Leonora Carrington and Goliarda Sapienza: Anarchic Bodies

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages

University of Oxford – Trinity Term 2022

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Abstract

This thesis brings together two little-know figures in the history of 20th-century literature: Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) and Goliarda Sapienza (1924-1996). Building on recent academic and public interest in both women, this research offers a new perspective by reading their literary work outside of its immediate cultural context.

Despite their differences, Carrington and Sapienza encounter many of the same cultural phenomena, and they share a sense of embodied, individual resistance to institutational power. Restraint enters the works of both authors via the Catholic church, psychiatric treatment, gender norms, and the rigidity of written language. In addition to closely analysing these themes through the comparison of several key texts, this thesis has a broader scope of considering the roles of autobiography, embodiment, and gender in the expression of identity.

Both Carrington and Sapienza, I find, evoke a sense of limitlessness in their depiction of personal identity. This resistance to restraint is carried over into the methodological approach of this comparison, bringing Carrington away from her Surrealist label, and bringing Sapienza toward it, and therefore casting their work in a new light.

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Long Abstract

Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) was a British-Mexican artist and writer, remembered most prominently as one of the last surviving Surrealists. Goliarda Sapienza (1924-1996) was a Sicilian actress and writer, who lived and worked mostly in Rome in her adult life. Having experienced only limited recognition for their writing careers during their lifetimes, both women have undergone a re-evaluation in recent years, garnering a great deal more public and academic interest in their prose.

This thesis offers an orginal reading of each author in dialogue with one another, allowing space for the originality of their individual creative practice, but also finding unexpected resonances between their work. Crucially, this analysis brings Carrington away from the Surrealist label which has dominated the critical reception of her work, viewing her instead within the framework of women's life-writing. Sapienza on the other hand has been viewed almost exclusively not as part of a group, but rather a radical individual. This comparison offers a new insight into Sapienza's radicalism by bringing her into dialogue with one of the great avant-garde movements of the 20th-century: Surrealism. My approach then is 'anarchic' in that it disrupts traditional divisions of literary studies, while this thesis also considers that formally and thematically the two authors' work might be 'anarchic', prone to a sense of excess and defying limitations. Furthermore, I suggest that the anarchism of Sapienza and Carrington's bodies of work may contribute to their outsider status in the 20th century, and their reappraisal in the 21st.

In order to clearly view this sense of excess and limitless personal identity, this thesis progresses through a series of different thematic chapters, where different sources of restraint and limitation are considered in turn. There are a remarkable number of shared life experiences between the two women, but moreover I have sought to highlight where the two inhabit a shared cultural landscape, albeit alongside many differences of local context and language. Most importantly, my thesis explores where Carrington and Sapienza's shared sense of limitlessness overcomes institutions and structures of power.

In the first chapter, power is represented in a dogmatic way by the Catholic church, where convents and nursing homes both act as spaces where women are isolated and their bodies controlled. This analysis centres on a well known novel by each author, *The Hearing Trumpet* and *L'arte della gioia,* both texts which establish that Carrington and Sapienza's common vision of embodiment is rooted in an anarchic sense of excess in both the cerebral and the corporeal. Carrington writes, "Nobody could ever be bored with me I have too much soul. Far too much, but lots of body too, thank Heavens." (The Hearing Trumpet, p17). Crucially this approach foregrounds the lived experience of the female body not as the counterpart to male celebreality or as a regression to biological essentialism, but rather as a challenge to dualistic thought and the oppressive boundaries of categorisation. Their project is to rehabilitate the physical body into the conscious subject.

With regard to Catholicism, both writers find ambivalent potential within its imagery and rhetoric for an empowered female body, one where physical experience possesses importance. This chapter explores this dynamic and also goes on to explore how Carrington and Sapienza view all rigid doctrines with suspicion. The emphasis upon individual rather than institutional knowledge sets up a reading of maturity and the significance of knowledge and learning in each text. Both novels are found to be remarkable in their expansive and open-ended narration of female old-age.

The second chapter focuses upon mental health, arguing for both Carrington and Sapienza's inclusion in the twentieth-century canon of the psychiatric novel, and highlighting the significant value of their portrayals of early convulsive treatments and their aftermaths. My analysis of the novels *Down Below* [*En Bas*] and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* centres upon the unorthodox dialogic nature of these texts, exploring the role of communication in recovery from mental illness, and also highlighting the importance of distance in these texts: between patient and doctor, writer and reader, mind and body.

The following chapter takes a broader approach than the previous two, both in that it considers a wider number of texts, and also that in the place of the very concrete restriction of the convent or the psychiatric hospital, here restriction is explored more loosely in the form of a rigid gender binary that influences both writers through childhood and beyond. In the first half of this chapter I examine two under-analysed texts from each author's oeuvres, *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin,* each of which is remarkably an autobiographic text where the author has reimagined themselves through the lens of a male alter-ego. This analysis is used as a basis to consider how gender is depicted very differently at various stages of each author's work, where their tendency to self-exceptionalism is sometimes at odds with an emerging political Feminist landscape of female solidarity. I suggest that the use of the male alter-ego is both a protest against traditional gender norms, but is also evident of an internalised misogyny where both writers evade identification with other women.

The final chapter takes an even more abstract approach to the notion of restriction, examining how language itself can exert control over the writer. Both writers' sense of excess and freedom finds itself in opposition with the medium they use to express it. This chapter analyses how this frustration is conveyed in a number of texts, but also moves beyond the texts themselves to consider how Carrington and Sapienza sought expression via

other means; considering the role of writing within each woman's life and career, and how visual art and acting may differ from the fixity of the written word.

Throughout the thesis, I have also sought to highlight the disrupted timelines of publication of each author, and comment on where this has distorted analysis of their work or obscured their importance and originality. For example, I propose that Carrington's exceptionally complex composition process with *Down Below* is crucial to the reading of that text, and also that Sapienza's struggle to find an audience for her work manifests in her relationship with writing and language. In this way the meaning of my thesis is twofold, where Carrington and Sapienza's anarchic bodies of work have eluded categorisation, their meaning and potential unmeasured.

In terms of a theoretical framework, this thesis draws widely on different schools of thought to support the different approaches in each chapter, including writings on Catholicism, gender, psychoanalysis, autobiography, embodiment, queer theory, phenomenology and deconstruction.Throughout the thesis the central theoretical paradigm is writing as an embodied subject, and the feminist writings of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous have been particularly crucial in building this analysis.

Overall, this thesis contributes new perspectives on both authors, finding that they share an open, fluid and unrestrictable sense of personal identity.

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Acknowledgements

It was a great stroke of luck that Laura Marcus generously agreed to co-supervise this project. Her comments were always as unexpected as they were perceptive, drawing on a well of knowledge that seemed inexhaustible. Laura particularly influenced my thinking on visual art and film, and our meetings were constantly punctuated by Google image searches to find a new reference point. This final thesis feels sadly incomplete without Laura's insights, but I am very grateful to have benefitted from her outstanding supervision, intellect, and warmth.

I am equally indebted to Giuseppe Stellardi for his steadfast support and encouragement. Through the several years of this project his supervision has been both open and precise, allowing me to develop as an independent scholar, while also pushing and expanding my ideas beyond my limitations.

I am also grateful to Matthew Reynolds, both for his astute examination of my Confirmation of Status, which allowed me to conceive of the comparative nature of this thesis much more clearly; and for his generous supervision in the final stages of this project.

I would like to thank the AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership and the Browning Senior Studentship for making this research possible, and also the Pembroke College Dean of Graduates Fund for funding my conference travel.

I am grateful to the welcoming and inspiring community of Italian scholars and Sapienza enthusiasts I have met at Oxford and Durham, including Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, Alberica Bazzoni, and Ella Saxen. I have also benefitted greatly from the support and guidance of Emanuela Tandello and Vilma de Gasperin. I am lucky to have undertaken this project at the same time that my old friends Claudia Dellacasa and Sam Bailey have completed their own doctoral work, their shining example has helped me to keep going.

I certainly never would have started down this path had it not been for my first academic mentor Thomas Wynn. I am very grateful for the confidence he had in me then, and for the years of advice and friendship that have followed from Tom and his husband Silas.

It has been a great source of joy to meet so many wonderful friends at Pembroke. I would gladly write a thesis ten times over to relive our time together. I'd like to particularly thank Patrick and Brittany, for their endless generosity hosting me in Oxford and the U.S., and for being my most reliable source of positive energy. I am also enormously grateful to Allie, Ariana, and Constantin: my housemates, confidantes, and the very best people to have around you when the world stops.

I am lucky to have the love and support of dear friends and family. Thank you to Alice, whose brilliance in all things - and ability to have very long conversations - have immeasurably improved my life. Thank you also to my brothers Alex and Ross, and my sister-in-law Vicky, for always being in my corner. Thank you to Cillian for being there to pick me up when I've needed it most, I'm so glad we've tackled this chapter together. And finally, thank you to my parents Annie and Andrew, the best examples I could have of working hard and loving unconditionally.

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Introduction

> It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. […] It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can subjugate.[1]

This thesis offers an original comparative reading of the writers Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) and Goliarda Sapienza (1924-1996), two peripheral figures in the history of Western Literature in the twentieth-century, but both provoking a resurgent critical and public interest in the twenty-first. With each author writing in different languages, mostly on different continents, and published only narrowly during their lifetimes, this comparison is resolutely not founded in any cross-influence. Indeed, it is very likely that they would never have heard of each other. Despite the absence of a direct genealogical influence however, there are many shared cultural referents and frameworks between the two women, which seep into and inform their creative practice. This thesis reads the two authors together through a sequence of these shared frames, each one presenting a sense of restriction on the individual, namely: Catholicism, psychiatry, rigid gender roles, and language. By design, these topics are structured in a way that they become increasingly broad, or abstract, moving from the very literal restrictive environment of the convent to the intangible restriction felt within the written word. Throughout, these external authorities are countered with an individualism rooted in an embodied self, where physical experience and personal knowledge are elevated above received wisdom. Thus the *anarchic* bodies of my title relate to this sense of resistance to subjugation, and how the physical body rallies against restriction. Moreover, following Cixous's contention that *peripheral figures* are best placed to resist such authorities, this thesis will consider how Carrington and Sapienzas' *bodies* of

[1] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs,* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976) pp. 875 – 893, p 883. Transl. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen.

work are also anarchic, ex-centric, and bound up in their literary significance is their history of marginalisation.

Across the thesis, my analysis will focus on conflict between the individual and external authorities. Additionally, across each chapter there are recurrent themes of autobiography, gender, embodiment and subjectivity, where the overall aims of the thesis are to offer a new contribution to knowledge regarding each author's understanding of artistic representation, of the relationship between life and art, and between body and mind, and ultimately the role narrative plays in constructing and communicating identity. The comparative ethos of the thesis is sustained throughout, via close comparison of a number of key texts and shared themes, in addition to a consideration of the many differences between the authors in terms of their publication history, reception, and categorisation of their works. Through these close readings and thematic comparisons, the following research questions will be addressed in relation to both writers:

- How does the rhetoric of Catholic incarnation inform an understanding of the mind/body divide, particularly for the female subject? How does the pursuit of knowledge and a sense of excessive curiosity shape the text?
- To what extent can profound mental illness be communicated in text, and what is the value of doing so? What is the difference between spoken and written language in a psychiatric context, and how do the two coalesce to create the text?
- What impact does the use of a male avatar have on the formation of an adolescent gendered subject? How does gender identity function on an individual and collective level?
- To what extent is lived experience compatible with written language? How important is communication and authenticity to each writer's project?

These research questions have been chosen to indicate precisely where reading Sapienza and Carrington together may be mutually revelatory. While allowing for their many differences, this approach seeks to interpret each author not only as singularly eccentric, but as overlooked contributors to a transformative cultural reckoning - still ongoing - with key questions of gender, identity, and expression, in literature and beyond.

Carrington and Sapienza: Lives and Works

Leonora Carrington was born in Lancashire in 1917, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist father and an Irish Catholic mother. From her enrolment and expulsion from various convent schools, descriptions of Carrington as a child linger on her rebellious nature, her longing for the freedom her brothers enjoyed, and her affinity with horses and the folktales told to her by her Irish nanny.[2] As an adolescent, her inclination towards art becomes more evident, with an influential period of study in Florence at Mrs Penrose's Academy of Art and later at the Chelsea School of Art and the Ozenfant Academy of Fine Arts.[3] This latter period spent in London from 1935-1937 appears to be a great turning point in Carrington's life, with one foot still in the upper-class circles of her family – in 1935 she was presented at court, the subject of her celebrated short story 'The Debutante' – and the other foot in avant-garde artistic circles, where she would portentously cross paths with Max Ernst at a dinner party, the Surrealist artist 26 years her senior.

In contrast to her family's belief that she was swept away to become an artist's model, Carrington asserted that she 'did all of [her] running away alone.'[4] She lived in Paris with Ernst, and later in the South of France, where, at the very centre of the well-established Surrealist circle, she began to paint and to write industriously in the company of Leonor Fini, André Bréton, Paul and Nusch Éluard, Lee Miller, Salvador Dalí and Roland Penrose, amongst others. This relative idyll of productivity and collaboration - interrupted at times by the intrusion of Ernst's estranged wife – was halted abruptly by the outbreak of the

[2] See Marina Warner, Introduction, in Leonora Carrington, *House of Fear: Notes from Down Below,* Virago (London: 1989), pp. 1 – 21, and also Ali Smith, Introduction, in Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* Penguin Modern Classics (London: 2005), pp. v-xv.

[3] Susan L. Aberth gives an excellent overview of this period in her chapter 'The Early Formation of Leonora Carrington's Artistic Vision', in Jonathan Eburne and Caitriona McAra (eds.), *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde,* Manchester University Press (Manchester: 2017) pp. 20-38. It is important to note particularly that Carrington's style was heavily influenced by her exposure to Italian Renaissance styles and techniques in Florence, and later by Amédée Ozenfant's meticulous technique-driven teaching style, all prior to her exposure to the Surrealists.

[4] Leonora Carrington speaking to Joanna Moorhead, in Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington,* Virago (London: 2017), p. 71.

Second World War. With Ernst taken prisoner, Carrington fled occupied France to cross into Spain. She suffered a mental breakdown at this time, and by the authority of the British consul and her family she was interned in an asylum in Santander. There she was treated with the convulsive drug Cardiazol. After sometime it was arranged that she would be transferred to another institution in South Africa. Awaiting passage in Lisbon, Carrington sought out an old acquaintance from Paris, the Mexican diplomat Renato Leduc, and they quickly married, allowing her to escape from Europe, her family and the asylum. This period of Carrington's life was then recorded in New York and Mexico as her memoir – *Down Below* [*En Bas*].

From this point, Carrington spent the rest of her life in North America, living first in New York, and then Mexico City, where she married her second husband, the Hungarian Jewish photographer Emerico 'Chiki' Weisz, and had two sons. One amongst many European refugees of the war in Mexico City, Carrington became famous in her adopted country as a member of the emigré artist community, an association as significant perhaps in her artistic output as her more famed association with the Surrealists. Of particular significance are her close collaborative friendships with Remedios Varo and Kati Horna.[5] Over time, Carrington became embedded also within Mexican culture and even public life, including her involvement with the work of filmmakers Luis Buñuel and Alejandro Jodorowsky[6], and her contribution to the Mexican Women's movement and art projects such as the mural *El Mundo Magico de los Mayas* [The Magical World of the Mayans] now displayed at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. It is less known perhaps that Carrington continued to spend extensive periods in the U.S throughout her life, with Susan Rubin

[5] See Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead and Teresa Arcq, with contributions by Sharon-Michi Kusunoki and Antonio Rodriguez Rivera, *Surreal Friends : Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, Lund Humphries in association with Pallant House Gallery (Farnham: 2010).

[6] See Lora Markova and Roger Shannon, 'Leonora Carrington on and off Screen: Intertextual and Intermedial Connections between the Artist's Creative Practice and the Medium of Film', *Arts* (2019, 8, 11)

Suleiman somewhat bemusedly travelling to Oak Park, Illinois, in 1990 to interview the artist in her apartment there in an unassuming suburb of Chicago.[7] Carrington died in Mexico City in 2011, aged 94.

Beginning in Paris in 1938, Carrington authored published works in French, English and Spanish, producing two novels - *The Hearing Trumpet* and *The Stone Door* - , two novellas - *Down Below [En Bas]* and *Little Francis* - , and an extensive body of short stories and one-act plays, as well as a collection of stories for children. She also, from the late 1930s, produced huge amounts of visual art in a great variety of sketches, paintings, costumes, and sculptures. Carrington is well remembered as an artist, especially in her adopted Mexico City where her public artworks can be found, and where her former house has been converted into a museum. Although less well known in the UK, she was championed here most notably by Edward James, a loyal correspondent and friend who orchestrated many of her art sales. To date, there have been major retrospective exhibitions of her visual art in New York, San Francisco, Mexico City, London, Liverpool, and Dublin. Certainly Carrington has been amongst the most celebrated and studied of the women labelled as Surrealists, with interest steadily building since the 1970s, driven by the Feminist reconsideration of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth-century, and also the convenient timing of Carrington's novels finally appearing in print in 1974 (*The Hearing Trumpet*) and 1976 (*The Stone Door*). This reassessment of Carrington's position within Surrealism has served as a model for her critical reception ever since, where her work is viewed as a corrective to that movement's objectifying vision of femininity as *femme-enfant* [woman-child], a muse prized for her guilelessness, wild beauty, and proximity to the dream-world. Undoubtedly, such analysis of Carrington has been influential in the reclamation of the works of other women associated with Surrealism, who have also been

[7] Susan Rubin Suleiman 'The Bird Superior Meets the Bride of the Wind: Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst', in Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership,* Thames and Hudson (London: 2018), pp. 94-113, pp. 97-98.

subject to great scholarly interest in recent years, including Whitney Chadwick's 2017 volume *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* and major exhibitions at the Tate Modern of Dorothea Tanning (2019), and Dora Maar (2020), amongst others. In summary, it appears that feminist criticism has effectively succeeded in bringing Carrington to the centre of the arts world, where she is figured increasingly as an essential - rather than peripheral - contributor to Surrealism.[8] In 2022 alone her work will be featured once again at the Tate Modern, as the banner artist of their exhibition 'Surrealism without Borders', while the Venice Bienniale takes its theme 'The Milk of Dreams' from Carrington's children's book of the same title. Furthermore, as of 2020 a new 'Surrealist Feminist' arts journal, based in Scotland, shares its name with one of Carrington's most prominent works and identities, 'The Debutante'.[9] This perhaps is the single best example to illustrate Carrington's significance as *the* defining figure of Feminist Surrealism, and an ongoing source of inspiration and influence for contemporary artists and writers.

These final two examples, both visual art projects taking their names from Carrington's written work, provide evidence of the interconnectedness of her visual art and prose. The position of writing within Carrington's career is analysed in much greater depth in the final chapter of this thesis, but it is important to note here that despite limited public access, Carrington's prose has been central to critical analysis of her work for many decades. In addition to a good number of articles on her prose, the major edited volume on Carrington's career, edited by Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra, features prose and visual art in

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[8] Kate Dwyer explores the contemporary resonances of Carrington's work in her article 'Why Leonora Carrington's Work Feels So of the Moment", *W Magazine,* *https://www.wmagazine.com/culture/leonora-carrington-venice-biennale-books-history*, February 4th 2022, last accessed 28th March 2022.
See also Merve Emre, who declares *The Hearing Trumpet* 'one of the great comic novels of the twentieth century' in her piece 'How Leonora Carrington Feminized Surrealism', *The New Yorker,* *https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/12/28/how-leonora-carrington-feminized-surrealism*, December 28th 2020, last accessed 30th March 2022.

[9] See Rachel Ashenden and Molly Gilroy (eds.), *The Debutante,* https://www.thedebutante.online, last accessed 28/03/2022.

equal measure. Indeed, Anna Watz identifies Carrington as *the* trailblazer for recognition of Surrealist women's writing in her collected volume on that topic.[10] Despite this acclaim, to a general and academic readership in the U.K., Carrington's writing remains somewhat marginal. Both of her novels appeared in print some two decades after their composition, with the English volumes trailing their French translations. While *The Hearing Trumpet* has reached a much wider audience with its inclusion in the Penguin Modern Classics series in 2005, to date *The Stone Door* remains out of print. There has been particular interest and promotion of Carrington's career surrounding her centenary year in 2017, including the publication of her collected short stories and Moorhead's biography, the latter of which makes a point of reasserting Carrington's significance to her country of birth, and also refers widely to her works of literature.

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Goliarda Sapienza was born in Catania, Sicily in 1924. Named for her father's older son, Goliardo, who had died by drowning, she was the youngest child of a large blended family, and the only child of the union between her mother, Maria Giudice, and her father, Giuseppe 'Peppino' Sapienza. Giudice is a fascinating figure in her own right: a prominent Socialist, she was sent to Sicily from her home in Lombardy to direct the local efforts of the trade union movement.[11] Peppino meanwhile was a Catania native, a lawyer of poor origins who represented mostly working class people, and was also committed to the Socialist cause. Together, they ran the Socialist newspaper *L'Unione*. Goliarda, or Iuzza as she was known as a child, grew up surrounded by activity in this household, with both of her parents working from home and hosting colleagues and clients, and the comings and goings of her adolescent half-siblings. A key influential figure in Sapienza's life at this time is her tutor

[10] Anna Watz (ed.), *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration*, Manchester University Press (Manchester: 2020)

[11] Only recently Maria Giudice has been the subject of her own biography, see Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Maria Giudice,* Perrone (Rome: 2022)

Professor Jsaya, who gave her private lessons; at age 14 Sapienza was withdrawn entirely from school, due to the domination of the curriculum by the ruling Fascist party. At age 16, she received a scholarship to study acting at the *Accademia d'arte drammatica* in Rome. Sapienza's life to this point is thoroughly explored in her autobiographical fiction, with the texts *Lettera aperta* (1967), *Il filo di mezzogiorno* (1969) and *Io, Jean Gabin* (written circa 1980, published posthumously 2010) all returning to Catania, and the key figures of Maria, Peppino, Jsaya, and a vibrant carousel of neighbours, siblings, housemaids and uncles. While Sapienza's childhood is marked by the shadow of profound political conflict between her parents' Socialist beliefs and the overarching Fascist environment, there is also a great sense of play and freedom in many of her anecdotes from childhood, driven undoubtedly by her growing love of the theatrical and cinematic. Her studies in Rome were disrupted considerably by the Second World War, and during the conflict Sapienza spent periods both fighting with her father as a partisan, and in hiding within the safety of a Roman convent.

In the post-war years Sapienza's career as an actress began in earnest, with a number of theatre and film roles, working with prominent directors such as Alessandro Blasetti, although her cinematic work was confined to small, supporting parts. She began also a long-term romantic partnership with the director Francesco 'Citto' Masselli, with whom she would collaborate on a number of film projects over the following decade, and frequent intellectual social circles including writers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Elsa Morante. As in childhood, the political and personal continue to intertwine: in 1953, Sapienza's mother died, after suffering from presumed Alzheimer's for some years, and in 1956 the twentieth congress of the USSR took place, exposing some of the failings of Stalin's Socialist utopia to the West, with both events seeming to have a destabilising effect on Sapienza's worldview. She had begun to write poetry around the time of her mother's death. Her first published works of prose came about during a period of recovery from a prolonged depressive episode, which began in the late 1950s. During this intensely difficult time,

Sapienza attempted suicide twice, received Electroconvulsive therapy as an inpatient, resulting in memory loss, and underwent intensive psychoanalysis – often daily – for over three years. This period is recounted in detail in *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, which is considered at length alongside Carrington's *Down Below* in this thesis in the chapter on mental illness narratives. Following the modestly successful publication of *Lettera aperta* (1967) and *Il filo* (1969), Sapienza undertook the decade-long project of writing her most celebrated work: *L'arte della gioia* . This epic novel is today undoubtedly the most widely-read and studied of all Sapienza's output, it is unique also among her texts in terms of its length, scope and subject matter, as well as being her only venture into fiction. However the novel was rejected by several publishers, resulting in a personal financial crisis for Sapienza, and precipitating her brief imprisonment for theft in 1980, an experience recounted in the further autobiographical text *L'università di Rebibbia* (1983) and its aftermath in *Le certezze del dubbio* (1987). Throughout the late 1980s and early 90s Sapienza continued to write prolifically, although a large part of her works from this period were unpublished in her lifetime. She also returned to acting, and taught at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* in Rome. Sapienza married the writer and actor Angelo Pellegrino. She died in Gaeta, Lazio, in 1996, aged 72.

Monica Farnetti charts the slow swell of interest in Sapienza's writing from the 1990s onwards,[12] beginning with scarce journalistic and television interest in Italy and exploding with the unexpected success of the French translation of *L'arte della gioia* in 2005. This success facilitated the long-awaited unabridged publication of *L'arte della gioia* in Italian in 2008, and was rapidly followed by reissues of the earlier published works, and the appearance of posthumous volumes including the autobiographical novels *Io, Jean Gabin* (2010) and *Appuntamento a Positano* (2015) as well as extracts from her many notebooks *Il*

[12] See the introduction to Monica Farnetti's *Appassionata Sapienza,* La Tartaruga edizioni (Milano: 2011).

vizio di parlare a me stessa (2011), and her collected poetry *Ancestrale* (2013). Farnetti, alongside Giovanna Providenti, plays a key role in arguing for Sapienza's literary significance, with several publications appearing in 2010-12[13]. This early critical work establishes many of the core characteristics of Sapienza's narrative style, exploring especially the uniqueness of her autobiographical cycle, and also the centrality of embodiment and the experience of the writing subject. Strikingly, this early criticism is marked by an infectious, impassioned enthusiasm for Sapienza's work, reflecting a sense of cult fandom for these 'lost' works, demonstrated not least by the titles of these works, such as Farnetti's '*Appassionata Sapienza'* [loosely, 'Sapienza enthusiast']. This wave has continued to spread, with a number of further key publications appearing over the past decade largely in English, in work carried out by British and Italian scholars based in the U.K. Significantly, the first international conference in Sapienza studies took place in London in 2013, and later formed the basis of the volume *Goliarda Sapienza in Context* (2016), edited by Alberica Bazzoni, Emma Bond, and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi. This volume, with several essays dedicated to bringing Sapienza's work into dialogue with international peers, indicates a path for scholarship that accounts for both the international influences on Sapienza's work (for instance Woolf) and also for her international reception.

Sapienza's international reception comes amid a burgeoning interest in the Anglophone sphere in Italian women's writing. Unlike Carrington's towering position amongst Surrealist women's writing, Sapienza is certainly not the banner name amongst this group, with 'Ferrante fever' blazing a trail in the contemporary category, while more established mid-century peers such as Natalia Ginzburg and Elsa Morante have also been the subject of new translations and re-editions. Sapienza sits uneasily amongst these names, not quite a

[13] In addition to Farnetti's edited volume *Appassionata Sapienza,* see also Giovanna Providenti's volume of biography and literary criticism: *La porta è aperta: Vita di Goliarda Sapienza,* Villaggio Maori edizioni (Catania: 2010), and her edited volume *«Quel sogno di essere» di Goliarda Sapienza: Percorsi critici su una felle maggiori autrici del novecento italiano,* Aracne (Roma: 2012).

contemporary author but almost entirely unpublished until the 2000s. Her oeuvre is also difficult at times to place, with the breakout text *L'arte della gioia* being so atypical of her work, perhaps indicating why it has taken ten years from that work's publication in English to be followed by another translation of her work, arriving in 2021 in the form of Meeting in Positano [*Appuntamento a Positano*]. Despite the specificities of Sapienza's trajectory, the success of *L'arte della gioia* in translation raises questions that have also been addressed in scholarship on Ferrante in particular, namely, how and why have women's narratives been overlooked by the Italian literary establishment? Cecilia Schwartz has effectively demonstrated the shift in perception in the Italian press of Ferrante's Neapolitan novels from banal '*Romenzo rosa',* to a more elevated literary value following their success abroad, especially in the U.S,[14] which dovetails precisely with the rejections received by Sapienza in the 1970s for *L'arte della gioia* , deemed too sentimental to be a true philosophical novel. At the same time, both Sapienza and Ferrante may benefit in translation from a certain uncomfortable romanticization of a poverty-stricken mid-century Italian south, shifting significantly the connotations of the original language and context. Certainly, Sapienza's work and its reception has much to offer to this wider discussion of Italian women's inclusion in the canon, and their resonances abroad.

[14] Cecilia Schwartz, 'Ferrante Feud: The Italian Reception of the Neapolitan Novels before and after their International Success', *The Italianist*, DOI: 10.1080/02614340.2020.1738122, 2020.

Anarchic: A Case for Comparison

Given their relative obscurity, and the limited availability of Sapienza's prose in English, mirrored by a similar absence of Carrington in Italian, there is presumably a vanishingly small overlap between the readership, both general and critical, of both authors. Amongst the critical studies on both women, there have been a significant number of comparative chapters and essays, largely responding to the need to contextualise each author, and to establish their relative significance and merit. This has in practice fallen into two distinct schools, where comparisons of Carrington with Surrealist practitioners such as Leonor Fini, Remedios Varos, and André Breton explore both her personal relationships with those creators and their cross-influence, within the confined cultural sphere of Surrealism. Meanwhile, comparative studies of Sapienza have undertaken to locate her work in relation to more prominent voices in 20th-century women's writing, in Italy and abroad, prompting comparisons with Virginia Woolf, Elsa Morante, and Elena Ferrante. Patently, this thesis employs neither tactic, not relying upon a relationship or shared artistic movement between the two women, nor utilising the greater acclaim of the one to elevate the status of the other.

On a perfunctory level, this thesis is grounded in a remarkable number of shared themes in the authors' works - themes that emerge from shared life experiences. While living in different countries and continents, both women experienced a childhood shaped by the cultural and institutional values of Catholicism, spending periods within convents or convent schools. They both write about formative traumatic experiences of separation and escape during the Second World War. They were both patients of psychiatric institutions and underwent forms of convulsive therapy, writing autobiographical accounts of these experiences. They both had creative careers outside of writing, which were at times overshadowed by significant relationships with a more renowned male artist in that field. They both have disrupted and delayed histories of publication and reception, indicating a

peripheral status of their lives and works. These overlaps provide points of entry into the texts explored in this thesis, but often the arc of my analysis shows greater and greater divergence between the two women in their responses to these biographical prompts. Rather than becoming overly concerned with a mere list of similarities and differences between two evidently different individuals, it is hoped that instead this thesis may offer new insights by reading the two together, employing their texts in such a way that exposes underexplored resonances.

Crucially, these resonances are not merely thematic but also expand in less anticipated avenues through the use of form and style in Carrington and Sapienza's works. Largely, form and style serve in this thesis to establish the particularities of each author's creative practice, a source of conflict in contrast to the shared concerns of their themes. At times, for instance, Sapienza's directness exposes Carrington's obfuscation, or Carrington's expansive sense of place draws out a claustrophobia in Sapienza. This is perhaps most evident in the analysis of how autobiography functions in each author's work, drawing out some of the contentions of that form. Carrington has been almost entirely neglected in the field of life-writing, where often the autobiographical nature of her work is subsumed into an anecdotal account of her real-life Surrealist exploits, and not provoking further reflection or comparison in terms of her contribution to that genre.

It is striking that despite the overall more prominent profile of Carrington, almost all criticism of her work is entirely embedded within Surrealism, suggesting perhaps an over-reliance on stylistic analysis of her work. This may be due to her greater renown as an artist rather than writer, and also perhaps a tendency within criticism to categorise Surrealism almost as genre literature, a self-contained and self-sustaining ecosystem. In large part, this thesis is an experiment in bringing Carrington out of Surrealism, and examining the ensuing connections and possibilities of her work outside of this context. In equal measure, then, this comparison brings Sapienza into the realm of Surrealism, an association that likewise

uncovers new dimensions in her work. While not reliant upon a direct influence between the two, this method of comparative literature is reflective of the international cultural milieu of both authors, where various Western political and cultural forces are felt in both women's works, from the upheaval of the Second World war, to restrictive religious and gendered social norms, and also the opening up of new creative productive streams such as transatlantic post-war cinema, and an awakening Feminist imaginary.

