and identity of *Cosima* can be construed as a further example of this.

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<sup>322</sup> Tobia, p. 42.

<sup>323</sup> Cristiano of *Il segreto* attempts to hide himself away from the world. Similarly, when confronted with his mother's condemnation, Paulo, in *La madre*, chooses to hide himself from his lover, Agnese.

In another study which gives an overview of Deledda's oeuvre, Neria De Giovanni's analysis of *Cosima* highlights its two central themes as love and writing.<sup>324</sup> De Giovanni points out the distinction between Cosima and Deledda's other characters: 'Il suo destino è quello di *scrivere* convegni d'amore, non già di *vivere* tali appuntamenti.'<sup>325</sup> According to De Giovanni, therefore, Deledda is only able to live these rebellious love affairs in her writing; it is a vicarious form of romance and fantasy. I wish to argue that her writing *is* her rebellious love affair. It is through writing that Cosima is able to define herself distinctly from those around her. De Giovanni discusses the central conflict of Cosima's life, that is, her struggle to become a writer despite her social and familial objections. I intend to present this conflict as a crisis of identity suffered by Cosima, similar to those suffered by many of Deledda's other characters. She is torn between her desire to become a writer and her desire to fulfil her social obligations.

Giovanna Cerina's article 'Il favoloso apprendistato di *Cosima*', published in 1992, discusses the blend of fantasy and reality Deledda creates. She regards *Cosima* as an opportunity for Deledda to look back at the truth of her life and combine it with the touches of fantasy and magic that characterise her other novels.<sup>326</sup> In my reading, this blend of fantasy and reality is a symptom of Cosima's divided sense of identity. Torn between the reality of Sardinian life and the fantasy of a creative life in Rome, she conveys both sides of her character in her rendering of her past. Cerina believes *Cosima* to be an attempt by Deledda to understand her past.<sup>327</sup> She aptly examines the divide between Deledda the narrator and Cosima the narrated, a distinction I will also consider in my own analysis:

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<sup>324</sup> Neria De Giovanni, *Grazia Deledda* (Alghero: Nemapress, 1991), p. 25.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>326</sup> Cerina, 'Il favoloso apprendistato', p. 226.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

Narratore e personaggio (due maschere complementari della figura dell'autrice) compiono insieme un viaggio nel passato, concordi nel volerne rispettare i contorni e lo spessore in termini di realtà, a patto che siano filtrati dalla fantasia. Su questo patto poggia l'accordo tra l'autrice e il suo personaggio, cosicché la piccola Cosima può conservare la libertà di reinventare il suo passato, di trasformare l'immagine di sé nell'eroina di una storia favolosa, che acquista diritto di esistere nel mondo finto delle fantasie letterarie.<sup>328</sup>

They are, in a sense, two further facets of her identity, for Deledda is able to view herself from the outside by narrating her own history. Cerina points out that the narrator has the advantage of knowing future things the protagonist does not.<sup>329</sup>

According to the philosophy of Adriana Cavarero, a person is only able to understand the meaning of their life if they regard it from a separate, external perspective:

Il significato del racconto sta infatti proprio in questo semplice *risultare* che non consegue ad alcun progetto, e nell'*unità* figurale del disegno. Detto altrimenti, il disegno – non dei tratti confusi, ma l'unità di una figura – non è ciò che guida fin dall'inizio il percorso di una vita, bensì ciò che tale vita si lascia dietro, senza poterlo mai prevedere e neanche immaginare. La cicogna si vede solo alla fine, quando chi l'ha tracciata con la sua vita o altri spettatori, guardando dall'alto vedono le orme *lasciate* sul terreno.<sup>330</sup>

In this way, therefore, Deledda needs to review her past from the external perspective of a third person narrator in order to gain an understanding of it. Both the narrator and the narrated play an equally important part in the formation and the understanding of Cosima/Deledda's identity.

Maria Giovanna Piano's study, which was published in 1998, takes a particular slant on its consideration of Deledda's work, for it focuses on female characters, particularly the figure of the mother. The mother has an influential role in several Deleddian novels, either through her presence or her absence. The mother can be formative, shaping the identity of her offspring, as we have seen in *La madre*. Her

<sup>328</sup> Cerina, 'Il favoloso apprendistato', p. 210.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., pp. 208-209.

<sup>330</sup> Cavarero, pp. 7-8.

neglect can be equally powerful, however, such as in *Cenere* (1904).<sup>331</sup> Piano identifies the relationship between Cosima and her mother, however, as relatively unimportant: ‘Il rapporto di Cosima/Grazia con la madre appare come un rapporto insignificante, incapace di dare senso alla vita di lei; la soggezione tiene tutte le sorelle Deledda a distanza dalla madre, esiliata nella sua stessa infelicità.’<sup>332</sup> I would argue that although this relationship is not a primary focus in the novel, and although Cosima’s relationship with her mother is not portrayed as a close one, it is certainly influential. Cosima is caught between her family’s desire for financial security and her dream of literary success. In many ways, she mirrors her mother’s reactions to certain tragedies, attempting to draw the family nucleus together while simultaneously fighting against it.

Piano also notes that of all Deledda’s characters, Cosima is the only female who successfully achieves true freedom:

L’unica esperienza di emancipazione femminile tradotta in romanzo (*Cosima*) è quella della scrittrice e sembra possibile e raccontabile proprio in quanto emancipazione positiva e ipotecata da una precisa assunzione di responsabilità; una emancipazione posta non sotto il segno della rottura e dell’abbandono, ma sotto un segno di fedeltà, sotto il segno di un’implicanza contrattuale che sembra sottendere il rapporto tra la scrittrice e la sua terra.<sup>333</sup>

She notes that Cosima’s freedom is a result of accepting her roots rather than fighting against them.

A complementary analysis of Deledda’s work can be found in Bruce Merry’s work *Women in Modern Italian Literature*, published in 1990. In his chapter on

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<sup>331</sup> *Cenere* tells the story of Anania, a boy who is born as a result of an affair. Having been abandoned to his father by his mother, Oli, Anania dedicates his entire life to searching for her. This journey is a quest for his identity, for a self-understanding that can only come from knowing his origins. In a sense, it is the same journey that Deledda undertakes by exploring her own origin through the writing of *Cosima*.

<sup>332</sup> Maria Giovanna Piano, *Onora la madre: autorità femminile nella narrativa di Grazia Deledda* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1998), p. 18.

<sup>333</sup> Piano, pp. 21-22.

Deledda's novels, he focuses on the depiction of women. Here he comments briefly upon *Cosima*, analysing the protagonist's relationship with her male relatives:

In the case of Grazia Deledda the concept of thralldom to maleness is a real possibility. Objectively speaking, we may say that the brothers who provide her first social role model are uneducated and churlish. Andrea, for example, siphons off most of the family's money into his own pocket. Cosima sees this state of affairs but she forgives them because they are, after all, men behaving like boys. Her own virtues then become faults because they are not those of a boy.<sup>334</sup>

Merry sees Cosima's identity as shaped greatly by her relationship with her brothers. As a woman, she regards herself as lacking in authority and so, to an extent, incapable of dictating her own behaviour and perhaps, eventually, her future choices. The female role assigned to her by society as a woman is an obstacle she grapples with throughout her life. Her sense of inferiority, therefore, which is associated with the dominance of her male relatives, diminishes over time as she gains a stronger sense of her own identity.

Merry similarly underlines Cosima's extremely obedient attitude towards her father:

Deledda's own subservience to her father is sketched, within the figure of Cosima, by the way she always calls him 'il signor Antonio' rather than by any Italian equivalent for the word 'Dad'. Her father is not seen playing with, or embracing, his child. When he dies, none of the women in the household except the maid can go out for several months.<sup>335</sup>

Cosima's submissiveness is not restricted to her father and brothers, however. Her instinct to obey and please runs throughout her relationships, but it is punctuated by an increasing desire to please herself. We will see that her perspective alters through the narrative, developing an awareness of the reciprocal impact of people on each other in their conflicting desires and expectations. Her respect for her family,

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<sup>334</sup> Merry, p. 7.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

therefore, lies in conflict with her own aspirations, and it is this conflict that she must resolve as she matures into an independent individual.

The most recent critical study of *Cosima* appears in the collection *The Challenge of the Modern: Essays on Grazia Deledda*, published in 2007. Ursula Fanning's article draws interesting comparisons between the characters of Cosima and Marianna Sirca.<sup>336</sup> Her analysis of the struggle for freedom endured by both women provides interesting insight into the depiction of the characters as restricted females. Fanning emphasises the significance of images of claustrophobia, confinement and liminality for the protagonists of both novels:

A sense of enclosure is felt by both male and female characters in Deledda's work [...] Those characters most relentlessly enclosed, however, are Marianna and Cosima and they are also the two who repeatedly and consistently envisage and attempt escape and flight. For that reason, I suggest, they are closely related to each other and, indeed, to their creator.<sup>337</sup>

Both women constantly search for a means of escape, often viewing themselves as caged birds on the brink of liberation. In my analysis of Cosima's identity which is trapped between two conflicting worlds, I will highlight the association of these images with the theme of the written word. Fanning also draws a link between the important features of Deledda's life, that is, love and writing: 'The salient link between these two themes is their potential to liberate. But writing and the erotic are both, equally and perhaps surprisingly, figured in this work as compulsive and physical. They are also, for Cosima, associated with subversion and rebellion.'<sup>338</sup> I intend to draw these themes even closer, for Cosima's writing is to her an actual love affair. The evocation of such rebellion in language is rebellion enough in itself, for it is through language that identity is most clearly defined. Deledda asserts control over

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<sup>336</sup> Fanning, pp. 215-236.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

her own identity in the form of Cosima and the narrative of her life. By tracing the steps of her development as a writer, therefore, she follows, and indeed re-writes, the liberation of her own self through the process of writing.

Furthermore, Fanning argues that Marianna Sirca and Cosima portray ‘more representative versions of her own self than any we may find elsewhere in the corpus of her work, and that both works present us with *dénouements* which comment, in ambiguous fashion, on the limited forms of self-determination available to women (writers or not) in her lifetime’.<sup>339</sup> I believe that Deledda’s comments on the restrictions of self-determination and self-definition are not exclusively associated with her female characters. As we have seen in previous chapters, her male protagonists Cristiano and Paulo undergo similar crises of identity as they face the inconsistencies in the many ways in which they are perceived. Cosima and Marianna Sirca both endure difficulties placed upon them by society because they are women in a patriarchal age. Their struggle, however, is more universal and more complex. Although they endeavour to free themselves from the views of others at times, they constantly waver between their own and other people’s definitions of their identities. In my view, therefore, the concept of the self is not simply a question of female emancipation, but a journey of self-exploration.

I wish to expand upon these ideas explored by Fanning by analysing the recurrent images of enclosure as a representation of Deledda’s restricted sense of self. I particularly intend to examine the relationship between Deledda’s exploration of her identity through language, that is, through the process of writing. By drawing upon Fanning’s interpretation of these modern ideas in Deledda’s work, I intend to examine the way in which Deledda constructs her own past and present identity through the

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<sup>339</sup> Fanning, p. 234.

narrative of *Cosima*, in the same way as she has done with many of her characters. The power of language over the self is most distinctly present in the self-conscious, self-construction of Deledda via Cosima in this autobiographical novel.

### **Narrative voice**

The narrative voice of *Cosima* causes difficulties for the definition of its genre, for although the narrative is written in the third person, its content is that of Deledda's own life. In order to consider the genre of *Cosima*, I wish to engage briefly with the problematic definition of autobiography. As conveyed by Karl Weintraub: 'Since the word "autobiography," by its derivation, means no more than the life recorded is the life lived by the writer, the reach of the term is very wide.'<sup>340</sup> A strict definition of autobiography itself is extremely difficult, for theorists are in disagreement as to its parameters, its division from fiction and particularly the significance of its intention. Linda Anderson astutely summarises these diverging approaches to the genre in her study, noting that for critics such as James Olney, the definition and thus limitation of the genre is 'virtually impossible',<sup>341</sup> leaving autobiography itself as 'ineffable and irreducible as the self it figures',<sup>342</sup> whereas critics such as Philippe Lejeune and George Gusdorf believe that the genre should be assigned boundaries, for it must be distinguished from fiction.<sup>343</sup> I do not intend to examine the parameters of autobiography at length; instead I wish to consider the pertinence of certain theories of autobiography in relation to *Cosima*.

For several theorists, the primary feature of autobiography is the author's exploration of his/her self. According to the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey,

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<sup>340</sup> Karl Weintraub, 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness', *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (1975), 821-848 (p. 822).

<sup>341</sup> James Olney, *Metaphors of Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 38.