Beyond mere coincidences, these shared histories may serve to illustrate the folly of attempting to retrospectively parse authors into the distinct categories of different artistic movements, and national or language-based canons. Indeed while contemporary criticism has consistently examined Surrealism in terms of its exceptionalism against other forms of avant-garde or Modernist artistic practice, this may distort the ways in which readers and writers experienced literature and art. Beyond the methodological question, the sequestering of Carrington and others into a monolithic Surrealist sphere is troubling also in that it seems to go against the very anarchic and expansive ethos of that movement. *Anarchic* is used to describe the essence of the comparison between Carrington and Sapienza in this thesis, capturing a shared sense of resistance to subjugation, and also of a certain sensory excessiveness, in addition to an ex-centric subject position. In keeping with this will to anarchy as a feature of both authors, this comparison itself is somewhat anarchic in kind: uniting two peripheral figures, and disregarding differences of language, and literary categorisation.

Anarchy is also prevalent as a feature of Surrealism, as from the Surrealist Manifesto:

> L'homme propose et dispose. Il ne tient qu'à lui de s'appartenir tout entier, c'est-à-dire de maintenir à l'état anarchique la bande chaque jour plus redoutable de ses désirs. La poésie le lui enseigne.[15]

[15] André Breton, *Manifeste du Surrealisme,* in *Manifestes du Surréalisme,* Jean-Jacques Pauvert *(*Paris: 1962*)* pp. 14 -64., p. 31.

> [Man proposes and disposes. It is up to him alone to belong entirely to himself, that is to say to keep his bunch of ever more formidable desires in an anarchic state. Poetry teaches him so.]

Interestingly, even while seeking to establish a group identity Breton here underlines a sense of radical individualism. This reflects the comparison at hand, where both Carrington and Sapienza are both radically individual, yet share in this characteristic. Another crucial aspect of the above quotation is Breton's observation that poetry itself is the originator of this sense of anarchy. This will be a key notion in this thesis where, despite the formal differences between Sapienza and Carrington, I will argue that their narrative drive is rooted in an individual, anarchic, embodied self, giving rise to a sense of sensory excess and expansive layers of meaning in their prose. Bringing Sapienza into dialogue with Surrealist sensibilities in this manner aligns well with Breton's own understanding of Surrealism, and his habit of appropriating figures such as Sade, Hugo, Dante and Shakespeare into the movement (albeit with caveats, for instance Breton considers Shakespeare a Surrealist only 'at his best').[16] In this vein, Sapienza's work certainly can be interpreted as intersecting with a Surrealist sensibility. Non-conformity and ideological freedom has been established, particularly by Alberica Bazzoni, as a key tenet of her work, Bazzoni writes:

> From a position of marginality and ex-centricity, Sapienza gives voice to a radical aspiration of freedom and new, creative ways to conceive personal identity and human relationships, addressing a subversive criticism to the very centre of Western thought and society, and representing an alternative and original voice in 20th-century Italian literature.[17]

Considering especially 'marginality and ex-centricity', which may be viewed as compatible with, if not synonymous to 'anarchy', this contention may be the point at which both Sapienza and Carrington begin to veer away from the Surrealist notion of freedom. Breton and his list of (entirely male) great poets choose to embrace anarchy, doing so by breaking the status quo of art and traditional notions of form. This requires action and will, a constant

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[16] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

[17] Alberica Bazzoni, *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative*, DPhil Thesis, Oxford University, 2014, p. 7.

effort to ‘maintain an anarchic state’ as Breton says. Does this apply to women writers? I would contend that for Carrington and Sapienza, their anarchism is tied to their marginalisation, and is not so much an active choice but a function of their subject position as women writers and artists.

Bodies: Gender, Autobiography, Subjectivity

Many of the points of comparison explored in this thesis arise from the fact that both Carrington and Sapienza are women who write autobiographically. Moreover, both writers foreground the female body, and the experience of women as embodied subjects, across their work both fictional and autobiographical. This enduring association between gender, autobiography, and body, has been affirmed by an abundance of scholarship across the latter part of the 20th century. Writing in 1990, Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom offer an overview of the contributions of studies on women's life-writing thus far, and the scholars who went before them who:

> [H]ave protested the exclusion of women from the autobiographical canon, questioned the paradigm of 'singular' or 'exemplary' lives based on men's experience, explored the differences between men's and women's forms of self-representation, and proposed several new women-centred literary models.[18]

This era of rediscovery of women's autobiography has subsequently been subject to the criticism that overstating the existence of a feminine mode of writing is a limiting and essentialist philosophy. In more recent scholarship on the topic, such as Ursula Fanning's 2017 text on Italian women's autobiographical writing in the 20th century, this accusation of essentialism is addressed head on, as Fanning asks:

> Why lay oneself open to charges of essentialism in restating a link between women's writing and the autobiographical mode and in trying to establish what the specific function of the autobiographical mode might be for women writers? The answer must be in part, 'because it's there'; the sheer number of autobiographical works written by women in Italy in the past century is arresting and seems to beg investigation.[19]

The directness of this justification is appealing, and creates a space for the consideration of women's autobiography as a category by virtue of historical pragmatism, and not derived from an abstract sense of universal experience or inherent female identity. In line with

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[18] Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom (eds.), *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender*, State University of New York Press (Albany, NY: 1990), pp. 1-2.

[19] Ursula Fanning, *Italian Women's Autobiographical Writings in the Twentieth Century: Constructing Subjects,* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press (Madison, Wisconsin ; Teaneck, New Jersey : 2017), p. ix.

Cixous's claim, quoted at the beginning of this introduction, that 'it is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing',[20] it seems plausible that an amorphous and complex feminine practice of writing may exist in response to the historical treatment and position of women, which has engendered shared experiences and responses in text, but has always been multifaceted, and remains open to further change. Interviewed in 2021, some thirty years after her seminal text *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler re-affirms the open-endedness of her understanding of female identity, and all gender identities, saying that:

> Feminism has always been committed to the proposition that the social meanings of what it is to be a man or a woman are not yet settled. We tell histories about what it meant to be a woman at a certain time and place, and we track the transformation of those categories over time.
>
> We depend on gender as a historical category, and that means we do not yet know all the ways it may come to signify, and we are open to new understandings of its social meanings.[21]

In line with this statement, both Carrington and Sapienza speak to the social realities of gender identity, at times offering radical visions of freedom and ambition, and at others reflecting the limitations of their historical moment. This contention will be explored at far greater length in the body of the thesis, particularly in the third chapter which explores the balance between each author's individual voice and sense of belonging to the wider category of 'woman', noting that in the span of their writing careers from the 1930s to the 1990s we encounter vast shifts in the cultural understanding of 'gender as a historical category'. The resurgent interest in both authors in the twenty-first century is often attributed to their out-of-their-own-time feminist perspective, speaking to a modern sensibility through their anarchic resistance to social norms, and in their expansive and fluid understanding of the gender binary. Their prescience is also informed though by a profound sense of history, with fictional texts *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet* both

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[20] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 883.

[21] Judith Butler, interviewed by Alona Ferber, 'Judith Butler on the culture wars, JK Rowling and living in "anti-intellectual times"', The New Statesman, 22nd September 2020, https://www.newstatesman.com/uncategorized/2020/09/judith-butler-culture-wars-jk-rowling-and-living-anti-intellectual-times, last accessed 07/01/2022.

reaching back into the past and constantly looking forward to a new world yet to come. In their autobiographical work too I would contend that this unique blend of 'fact' and 'fiction' has a radical impact on their depiction of an embodied gendered identity, at every turn there is a sense of what woman *is* and what woman *could be*. This fluidity has an effect of breeding contradictions, with a resulting uncertainty on many of the core concepts of gender theory to come, for instance whether the female body is a source of power or a burden? Is femininity innate or learned? Writing from a subjective, autobiographical position, these questions are felt to be unanswered and perhaps unanswerable, as Carrington writes in *The Stone Door*, '[i]t is difficult to say if the load was heavy or light because I already seemed to be accustomed to carrying loads and this had become a function of my body.'[22]

This quote sheds light upon one of the key theoretical concerns of this thesis, that is to what extent is identity rooted in the body? To some extent my approach aligns with a phenomenological understanding of embodiment, where, as above, the physicality of the world and the literal actions of the body are highlighted by both Sapienza and Carrington as important, instilling and creating their own truth. Both writers foreground sensory experience in a way that chimes with phenomenology, as defined by Taylor Carman as

> [A]n attempt to describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a first person point of view, in contrast to the reflective, third person perspective that tends to dominate scientific knowledge and common sense.[23]

Certainly Carrington and Sapienza place a great emphasis on the powers of their own perception, both distrustful at times of institutions and their knowledge. One criticism of such an approach may be that the writer who is ruled by experience is liable to flightiness. Looking at this thesis as a whole, I am struck by the multiplicity of the lived body in

[22] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* Routledge (London: 1978), p. 16.
[23] Taylor Carman, Foreword, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* Routledge (London and New York: 2012), p. viii.

Carrington and Sapienza's texts, pointing perhaps to the rich potential of a subjective philosophy. Bodies in this thesis take the form of a saintly martyr, an androgynous abbess, of psychiatric patients subject to convulsive therapies, a young girl posing as a film star, and a hyena posing as a debutante. Female bodies both old and young, Marian figures of maternal bliss, spinsters, tomboys, the resonant sense of embodiment in these texts is of experimentation and fluidity.

This instability speaks to perhaps the primary theoretical concern in criticism on autobiography, that is, does a stable identity exist? And if not, how can an identity be communicated in writing? Shirley Neuman, in her work on autobiography and gender, affirms that 'The development of a poetics of autobiography has been one response to a moment of cultural contestation about the "self."'[24] Given the responsibility of responding to new ideas about the self, theorists on autobiography must now take a stance on the meaning of that self, responding to a dominating poststructuralist theoretical landscape where the relationship between the signified and signifier can no longer be taken for granted, and a previously understandable, rational, universal 'self' may no longer be said to exist. This takes different forms, where some writers such as Groag Bell and Yalom consider the influence of poststructuralism to overreach its bounds, distorting the value of autobiography that can be derived if we accept at face value that the text is founded in reality.[25] For others, such as the influential Sidonie Smith, women's autobiography possesses an importance in the context of the 20th century precisely due to this potential to destabilise the masculine unmoving pillar of identity, where the line of the 'I' on the page:

> [..] is itself a sign of death-in-life. Casting aridity within its shade, it blocks out creativity like a sunscreen. […] And so, for Woolf, the bar that serves metaphorically as a site for the universal subject and its normative masculinity,

[24] Shirley Neuman, Introduction, in Shirley Newman (ed.), *Autobiography and Questions of Gender,* Frank Cass (London and Portland: 1991), pp. 1-11, p. 1.
[25] Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom, p. 3.

> requires barring. It must be crossed, perhaps double-crossed, before it can signal the trace of female subjectivity in an autobiographical text.[26]

Accepting the written word as true and stable is therefore tantamount to death, an idea which will be explored at length in the final chapter of this thesis, and is certainly borne out significantly in the work of both Carrington and Sapienza. And yet we run the risk here of adopting a new essentialist and restricting binary, if women are unchangingly *unstable* in response to male stability. In navigating these opposing values, this thesis is indebted to the approach adopted by Fanning in her recent volume on both issues at hand here, namely the referentiality vs textuality issue at stake in autobiography, and secondly the perception of a new binary between a stable male subject and unstable female. On the first issue, Fanning employs the work of Lilian Furst on realist fiction, 'where she rejects the notion of reading it as an "either/or option between referentiality and textuality" and chooses instead to focus on the "porous interface" between the two'.[27] Within this paradigm, the reality of the events depicted in autobiography can be held to possess meaning, all the while allowing for the fluid and uncertain translation of life into writing, and the expansions and reductions in meaning that might be garnered from both living, and writing a life. On the second point, Fanning disrupts the binary between a male and female subject position by questioning 'the possibility of either men or women speaking from a cerned subjectivity',[28] but instead finds a point of difference between the genders, where for women there is a positive potential in asserting even an unstable subject position. She argues that for women writing autobiographically 'a fleeting hold of a double/multiple/unstable subjectivity is a positive liberation for the women writer from the relentlessly monotonous, negative, and fixed position of object of discourse and narrative.'[29] I find that this 'positive liberation' aligns with Carrington and Sapienza's autobiographical writings, participating in the uncertain and

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[26] Sidone Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body,* p. 2.
[27] Ursula Fanning, *Italian Women's Autobiographical Writings in the Twentieth Century: Constructing Subjects,* p. xi.
[28] *Ibid.,* p. xiii.
[29] *Ibid.,* p. xiii.

new potential of writing the female subject. There is a profound sense of hope and potential in both women's works, as Alberica Bazzoni writes on Sapienza, '[…] there is not the sense of a previously universal and rational subject falling apart, but rather the coming to being of a new subjectivity.'[30]

[30] Alberica Bazzoni, *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative*, p. 83.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter of this thesis offers a close comparison of the novels *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet*, each the most famous and well-read work of their respective authors. My point of entry is the shared influence of Catholicism on the depiction of the female body, broadening in the second part of the chapter to consider how questions of knowledge, doctrine, and embodiment resonate in each text beyond the reaches of Catholic teachings. These texts provide an excellent entry point into the works of each author: while not as overtly autobiographical as the majority of their wider output, they offer via their invented heroines a model of liberated, joyful, female identity. These texts establish the centrality of both embodiment and intellectual freedom to each woman's conception of subjectivity, which will be explored throughout the thesis.

The second chapter further evidences this crucial link between bodily and intellectual freedom, through analysis of Carrington and Sapienza's 'psychiatric novels', *Down Below [En Bas],* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno.* Firstly, this chapter explores how both authors depict their experience of mental illness as a sense of distance and alienation from others and one's own body, as well as a gendered ordeal where their enforced position of passivity contrasts with their male psychiatrists' power, with the latter identified with the fascist power structures both women have encountered. This thematic analysis is followed by a more philological approach; exploring both authors' differing methods of writing autobiographically, my analysis parses the intersection of the written and spoken word in the composition of both texts, asking what is at stake for an individual narrating their own experience of mental illness.

The third chapter once again centres on autobiographical writing, examining how gender identity is expressed through the singular texts *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin.* My analysis reads the use of a male alter ego in both works as a means for their young

protagonists to explore the performativity of gender and rebel against traditional femininity, examining this literary device in the light of critical theory on drag performance by Jack Halberstam and Judith Butler. This focus on performance also opens up new questions on autobiography or auto*fiction*, and the effect felt in these texts from the layering of different elements of truth and fiction. The arc of this chapter moves from the singular, adolescent protagonists depicted via a male alter ego in these two key texts, to consider more mature and collective depictions of female identity more broadly across both authors' works.

Throughout the thesis, writing is often presented as a tool in the author's arsenal to overcome restrictive social systems. However, in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis language itself is measured as a source of this sense of restriction. This analysis considers contributions from a wide range of theorists and authors, including Jacques Derrida, bell hooks, Johann Georg Hamann and Elena Ferrante, taking into account the gap between life and writing, and the potential of that gap to instil a sense of joyful expanse or mournful loss in both the writer and reader. Building on the recurrent theme of autobiography in this thesis, this chapter will particularly consider to what extent Carrington and Sapienza aim to truly embed themselves into their writing, and whether expectations of authenticity and total intimacy from autobiographical writing take on a gendered aspect. Intertextual readings pertinent to the context of each author are employed here to further explore these themes, with comparative analysis of Italo Svevo and Luigi Pirandello with Sapienza, and Claude Cahun with Carrington. Cahun's autobiographical writings open a segue into the potential - both positive and restrictive - of viewing Carrington and Sapienza's work as an example of *écriture féminine*.

Chapter One: 'Unholy Curiosity': Knowledge, Body, and Doctrine in *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet*

Introduction

Both *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet* stand isolated within their respective authors' canons. Their best known and most widely read works, they contain both writers' most developed female protagonists, with narratives distinctly removed from their own biographies. Their length alone created a model that neither Carrington nor Sapienza sought to recreate. Each offers perhaps the most fully realised example of the pure imaginative force of their creator: they demand attention. Attention in the form of popular and critical success has only occurred in recent years, which, in addition to the disjointed and delayed publications of both novels, has had the effect of detaching them from their own time periods.

L'arte della gioia was the result of a sustained effort on Sapienza's part. After almost ten years of work on the manuscript (1967-76) it was declined by several publishing houses; she would never see her work achieve widespread acclaim. Yet the book was finally able to reach a rapt audience, following an initially modest publication in the original Italian in the 1990s in abridged form, the novel's popularity soared with the arrival of the French translation in 2006, swiftly followed by the now ubiquitous Einaudi edition of 2008.[31] Strangely enough, there was also a gap of some twenty years between the composition and publication of *The Hearing Trumpet*, although rather than seeking publication Carrington had simply lost the manuscript,[32] with the first edition appearing in French translation in

[31] Angelo Pellegrino 'Lunga marcia dell'Arte della gioia', in Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* Einaudi (Turin: 2008) pp.v-x. [Transl. Anne Milano Appel, *The Art of Joy,* Penguin (London: 2013)]

[32] Anna Watz, ''A language buried at the back of time': The Stone Door and poststructuralist feminism', in Eburne and McAra (eds.), *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, pp. 90 – 104, p. 91.

1974, then in English in 1976. The re-issuing of the novel in 2005 by Penguin Classics indicates an increased level of recognition and interest in the new millennium.

These similar trajectories give both novels the impression of being out of their own time, which is significant on a textual level given that both contain unique representations of history and time. However, the difference between the two writers' relationships with publishing houses, and therefore the wider literary world, indicates the significant difference in form of the two novels, and their relation to their contemporaries. Gloria Scarfone describes how *L'arte della gioia* was perceived by potential publishers as an indefinable novel, caught between two stools:

> [N]é un'opera d'avanguardia né un semplice romanzo popolare, ma si collocava in una posizione intermedia che lo rendeva idealmente inadatto tanto alla cosiddetta élite intellettuale quanto al lettore medio.[33]
>
> [neither an avant-garde work nor a simple popular novel, it was situated in an intermediate position which made it unsuited for both the so-called intellectual elite and the average reader.]

This incompatibility with the publishing market in Italy in the 1970s prompts Charlotte Ross to argue that *L'arte della gioia* is 'a novel that does not fit the moment of its composition',[34] and certainly contemporary readers have been kinder, with many critics describing a deeply effecting reading experience. Manuela Vigorita credits it as 'la prima volta che un testo mi mostrava così chiaramente il potere del desiderio femminile, la sua libertà, la sua capacità di creare mondo.'[35] [the first time that a text had shown me so clearly the power of female desire, its freedom, its capacity to create a world.] But it remains, nevertheless, a resolutely unusual text, perhaps due precisely to this ability to create its own world. The idiosyncratic Modesta is born in poverty in Sicily on January 1st 1900, twenty-four years before her creator. As her life story unfolds in tandem with the twentieth century,

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[33] Gloria Scarfone, *Goliarda Sapienza: Un'autrice ai margini del sistema letterario,* Transeuropa (Massa: 2018) p. 67.
[34] Charlotte Ross, 'Goliarda Sapienza's Eccentric Interruptions: Multiple selves, gender ambiguities and disrupted desires', *altrelettere,* 2012, p. 1.
[35] Manuela Vigorita, 'Linee per un ritratto', in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza*, p. 20

Sapienza's style shifts between striking verisimilitude (Modesta's incarceration by the Fascists) and the fantastical (deep sleeps that last for days, voices that speak from the past). This shifting style is most apparent in the stark difference between the first part of the novel, with its striking vibrancy and the melodrama of serial murder, and the rest of the novel, with its more measured tone and pace. Scarfone argues convincingly against these shifts being dismissed as incoherence, questioning the validity of coherence as a measure of success within Sapienza's work.[36] With Scarfone's sustained analysis as an exception, it is apparent that critics have often confronted *L'arte della gioia* in fragments, perhaps unavoidably given its fluid style and plot, amplified by its unwieldy length.

In contrast, *The Hearing Trumpet* is resolutely avant-garde, and sits more recognisably within the canon of Surrealist literature. It is through her association with the Surrealists that Carrington developed a supportive relationship with the French editor Henri Parisot, who sought out her work even after her move to Mexico. The loss of *The Hearing Trumpet* for twenty years also indicates a certain indifference to publication entirely at odds with Sapienza, for whom the rejection of *L'arte della gioia* was a heavy weight which prompted depressive episodes.[37] Although not well known to a wider audience, Carrington gained some level of critical recognition as a significant practitioner amongst the Surrealists, with the inclusion of *The Hearing Trumpet* in Susan Suleiman's *Subversive Intent*[38] as one noteworthy example. In addition to its subversion, however, *The Hearing Trumpet* is notable (amongst both avant-garde literature in general and Carrington's own work) for its accessibility and infectious humour. The novel centres upon the nonagenarian Marian Leatherby, and her confinement to a nursing home for elderly women by her objectionable family. These recognisable everyday elements sit alongside the more outlandish, where

[36] Gloria Scarfone, pp. 102-103.
[37] Angelo Pellegrino, in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza* p. 79.
[38] Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde,* Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA and London: 1990).

furniture is painted onto the walls of rooms and a woman might feasibly have the head of a wolf. Alicia Kent suggests that

> [I]t is perhaps The Hearing Trumpet's and Carrington's greatest contribution to Surrealism that she makes magical the antithetical juxtaposition of the modern and the traditional in the everyday.[39]

This interplay of the modern and traditional has continued to resonate in the decades since the novel's conception, with Ali Smith suggesting a heightened significance in the modern day due to the plot's eco-consciousness.[40]

How then, do these two novels, and indeed these two writers, relate to one another? Carrington and Sapienza share a wry and sometimes vicious scepticism towards the status quo, against which they propose an uncompromisingly assured individuality. This individuality is rooted in the body, in an undivided and indivisible body/mind subject whose knowledge is born of their own instinct. Marian Leatherby tells us herself: 'Nobody could ever be bored with me I have too much soul. Far too much, but lots of body too, thank Heavens.'[41] In addition to the unification of body and mind, the notion of excess is central to this conception of subjectivity. It is not just that Marian has a body and a soul, but that she has far too much. Moreover, this is cause for celebration and joy, subverting traditional moralist teachings on the virtues of restraint. Sapienza's narrative style lends itself to this joyful excess, she 'represents life as being about gain – it is about additions and constant, surprising, and abundant acquisitions that go against any sort of limitation.'[42] I contend that this limitless depiction of personal identity is a distinctive feature of the narrative style of

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[39] Alicia Kent, 'Are we to be contented with dreams? Getting older in the work of Leonora Carrington', *Journal of Romence Studies*, Vol.17. No.3 (Winter 2017), pp. 293 -309, p. 299.
[40] Ali Smith, Introduction, in Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* Penguin Classics (London: 2005) p. xiv.
[41] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 17.
[42] Monica Farnetti, 'Nomadic Modesta', in (ed.) Alberica Bazzoni, Emma Bond and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, *Goliarda Sapienza in Context: Intertextual Relationships with Italian and European Culture,* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press (Madison, NJ: 2016) p. 70.

both authors, as Farnetti describes, 'forse è questo ciò che meglio connota il romanzo, il suo «di più»'[43] [perhaps it is this which best characterises the novel, its "excessiveness"].

Thematically, such excess is only truly felt when it has overcome a restrictive force; limitation enters both novels via the spectre of religion. The Catholic Church features recurrently in both novels, in both overt and implicit reference, with *L'arte della gioia* even subtitled as a *Romenzo anticlericale* [anticlerical novel] in its earliest publication.[44] Catholicism has, however, received little attention in critical analysis of the texts. In keeping with both authors' association of bodily freedom with intellectual freedom, the church seeks to assert control over both, believing them to be linked. Bodily conformity is akin to spiritual conformity, where true belief serves to erase the female body entirely:

> Quelle donne non facevano nessun rumore quando ti passavano accanto o entravano e uscivano dalle loro celle: non avevano corpo. Non volevo diventare trasparente come loro. [45]
>
> ['Those women didn't make a sound when they passed you or went in and out of their cells: they had no body. I didn't want to become insubstantial like them.']

This chapter will explore the ways in which Marian and Modesta resist becoming *trasparente*, positing a relentlessly physical female body against the restrictive boundaries of doctrine. The virtue of restraint is imposed through the church or its agents in various guises, via sexual abstinence, fasting, or physical mortification. Sapienza and Carrington are unfailingly united in their refusal to associate physical pleasure with immorality.

Each author's account of Catholicism is, however, sensitive to the nuances of a complex doctrine that at turns restricts and elevates the body. The first half of this chapter will assess both writers' depictions of convent life, and the contradictory ways in which this lifestyle can both burden women and provide them with opportunity. Errant nuns and novices

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[43] Monica Farnetti, 'Introduzione', in *Appassionata Sapienza*, p. 10.
[44] Manuela Vigorita, 'Linee per un ritratto', in *Appassionata Sapienza*, p. 20.
[45] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 42. [p. 58.]

exploit this paradoxical potential for freedom within the confines of Catholicism in both novels, not simply abandoning the paradigm of female holiness they find within the Church, but repurposing it to new ends. More broadly, the centrality of Christ's embodiment to Catholic worship disturbs the traditional degradation of women by their association with their body. Instead, a space is opened up whereby women's 'bodily-ness' aligns them with the divine, albeit not unproblematically: this association of women's bodies with Christ's body most often takes the form of suffering. Nevertheless, within the imagery of Catholicism both writers see models of femininity which associate the female body with the divine. This section will examine the pervasiveness of Catholicism in the depiction and understanding of female bodies, and the ambivalent and unexpected ways that these writers engage with such images.

In the second half of this chapter the battle of body and mind in these texts will move beyond Catholicism to consider more broadly how knowledge is disseminated by institutions and understood by the individual. Religion provides a powerful example of the imposition of external doctrine onto the body. However, the resistance of both writers to the restrictions of the status quo reaches beyond the walls of the convent. They demand little more than total revolution, quite literally, in the case of *The Hearing Trumpet,* where we find that the world has spun on its axis. Both novels take a startlingly broad scope, whether fantastical or rooted in real events the narrative takes on historical, epic, significance. Indeed, each novel's structure suggests that the constraints of Catholicism are somewhat past, but that new doctrines are flourishing to take the church's place. Whether it be Capitalism, Socialism or Psychoanalysis, both writers seem sceptical of the widespread need to adhere to a strict set of beliefs. Life, they argue, resists doctrine. Jonathon Eburne

and Catriona McAra express this tendency in Carrington's work as 'an openness to uncertainty and non-knowledge'.[46]

Finally, the exploration of the female body in both novels foregrounds questions of age and maturity. The unorthodoxy of portraying the experience of older women is still apparent even decades after the first composition of both texts. Furthermore, each author's use of the first-person narratorial voice and their treatment of time bears on the association of body and identity. If the self is indeed instinctual, or innate, this poses an interesting counterpart to conventional notions of development and maturity. Do Modesta and Marian 'grow' as individuals? If there is worth and value in age, how does this balance with the widespread association of female beauty with youth? Personal maturity, an assured individuality rooted in the mind and body, these tools unite Marian and Modesta and offer a powerful foil to institutionalised knowledge and power. Age is crucial in this question as an obstacle which illuminates the vitality of each author's joyful embrace of life. It is this joyfulness which also suggests a dialogue between these texts, amongst the body of Sapienza and Carrington's work. The word which might best express this comparison is *irreverence*, suggesting as it does a defiance of cultural and religious norms, but also a certain levity.

[46] Eburne and McAra, Introduction, *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde*, p. 2.

Catholicism

Goliarda and Leonora: A Non-conformist Inheritance

Both authors hold unusual positions on the peripheries of the Catholic tradition, lending an outsider status which may influence the subversive stance they take on women's roles and depiction within the church. In Sapienza's autobiographical fiction (particularly *Lettera aperta* and *Io, Jean Gabin*) she outlines her upbringing as the youngest child of the blended families of her prominent Socialist parents; atheists who withdrew their daughter from school to evade the indoctrination of the ruling Fascist party. This spirit of non-conformity extended to Sapienza's name, which she notes, 'mio padre, essendo ateo, me lo mise perché era un nome senza santi'.[47] [my father, being an atheist, gave to me because it wasn't a saint's name]. From the perspective of the child Goliarda, both Catholicism and Fascism loom as malevolent influences, ideologies endorsed and propagated by the institutions of state and church. The complex relationship between the Vatican and the Italian state during the Fascist period has been well documented, where the church's pragmatic stance was largely complicit, viewing Fascism as:

> [C]apable of establishing the conditions seen as ideal by the Vatican for the intended 're-christianisation of society', such as social order and discipline, but more particularly the establishment of an anti-liberal and anti-socialist, authoritarian and hierarchical State.[48]

This authoritarian dictation of values by Church and State is resisted by Sapienza in her life and writing, as well as by her distinctive heroine Modesta in *L'arte della gioia* . However, religion isn't always so closely aligned with the prevailing power structures, as demonstrated by Sapienza's political asylum during the Second World War inside a convent

[47] Goliarda Sapienza, *Lettera aperta,* Einaudi (Torino: 2015) p. 28.
[48] Jan Nelis, Anne Morelli and Danny Praet, 'The Study of the Relationship Between Catholicism and Fascism, Beyond a Manichean Approach?', in Jan Nelis, Anne Morelli and Danny Praet (eds.), *Catholicism and Fascism in Europe 1918-1945,* Georg Olms Verlag (New York: 2015) pp. 9-14, p. 9.

in Rome.[49] Whilst maintaining a deep scepticism of the Church as a whole, and without the conviction of belief, Sapienza recognises the cultural antecedents of Catholicism, particularly in Sicily, writing:

> [N]oi eravamo atei, nondimeno tenevamo in gran conto le usanze popolari che hanno radici nel profondo della Storia e che quel pivellino di Cristo aveva solo sfruttato per il suo progetto[50]
>
> [we were atheists, nevertheless we held in high esteem the customs of the people which had their roots deep in history, and which that little upstart Christ had only exploited for his own plans]

This distinction between the local lore and customs which underpin religious tradition on the one hand, and the instrumentalisation of faith for some exploitative *progetto* on the other, indicates Sapienza's resistance to organised religion as separate to her understanding of faith in general. As this chapter will go on to discuss, this distinction is apparent in the ambivalent depiction of religion found in *L'arte della gioia* , where Modesta's own atheism doesn't preclude an identification or fascination with certain elements of Catholic tradition. Indeed, despite the prescriptivist nature of religious doctrine, the potential for uncertainty, or irrationality within spiritual experience, holds a resonance with Modesta's personal convictions. Carmelina Canta identifies this 'irrational' side of religion with an unexpected proximity between religious belief and magic in Sicily, described as a difference between 'religione «prescritta» e religione «vissuta», intrisa di elementi magici.'[51] ["prescribed" religion and "lived" religion, imbued with magical elements]. This idea of a magical, 'lived' religion is highly relevant to the question of embodiment, raising questions of how spiritual truth may be felt through the body rather than empirically known.

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[49] For an account of Sapienza's involvement with the partisans and refuge in the convent, see: Angelo Pellegrino, 'Un personaggio singolare, un romanzo nuovo, una donna da amare per sempre', in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* pp. 74-75.

[50] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* Einaudi (Torino: 2010), p. 12.

[51] Carmelina Chiara Canta, *La religiosità in Sicilia: Indagine sulle tipologie religiose e culturali*, Salvatore Sciascia Editore (Roma: 1995) p. 97.

The magic of religious experience is transplanted into the avant-garde with ease in Carrington's Surrealism. Frequently satirical, the depiction of religion in *The Hearing Trumpet* is informed by a Catholic education interrupted by expulsions from several convent schools. As the daughter of an Irish Catholic mother and an English Protestant father, it has often been suggested that Carrington drew more imaginative excitement from the rich folkloric tradition of her maternal line.[52] Like Goliarda, Leonora's (Christian) name betrays her religious inheritance. Carrington's biographer and cousin Joanna Moorhead notes that Leonora took some inspiration from her own namesake, an Irish nun she called Aunt Leo:

> Aunt Leo was a legend in our family like so many nuns of past generations, she probably saw the convent as a liberation from the only alternative to which she could aspire, that of being a wife and mother. Embracing a future in a convent brought a kind of autonomy and independence that was lacking in her sister Maurie's life as a wife, even the wife of a wealthy man.[53]

In real life Aunt Leo engaged in a heated argument with a certain archbishop and her defiance was punished by being made to clean the convent floors.[54] The incident remained with the younger Leonora, providing fodder for her 1951 painting 'Clean Up at Once, Said the Archbishop' (see below). Transfigured into recognisably Carrington-esque figures, the archbishop becomes a humanoid figure with a scarlet elongated head: half-mitre, half-flame. Aunt Leo herself could be a cipher for the Virgin Mary with her curved stomach and blue flowing robes, her hare's head unsurprising amongst Carrington's persistent identification with animals in painting and prose. Nose to nose with the austere bishop, the hare suggests wilderness, defiance and grace.

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[52] See Marina Warner, Introduction, in Leonora Carrington, *House of Fear: Notes from Down Below,* Virago (London and New York: 1988)
[53] Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington,* Virago (London: 2017), p. 57.
[54] *Ibid.* pp. 56-57.

Figure 1 Leonora Carrington, 'Nettoyez immédiatement, dit l'archevêque' ('Clean Up at Once, Said the Archbishop'), Oil and tempera on plywood, Private collection, 1951, christies.com.

Carrington then draws from the older Leo a vision of a religious life rich in potential for personal fulfilment and defiance of societal norms. Her own pursuit of an unconventional life however, led her to a very different path, and certainly amongst the Surrealist circle she found in Paris in the late 1930s Catholicism was perceived as traditionalist, part of the old order they sought to break. Living with Max Ernst, Carrington viewed the renewed piety of his estranged wife Marie-Berthe Aurenche with disdain. In Carrington's novella *Little Francis*, Marie-Berthe's counterpart Amelia is 'a little prude'[55] who 'seemed to degenerate into an hysterical old woman' after a period in a convent.[56]

[55] *Little Francis,* p. 69.
[56] *Ibid.* p. 112. Joanne Moorhead discusses further how Carrington's attitude to Marie-Berthe shifted over time, see *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington,* pp. 78-81.

For both Carrington and Sapienza, living and writing in Italy, France, and Mexico, Catholicism proved to be omnipresent, and its images and rhetoric permeate their work. Given the immense complexities and histories of the religion, it is probably unsurprising that neither author dismisses it entirely, despite the apparent incompatibility of the faith with both Socialism and Surrealism. Furthermore, this ambivalence sheds light on several of the conflicts at the centre of the novels *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet,* between the rational and the miraculous, knowing and doubt, the mind and the body, and between matter and spirit.

Incarnation and the Catholic Body

Religion and religious experience can provide a useful paradigm for considering the problems of embodiment, and the difference between bodily experience and theoretical knowledge. Perhaps no other domain better foregrounds the meeting of matter and spirit inherent to all discussions of body and mind. In the doctrine of the Catholic church, there is an easy association to be made between the body and sin, and consequently between the soul and holiness. This association is evident wherever *carne* or 'flesh' is used to mean body, with its associations of carnal sin, or sins of the flesh. 'Flesh' is curiously dehumanising, emphasising the disconnect between the lofty mind and the animalistic body. Body as 'flesh' aligns with a dualistic understanding of self, where the body is merely a vessel, inherently *other*.

Does the body then have no part in Christian identity? On the contrary, despite the negative potential of the body, Catholic doctrine emphasises the body's role and the interconnectedness of matter and spirit. Nowhere is this more evident than the incarnation of God in Christ, a belief which foregrounds the importance of bodily experience, predominantly suffering. In Italian, the ideas of incarnation and embodiment are neatly expressed with the single word *incarnazione*. 'Incarnation', or being *in* flesh, implies at once the miraculous unity of God and man that is Christ, and the relatively mundane human experience of being both a body and a mind. Christ's embodiment continues to play a crucial role in Catholic worship; the eucharist doctrine teaching that in the taking of communion adherents ingest the literal flesh of Christ. This worship of the physical body is evident also in the prolific veneration of relics in the Church, not least the preserved heart of St Teresa of Avila, whose embodied experience is discussed later in this chapter. This recurrent emphasis of physicality implies that bodies can be holy of themselves, and indeed, the incarnation of Christ is reflected in the dogma of 'general resurrection', where *all*

physical bodies will be reinstated after death. This dogma is established by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which states:

> But He descended in soul, arose in flesh, and ascended equally in both; He will come at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead and will render to the reprobate and to the elect according to their works. *Who all shall rise with their own bodies which they now have* that they may receive according to their merits, whether good or bad, the latter eternal punishment with the devil, the former eternal glory with Christ.[57]

The Catholic belief in transubstantiation is also pertinent to embodiment because it challenges literal assumptions about the meaning of the "body". If the bread of the eucharist is the body of Christ, then what actually is a body? Here religion intersects with broader critical theory on the body, as Sarah Coakley points out, 'it is as if we are clear about an agreed cultural obsession – the 'body' – but far from assured about its referent.'[58] Carrington's prose takes a similar stance whereby the 'body' is felt as a significant presence not necessarily synonymous with the individual's flesh. Marian thinks, 'This is true of the backyard and the small room I occupied at the time, my body, the cats, the red hen all my body all part of my own sluggish blood stream.'[59] Just as Sapienza described the immateriality of the nuns in the convent of Saint Agatha, the body or lack thereof is employed as a rhetorical device in both texts. Whether the referent of the 'body' is understood as a literal body or not, 'body' is understood as a substance of value, inherent to personal identity. From the perspective of both heroines, an absence of spiritual or intellectual connection is synonymous with an absence of body:

> Your head has dissolved into thin air and I can see the rhododendrons through your stomach. It's not that you are dead or anything dramatic like that, it is simply that you are fading away and I can't even remember your name.[60]

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[57] The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, Canon 1, from Paul Halsall (ed.), Internet Medieval Sourcebook, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp, emphasis my own.
[58] Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body,* Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1997) p. 2.
[59] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 13.
[60] *Ibid.,* p.17.

Whether associated with religion or broader cultural theory, questions about the body have always been concurrent with questions of gender. While the association of women with the body has often been degrading, the importance of Christ's bodily experience grants women a degree of significance, Andrew Louth writes:

> [S]trategies that focused on the body and food offered women access to power. Through their bodies they could make manifest their oneness with Christ who in His body suffered for the salvation of humankind. Assimilation to Christ, physically manifest in stigmata and miraculous periodical bleeding, gave access to a power and authority, not of office, but of experience: an authority, not hierarchical but 'charismatic'.[61]

Both Carrington and Sapienza, I will argue, find value in the charismatic authority of the female body in Catholicism, while they also rebel against the restrictions the doctrine places on them. Because, while women's physicality is important, their suffering powerful, their bodies are also the *carne* that is so vulnerable to sin. Much of the Catholic rhetoric around the female body is rooted in the need to control it. Julia Kristeva 'defined religion as working on behalf of the social ensemble to manage that which is excessive, but also necessary to it'[62], nowhere is this truer than in Catholicism's celebration and restriction of the female body.

Those restrictions are implied in the names of the protagonists of both *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet*. Modesta [Modest] and Marian don't subscribe to nominative determinism, they subvert the feminine expectations of their names. The inaccuracy of Modesta's name is frequently referenced, while Pellegrino has noted its intentional irony.[63] Carrington's more commonplace choice of 'Marian' could be coincidental, but it seems pointed for a character who tells us that she 'was not educated in a convent school for nothing.'[64] Indeed, although Christians are called to act like Christ, the model of ideal

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[61] Andrew Louth, "The Body in Western Catholic Christianity", in Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body,* p. 126.
[62] Griselda Pollock, "Sacred Cows", in ed. Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron, *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference,* I.B Taurus (London and New York, 2007), p. 13.
[63] Angelo Pellegrino, Introduction, *L'arte della gioia,* p. vii.
[64] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 20.

female behaviour is undoubtedly Mary. Mary is also the key to Christ's incarnation, the human woman who gives him life. Yet, the religious certainty that is Mary's virginity removes her from the physical reality of the body. In *The Hearing Trumpet* and *L'arte della gioia* the embodied female subject strains against this paradox, whereby the body is both a joyful source of all life and a dangerously volatile substance that must be contained. Eleanor Heartney outlines this premise:

> This mixed message about the value of the body and sexuality (especially female sexuality) lies at the heart of the female version of the Incarnational imagination. The full-figured nursing Mary radiates physicality and heady sensuality. In her role as Queen of Heaven, she is a commanding presence who is the object of Christ's desire. But she is also the eternal Virgin, whose physicality is compromised by her sexless conception and her special status as the only human after Adam and Eve born without sin.[65]

The Virgin Mary's purity is unobtainable to all other women, whose propensity to sin is linked closely to the body. Amongst the litany of sins available to the wayward Catholic, religious rhetoric surrounding women overwhelmingly focuses on carnal sin:

> 'Mightn't she [Mary Magdalene] have been avaricious, or deceitful? Or a glutton, or cruel? Or even a murderer or a thief?' Of course such sins didn't fit the picture, as it had come down to us, but the mismatch showed, I argued passionately, how women, sexuality and sin were all bound up together in our perspective on human nature.[66]

Marina Warner's description of Mary Magdalene's sin prefaces her influential work on the older Mary: *Alone of All her Sex.* The Virgin Mary's exceptionality reveals the paradox that Catholicism places on female bodies; they are both naturally pure and inherently corrupt. And yet despite the inimitable perfection of the holiest of Christian women, the image of Mary is leveraged against women as a tool of restriction. Her example is one of self-denial and abstinence, a model that has been particularly applied to the women who follow her lead of virginity and religious devotion by taking the veil. In both of the novels at hand the

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[65] Eleanor Heartney, "Thinking Through the Body: Women Artists and the Catholic Imagination", *Hypatia,* Vol.18. No.4. (Fall/Winter 2003), p. 3-22., p. 8.

[66] Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary,* Vintage (London: 2000) p. xiv.

example of Mary is infrequently invoked, however her influence is felt deeply via the emulation of her example in religious communities of women. The ascetic lifestyle's deprivations are deeply linked to the virtue of restraint shown so perfectly in Mary's example.

Asceticism, Restraint and Power

For the initiates and nuns who subscribe to the Marian model of femininity, it is not only sexual abstinence that denotes moral purity, but rather a more total denial of bodily experience which is of heightened importance for the female believer. Physical denial atones for women's sinful flesh:

> Through the ascetic renunciation of the flesh, a woman could relieve a part of her nature's particular viciousness as the Virgin Mary had done through her complete purity. The life of self-denial was seen as a form of martyrdom, and the virgin was encouraged to suffer physically.[67]

In both texts, the two protagonists Modesta and Marian, as well as the formidable Abbess Rosalinda, live within religious communities of women where physical suffering is employed as a means to achieve spiritual purity, under the various guises of fasting, modesty, abstinence and even self-flagellation. Of course, the home for elderly women in which much of *The Hearing Trumpet* takes place is not a convent. However, there is a compelling link between this (almost) entirely female residence peopled with comically rebellious women and the convent of the Abbess Rosalinda of the *mise en abyme* narrative. Indeed, I would argue that the compelling link between these two seemingly incongruent parts of Carrington's novel is this resistance to limiting doctrine. Although the pseudo-Christianity of the home is not directly identified as Catholicism, the physical and spiritual conformity expected of the women echoes the restraints of that religion. This slight distance from Catholicism also allows Carrington's satire total free reign, whereby the absurdity or contradictions of commonly-held beliefs are exposed through the originality of her prose. Dr Gambit argues: 'If you deliberately allow your lower centres to take hold of your organism you will soon become victims to a mass deteriorisation which may have serious consequences.'[68] The language is novel but the sentiment echoes the Catholic belief that

[67] *Ibid.,* p. 68.
[68] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 115.

women's worth is dependent on their virtue. Gambit's allusion to 'hysterical complaints'[69] implies a symbiotic relationship between the use of religion and psychiatry to characterise women by their association with their bodily functions. This link will be explored further in relation to both writers and the 'new religions' they encounter beyond Catholicism.

Importantly, sexuality is not the sole bodily experience that the 'convent' setting seeks to erase. The female subject's relationship with her own body is embedded in its full functionality, and the full range of sensory experience. Accordingly, Modesta's resistance of the restriction of the convent relates not only to her desire for sexual fulfilment but more generally a sense of the joy of the working body: 'Accecata dal terrore avevo dimenticato di avere il seno, il ventre, le gambe.'[70] ['Blinded by terror, I had forgotten that I had breasts, a belly, legs.'] Marian is similarly preoccupied with the anatomical reality of her body, dwelling on the working details of her aging body, with a particular emphasis on digestion.[71] Sexual appetite and dietary appetite are akin to one another, both signify a lack of control of one's body and desires. In *The Hearing Trumpet* Dr Gambit tells Marian so quite directly: 'Reports in your particular case show the following list of interior impurities: Greed, Insincerity, Egoism, Laziness and Vanity. At the top of the list Greed, signifying a dominating passion.'[72] Dietary restriction is also imposed upon Modesta, with the direct result intended to be a purer religious experience:

> [A]ncora non sai la dolcezza paradisiaca della rinuncia e dell'umiltà. La tua fibra giovane è ancora troppo piena di vitalità animale, di salute. Anzi, ne ho parlato con suor Costanza, ci faresti una grazia se riducessi il cibo, almeno la sera. Ormai sei adulta e sana. Qualche rinuncia alla tavola non potrà che aiutarti nella preghiera.[73]
>
> [you don't yet know the blissful sweetness of renunciation and humility. Your youthful fibre is still too full of animal vitality, of physical well-being. In fact, I spoke to Sister Costanza about it. We would like you, please, to decrease your food

[69] *Ibid.,* p. 115.
[70] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 42. [p. 58.]
[71] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 1-2.
[72] *Ibid.,* p. 44.
[73] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 43. [pp. 59 -60.]

> intake, at least in the evening. By now you are all grown up and healthy. Any denial at the table can only help you pray.]

Fasting is highlighted by Warner as a practice of particular religious significance to women, as a means of interrupting the physical identifiers of femininity. As sexual abstinence removes the possibility of childbirth and motherhood, fasting also has the effect of disrupting menstruation and therefore contributes to the same end, removing the 'impure' markers of the female body.[74] Fasting also has the implication of reducing the physical mass of the body, contributing to the sense that doctrines of restriction seek to erase the body entirely.

Modesta's experience in the convent coincides with puberty, and the rules of the convent regarding modesty complicate her relationship with her own body:

> Strappandomi il grembiule e la camicia, le mie mani trovavano quelle fasce strette «perché il seno non si mostrasse», che fino a quel momento erano state come una seconda pelle per me. Una pelle dall'apparenza morbida che mi legava col suo biancore rassicurante. Presi le forbici e le tagliai a pezzi. Dovevo respirare. E finalmente nuda – quanto era che non sentivo il mio corpo nudo? anche il bagno con la camicia si doveva fare – ritrovo la mia carne.[75]
>
> [Tearing off my smock and shirt, my hands found those tight strips "so your breasts won't show", which until that moment had felt like a second skin to me. A seemingly compliant skin that bound me with its reassuring whiteness. I took the scissors and cut them to shreds. I had to breathe. And finally naked – how long had it been since I'd felt my naked body? we even had to bathe with our shirts on – I rediscover my flesh.]

In the convent Modesta encounters an ascetic life which demands the literal binding of its female adherents. The novices are alienated from their own bodies via this practice and the total avoidance of female nakedness. This restriction is felt as both a comfort and a denial of life, Modesta's defiant 'dovevo respirare' suggesting the suspended animation of living the purely spiritual life of the nun. The emotion that sparks this realisation in Modesta is hatred, a reclamation of the potential for female identity and sexuality to be sharp, brutal, violent. Modesta's hatred chimes with Warner's allusion to the 'particular visciousness' of female

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[74] Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex,* p. 73-74.
[75] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 41. [p. 56.]

nature, an intensity which needs to be deadened with the blunt instruments of physical restriction.

Why would anyone consent to the erasure of their own body? The advantage to be gained within the Catholic paradigm is the eternal soul, an existence which privileges the spiritual above the physical. This duality has been linked to the gender binary, whereby erasing their femininity allows women to escape the reductive association of their gender with the body. Marina Warner quotes St Jerome: 'As long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called man.'[76] This dynamic allows for women within religious communities to climb to positions of power, unbeholden to husbands or the dangerous, time-consuming business of motherhood. In both novels, convents are presented as centres of female learning and relative freedom from male interference, with Mother Leonora and the Abbess Rosalinda acting in positions of authority outside of the domestic sphere. Interestingly, the nursing home has this in common with the convent, in their old age, the women no longer fulfil the feminine role of childbearing, allowing them a greater degree of personal freedom, and an identity unbound to their body's function.

In *L'arte della gioia* the convent is presented as a departure from the physical labour of domesticity and motherhood that binds most women. Modesta's initial impressions of the convent are positive, as she relishes the opportunity to learn to read and play piano, and Mother Leonora is a preferable female role model to her silent mother, with her seemingly limitless knowledge:

> [i]nvece delle tazze e piatti e bicchieri, come in quella della mamma, le credenze di madre Leonora erano piene di libri. E quei libri erano pieni di tutte quelle parole e storie che madre Leonora mi insegnava.[77]

[76] *Alone of All her Sex,* p. 73. (St Jerome quoted in Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex,* p.43.)
[77] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 20. [p. 26.]

> [instead of the cups and plates and glasses, like in Mama's cupboard, Mother Leonora's shelves were full of books. And those books were full of all those words and stories that Mother Leonora taught me.]

Sapienza's Leonora is almost always heard, rather than seen or felt. Her beauty is held in her voice, a voice that is heard and eventually mimicked by Modesta as a way of affecting religious compliance. Her voice is also her power, the marker of her eloquence and social class that distances her from Modesta's impoverished mother:

> La voce promettava una ninna nanna calda e morbida di lenzuoli profumati e racconti avventurosi di regine e reggenti, assedi e guerre e tormenti. Nella voce soave e danzante di madre Leonora, eserciti avanzavano con corazze d'oro e d'argento.[78]
>
> [The voice promised a warm, gentle lullaby of fragrant sheets and daring adventures of queens and regents, sieges, wars and exploits. In Mother Leonora's sweet lilting voice, armies advanced with gold and silver breastplates.]

Katrin Wehling-Giorgi has noted the importance of voice and motherhood in Sapienza's autobiographical work,[79] and indeed the association of voice with femininity and class is prevalent across Sapienza's writing, particularly in relation to the Sicilian dialect. Here the voice is a marker of femininity in its beauty, but entirely disembodied, and therefore devoid of the baseness associated with female physicality. The process of denying the body in favour of the mind points to the potential for women within this system, where women can obtain power by denying themselves physical fulfilment. Modesta's eagerness to learn draws her into the life of the convent for a time, however the convent's offer of power and knowledge is insufficient. In addition to the required sacrifice of physical pleasure, there are gendered limits on what the nuns may study 'Ho paura della tua intelligenza…sei donna…sei donna'[80] ['I worry about your intelligence…you're a female… a woman'],

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[78] *Ibid.,* p. 18. [p. 23.]
[79] Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, '"Ero separata da me": Memory Selfhood and *Mother-Tongue* in Goliarda Sapienza and Elena Ferrante', in Bazzoni, Bond and Wehling Giorgi (ed.), *Goliarda Sapienza in Context,* pp. 215-230.
[80] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 21. [p. 27.]

'Studiare è un lusso che corrompe,'[81]['Studying is a luxury that corrupts']. Modesta is driven to seek more on both an intellectual and physical plane.

Although Modesta fears self-negation, she understands the power she stands to gain by obeying the rules of the convent, or at least appearing to. Both Modesta and the Abbess Rosalinda of *The Hearing Trumpet* learn to manipulate the existing restrictions of the church in order to overcome the body/mind binary and revel in their possession of both. A disconnect develops between internal disobedience and external compliance, treading the line between achieving power in an unequal system and maintaining the integrity of living true to one's own desires. This compromise is imperfect; both texts are attracted to the notion of revolution, suggesting that the overthrow of the entire system is necessary to allow the body's fulfilment alongside the mind. However, in the meantime, a game must be played, projecting the constrained, docile vision of Catholic femininity while allowing for the personal pleasure of a woman reconciled with her physical form. Modesta feigns the compliance of the devout initiate with exacting self-control, restraining her joyful response to the lavish surroundings at the villa, and even speaking in the voice of her old mentor Mother Leonora.[82]

For the future abbess of *The Hearing Trumpet*, a religious fanaticism must be feigned in order to gain power. She does so through her enthusiastic embrace of physical privations:

> During the first years of her life in the convent Doña Rosalinda was conspicuous for her piety and strenuous penitence. The sounds of flagellation brought admiring groups of nuns outside the doors of her cell. At times she would kneel all night in the chapel repeating Ave Marias on her rosary.[83]

[81] *Ibid.,* p. 38. [p. 52.]
[82] *Ibid.,* p. 58.
[83] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 76.

Later as she ascends to the position of Abbess, Rosalinda has more power to direct the convent as she wishes. In contrast with Marian's first-person voice, Rosalinda's story is told via the writing of the abbey's priest, whose disapproval of her actions falls on deaf ears:

> I even suggested to the Abbess herself a slight penance, consisting of three rosaries a week and the present of a few candles to the Blessed Virgin. However she laughed so much when I suggested this that I was obliged to retire pained and somewhat abashed.[84]

Here perhaps Carrington's propensity to fantasy takes over, as unlike the formidable Archbishop who faces down Aunt Leo, Rosalinda is able to assert her own power. It is telling also that Rosalinda experiences freedom beyond the walls of the convent by dressing as a man, an echo of the androgynous figures who recur in Carrington's work.[85]

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 86.
[85] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis*, in *House of Fear: notes from Down Below,* pp. 69 -162.

Religious Ecstasy: A Role for the Female Body in Catholic Iconography

Even as Carrington and Sapienza reject the physical privations of the ascetic lifestyle, they show fascination in the female iconography of the Catholic church, and the way that it so often centres upon the body. In this vein inspiration is found in unlikely places: the mutilation and torture of the female body in the imagery and stories of martyrs, notably Saint Agatha and Joan of Arc, provide an analogy of the potency of that body. Such women had a different way of seeing to those around them, and their very suffering reasserts the reality of the physical body: 'I can't help feeling some deep affinity with Joan of Arc and I often feel I am being burned at the stake just because I am different from everybody else'.[86]

Religious experience is often associated with a lack of control over the body, foregrounding the uneasy relationship between the body and mind. In contrast to the dogmatic truth of some religious teaching, this phenomenon is based on uncertainty, and as Benedicta Ward describes, is particularly associated with women in the history of the church:

> There were women visionaries whose ecstasies seem to us pointless, neither significant nor helpful to others. Perhaps Christina the Astonishing falls into this category of someone we regard as simply neurotic. She is said to have been frequently in trances so deep that they were mistaken for death; on one occasion her body had been carried into the church for burial when she revived. At once, her corpse flew up to the roof where she perched like a bird […] This tomboy athletic style of sainthood seems to us unedifying since totally devoid of theological or moral content but her contemporaries were prepared to accept what they did not understand; there was sufficient respect for her trances for her to be included in the in the calendar of the saints. The reactions of the body were regarded as the work of the spirit upon flesh and that was sufficient for wonder and awe[87]

The tomboyish Christina the Astonishing is remarkably similar to the many heroines of Carrington's surrealist fiction. The potential for her recognition within the church suggests a tolerance of irrationality unavailable in the secular world, and reminiscent of the abbess

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[86] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 25 -26.

[87] Benedicta Ward, 'Saints and Sybils: Hildegard of Bingen to Teresa of Avila', in Janet Soskice (ed.), *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition,* Collins Marshall Pickering (London: 1990), pp. 103-118, p. 110.

Rosalinda's position in *The Hearing Trumpet.* Meanwhile her 'trances' resemble the days-long sleeping episodes of Modesta, which the more 'educated' Joyce views with utter terror, but are readily accepted by Modesta as a welcome phenomenon, although unexplained. This dynamic in their relationship is also marked by differences between the rational, continental, Joyce, and Modesta's sanguine acceptance of the unexplained, from her sleeping episodes, to the local religious festivals of Catania, and to the tempestuous Sicilian storms and earthquakes.[88]

Modesta's acceptance of her sleeping episodes indicate a harmonious acceptance of her own body, which is characteristic of Carrington and Sapienza's shared vision of a fulfilled female identity. Both Modesta and Rosalinda convey a sense of total power over their own actions and emotions. This mastery over their own physicality results in a strange performance of religious compliance. They both feign the phenomenon of religious ecstasy in ambiguous scenes where the link between body and mind is called into question. 'During High Mass she [Rosalinda] would constantly fall into ecstasies and would have to be propped up by *priedieus* that were rigid and stiff as a board.'[89] The Abbess's performative piety demonstrates the intriguing incongruence between control and excess that is inherent to Catholic ideas on the body. Again, the practices that are supposed to exert control over the female adherent serve to highlight her embodied state. The idea of falling 'into ecstasies' is a curious phenomenon that rests ambivalently between a spiritual and erotic condition, in contrast to the restrictive patterns of monastic life it embraces the possibility of unrestrained emotion. Both Rosalinda and Modesta understand that an excess of emotion, or being overcome, can be helpful in conveying their religious devotion. There is an ambiguity in Modesta's case where her frequent lapses of consciousness seem to be somewhere between feigned and real:

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[88] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* see chapters 60 and 61, pp. 285 –297.
[89] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 76.

> […] potevo benissimo svenire dal dolore e sottrarmi cosí a quella prova che loro mi volevano infliggere. E caddi come corpo morto cade, dice il poeta e maestro di vita. E non ci fu modo di svegliarmi, né quella notte, né l'indomani.[90]
>
> [I could very well faint out of grief and thus evade the ordeal they wanted to inflict on me. *E caddi come corpo morto cade*, I fell like a dead body falls, as the Poet and master of life says. And there was no way to wake me, either that night or the following day.]

Modesta's self-induced sleep implies a strange mix of self-control and lack thereof, what is clear, however, is the deep implicit link between her emotional state and the actions of the physical body.

Although both Modesta and Rosalinda feign compliance with the restrictions of the church, their true identities are resolutely linked to their bodies. Furthermore, this emphasis on the body is directly contrasted with the disembodiment of the Virgin Mary. In *The Hearing Trumpet* Rosalinda's supernatural pregnancy is a gruesome shadow of the beatified virgin's, 'For Doña Rosalinda, who had always been a thin woman, had swollen to such a monstrous size as to resemble a small whale, and she had turned coal black.'[91] In addition to her miraculous pregnancy, a central tenet of the Catholic understanding of Mary's physicality is the incorruptibility of her body in death. Her spectacular ascension asserts 'the Christian equivalence between spiritual impurity and bodily decay […] which declares that the all-pure Virgin was spared the dissolution of the grave.'[92] In contrast, Rosalinda's incapacitating pregnancy balloons to catastrophic levels, her sublimely comical death dramatically misinterpreted by the nuns who witness it, who believe 'that she had ascended to Heaven like the Blessed Virgin,'[93] when in reality her ignominious explosion leaves behind 'a morsel of damp black skin'.[94] The physical body is quite bleakly reasserted. That the 'scrap of skin was laid out amongst roses and lilies and afterwards interred in a

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[90] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 47. [pp. 66-67.]
[91] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 99.
[92] Marina Warner, *Alone of all Her Sex,* p. xxv.
[93] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 100.
[94] *Ibid.,* p.99.

magnificent coffin big enough to hold three Abbesses'[95] serves to parody the veneration of relics and the paradoxical fascination of Christianity with both immateriality (ascension, the soul, the Holy Spirit) and the physical body (relics, transubstantiation, maternity).

The suppression of the body in favour of the mind presupposes the existence of a hierarchy whereby the latter is the more worthy entity. However, as we have seen the body is relentlessly present even when suppression is attempted. Curiously, the centrality of the body to Catholic doctrine can be interpreted as a source of strength to women via their association with the body that has so often been used to subjugate them. Heartney argues:

> Body was, from one perspective, a source of the temptations that lead to sin. But it was also, through its association with the body of Christ, the key to salvation and hence a means of access to the Divine. And as a symbol of body, especially Christ's body, woman harbors humanity's potential for salvation.[96]

In this paradigm woman's physicality is repositioned as an asset, however 'its association with the body of Christ' is intrinsically linked to suffering. A powerful female body within Catholic doctrine is very often the body of a martyr. Sapienza and Carrington engage with this uncomfortable prevalence of female suffering by reinterpreting the image of the virgin, the martyr and the nun to their own ends. They embrace their defiance and the attachment of spiritual significance to bodily experience, but advocate for pleasure alongside pain. Modesta's Sicilian convent is dedicated to the memory of the virgin martyr Saint Agatha, to whom she feels drawn:

> Sant'Agata era bellissima. Avevo fatto bene a chiedere chi era, le sue mammelle tagliate sul vassoio davano un brivido anche piú forte delle mani delicate e tenere di madre Leonora quando mi accarezzava se avevo una crisi epilettica.[97]
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> [Saint Agatha was very beautiful. I was right to ask who she was. Her severed breasts on a tray made me shudder even more than Mother Leonora's delicate, gentle hands, which caressed me whenever I had an epileptic seizure.]

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[95] *Ibid.,* p. 100.
[96] Eleanor Heartney, 'Thinking through the Body', p. 10.
[97] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 18. [p. 23.]

Modesta's attraction to this image of sexualised violence is startling, yet given the context of the total absence of female nakedness in the convent the painting offers an important acknowledgement of the female form. It anticipates Modesta's later affirmation of her own body and her attraction to Beatrice. The image also aligns with Sapienza's depiction of a female sexuality that is unabashedly dark. The Catholic understanding of the violence and excessive potential of female sexuality necessitates restriction and punishment. Sapienza's position is to embrace that excessive potential.

Carrington similarly subverts typical religious iconography with the haunting and alluring portrait of the abbess on the wall of the home for elderly women:

> The face of the nun in the oil painting was so curiously lighted that she seemed to be winking, although that was hardly possible. She must have had one blind eye and the painting had rendered her infirmity realistically. However the idea that she was winking persisted, she was winking at me with a most disconcerting mixture of mockery and malevolence.[98]

The unknown nun's image is a persistent one, stalking the lives of the inhabitants of the home and also invading the dreams of Marian's friend Carmella. Her malevolence is strangely unthreatening, Marian says, 'I think I can quite definitely say I find her friendly, although of course one would not expect sentimentality from such a relationship.'[99] Later, after the Abbess's long history of female-led rebellion has been revealed, Marian identifies herself with her at a crucial moment:

> Holding the mirror at arm's length I seemed to see a three-faced female whose eyes winked alternatively. One of the faces was black, one red, one white, and they belonged to the Abbess, the Queen Bee and myself.[100]

In Carrington's novel the world is turned on its axis so that the north pole, where Marian had so longed to go, is now found in Central America, and simultaneously the patriarchal dominance of Christianity is overthrown in favour of an ancient tradition of goddess

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[98] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 28-29.
[99] *Ibid.,* p. 72.
[100] *Ibid.,* p. 138.

worship. This remarkable conclusion is foreshadowed by the ridicule of various biblical stories, affirming the central role of women to history:

> Everybody knows that the whole bible is inaccurate. True, Noah did go off in an ark, but he got drunk and fell overboard. Mrs Noah went aft and watched him drown, she didn't do anything about it because she inherited all those cattle. People in the bible were very sordid and a lot of cattle in those days was like a bank account.[101]

Carrington's irreverence has a cynical pointedness, where the marginalised old women of the nursing home identify with the put-upon female subject of religious lore. She asks her reader 'why was Eve blamed for everything?' and writes that Anna 'often feel[s] like Joan of Arc so dreadfully misunderstood and all those terrible cardinals and bishops prodding her poor agonised mind with so many unnecessary questions.'[102] The revolution in *The Hearing Trumpet* is to worship the goddess who, Marian learns, has been obscured by the Catholic church. This brings our analysis back to Mary Magdalene, that eternal symbol of carnal sin who in Carrington's imagination was actually a servant of the eternal goddess who predates Christianity.