<sup>342</sup> Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

‘Autobiography is merely the literary expression of a man’s reflection on his life.’<sup>344</sup> The focus of this reflection, however, is of significance, for Karl Weintraub emphasises that autobiography must enable an understanding of the authorial self rather than a mere depiction of it: ‘The genuine autobiographic effort is guided by a desire to discern and to assign meaning to a life.’<sup>345</sup> In this sense, therefore, *Cosima* can be described as an autobiography for its composition is a means for Deledda to gain an understanding of her own life and consequently of her own identity. Michael Sheringham aptly points out that the ‘will-to-form diagnosed in autobiography’, that is, the search for a united, cohesive self, emphasises the role of autobiography as a search for meaning in one’s identity rather than a truthful depiction of the author’s life.<sup>346</sup> According to Sheringham, however, this perspective ‘erodes excessively the distinction between autobiography and fiction.’<sup>347</sup>

Let us therefore consider *Cosima* in relation to the definition imposed on the genre by Philippe Lejeune’s seminal works on autobiography, which distinguish between pure autobiography and fiction: *L’autobiographie en France*, published in 1971,<sup>348</sup> and the subsequent study, *Le pacte autobiographique*, published in 1975.<sup>349</sup> According to Lejeune, autobiography should be defined as follows: ‘le récit rétrospectif en prose que quelqu’un fait de sa propre existence, quand il met l’accent principal sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité.’<sup>350</sup> This definition is maintained in his second study, with the additional detail that the aforementioned ‘quelqu’un’ should be someone real, rather than a fictional creation.

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<sup>344</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, ed. by H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 215.

<sup>345</sup> Weintraub, p. 824.

<sup>346</sup> Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>348</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *L’autobiographie en France* (Paris: A. Colin, 1971).

<sup>349</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

<sup>350</sup> Lejeune, *L’autobiographie en France*, p. 10.

Further to this definition, Lejeune adds that an autobiography must adhere to three necessary categories. Regarding its language, it must be an account written in prose. Secondly, its subject must be that of an individual's life, or the history of an individual's personality. The third regards the position of the author in relation to the text: the identity of the author, the narrator and the protagonist must be one and the same; and furthermore, the narrative must be written retrospectively. *Cosima* meets many but not all of these requirements. Since the narrative is composed in the third person, it is more difficult to argue that the author, protagonist and narrator all share the same identity. Indeed Lejeune states that most autobiographies are composed in the first person, though he does not state that this is true of all autobiographies.<sup>351</sup> He elaborates upon this declaration in *Le pacte autobiographique*, by admitting that the narrator and protagonist can be one and the same without the need for a first person narrative voice. He adds, however, that the use of a fictional name in place of the author's own name in a text prevents it from being classed as an autobiography:

Dans le cas du nom fictif (c'est-à-dire différent de celui de l'auteur) donné à un personnage qui raconte sa vie, il arrive que le lecteur ait des raisons de penser que l'histoire vécue par le personnage est exactement celle de l'auteur : soit par recoupement avec d'autres textes, soit en se fondant sur des informations extérieures, soit même à la lecture du récit dont l'aspect de fiction sonne faux [...] Aurait-on toutes les raisons du monde de penser que l'histoire est exactement la même, il n'en reste pas moins que le texte ainsi produit n'est pas une autobiographie : celle-ci suppose d'abord une *identité assumée* au niveau de l'énonciation, et tout à fait secondairement, une *ressemblance* produite au niveau de l'énoncé.<sup>352</sup>

When a fictional identity is adopted by the author, this is defined as an autobiographical novel. When the author decides to conceal his or her identity from the reader, or to mask it in some way, it is an autobiographical novel rather than an autobiography. According to Lejeune's analysis, therefore, *Cosima* should be

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<sup>351</sup> Lejeune, *L'autobiographie en France*, p. 16.

<sup>352</sup> Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, pp. 24-25.

regarded as an autobiographical novel, for the use of Deledda's second name is a form of '*identité assumé*'; it is a step taken away from Grazia Deledda herself.

Furthermore, the basis of Lejeune's definition is that the author enters into a form of 'pact' with the reader which defines the nature of the work he/she has created. By labelling the work as an autobiography, the author engages the reader's trust that he/she has promised to write the truth about his/her own life in this work:

Dans l'autobiographie, on suppose qu'il y a identité entre l'*auteur* d'une part, et le *narrateur* et le *protagoniste* d'autre part. C'est-à-dire que le « je » renvoie à l'auteur. Rien dans le texte ne peut le prouver. L'autobiographie est un genre fondé sur la confiance, un genre... « fiduciaire », si l'on peut dire. D'où d'ailleurs, de la part des autobiographes, le souci de bien établir au début de leur texte une sorte de « pacte autobiographique », avec excuses, explications, préalables, déclaration d'intention, tout un rituel destiné à établir une communication directe.<sup>353</sup>

Deledda enters into no such pact with the reader. Indeed, she left no title to the manuscript to indicate that it was an autobiography, and the use of Cosima's character steers us away from that conclusion. Michael Sheringham similarly highlights in his study of French autobiography that the autobiographer has at his or her disposal 'a variety of tags [...] which, when featured on a title-page, discussed in a preface, or alluded to in passing at any stage, can be used to signal (or camouflage) intentions.'<sup>354</sup> Sheringham adds that 'by eschewing such labels, and by adopting a non-committal or ironic title [...] the autobiographer may seek to sidestep the question of genre, and lay claim to generic indefiniton.'<sup>355</sup> In a sense, therefore, Deledda's decision to avoid a specific title which defines the text as an autobiography could reflect her authorial intention for this to be read as a novel. Furthermore, the use of Cosima's name rather than Grazia, engages the reader in a 'pacte romanesque' as outlined by Lejeune in his second study, underlining the text's status as a fictional novel. This can be created

<sup>353</sup> Lejeune, *L'autobiographie en France*, p. 17.

<sup>354</sup> Sheringham, p. 16.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

precisely by ‘*pratique patent de la non-identité* (l’auteur et le personnage ne portent pas le même nom)’.<sup>356</sup>

Although the genre of autobiography remains problematic, and *Cosima* could be regarded as a pure autobiography for some theorists such as James Olney, I believe that the term autobiographical novel is most suitably applied to this text which intentionally merges the fictional with the real. Having outlined some of the complexities of the novel’s genre, let us now look in more detail at Deledda’s use of the narrative voice. The events of *Cosima*’s plot are certainly those of Deledda’s own life.<sup>357</sup> Deledda has, however, chosen to adopt her other name, her second name in this work. In so doing she does not abandon her connection with her biography completely. By choosing *Cosima*, Deledda allows herself to write about her own life at a distance. She is able to address herself in the third person, dividing herself into the figures of narrator and character, observer and observed. She is both self and other in the process of constructing her identity.

Cavarero notes that any autobiography is a form of self-doubling, for the writer becomes both the protagonist and narrator of their own life-story:

Il carattere narrativo della memoria è infatti tutto ciò in cui il sé narrabile consiste senza tuttavia poter avere alcuna distanza dalla stessa. Raccontarsi è distanziarsi, sdoppiarsi, farsi altro. Non a caso la narratologia deve cimentarsi con ‘l’anomala coincidenza di autore, narratore e personaggio’ che è tipica dell’opera autobiografica. C’è così, nell’autobiografia, la strana pretesa di un sé che si fa altro per potersi raccontare, ossia di un sé che, utilizzando come specchio separato la memoria in cui inseparabilmente consiste, appare a se stesso come un altro: esterna la sua intima autoriflessione. L’*altro*, dunque, è qui il prodotto fantasmatico di uno sdoppiamento, la supplenza di un assente, la parodia di una relazione.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, p. 27.

<sup>357</sup> The main events of the plot are all described in Neria De Giovanni’s biography of Deledda, *Come la nube sopra il mare: vita di Grazia Deledda*, published in 2006 by Nemapress.

<sup>358</sup> Cavarero, pp. 109-110.

Autobiography is an attempt to view oneself from the outside, to examine the events of one's life from an external perspective in order to understand their meaning. This self-doubling is highlighted even more, however, by the use of the third person narrative voice, which creates a greater divide between the self and other that are created through autobiographical writing.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Kristeva deems it essential for the other to exist in order for the self to have meaning.<sup>359</sup> By writing in the third person, therefore, Deledda offers herself the opportunity to consider her life and herself from the outside. She is thus able to understand and give meaning to her own identity. She has detached herself from the story of her own life, approaching it as an external observer, presenting its meaning in a seemingly objective manner. According to Cavalerian philosophy, the meaning of a person's life can only be deduced afterwards, when it is narrated to them by another person, thus invoking the need for the other in the definition of one's identity: 'Come il disegno, che si vede solo all'alba dalla prospettiva di chi guarda dall'alto il terreno senza più calpestarlo, la storia può essere narrata solo dalla prospettiva postuma di chi non partecipa agli eventi.'<sup>360</sup> This quotation highlights a very Pirandellian notion, that is, a life can only be understood by someone who is not participating in its events.<sup>361</sup> Deledda is only able to understand the events of her life when she is not in the process of experiencing them. She is able to do this, therefore, through narrating the story of Cosima. By distancing herself from the story, she is not the protagonist who is living the events, but the narrator who is painting the picture from a future perspective.

As we will see, however, her external interpretation is not an objective one, and as the narrator's perspective occasionally interferes, we are clearly given a

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<sup>359</sup> See footnote 139.

<sup>360</sup> Cavarero, p. 8.

<sup>361</sup> This idea is illustrated in Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal*.

subjective interpretation of Cosima's identity. Indeed, Kristeva and Cavarero both believe that objectivity is impossible. To this extent, therefore, Ricoeur's emphasis on the necessity of self-interpretation is more relevant: 'For really, how can we ask ourselves about *what* matters if we could not ask *to whom* the thing mattered or not? Does not the questioning about what matters or not depend upon self-concern, which indeed seems to be constitutive of selfhood?'.<sup>362</sup> In this regard, the labelling of *Cosima* as an autobiographical novel rather than autobiography aptly reminds us of the interpretative and partially fictional nature of the work. Deledda is presenting her own interpretation of her life, emphasising what she regards as the most important aspect of it, namely, her development as a writer.

The self-interest of an autobiographical novel does not, however, discount the importance of the 'other' for whom it is intended, that is, the reader. No person writes an autobiography for their own benefit. As described by Michael Sheringham, 'To write is to presuppose a subsequent act of reading, and the imagined reader is another manifestation of the otherness with which the autobiographer must reckon.'<sup>363</sup> A writer has chosen to share their life with the reader, to relate it to an 'other' and thus to create a new perspective of their own existence. Furthermore, an autobiography is necessarily an account of a life which involved encounters with other people. Nobody lives in complete isolation, and so their identity is linked to their involvement with others. As conveyed by Cavarero:

La storia di vita di qualcuno risulta sempre da un'esistenza che, sin dall'inizio, lo ha esposto al mondo rivelandone l'unicità. Solo nel caso improbabile di una vita spesa in perfetta solitudine, nel deserto senza sguardi, l'autobiografia di un essere umano potrebbe raccontare l'assurda storia di un'identità inesposta, senza relazioni e senza mondo.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Ricoeur, p. 137.

<sup>363</sup> Sheringham, p. ix.

<sup>364</sup> Cavarero, p. 51.

Autobiography can therefore be regarded as an exploration of a writer's life, a subjective interpretation of its meaning presented for the benefit of the reading public. Autobiography does not, according to Cavarerian theory, enable a person to understand the meaning of their existence for they need the perspective of an external, impartial narrator. By adopting the third person narrative voice, however, Deledda has attempted to divide herself from the story of her life, creating this necessary narrative distance. She is thus able to review and recreate her identity through the process of writing.

In the course of my own research undertaken in the *Istituto Etnografico della Sardegna* in Nuoro, I examined the original manuscript of *Cosima*. There, I discovered that Deledda initially wrote sections of the work in the first person, and this was later corrected to the third person. In the edition of *Cosima* edited by Giovanna Cerina and published in 2005, she has noted several of these changes in her 'Nota al testo'. Given the different penmanship of these changes, Cerina has attributed the correction of narrative voice to the interference of those who had the manuscript after Deledda's death. It is likely, therefore, that her son, Sardus, made many of the alterations from the first to the third person:

La presenza di molteplici interventi, riconoscibili dal colore differente delle matite, dimostra che il testo fu oggetto di rimaneggiamenti, ad opera di curatori postumi, in occasione della pubblicazione in rivista prima e in volume poi, il primo dei quali risulta essere il primogenito della Deledda, Sardus Madesani, morto poco dopo la madre, nel 1937. A quest'ultimo sarebbero da attribuire quelli vergati con lo stesso inchiostro nero usato dall'autrice, ma distinguibili dal tratto più marcato, nonché dalla differente grafia. Gli unici, tra l'altro che entrano in merito alla sostanza del testo attenuando la crudezza di alcuni riferimenti a persone realmente esistite; riportando il testo alla terza persona (p. 76 ms: il nostro paese > il paese di Cosima; p. 86 ms: nel nostro Circondario > nel Circondario; p. 101 ms: per la nostra famiglia > la famiglia di Cosima; p. 103 ms: la

mamma > la madre); abbellendo il testo (p. 63 ms: strette > anguste; p. 70 ms: sviluppare > far fiorire; il crepuscolo > l'incerto biancore.)<sup>365</sup>

In the course of my own analysis of the manuscript, I found an additional alteration which has not been noted by Cerina. Given that the correction is merely made with the addition of brackets to the manuscript, it is difficult to establish who made it. When describing the time of Cosima's infatuation with Antonino, the original manuscript contains a present tense, first person comment which was removed from the published version. The manuscript reads: 'Egli non c'era, ma doveva pure qualche giorno venirci, (tengo) come tutti gli altri giovani della città, che anche se i loro parenti non erano quassù, combinavano gite e passavano anche la notte nel luogo incantevole.'<sup>366</sup> In the published editions, however, the 'tengo' has been removed (*Cosima*, p. 73). The inclusion of 'tengo' in this sentence would of course not make grammatical sense. It could perhaps be a comment inserted by Deledda, asserting her belief that he would one day arrive. On the other hand, this could be another example of the grammatical errors which editors attempted to correct. Patrizia Guida has pointed out that the editorial changes made to the original manuscript were intended to mask associations with real people and places described in the text, and to correct Deledda's use of language. Guida adds, however, that despite these efforts 'there are still some textual irregularities, such as gaps in the narrative or the occasional grammatical flaw: missing or incomplete words, erratic punctuation, or the unconventional use of tense.'<sup>367</sup>

The alterations identified by Cerina have been incorporated into the text of her edition of *Cosima*. As the above quotation indicates, she believed them to be

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<sup>365</sup> Giovanna Cerina, 'Nota al testo', in Grazia Deledda, *Cosima*, ed. by Giovanna Cerina (Nuoro: Ilisso, 2005), p. 29.