Carrington and Sapienza undo the traditionalist moral teachings of female restraint in the Catholic church. Yet at the same time much of their imagery and rhetoric is inseparable from that tradition. Even the more extreme examples of divergence from Catholic teachings (namely the Abbess Rosalinda's carnal adventures and Modesta's sexualised fascination with Sant'Agata) are consistent with a tradition where the physical experience of religion has often been associated with the erotic. As Georges Bataille has argued, 'the longed-for swoon is thus the salient feature not only of man's sensuality but also of the experience of the mystics.'[103] As in Modesta's feigned or real fits, in both religious ecstasy and the sexual act there is a degree of lost control, the 'swoon'. Perhaps the most famous example in

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[101] *Ibid.,* p. 64.
[102] *Ibid.,* p. 25.
[103] Georges Bataille, *Eroticism,* Penguin Classics (London: 2012), transl. Mary Dalwood, p. 240.

Catholic rhetoric is that of Saint Teresa of Ávila, or rather her depiction in the Bernini sculpture that led to Lacan's confident assertion of the sexual nature of the experience. Bataille refers instead to Teresa's own account of the incident, she writes:

> In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God.[104]

Both Bataille[105] and Dany Nobus[106] offer compelling histories of the scholarship on Teresa's religious ecstasy. Teresa's own account certainly foregrounds the Catholic obsession with the body as meeting point of matter and spirit: 'It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it.'[107] But what is also striking is the violence of the language she uses, something noticeably absent in the Bernini rendering. As noted above, the significance of women's bodies in Catholicism is in part rooted in their bodily suffering, a reminder of Christ's own pain. Carrington and Sapienza share with Saint Teresa a profound awareness of the visceral pain that can be inflicted on the body, and its puzzling associations with pleasure.

Ultimately, the prevalence of religion in both *The Hearing Trumpet* and *L'arte della gioia* serves to foreground Bataille's contention, that the sacred and the sinful are closer than we think. Even within the high walls of a convent, sin is presented as a necessity, central to the genesis of new life:

> Che l'odio l'avesse fatta rinascere dentro di me? Può tutto la preghiera dell'odio, può dare la vita e la morte, tutto.[108]
> [Could the hatred have reawakened her inside me? The prayer of hatred can do anything, it can bestow both life and death, anything.]

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[104] Teresa of Avila, quoted in Georges Bataille, *Eroticism,* p. 224.
[105] Bataille, *Eroticism,* p. 224-228
[106] Dany Nobus, "The Sculptural Iconography of Jouissance: Lacan's Reading of Bernini's Saint Teresa in Ecstasy", *The Comparatist*: *Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association,* Vol. 39 (Oct 2015), pp. 22-46.
[107] Teresa of Avila, quoted in Bataille, *Eroticism,* p. 224.
[108] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 76. [pp. 108-109]

> '"This is Hell," she said with a smile. "But Hell is merely a form of terminology. Really this is the Womb of the World whence all things come."'[109]

These passages recall Kristeva's contention that religion works 'on behalf of the social ensemble to manage that which is excessive, but also necessary to it'.[110] This is particularly true in the Catholic veneration of Mary as the feminine ideal, and the impossibility of the virgin mother. Female sexuality is necessary to the social ensemble, but its excesses must be curtailed in a patriarchal system. The first part of *L'arte della gioia* closes with Modesta giving birth to a son. Her pregnancy and motherhood offer compelling amalgams of religious and sacrilegious behaviour and imagery. While outwardly fulfilling the role of a saintly initiate, her pregnancy contains echoes of the virgin birth, presumed as it is to be the result of her union with the disabled estate heir Eriprando, a union in which she is figured as a martyr and nurse, a totally sexless creature. Yet in reality the child is the product of her affair with the estate manager Carmine. While her sexual liberation is a rejection of the physical denial of the convent; yet it also aligns her with the most prevalent of Catholic images, as after the birth she rejects the aristocratic custom of using a wet-nurse and nurses her baby.

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[109] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 137.
[110] Griselda Pollock, "Sacred Cows", in *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference,* I.B Taurus, p. 13.

New and Old Knowledge : The Priority of Learning

Catholicism is significant in both novels in that it appears not only as a draconian institution, a prison; but also as a doctrine, a system for viewing the world and understanding one's own place within it. Systems of knowledge, and the relationship of an individual mind and body with such systems, occupy and stimulate the journeys depicted in both *L'arte della gioia* and *The Hearing Trumpet,* with both novels sharing a remarkable blend of deep scepticism alongside insatiable curiosity. In this section, I will propose a reading of both texts as narratives driven by learning, where alongside the subversive embrace of bodily pleasure, the freedom of the mind is also promoted through the overcoming of obstacles to access information, and also through recognising undervalued modes of knowledge. This will be considered firstly in relation to both protagonists' relationship to other, more contemporary, systems of knowledge beyond Catholicism, and secondly regarding the importance of age, maturity and wisdom, in comparison with the more typical narrative of learning and development seen in a Bildungsroman. By centring the still-neglected perspective of the older woman (notably for both authors their protagonists reach a considerably greater age than themselves at the time of writing), these texts can offer a new perspective on the traditional coming-of-age narrative, forging a space for the value of women's knowledge, and above all, the privileged position of the individual mind/body subject over the homogenising strength of institutional knowledge.

Curiosity and the acquisition of knowledge are central to the plots of each novel, highlighting and also subverting the ways in which women have been excluded from learning and power. Both Modesta and Marian are depicted as relentlessly curious, and crucially as seeking to obtain information that has been deliberately withheld from them. Carrington herself considered curiosity 'a great virtue, [it] can only be satisfied if the

millennia of accumulated false data be turned upside down',[111] pointedly these millennia of false data do not discriminate as to the source of information, whether it be religious, scientific or otherwise. The whole system, Carrington seems to say, is false. This chapter follows the twin concerns of each novel, where mental curiosity is the necessary counterpart to physical desire, both contributing to a true notion of self. While Marian's 'reigning passion', or fault, is deemed by Dr Gambit to be greed[112], her counterpart and companion the Abbess's 'dominating passion had always been unholy curiosity'.[113] Signalled by the almost identical language and judgement bestowed by a male religious authority, these two flaws are shown to be two sides of the same coin, indicative of a lack of contentment with the status quo, and a desire for more. This drive to learn (and to eat) extends across Carrington's work, contributing to this cumulative experience of excessiveness in her narrative. In *The Stone Door* particularly, women's access to knowledge is at stake, and this learning is curiously embedded also in embodiment, where wisdom equals a greater physical presence:

> I feel small and ignorant and this pleases me not at all. I cannot accept this, I want to feel enormous and powerful. (I secretly believe that I am a goddess with very short moments of incarnation.)[114]
>
> […] I eat and grow wings and become wise.[115]

This 'unholy curiosity'[116] is certainly present also in *L'arte della gioia* , where Modesta's immodest pursuit of knowledge encompasses not only the knowledge of sexual experience, but also extends into a wish to learn about almost everything she encounters. Maria Rizzelli, in her analysis of space in Sapienza's works, offers a compelling reading of the power of

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[111] Carrington, quoted in Eburne and McAra, Introduction, *Leonora Carrington and the International avant-garde,* p. 15.
[112] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 46.
[113] *Ibid.,* p. 83.
[114] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 15.
[115] *Ibid.,* p. 21.
[116] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 83.

books to enlarge the space of the mind, reading this as a material but notes that in the convent access to this power is gendered and remains just out of reach for women:

> Se dunque i libri possono allargare lo spazio mentale e materiale, abbattere pareti e dilatare i confini di una stanza, dentro quel contesto sembrano non poter ampliare l'orizzonte di possibilità dell'esistenza di una donna.[117]
>
> [If then books can enlarge the material and mental space, break down walls and expand the boundaries of a room, in this context they seem to be unable to widen the horizon of possibility for a woman's existence.]

Once out of the convent, Modesta repeatedly encounters this paradigm where she seeks to read and learn from sources that were traditionally the preserve of men, from the accounts of the Brandiforti estate, to the libertine and philosophical contents of Ivanoe's books, to being able to swim and drive. Indeed, the predominance of 18th-century French texts in Ivanoe's library (where Modesta reads Diderot, and *Candide*, among others), is indicative of precisely this co-dependence of the pursuit of physical pleasure and knowledge. Sapienza engages with a notably libertine ideology throughout *L'arte della gioia* , where this 'anti-clerical novel' has evident 18th-century antecedents.[118] Gloria Scarfone has noted the influence of Diderot's *La religieuse* in the first part of the novel set in the convent,[119] and also finds a model for Modesta in Madame de Merteuil of *Les liaisons dangereuses*. This latter comparison by Scarfone is based upon Merteuil's propensity for violent acts, and indeed the violence in *L'arte della gioia* has garnered much interest from critics.[120] I would suggest though that another key shared characteristic of the two women is precisely the vigorous way in which they engage with education. Both excluded from the more structured

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[117] Maria Rizzarelli, *Goliarda Sapienza: Gli spazi della libertà, il tempo della gioia,* Carocci (Rome: 2018), p. 83.

[118] The shared features between *L'arte della gioia* and the French libertine novel are compelling and merit much greater analysis than that afforded here. This may prove of particular interest given the novel's particular success in French translation.

[119] Gloria Scarfone, pp. 92-93.

[120] Aureliana di Rollo and Susanna Scarparo have explored how the different episodes of matricide in *L'arte della gioia* challenge traditional narratives and disrupt the Italian family model.
See Aureliana di Rollo 'Reforging the Maternal Bond' in *Goliarda Sapienza in Context,* pp. 33-45
And Susanna Scarparo and Aureliana di Rollo, "Mothers, Daughters and Family in Goliarda Sapienza's *L'arte della gioia*", *The Italianist,* Vol. 35. No. 1 (2015), pp. 91-106.

forms of education available to men, their learning consists of voracious reading wherever possible, setting them apart from other women and allowing the construction of an independent self. Both Merteuil and Modesta view themselves as somewhat unique in their abilities of perception, but also note that this state of independence they have achieved through self-instruction would be achievable in other women if they had the opportunity of education. Merteuil advises naïve Cecile that she should take greater care in her writing style, showing a rare glimpse of the process of self-improvement and learning she herself has undergone. [121] Modesta, meanwhile, finds with frustration that Beatrice is too embedded in her environment to be open to learning, and as an almost grown woman, is unable to really engage with higher levels of thinking, despite Modesta's efforts to share knowledge:

> Quanto ho cercato di inculcare almeno qualcuna di queste idee a Beatrice! Ma è difficile staccarla da questo contesto barbarico che la circonda. Ci voranno cento anni perché la donna possa ascoltare la tua voce, vecchio Augusto![122]
>
> [How I have tried to instil at least some of these ideas in Beatrice! But it's difficult to uproot her from this barbaric setting that surrounds her. It will take a century before women can hear your voice, old Augusto!]

This promise that Modesta anticipates for the future does come to fruition later in the text, albeit on an individual scale, with Beatrice's own daughter Bambolina, for whom the cycle of ignorance is broken through the intervention of early education.[123]

Marian is certainly less preoccupied with the prospect of formal education, and pointedly her heretofore unknown wisdom is centred on an ancient order of female power which would discount the sum total of all patriarchal and socially recognised knowledge. This point is made quite abundantly in the illustration that accompanies Marian's visit to Dr Gambit's office, where the good doctor is flanked by an imposingly huge bookcase of heavy tomes, where one can read titles such as 'Holy Bible' directly beside 'Porno'

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[121] Pierre de Laclos, *Les liaisons dangereuses,* Gallimard (Paris: 1972) p. 301.
[122] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 91. [p. 129]
[123] *L'arte della gioia,* See particularly p. 265 on the early indoctrination of women into feminine ways of thinking and acting, and the potential of countering this through education.

volumes one and two.[124] Unlike Modesta, for Marian the knowledge she seeks is not to be found in books. However the trajectory of her story also sees her excluded from knowledge and therefore powerless, before gaining access to that knowledge and therefore more freedom. Sparking the events of the plot, Marian is gifted the titular hearing trumpet by Carmella, thereby gaining the ability to *know* what it is her family are plotting, and later to be included in the community of older women at the home, and in that mature community, as we will shortly see, she is able to access and to appreciate new forms of knowledge.

[124] *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 45.

New Religions

Carrington and Sapienza's cynicism extends beyond Catholicism to other forms of constructed belief. Whether it is Capitalism, Socialism, or Psychoanalysis, new 'religions' are treated with renewed scepticism, and an equivalence which pits all forms of structured knowledge against the liberty of the individual. Ali Smith provides a summary of Carrington's intent which can be readily applied to Sapienza, they 'advocate a very simple anarchy – one of independent thought.'[125]

This emphasis upon individual curiosity allows for some value to be found in the teachings and beliefs of others. As with Catholicism, neither author deals in wholesale rejection, but it is an imperative for the individual to assess information on their own terms, and crucially the supposed rationality of external knowledge in no way trumps the 'irrational' self. Above all, they are distrustful of the *organisation* of ideas into systems which wield power over the individual, or in other words: institutions. This widespread cynicism derives from the conviction that it is not only the content of doctrines which should be challenged, but rather the acceptance of any belief that is rooted in external knowledge and not the individual's experience. Institutions are not conducive with the flexibility of life, Carmella muses: '"Institutions, in fact, are not allowed to like anything."'[126] Sapienza shares this distrust of institutions, fittingly for a writer whose own childhood was spent outside of school, in *L'arte della gioia* , she 'entra in un bowling, fa strike e colpisce Dio, Patria, Famiglia, tutti i valori che lastricano la nostra cultura, la nostra formazione.'[127] [goes bowling and lands a strike against God, Nation, Family, all the values that pave our culture, our development.]

In both novels the prevalence of the convent is largely consigned to the past, yet their restrictive legacy remains or is replaced by new iterations. As noted above, In *The Hearing*

[125] Ali Smith, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. xii.
[126] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 12.
[127] Manuela Vigorita, 'Linee per un ritratto', in *Appassionata Sapienza*, p. 27.

Trumpet the institute for old women is mirrored by the convent in the Abbess Rosalinda's story, where the former is ruled not by traditional Catholicism but 'by the Well of Light Brotherhood and they are financed by a prominent American cereal company (Bouncing Breakfast Cereals Co.).'[128] This delightful mishmash of new age religion and commerce is really a modern example of an old formula: the rigid control of female bodies and minds. In addition to the identification with the old convent, the home is likened to a prison by Carmella, who imagines a 'huge dreary cement building'[129] with 'stark exercise yards full of menacing hounds, those lantern jawed policewomen making you tramp all around in your grey uniforms.'[130] In truth, the home's architecture is made up of bizarrely unique individual buildings, reflecting perhaps the individuality of its occupants. Unlike the anonymous sisters of the convent of Saint Agatha in *L'arte della gioia* , each of Marian's fellow 'inmates' are asserted as distinct characters. Here diversity amongst the elderly women illuminates the disconnect between individuals and institutions.

There is also a parallel in real life between Marian's scepticism and Carrington's own mistrust of institutions. After her early years of expulsion from convent schools, Carrington continued to resist being subsumed into any larger school of thought. This reluctance is apparent in her association with the surrealists, a group with whom she certainly shared a great deal yet whose name she later rejected.[131] Whitney Chadwick outlines the difficulty with which the many women associated with surrealism have self-identified with the label; describing a movement which supported the women artists' 'desire to escape what they perceived as the inhibiting confines of middle-class marriage, domesticity, and motherhood.'[132] Chadwick's description of the attractions of Surrealism echo the attractions

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[128] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 10.
[129] *Ibid.,* p. 52.
[130] *Ibid.,* p. 52.
[131] Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism,* Thames and Hudson (London: 2017)
[132] Whitney Chadwick (ed.), *Mirror Women, Surrealism and Images Self-Representation,* The MIT Press (Cambridge, MA; London: 1998), p. 5.

of the convent as described by Joanna Moorhead with regard to Carrington's Aunt Leo. Of course, there were many material differences between Carrington's life as Max Ernst's lover in Paris and her aunt's Irish convent. However, in some respects the trade-offs are comparable, power and freedom in some measure, yet always within the confines of a patriarchal environment where women are defined pre-eminently by their physicality.

Meanwhile, *L'arte della gioia* also establishes in its structure a recurrent conflict between the individual woman and restrictive doctrines. However, this conflict centres almost exclusively on the experiences of Modesta, as she encounters new ideas first with hope and gradually renewed scepticism. She escapes the high walls of the convent to end up closed behind the high walls of an aristocratic villa. Later, having escaped from the influence of Gaia and the conventions of upper-class society, Modesta seeks the intellectual freedom she craves in Socialism, only to find the same rigidity. She finds it to be like the religion she sought to escape, with the same compulsion to martyrdom and self-punishment:

> -Ma Carlo, anche tu come i tuoi compagni a Catania: «L'ascetismo del popolo russo, la sacralità della classe operaia il martirologio del proletariato, la natura come Dio, l'artista come Dio». Come è possibile?
>
> -Che c'entra tutto questo?
>
> -C'entra invece, perché fra i tuoi compagni ho trovato soltanto malcelata aspirazione alla santità e vocazione al martirio. O la ferocia del dogma per nascondere la paura della ricerca, della sperimentazione, della scoperta, della fluidità della vita. […] E sono fuggita via, sí, perché non avevo intenzione di cadere in un tranello forse peggiore della Chiesa alla quale sono sfuggita.[133]
>
> ['Carlo, you, too, like your comrades in Catania: "The asceticism of the Russian people, the sacredness of the working class, the martyrology of the proletariat, nature as God, the artist as God." How is it possible?'
>
> 'What does all that have to do with it?'
>
> 'It has everything to do with it, because all I found among your comrades was a barely concealed aspiration for sainthood and a vocation for martyrdom. Or else a ferocity of dogma hiding a fear of investigation, of experimentation, of discovery, of life's fluidity. […] And I ran away, yes, because I had no intention of falling into a trap perhaps worse than the Church from which I had escaped.']

[133] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 168. [pp. 229 -230.]

This association of the dogma of Socialism with that of the church is highly significant to Sapienza's ethos as a writer. It shows that the rigidity of any system of thought is objectionable in itself regardless of the merit of the ideas argued. As Goffredo Polizzi explains:

> Modesta grows dissatisfied by the socialist and communist circle whose materialism is reified and does not take corporeality into due consideration. Once again the body is the unit against which everything must be measured, and ideas do not have any life other than "in the flesh."[134]

Sapienza's autobiographical writing echoes Modesta's distrust of any system that constrains the *fluidità della vita.* In *Lettera aperta* she notes the significance of the twentieth congress of the Soviet communist party; this watershed moment dispelled the rigid hero worship of Stalin, and therefore the USSR, that Modesta saw in Carlo's comrades: 'e cosí venne il ventesimo congresso e allora tutto non fu cosí bloccato, cosí concluso, sicuro'[135] [and so came the twentieth congress, and then everything wasn't so blocked, so settled, certain]. The potential for uncertainty is crucial to lived experience.

While Carlo represents in the text the potentials and pitfalls of the Socialist belief system, it is Joyce who represents psychoanalysis. It is crucial that these two 'enlightened' characters in tune with these major belief systems of the twentieth century are still hampered by a traditionalist view of the female body and sensual pleasure. Carlo's fixation with Modesta doesn't allow for her active engagement in the sexual act, instead she should be still and saintly. Modesta resists, asking: 'L'amore senza sesso che cosa è? Una venerazione di statue, di madonne.'[136] ['What is love without sex? A veneration of a statue, of a Madonna.'] Her cutting analysis shows what is at stake when religious devotion eclipses the

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[134] Goffredo Polizzi, 'The Art of Change: Race and the Body in Goliarda Sapienza's *L'arte della gioia*', in Goliarda Sapienza in Context, pp. 163-180, p. 171.
[135] Goliarda Sapienza, *Lettera aperta,* Einaudi (Turin: 2015), p. 55. Translation my own.
[136] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 168 [p. 229.]

female body. Sex, life, and the body are one and the same. This mismatch in their philosophies causes the breakdown of their romantic relationship.

With Joyce, Modesta's curiosity is satisfied by learning of this revolutionary new understanding of the unconscious, a system which centres on the individual's own experience. Joyce tells her that

> Freud ha scoperto che l'anima non è una stella fissa eterna e immutabile dentro di noi, ma una luce che rotea seguendo le pulsazioni delle vene e dei nervi[137]
>
> [Freud discovered that the mind isn't a fixed star, eternal and immutable, within us, but a whirling light that follows the pulsations of the veins and nerves]

And yet Joyce is ashamed and detached from her own body, believing her homosexuality to be an expression of neurosis, 'Non sono una donna,' she says, 'Sono un essere deviato.'[138] [I'm not a woman. I'm a deviant being.] Like Carlo, she is unconventional in some ways yet still deeply conservative in matters of sex, as Scarfone has pointed out she is

> [L]a donna del Novecento che, per quanto colta ed estremamente intelligente, non riesce ancora a emanciparsi, rimanendo così vittima di un sistema patriarcale di cui pure conosce l'illegittimità.[139]
>
> [The twentieth-century woman, who, however cultivated and extremely intelligent, doesn't yet succeed in emancipating herself, thus remaining a victim of the patriarchal system even while understanding its illegitimacy.]

Sapienza's engagement with psychoanalysis will be explored at greater length in the subsequent chapter on mental health and *Il filo di mezzogiorno.* In the case of Joyce, it is often not the content of psychoanalysis but her relentless pursuit of an external knowledge in place of true self-understanding which puts her at odds with Modesta. She asks 'Oh Modesta, mi insegni a essere felice! Perché lei ha scelto di essere felice. Quando ha detto:

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[137] *Ibid.,* p. 311 [p. 412]
[138] *Ibid.,* p. 349 [p. 461]
[139] Gloria Scarfone, *Goliarda Sapienza: un'autrice ai margini del sistema letterario,* p. 52.

«I fatti c'entrano poco», ho sentito che la sua serenità è stata un atto di volontà.'[140] ['Oh Modesta, teach me to be happy! Because you chose to be happy. When you said "The facts don't matter much," I sensed that your serenity was a deliberate act of will.'] 'I fatti c'entrano poco' is particularly crucial here, it epitomises Sapienza's approach to the notion of truth, and certainly establishes a hierarchy where truth is not of greater value than happiness. Ultimately, doctrine can be of no value if it does not align with personal happiness, reasserting the individualism that Sapienza goes on to sustain across her writings, and particularly in her autobiographical work on mental health and psychoanalysis.

Communism, Surrealism and psychoanalysis all represent shifting cultural norms, and vastly differing understandings of the importance of women and their bodies in the mid twentieth century. All of them however, are felt ultimately as limitations, as systems incompatible with true freedom. How then, if systems of organised knowledge are to be so mistrusted, can we ever attain knowledge, or perceive something to be true? The answer, for Carrington and Sapienza, lies within the embodied self. In resisting prevalent schools of thought, I contend that Carrington and Sapienza resist the very idea that there exists a 'universal subject'. That is not to posit an 'irrational' female subject against the 'rational' universal male. Instead they question the legitimacy of any 'rationality' that is derived from an external logic. Their embodied approach allows for confusion, and doubt, where truth exists *because* of doubt, not in spite of it: 'To approach Absolute Knowledge for Carrington, demanded resisting its very claim to totality. To believe otherwise was to succumb to what she later called 'Dogmaturd', the dogmatic adherence to ordering principles that reduced knowing to a totalising, totalitarian act of will.'[141] Curiously, in

[140] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 302. [p. 401.]
[141] Jonathan Eburne, 'Poetic Wisdom: Leonora Carrington and the esoteric avant-garde', in Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra (eds.), *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde,* pp. 141 -162, p. 142.

these two novels which are the furthest removed from their authors' 'reality', they each make their most conspicuous claim to truth. Modesta writes: 'non mi va di fare supposizioni o d'inventare. Voglio dirvi quello che è stato senza alterare niente.'[142] ['I don't want to correct or invent things. I want to tell you how it was without changing anything.'] Whilst Marian tells us 'This is the end of my tale. I have set it down faithfully and without exaggeration either poetic or otherwise.'[143]

This assertion of truth as a lived experience once again brings us to the notion of the body. In resisting doctrines both secular and holy, Carrington and Sapienza's depiction of freedom is always felt as a bodily right as a well as a spiritual one. Although Modesta struggles against myriad systems of thought across the long arc of the twentieth century, there is only one thing she aspires to: 'Grande libertà di mente e di movimenti!'[144] [Enormous freedom of thought and action!]. As Catholic doctrine understands when it conflates physical obedience with spiritual devotion, one cannot have freedom of mind without freedom of body.

[142] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 5. [p. 5.]
[143] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 158.
[144] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 403. [p. 530.]

Maturity and the Aged Body

In order to demonstrate how Carrington and Sapienza compare with typical expectations around women's age and maturity, I take as a starting point the models of female development offered by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland in their edited volume *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development.* The texts at hand both conform to and diverge from these models, evoking familiar tropes of the personal adventure of development, but with key differences.

At first glance, the two main subcategories of a female novel of development identified at the outset of the *The Voyage In*[145] map quite readily onto the two novels in question. Firstly, the novel of apprenticeship, wherein the protagonist is seen chronologically from childhood to adulthood, detailing the trials that accompany this transition, which may quite clearly be applied to *L'arte della gioia* , and indeed is the typical model for all bildungsroman regardless of gender. Secondly (and underscored as the more common choice for the depiction of uniquely *female* development), the novel of awakening, showing 'women developing later in life, after conventional expectations of marriage and motherhood have been fulfilled and found insufficient.'[146] The ninety-two year old Marian certainly fulfils this brief, and the arc of *The Hearing Trumpet* can be said to offer an awakening to herself and her companions in the institute, where Georgina proclaims:

> Although freedom has come to us somewhat late in life, we have no intention of throwing it away again. Many of us have passed our lives with domineering and peevish husbands. When we were finally delivered of these we were chivvied around by our sons and daughters who not only no longer loved us, but considered us a burden and objects of ridicule and shame.[147]

[145] Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (eds.), *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development,* pp. 11-12.
[146] Abel, Hirsch and Langland, *The Voyage In,* p. 7.
[147] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 122.

As previously noted, both novels centre learning and curiosity, with discovery powering the progression of the plot, in keeping again with the sense of growth and development expected within this genre or model. However one key difference with Abel's work is that both of the above models typically revolve around the advent of sexual maturity, whether that be during adolescence or young adulthood, or delayed to a later act of transgression, where 'the novel of awakening is often a novel of adultery.'[148] If the bildungsroman is inherently a novel about the advent of maturity, sexual or otherwise, then in contrast both Modesta and Marian appear fully matured.

In Carrington's text, the advent of sexual maturity is irrelevant to the nonagenarian protagonist, although she encounters entirely unfazed the more creative exploits of the Abbess Rosalinda. Indeed, the advent of any form of maturity is rendered redundant to Marian and her bevvy of crones. Each character is presented to the reader as a fully-formed whole where development is external rather than the internal development typical of the bildungsroman genre. The external world changes enormously, affording the old ladies more power, yet their internal character remains constant. Smith identifies the novel as Carrington's 'most mature written achievement – and in its own way a statement on maturity, and the meanings of maturity.'[149] Yet, not only was Carrington so much younger than her characters, she had been moving within Surrealist circles which prized her precisely because of her youth:

> Leonora Carrington was a very striking young woman, with her oval face and black eyes, her long black hair and slender limbs; in her artlessness and innate, innocent perversity she seemed to have sprung out of the dreamworld as if directly summonsed by the voices of the Surrealists at their automatic séances, a real-life *femme-enfant* who speaks of desire and has not yet grown up enough to grasp the full implication of what she says. Belief in the penetrating faculty of youth, the young woman-child's closeness to mystery and sexuality formed the crux of Surrealist doctrine.[150]

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[148] Abel, Hirsch and Langland, *The Voyage In,* p. 12.
[149] Ali Smith, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. xi.
[150] Marina Warner, 'Introduction' in *House of Fear: notes from Down Below,* p. 6.

Marian is no *femme-enfant*. Indeed, in *The Hearing Trumpet* there exists no 'belief in the penetrating faculty of youth', instead the younger characters are unperceptive and reductive in comparison with the supposedly senile old ladies. Marian revels in her aged body, because it is the mechanism she lives through 'I am no beauty, no mirror is necessary to assure me of this absolute fact. Nevertheless I have a death grip on this haggard frame as if it were the limpid body of Venus herself.'[151] Marian's assured connection to her body and its functions certainly challenges the Surrealist model where young female bodies are aesthetic objects. Ali Smith poses the question: 'Could Marian Leatherby's great age also be a reaction against Carrington's Surrealist objectification as astonishingly gifted child-woman? Probably, and probably Marian is a version of the crone of Celtic mythology, the wise old woman whose wisdom is the magic key to all the human ages and fertilities.'[152] It seems impossible that Carrington's meditations upon maturity, and specifically female maturity, in this novel have not been inflected by her experiences with the Surrealist obsession with female youth. Marian shares some biographical details with Carrington, an Englishwoman settled in Mexico, she remembers a youth spent in Paris:

> My long dark hair is soft like cat's fur, I am beautiful. This is quite a shock because I have just realised I am beautiful and there is something I must do about it, but what? Beauty is a responsibility like anything else, beautiful women have special lives like prime ministers but that is not what I really want, there must be something else…[153]

The beautiful mass of dark hair that features so prominently in Carrington's self-portraits from the period is the same, and alongside it a sense of the burden that female beauty carries, the 'responsibility' perhaps of inspiring artistic, older, men? The infantilizing label of muse had been very directly imposed upon Carrington, intruding upon her early writing via the introductions of Max Ernst and her French publisher, Henri Parisot. In the very first published edition of Carrington's short stories the former 'had evoked his young lover as a

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[151] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 13.
[152] Ali Smith, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. xiv.
[153] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 15.

surrealist woman-child, destined to inspire [man] through her youth, her beauty and her innocence.'[154] Speaking later in life, Carrington herself left no doubt about her views on being a surrealist muse, saying 'I thought it was bullshit.'[155] Unlike those early French works prefaced by Ernst and Parisot, *The Hearing Trumpet* represents the summit of Carrington's writing as a grown woman in Mexico, she has been through the chaos of war and suffered the breakdown that would see her committed to an asylum in Spain. She is no longer the naïve woman-child, or rather, she has learnt that she never was. In this sense *The Hearing Trumpet* as a novel on maturity cleaves closer to Carrington's reality than might be expected, where Marian's great age is symbolic not only of the accumulated knowledge of women through time, but also of Carrington's painfully gained experience. As Alicia Kent describes: '[i]n old age Marian has a freedom paradoxically created by no longer being needed, or being looked at, or being available to be looked at'.[156] At the time of writing Carrington is removed entirely from Surrealism, Europe, and her previous relationship with Max Ernst; represented by the great distance between Marian and her own past due to her advanced age. The flashes of nostalgia in *The Hearing Trumpet* are the closest this text comes to autobiography, where Marian dreams of a past love in Paris, 'but Simon must be dead for thirty years now, there is nothing left of him as far as I know.'[157] Kent goes on to suggest that Carrington's writing of *The Hearing Trumpet* acts almost as an elegy to Surrealism itself, functioning 'as a meditation on the (living) legacy of surrealism, and perhaps an artist's meditation on her own relevance.'[158] Kent also notes that the publication date of *The Hearing Trumpet* in English in 1978 coinciding with the deaths of many key Surrealists including Ernst and Man Ray.[159] However I believe this focus upon the

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[154] Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism,* Thames and Hudson (London and New York: 2017), pp. 81-82.
[155] Leonora Carrington quoted in: Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse,* p. 9.
[156] Alicia Kent, 'Are We to Be Contented with Dreams? Getting Older in the Work of Leonora Carrington', p. 297.
[157]Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 59.
[158] Alicia Kent, 'Are We to Be Contented with Dreams?', p. 299.
[159] *Ibid.,* p. 299.

publication date here rather than the date of composition is unhelpful here, confusing the creativity of Carrington's practice. In reality she is not remembering Paris at a distance of decades - it has in fact only been a few years - but instead this distance is felt profoundly in her removal from that circle, and is symbolised in the text through advanced age, placing her at a safe distance from that group's adulation of guileless youth.

Beyond the influence of Surrealism's infantilisation, Carrington's meditations on age in *The Hearing Trumpet,* and the figure of the wise crone in her other works, offer a compelling perspective on gender and embodiment. Marian's physical role as a woman has been fulfilled through her role as wife and mother, and so, while her identity is still tied to her body and physical experience, as an elderly woman this association no longer carries so much of the weighted expectation of gender. Elsewhere in her writing Carrington describes how the denial of motherhood allows for other bodily experiences to come to the fore, and, crucially, for knowledge, or 'discovery', to take priority.

> I can hear many things and my eyes are sharp. […] I have trained all the love in my body, into energy, and all my hate, which is also a great force, I have trained into thought. My womb is no larger than a grain of rice because its powers have all been used in discovery.[160]

Perhaps as an old woman Marian is enabled to focus her powers upon discovery, and thus writing from her perspective allows Carrington to explore a subjectivity where embodiment is not solely rooted in gender. This perspective is not purely positive however, as the enjoyment of sexual desire and motherhood must be put aside in order to gain this freedom. Thus this freedom is associated with suppressing the female in order to become an approximation of a man, diverting power from the womb to the mind, just as St Jerome earlier in this chapter viewed women who undertook religious orders. As Carrington continues from the above passage of *The Stone Door*:

> "Have you never missed the ordinary functions of a female, loving a man or bearing children?"

[160] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* pp. 39-40.

> "That is a difficult question to which I could answer yes or no. If I passed through the pleasure and suffering of a female animal I would become a different creature. […]"[161]

In *The Hearing Trumpet*, the elderly women in the nursing home have suffered precisely through 'the pleasure and suffering of a female animal', and only in old age are they able to engage fully in discovery.

Although *L'arte della gioia* opens with Modesta as a child, it is telling that at the very beginning of her story as it is presented to us, she has undergone a sexual awakening. Moreover, this awakening originates from and within herself (via masturbation) and is clearly delineated as a positive experience relating primarily to herself and not to the input of anyone else. Thus, the example of *The Voyage Out*, where the heroine suffers a crisis based on 'fears about adulthood'[162] is a somewhat alien model. *L'arte della gioia* does not anticipate sexual maturity, and Modesta certainly doesn't fear its arrival. Instead, this knowledge is innate, and what is gained is experience, not knowledge, over the course of the text. Perhaps most unusually, the traumatic sexual experience at the beginning of the novel is presented in a disarmingly matter-of-fact manner, and has seemingly no ramifications for the development of the plot (in stark contrast to Modesta's experience of masturbation, and her positive encounter with Tuzzu which continue to inform her understanding of sexuality).

In addition to this unexpected figuring of sexual maturity in childhood, Sapienza also subverts expectation with Modesta's eventual mature self. While the depiction of childhood will be a key aspect to Sapienza's autobiographical texts (particularly *Lettera aperta* and *Io, Jean Gabin*) the depiction of maturity is rather more unusual amongst her oeuvre, and perhaps merits more attention. As I outlined previously, the early parts of *L'arte della gioia*

[161] The Stone Door, p. 40.
[162] Abel, Hirsch and Langland, *The Voyage In,* p. 4.

are perhaps the most striking thanks to a few occasions of matricide, and have undoubtedly garnered the most academic attention.[163] But the final parts of the novel demonstrate also a subversion of expectation for old age, where unlike a typical bildungsroman we do not find a tranquil, reflective old age remembering the transgressions and upsets of youth. Instead the thrust of the novel is towards constant upheaval and change, just as Modesta believes herself settled with her family, the earth moves again. Key characters arrive, leave and return, relationships fundamentally alter, and Modesta's position on any number of issues has to shift and adapt. Returning again to the sense of excessiveness in response to restraint which runs through this chapter, I quote again Monica Farnetti for whom the novel 'represents life as being about gain – it is about additions and constant, surprising, and abundant acquisitions that go against any sort of limitation.'[164] Sapienza does also concede to nostalgia however in her depiction of old age, choosing to end the novel with the kind of full-circle imagery that one might expect from the prototypical novel of development. Returning to the child Modesta's experience of sexual maturity, she writes:

> E se questo mio vecchio ragazzo si stende su di me col suo bel corpo pesante e lieve, e mi prende come ora fa, o mi bacia fra le gambe proprio come Tuzzu faceva allora, mi trovo a pensare bizzarramente che la morte forse non sarà che un orgasmo pieno come questo.[165]
>
> [And when this old youngster of mine lies on top of me with his beautiful body, heavy yet light, and takes me as he's doing now, or kisses me between my legs just like Tuzzu did back then, I find myself thinking oddly that death might simply be an orgasm as satisfying as this one.]

And so despite the familiar nostalgia of the novel of development returning to the beginning at the story's close, here Sapienza uses this trope to subvert expectation instead. Rather than reflecting sanguinely in old age, Modesta contemplates death with the same passions as always. In this way Sapienza mirrors Carrington, where both *L'arte della gioia* and *The*

[163] Not least in the present chapter, where the brief but crucial sojourn in the convent has been analysed in much greater depth than the other stages of Modesta's journey.
[164] Monica Farnetti, 'Nomadic Modesta', p. 70.
[165] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 511. [p. 670.]

Hearing Trumpet resist a cyclical, meditative view of old age. Instead, their narrative tends to an endless cumulative power, embracing excess, learning, and experience.

Chapter Two: Writing Insanity in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Down Below*

Introduction

Amongst Carrington and Sapienza's many works, *Down Below* (1944) and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* (1969) present themselves perhaps the most readily for comparison. Despite the differing styles of the authors these texts belong self-evidently within the much broader and well-studied pantheon of psychiatric autobiography. However, given their relative obscurity little has been done to situate these works within this broader context through sustained analysis, despite the great number of avenues that might be pursued in comparative study. For example, Carrington and Sapienza's texts are both born from painful periods of institutionalisation and ruthless treatment methods that are echoed in such renowned works as Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (1961). That Carrington's work predates these two examples by almost twenty years is highly significant and embedded in the historical development of psychiatric treatment. In the Spanish asylum she describes in *Down Below* she is administered the drug Cardiazol, a precursor to the Electroconvulsive therapy that features so prominently in the work of Frame and Plath. Her unflinching account of this treatment has been noted by many scholars, but has not yet been positioned in dialogue with these successive works. Also writing in the 1960s, Sapienza's narrative is similarly imbued with the disruptive force of ECT. But here, instead of being situated so squarely within the institution, or at the moment of treatment, Sapienza lingers heavily on its aftermath and in her own past, as the psychoanalysis undertaken in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* seeks to reconstruct the memories lost as a result of ECT. Both women bear witness to a rapidly changing field of medical practice, where more holistic approaches exist alongside these more controversial physiological treatments. Sapienza is committed in 1962, too early to benefit from the seminal work of Franco Basaglia on the inefficacy of psychiatric hospitals - *L'istituzione negata* (1968) – or the reforms bearing his name, which did not pass into law until 1978.

In addition to this international landscape of women's autobiography, there are compelling connections specific to Carrington and Sapienza's local contexts that might be explored further. In her comprehensive, albeit necessarily preliminary chapter, 'Beyond the Canon: Goliarda Sapienza and Twentieth-Century Italian Literary Tradition', Laura Fortini reads *Il filo di mezzogiorno* as a Bildungsroman, or a novel of emergence by Bakhtin's definition.[1] This approach centres upon *Il filo di mezzogiorno* as the sequel to *Lettera aperta* in Sapienza's autobiographical works. These two texts are often addressed together by scholarship: written in quick succession and treading similar ground in Sapienza's childhood, their similarities stand in stark contrast to the fantastical epic of *L'arte della gioia* . Yet *Il filo di mezzogiorno* is itself distinct within Sapienza's autobiography, centred as it is upon the realities of intense psychiatric treatment, both through ECT and the psychoanalytic dialogue. Manuela Fraire has drawn an illuminating comparison with Freud's infamous Dora case study,[2] establishing Sapienza's important contribution toward an understanding of the complexities of the relationship between analyst and analysand. Yet there remain to be explored compelling links with the culture of psychoanalysis in Rome of the 1960s, and with the Italian literary tradition of the wider 20th century.

Amongst Sapienza's cosmopolitan circle of filmmakers and actors in mid-century Rome, psychoanalysis is commonplace, its tropes and language well-known. The scepticism with which Modesta views organised religion and Socialist politics in *L'arte della gioia* is seen again here in Sapienza's distaste for any dogmatic system of belief. She tells her analyst:

> '[H]o conosciuto molti psicoanalizzati e…be'! avevano l'aria di… be' sì! di capire tutto, spiegarsi tutto con quattro regole abbastanza accomodanti, come posseduti da un'illuminazione mistica.'[3]

[1] Laura Fortini, 'Beyond the Canon: Goliarda Sapienza and Twentieth-Century Italian Literary Tradition', in Alberica Bazzoni, Emma Bond and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi (eds.), *Goliarda Sapienza in Context: Intertextual Relationships with Italian and European Culture,* pp. 131-146, p. 136.
[2] Manuela Fraire, '«Il filo di mezzogiorno» Goliarda paziente', in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* pp. 130 – 147.
[3] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* Baldini & Castoldi (Milano: 2015), p. 59. [All translations my own unless otherwise stated.]

> [I've known many psychoanalysis patients, and… well! They have an air of… well yes! Of understanding everything, of explaining everything to themselves with four accommodating rules, like they're possessed of a mystical illumination.]

Despite her scepticism, the centrality of analysis to *Il filo di mezzogiorno* conveys its power as a facilitator of narration, albeit one whose ability to cure is called into question.

Literature has played a prominent role in the Italian reception of psychoanalytic theory from its beginnings. Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923) acts as a bridge between German-language psychoanalytic practice in Austro-Hungarian Trieste and its diffusion in the Italian-language novel. Although fictional, there are striking similarities between Svevo and Sapienza's approach to analysis, where a first-person memoir arises from a failed analyst/analysand relationship:

> Svevo was highly sceptical about the effectiveness of psychoanalysis. This attitude was due to a personal experience: one of his close relatives undertook a therapeutic course with Freud himself, with negative results. Nonetheless, Svevo continued to acknowledge psychoanalysis as an important source of artistic expression: 'Grande uomo quel nostro Freud, ma più per i romanzieri che per gli ammalati.'[4]
>
> [A great man our Freud, but more for the novelists than for the sick.]

This shared ambivalence toward psychoanalysis,[5] where the practice is not trusted as a form of treatment, yet embraces the possibilities opened up by psychoanalytic theory in the self-exploration of the novel, offers a compelling dimension of comparison between *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and its more celebrated predecessor that is yet to be explored.

The most pertinent local context for Carrington in 1944 is the Surrealist circle, transplanted from Paris into wartime North America. This web of influence has been relatively well documented, to the extent that interpretations of *Down Below* have been dominated by its association with the Surrealists:

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[4] Pierluigi Barrotta and Laura Lepschy, 'Introduction', in Pierluigi Barrotta and Laura Lepschy with Emma Bond (eds.), *Freud and Italian Culture,* Peter Lang (Bern; Oxford: 2009) pp. 1-8., pp. 4-5.

[5] See Emma Bond, "Zeno's Unstable Legacy: Case-Writing and the Logic of Transference in Giuseppe Berto and Goliarda Sapienza" in Giuseppe Stellardi and Emanuela Tandello Cooper (eds.), *Italo Svevo and his Legacy for the Third Millenium: Volume II: Contexts and Influences,* Troubador (Leicester: 2014) pp. 101-113 for a more extensive exploration of the links between Svevo and Sapienza and their shared ambivalence towards psychoanalysis.

> *Down Below* has invariably been discussed in terms of its faithful representation of her mental breakdown and as a critical response to surrealism's aestheticized representation, and indeed celebration, of female madness.[6]

This abiding fascination with *female* madness is embedded in the Surrealist imaginary, dating to André Breton's own novel *Nadja* (1928). Attracted by the unknowable mystery of true psychosis, Carrington's work stands apart in depicting a first-hand account of mental illness. After escaping the Spanish asylum, she occupied a place of higher importance to the Surrealists she re-joined in New York. Her lived experience of madness held an abiding fascination for a group that found deep resonances between such a loss of reason and the distorted or heightened reality they depicted in their works. The first publication of *Down Below* in 1944 was, significantly, in the *VVV* journal published by the Surrealists in New York. In his introduction to the French edition, Jean Schuster explains why it is that such a first-hand account should have a privileged position in the discourse on mental illness; for him Carrington's work signifies a watershed in the communication of what remains a mysterious condition: 'Longtemps la folie a paru ineffable […] Comment dire le délire sans se perdre dans le cri qui doit le dire ?'[7] [For a long time madness had seemed ineffable […] How does one express delirium without losing oneself in the cry that must say it?].

Removed a little from the specificity of these local contexts, a comparison between *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Down Below* has the potential to draw out these issues in a new light. What is at stake in an autobiography of female madness? The risk of 'se perdre dans le cri qui doit le dire' is close at hand for both Sapienza and Carrington. The imperative to communication, to narration is central to both texts, as a means of healing yet also fraught in itself with its resultant exposure of a fractured identity. Embedded in this imperative is a deep desire to be understood and known by others; the ineffability of madness as expressed by Schuster connotes precisely the absence of any such understanding. This chapter will

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[6] Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and knowledge in *Down Below',* in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde,* pp. 57-71, p. 59.
[7] Jean Schuster, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *En Bas,* Le Terrain Vague (Paris : 1973), p. 5.

engage primarily with these questions, that is how is the distancing experience of madness expressed in these texts? And how does communication bridge that gap of understanding?

With regard to the surrealism of *Down Below,* the affinities between that movement and an understanding of madness may prove pertinent to interpretations of other 'psychiatric' literature, not least *Il filo di mezzogiorno*. Whitney Chadwick describes the purpose of the Surrealist movement as 'to explore the unconscious as a site of meaning and to challenge rationalist distinctions between self and other, inside and outside, conscious and unconscious.'[8] With this definition, it becomes apparent that the core ideas of surrealism may resonate with many madness narratives regardless of author. The following passages from *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Down Below* indicate the fluidity of those 'rationalist distinctions' in the texts, calling into question the delineation of the latter as Surrealist and the former not:

> Sono stata stesa sul letto due giorni, due mesi, due ore. Non lo so. Non volevo crescere e il soffitto s'abbassava, e il sapore della calce mi alitava sugli occhi. Era il soffitto che si chinava su me (o ero io lo stesso soffitto?). Io ero il soffitto stesso. La mia carne era di lana, senza emozioni: le mie mani piegate, il lenzuolo, le mie gambe, affondavano nella lana del materasso: erano di lana molle e senza forza.[9]
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> [I had been lying on the bed two days, two months, two hours. I don't know. I didn't want to rise and the ceiling lowered itself, and the taste of the lime breathed onto my eyes. It was the ceiling bearing down on me (or was I the ceiling?). I was the ceiling itself. My flesh was of wool, emotionless: my hands folded, the sheet, my legs, sunk into the wool of the mattress: they were made of soft wool and strengthless.]

> "The brakes have jammed." "Jammed!" I, too, was jammed within, by forces foreign to my conscious will, which were also paralyzing the mechanism of the car. This was the first stage of my identification with the external world. I was the car.[10]

[8] Whitney Chadwick "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation", in Whitney Chadwick (ed.), *Mirror Women, Surrealism and Images Self-representation,* pp. 2-35, p. 5.
[9] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 61.
[10] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* New York Review of Books (New York: 2017), p. 7.

The two texts at hand concern two vastly different contexts, not least because of the different diagnoses, treatments and recoveries of the two authors. By bringing Carrington away from the Surrealists, and Sapienza towards them, it is hoped that underexplored ideas emerge from each text, in a way that contributes to the ongoing critical discourse on the presentation of female madness.

This chapter will take as a starting point the dehumanising loss of identity common to both women at the moment of breakdown, and the confrontation between this loss of identity and the observational judgement of the psychiatrist. Using Kristeva's theorisation of the 'cadaver' this analysis will consider this alienation as a symbolic death. My analysis will then move on to consider how gender, and the fascist political landscape that both authors lived through, contributes to this sense of alienation and informs their experience of psychiatric treatment. In both texts the conflation of male family members, romantic partners and fascist authorities with medical staff contributes to a gendered fear of domineering power. Carrington and Sapienza recognise within themselves some tendency towards an Oedipal complex, yet resist a simplified rendering of their most meaningful relationships. Finally in this half of the chapter I consider the use of horses as a metaphor for freedom and return to selfhood, drawing on both texts and Carrington's art. Building on the earlier discussion of death and rebirth, the horse is presented as a dual figure where death and life coincide, pointing to a complex new subjectivity, rooted in fragility, where the two must be reconciled in order to proceed. In both texts the process of writing itself is central to the authors being able to proceed in their journey to recovery. The act of writing has been framed as a rebirth by scholars of both texts: Kristoffer Noheden argues that 'the process of narrating *Down Below'* acts as a 'symbolic rebirth' for Carrington,[11] whilst Maria Arena describes almost identically the potential for re-birth through writing for

[11] Kristofer Noheden, 'Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation: Symbolic Death and Rebirth in *Little Francis* and *Down Below*', *Correspondences* (Vol. 2 No.1: 2014), pp. 35 -65, p. 37.

Sapienza.[12] The second half of this chapter moves away from a thematic approach to focus on the composition of each text and the role of narration as treatment for mental illness. This analysis focuses upon the role of the spoken word in the composition of both texts, and how this aligns with practices of psychiatry. In the case of Carrington this necessitates a sustained consideration of the many versions that exist of *Down Below*, themselves a testament to the difficulty of forging a renewed identity.

[12] Maria Arena, '*Il filo di mezzogiorno*: Morte e rinascita attraverso la scrittura', in Giovanna Providenti (ed.), *«Quel sogno d'essere» di Goliarda Sapienza: Percorsi critici su una delle maggiori autrici del novecento italiano,* Aracne (Roma: 2012), pp. 149-156,

‘I was sinking down into a well’: Distance, Gaze and Identity

In the early stages of their treatment, both Carrington and Sapienza are delivered to their doctors in a manner devoid of all personal agency. In May 1962, having received electroshock therapy at the high rate of multiple doses a day, Sapienza is removed from hospital;

> Crede di essere a Catania e scambia per suo padre e per suo fratello Ivanoe i due uomini che l’aiutano a reggersi e a salire in macchina. Invece sono Citto e un giovane psichiatra siciliano, Ignazio Majore[…].[13]
>
> [She believes she is in Catania and mistakes for her father and brother Ivanoe the two men helping her to stand and to climb into the car. Instead they are Citto and a young Sicilian psychiatrist, Ignazio Majore […].]

The psychoanalysis Sapienza undergoes with Majore is at the will of her long-term partner Citto Maselli. Suffering from memory loss from the electroshock therapy, Sapienza is initially unaware of the analyst’s role, he is simply ‘il padrone’ [the boss]. In the absence of bodily agency the power vacuum is filled by men to whom it falls to support her physically and rebuild her mentally.

On Carrington’s journey to the sanatorium in Santander she is given an anaesthetic and is ‘handed over like a cadaver to Dr Morales.’[14] The pronouncement of the British consul in Madrid that she is ‘incurably insane’[15] aligns closely with Kristeva’s definition of the *cadavre*; she writes:

> […] le cadavre (cadere, tomber), ce qui a irrémédiablement chuté, cloaque et mort, bouleverse plus violemment encore l’identité de celui qui s’y confronte comme un hasard fragile et fallacieux.[16]

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[13] Giovanna Providenti, *La porta è aperta: Vita di Goliarda Sapienza,* Villagio Maori Edizioni (Catania: 2010), p. 152.
[14] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 18.
[15] *Ibid.,* p.3.
[16] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur : Essai sur l’abjection,* Éditions du Seuil (Paris : 1980) p. 11. [Translation : Leon S. Roudiez (trans.), Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* Columbia University Press (New York: 1982) p.3.]

> [The corpse (or cadaver: cadere, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance.]

The etymology of cadaver highlighted here - 'cadere, to fall' – speaks to a condition in which the 'dead' are not only a physical body divested of consciousness, but something remote, detached and distant from an ordinary existence.

In the most distressed passages of *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Down Below* both writers evoke a profound sense of distance between themselves and others. The relief and comfort of lucid communication is absent. Madness can be observed as a breakdown at the most basic level of human communication, where one's own reality is no longer compatible or recognisable to the wider society. This is mirrored on an internal level, in the midst of experiences such as hallucination, memory loss, or the distorted perception of time, where the link between body and mind is disrupted. That is, as well as failing to be understood by others, the individual is unable to rationalise themselves. Writing (or speaking)[17] in hindsight, Carrington indicates that she felt an awareness of such a disconnect even as she found herself in the midst of it: 'I realized that my anguish – my mind, if you prefer – was painfully trying to unite itself with my body'.[18] To borrow from the terminology of psychiatry without speculating on diagnoses, this sensation might be termed dissociative. Evidently, the result is a profound disruption to personal identity, a disconnect between the narrating subject of the text and the physical body. Sapienza feels such a disconnect as she looks into a mirror, seeing her own madness 'nei miei occhi stessi che mi fissavano dallo specchio con uno sguardo fermo muto spento a me sconosciuto'[19] [in my own eyes which stared at me from the mirror with a fixed mute lifeless gaze I didn't recognise]. The ability to recognise one's own image is central to the formation of the self in psychoanalytic theory, as Whitney Chadwick explains:

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[17] The composition of *Down Below* is complex, it is discussed at length in pp.113-120 of this chapter.
[18] *Down Below,* p. 9.
[19] *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 184.

> Even before 1936, when psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan first presented his paper arguing for the origins of selfhood in a 'mirror stage' (the 'misrecognition' of another in the mirror that produces the self, or subject), theories of subjectivity and sexual identity had revolved around seeing.[20]

With both Carrington and Sapienza unable to recognise themselves in this way, the locus of their identity is shifted outward, into the judgements, diagnoses and gaze of the (usually male) people who surround them. Observation is constant within the confines of a psychiatric institution, both patients are subject to severe scrutiny; and the *sguardo* or gaze is a recurrent motif in both texts, frequently that of the doctor upon the patient. It foregrounds the painful distance and lack of understanding between the two, a distance that must be bridged via communication if the patients are to prove themselves 'cured'. This is persistently a gendered gaze where the female patient is subject to the evaluation and assessment of the male doctor. Placed in psychiatric institutions both women struggle with the imposition of a 'true' reality onto them by the male practitioners whose evaluating gaze they fear. The unrelenting observation of such institutions, and the discomfort of being unable to evade it, and of being misunderstood, is brought into focus by the recurrent image of eyes.

> Era il padrone, e si vedeva da come lo guardavano, e lui aveva occhio per tutto. («I padroni hanno cento occhi»).[21]
>
> [He was the boss, and you saw it from how they looked at him, and he saw everything. ("Bosses have a hundred eyes").]

> Each one of them got hold of a portion of my body and I saw the *centre* of all eyes fixed upon me in a ghastly stare. Don Luis's eyes were tearing my brain apart and I was sinking down into a well… very far…[22]

In these passages the gaze of the doctor is invested with a tremendous power. In contrast to this all-seeing terror, in Carrington's later work *The Hearing Trumpet* there is an alternative

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[20] Whitney Chadwick, *Mirror Women, Surrealism and Images Self-representation,* p. 8.
[21] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 23.
[22] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 40.

take on the gaze of the male doctor, belonging here to the hapless pseudo-psychiatrist Dr Gambit. She writes that '[i]t was difficult to see his eyes as he wore very thick spectacles. […] they looked like the eyes of a child. They were eyes that looked at nothing.'[23] Perhaps there is an element of wish fulfilment in the impotent unseeing gaze of Dr Gambit, and the comedy of that text is absent in the harrowing experience of *Down Below*. The gaze of the doctors is raised concurrently with the worst experiences of psychiatric treatment by both Carrington and Sapienza:

> I knew that by closing my eyes, I could avoid the advent of the most unbearable pain: the stare of others.[24]

> Ero stata pazza: era chiaro: ma non avrei più subito quelle torture che dicono possano guarire e che invece distruggono lentamente, slabbrano i tessuti ed il pensiero, solo prolungando l'agonia. […] Ma ora, mi guarda come io guardavo mia madre.
>
> Non potevo sopportare quello sguardo. Dovevo sparire.[25]
>
> [I had been crazy: it was clear: but I would no longer undergo those tortures that they say can cure but instead destroy slowly, they chip away at one's tissue and thoughts, only prolonging the agony. […] But now, he looks at me like I looked at my mother.
>
> I couldn't bear that look. I had to disappear.]

In the first passage, Carrington is being administered Cardiazol; 'a precursor to electroconvulsive therapy'; the drug induces an epileptic fit, 'its lengthy list of possible side effects included a heart attack, a dislocated jaw, spinal fracture, worsening depression, intense fear, hallucinations and memory loss.'[26] In both this treatment and Sapienza's ECT, the removal of bodily autonomy exposes the disrupted link between mind and body, bringing to the fore a sense of depersonalisation. Once again, in the absence of a strong individual sense of self, the gaze of others is felt to be an insupportable burden; the damage

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[23] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 27.
[24] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 47.
[25] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 40.
[26] Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington,* p. 123.

of experimental treatments is felt almost as an extension of the distress caused by the other's gaze.

Amidst a crisis of identity both Carrington and Sapienza begin to rebuild their 'selves' in the first instance through the dislocated self they find in other peoples' appraisals of them. This is built partially through the medium of sight, where the observation of the doctor is paramount to being deemed 'cured'. Returning to the dominance of sight in the creation of identity; Chadwick notes the gendered history of the gaze, where women are 'positioned to collude in their own objectification, unable to differentiate their own subjectivity from the condition of being seen'.[27] Under the male gaze both women repossess their sexual identity by entering into dynamics which cross the boundary of patient and doctor and into more ambivalent territory. In one passage Sapienza strips in front of Majore, seeking his approval, when he tells her she is beautiful she reflects, 'sentivo sotto il suo sguardo di avere le braccia le spalle il seno…'[28] [I felt under his gaze that I had arms, shoulders, breasts…] Meanwhile Carrington recounts a relationship with her doctor Don Luis, who administers the dreaded Cardiazol; she writes: 'He would stare at me in amazement at finding me lucid, then laugh. And I would say: "Who am I?" while thinking: Who am I *to you*?'[29] Through sexual or romantic attachments they find, at least temporarily, a way to establish an identity. Writing on *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* Manuela Fraire notes that:

> L'innamoramento è quello stato in cui il nostro bisogno di essere riconosciuti, identificati dall'altro compie un salto, quasi mortale, e colma l'invalicabile distanza che distingue noi dall'altro.[30]
>
> [Falling in love is that state in which our need to be recognised, identified by the other makes a leap, almost fatal, and bridges the insuperable distance which distinguishes us from the other.]

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[27] Whitney Chadwick, *Mirror Women, Surrealism and Images Self-representation,* p. 9.
[28] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 156.
[29] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 55.
[30] Manuela Fraire, "«Il filo di mezzogiorno». Goliarda paziente", in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* p. 130.

The figuring of the romantic connection as a leap between two distinct identities applies beyond the psychiatric setting, and is indeed explored by thinkers such as Bataille.[31] If mental illness can be characterised as a feeling of distance, then the profound desire to make this leap may be exacerbated by the painful distance between the psychiatric patient and the other. Fraire's analysis suggests the danger involved, placing the identifying power with the other entails a surrender of personal agency. In this dynamic the patient is absorbed entirely into the identity imagined for them by the other.

[31] Georges Bataille, *Eroticism,* transl. Mary Dalwood, Penguin Classics, p. 20.

Male Authority: Fascism and Freud

While the practice of psychoanalysis as a therapy is central to the plot and structures of *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, the wider influence of psychoanalytic theory is also evidenced in the framing of Carrington's relationships in *Down Below*. In both texts, significant male figures are viewed through the prism of Freud's Oedipus complex. Whether it be Max Ernst, Citto Maselli, or a host of other male characters encountered by Sapienza in childhood or Carrington in her journey through Spain, they are presented as literal or metaphorical replacements of the father.[32] It is pertinent perhaps that both texts depict the end of a long-term relationship (Ernst and Carrington, Sapienza and Maselli). Indeed, these are also relationships where the male partners are more celebrated and established in their artistic field, with the women working alongside them collaboratively, but in relative obscurity. This point of comparison is not raised with the intention of reducing these complex works to the result of heartbreak, and neither author lingers particularly on the emotional aftermath of the relationship, instead focusing much more deeply on the inner turmoil of mental illness. Yet the ending of these lengthy and influential partnerships undoubtedly lends weight to the sense of rebirth in both texts, where emerging from this sphere of influence alone marks a new beginning.

Down Below begins, not with Carrington's committal to the asylum, or her escape from France, but with Ernst's arrest, at 'the moment when Max was taken away to a concentration camp for the second time, under the escort of a gendarme carrying a rifle (May 1940)'.[33] With the addition of the 1987 postscript, the final passage of the text is no longer the departure from the asylum, but instead recounts another separation from Ernst, this time of Carrington's own volition, in Lisbon. The final words of the postscript read: 'I

[32] Perhaps the most latent example of the oedipal complex in Carrington's prose is 'Little Francis' where she depicts herself as Ernst's nephew, and his wife as his daughter. This shift from reality is discussed at length in the following chapter, particularly pp. 134 – 135.
[33] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 4.

was tormented by the idea that I had to paint, and when I was away from Max and first with Renato, I painted immediately. I never saw my father again.'[34] This ending note of intense artistic productivity is remarkably aligned with Sapienza in *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, suggesting a new era and the healing power of being unburdened through creativity. The way in which Ernst and her father are simultaneously consigned to the past is striking, their association strengthened by earlier references to Ernst as a father figure.

Carrington's familiarity with psychoanalysis is evident, its popularity considerable amongst her circle of intellectual and artistic friends in pre-war France. Her attitude to the insights of that field bear many similarities to Sapienza, finding some truth but resisting the notion that individuals might be wholly explained by archetypal patterns. As described in *Down Below*, Carrington's friend Catherine is an enthusiastic recipient of analysis, and she offers her own interpretations of Carrington's distressed state. She suggests to Carrington that her 'attitude betrayed an unconscious desire to get rid for the second time of my father: Max, whom I had to eliminate if I wanted to live […] I think she interpreted me fragmentarily, which is worse than not to interpret at all.'[35] Elsewhere, scholars have considered the extent to which Ernst's role in Carrington's life can be adequately described as that of a father figure:

> There was no disguising in Leonora's mind about the role Max occupied; of course Max was a father figure; and unlike her actual father, who had wanted to, as she always put it, 'diseducate' her into the ways of the English upper classes, Max was intent on educating her in every way he could. All her life, Leonora would remember how much she learned from Max: 'It was more or less everything,' she told me.[36]
>
> I will resist the psychoanalytic temptation in this instance, for I think it would yield only a truism: what, if not ambivalence, would characterize the feelings of a very young woman toward a much older man who appeared in her life at once as a mentor, lover (both faithful and faithless), idealized father, and artistic brother in arms?[37]

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[34] *Ibid.,* p. 68.
[35] *Ibid.,* pp. 5 -6.
[36] Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington,* p. 92.
[37] Susan Rubin Suleiman, "The Bird Superior Meets the Bride of the Wind: Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst", in Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership,* pp. 94-113, p.102.