<sup>366</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Cosima* (Nuoro, Istituto Etnografico della Sardegna, Fondo Deledda, Donazione Madesani), fol. 158.

<sup>367</sup> Guida, p. 42.

appropriate as they are in keeping with the narrative voice of the rest of the novel. These alterations, however, were not included in the edition published by Mondadori in 1947. I have used the Mondadori edition of *Cosima* for references throughout this thesis. The following quotations provide a selection of examples which illustrate the use of the first person in the Mondadori edition and which have been eliminated in Cerina's edition: 'L'estate era certamente la nostra stagione più felice' (*Cosima*, p. 37); 'Vennero però tristi giorni anche per la nostra famiglia' (*Cosima*, p. 47); 'E anche nella nostra casa dunque s'era introdotto il male' (*Cosima*, p. 49); 'nella nostra cerchia primitiva, isolata' (*Cosima*, p. 57).

Although the novel is composed principally in the third person, we can see that there are many examples of error or perhaps hesitation on Deledda's part where she has opted for the first person. The choice of adopting the third person could be regarded as an attempt to create some distance from her fictional character. On the other hand, the occasional use of the first person, be it intentional or accidental, could indicate that she found it difficult to separate herself from the story of her life in this narrative. Either way, these rare variations in narrative voice demonstrate that her overall decision to narrate her story through *Cosima*, rather than in the first person was certainly intentional.

Deledda's decision to write her most autobiographical piece in the third person could also be viewed as a form of self-effacement. Nicoletta Simborowski analyses the significance of silences such as this in Italian women's writing in her study entitled *Secrets and Puzzles*. According to Simborowski, 'Women's autobiography has been a particularly problematic form owing to the clear tension between the requirements of writing about the self and the repressive effects of culturally-imposed

silence.<sup>368</sup> Although Deledda has not been considered in Simborowski's study, I would argue that this conflict should be considered in relation to Deledda, who was socially scorned because of her attempts to become a writer. Furthermore, according to Simborowski, 'it is acknowledged that women have a greater facility with language at an early age in a cross-section of the population, and also find it easier to learn foreign languages at later stages in their development.'<sup>369</sup> She highlights that there is a contradiction between women's natural ability with language and society's desire to silence them. This idea is particularly pertinent to Deledda who was raised to speak the Logudoro dialect. She learned Italian largely independently from school and consequently gained a proficiency that allowed her to compose her extensive oeuvre in Italian. Despite Deledda's obvious talent for language acquisition and her creative skill with words, society and indeed her own family wished to silence her.

Simborowski argues that silence can represent a writer's subconscious effort to censor aspects of him/herself in a text and that this largely results from society's dismissal of the value of the female voice:

The 'identity crisis' peculiar to the woman writer, whether of fiction or autobiography, was significant in the effect it has had on the style of women's writing. It seemed that the various and conflicting self-images available for women have resulted in certain literary tendencies, which included motifs and tropes of silence or muteness, the displacement of the female figure from the centre of the narrative even when a text was ostensibly about a woman, and strategies for talking about the female 'self' that involved concealment.<sup>370</sup>

Simborowski cites Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare* as a prime example of silence in women's writing. Like *Cosima*, *Lessico familiare* is best described as an autobiographical novel rather than an autobiography, although it is based on the author's own life. Ginzburg herself highlights this tension in her introduction where

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<sup>368</sup> Simborowski, p. 107.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

she openly declares to have written nothing but the truth. She claims: ‘Non ho inventato niente’,<sup>371</sup> and yet she advises the reader to approach the work as a novel. The term autobiographical is still problematic with regard to this work despite the author’s assertion to its truth, for the focus of the story falls on Natalia’s family and the people she encountered rather than on the events of her own life: ‘Questa difatti non è la mia storia, ma piuttosto, pur con vuoti e lacune, la storia della mia famiglia.’<sup>372</sup> In this sense, although the novel is narrated in the first person, its protagonist remains somewhat hidden in the background. The author’s voice is therefore muted, obscuring the details about her own identity. This narrative silence is heightened further by the author’s unwillingness to talk about certain painful topics, keeping the reader at a suitable distance. It has, as the author states, many gaps and empty spaces, a void of personal emotion that Ginzburg chooses not to fill. According to Simborowski:

In the light of the author’s writings on silence and her recourse to psychoanalysis, I would suggest that this absence at the centre of an ostensibly autobiographical work implied an unhealthy self-effacement, concealing painful emotions of many kinds, a deliberate self-effacement belied by the apparently detached tone of the narrative.<sup>373</sup>

Similarly, Deledda places an emphasis on her family at the beginning of *Cosima*, keeping the protagonist somewhat in the background as the early events unfold. Initially, although Cosima is present, she does not participate in the world around her. The narrative describes her perspective as she observes her environment, exploring it but not yet living her own life in it. We are given detailed descriptions of her perception of family members, of her exploration of the house, of her experiences of phenomena such as snow and fire, and her wonder at the art of story-telling. Words

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<sup>371</sup> Natalia Ginzburg, ‘Avvertenza’, in Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963), p. XXI.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XXI.

<sup>373</sup> Simborowski, p. 91.

associated with perception are used frequently in relation to Cosima such as ‘guardare’, ‘vedere’, ‘sentire’ and ‘sembrare’, all of which emphasise the peripheral nature of Cosima’s presence at the beginning of the novel: ‘La piccola, Cosima [...] le guarda con ammirazione’ (*Cosima*, p. 9); ‘Cosima provava uno strano senso di sogno quando la vedeva apparire d’improvviso’ (*Cosima*, p. 11); ‘Cosima, poi, sentiva per lui un senso sconfinato di confidenza’ (*Cosima*, p. 14); ‘Il babbo [...] le sembrava alto’ (*Cosima*, p. 14).

The focus on Cosima becomes stronger as the narrative proceeds and as Cosima’s self-confidence develops. Cosima eventually places a greater emphasis on the value of her own view of herself, of her own aspirations and opinions. Simultaneously, the events narrated relate more and more to Cosima, rather than to the other members of her family. The events described appear to be of greater significance in Cosima’s own life, placing her at the centre of the narrative, just as she places herself at the centre of her own life’s narrative. Most importantly, the narrative concentrates more and more on Cosima when she begins to write. A turning point comes with the death of her sister, Enza. This is not Cosima’s first experience of death, as she has already lost her sister Giovanna and her father, but the tragedy appears to spark a greater reaction in her. She does not speak of her own response to these other deaths in the family, rather, she only comments on the impact it had on her mother and her brother, Santus. Following Enza’s death, which she experiences firsthand by finding her sister’s body, she feels compelled to write, expressing herself in her stories and poetry.<sup>374</sup> From this point onwards, Cosima takes a more central role in the narrative of the novel, and therefore appears to be gradually taking control of her own voice.

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<sup>374</sup> *Cosima*, p. 56.

Simborowski also notes that women writers in particular often choose to use a third person narrator to mask an autobiographical narrative. Displacement of the female voice in this way is indicative of a psychological reluctance towards self-expression in conflict with a desire to articulate female experience. It is interesting to note here that Deledda has chosen to write about her own experiences in the third person, in the form of several of her protagonists,<sup>375</sup> and especially in the form of Cosima. It could be argued, therefore, that Deledda's distancing of herself from her narrative past is also reflective of her identity conflict, for her voice was frequently silenced by the objections of her family and society. She wishes to express her experience and her identity through her writing but is conflicted in her reluctance to displease her family.

### **Narrative tenses: the division of past and present**

As we have seen, the distance created between Deledda and the persona of Cosima is similar to the distance maintained by Ginzburg from her narrative persona in *Lessico familiare*. Both of these autobiographical texts share another common technique: that of a varied use of tenses throughout the narrative to highlight the connection and the distance between the character of the past and the narrator in the present. Although Deledda often employs the present tense to describe the past in her novels, the use of the present tense in this autobiographical text is particularly interesting given that the events narrated in the present tense form part of the author's own past.

The narrative of *Cosima* incorporates the imperfect, the past historic and the present tense, evoking both the distance between the narrator and the protagonist, and their close relationship. Simborowski's study of silence proposes that a change in

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<sup>375</sup> *Il paese del vento* (Milano: Mondadori, 1981) is considered to be Deledda's second most autobiographical work of fiction. Furthermore, her own crisis of identity and conflict with society is traced in the lives of several other characters, such as Marianna Sirca, Paulo and Cristiano.

tense can be regarded as a gap, a silence in itself,<sup>376</sup> and that it draws attention to the arbitrary relationship of language and reality, and calls into question the authority of the author. The reader is, therefore, naturally led to wonder who is talking and who is in control of the story. Most of the narrative is written in the imperfect as it describes constant features of the protagonist's past: 'La casa era semplice, ma comoda' (*Cosima*, p. 3). Individual incidents are added in the past historic, marking their permanent state in a completed period of her life: 'Cosima cercò di prender posto fra le sorelle, ma le due maggiori, al solito, la respinsero e la punzecchiarono' (*Cosima*, p. 23). However, the narrative often slips into the present tense, maintaining a third person narrative voice, but creating a stronger connection between the narrator and the character of Cosima: 'Ecco che anche lei fa la comparsa in cucina, portata a mano dalla nonna' (*Cosima*, p. 11).

In order to engage with the subject of Deledda's use of tenses, I wish to employ certain theories laid out by Harald Weinrich in his study of tenses in narrative, *Tempus: besprochene und erzählte Welt*.<sup>377</sup> Weinrich assigns two categories of narrative tense: the past historic, imperfect, pluperfect and conditional tenses are all 'raconté' and the remaining tenses are 'commenté'. The tenses considered 'raconté' are those usually employed for the purposes of fictional narrative, whereas 'commenté' would be used for more factual or critical accounts. In a sense, therefore, the mixture of tenses employed by Deledda in *Cosima* is already indicative of its semi-fictional nature.

Weinrich describes the imperfect as a tense which is used frequently to denote a narrative, that is, a story being told. According to Weinrich, it is used in many ways

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<sup>376</sup> Simborowski, p. 12.

<sup>377</sup> All quotations are taken from the following French translation of *Tempus: besprochene und erzählte Welt*: Harald Weinrich, *Le temps: le récit et le commentaire*, trans. by Michèle Lacoste (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).

to distinguish between fiction and reality, and between the story and the reader. He argues that the use of the imperfect tense invites the reader into the realm of the narrative, and distinguishes it from that of the reader. Its consistent use, therefore, reminds the reader that they are perceiving a different world from the one they know.<sup>378</sup> The imperfect tense which dominates *Cosima*, therefore, presents it as a story to the reader.

Furthermore, the imperfect tense is ascribed to what Weinrich calls the ‘arrière-plan’ of a narrative. This is the background, the environment in which the main events of a plot occur. When these more central events are narrated, the narrative often changes to the past historic tense, thus moving to the ‘premier plan’.<sup>379</sup> In *Cosima*, there are several instances in which the imperfect tense is used to describe the setting of an event, or the nature of a character, interspersed with actions described in the past historic. For example, the description of Cosima’s father illustrates this different use of tenses: ‘egli coltivava anche gli studi poetici: le sue poesie erano dialettali [...] raccoglieva a volte intorno a sé altri campioni famosi [...] e competeva coi più bravi e ispirati. [...] Tentò piantagioni di agrumi [...] Impiantò anche una piccola tipografia e stampò a sue spese un giornaleto’ (*Cosima*, p. 45).

The past historic in the novel certainly denotes events in the past which occurred and are now completed. These events, however, are often also narrated using the present tense. At the opening of the novel, for example, the house in which Cosima grew up and which remains the principal setting for most of the novel’s events is described in the imperfect: ‘Nell’angolo vicino alla finestra sorgeva il forno monumentale [...] per lo più le vivande si cucinavano alla fiamma del camino’ (*Cosima*, p. 4). The imperfect tense here serves both to set the scene and to convey the

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<sup>378</sup> Weinrich, p. 47.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

habitual behaviour of Cosima's family. On the following page, however, when Cosima is first introduced, the present tense is used: 'A questo portone, una mattina di maggio, si affaccia una bambina bruna' (*Cosima*, p. 5). The event described is also one which has been completed in the past. The present tense, however, creates a sense of connection with the character. These moments are being relived through their telling.