The above quotations both stem from later interviews with Carrington about her relationship with Ernst, a comparatively brief period in her life which has proved to be of endless interest, sometimes overshadowing the significance of her work. Carrington's attitude remains largely unchanged from her contemporary assessment given in *Down Below*: yes Ernst is a symbolic father, but he is not only this.

This idea is echoed in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* where Sapienza's ultimate riposte to Majore's analysis is to ask '… ma solo questo?'[38] […but only this?]. Interpretations are not dismissed as untrue but rather criticised as fragmentary, unable to capture the complexities of real human relationships. This dynamic is evidenced when Majore suggests an interpretation for Sapienza's close relationship with her uncle Nunzio:

> […] si costruì nella figura di questo zio, un padre perfetto, forte, coraggioso, […] questo zio somigliava a suo padre suppongo, no?
>
> [[…] you constructed in the figure of this uncle, a perfect father, strong, courageous, […] this uncle resembled your father I suppose, no?]

And Sapienza replies:

> Si, certo, ma era anche molto diverso… aveva una sua personalità e presenza fisica molto particolare, precisa e molto differente da quella di mio padre… scusi dottore… ma oltre ai nostri transfert, compensi, esiste anche l'individuo che si presenta con il suo peso, che si staglia nell'aria sempre in modo diverso da chiunque e che suscita emozioni diverse da chiunque altro, e Nunzio era Nunzio anche se come lei dice e capisco che ha ragione in parte… […][39]
>
> [Yes of course, but he was also very different… he had his own personality and a very particular physical presence, precise and very different from that of my father… excuse me doctor… but beyond our 'transfer', compensations, there exists also the individual who presents themselves with their own weight, who stands out from the air in a different way to anyone else, and who provokes different emotions in everyone else, and Nunzio was Nunzio even if, as you say and I understand that you're right in part…[…]

As previously noted, Sapienza's retort to the ordering language of psychoanalysis is to evoke a profoundly physical understanding of the world, where individual identity is known by the shape of a person against the air. Within this paradigm, male figures are endlessly

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[38] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 185.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 126.

symbolically interchanged, Citto, her father, her brothers, Majore, Nunzio, but also women: Giovanna, Jane, Nica… These shifting dynamics do not however diminish the nuance and individuality of each of these relationships.

Beyond the intimacies of romantic and familial relationships, these cross-identifications bear on the ways in which Carrington and Sapienza interact with the wider world, and their understanding of global political events in the more irrational moments of their illnesses. The prevalence of male authority in the patriarchal family, and in psychiatric medicine, are both seen in the malevolent presence of fascist power. Returning again to Kristeva's theorisation of the cadaver, the total lack of agency allowed to both women at the moment of their confinement is conflated with political imprisonment by fascist forces.

As a result of Sapienza's memory loss, although the events depicted in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* take place in the 1960s, in the early part of the text she is under the delusion that the fascists are still in power, and that the staff members of the institution she finds herself in are themselves fascists. She writes: '[…] in quella prigione mi devono aver fatto qualcosa che mi ha fatto perdere la memoria. Sono bene attrezzati e progrediti, questi fascisti.'[40] [in that prison they must have done something to me to make me lose my memory. They are well equipped and advanced, these fascists.] It is unsurprising that for Sapienza her confinement to an institution, and the loss of bodily autonomy through ECT, would evoke the spirit of fascism; elsewhere in her autobiographical fiction she details the persecution of her family by the regime (see *Io, Jean Gabin* and *Lettera aperta*). *Il filo di mezzogiorno* also makes reference to this period, detailing particularly Sapienza's mother's own breakdown as she suffers from stress induced by the imprisonment and harassment of her husband and older children. While Sapienza mistakes her analyst Majore and her partner Citto Maselli for her father and brother, and later believes that she is imprisoned by

[40] *Ibid.,* p. 30.

fascists, even as her memory and awareness return, she continues to associate Majore with the fascists. She asks: 'Nero. Il colore dei fascisti. Non è vero che lei è o è stato fascista?'[41] ['Black. The colour of the fascists. Isn't it true that you are or were a fascist?']. This association creates a parallel between Sapienza's position of weakness within the psychoanalytic dialogue, and the persecution she and her family have faced during the fascist period. Furthermore, the differences between psychoanalysis and fascism are effaced, where all ideologies become alien and threatening against the individual. This extends to left-wing political views as well, where in the final pages of the text Sapienza draws together the psychoanalyst and her Socialist mother, comparing their explanations for suicide:

> se per mia madre non esistevano suicidi ma solo assassinî della società e per questo medico non esistevano suicidi ma solo assassinî del padre e della madre… ma solo questo?[42]
>
> [if for my mother suicide victims didn't exist but only murders of society, and for this doctor suicide victims didn't exist but only murders of the father and of the mother… but only this?]

This cross-identification of different ideologies and authority figures as threatening toward the individual is echoed in Carrington's text. Her breakdown is deeply linked to her own traumatic experience of the Second World War, and in many ways the text is as much an account of a displaced person fleeing the chaos of Europe as it is one of psychiatric illness. As noted above, Ernst's imprisonment occurs at the beginning of *Down Below.* These intertwining narratives of loved ones taken prisoner by fascist forces and the narrators' confinements to psychiatric institutions are compelling, and certainly in Carrington's text the isolation of her mental illness is compounded by her inability to discern who might be an ally or an enemy. The isolation of mental illness bears an interesting parallel with the

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 48.
[42] *Ibid.,* p. 185.

burden of living as a non-conformist in a period of political extremism. Carrington becomes convinced that a man she meets in Madrid is in fact an agent of Hitler, she visits the British Consul, where she 'endeavoured to convince him that the World War was being waged hypnotically by a group of people – Hitler and Co. – who were represented in Spain by Van Ghent'.[43] Van Ghent takes on endless symbolic identities, an agent of fascism, capitalism, and crucially, Carrington's own father: 'To me Van Ghent was my father, my enemy, and the enemy of mankind'.[44] This association is not entirely rhetorical, as at various stages in the text Carrington's father intervenes at a distance, exploiting his influence to direct the management of his daughter's breakdown. When Carrington sees her father in the male authority figures around her, she is often right.

In the midst of Carrington's breakdown, she identifies wholly with the plight of Europe: on her entry into Spain, she is entirely overwhelmed, 'I thought it was my kingdom; that the red earth was the dried blood of the Civil War. I was choked by the dead, by their thick presence in that lacerated countryside.'[45] It proves impossible to extract the political element of the text from the psychological. This is particularly striking in the context of Carrington's other work, with *Down Below* occupying a unique position in being so unambiguously autobiographical. Here there are dates, places, names, and a level of realist historical testimony quite alien to the hermetic, allegorical quality of a work like *The Hearing Trumpet.* As Carrington's comprehension of reality weakens she associates her own suffering directly to that of the wider political struggle, she 'ties her physical and mental freedom to the freedom of Europe and links her own paranoia and the hypnotic power of fascists to the spellbound state of Spain and France.'[46] The 'hypnosis' of the fascist's power is compelling in the realm of psychiatric practice, where the power of the

[43] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 16.
[44] *Ibid.,* p. 15.
[45] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[46] Erich Hertz, 'Disruptive Testimonies: The Stakes of Surrealist Experience in Breton and Carrington', *Symposium*, Vol.64, No.2 (2010), pp. 89-104., p. 101.

doctor to construct or impose the 'correct' version of reality may be felt as a kind of hypnosis, as an imposition of an unrecognised truth. Both Carrington and Sapienza identify strongly as independent thinkers, and their personal histories of opposition to fascism render them reluctant to subscribe to any institutional system which seeks to unilaterally arbitrate truth.

In Sapienza's novel *L'arte della gioia* the malevolent power of the charming but lethally dangerous fascist is abundantly clear in the figure of Joyce's brother Timur who comes in search of her from Germany. His physical resemblance to Joyce indicates the unobservable divide between those who have been indoctrinated into fascist belief and those who have resisted. It is apparent in *Down Below* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* that resistance to fascism is experienced as a terrifying isolation from others, and the impact that this has on both women's approach to psychiatry has been perhaps understated. Sapienza writes:

> Aveva proprio ragione il professore Jsaya. Siamo la generazione del fascismo. Giulio dice la generazione d'oro: io dico la generazione di merda. Il ventiquattro: mi sono ricordata che sono del ventiquattro[47]
>
> [Professor Jsaya really had a point. We are the generation of fascism. Giulio calls it the golden generation: I say it's the generation of shit. 1924: I am reminded that I am from 1924.]

Separated by only a few years at birth, both Carrington and Sapienza came of age amid the slow and menacing rise of an ideology that would dramatically disrupt their lives. That idea of a 'generation of fascism' suggests the pervading influence of that history, regardless of whether individuals such as Sapienza evaded indoctrination. In the 1960s of *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* the legacy of fascism had come to occupy a central place in Sapienza's understanding of her own identity. This psychic shadow of fascism suggests a link between not only Sapienza and Carrington, but also ties them to a wider genre of post-war memoir, and the *generazione del fascismo* which extends into other national canons, most notably Germany. In German studies Susan G. Figge has established a paradigm for the memoirs of

[47] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 31.

the children of fascist fathers, a model which resonates with Sapienza's generational experience, and particularly Carrington's sense of a patriarchal fascist order. For Higge, this genre is characterised by both the experience of fascism and the 'personal psychic pain'[48] of the children.

[48] Susan G. Figge, '"Father Books": Memoirs of the Children of Fascist Fathers, in Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom (eds.), *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender*, State University of New York Press (Albany, NY: 1990), pp. 193-202, p. 193.

Freedom: Horses in Dreams and Art

Amid the encroaching threat of the war, violence seeps into *Down Below*. Carrington's persistent imagery of animals, particularly horses - so prominent in her previous work concerning both her relationship with Ernst and her childhood - becomes redolent with the omnipresence of death:

> For Leonora, as the war moved ever closer in 1939, the human and animal worlds became intertwined and interdependent, as evident in slaughterhouses and markets, and on battlefields sustained by human choices […] Metaphors of purity/freedom and putrefaction/death continued to colour Leonora's obsession with horses[…][49]

The violence of the war brings up these conflicting images of freedom and death, and this tension is felt most acutely in the early passages of *Down Below* where Carrington is in the midst of fleeing France, and believes herself to be capable of communing with animals. On the road from Saint-Martin in the early stages of her breakdown, Carrington recalls:

> We had driven all night long. I would see before me, on the road, trucks with legs and arms dangling behind them, […] I was very frightened: *it all stank of death.* I learned later that there was a huge military cemetery in Perpignan.[50]

This horrific image recalls the more everyday occurrence of the transportation of farm animals, conflating the familiar with a remarkable and distressing experience. Animals in Carrington's imaginary are powerful but also vulnerable, and she is aligned with them via the painfully heightened perception of her madness. Almost immediately after the occurrence above, she joins a herd of horses in Andorra, saying 'The fact remains that I could draw near animals where other human beings put them to precipitate flight.'[51]

Carrington's identification with horses across her career has been well documented by Susan Suleiman, who notes particularly how the animal's symbolic meaning differs

[49] Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism,* p. 87.
[50] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* pp. 7-8.
[51] *Ibid.,* p.11.

between Carrington and Ernst's work.[52] Where Ernst's horse-figure - dubbed *'la mariée du vent'* ['bride of the wind'] - functions primarily as a symbol of sexuality and wildness, for Carrington the horse is a more ambivalent figure that mirrors her personal identity: both wild and trapped, suffering and fearless. This duality is seen in her painting, 'The Inn of the Dawn Horse Self Portrait' (1937-8):

Figure 2 Leonora Carrington, Self Portrait, oil on canvas, ca.1937-38, The Pierre and Maria-Gaetana Matisse Collection, 2002, metmuseum.org

This dual image of the horse pertains to the tension in both *Down Below* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* between death and life. Carrington, in fleeing the death of war and arriving at Santander as a 'cadaver' is closer to the frozen rocking horse of her self-portrait than the

[52] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'The Bird Superior Meets the Bride of the Wind: Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst', in Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership, pp. 94-113, pp. 108-109.

free, galloping horse outside. Inside the sanatorium, she hears outside 'the clatter of horses' hooves, which gave me a terrible nostalgia and a desire to run away.'[53] Produced in the intervening period between her time in the asylum, and the summer of 1943 when *Down Below* was written, the painting 'Green Tea' (1942) brings together several of the images at hand in this analysis:

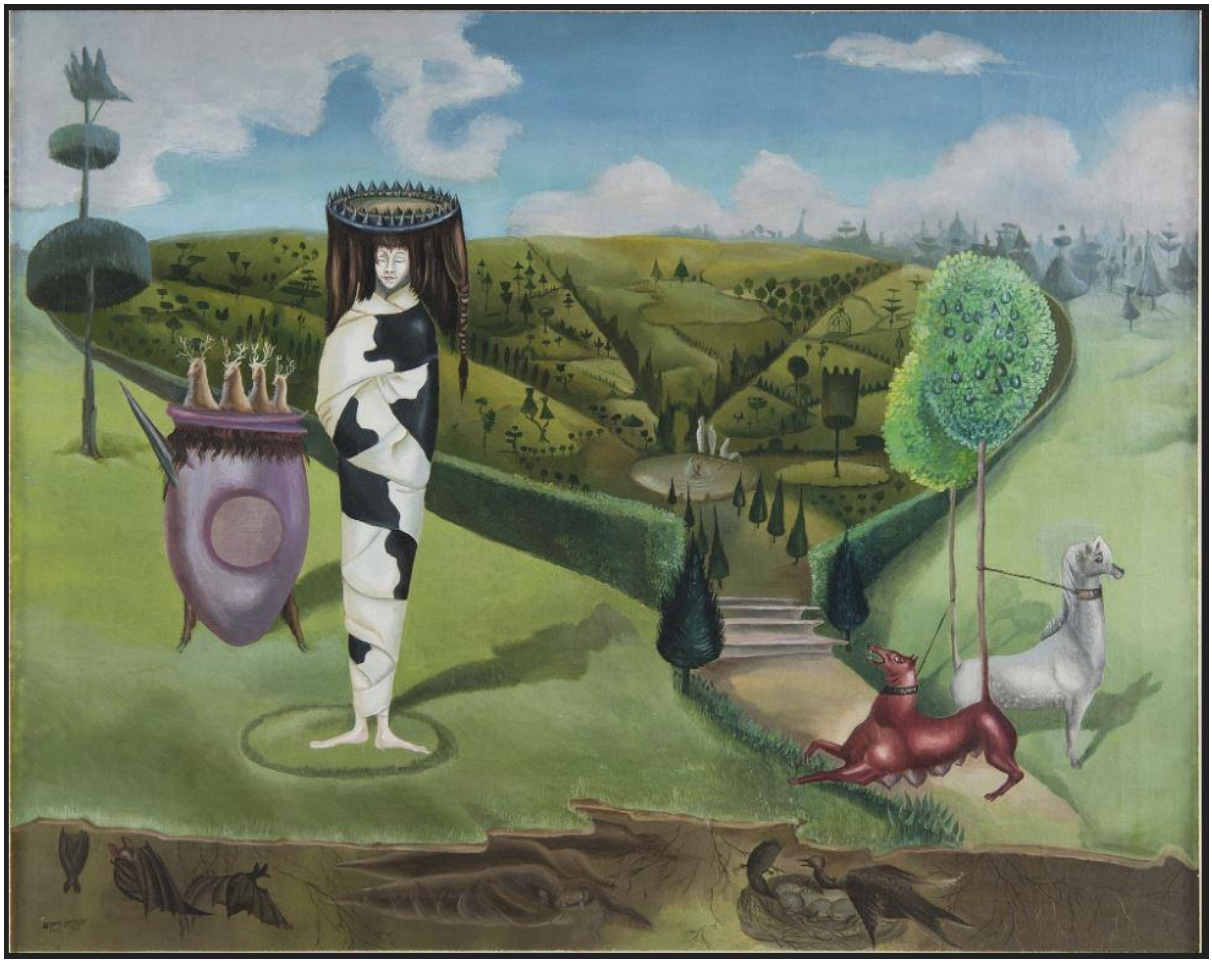

Figure 3 Leonora Carrington, Green Tea, oil on canvas, 1942, moma.org,

The mummified figure, together with the chrysalis-like beings below the surface, a nest of eggs, and sleeping bats, suggest the fallen or passive identity of the cadaver, yet they are imbued with the potential for rebirth. In comparison with these dormant figures and the still, labyrinthine garden, the two horses are almost defiantly alive, albeit chained. Upon closer

[53] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 35.

inspection, they may not be horses at all, but a hybrid creature with dog-like features, In typical Carrington fashion there are countless details that might merit further analysis, challenging simplistic explanations of her work. The chaining of her symbolic avatar is noteworthy so soon after her confinement to the asylum. Yet again here there are two depictions of the horse, but while both are alive one fights against its captivity and the other stands calmly. But what is the source of their captivity? Perhaps the answer is their relationship to one another – the female brunette and the elegant grey-haired horse, who are in fact each chained to a tree protruding from the other's tail.

In one of the many dreams analysed in *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* Sapienza tells an unnerving story of a horse half dead and half alive:

> Fra le maioliche bianche c'era in una nicchia un cavallo incastrato con le zampe davanti sollevate, il muso fra gli zoccoli aveva occhi grandi umani, il torace e il ventre proteso quasi a mostrarlo. Il professore Jsaya con un coltello lungo affilato cominciò lentamente a staccare la pelle flaccida e giallastra come gonfia di pus di quel cavallo. Volevo voltare il viso per non vedere ma le palme di vento e di grandine mi tenevano il viso eretto in direzione degli occhi del cavallo. […] sotto quella pelle e carne flaccida che il coltello aveva asportato, una trama di tendini e vene e nervature e filamenti d'argento elastici e vibranti brillavano nel rosso vivo della carne pulsante di vita…[54]
>
> [Among the white tiles there was a horse trapped in a recess with its front legs raised, the face between the hooves had large human eyes, the chest and stomach stretched out as if to display them. Professor Jsaya started with a long sharp knife to cut off the flaccid, yellow, pus-filled skin from the horse. I wanted to turn my head to not see it but the hands of the wind and hail kept my face straight in the direction of the horse's eyes. […] underneath that flaccid skin and flesh that the knife had removed, a web of tendons and veins and nerves and elastic vibrant silver fibres shone in the living red of the flesh pulsing with life…]

Majore identifies the horse as Sapienza herself, given that 'lei ama i cavalli come mi disse'[55] [you love horses like you told me]. The presence of Sapienza's erstwhile childhood teacher holding the knife, and the white tiles of the setting, suggests an amalgamation of patriarchal authority and clinical detachment from the suffering of the animal. It is tempting to read the painful process of cutting away the dead flesh as synonymous with the process

[54] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* pp. 83-84.
[55] *Ibid.,* p. 85.

of analysis, yet it seems to be more aligned with Sapienza's burgeoning practice of autobiography; as the dead flesh falls to the ground it transforms into sheets of paper filled with her own handwriting,[56] suggesting once again the role of narrative in painfully cutting through to the point of rebirth. Whether symbolic of analysis or writing, the cutting away of rotting flesh is a visceral metaphor for the recovery of a living identity. Such a task speaks to an internalised understanding of identity, as Sidonie Smith suggests:

> Typically the pursuit of selfhood develops in two directions. The self may move consecutively through stages of growth, expanding the horizons of self and boundaries of experience through accretion, but always carrying forward through new growth that globe of an irreducible, unified core. This direction we might call horizontal. Or the self may proceed vertically, delving downward into itself to find the irreducible core, stripping away mask after mask of false selves in search of that hard core at the center, that pure, unique or true self.[57]

Delving downward suggests once again Carrington's evocative title *Down Below.* Smith's idea of an inward journey to identity appears the more painful and traumatic route. How is 'that pure, unique or true self' realised in *Down Below* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno*? Having cut away the dead skin, or false masks, Sapienza stands at the end of her text renewed but raw. She returns to the imagery of open nerves:

> … e andai al mare… ma il mare era troppo freddo e salato per il mio corpo senza pelle. Con terrore nell'acqua mi accorsi che non avevo più pelle né carne. I nervi e le vene snudate vibravano dolorosamente, graffiati dal sole troppo forte.[58]
>
> […and I went to the sea… but the sea was too cold and salty for my skinless body. With terror in the water I realised that I no longer had skin or flesh. The exposed nerves and veins vibrated painfully, clawed by the too-strong sun.'

Coming back into sensory experience through the exposed nerves is striking given the position of the nervous system as a liminal space between the body and the mind, or the corporeal and cerebral. Despite the intense pain Sapienza describes, this image may indicate the reconnection of the two inalienable components of identity.

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[56] *Ibid.,* p. 84.
[57] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century,* Indiana University Press (Bloomington: 1993), p. 18.
[58] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 178.

The Talking Cure: Dictation, Dialogue and Writing

> By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny/ stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.[59]

Soon after her escape from the asylum and the control of her parents, Carrington was reunited with Max Ernst in Lisbon. In a letter to their mutual friend Leonor Fini, he wrote: 'I have found (and lost again) Leonora… She is unrecognizable. She lives with Renato Leduc… she has not spoken about her life for a year.'[60] Following their tumultuous separation, the change that Ernst perceives in Carrington is unsurprising. It is striking however that he remarks upon her silence, reading it as a symptom of trauma. By doing so he anticipates the narrative that would take shape two years later as *Down Below*, and the role that 'speaking about her life' might take in reasserting her identity, or rather realising a new one.

'Speaking' is crucial, as the text takes form not through the solitary act of writing, rather there are multiple agents at work in the text. Marina Warner provides a comprehensive note in the most recent English edition of 1987 (re-issued with a new introduction by Warner in 2017), which charts the many versions of *Down Below*:

> First written in English in 1942 in New York (text now lost). Dictated in French to Jeanne Megnen in 1943, then published in *VVV*, No.4., February 1944, in a translation from the French by Victor Llona. The original French dictation was published by Editions Fontaine, Paris, 1946. Both the French dictation and the Victor Llona translation were used as the basis for the text here, which was reviewed and revised for factual accuracy by Leonora Carrington in 1987.[61]

[59] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 880.
[60] Max Ernst, from a letter to Leonor Fini, cited in Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse,* p. 101.
[61] 'Note on the Text', *Down Below,* p. 69.

Existing scholarship has dealt with this Gordian knot of publication history to varying degrees, but often it is noted briefly and set aside in favour of more direct textual analysis. But which version should be the focus of such analysis? It might be anticipated that the original French should be considered the 'true' version, as the most direct source of Carrington's writing without the filter of translation. Yet this edition has overwhelmingly been ignored, even in works comparing *Down Below* directly to other works of French surrealism, such as André Breton's *Nadja* or Pierre Mabille's *Miroir du merveilleux.*[62] Several factors are most likely at play here, namely: the scarcity of the French edition, the earlier publication date of the English translation, and the prominence of English in Carrington's work overall. It might also be argued that the lost English original has a ghostly claim on the ultimate text, seeping into its structures and patterns. Initially conceived in English, and first published in English, it is somewhat an accident of fate that the French version exists at all. How can this uniquely bilingual text be reconciled?

As evidenced by the note above, the 1987 English edition offers the most comprehensive presentation of the fractious elements of the text, particularly given the further inclusion of a postscript (told to Marina Warner that same year). It seems reasonable to conclude that this version was considered by the author to be a 'final' offering.[63] For this reason and in the interest of legibility it is this edition which is cited in the analysis at hand. However, while this is certainly the latest version that exists of *Down Below,* it seems unnecessarily dismissive and narrow to consider it the 'definitive' version. Indeed, full understanding seems impossible without an awareness of the various interventions and interlocutors involved in the long genesis of the text. Such an awareness proves essential to the central

[62] Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and knowledge in *Down Below'*, in Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra (eds.), *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde,* pp. 57-71.
[63] Several of Carrington's interviewers in later life indicate an intense reluctance on her part to revisit the events recounted in *Down Below,* making the 1987 interview and revisions all the more significant.

questions raised by the text of recovery from profound mental illness, and the role of collaborative narration in that process.

It is desirable then for studies of *Down Below* to grapple with the implications of its publication history. This has been achieved with considerable insight with regard to the initial publication of the text in the February 1944 issue of *VVV*, showing as it does Carrington's assured position amongst the reformed Surrealist circle in the Americas. Natalya Lusty's analysis considers the significance of its inclusion in a volume on the theme of 'collective myth' and uncovers intertextual links with works by Bataille and Mabille.[64] Particularly valuable is that this approach expands the scope of *Down Below* beyond an exploration of individual madness and toward a more encompassing understanding of human knowledge and experience. Lusty goes on to consider the direct role of Mabille in the writing of *Down Below* and how his presence in that text suggests the possibility of collective gain from personal trauma. Pierre Mabille, a doctor and intimate member of the Surrealist circle, is absent from the expansive note on the text above, yet he had perhaps the greatest influence on the composition of *Down Below* after Carrington herself. He is the interlocutor she addresses directly in the opening pages of the text (using the formal 'vous' in the French), and he encouraged her to attempt to record her experiences in Mexico City in August 1943, possibly with the explicit intent of treating her trauma. Lusty writes that

> […] it seems Mabille treated Carrington for severe anxiety and post-traumatic stress stemming from her experience in Spain, and that part of her treatment involved encouraging her to work through traumatic memories by formally recording them in the essay, Down Below.[65]

Framing the narrative as a treatment aligns closely with Carrington's own comments on the writing process in *Down Below*, 'I am in terrible anguish,' she says, 'yet I cannot continue living alone with such a memory … I know that once I have written it down, I shall be

[64] Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and knowledge in *Down Below*', pp. 57-71.
[65] Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and knowledge in *Down Below*' p. 61.

delivered.'[66] Here, the compulsion to write is to spare the writer the burden of being *alone* with their own memories, and in this Carrington is very closely aligned with Sapienza. In her first autobiographical novel *Lettera aperta* - written during the period depicted in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* - Sapienza states her motive plainly as writing to prevent another suicide attempt,[67] a way to rid herself of suffocating memories:

> […] ho bisogno di voi per essere in grado di sbarazzarmi di tutte le cose brutte che ci sono qui dentro. Parlando, dalla reazione di chi ascolta, puoi capire cosa va tenuto e cosa buttato. Ho bisogno di voi per liberarmi di tutte le cose inutili che affollano questa stanza. Ho la bocca piena della loro polvere.[68]
>
> [[…] I need you so I can unburden myself of all the ugly things that are here inside. By speaking, through the reaction of the person listening, you can understand what should be kept and what should be thrown away. I need you so I can free myself of all the useless things that crowd this room. My mouth is full of their dust.]

It is striking that both authors use the second person to appeal for support, thus highlighting the centrality of communication to their project. Siri Hustvedt theorises on the unquantifiable benefits of writing in the treatment of mental illness, based on her own experience of teaching creative writing in a psychiatric hospital. Such benefits, she argues, are 'connected to language as relational.' She continues:

> Writing is a perceived transition from inside to outside, and that motion is in itself a step in the right direction, a passage into a dialogical space that can be seen. […] writing lifts us out of ourselves, and that leap onto paper, that objectification, spurs reflective self-consciousness, the examination of self as other.[69]

By unburdening 'these things inside', Sapienza and Carrington enter this dialogical space, sharing the burden with an 'other', whether an imagined reader or a trusted friend. The rebirth of both *Down Below* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* is linked to this act of writing; in Mexico in 1943 Carrington is not serenely memorialising her turmoil, she writes in the hope that this act will be her most effective cure. The level of formality with which this was

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[66] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 39.
[67] Goliarda Sapienza, *Lettera aperta,* p. 3.
[68] *Ibid.,* p. 4.
[69] Siri Hustvedt, 'The Writing Self and the Psychiatric Patient', in *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind,* Sceptre (London: 2016), pp. 96-117, p. 104.

intended as a treatment is unclear; Warner is somewhat less concrete than Lusty and describes Mabille as 'a friend' who 'urged' Carrington to attempt to recreate the lost text.[70] Within the text itself Mabille is silent, his impact suggested only from the perspective of Carrington, who hopes that he will act as a guide, believing that he 'will be of help in my journey beyond that frontier by keeping me lucid'.[71] The text in effect traces two journeys to that promised space 'Down Below': the first to the promised building of that name within the sanatorium, marking the journey back to sanity; the second through the medium of narrative, returning 'beyond that frontier' into the memory of her experience. Casting Mabille as a guide in that journey indicates the profound risk to the individual of writing an autobiography of trauma, and casts light on the potential value of a third party in the conventionally solitary act of writing.

The other crucial silent voice in the text originating from this period is that of Mabille's wife, Jeanne Megnen, who is credited as the transcriber of the text. In fact, her input is silent to such a degree that her presence has been called into question. Lusty writes that:

> Although the *VVV* and later versions of the essay conclude with the words 'as told to Jeanne Megnen,' Mabille's wife, thereby suggesting its oral transmission, throughout the essay itself Carrington repeatedly draws attention to her actual 'writing' of the narrative.[72]

This comment is confined to a footnote, so there is no speculation as to why Megnen would be falsely credited, although it seems a remarkably strange act of obfuscation. It is true that Carrington refers explicitly to 'writing', although not in a physical sense – there are no mentions of pen and paper and ink - instead she says: 'I have been writing for three days'[73] and 'How can I write this when I'm afraid to think about it?'[74] Stranger still is that in addition to these references to writing, elsewhere in the text there are the direct addresses to

[70] Marina Warner, Introduction, in Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. xxv.
[71] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 3.
[72] Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and knowledge in *Down Below*' p. 70.
[73] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 32.
[74] *Ibid.,* p. 39.

Mabille that take the aspect of speech¸ or fragments suggesting an oral tradition of storytelling ('I must go on with my story'[75]). These conflicting asides are consistent with a difficult, multi-layered generation of the text, which feasibly could have included conversations with Mabille, dictation to Megnen, and traditional writing.

Given the emphasis within the existing scholarship on the English language version of *Down Below,* it is perhaps unsurprising that the role of Megnen as transcriber has been effaced. A cursory comparison of the French publication of *En Bas* with other French texts by Carrington of a similar date shows a greater level of fluency and grammatical accuracy. This seems unlikely to be the work of copy-editors, as Carrington's French publisher Henri Parisot consistently printed her work without correction, finding her anglicisms 'charming';[76] including the letter from Carrington to Parisot that prefaces the French edition, which contains several such errors. At a practical level it seems highly likely that Carrington had some linguistic support in the creation of the text, not least because, despite its brevity, *Down Below* is still significantly longer than the shorter works Carrington had previously written in French. As the lingua franca of the circle of international artists and intellectuals Carrington mixed with in both Paris and New York, French can be traced as a hallmark of collaboration in her prose. In her first published piece of fiction, the Max Ernst illustrated and prefaced 'La Maison de la Peur', and subsequent short stories written in French in Paris, it becomes apparent that Carrington chooses to write in French, a language she didn't write fluently, when it serves a practical collaborative purpose. As a point of reference, with the exception of *Down Below* each of Carrington's longer works of fiction - the novels *The Hearing Trumpet* and *The Stone Door,* and the novella *Little Francis* - were written in English. Notably, the latter predates *Down Below,* having been written while

[75] *Ibid.,* p. 32.
[76] Henri Parisot, "Avant-propos", in Leonora Carrington, *Une chemise de nuit de flanelle,* Librairie les Pays Perdus (Paris : 1951), p. 7.

Carrington was resident in France with Ernst. This pattern of collaboration in a non-native language persists in Carrington's use of Spanish in her later short-form fiction.

These details make a more compelling case for Megnen's presence as transcriber, and the role she played in offering practical support in the creation of the text. It remains to be seen, however, what effect this process has on the artistic expression of the text. Dictation has the immediate effect of creating a distance between the author and her words, an effect which is compounded by her use of French. Given the intense difficulty Carrington describes in the 'writing' process, and indeed her later affirmations of this as the most challenging period of her life, what purpose does Megnen serve? Mabille may be the guide, but Megnen is the recipient and the transmitter of the words. When Carrington says 'How can I write this when I'm afraid to think it?'[77] perhaps the answer is the third pathway of dictation: more than merely internal thinking, and less isolating than writing, what potential is there in *telling* such a story? Such a format is reminiscent of the confession, or indeed of a talking therapy. Remembering again that by the summer of 1943 Carrington had already written and lost a version of *Down Below* in English, dictation is a distinct choice which sets this text apart from her other works in either language.

The distancing effect of dictation and French may serve a protective purpose, but Carrington is also aware of shifts and expansions of meaning when using a language which is not her own. This sense of distance is echoed in Carrington's comments on the Spanish language within the text itself; she says:

> The fact that I had to speak a language I was not familiar with was crucial: I was not hindered by a preconceived idea of the words, and I but half understood their modern meaning. This made it possible for me to invest the most ordinary phrases with a hermetic significance.[78]

[77] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 32.
[78] *Ibid.,* p. 12.

In Henri Parisot's praise of Carrington's naïve French there is something of a gendered paternalism, but here Carrington offers her own insight as to the potential of writing or speaking in a language not entirely familiar. Marina Warner has noted the strange quality of the language of *Down Below*, no doubt born of this extraordinary gestation; she writes:

> This journey to and from oral and written versions, to and from French and English translations, accounts for the difference in tone between *Down Below* and Leonora's other writings. […] it has only moments of distinctive Carrington drollness. It's as if, in her dementia, she vacated her own being, becoming for a while other, uttering in a different voice, to a different pace, using another sentence structure.[79]

'Becoming for a while other' by inhabiting another language is a compelling idea particularly in the context of Surrealism. The potential, as Carrington sees it, 'to invest the most ordinary phrases with a hermetic significance' allows elements of the everyday to be subjected to new scrutiny. Everything is felt to be new. This sensation of strangeness in the familiar is pertinent therefore not only to speaking a different language, but to the sensibilities of Surrealism and, most crucially, the disconnection of mental illness. Trauma is an obvious factor in the absence of 'drollness', here there is an entanglement of subject matter and form where the two become so interdependent as to be almost indistinguishable. That is, there is a profound symbiosis between the content and the process of *Down Below*, and the distancing effect of speaking the text in French is a necessary product of the very experiences narrated.

In some ways the fruition of *Il filo di mezzogiorno* as a text is the diametric opposite of *Down Below*. Whereas the latter was composed orally but omits any textual reference to Megnen as transcriber, in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* we find a written text mimicking the dialogic construct of conversation. Sapienza presents the text as a verbatim transcript of the sessions conducted between herself and her analyst Ignazio Majore, interspersed with her own memories and dreams. The conversational structure of the novel distinguishes it from her other works, including *Lettera aperta*, which as noted above addresses the reader in the

[79] Marina Warner, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *House of Fear: Notes from Down Below,* p. 17.

second person to reiterate the effect of the novel as a letter, communicating with an unknown third-party. This effect is somewhat echoed in the final passages of *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* where Sapienza once again explains her reasoning for writing and employs the second person 'vi chiedo solo questo'[80] [I ask you only this]. Generally, however, the two novels employ very different styles, Maria Arena notes:

> […] questo romanzo non si rivolge più al lettore in forma di lettera aperta, qui regna la solitudine necessaria per invocare/ evocare la propria ombra, o la propria musa, come compagna del viaggio a ritroso.[81]
>
> […] this novel doesn't address itself to the reader in the form of an open letter, here the solitude dominates that is necessary to invoke/ evoke one's own shadow, or one's own muse, as a companion in the journey backwards.

While the distinctions between the two narrative conceits are clear, it seems strange to identify *Il filo di mezzogiorno* as 'solitary' in comparison with its predecessor. Although Sapienza's voice emerges as strong and perhaps solitary in the final pages, much of the text is dominated by her interlocutor. Majore is a distinct and influential voice throughout. There is an interesting parallel here with Mabille as Carrington's guide in her journey, with Arena's language of a 'viaggio a ritroso' being reminiscent of the return 'down below'. Certainly Majore is a constant companion in the text, with his presence implied even in the passages recounting dreams and memories.

Of course, in the absence of transcripts or recordings, the conversational element of this text is something of an illusion. Sapienza's approximation of speech cannot be regarded as synonymous with 'real' speech, yet the conceit highlights the centrality of dialogue to the constructive narrative of psychoanalysis. In this profoundly dialogic setting, the balance of

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[80] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 186.

[81] Maria Arena, '*Il filo di mezzogiorno*: Morte e rinascita attraverso la scrittura', in Giovanna Providenti (ed.), *«Quel sogno d'essere» di Goliarda Sapienza: Percorsi critici su una delle maggiori autrici del novecento italiano,* pp. 149-156, p. 152.

power lies predominantly with the analyst, as the professional responsible for the setting;[82] and this is reflected in Sapienza's interweaving of psychoanalysis with the form of the novel, where the analyst's speech frequently directs the structure of the text, his questions ending and opening chapters, setting the agenda. As a devoted student and actress of Pirandello, the dynamic between Goliarda as 'character' in her own memories and Majore as 'director' is unlikely to have escaped Sapienza. The dialogue of psychoanalysis is deeply linked to narration and storytelling, where the relationship between doctor and patient takes on the aspect of 'an uneasy dialogue between narrator and narratee, a struggle to construct and to control the text, and to master the past through its telling and interpretation in the present'.[83]

There is an explicit imbalance of power from the outset of Sapienza's analysis, beginning, as we have seen, with her diminished state of passivity and confusion at the beginning of *Il filo di mezzogiorno.* Taking Freud's famous definition of psychoanalysis as 'a conversation between two people equally awake' it seems evident that Sapienza does not meet this threshold. Suffering from memory loss, it is not Sapienza who chooses to enter into analysis but her partner Citto Maselli, and it is not until multiple sessions have elapsed that she is aware of Majore's role as analyst. In this confusion, where she mistakes her partner and analyst for her father and brother, her analysis starts precisely with the aim of recovering her memory. Scholarship on the text has not differentiated between this aim and the practice of psychoanalysis to recover repressed memories, yet a tension recurs throughout the text between these two distinct ideas, where Majore insists on particular interpretations of the past. Throughout the novel, the analyst maps emotions and associations onto Sapienza's memories. An incompatibility between their viewpoints is evident from the outset, as

[82] Luciana Nissim Momigliano, 'Two people talking in a room: an investigation on the analytic dialogue', in Luciana Nissim Momigliano and Andreina Robutti (eds.), *Shared Experience: The Psychoanalytic Dialogue,* Karna Books (London and New York: 1992), pp. 5-20, p. 7.
[83] Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling,* Blackwell (Oxford: 1994), p. 61.

Majore insists on referring to Maselli as her husband, and addressing her with the formal *Lei*, prompting Sapienza to object 'parla come un piccolo borghese!'[84] [you speak like a petit-bourgeois!]. But in the earlier stages of treatment Majore's interventions upon her memories are largely accepted by the patient, with a particular example being his rationalisation of her suicide attempt, 'Cerchi di ricordare:' he says, 'lei non voleva morire, voleva solo cambiare.'[85] ['Try to remember: you didn't want to die, you only wanted to change.'] to which Sapienza replies 'Sì. Non ricordo, ma mi pare.'[86] ['Yes. I don't remember, but it seems so] Despite her weakened position, Sapienza's own interventions on her past maintain a sense of conviction and truth derived precisely from the fractures and unreliability of her memories. Fraire asks:

> Perché mi sono chiesta, rileggendo le risposte «sensate» dell'analista all'innocenza geniale di Goliarda, come mai l'analista è quello che convince meno?[87]
>
> [Why, I asked myself, re-reading the analyst's "sensible" answers to Goliarda's bright innocence, why is it that the analyst is the less convincing one?]

The relationship becomes increasingly ambivalent as time progresses, resulting in the following rupture:

> La terapia analitica, che nel 1963 diviene addirittura quotidiana, si protrarrà per tre anni, ma non sortirà gli effetti sperati: al 1964 risale il secondo grave tentativo di suicidio di Goliarda, il quale non solo condurrà la donna al coma ma spingerà Majore ad abbandonare la professione di psicoanalista. Nonostante l'esito fallimentare della terapia, probabilmente aggravato dai metodi non ortodossi dell'analista…[88]
>
> [The analysis, which in 1963 took place even daily, would last for three years, but would never produce the hoped-for effects: in 1964 Goliarda had a second serious suicide attempt, which not only would put her into a coma but would prompt Majore to abandon the profession of psychoanalysis. Despite the failed outcome of the therapy, probably worsened by the unorthodox methods of the analyst…]

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[84] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 70.
[85] *Ibid.,* p. 59.
[86] *Ibid.,* p. 59.
[87] Manuela Fraire, '«Il filo di mezzogiorno» Goliarda paziente', p. 127.
[88] Gloria Scarfone, *Goliarda Sapienza: Un'autrice ai margini del sistema letterario,* p. 20.

In their final sessions, as presented in *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* Majore becomes almost frantic, insistent on his ability to 'cure' Sapienza. He resolves to return to her most pressing issues, promising 'parleremo di tutto'[89] [we'll talk about everything], and in the following pages Sapienza repeats this refrain 'E ne parlammo…'[90] [And we talked about it…] seven times, each time followed solely by Majore's voice. The dialogic space has become irreparably one-sided. This is their last session in the novel. The absence of Sapienza's voice in this passage indicates the ultimate failure of her psychoanalysis, but it also represents a conscious withdrawal from this uneven, gendered power dynamic. Brooks notes that as in Freud's infamous Dora case, the withdrawal of language is the 'ultimate riposte available to the storyteller'.[91] In this light, Sapienza's silence is significant as the only position of power available to her.

Adjacent to this understanding of silence as a source of female power, Sapienza's narrative style throughout the novel decentres language as a source of authority or truth. As discussed previously with regard to *L'arte della gioia* , sensory experience is heightened as a means of deriving value from the world. In the memory sequences of *Il filo di mezzogiorno* the emphasis on colour, smell, taste, and physicality are felt more vividly than the words of the analyst. At the end of the novel, as the analysis ends, the reborn Sapienza looks to physical experience as the way to reaffirm her identity, believing that her body will regrow and 'chiederà affamata aria, luce, carezze, pane… chiederà strade per camminare… voci da ascoltare… visi da guardare,'[92] [will hungrily ask for air, light, touches, food… will ask for streets to walk down… voices to listen to… faces to look at].

Yet language is still felt to be powerful, and dialogue seeps into the novel via other means, where through autobiography Sapienza enters into a conversation with both an imagined

[89] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 169.
[90] *Ibid.,* pp. 169-171.
[91] Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling,* p. 57.
[92] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 186.

reader and, perhaps most importantly, creates a space for conversation between her narrating and narrated self. In this period following her depressive crises, Sapienza saw a newly heightened phase of productive writing, quickly writing *Lettera aperta* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* before embarking on the decade-long project of *L'arte della gioia* . The first two texts would mark the beginning of a long tradition of autobiography, and a complex relationship with herself:

> Nelle sue scritture «dell'io» Goliarda Sapienza mostra dunque che fare memoria non è semplicemente ricordare, ma è intervenire sul passato entrando in una relazione empatica e vivente con esso[…][93]
>
> [In her writings "of the self" Goliarda Sapienza shows then that creating memoir isn't simply remembering, but is intervening on the past by entering into a living and empathic relationship with it[…]]

Within *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* there is yet one further notable interlocutor, the nurse, Giovanna, whose conversations with Sapienza give rise to the will to narrate, to communicate:

> Parlava e la sua voce era viva…parlava di incontri vivi… il tram… era la prima voce viva dopo tre anni di sussurri seccati dalla grandine d'odio di quell'uomo […] accesi la luce… volevo vedere la bocca, il viso di quella voce calda e viva… la vidi era un viso forte e dolce. E quel viso non sezionato dal bisturi di quel medico mi spinse a raccontare di Nica di… Giovanna ascoltava e dalla curiosità e stupore che muoveva la sua carne viva in onde di emozioni confuse vidi dietro di lei una folla di visi ignoti… una folla di amici nuovi che avrebbero ascoltato come Giovanna se solo avessi saputo raccontare… io ero un'attrice… sapevo ancora raccontare? E così per avere il coraggio di aprire quella cassapanca piena di cadaveri e di vivi a pezzi mi rivolsi a voi e…[94]
>
> [She spoke and her voice was alive… she spoke of living encounters… the tram… it was the first living voice after three years of dry murmurs from the hailstorm of hatred of that man […] I turned on the light… I wanted to see the mouth, the face of this warm and lively voice… I saw that it was a strong and sweet face. And this face which wasn't dissected with that doctor's scalpel prompted me to talk about Nica about… Giovanna listened and from the curiosity and astonishment that moved her living flesh in waves of confused emotions I saw behind her a crowd of unknown faces, a crowd of new friends who would listen like Giovanna if only I knew how to narrate… I was an actress… did I still know how to narrate? And so to have the

[93] Monica Farnetti, "Introduzione", in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* p. 8.
[94] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 176.

> courage to open this drawer full of cadavers and of mutilated living things I have turned to you and…]

Strikingly, Giovanna's voice is imbued with a sense of physicality, of warmth and living movement, in stark contrast to the 'sussurri seccati' of the analyst. His commanding voice which has dominated the text, and by consequence the narrative of Sapienza's own life, is reduced here to a murmur. It should be noted that even as Sapienza regains control of the narrative, it is not in solitude as suggested by Maria Arena, rather it is precisely because of Giovanna's presence as an active listener, and the suggested unknown reader ('voi'), that she has the courage to speak.

Sapienza's use here of the Italian verb *raccontare* is difficult to convey in translation, meaning either 'to tell' or 'to narrate' it sits at the intersection of speech and writing. Both *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Down Below* exist at this intersection, where the therapeutic value of spoken language intermingles with the wish to record, to be physically delivered through this means of the burden of their experience. The presence of the silent female listener in both texts, Giovanna and Jeanne Megnen, is significant to the earlier question of how the self is rationalised through the presence of the other. Ultimately, as Hustvedt outlined, the value of projecting an othered self through narrative separates oneself from past trauma through the distance of the spoken or written word. This proves to be of immense therapeutic value, in addition to expressing profound ideas on the location and creation of selfhood.

Conclusions: An Inscrutable Self

The journey back to health is achieved only through the repossession of personal identity. In contrast to the painful scrutiny and observation of their psychiatric treatment, for both Carrington and Sapienza the kernel of this identity consists of an unknowable personal secret. As they move away from the structures of formal or institutional mental health supervision, they reassert their desire, or moreover a *right*, for each individual to maintain a modicum of privacy. Carrington tells Don Luis, "I am not the public property of your house. I, too, have private thoughts and a private value. I don't belong to you."[95] In doing so she reasserts the possessive right of her own identity, which is no longer embedded in his perception of her but rather resides somewhere amongst her 'private thoughts'. In Sapienza, this right to secrecy is the closest thing to an irreducible core of identity: 'Ogni individuo ha il suo segreto che porta chiuso in sé fin dalla nascita'[96] [Each individual has their own secret that they carry closed within themselves from birth]. The position of both writers is to question the right and the ability of psychiatry to penetrate into this secret inner space. They do not claim themselves to be 'cured' or 'healed', despite their earlier obsession with the labels 'incurably insane'[97], 'la sua pazzia è inguaribile'[98] [her madness is incurable]. The reassertion of a secret individuality bears more importance than the shifting sands of madness and sanity.

Referring to her suicide attempts, Sapienza positions herself as on the cusp between living and death, but frames the self-possession of her own identity as the key to her passage into either state. She writes:

[95] Leonora Carrington, *Down Below,* p. 60.
[96] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 185.
[97] Leonora Carringotn, *Down Below,* p. 3.
[98] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 184.

> Ogni individuo ha il suo diritto al suo segreto ed alla sua morte. E come posso io vivere o morire se non rientro in possesso di questo mio diritto? È per questo che ho scritto, per chiedere a voi di ridarmi questo diritto…[99]
>
> [Each individual has the right to their own secret and their own death. And how can I live or die if I don't regain possession of this my right? It is for this that I have written, to ask you to give me back this right…]

Crucially, this position does not indicate the simple passage from illness to health, from symbolic death to rebirth; as Katrin Wehling-Giorgi has noted, 'the narration ends on a note of suspension as the protagonist is left with a "piaga sanguinante"'[100] [bleeding wound], both outcomes remain possible.

In her letter prefacing the French edition, Carrington refers somewhat obliquely to a process of seeking to know death, that personal secret as Sapienza frames it. Carrington also writes as a means of reaching this understanding:

> Comme une vieille Taupe qui nages sous les cimitières je me rends compte que j'ai toujours étais aveugle – je cherche à connaître Le Mort pour avoire moin peur, je cherche de vider les images qui m'ont rendus aveugle- [sic][101]
>
> [Like an old mole who swims beneath the cemeteries I realise that I've always been blind – I'm seeking to know Death in order to be less afraid, I want to empty the images which have made me blind-]

The old mole swimming beneath the cemeteries is reminiscent of the underworld of animal life seen in *Green Tea.* The action of seeking to know death, however, feels quite different to the passivity of the embalmed figure seen in that painting, or the cadaver that was handed to Dr Morales. There is change here, but that change is imbued with death, void of the joyful rejuvenation implied by the idea of 'rebirth'. Carrington tells her French readers that 'Je suis une vieille dame qui a vecue beaucoup et *j'ai changée* […] JE N'A PLUS UNE SEUL DENT [sic]'[102] [I am an old woman who has lived a lot and *I've changed* […] I DON'T HAVE A SINGLE TOOTH LEFT']. It's worthwhile to remember that Carrington

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[99] *Ibid.,* p. 185.
[100] Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, '"Ero separata da me": Memory, Selfhood, and *Mother-Tongue* in Goliarda Sapienza and Elena Ferrante', p. 222.
[101] Leonora Carrington, *En bas,* p. 8.
[102] *Ibid.,* pp. 7-8.

is in fact in her late twenties at this time. This letter is revealing in that it suggests a writer who anticipates being misunderstood, but one who has come into a full understanding of herself, drawing on her familiar image of the wise old crone. She signs off the letter with a final challenge: 'Tachez de comprendre ça - '[103] [Try to understand that -].

The final passage of *Il filo di mezzogiorno* suggests a similar fear and suspicion of being misunderstood by the very reader that has previously been an aid and a friend. As Sapienza stands on the very edge of death and life, she entreats her reader not to rationalise her actions:

> […] vi chiedo solo questo: non cercate di spiegarvi la mia morte, non la sezionate, non la catalogate per vostra tranquillità, per paura della vostra morte, ma al massimo pensate – non lo dite forte la parola tradisce – non lo dite forte ma pensate dentro di voi: è morta perché ha vissuto.[104]
>
> [[…] I ask you only this: don't try to explain my death to yourself, don't analyse it and categorise it for your own tranquillity, from fear of your own death, but at most think – don't say it aloud words betray – don't say it aloud but think inside yourself: she died because she lived.]

Achieving a note of hopefulness in discussing the most morbid of themes, Sapienza places this unknowable *and* unspeakable idea at the core of her identity. Once again, the medium of language is crucial, whether spoken, written or thought. Sapienza suggests that spoken or written language is insufficient, as words prove too treacherous, too prone to reductive ideology and truisms. Instead meaning must be derived internally, must be rooted in the secrecy of the individual self, unknowable and unknown to the institution of the psychiatrist. Some things remain unsaid in the private space of our thoughts, some things cannot be narrated, and herein lies the key to ourselves.

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[103] *Ibid.,* p. 8.
[104] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 186.

Chapter Three: Performing Gender: Drag and Collective Identity

Introduction

> Fifty-three years ago I was born a female human animal. This, I was told, meant that I was a 'Woman'.
>
> But I never knew what they meant.[1]

What it means to be a woman is perhaps the largest common thread through scholarship on Sapienza and Carrington. Whether central or peripheral, it is omnipresent in a way which is common to our interpretation of almost all women writers and artists. Carrington's frustration with the label of woman in the above quotation may serve as a warning to all who risk reducing her (myself included) to the further dubious label of 'woman writer'. Carrington has often been sequestered to the study of Women Surrealists, an association resulting in much valuable and insightful analysis - by Whitney Chadwick and Anna Watz, among others – but that also risks figuring her work always as peripheral, as a counterpart to the centrality of male identity.[2] The counter to this argument for Sapienza, Carrington, and many others, is that overwhelmingly male identity *has* been central, and their writing is at least in part a response to this truth, and explores the marginalisation of female identity thematically in intentional, complex, and varied ways which merit investigation. Indeed, this chapter takes as its primary subject the interplay between male and female subjectivity, highlighting the deficiencies still being redressed by feminist theory where the presumption of masculinity as the norm obscures our understanding of all gender identities, and not only those of women.

In one way or another gender is woven into each chapter of this thesis, from the representation of the female body in the Catholic Church, to the fetishization of madness in

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[1] Leonora Carrington, 'What Is a Woman?', in Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson with Krzystof Fijalkowski (eds.), *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas,* Tate Publishing (London: 2015), pp. 72-76, p. 72.

[2] Carrington certainly has been compared also with many of the significant male practitioners of Surrealism, which again can risk presenting her contribution as a female reaction to the movement, but also serves to establish her significance amongst her peers.

women, and finally to the possibilities of writing female experience within a male-driven language. These topics contribute to wider scholarship on Sapienza that has explored particular aspects of female identity and experience through such diverse themes as solidarity and shame in her prison writings,[3] and female heroism and nationality in *L'arte della gioia* .[4] On Carrington's part, there is at times a conflict between asserting her position in the artistic sphere on a par with the contributions of men, which may be seen as a necessary, but limited, feminist act of scholarship; and engaging directly with her work as a contribution to our understanding of the historical and theoretical permutations of gender. To some extent academic forays into the latter are only just beginning, with notable examples such as Anna Watz on language and poststructuralist feminism in *The Stone Door*,[5] which will contribute to the discussion in the chapter on language in this thesis.

Given this wide and complex scholarly history on gender in both authors, the current chapter must undertake a relatively narrow project of comparison, exploring only in part the many iterations of gender identity depicted in their works. But by placing gender at the centre of my analysis, and asking what role gender plays in the formation of the subject, this chapter will build upon central concerns in the previous chapters, namely the relationship between mind and body, and the role of narration in establishing a personal identity. Curiously, two of the most striking explorations of gender in Carrington and Sapienza's oeuvres are texts where their female identity is effaced in favour of a male identification or alter ego. These remarkable examples: *Io, Jean Gabin* and *Little Francis*, are amongst the

[3] See Emma Bond, '"A World Without Men": Interaffectivity and the Function of Shame in the Prison Writings of Goliarda Sapienza and Joan Henry', (pp. 101-114) and Maria Morelli '"L'acqua in gabbia": The Heterotopic Space of the (Female) Prison in Goliarda Sapienza's and Dacia Maraini's Narratives', (pp. 199-214), in Bazzoni, Alberica, Emma Bond and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi (eds.), *Goliarda Sapienza in Context: Intertextual Relationships with Italian and European Culture*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, (Madison, NJ: 2016).

[4] See Alberica Bazzoni, 'Ippolito Nievo's Pisana and Goliarda Sapienza's Modesta: Female Heroism as a Challenge to Gendered Configurations of the Nation', *The Italianist,* Vol. 39, No.3 (2019) pp. 332-346.

[5] See Anna Watz, 'A language buried at the back of time': *The Stone Door* and poststructuralist feminism', in Eburne and McAra (eds.), pp. 90 -104.

least studied works by either author; yet they share a compelling adolescent exploration of the performativity of gender. Coming of age in pre-war Europe, Sapienza and Carrington's mutual discomfort with performed femininity is expressed through androgynous, and sometimes masculine, individualism, serving to assert their own exceptionalism, and separating them somewhat from the common cause of Feminism that would come in later years. In reading these texts together, it becomes evident that their use of the male voice differs greatly, with a great gulf of masculine norms between Carrington's anxious youth, and Sapienza's bombastic film star. Yet as a consequence of this literary device, both writers separate themselves from the other women in their stories, rejecting a female identification as much as they actively take up a male one. In order to interpret this very specific use of gender identity as performance, this analysis will employ theory on drag performance by Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam, considering whether the texts at hand align with this paradigm, and also how such performance differs from lived expressions of gender non-conformity. Additionally, it is significant that in both texts this device of imitation is inflected with deep admiration of an older man during a period of childhood or adolescence. I will consider to what extent these characterisations of their past selves are not contingent on desiring typically 'masculine' traits; but rather, that they assert independence from the constraints of traditional femininity, conveying a level of internalised misogyny.

This chapter will position both *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin* as texts that speak to an adolescent reckoning with gender and performative identity. In the latter part of the chapter the discussion will move on to consider how adult gender identity is expressed in a broader range of examples from both authors. Carrington and Sapienza display a fluctuating understanding of gender across their work, undoubtedly influenced by a rapidly shifting socio-political landscape in the second half of the 20th century. While written in the early 1980s, *Io, Jean Gabin*, returns to the Catania of Sapienza's childhood, where rigid gender

roles provide insufficient models for adult womanhood. Likewise, for Carrington, her upbringing in England and early career in France are defined by a rigid gender binary. Both women might be labelled as tomboys for their non-conformity in these early years, but their evident discomfort in these environments evolves into a much more nuanced understanding of a collective identity struggle in later years, culminating for Carrington with her personal involvement in the women's movement in Mexico, and her polemical text 'What is a Woman?', written in 1971. Due to the disrupted and delayed publication history of both authors, their position within the history of gender theory has been obscured; once again the key texts in this chapter were unpublished for many decades after their original composition. This chapter will examine the ways in which scholarship has sought to bring both authors into dialogue with this context, and question the wisdom of containing either woman to a 'proto-feminist' canon given their long and varied careers.

Re-written Selves: Fiction and Autobiography

Although both employ a male avatar to explore the writer's identity, the two texts at hand take very different approaches to autobiography as a tool of memory and narration. Written at the tail end of the 1930s, *Little Francis* charts a formative period of Carrington's life where, independent of her family, she is consumed with both her relationship with Max Ernst and her initiation into his circle of artist and intellectual friends. Coming directly before the descent of *Down Below* and the tumultuous war years, Carrington's relative naivety at this juncture is crystallized in her depiction as a young boy. A roman à clef, the story traces the outlines of the love triangle between Carrington, Ernst and his second wife Marie-Berthe Aurenche. In doing so, the text is in many ways a precursor to *Down Below*, unveiling the intricacies and depth of the emotions at stake in that later work.[6] Indeed, this first foray into autobiography, is distinct from the shorter works of fiction that Carrington had begun to write and publish in French in the same period; *Little Francis* is unusual for having been conceived in English, suggesting perhaps that its contents are more personal and intimate than the likes of 'La maison de la peur'.[7] In its immediacy and intimacy, the novella has more of the spirit of a journal than a carefully filtered and compiled memoir. This immediacy has been somewhat obscured by a fifty-year delay between composition and publication, with the text only appearing in print in 1988 in the anthology *House of Fear: Notes from Down Below.*

In addition to the passage of time, it may be argued that the filter of fictionalisation adds a further layer of removal to the autobiographical practice of *Little Francis.* However, in some regards the particular changes that Carrington chooses to make to reality serve to

[6] Kristoffer Noheden has examined the links between these two texts in much greater detail, noting that 'in its depiction of identity loss, a descent into the underworld, and the death of the protagonist, the novella [*Little Francis*] prefigures the mental unrest that fed into *Down Below.*' in 'Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation: Symbolic Death and Rebirth in *Little Francis* and *Down Below,*' p. 37.
[7] As discussed in the chapter on *Down Below,* French in Carrington's work from this period is a hallmark of her collaboration with other Surrealists, most notably Ernst.

intensify and clarify the emotional truth of her situation. Carrington, Ernst, and his second wife Marie-Berthe Aurenche are re-cast respectively as Little Francis, his 'Uncle' Ubriaco, and Ubriaco's daughter Amelia. Thus, there are three significant departures from reality: Carrington's depiction as male, both Carrington and Marie-Berthe becoming significantly younger, and finally, Ernst becoming a father and uncle rather than husband and lover. Marina Warner has noted the significance of all three changes, arguing that the change in sex 'expresses Leonora's personal frustrations at being a girl;'[8] and also that:

> By changing herself into a youth, she uncovered a deeper truth about her relation to Max Ernst, revealing in the devotion and passivity of the boy Francis the tutelage in which Ernst and other masters held their *femmes-enfants*, their brides of the wind; similarly, by transforming Ernst's wife into his daughter, Leonora unveiled that relation of dependence and authority as well.[9]

This interpretation highlights the uneven nature of the power dynamic between both Ernst and Carrington and between Ernst and Marie-Berthe. However, despite this similarity in their relationship to Ernst, these shifts from reality also reinforce a key difference between Carrington and Marie-Berthe, with the latter in the more secure, official position, as the 'daughter' Amelia. Carrington as Francis refers to Ubriaco as uncle, but it is unclear whether this is meant as a blood relation or a more casual mentorship. The difference of course between Ubriaco as an uncle or a father reflects Carrington's insecure position as mistress, where Francis is treated with violent disdain by Amelia as an interloper. On the other hand, by holding the more secure position Amelia's claims on Ubriaco are made to seem more bourgeois and conventional, unlike the purer artistic symbiosis between the two men.

The plot follows in broad strokes the real history where Carrington and Ernst left Paris to evade Marie-Berthe, living for some time in the south of France until, discovered, Ernst left Carrington to return briefly to his wife. Carrington renders this episode in withering fashion

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[8] Marina Warner, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *House of Fear: Notes from Down Below,* Virago (London and New York: 1988), pp. 1-24, p. 11.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 10.

in *Little Francis*, where Francis refers to Amelia as Ubriaco's 'genital responsibilities'.[10] The adolescent emotion of *Little Francis* is unfiltered and unfamiliar to an older Carrington, who admits in later life to not understanding the depth of her hatred towards her rival, telling Marina Warner that:

> [L]ooking back on those days now, [she] cannot credit that she directed her anger against Marie-Berthe, rather than against Max Ernst, but on one occasion, when Leonora had joined him in Paris and his wife came upon them together in a café, Leonora leapt up and struck Marie-Berthe with all her force.[11]

This shift in attitude indicates that the strength of emotion conveyed in *Little Francis* owes something to its immediacy. Despite allowing some significant interviews in the 1980s, most notably with Warner and Paul de Angelis, Carrington repeatedly expressed a disinclination to dwell on this period of her life. Certainly, in the relentless reinvention of her art and prose, she shows a consistent disregard for nostalgia.