Weinrich also notes that the imperfect and the past historic tenses, can distinguish between the narrator and the narrated, i.e. the protagonist. They do not place the narrator in a future time from that of the protagonist, rather they divide the two. They simply indicate that the narrator is not the protagonist but that he/she is presenting the protagonist to the reader.<sup>380</sup> The tenses in *Cosima* can, therefore, be initially divided into those in the past tense and the present tense which signify the gap between the narrator and the protagonist. The imperfect and past historic tenses represent the perspective of the narrator. Although the present tense still employs the third person narrative voice for the most part, it is usually more directly linked to the perspective of Cosima. For example, Cosima's divided loyalties to herself and to her family are illustrated by the narration of the moment she chooses to steal oil from the family's resources. Her determination to succeed is narrated in the present tense: 'Ma poiché è necessario andare avanti a tutti i costi, ecco che la scrittrice, la poetessa, la creatura delle nuvole, scende in cantina e ruba un litro d'olio' (*Cosima*, pp. 75-76). At this moment she embodies the creative side of her identity, following her own ambition and desire. Switching to the perspective of the omniscient narrator and thus adopting the past historic, her allegiances are divided: 'È vero che poi rivelò il peccato al confessore, dicendo di aver rubato, senza però rivelarne il motivo'

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<sup>380</sup> Weinrich, p. 58.

(*Cosima*, p. 76). She knows that stealing the oil was wrong, and although she can initially justify it to herself for the sake of her ‘gloria’ (*Cosima*, p. 76), she still feels a duty to her family and to God. Her confession is guarded, however, protecting her passion for writing which is so important to her. By keeping the reason for her act of theft a secret, and by controlling her use of language, she maintains power over her actions. The present tense also propels the action to the fore, adding immediacy and poignancy. Her silence in this case conveys the control she wishes to maintain over that aspect of her identity, even though it is plagued by guilt. The divide in her identity as poet and daughter, and as protagonist and narrator, is therefore highlighted even further by the differing use of narrative tenses.

On the other hand, the present tense often draws attention to the connection between Cosima and the narrator. As suggested by Margherita Heyer-Caput: ‘It is interesting to note that [...] the presence of ironic interventions of the narrating voice intensifies and uses repeatedly the sudden switch from the diegetic past tense to the mimetic present tense.’<sup>381</sup> We see, for example, that there is a temporary change to the present tense as the focus moves from the people in her environment to Cosima: ‘Fra questa gente e in questo ambiente cresceva dunque la piccola Cosima: adesso ha sette anni e va anche lei a scuola’ (*Cosima*, p. 29). With the change in tense, the attention of the narrative descends on Cosima like a camera zooming onto its subject.

The present tense can also evoke the connection between Cosima and Deledda, whose voice in the future has a greater knowledge of what is to come in Cosima’s life. For example, when Cosima recalls her admiration of Antonino, an ambiguous subjunctive is used which suggests that the feelings she once felt for him are still clear to Deledda: ‘Tutto era luminoso, in lui, in quel momento, e la luce d’oro

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<sup>381</sup> Heyer-Caput, p. 194.

del tramonto pareva scaturisse dai suoi occhi, dal suo viso bruno, dai capelli raggianti. Per tutta la sua vita Cosima lo ricordò così: e basta ancora che pensi a lui per sentire una gioia misteriosa' (*Cosima*, p. 67). The subjunctive, 'che pensi a lui', could refer either to Cosima in the past or Deledda in the present, and we are thus reminded of the important connection between the narrator and the protagonist. The narrator maintains a more knowing, future perspective and, in a Cavarerian sense, is able to shed light on the events of the protagonist's life, inferring its meaning: 'Al contrario dello spettatore, il narratore tuttavia non è presente agli accadimenti e ha perciò su di essi, come lo storico, uno "sguardo retrospettivo". Egli conosce meglio degli altri ciò che è accaduto proprio perché non partecipa direttamente al contesto delle azioni da cui è risultata la storia.'<sup>382</sup> The use of the present tense, however, also highlights the subjective nature of the narrative. The narrator, knowing the final outcome of the story, shapes the way in which the protagonist's past is portrayed to the reader. Despite the use of a third person, therefore, there is an inevitable subjectivity that makes this self-portrait an intentional form of self-definition. For as Cavarero states, 'per il significato e la verità della storia, è indispensabile che chi la racconta non sia coinvolto nell'azione del suo protagonista.'<sup>383</sup>

### **Narrative perspective**

Although the narrative is carried by an external, third-person voice, it is told almost exclusively from the perspective of Cosima throughout the text. The narrative only diverts from this occasionally by adopting a more omniscient perspective, often indicative of the interfering voice of Deledda. For example, the phrase 'Bisogna dire' draws attention to an omniscient narrator who is describing the characters and events

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<sup>382</sup> Cavarero, p. 38.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

from an external perspective to that of Cosima: ‘Soddisfatta, rientrò nella cucina e aspettò [che] la serva finisse di cuocere il latte per la colazione. Bisogna dire due parole di questa serva, che, a ricordarla, sembra anch’essa una invenzione fuori della realtà’ (*Cosima*, p. 7). The phrase highlights the act of narrating itself, and the change of tense in this instant serves to emphasise this divide in narrative perspective even further. We are also made aware of the narrator’s interference when additional, contextual information is required: ‘Parlava sempre di banditi e delle loro imprese brigantesche. Bisogna dire che, in quel tempo, il banditismo locale aveva ancora un carattere quasi epico’ (*Cosima*, p. 39).

Most of the narrative, however, conveys the events and other characters from Cosima’s perspective, as illustrated in the following examples: ‘Le due sorelle maggiori dovevano sistemarsi nella camera alta, per lasciar posto, nel letto di Nanna, a lei Cosima’ (*Cosima*, p. 10); ‘La nonna, poi, le ricordava [...] certe donnine favolose’ (*Cosima*, p. 11); ‘Queste fantasie barbariche non le mancavano nella mente.’ (*Cosima*, p. 13.) The repeated third person subject and object pronouns ‘lei’ and ‘le’ refer to Cosima, who indirectly presents her memories, opinions and interpretations of the world around her.

Cosima is the first character to be introduced, although this only occurs on the third page of the novel.

A questo portone, una mattina di maggio, si affaccia una bambina bruna, seria, con gli occhi castanei, limpidi e grandi, le mani e i piedi minuscoli, vestita di un grembiale grigiastro con le tasche, con le calze di grosso cotone grezzo e le scarpe rustiche a lacci, più paesana che Borghese, e aspetta, dondolandosi su una gamba su e una giù, che passi qualcuno o qualcuno si affacci a una finestra di fronte, per comunicare una notizia importante (*Cosima*, p. 5).

She is immediately presented as a poor, socially restricted but creative character who wishes to share stories of her own invention with other people. This little girl eagerly

awaits the passing of any other person so that she can relate the news that her baby brother has been born. In actual fact, it is a baby sister that Cosima has received, but she chooses to bestow the identity of a brother on Giovanna, which is perhaps a further indication of her creative, inventive nature from an early age and from her very first mention in the novel. Furthermore, despite her impoverished appearance, she is of a happy disposition, blissfully unaware at this stage of the challenges she will encounter.

### **Cosima's changing self-perspective**

Cosima's name is not actually given until page nine of the novel. As with Cristiano in *Il segreto*, we are let into the fantastical world of this little girl's mind very slowly, and this is mirrored in the gradual way in which she is introduced to the reader. As we will see, her perspective of the world alters as she grows older, and her understanding of reality and its tragedies develops alongside her imagination. Cosima's identity, therefore, takes shape as the narrative progresses. She becomes aware of the role assigned to her by society and her family, as well as her naturally creative instincts which eventually burst into a desperate, physical need to write. The narrative depicts the importance of both language and family in Cosima's life, for it is these two initially opposing forms of her identity which lie at the heart of her self-exploration.

The story is narrated from Cosima's perspective as it evolves over time. Her increasing understanding of the world is reflected in the way in which events are depicted, and occasionally by comments from the narrator who reflects upon the difference between Cosima in the past and Cosima/Deledda in the present as an older, more knowing woman. We are presented with an innocent lack of understanding of life's very beginning when her new baby sister, Giovanna, is born. In an attempt to

quieten the excitable Cosima, her brother, Andrea, promises to take her to Monte Orthobene the following day. Cosima looks on with her ‘grandi occhi [...] lucenti di gioia e di speranza’ (*Cosima*, p. 10), an image representative of her child-like enthusiasm and curiosity. At this early stage, Cosima mingles dream with reality, associating her excitement about the next day’s adventure with the mystery of this new inexplicable life: ‘e questa promessa del fratello, piena di lusinghe e di visioni straordinarie, si mischiò alle sue fantasticherie intorno al mistero della creatura nata quella notte in casa, venuta non si sa [di] dove, non si sa come né perché’ (*Cosima*, p. 10). The baby is like a creature of fantasy, brought into the world from an unknown land by biological means that Cosima is as yet unable to comprehend.

The novel opens with a detailed three page description of Cosima’s family home. The description places an immediate emphasis on the importance of the family nucleus as the stronghold of Deledda’s upbringing:

La casa era semplice, ma comoda: due camere per piano, grandi, un po’ basse, coi pianciti e i soffitti di legno; imbiancate con la calce; l’ingresso diviso in mezzo da una parete: a destra la scala, la prima rampata di scalini di granite, il resto di ardesia; a sinistra alcuni gradini che scendevano nella cantina (*Cosima*, p. 3).

The sense of detail is emphasised by the repetition of the conjoining ‘e’: ‘Gli oggetti più caratteristici stavano sulla scansia; ecco una fila di lumi [...] e accanto l’oliera [...] e il piccolo orcio [...] e un armamento’ (*Cosima*, p. 4). This detailed description continues for three pages, covering every feature of the building before introducing the first character: Cosima. It is true that throughout Cosima’s young life, her family and their house are at the centre of her life. The emphasis here is on its familiarity, and its welcoming, warm atmosphere: ‘E la cucina era, come in tutte le case ancora patriarcali, l’ambiente più abitato, più tiepido di vita e d’intimità’ (*Cosima*, p. 3). As

Cosima's character develops, however, she comes to view this house as a prison rather than a home, a cage which restricts her creative aspirations.

Cosima's naivety is coupled with acute curiosity. Whenever she finds herself in a new environment she is eager to explore and discover all that she can: 'Cosima non esitò ad esplorare la grande stanza, che anch'essa rappresentava per lei un ripostiglio di misteri' (*Cosima*, p. 12). Deledda sets the scene of her protagonist's upbringing by leading Cosima to explore the house, as she herself must have done as a young girl. We are thus given a glimpse of the life Deledda led and of the life she saw emerging for her from that poor Sardinian home.

Cosima describes the house from bottom to top, symbolically ranking the location of her family members and consequently of her own future. She begins in the kitchen, the house's *cantina*, where she admires the delicate plates which are placed out of her reach. She respects this necessary restriction for she is not yet worthy to touch them: 'era giusto che le cose lassù non dovessero toccarsi come non si toccano i sacri oggetti dell'altare' (*Cosima*, p. 17). This crystal plate is a thing of beauty to Cosima: 'rappresentava l'arte e la bellezza' (*Cosima*, p. 17). Even in the depths of the family's *cantina* she can find the art and creativity that she so admires. She describes the porcelain as 'una rosa vera che è proibito di cogliere' (*Cosima*, p. 18). These objects of beauty must, for now at least, remain physically and metaphorically out of her reach. This is something that Cosima 'capì molto più tardi' (*Cosima*, p. 17), a reference which reminds us of the interfering voice of the narrator.

As she climbs the stairs to explore further, she looks around to contemplate the significance of this place. Deledda juxtaposes the ambitions of a creative Cosima with the traditional life that is expected of her: 'E la piccola sognatrice pensa che un giorno dovrà anche lei sposarsi, come la madre, come le zie, ed abitare lassù, e in quei

fornelli manipolare i cibi per sé e la famiglia' (*Cosima*, p. 18). She aligns herself with the other women of her family, seeing no choice in the future ahead of her. Although this reflection is not a particularly negative one, it depicts the planned life that Cosima felt she had, and this conflicts with the inquisitive dreamer that is depicted.

Cosima's curiosity is principally fixed on the written word. The thing that is placed above all else in her description of the home is the bookcase in her brothers' room, suitably kept away from the girls. Her social position is again highlighted by the dowdy image of the bedrooms, a description which contrasts, however, with the cultural wealth of books to be found in the boys' room:

Per adesso le due camere [...] sono le più povere della casa [...] ma in quella dei ragazzi esiste pure una grande ricchezza; uno scaffale pieno di libri: libri vecchi e libri nuovi, alcuni di scuola, altri comprati da Santus nell'unica libreria della piccola città. Cosima non sa ancora leggere, ma capisce le figure, e sebbene anche qui sia proibito di toccare, apre piano piano un grande libro di fogli grossi, anzi di cartoni color cilestrino, tutti segnati di punti gialli, ch'ella sa che cosa sono: sono le stelle, nell'atlante celeste (*Cosima*, p. 18).

Cosima longs to read these treasures which remain prohibited to her, a detail which reminds us of the rebellion she undertook through writing. The books, which contain the stars of her sky, represent her greatest aspiration. Although she cannot yet read them, she knows the value that lies within. Deledda wishes to emphasise that language, particularly written language, is of great importance to Cosima throughout her life. Even before she can understand its meaning, she can appreciate its significance.

Without knowledge of written language, Cosima is still able to appreciate the value of language in the form of stories. Cosima is familiar with countless 'racconti briganteschi' that have been recited to her by locals since she was a child (*Cosima*, p. 23). These tales were important to Deledda who transposed many of them into her

own written versions at a later point in her writing career.<sup>384</sup> These stories have a great impact upon Cosima. They encourage her sense of adventure, her interest in the lives of others and most importantly, her interest in the effect of story-telling. When the servant, Proto, tells the children the tale of ‘il muflone’, Cosima is amazed at the depth of its insight and beauty: ‘La storia piacque a Cosima. [...] soprattutto le destava una impressione profonda, quasi fisica, il mistero della favola, quel silenzio finale, grave di cose davvero grandiose e terribili, il mito di una giustizia sovranaturale, l’eterna storia dell’errore, del castigo, del dolore umano’ (*Cosima*, p. 27). This almost physical impact is very profound, marking an interest in language and literature for Cosima that will last throughout her life.

When Cosima is old enough to start school, she is able to move straight into the ‘seconda elementare’, skipping a year because she is already able to read more than others of her age. At this point, she has been taught to read certain things by *il signor Carlino*, who owns the local bookshop. Amid the local things which all prove fascinating to Cosima, shops and cafes all described as a ‘mervaglia’ (*Cosima*, p. 30), the greatest of these is certainly *il signor Carlino*’s bookshop: ‘quella che più interessa la nostra scolarotta è la libreria del signor Carlino, dove si vendono i quaderni, l’inchiostro, i pennini; tutte quelle cose magiche, insomma, con le quali si può tradurre in segni la parola, e più che la parola il pensiero dell’uomo’ (*Cosima*, p. 30). Here, Cosima engages with the concept of language and its potential power. As we have seen in previous chapters, Deledda explores the importance of language in her works as well as the relationship between language and identity, between language and the formation of the self. For Cosima too, language represents great power. It enables the expression of human thought, and consequently, the expression of the self. This

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<sup>384</sup> For example, the story ‘Il muflone’ that Deledda heard as a child from the servant, Proto, was transposed into the script of *Cosima*. *Cosima*, pp. 23-27.

concept is particularly pertinent to this autobiographical novel, for as Sheringham states, ‘the autobiographical self is constructed in language.’<sup>385</sup>

Cosima’s passion for reading is greatly linked to her passion for knowledge. There is great emphasis placed on her desire to know the world, to break beyond the boundaries of her somewhat small, rural existence: ‘E Cosima voleva, voleva *sapere*: più che i giocattoli l’attiravano i quaderni; e la lavagna della classe, con quei segni bianchi che la maestra tracciava, aveva per lei il fascino di una finestra aperta sull’azzurro scuro di una notte stellata’ (*Cosima*, p. 31). Once again, it is language that draws Cosima’s attention. The words drawn on the blackboard in school represent a gateway to knowing the wider world, and all that lies beyond Cosima’s known existence. They lead the way to the starry night sky, a repeated image which conveys the height of Cosima’s creative aspirations.

### **Cosima’s changing view of the world**

Through *Cosima*, Deledda composes the story of her own life as a writer. She therefore selects a portion of her past which best conveys her view of her self. As described by Weintraub, autobiographical writing ‘is expected to have recaptured a significant segment of a life, a formidable portion of an experience.’<sup>386</sup> We witness the evolution of her relationships with family members and other local characters, her exploration of nature, love and travel, and her growing interest in reading, writing and all things literary. As her interest in these concepts expands, so does her interest in her own being. She develops a greater understanding of herself as an individual, of her expected place in society and of her contrasting view of the life she wants. Initially, therefore, Cosima does not understand the significance of the events narrated in her

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<sup>385</sup> Sheringham, p. viii.

<sup>386</sup> Weintraub, p. 822.

life. The protagonist is thus divided from the narrator by her lack of knowledge. According to Cavarero, the narrator has a wider knowledge of the protagonist's life for it is only in the telling of the story that its meaning is created and only in this way can its meaning be understood:

Detto altrimenti, chi cammina sul terreno non può vedere la figura che i suoi passi si lasciano dietro, gli è necessaria un'altra prospettiva. Non a caso, colui che comprende il significato della storia è soprattutto il narratore che, tracciando la cicogna sul foglio, accompagna col disegno il racconto.<sup>387</sup>

It is the narrator who is able to perceive the meaning best because the narrator has the clearest perspective of the events being told. Deledda was not able to perceive the meaning of her own life while she was living it, and in the same way, Cosima cannot see the greater meaning of her whole existence, for only the narrator of her story is able to do this.

Cosima does, however, gain a clearer understanding as the text proceeds. As she matures as an individual, she gains in confidence and asserts her own sense of identity more clearly. It is then the narrator who is able to draw the links between the significant events in her childhood and the identity of the adult who emerged from it. Aptly, therefore, Cosima's perspective alters as her character grows older in the text. As a child, an emphasis is placed upon her small stature as she looks up both physically and emotionally to her father: 'Il babbo era sopra di lei; le sembrava alto, quasi gigantesco, mentre invece era piccolo e un po' grasso' (*Cosima*, p. 14). Here the distinction is highlighted between the perspective of the small child and the altered perspective of the narrator, who is able to look back on these facts with a different eye. We should also recall Bruce Merry's comments about the respect Cosima shows

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<sup>387</sup> Cavarero, p. 10.

her father by referring to him as ‘il signor Antonio’ later in the text.<sup>388</sup> When she is a child, he remains her ‘babbo’, despite his apparently large stature. As an adult, although she knows him to be smaller than she once believed, she demonstrates a greater distance from him by addressing him and describing him in a more formal manner.

As Cosima grows older, she is frequently disillusioned by the harsh tragedies of reality which pose a threat to her fantastical imagination. She is first faced with great sorrow when her sister Giovanna dies, and consequently, in her grief, her mother retreats into silence: ‘taciturna, chiusa in un mondo tutto suo’ (*Cosima*, p. 28). She cuts herself off from the linguistic world in an attempt to come to terms with her loss and regain control of her feelings and herself. This silence is heightened further at a later stage in the novel when Santus shatters the family’s hopes by returning from university in the middle of the night, drunk and having spent all of the family’s money:

[L]a madre si fece ancora più silenziosa, pallida, e qualche volta inquieta, di quell’inquietudine di uno che ha smarrito qualche cosa di prezioso. [...] pensava a loro come a bambini smarriti nel bosco, e andava a cercarli, e si smarriva anche lei nelle ombre di una selva pericolosa: quella della disperazione (*Cosima*, pp. 90-91).

The description of the ‘selva’ into which her mother disappears is perhaps reminiscent of the Dantesque ‘selva oscura’ which represents a God-less fear and despair.

While Cosima contemplates her mother’s sorrow, attempting to relate to her devastation, she muses on her mother’s unhappy life and wonders if she ever truly loved:

Forse il mistero della sua tristezza derivava dal fatto ch’ella si era sposata senza amore, ad un uomo di venti anni più vecchio di lei, che la circondava di cure, che viveva solo per lei e la famiglia, ma non poteva

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<sup>388</sup> Merry, p. 7.

darle il piacere e la soddisfazione sensuale dei quali le donne giovani hanno bisogno (*Cosima*, pp. 28-29).

Her life centred entirely on her children, and so the loss of a child is of catastrophic consequence. Indeed, her situation is not uncommon, for love itself is a source of constant disappointment for many women, in Deledda's view: 'Ci sono molte donne che vivono del ricordo di un amore fantastico; e l'amore vero è per esse un mistero grande e inafferrabile come quello della divinità' (*Cosima*, p. 29). At this stage, therefore, the ideal of love remains an unlikely dream, distinct from the reality of a peaceful, secure but loveless marriage that is the likely outcome of Cosima's future.

Although the plight of women is not a central element of this novel, its presence here is worth some brief consideration. As I have stated previously, Deledda did not consider herself to be a feminist.<sup>389</sup> Despite this open declaration, it is clear that many of her female characters endure difficult social restrictions, including those which are representative of Deledda herself, such as Cosima. Cosima does not share a close relationship with her mother. It seems that Cosima hardly knew her mother at all because of her closed, dispassionate nature. We see even towards the beginning of the novel that her mother remains indifferent when her daughter Enza is born: 'La madre sonnacchiava: lei sola non era cambiata, col suo pallido viso dal naso un po' aquilino, la bocca già appassita e i capelli già grigi: né giovine né vecchia, come la bambina l'aveva sempre conosciuta; né allegra né triste, quasi impassibile e quasi enigmatica' (*Cosima*, p. 16). In a sense, therefore, her reaction to Giovanna's death is very similar: reserved and unemotional. The quiet suffering that the mother experiences following her daughter's death is described at a certain distance, evoking sympathy and a sense of wonderment. Cosima pities her mother, but does not truly understand the deeper source of her ongoing misery. Perhaps she is unable to relate to a woman who has

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<sup>389</sup> See footnote 115.

accepted her social fate, incapable of fulfilling her ambitions with the same drive as Cosima. Indeed, her mother describes herself as ‘una donna senza forza e senza volontà’ (*Cosima*, p. 110), a woman who is very different from her ambitious daughter, Cosima. Her mother’s silence also brings to mind Simborowski’s analysis of muted women in literature. Cosima’s mother is powerless, left without a voice, unable to express her grief or to assert control over the tragedies inflicted on her family.

According to Cavarero, the exploration of one’s identity is intrinsically linked to one’s gender: ‘Sin dalla nascita, l’unicità che appare, e che provoca la domanda fondamentale “chi sei?”, è un’unicità incarnata e perciò sessuata.’<sup>390</sup> In this sense, therefore, Cosima’s femaleness is necessarily part of who she is. In this regard, her plight, although individual, is one which is shared by many women. The emphasis is placed upon her struggle as a writer, but her struggle as a female is also necessarily tied to this.

Cosima’s rebellion against the social restrictions placed upon her as a woman is born of her relationship with literature. Sadly, it is her curiosity which leads her to discover the disappointing aspects of reality. Her love of knowledge and keen interest in reading spur her to work hard in school, and she is delighted, therefore, when her teacher informs her that she is to be moved up a class. When she excitedly presents the letter from her teacher to her father, however, a disappointing realisation emerges. The teacher has only promoted Cosima in order to obtain a loan from her father. The omniscient narrator, representing the gossiping voice of society and of the present, more informed Deledda, tells us that Cosima’s teacher and her husband are drunkards who are taking advantage of a little girl’s enthusiasm: ‘Questa fu una prima delle

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<sup>390</sup> Cavarero, p. 83.

commedioline tragiche della realtà che diede a Cosima una lezione pratica della vita' (*Cosima*, p. 32).

Even at the close of the novel, when Cosima faces a freer future and the opportunity to define herself as a writer living away from Sardinia, the uncertainty of an unhappy reality is ever present: 'Ma quando si decise a prendere il mazzo dalle mani del garzone che la guardava con occhi maliziosi, si sentì pungere da una spina acuminata: e pensò che la vita anche sotto l'illusione delle cose più belle e ricche, nasconde le unghie inesorabili' (*Cosima*, p. 132). Thus, even when a dream is realised, one must be aware of the potential sting of reality.

One of the greatest disappointments in Cosima's childhood is the one caused by her brother Santus, whom she so admired.<sup>391</sup> When Santus left Nuoro to study at the University of Cagliari, he left with both the hopes and carefully saved funds of his family. He was the envy of little Cosima who had scholarly aspirations of her own which could never be fulfilled. To her, he was an example of all that knowledge and study could achieve: he was her hero. Sadly, he returned late one night, drunk, having spent the family's money and thrown away his scholarly future. The sound of this terrifying knock on their door, which literally shook their lives, still echoes around the present Cosima/Deledda's mind:

Dopo mezzo secolo di vita, Cosima ricorda ancora quel picchiare come di tamburo che annunzia una disgrazia: lo sente ancora rimbombare dentro il suo cuore; è il suono più terribile che abbia mai sentito, più funebre di quello che annunzia la morte, più del suono della campana che chiama a spegnere un incendio (*Cosima*, p. 51).

The use of the present tense here again evokes the connection between the present, narrating Deledda and the narrated Cosima who is in the past. Although the sound

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<sup>391</sup> A parallel can be drawn here with the Brontë sisters and their brother, Patrick Branwell, who developed an addiction to alcohol which led to his ruin, and eventually his death. He contracted tuberculosis which was masked by his alcoholism, and this disease brought on his own death and that of his sisters, Emily and Anne. Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), pp. 564-594.

was frightening to Cosima at the time, its implication is only understood by the narrating Deledda. Santus had thrown away his future, and had damaged the entire family's reputation and prospects. His failure betrayed Cosima in two ways. Firstly, she would have taken greater advantage of his wasted opportunities, and secondly, it made her need to please her family even greater, dragging her further away from her dream of writing. This event is described as: 'Notte di angoscia indimenticabile, durante la quale Cosima conobbe un'altra pagina del libro terribile della vita' (*Cosima*, p. 89). Once again, the line between fantasy and reality is blurred by this metaphor. Cosima views her life as a book; it is the story of her own creation. Indeed, Deledda is rewriting the story of her life through the writing of *Cosima*, both retracing and recreating the development of her identity. As Cavarerian philosophy describes, she is creating an external narrator in order to review the story of her life and find its meaning.<sup>392</sup>

### **The search for freedom**

The quest for personal freedom is a journey undertaken by many of Deledda's protagonists. They strive to understand their true identities, grappling with relationships with others and ultimately aiming to achieve fulfilment through a loving relationship with another person. They fight against the disapproval of a rigid, moral society which carries certain expectations of its citizens. We have seen in the previous chapters that Paulo in *La madre* attempts to free himself from the disciplined bonds of his mother by engaging in an affair with Agnese. In the same way, Cristiano tries to free himself from the demons of his past that continue to haunt his unstable mind by accepting his feelings for Sarina. For Cosima, although a number of potential love

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<sup>392</sup> Cavarero, p. 8.

interests come and go, her greatest love affair is with her reading public. She too must combat the same social and familial expectations as Deledda's other characters in order to fulfil what she regards as her destiny, her identity, by becoming a writer. I will, therefore, now examine the relationship between identity and the theme of language, particularly, language in the form of reading and writing.

Before she herself begins to write, the world of literature presents certain opportunities for Cosima. It is through reading about adventures in distant lands that she can conceive of the possibility of living elsewhere herself, of living a life she somehow feels destined to follow: 'Anche leggendo già di nascosto i libri del fratello maggiore, e quelli che esistevano in casa, pensava a una vita lontana, diversa dalla sua, e che pure le sembrava di aver un giorno conosciuto' (*Cosima*, p. 33). From a young age she expresses a desire to go to Rome, which she regards as her creative Mecca, the ultimate artistic goal. 'Roma era la sua meta: lo sentiva. [...] era una specie di città veramente santa, la Gerusalemme dell'arte, il luogo dove si è più vicini a Dio, e alla gloria' (*Cosima*, p. 62). Deledda is clearly fond of her Sardinian home, evidenced by her constant use of Sardinian settings in her writing, and by her evocative depiction of the beautiful, peaceful landscape: 'Solo la vigna loro rallegrava coi suoi quadrati verdi e gialli, con qualche filare di grandi fichi bassi, la dolce triste solitudine del luogo: i monti lontani innalzavano una muraglia azzurra intorno all'orizzonte' (*Cosima*, p. 101); 'il punto centrale del paesaggio, il più bello, era il pino solitario entro il quale vibravano le fiamme del sole che pareva vi si annidasse come un grande uccello di porpora' (*Cosima*, p. 106). However, these solitary images, although beautiful, evoke a silence which is limiting for it represents a counterpoint to her expressiveness. She has always, therefore, dreamed of reaching Rome where her voice will finally be heard.

As an artist Cosima is divided from those around her, and certainly distinct from the role assigned to her by society. As for many of Deledda's protagonists, society has strict expectations for the way she will lead her life. Her family agrees with these requirements to a large degree, concerning themselves primarily with Cosima's search for a husband. As a woman she is expected to remain uneducated, mostly confined to the home, and fully dedicated to her role as a wife, and eventually, as a mother. Even her brother, Andrea, who is most supportive of her artistic endeavours, displays concern for her future security. He too hopes that she will find a suitable husband for the sake of her own protection and stability, for he cannot imagine that she could support herself as a female author.<sup>393</sup>

Although there is much frustration expressed towards these social restrictions, Cosima often feels divided between her own desires and those prescribed for her by society and by her family. For example, when Cosima allows herself to be kissed by Fortunio, she succumbs to a physical desire which goes against the morality that religion and society have taught her. Despite her attraction, she knows that she has no intention of marrying Fortunio, and so engaging in physical relations with him is perceived as a sin. She therefore feels torn, once again, between her passion and her duty, between herself and society. It is in fact, a battle with herself: 'una fredda, quasi malvagia forza di analisi la sosteneva in quella specie di lotta dei sensi contro se stessa e contro l'altro; e ne usciva stanca, disgustata, amara di umiliazione e di rimorso' (*Cosima*, p. 88).

As Cosima grows older, she becomes more conscious of the impact that her creative mind has upon others. At a late stage in the text she displays an awareness of her mother's concern for her financial and social well-being. In a discussion with the

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<sup>393</sup> *Cosima*, p. 63.

servant, Elia, Cosima's mother expresses her worries about her children, Cosima in particular: 'Non c'è via d'uscita; bisogna soffrire. E poi io voglio bene ai miei figli: troppo bene ci voglio; più sono disgraziati più li amo e li compatisco. Ma quella Cosima! È quella che più mi dà pensiero' (*Cosima*, p. 110). Her mother presents a pessimistic attitude which recurs in a number of Deledda's novels, and which is reminiscent of the veristic melancholy of Giovanni Verga's work. They are all doomed to suffer and must accept this fate. Cosima's rebellion and individuality is therefore a source of great concern to her mother. Although her attitude is quite damning, she clearly loves her children, and her pain and worry is difficult for Cosima to endure:

[I]n quel momento avrebbe rinunciato a tutti i suoi sogni, pur di consolare la madre: pensò che bisognava almeno darle il conforto della speranza di un buon matrimonio, fra lei e un qualche bravo giovine del luogo, e passò in rassegna tutti i proprietari, i professionisti, gl'impiegati di sua conoscenza. Ma essi erano tutti imbevuti del pregiudizio che ella non potesse, con quella sua passione dei libri, diventare una buona moglie; né, d'altronde, ella voleva più umiliarsi con nessuno. E fu in quel momento che le venne l'idea di muoversi, di uscire dal ristretto ambiente della piccola città, e andare in cerca di fortuna. Per dare consolazione alla madre (*Cosima*, p. 111).

Cosima is divided by her ties to her mother and to her dreams. In this passage, her thought process vacillates between concern for her mother and for herself. She decides that she must marry, but realises that this will prevent her from writing because many men hold the same social prejudices that have restricted her thus far. Indeed, she literally describes the atmosphere of the small city as 'ristretto', once again evoking her sense of enclosure. Unable to reconcile the two desires, she decides that she must move away, prioritising her dream, but she concludes her thought by emphasising the importance of pleasing her mother, a point underlined further by its separation into an incomplete sentence at the end of the paragraph. Her division between the two facets of her identity is clear. She wishes to please her mother,

playing into the Kristevan theory of the importance of the other, but tries to stay true to herself, placing emphasis on Ricoeur's belief in the need for self-definition.

The notion of freedom is depicted throughout the novel by images of flight and escape. Ursula Fanning has noted the importance of these images which perpetuate throughout *Cosima* as they do in *Marianna Sirca*.<sup>394</sup> Both Cosima and Marianna are described as caged birds, seeking to fly away from the restricted life they know. When Cosima first sees the sea, she is overwhelmed, and feels an even greater connection with the world that lies beyond the borders of the Sardinian shores: 'Il mare: il grande mistero, la landa di cespugli azzurri, con a riva una siepe di biancospini fioriti; il deserto che la rondine sognava di trasvolare verso le meravigliose regioni del Continente' (*Cosima*, p. 60). She is drawn even further into the realm of her dreams by the vision of the sea, but is recalled to reality by her brother:

Era tempo di ritornare a casa; e ricordando le giornate ancora fanciullesche, rallegrate solo dalle storielle ch'ella raccontava a se stessa, ella si sentiva, al cospetto del mare e sopra i grandi precipizi rossi di tramonto, come la capretta sulla vetta merlata della roccia, che vorrebbe imitare il volo del falco e invece, al fischio del pastore, deve ritornare allo stabbio (*Cosima*, p. 61).

There is a grave contrast between the bird she wishes to be and the mimicking goat she actually is. She is recalled, like an obedient animal, to do her duty, and describes her hope of flying away as an unrealistic fancy.

When Cosima has achieved some success and fame through her writing, her sense of flight is heightened further. She is able to invest in new clothes which single her out when attending church. She is overcome by a sense of flying, once again likened to a robin in the following passage:

Piegate sul suo libro di preghiere, ella volava: le pareva di essere una rondine; sentiva voglia di piangere; era un rigurgito di gioia, di trionfo, ma anche di dolore profondo; e se sollevava gli occhi umidi e vedeva i

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<sup>394</sup> Fanning, p. 217.

finestroni alti sotto la vòlta della chiesa, azzurri di lontananze quasi marine, pensava allo sfondo della finestra del frantoio e alle donne povere unte di olio nuovo che le raccontavano le loro pene (*Cosima*, p. 96).

Although she is pleased by her success, it has increased her desire to flee. She is aware of being watched by other people who disapprove of her chosen path, and she symbolically glances towards the windows, seeking escape and relating to the weeping women who remain trapped below them.

Her desire for flight is also evoked in an encounter with a lady-bird at a late stage of the novel, when she is contemplating the possibility of leaving her home. She feels an intimate connection with this creature, observing its human-like features and greatly envying the ease with which it is able to fly away:

Una coccinella salì, da un cespuglio, sulla veste di Cosima, come su un cespuglio più alto: andò su, su, tranquilla, fino al braccio di lei, fino alla sua mano. Era un essere meraviglioso e quasi terribile: [sopra] il piccolo dorso piatto, d'un rosso scuro di lacca, era disegnato in nero un viso umano perfetto, con gli occhi, il naso, la bocca, tutti un po' obliqui come nelle maschere giapponesi: parve a Cosima che quegli occhi la guardassero, con la stessa meraviglia misteriosa con cui lei li guardava. Arrivata all'estremità del dito medio, sull'unghia rosea di tramonto, la coccinella aprì due piccole ali iridate e volò via. Cosima avrebbe voluto imitarla, ma i suoi piedi erano legati alla terra, ed ella avrebbe dovuto camminare fino all'estremità del mondo per potersi slanciare così (*Cosima*, p. 106).

She is both afraid and in awe of this tiny creature. The lady-bird must go to the furthest physical extremity in order to launch itself into the sky. In the same way, therefore, Cosima realises that she too would have to go to the end of the world in order to mimic it, a feat which is far beyond her capabilities while she is trapped in Sardinia.

Feeling confined, Cosima seeks to free herself through an expression of her desire, as many of Deledda's other characters do through their affairs. This desire manifests itself in the form of writing, which becomes an utter compulsion for Cosima. In fact, Cosima's determination to write motivates her to deceive her family

in order to fund her potential publications: ‘Ma poiché è necessario andare avanti a tutti i costi, ecco che la scrittrice, la poetessa, la creatura delle nuvole, scende in cantina e ruba un litro d’olio’ (*Cosima*, pp. 75-76). It is absolutely necessary that she continues to write in order to achieve her goal, and to satisfy her sense of self. Indeed, Cosima feels her desire to write as an actual physical need. It is a part of herself which cries out for realisation. Writing is, in this sense, the most fulfilling expression of her view of her own identity: ‘E Cosima, come costrettavi da una forza sotterranea, scriveva versi e novelle’ (*Cosima*, p. 56).

The image of birds is often associated with the written word. When Andrea brings her a letter, Cosima is overcome by excitement: ‘Una lettera! Ella la prese, come faceva sempre, trepidando: le pareva, ogni volta, di afferrare un uccello a volo, l’uccello favolo della fortuna e della felicità.’ This letter, however, is merely a request for copies of her books from a journal. It brings no change, no news, no possible escape and adventure. She therefore casts it aside, ‘come appunto si lascia andare un uccellino che non serve a niente’ (*Cosima*, p. 105).

Cosima’s greatest means of escape is through her writing, which is described, like her own self, as a bird which needs to be freed. Through writing, therefore, Cosima liberates herself. She defines her own identity through the language of her stories. She is, in a sense, more real and more alive in her novels than she is in her own reality:

[S]crive, scrive, per un bisogno fisico, come altre adolescenti corrono per i viali dei giardini, o vanno a un luogo loro proibito; se possono, a un convegno d’amore. | Anche lei, nelle sue scritture, combina convegni di amore: è una storia, la sua, dove la protagonista è lei, il mondo è il suo, il sangue dei personaggi, le loro ingenuità, le loro innocenti follie sono le sue. [...] E un giorno, quando è finito, ella lo sente palpitare vivo fra le sue mani fredde, come un uccello che le sguscia fremente fra le dita e vola a battersi le ali contro i vetri chiusi della finestra. | Ella non esita a cercare il modo di liberarlo, lasciarlo andar via per gli spazi infiniti (*Cosima*, p. 75).

A direct comparison is drawn here between Cosima/Deledda's own rebellion, that is, the act of writing, and the rebellious behaviour of her characters who become involved in illicit relationships. Cosima forms her own identity by engaging with her innermost desire to write. Her identity is formed in the fictional worlds of her creation, where her characters play out different versions of her own rebellion against society.

Cosima's identity as a writer has been described as a caged bird, unable to fly throughout the narrative. It is only apt, therefore, that when she embarks on her final adventure to the city of K\*\*\*, she sees a cluster of birds in flight, free to reach the skies just as she is finally able to do: 'Uccelli mai veduti, grandi con le ali iridate, si sollevarono dallo stagno, come sgorgassero dall'acqua, e disegnarono una specie di arcobaleno: forse era un miraggio: ma a lei parve un lieto auspicio' (*Cosima*, p. 129). This image is one of hope, emphasised further by the rainbow the creatures appear to form. Cosima, like these birds, has been released from the restrictions of the Nuorese society that denounced her. In a sense, both aspects of her identity are fulfilled on this journey: she is free to travel, to write and to love, for it was during this trip that Deledda met her future husband.

### **Fantasy and reality**

Cosima's divided identity is mirrored by her relationship with fantasy and reality, which intermingle throughout the narrative, evoking Cosima's creative nature as a character. Her perspective of the world is dotted with fantastical interpretations, suggesting the imaginative nature that forms the version of her identity as a writer. The blurring of fantasy and reality in the novel also reminds the reader that Deledda

has recreated the reality of her own past as a fiction, for she blends elements of fairy-tale into the true story of her life.

Cosima is described as ‘la piccola sognatrice’, a title which highlights the vivid imagination that characterises, and to a great extent, defines her. She loses herself quite willingly in the realm of fantasy which saves her from the disappointments of reality. From the very beginning, when Cosima is first introduced, we are told that she approaches everything with a mixed perception of dream and reality:

Tutto, del resto, è straordinario per lei: pare venuta da un mondo diverso da quello dove vive, e la sua fantasia è piena di ricordi confuse di quel mondo di sogno, mentre la realtà di questo non le dispiace, se la guarda a modo suo, cioè anch’essa coi colori della sua fantasia (*Cosima*, p. 6).

Her vivid imagination impinges on the way she views the world. Although she does not dislike the real world, she would much rather regard it as she does her dreams, that is, with a touch of fantasy. This is the sentiment which characterises Cosima’s approach to existence throughout the novel, as she discovers the creative side to her identity which is so important to her, and so difficult for others to accept.

Cosima often drifts into a dream-like state while she is still awake. When Andrea takes her to the top of Monte Orthobene and she perceives the sea for the first time, she drifts into her own imagination and must be recalled from it: ‘I gridi dei giovani nella radura le richiamavano alla realtà’ (*Cosima*, p. 60). Indeed, fantasy perforates every aspect of her daily life. She even interprets some of the people in her life as forms of fictional characters. For example, she frequently describes her grandmother as a fairy-like or dwarf-esque figure: ‘La nonna invece non sentiva bisogno di dormire, sebbene fosse una piccolissima donna fragile, quasi nana, con mani e piedi da bambina’ (*Cosima*, p. 11); and again: ‘Come sei bella, nonnina; adesso, sì, sembri davvero una fata’ (*Cosima*, p. 121). Once again, she emphasises that she interpreted her grandmother in this way quite intentionally:

La nonna, poi, le ricordava, - ma questo un po' volontariamente, - certe donnine favolose, o piccole fate, buone o cattive secondo l'occasione, che la leggenda popolare affermava abitassero un tempo in piccole case di pietra, scavate nella roccia, specialmente negli altipiani granitici del luogo (*Cosima*, p. 11).

Thus, the real people in her life play into the mythical construction of her existence in her mind.

Reality in turn influenced Cosima's sense of fantasy, for she admittedly took inspiration from her real life to create many of her fictional characters. Towards the end of the novel, when Cosima fears she has little left to experience of life, she consoles herself with the knowledge that her reality has been preserved forever in the form of her stories:

Le pareva di essere già vecchia, piena di esperienza e col fiore della speranza già appassito fra le dita. Pensava fosse effetto della solitudine, della povertà del luogo e della sua stessa vita: e disperava di poter ritrovare una occasione di guardare la vita altrui [...] Non contava più in Elia, e neppure nel movimento della vicina vendemmia, della quale aveva già conosciuto i colori d'idillio, e li aveva anche già riversati in qualche sua novella (*Cosima*, p. 112).

As her identity as a writer flourishes, her sense of fantasy within her reality is greatly increased. When she has earned some success from her writing, she sees herself as falling into a fairy-tale like those of her own creation: 'E tutto, luce, suoni, colori, accresceva la luminosa illusione di Cosima, che si vedeva trasportata in un fantastico mondo di fiaba. [...] E fu proprio da quel tempo che la sua vita prese un'andatura fiabesca' (*Cosima*, p. 96). She regards these days as the happiest of her life, and describes the experience as 'il sogno vivo' (*Cosima*, p. 99). The focus of her life begins to fall more and more on the realm of fantasy, for she has found her true calling in her writing.

### **Self and other: mirrors and pictures**

As we have seen, Cosima struggles with the definition of her identity throughout the novel. As she grows older, she develops a greater understanding of what is expected of her by others, as well as a greater understanding of her own desires and intentions. She wavers frequently as she considers the implications of her choice on those she cares for, but ultimately her goal remains fixed: she will become a writer. During this journey of self-contemplation, Cosima experiences certain climactic moments of realisation which resemble those of Deledda's other characters, as she literally faces the image of herself that is projected to other people.

In a moment which is reminiscent of Paulo's self-contemplation in front of a mirror, Cosima views her own poetic self in her reflection in the water of a church fountain: 'nel piccolo specchio d'onice dell'acqua in ombra Cosima vide i suoi occhi, che le parvero della stessa miracolosa luce: luce che scaturiva dalla profondità della sua terra e aveva un giorno riflesso davvero l'anima assetata di divinità dei suoi avi pastori e poeti' (*Cosima*, p. 71). The mirror, as we have seen, is an important modernist image that is related to the notion of identity.<sup>395</sup> It represents self-reflection and self-contemplation as a person is able to view themselves from the outside. It also opens a window into the way in which we are viewed by others, drawing connections or contrasts with the way we feel within and the way we appear without.

Cosima is faced with this inconsistency when she is asked to produce a photograph of herself to accompany her published story. Cavarero points out that 'Anche una fotografia è un testo e ha ovviamente un autore, ossia è un'immagine costruita da un particolare punto di vista'.<sup>396</sup> A photograph is, therefore, a constructed image of the self projected in a particular way for the perception of others. This

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<sup>395</sup> This concept has been examined in the chapter 'The Controlled Self: Identity and Narrative in *La madre*'.

<sup>396</sup> Cavarero, p. 94.

request is a revelation to Cosima, for she is utterly dissatisfied with the only image of herself that she possesses: ‘Di fotografie Cosima ne possedeva solo una, che era stata anch’essa una delle prime sue disillusioni personali. [...] la prima deformazione della sua personalità spirituale’ (*Cosima*, p. 77). There is clearly a conflict between the way she feels about her identity, her spirit, and the way in which she appears to others.

In order to remedy the situation she saves her money and purchases another picture, one which represents her accurately to her reader:

Aveva capito che quell’immagine era destinata a un amatore, a qualcuno che Cosima voleva attirare per passione, ma anche per arte: e questo primo innamorato lontano, ricco come un re e forse anche più potente, era il pubblico dei lettori, specialmente giovani, intelligenti, e affini all’anima e alle fantasie di lei (*Cosima*, pp. 77-78).

To some extent, therefore, Cosima defines herself in relation to her reader. To her, the ‘other’ for whom she must present herself is the public. Consequently, even in her capacity as a writer, Cosima’s identity is torn. She wishes to portray her identity in a particular way for the perception of her reader. Despite her determination to form her identity by becoming a writer, and thus control her identity through her own use of language, she appears to be in need of an ‘other’, as Kristeva states is necessary, in order to define her identity. In the same way, Cavarero argues that our identity is necessarily formed in relation to others because we only need define ourselves for the benefit of someone else’s understanding:

[L]’esistente umano, in quanto è unico e tale si mostra fin dalla nascita, è appunto l’*esposto*. Per questo l’identità corrisponde al *chi* ‘della domanda posta ad ogni nuovo venuto: “chi sei?”’. ‘L’impulso all’autoesibizione, [che consiste] nel reagire col mostrarsi all’effetto schiacciante dell’essere mostrati’, fa dell’identità un in-nato esporsi del *chi* allo sguardo e alla domanda altrui.<sup>397</sup>

Our identity is a response to the question ‘Who are you?’. We therefore necessarily exist in relation to another person, the person who is asking that question. The

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<sup>397</sup> Cavarero, p. 31.

photograph requested of Cosima is a prime example of this, for the documentation of her image is for the benefit of readers, not for her own sense of self. Its disjointed relationship with the way she regards herself, however, throws her sense of identity into disarray, and forces her to attempt to align them both by investing in a new photograph.

Cosima cements her relationship with the reader when she receives word from her first admirer, where the image of the bird is once again present:

Fu come un grido d'uccello nella notte, un richiamo passeggero di usignuolo, illuso anche lui dal chiarore delle lontananze; la serenata di un fantasma di trovatore sceso dalla foresta lunare delle pagine di un libro romantico. Ma per Cosima fu una cosa più che reale, più reale, più palpabile e corporea di tutte le altre più o meno grandi realtà trovate nella vita, intatta e fredda ma perfetta come una statua greca (*Cosima*, pp. 79-80).

This letter draws her fantasy and reality together once again. Another bird calls out to her artistic soul, enticing it to join it in the free world. Cosima wishes to be freed in order to engage with this admirer and with her readers as a whole. By writing, she allows herself to present her identity to others in the way she chooses. In this sense, therefore, the composition of *Cosima* is itself a presentation of Deledda's own identity to the perception of an 'other', that is, to the reader. She has reviewed and reshaped her past in the form of a fictional narrative and presented it as a self-portrait for her reading public.

Cosima has a different climactic moment of realisation where she sees herself standing at the boundary of her world. She describes the geographic divide between Nuoro and the world beyond, which also represents the frontier of her life as a writer. The conflict between Cosima and society, between the writer and the wife becomes suddenly insignificant. No matter what the outcome of her life's events, the importance lies in her acceptance of her fate and of her own identity. She decides,

more firmly than any of Deledda's other characters realise, that identity must come from within:

Mai Cosima, neppure sul limite dei boschi e delle rocce del Monte, davanti ai sontuosi tramonti visti dall'alto, aveva provato una malia simile a questa che l'avvolgeva in mezzo alla terra incolta, guardata solo da Dio. Ma invece di sentirsi piccola, e poiché era impotente a volare, le parve di essere alta, alta fino a toccare con la fronte la stella della sera; eppure in quel momento dimenticava tutte le sue ambizioni, i suoi vani sogni, la sua attesa di avvenimenti straordinari. La vita era bella così, [...] ed ella ne ebbe quasi la prima rivelazione, e si sentì uno scalino ancora più in alto, nella scala di Giacobbe che doveva essere la sua vita. Così per nulla: solo perché vedeva la stella della sera brillare sopra i monti non meno e non più meravigliosa della coccinella, e le erbe selvatiche odoravano al suo passaggio. Decise di non aspettare più nulla che le arrivasse dall'esterno, dal mondo agitato degli uomini; ma tutto da se stessa, dal mistero della sua vita interiore (*Cosima*, p. 107).

In a sense, therefore, her philosophy of identity is most in keeping with that of Ricoeur. Cosima will shape her own life and her own self, taking others' views into consideration, but ultimately defining her own identity, and she will do that in writing. The images of stars and the lady-bird draw together the early and later stages of Cosima's life. Her dream has remained with her throughout, and despite many obstacles, only she can realise it.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, *Cosima* is a semi-fictional, autobiographical novel which depicts the events of Deledda's life through the persona of Cosima. In a Cavarerian sense, Deledda has removed herself from the narrative of her life and viewed it from its end point (or at least, the end point of its drama in Deledda's view). By distancing herself from the character of Cosima, described in the third person, she is able to rewrite her life, interpret its meaning and present it thus to her reader in the form of a narrative. Her reader is, after all, the most significant 'other' in Cosima/Deledda's life. Cosima/Deledda is therefore divided into self and other in the forms of protagonist

and narrator, and has projected her identity for her own 'self' and for the 'other' that is the reader. The subjective nature of the narrative means that she is unable to detach herself fully from the story of her own life, a fact conveyed by the occasional use of the first person narrative voice and the frequent use of the present tense. Deledda has revisited the events and people of her own life and depicted them in a way that emphasises the formation of her identity. Identity and language are thus interwoven in the process of writing this autobiographical novel.

Identity and language, or more specifically, writing, are also strongly linked thematically in the novel. It tracks the development of Cosima as an individual, as a woman and as a writer. As her perspective alters through the narrative, the protagonist comes to comprehend the conflicting elements of her identity. Indeed, Cosima becomes a more central part of the novel's plot as she develops as a writer. As she takes control of her own identity, achieving her aspiration to write, she takes control of her own voice in a narrative and symbolic sense.

Cosima is torn throughout the novel between her allegiance to her family and society, and to herself. The expectation is for Cosima to remain at home and marry well. Her intention, however, is to travel beyond the confines of this Nuorese cage, to fly freely into the literary world and express herself through her vivid imagination. These conflicting demands that are placed on her identity battle throughout the novel. Her relationship with her family presents moments of disillusion and of utter tragedy which drive Cosima further into her realm of fantasy. Although she does not disregard her family's wishes completely, and eventually continues to fulfil her expected social role as a wife and mother, the central focus of the narrative is on Cosima's evolution as a writer. Cosima accepts her origins as a Nuorese woman because she is also ultimately able to realise her dreams without abandoning them completely.

Language plays an important part in Cosima's life throughout. From her appreciation of unreadable books to her desperate urge to write them herself, language is at the heart of Cosima's view of her own identity. She expresses herself and thus defines her self in and through her writing. Writing is her rebellion, her dream and eventually, her reality, all amounting to the winning feature of her identity. Cosima places a great deal of emphasis on the value of the other. She respects and needs her family and her readers, and both affect the way she regards herself and the way she presents herself to the world. Ultimately, however, Cosima realises that her sense of self must come from within, and the composition of *Cosima* itself is the best example of this achievement.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to redefine the work of Grazia Deledda, bringing to light modernist aspects of her writing which have thus far been overlooked by criticism. I have examined the presence of modernist ideas relating to identity and language that demonstrate the way in which Deledda's writing matured beyond the movement of *verismo* to which she has thus far been restricted. In a sense, Deledda's own identity as a writer has often been misinterpreted by the 'others' who have encountered her work. Much like the identities of her many trapped, misunderstood protagonists, the significance of her work has been ensnared by the criticism that has classed her as an inferior veristic author. Many critics have been unable to see past her position as a woman writer, and further restrictions were created by her birthplace of Sardinia, for her beloved island inspired the setting for most of her creations, including the three texts at the centre of this study. Her stories have consequently been labelled as regional romances, tales of love and temptation of no great merit.<sup>398</sup> This thesis has aimed to draw Deledda's work out from this limited perspective, and remove this false literary mask placed upon her. It has expanded on more recent critical studies of modernist elements of her writing, thus displaying further depth in the quality of her work.

A detailed analysis of three of Deledda's key works has demonstrated her engagement with stimulating philosophical and existential questions, and her impressive narrative skill, both of which make her worthy of far greater critical attention. She grapples with ideas regarding the self, interactions with others and with society as a whole, the power and limitations of the medium of language itself, and the relationship between language and the construction of identity. I have aimed to

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<sup>398</sup> Piromalli, p. 142.

demonstrate that the conflict at the heart of these Deleddian texts is that between the self and other. It is a struggle to understand one's identity amid a crowd of discordant voices. The individual must strive to gain or maintain power over his/her own identity by asserting linguistic and narrative authority in the story of his/her own life.

The characters of *La madre* undergo a journey of self-understanding as they each confront their own pasts in order to comprehend fully their present identities. Paulo, in particular, wrestles with his sense of self, proposing the concept of identity being multiple and divided. Throughout the narrative, he remains caught between the two women, unable to manipulate his own narrative and consequently his own self. He is split in two, for he is both a moral, obedient son and a passionate, adventurous lover. As Kristevan theory states, he can only exist in relation to an 'other', and so he must succumb to the rule of either his mother or his lover. He remains in this psychological prison until the death of his mother at the close of the novel which provides an opportunity for freedom at last.

As we have seen, this battle for power among the characters is mirrored in the changing narrative perspective of the novel. Although Deledda makes use of *free indirect speech*, leaving the reader unaware of an interfering omniscient narrator, the perspective of the narrative fluctuates between the characters as they attempt to master each other's lives. Furthermore, the three principal characters engage with the narrative of their pasts in order to understand their current behaviour. The characters find, as Cavarero states, that they must view the narratives of their own lives from an external viewpoint in order to understand their present identities. The image of the stork is only visible at the end of the story,<sup>399</sup> and thus their present selves are only comprehensible at the end of their narratives. Therefore, as Paulo splits himself in

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<sup>399</sup> Cavarero, pp. 7-8.

two, facing his reflection in the mirror, he becomes both self and other in an attempt to understand his own identity from without.

The protagonist of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* undergoes a similar experience of self-understanding as he tries to draw himself out of his self-inflicted prison. As the novel's title implies, Cristiano is introduced as a reclusive individual who has chosen to lead a life that is cut off from other people. Despite this choice of self-suppression, Cristiano finds it impossible to live an isolated existence entirely devoid of linguistic interaction. He attempts to engage in conversation with himself, with his cat and often with the inanimate objects that provide the only company in this lonely environment. This behaviour is once again in keeping with Kristeva's proposition that the self cannot exist without the other. According to Kristeva, we are defined by our interaction with other people, and therefore one's identity is dependent on the linguistic construction of others, and in the absence of others, of oneself.

Once again, the narrative of the novel is orchestrated to accompany the gradual revelation of Cristiano's identity. He maintains command of his concealed self by wielding linguistic control, in this case, in the form of silence. Both language and the absence of language are a form of power, for it is through language that identity is constructed, and through language that we are perceived by the others who apparently define us.

*Il segreto* also engages with relativist and existential questions about the nature of subjectivity and of madness. Cristiano comes to realise that he himself is very close to a state of insanity as a result of the isolated life he has been leading. He contemplates Pirandellian ideas regarding the state of madness, questioning if insanity brings one nearer to the truth since it is a step closer to the objectivity of death. He wonders if it is truly possible to know another person, or indeed to fully know oneself.

Although the other may be necessary in the formation of one's identity, does that other truly provide a clear interpretation? He questions the impossibility of absolute freedom, seeing the necessary ties to other people within the realm of the living, and he considers the inadequacy of language as a means of expression, often choosing to employ silence in its stead. It is the examination of these intriguing notions that illustrate Deledda's place as a modernist writer.

Lastly, the most autobiographical of Deledda's texts, *Cosima*, portrays the great affinity Deledda shares with her struggling protagonists. James Olney aptly describes an author's autobiography as 'a magnifying lens, focusing and intensifying that same peculiar creative vitality that informs all the volumes of [her] collect works'.<sup>400</sup> Indeed, the trials of Deledda's own life and the division in her own identity pervade the stories of her fictional novels. *Cosima* is the fictional embodiment of Deledda herself. She, like Paulo and Cristiano, strives to understand her identity, attempting to align the way in which she views herself and the way in which she is expected to be by others. Language is intimately linked to *Cosima*'s identity, for it is through language, through the process of writing that she can truly express her self. It is a means for crossing the boundaries of her island and of her society. The narrative perspective of *Cosima* also mirrors the development in the protagonist's growing self-assurance. *Cosima* becomes more central in the focus of the narrative as it proceeds, notably as she begins to write. *Cosima* masters her narrative voice in both the content and the narrative of the novel, aptly echoing the way in which she takes charge of her identity through the act of writing.

The composition of *Cosima* itself, in Cavarerian terms, could be defined as demonstrating the role of narrative in the construction of identity. Deledda revisits the

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<sup>400</sup> Olney, p. 4.

narrative of her own life, examining its most important elements and tracing her progression as a writer. By employing a third person narrative voice in this autobiographical text, Deledda is able to divide herself in two. She can adopt the form of narrator and protagonist in the story of her life, thus allowing herself to view her identity from an external perspective. Much like Natalia Ginzburg's approach to *Lessico familiare*, Deledda can create a distance between her present narrating self and the past she is composing. The turbulent relationship between Cosima and Deledda is further evoked by the novel's varied use of tenses. Deledda remains closely linked to Cosima while simultaneously distancing herself from her, a fact that conveys the divided nature of Cosima's own identity. Throughout the novel she is torn between her own desires and those of her family, for she is both a faithful daughter, and a passionate writer.

As we have seen, therefore, the characters of these key Deleddian novels contemplate complex notions regarding the self. They question their own existences, facing the distortion between the way they view themselves, and the way they are viewed by others. Although each of the three protagonists struggles with the influences of other people in their lives, ultimately they share a common goal: that is, to become the people that they wish to be, to fulfil the image of themselves that they hold. Paulo attempts to escape the domination of both influential women in his life; Cristiano strives to reveal his true self to the woman he loves in spite of social judgement; and Cosima endeavours to fulfil her destiny as a writer, transcending social and familial hurdles by believing above all in herself. Cosima understands better than any of Deledda's other characters that her identity must come from within. Her behaviour supports Ricoeur's thesis that self-recognition, self-definition surpass every other form of identification. As Piano aptly points out, Cosima is the only one

of Deledda's protagonists who truly achieves the freedom that they all so desperately seek.<sup>401</sup> It is Cosima who knows her own identity most clearly, and who fights to achieve this against the objections of those around her.

Nonetheless, these Deleddian texts do not provide an answer to the problem of identity; rather, they explore the various facets of identity and its integral relationship with language. Although an emphasis is placed upon the importance of self-definition, the characters also find that they require interaction with others. Paulo is unable to extricate himself from his relationships with his mother and lover. Cristiano is in desperate need of linguistic communication even in his solitude. Lastly, Cosima succeeds in pleasing herself and her family, for we know of Deledda that she became a writer and a mother, thus fulfilling her own expectations and those of society. Furthermore, Cosima is in need of the other that is her reading public. She describes her reader as her first true love. She calls out to an attentive audience who will receive her work with pleasure, and will consequently understand this aspect of her identity. For Deledda, therefore, identity is constructed by the self, by others and most importantly, through the somewhat limited medium of language. In a sense, Deledda's own relationship with language is divided. She acknowledges its power in its ability to free her from the confines of the world she knows, and yet she recognises its limitations and its perils. In a letter to Marino Moretti of 1914, she aptly describes her occasional tendency to hide away from words:

[M]i sento sempre più staccata dalle cose esterne e desidero di non vedere più nessuno: ogni mia parola viene tradotta in volgarità; ho, a volte, con gli estranei, paura della mie parole; me le vedo già uscir di bocca come pietre che mi ricadono addosso. Allora meglio tacere, andare avanti soli lungo il muro della vita, nell'ombra.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Piano, pp. 21-22.

<sup>402</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Lettere di Grazia Deledda a Marino Moretti*, ed. by Marino Moretti (Padova: Rebellato, 1959) pp. 33-34.

The fear of misinterpretation and miscommunication coupled with her known passion for writing illustrate Deledda's complex relationship with the medium of language.

The narratives of these novels are carefully crafted to accompany the characters' developing identities, and to engage with further questions relating to identity and language, and identity and narrative. As the protagonists delve further into an understanding of their own selves, the narratives in turn alter to evoke this change, either by placing greater focus on the protagonists or by yielding narrative control to them through linguistic domination. Cristiano, in contrast, attempts to cage his own identity through the power of his silence. As his need for communication and interaction breaks through, he reveals himself to the world, and to the reader through the narrative of the novel. Deledda's use of narrative is therefore far more intricate than the application of *free indirect speech* in order to objectively portray reality. Straddling two literary modes, Deledda employs familiar veristic styles to evoke modernist ideas, for the narratives of her novels shadow and enable the unfolding of her characters' identities.

The ideas brought forth in this thesis open up a number of possible directions for future study of Deledda's work. This study has focused in great detail on three Deleddian texts amid her vast corpus of thirty five novels, collections of *novelle* and poetry. Many of her other works would merit consideration in light of this study's interpretation of Deledda's narrative style. Furthermore, the fourth chapter of this thesis has focused on Deledda's most autobiographical text, *Cosima*, with particular attention given to Deledda's relationship with this text. The aim of this chapter was to examine the construction of Cosima's identity through the process of narrative, and the realisation of her identity through the action of writing. As I have noted, however, there are several other Deleddian texts which could be considered autobiographical

including *Il paese del vento* (1931) and later, *La chiesa della solitudine* (1936). It would be interesting to consider the intricacies of the relationship between autobiographical and fictional writing in these texts, and thus expand upon my analysis of Deledda's connection with *Cosima*.

Grazia Deledda demonstrated a great passion for her writing. It was through the act of writing that she wished to prove her value to the world, to display her own identity to her readers and to depict the challenges of human existence. Having lived in a solitary, somewhat lonely environment, similar to that of Cristiano, she experienced the need for human interaction, and the desire for her identity to be understood and accepted by others. She therefore expressed herself in the form of her fictional works and in her many epistolary exchanges. Using the canvas of Sardinian life as her inspiration, she depicted intricate features of the human condition. Her characters wrestle with themselves and with others, enduring similar difficulties to those of Deledda herself. Much as she challenged convention as a woman by writing, her work pushed past the parameters of literature at the time to explore modernist ideas. In these three Deleddian texts, identity is portrayed as divided, multiple, and above all, valuable, for Deledda's characters battle firstly to understand and then to control their own selves through the manipulation of language and narrative. The skilful way in which these ideas are woven into the narratives of these novels further illustrates Deledda's artistic talent and her interest in the power of language itself.

Deledda's final, most autobiographical work traces her blossoming as an individual and as a writer, having overcome her own social and personal challenges. Happily, Deledda herself was able to marry the traditional, Sardinian facet of her identity with its ambitious, adventurous counterpart that pushed boundaries and changed her future. This self-fulfilment provided a happy ending for the author who,

unlike many of her characters, did not have to compromise the woman she was. It was the command of language that ultimately enabled Deledda to become the person she dreamed of being: a writer.

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