The text culminates in a dream sequence unmoored from both the 'reality' of Carrington's real life and the internal 'reality' of the text, but nonetheless intensely personal and vulnerable. Francis becomes cursed with a horse's head (a striking choice given Carrington's use of the horse as her avatar in her painting), and he eventually comes to blows with his rival Amelia, ending in his violent murder:

> Francis clouted Amelia once, twice, five times in all on each side of her head, with all his force, shouting, "Bitch bitch bitch." Amelia screamed and foamed and grabbed a hammer […] Amelia whacked Francis in the head with the hammer till a big hole appeared in the horse's skull and streams of blood made a strangely shaped pool on the floor.[12]

This escalation of the violence between Carrington and Marie-Berthe is certainly the most dramatic shift that the novella makes from reality and is also perhaps one of the most revealing; the identical language here to that Carrington reported to Warner ('with all his [her] force') underlines the echoes. Carrington transforms the tensions of the real love

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[10] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis*, in *House of Fear, Notes from Down Below,* pp. 67-148., p. 120.
[11] Marina Warner, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *House of Fear,* p. 8.
[12] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis,* pp. 146-147.

triangle into their most extreme permutation, betraying a deep fear and sense of uncertainty on her part as to the outcome of her relationship with Ernst. Such an uncertainty is once again deeply linked to the urgency and immediacy of this novella. Where in real life Carrington is unaware of how the story will end, in her literary dreams the intensity of emotion heightens the narrative to total destruction. Strikingly, these violent ends are described as intimate and private, recalling once again the sense that the reader is gaining insight into deeply personal thoughts, Carrington writes about her own fictional death, that:

> [T]here was something private about the sprawling corpse and the bicycle wheel, making Amelia feel ashamed to look. She felt almost as if she was peeping in on somebody in the lavatory.[13]

Also depicting a real love triangle through a roman à clef, it is striking that Simone de Beauvoir's 1943 novel *L'invitée* similarly escalates the real story to end in murder, although in this iteration it is the author de Beauvoir as Francoise who murders her rival Xavière. Echoing very closely Carrington's disbelief in later life at the intensity of her hatred towards Marie-Berthe, in her 1960 memoir *La force de l'âge* de Beauvoir criticised the melodramatic ending, writing that when:

> Re-reading the final pages, today so contrived and dead, I can hardly believe that when I wrote them my throat was as tight as though I had the burden of a real murder on my shoulders.[14]

For both Carrington and de Beauvoir then, autobiographical writing can capture an immediate, intense emotion which is no longer felt in retrospect. Furthermore, real events become intensified through the process of fictionalisation, allowing for the enactment of the most extreme outcomes imaginable.

In stark contrast however to this immediacy, Sapienza foregrounds the many years of distance between the 1930s Catania depicted in *Io, Jean Gabin* and the narrating subject in

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[13] *Ibid.,* p. 147.
[14] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life,* Penguin (London: 1962), transl. Peter Green, p. 340.

1979,[15] with this text also significantly re-treading upon memories already explored in her autobiographical writings. Nor is this text a roman à clef in the style of *Little Francis*, instead being described most frequently simply as a *Romenzo autobiografico* (autobiographical novel). Yet this term doesn't begin to encompass the peculiarity of Sapienza's project here. Written directly after the decade-long project of *L'arte della gioia* , and the ensuing disappointment of that text's failure to reach publication, *Io, Jean Gabin* is a return to the familiar in one sense, in that like *Lettera aperta* (1967) and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* (1969), it is autobiographical, and features Sicily and childhood prominently. It was a deliberate strategy on Sapienza's part to return so many times to this period of her life, reforming it and revising the self presented in text. Angelo Pellegrino writes in the postscript to *Io, Jean Gabin*, that:

> Goliarda intendeva mostrare così, di contro alla rigida autobiografia tradizionale che tende ad appiattire fatti e persone contro un fondale fortemente idealizzato dal tempo trascorso, il continuo, inarrestabile mutamento della coscienza e dei suoi giudizi, la trasformazione dell'io nei confronti del proprio passato e in relazione al presente.[16]
>
> [Goliarda intended to thus demonstrate - unlike rigid traditional autobiography that tends to flatten facts and people against a strongly idealised backdrop of elapsed time - the continuous, unstoppable change of consciousness and its judgements, the transformation of the self against its own past and in relation to the present.]

Io, Jean Gabin should therefore be considered as one piece of a wider autobiographical project, but it also intentionally diverges from the earlier texts, showing a different facet of the ever-evolving self.[17] As explored in the previous chapter, *Lettera aperta* and *Il filo di*

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[15] To recount the complex interweaving timelines at play here, in subject matter both texts take place in the mid to late 1930s, with *Little Francis* being composed almost immediately, but not published until 1988. *Io, Jean Gabin,* however was not begun until 1979, and published for the first time posthumously in 2010.

[16] Angelo Pellegrino, 'Postfazione', in Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* Einaudi (Torino: 2010), pp. 113 - 114., p. 117.

[17] One aspect in which *Io, Jean Gabin* differs from these earlier works is that in addition to the landscapes of Sicily there is a prominent portrayal of French cinema and influences, see Charlotte Ross, 'Goliarda Sapienza's "French Connections"' in Alberica Bazzoni, Emma Bond and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi (eds.), *Goliarda Sapienza in Context: Intertextual Relationships with Italian and European Culture,* pp. 87-100. Ross suggests a queer reading of this structure, where the resulting layering of contexts and identities shows how 'Sapienza's textual selves can be seen to struggle with disorienting misalignment,

mezzogiorno offer variations on the theme of rebuilding a shattered identity through the medium of writing. Anita Gensabella offers a compelling reading of the author Sapienza's radically different approach to *Io, Jean Gabin,* where after a decade of writing the ebullient Modesta, her own identity is remoulded in her invention's image. Extrapolating on this theme to consider the use of Jean Gabin, she writes:

> [U]n'autrice che, attraverso il suo personaggio alter ego, è riuscita a trovare maggiore forza ed un'inedita consapevolezza di sé: la Goliarda di *Lettera aperta* o *Il filo di mezzogiorno* è – bambina prima e donna poi – fragile e timorosa, ricca di incertezze e alla ricerca della verità. [18]
>
> [an author who, through her alter ego, succeeds in finding a greater strength and a previously unknown self-awareness: the Goliarda of *Lettera aperta* or *Il filo di mezzogiorno* is – first as a girl and then as a woman – fragile and fearful, full of uncertainties and in search of the truth.]

The attraction to Gabin, coupled with Gensabella's reading of the intertextual influence of the 'real' Goliarda and the fictional Modesta, points to a fascinating entwinement of fiction and reality in Sapienza's 'autobiography'. Indeed, while it cannot be said to be a true roman à clef in the style of Carrington's work, in *Io, Jean Gabin* Sapienza relies on fiction to fully realise the world of the text, overlaying herself and Catania with Gabin and his casbah. The result is close to the layers of dream and reality found in *Little Francis*, with Maligro Martin Clavijo writing that 'Sono tanti i luoghi della realtà come quelli della finzione, della fantasia, della proiezione dei sogni nella quotidianità al centro di questo romanzo'[19] [there are as many places of reality as there are of fiction, of fantasy, of projections of dreams into the everyday at the centre of this novel.]

The central conceit of the alter ego pushes Sapienza to levels of experimentation unseen in the earlier autobiographies; in this text her childhood obsession with the French film star

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and therefore are sometimes unable to extend into the world about them, inhabiting it only partially.' p. 88.

[18] Anita Gensabella, 'Lei, Jean Gabin', in Giovanna Providenti (ed.) *"Quel sogno d'essere" di Goliarda Sapienza,* pp. 175.- 180., pp. 175-176.

[19] Milagro Martin Clavijo, 'I luoghi della formazione di Goliarda Sapienza: Io, Jean Gabin, in Giovanna Providenti (ed.), *"Quel sogno d'essere" di Goliarda Sapienza*, pp.157-174., p. 158.

Jean Gabin leads to an almost-total identification with him. The perspective of the novel shifts between the child admiring the film star, and the two speaking and thinking as though from one being. The title is difficult to render in English, meaning 'me...', 'myself…', or 'I…' '… Jean Gabin'. Sapienza's text differs then from Carrington in that she is not entirely absorbed into the male identification, making her text more like that of an autobiographical novel than a true roman à clef, yet there is still an element of requiring the 'key' of the relationship between the fictional and the real, as Pellegrino writes:

> [M]a per poterli raccontare, i suoi vicoli, Goliarda aveva bisogno di una chiave che giustificasse un certo modo a lei caro di trattarne […] La trovò in Jean Gabin, nell'identificazione col celebre attore. [20]
>
> [but to be able to describe them, her alleys, Goliarda needed a key that would justify the certain precious way she had of talking about them […] She found it in Jean Gabin, in her identification with the famous actor.]

In addition to 'becoming' Jean Gabin, Sapienza also identifies herself with the screen itself, with the world of cinema acting as one of the aforementioned 'spaces of fiction.' Like *Little Francis*, where the more Surrealist dreamscape of the final passage of the text might be rationalised as a drug-induced hallucination, *Io, Jean Gabin* imbues the everyday with the fantastical via the infinite possibilities and imaginative richness of the screen seen through the eyes of a child:

> Ero tutto un brivido, un sudore e tutto uno schermo pieno di immagini. Al posto del cervello avevo un grande schermo illuminato in maniera allucinante dove a cento all'ora passavano visi, machine in corsa, animali in fuga inseguiti da vecchi con barbe nere[…] [21]
>
> [I was covered in chills, in sweat, and everything a screen full of images. In place of a mind I had a great screen lit up like a hallucination, where there passed at a hundred miles an hour: faces, racing cars, animals fleeing chased by old men with black beards[…]]

Both authors then, examine these periods of their own adolescence and youth through an autobiographical lens; blending truth with fiction to access an elusive expression of their

[20] Angelo Pellegrino, 'Postfazione', in Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 120.
[21] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 89.

own identity. They differ greatly though in their proximity to the events relayed, and their philosophies of relating their narrating selves to the narrated past. The most compelling link between the two texts, written at a distance of forty years from each other, is that of the use of the male avatar.

Identification, Imitation and Male Avatars

> Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation.[22]

In the previous section I explored the various ways in which adding elements of fiction can enrich and expand the parameters of autobiography. The focus of this section will be to more closely examine the one change which links Carrington and Sapienza in the texts at hand, that is the use of a male alter ego. By centring theory on the effect of drag on gender identity, this section will seek to explore the ways in which Carrington and Sapienza's understanding of gender is built upon its inherent pliability and sense of theatre. Butler importantly notes that the theatrical nature of drag has a destabilising effect on *all* gendering. Maria Morelli, writing on *Io, Jean Gabin*, emphasises this far-reaching unsettling effect of drag, '[f]or being neither male nor female but both at once, drag confounds and destabilizes the categories on which we base our understanding of normative gender'.[23] However, both Butler and consequently Morelli's use of drag is rooted in the more prominent model of 'a male performer passing as a woman'[24], as Morelli terms it, while crucially both examples at hand here feature the much less common direction of women adopting male identities.

Jack Halberstam's 2019 text *Female Masculinity* builds upon much of the work on gender identity undertaken by Butler in *Gender Trouble* and elsewhere, but centres more precisely the ways in which women may choose to perform and play with male identity, upending the

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[22] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Subordination', in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories,* Taylor and Francis (Oxford: 1991), pp. 13-31, p. 21.

[23] Maria Morelli, *Queering Gender in Italian Women's Writing: Maraini, Sapienza Morante,* Peter Lang (Oxford: 2021), p. 166. See pp. 164-172 for Morelli's full analysis of queer performance in *Io, Jean Gabin,* centring on how the use of Jean Gabin as alter-ego 'subverts the temporal linearity of [Iuzza's] heterosexual performance', p.165. See also pp. 199-206 for further analysis of gender identity in relation to private/public spaces in *Io, Jean Gabin.*

[24] Maria Morelli, *Queering Gender in Italian Women's Writing,* p.166.

notion supported by Butler and others that drag is the preserve of a gay-male culture to which the female response is the butch-femme lesbian.[25] Halberstam notes that in comparison with the male performer, his drag-king counterpart has been largely neglected:

> As I have argued throughout this book, the history of public recognition of female masculinity is most frequently characterized by stunning absences. And the absence of almost all curiosity about the possibilities and potentiality of drag king performance provides conclusive evidence of precisely such widespread indifference.[26]

I would contend that while it doesn't take place upon the stage, the use of Jean Gabin as an alter ego by Sapienza fits very closely to Haberstam's paradigm of the drag-king,[27] with the accompanying implications:

> [T]he drag king performs masculinity (often parodically) and makes the exposure of the theatricality of masculinity into the mainstay of her act. Both the male impersonator and the drag king are different from the drag butch, a masculine woman who wears male attire as part of her quotidian gender expression. Furthermore, whereas the male impersonator and the drag king are not necessarily lesbian roles, the drag butch most definitely is.[28]

A sense of parody is particularly fitting for *Io, Jean Gabin,* which as noted by Alberica Bazzoni, is 'characterised by an ironic and light tone, [it] plays with the protagonists' identification with the French actor Jean Gabin, assumed as a model of a male identity,'[29] it is precisely this sense of playfulness which I would argue aligns this text with drag performativity. For Sapienza describing her childhood in Catania, the bombastic, macho image of Jean Gabin is an almost comical and exaggerated ideal of masculinity; entirely at odds with the small female child, known by her nickname Iuzza. The use of such a figure as an alter ego for a young girl is reminiscent of the heightened, exaggerated adoption of gendered behaviours and appearances associated with drag performance. 'Theatricalized',

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[25] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity,* Duke University Press (Durham, NC; London: 2019), p. 236.
[26] *Ibid.,* pp. 231 – 232.
[27] See also p.147 for further exploration of the way that Iuzza's relationship to other women in *Io, Jean Gabin* aligns with Halberstam's theorisation of female drag.
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 232.
[29] Alberica Bazzoni, *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative*, p. 257.

as Butler terms it, this act of drag, as suggested above, exposes the performativity of the supposed 'original' gender, where Gabin's archetypal cinema performances project a certain idea of masculinity. Sapienza's literary conceit chimes particularly with the performance of drag, as Iuzza is not subsumed into the identity of Gabin, nor does she necessarily conceive of herself as a man. Instead, the theatricality of the performance is apparent and central to its effect, as Halberstam notes above, drag is not equivalent to the wearing of male attire as part of a 'quotidian gender expression.'

A recurrent motif in the text is that of Goliarda projecting the physicality of Gabin, with particular reference to a feeling of strength and independence in his gait:

> Sola, bilanciandomi su passi brevi ed energici sprizzanti coraggio altezzoso, adattavo i miei piccoli piedi alla camminata piena d'autosufficienza virile di Jean Gabin[30]
>
> [Alone, balancing myself on quick spurts of energetic steps, brave and arrogant, I modelled my little feet on Jean Gabin's walk full of self-sufficient virility.]

The physicality of Sapienza's identification with Gabin is central to the effect of the identification. The resulting freedom of *Io, Jean Gabin* is largely rooted in this idea of unfettered physical expression. This 'autosufficienza virile' is perhaps the essence of the appeal of Gabin's masculinity, connoting confidence and, above all, freedom. As Sapienza writes: 'è bello saper usare le proprie gambe e andare dove si vuole.' [31] [it's beautiful to know how to use your own legs and to go where you want to], investing her with a level of agency and self-determination which is remarkable given her age and gender. In some ways, this may reflect the child Iuzza's young age, as she is unencumbered with the objectification of adult womanhood, with the text capturing a hallowed period of freedom in prepubescent childhood. This freedom extends into distinctly *un*-feminine traits, for

[30] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 3.
[31] *Ibid.,* p. 62.

example when Goliarda scuffles with another child and is scolded by her father she retorts: 'Jean Gabin avrebbe fatto lo stesso.'[32] [Jean Gabin would have done the same.]

This sense of freedom in childhood may serve to explain why, despite the apparent crossing of gender boundaries through the use of Gabin, elsewhere in the text there still exists a rigid notion of gender difference. Indeed, by identifying with Gabin, Sapienza becomes clearly delineated from the other women of the text, admiring, observing, even objectifying them. From her perspective as Gabin, but also as a child, she can begin to understand female identities. Indeed, Sapienza opens the text by introducing herself as: 'Io, che con Jean Gabin, ho imparato ad amare le donne,'[33] ['I, who learned to love women with Jean Gabin']. Writing in the early 1980s, Sapienza responds directly to the vast difference in the position and perception of women from her childhood in the 1930s, notably citing Margaret Thatcher as an example of how far women have diverged from Jean Gabin's ideal of 'una donna che fosse come un fiume'[34] [a woman who was like a river]. Her partner Angelo Pellegrino notes on the significance of Thatcher, that Sapienza had originally had instead cited Nilde Iotti, an Italian politician and member of the Communist Party, but found in Thatcher a better symbol. He writes:

> Goliarda trovò di meglio nella figura della premier inglese per testimoniare la sua amarezza e il dissenso verso un certo femminismo che portava dritto all'omologazione dei sessi.[35]
>
> Goliarda found a better figure in the English Prime Minister to testify to her bitterness and disapproval towards a certain type of feminism which led to the homogenisation of the sexes.

The switch between Iotti and Thatcher demonstrates then that the political spectrum has little to do with Sapienza's point here. Instead she is perhaps surprisingly advocating for a femininity which is at risk due to the increasing engagement of women in public and

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[32] *Ibid.,* p. 7.
[33] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 3.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[35] *Angelo Pellegrino,* 'Postfazione', in Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 121.

political life. Counterintuitively then, the use of Gabin as an avatar is intended often to reinforce the idealised hyper-feminine ideal seen in the heroines of his films. Sapienza's identification with Gabin allows her to worship this mythologised figure of woman, as he does, imagining a woman who was created 'troppo bella, troppo sensibile e perfetta per la ciurmaglia comune che, invidiosa, la voleva possedere e distruggere.'[36] [too beautiful, too sensitive and perfect for the common rabble who, jealous, wanted to possess and destroy her.] This opposition between the 'homogenisation of the sexes' of the 1970s and 80s represented by Thatcher and Iotti on the one hand, and the passive perfectly beautiful film starlet of the 1930s on the other, may perhaps ring hollow to contemporary readers, for whom new avenues in female representation may offer up paradigms for female equality which allow for both sensitivity and action.

The relationship of Iuzza to other women in *Io, Jean Gabin* reasserts Haberstam's assertion that the performative gender play of drag is not synonymous with sexual identity, and does not always denote lesbianism in the way that a butch-femme presentation would. Although certainly Sapienza expresses some forms of nascent queer desire in this text, and also explores lesbian relationships elsewhere in her works,[37] here desire and longing are figured as being before - or at most on the cusp of - sexual maturity, and therefore I would argue her admiration of womanhood is largely defined by the vantage point of childhood emulating adulthood, and not through sexual desire. Indeed, it is a further feature of the use of cinema that despite Gabin's excessive male virility his on-screen presence is sexually sanitised, allowing for the child to identify with his passions and desires without transgressing into the adult space of real sexual relationships.

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[36] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 4.

[37] See Charlotte Ross , 'Goliarda Sapienza's Eccentric Interruptions: Multiple selves, gender ambiguities and disrupted desires', *altrelettere*, 2012, https://doi.org/10.5903/al_uzh-2, for an effective overview of the different layers of relationships and queer identities across Sapienza's writing.

The most compelling example of this desexualised desire towards women is the way in which the child Iuzza describes viewing her own mother 'through Jean's eyes'. This Maria Giudice is seen in a very different light than elsewhere in Sapienza's oeuvre, particularly *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* where she appears mainly as cold and intellectual, unfeminine and unmotherly, although Sapienza sometimes resists this reductive view of her analyst. Here she appears still as an accomplished, almost heroic working woman, but also undeniably a sexualised, feminine woman, in the mould of one of Jean Gabin's paramours:

> Ecco la donna che avrei potuto amare! Ecco la donna che Jean non avrebbe potuto non amare se l'avesse incontrata.[38]
>
> [Here is the woman who I would have been able to love! Here is the woman who Jean wouldn't have been able to help himself from loving if he'd met her.]

> Certo lei – odiosa condizione della natura umana, anche della più celestiale – amava mio padre, con lui mi aveva concepito facendosi sbattere in un letto (ero stata educata modernamente io, […][39]
>
> [Certainly she – odious condition of human nature, even for the most divine woman – loved my father, with him she had conceived me by slamming into one another in a bed (I had had a modern education, me, […]]

By aligning her own perspective of adult women alongside Jean's, Sapienza places herself as something *outside* womanhood, observing it. Instead of the perhaps more expected route of a young girl seeing her mother as a role model and prototype, here the mother is observed, admired, and even desired. By placing herself apart from her mother in this way Sapienza is breaking a longstanding tendency in her life and work where her mother is seen as her model and precursor. In *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* we have seen how Sapienza resists being told by her analyst that her actions seek to mimic her mother.[40] This sexualised description also rallies against earlier depictions of Maria Giudice where her professional activities and manner are perceived as masculine, as Professor Jsaya says to Goliarda in

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[38] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 11.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 12.
[40] See *Il filo di mezzogiorno* chapter seven for an extended exchange between Majore and Sapienza on the aspiration to be like her mother, pp. 46-49.

Lettera aperta: 'vedo che cominci ad esprimerti come un uomo, e non come un animaletto femmina. Sei come tua madre.'[41] [I see that you're beginning to express yourself like a man, and not like a little female animal. You're like your mother.] Bazzoni has explored how Maria Giudice's physicality is denied in the earlier texts *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Lettera aperta,* where her femininity is negated in order to obtain 'male' intellect, and 'a woman's achievement of agency and independence ultimately entails an assimilation to men.'[42] Following these earlier texts, it is striking that here Maria represents almost the inverse, not the negation of the female but instead a vision of femininity. On the one hand, it appears that Sapienza's view of her mother has expanded to allow a more complete idea of womanhood that can encompass both the intellectual and the physical. But on the other hand 'the achievement of agency and independence' through 'an assimilation to men' resonates very clearly with the child's assumption of Gabin's identity.

The use of the male alter ego in *Io, Jean Gabin* can then be seen as a powerful symbol of the freedom from objectification in prepubescent childhood, but it also has the effect of differentiating Sapienza from other women. Similarly, in *Little Francis,* the use of the male alter ego has the marked result of both allowing identification with masculinity, and the male object of admiration, but also of alienating the author from identification with other women. *Little Francis* is however, distinct from *Io, Jean Gabin* and may not fit as readily into the paradigm of the drag performance. Here, the assumption of the alternate gender identity is unmentioned and unelaborated in the text, and indeed the anxious youth Francis does not engage with the parodic and exaggerated form of male identity that one would expect from a drag king, but instead appears almost effeminate. Curiously, the most obvious

[41] Goliarda Sapienza, *Lettera aperta,* p. 51.
[42] Alberica Bazzoni. *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative*, p. 37. See also more generally pp. 36-41.

instance of 'drag' within the text is in the more conventional direction of the male drag queen, where Francis is caught dressing in Uncle Ubriaco's corsets:

> Francis was rather tempted to try on a particular corset, a black one with faded purple lace and roses worked in gold thread. It was the matter of a moment to slip the corset over his head: it reached below his knees but by lacing tightly it made quite a nice fit around the waist.
>
> He closed his eyes and tried to imagine a pair of ample, warm thighs in place of his own rather thin legs […][43]

So here we have a more Shakespearean version of gender performance, with a woman writing herself as a man but then dressing as a woman. The image evoked here of the thin boy enveloped in a too-big corset is a very specific version of 'drag'. There isn't really a sense of performance here, instead Francis is trying precisely to be private, and there is none of the bombastic physicality of Sapienza's use of Jean Gabin. There is a physicality here though in Francis's consideration of his body. Indeed one way to read this passage may be Carrington's projection of an insecurity around the femininity of her own body, by figuring herself as a boy who is deficient in the supposed physical markers of sexual femininity, the 'ample, warm thighs' missing from the corset. In this way, the use of a male identity does not necessarily subvert the expectations around a heteronormative understanding of gender as we might expect, instead Francis as a timid, effeminate boy, could be said to represent Carrington's anxieties of conforming to the demands of stereotypical femininity, and therefore reinforcing the gender binary.

As explored above, Carrington's rivalry with Marie-Berthe gives rise to a viciousness resulting ultimately in Francis' death at the hands of Amelia, but this antagonism towards Amelia is echoed in the less than favourable descriptions of other women which are mired in misogyny. While Marina Warner has noted that transforming into Francis does not imbue Carrington with any traditionally masculine virility,[44] it is curious how his characterisation

[43] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis,* p. 72.
[44] Marina Warner, Introduction, in Leonora Carrington*, House of Fear,* pp. 10 -11.

differs from the negative feminine traits of Amelia. The latter is described in the text both by Ubriaco and his friend Jerome as having committed the dual sin against the male Surrealists of ageing and reverting to her faith. 'You are becoming a little prude'[45] Ubriaco tells her, and later, having run away with Francis, Jerome tells Ubriaco that he 'wasn't surprised' he had left her, as

> I never saw anyone change so much in seven years. The first time I saw her she was a delightful, gay little girl. Then, later, after she'd been to that convent, she seemed to degenerate into an hysterical old woman. She must be about fourteen now? Even her face became dry and peaked.[46]

This characterisation of a fourteen-year-old character as an hysterical old woman may be the earliest evocation of the recurrent figure of the crone in Carrington's work. In this iteration, Amelia's small mindedness and hysteria are anathema to Ubriaco's free-wheeling artistic sensibilities, she represents the establishment of the church and the resolute blindness of conventionality. Somewhat ironically, Marie-Berthe's failure to maintain her persona of *femme-enfant* will be echoed in Carrington's description of herself only a few short years later in her letter prefacing the French edition of *Down Below,* where in her mid-twenties she writes that 'Je suis une vieille dame qui a vecue beaucoup et *j'ai changée'* [sic][47] [I am an old woman who has lived a lot and *I've changed*]. Furthermore, Carrington's crone figure, as we have seen, has its most positive expression in *The Hearing Trumpet,* where female old age will come to represent enlightenment rather than ignorance. In *Little Francis* though there is no spark of recognition between Francis and Amelia, instead Carrington's prose emphasises the harmonious bond between Ubriaco and Francis, an intellectual and spiritual symbiosis totally separate from the irrational, religious, jealous Amelia. Indeed, the change of refiguring Carrington as a male youth has the effect of creating in Francis and Ubriaco a model of a pederastic relationship. Within this paradigm,

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[45] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis*, p. 69.
[46] *Ibid.,* p. 112.
[47] Leonora Carrington, *En Bas,* Le Terrain Vague (Paris: 1973), p. 7.

there exists both the admiration and artistic mentorship between the two, but also the potential for sexual desire, unconsummated in the text. It is perhaps this which is the most compelling motive for Carrington's change of sex in this text; as a woman she is inhibited from reaching the artistic heights of her peers, and reduced to a crudely sexualised body, where as a boy she may be admitted more closely into this realm of a purer ideal of male identification and mentorship, fulfilling the hopes expressed in the text of:

> […] a friendship between men. Two souls who understand each other. Two beings who speak the same language. Don't you think it is rather beautiful? Beautiful in a hard clean way?[48]

Inhabiting a male persona allows for a greater degree of intellectual freedom for both authors. Butler goes on to position her theory of impersonation and imitation in contrast to heteronormative understandings of relationships, particularly where '[s]ome psychoanalytic theories tend to construe identification and desire as two mutually exclusive relations'[49]. For Carrington it can be argued that by projecting the same gender as the objects of her admiration they gain access to a homosocial identification with the qualities she wishes to emulate, an identification that can co-exist with sexual desire. As Butler continues:

> It is important to consider that identification and desire can coexist, and that their formulations in terms of mutually exclusive oppositions serves a heterosexual matrix.[50]

This model may allow more latitude for the kind of identification and admiration both women feel towards these men, rather than the more limited, even objectified place of women within a traditional heterosexual partnership. In her biography of Carrington, Joanna Moorhead details at length the circumstances of the beginning of the relationship with Ernst, and the reductive assumptions of Carrington's family that she had run away to be an artist's model. Instead, Carrington says, '"I always did my running away alone"'.[51] By

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[48] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis*, p. 98.
[49] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Subordination', p. 26.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[51] Carrington quoted in Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington,* p. 71.

removing overt sexuality, and certainly the gender imbalance, from the story of their relationship, Carrington evades such assumptions, allowing for different emphases to emerge. In terms of the emulation of qualities, Sapienza may also share a sense of identification with Gabin as Carrington does with Ernst. It is striking that both Ernst and Gabin are well established in the creative, professional life to which both women aspire. Given the centrality of Gabin to the plot of his films, Sapienza may well be more drawn to his vigorous, adventurous form of acting as a child, rather than the more passive roles of his female counterparts. Ernst and Gabin as professional role models would serve as a counter to a time period where the avenues for women to achieve such professional fulfilment are uncertain and require their own performance of gender. Drawing a fascinating comparison with Carrington's 'The Debutante', Natalya Lusty explores one of the earliest critical texts to engage with performance and gender, Joan Riviere's 'Womanliness as a Masquerade'[52]. Written in 1929, the text details the potential pitfalls for a newly emergent class of professional women (to which Maria Giudice may certainly be said to belong) who are constrained to projecting masculinity in their professional lives but then often revert to a hyper-feminine performance in order to stave off potential backlash. Such a display reflects 'the ambivalent cultural position of the intellectual woman in this period: she is damned for performing as a man and damned for performing as a woman to hide her performance as a man.'[53] The use of the male alter ego in these texts may therefore be an extension of this particular kind of performance, where projecting a masculine identity paves a way towards the desired adult professional life. Referring again to Butler's definition of drag, this assumption of the male identity underlines the inherent performativity of all gender identities, where the supposedly male traits of their alter egos may feel as (un)natural or inherent as the 'correct' female traits they would otherwise possess.

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[52] Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* Ashgate (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: 2007), pp. 20-26

[53] *Ibid.,* p.22.

Certainly, for both Carrington and Sapienza there is a well recorded sense of their own resistance to the constraints of femininity in their childhoods. Marina Warner argues for this as a reason for the gender change in *Little Francis*, and indeed the performativity of femininity in 'The Debutante' is the basis of Lusty's analysis of the Riviere study. For Sapienza, there is an idea reinforced by her unconventional family that she is unlike her female peers, where her grandmother 'fu la prima in Italia a educare sua figlia come un uomo' [was the first in Italy to educate her daughter like a man].[54] Speaking, learning and thinking as a man are recurrent tropes in the childhood memoirs of Sapienza, separate to her identification with Jean Gabin.

[54] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 9.

Gender, Performativity and Class

In addition to distancing themselves from the experiences of other women, the use of the male alter ego in *Io, Jean Gabin* and *Little Francis* also betrays the intersection between class and gender, and the fear of a latent base female sexuality associated with the working classes. For both the middle class Sapienza and the upper class Carrington, their adolescent male alter egos encounter female sexuality primarily through the working classes, provoking pity, fear and disgust, and therefore widening the gap felt between the writer and other members of her sex.

In *Io, Jean Gabin,* outside of the revered figure of her mother Maria Giudice, there is a widespread tendency to describe women almost exclusively through their physicality, identifiable primarily by their sexuality. These women are the dreaded *donnette* [little women] and are identifiably poorer than the Sapienzas: prostitutes working in alleyways of Catania that Sapienza compares to the casbah of Jean Gabin, impoverished mothers and their ominously threatening daughters. Strikingly also in *Little Francis,* where the younger women are nothing short of deranged objects of fear (Amelia, Pfoebe), the older, poorer, women are base and repulsive, their sexual advances inappropriate. Despite Francis and Ubriaco's eventual affection towards Rosaline she has an inauspicious introduction:

> The woman inside wore a short skirt and thick woollen leggings ending in a pair of carpet slippers. She wasn't clean.[55]
>
> [S]he had a large mole on her chin, decorated with three grey hairs. Her manner was ingratiating: she mauled Francis's buttocks.[56]

These depictions are inflicted with a sense of stark class difference as well as gender between Carrington as Francis and the other women of the text. Of course, in addition to the performativity of gender exposed by drag, class also has a strongly performative element, and class and regional identities also reoccur across Carrington and Sapienza's work.

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[55] Leonora Carrington, *Little Francis,* p. 76.
[56] *Ibid.,* pp. 77-78.

Outside of *Little Francis*, one of the most striking examples of masquerading in Carrington's work is the short story 'The Debutante'. A hyena escaped from the zoo takes the place of a reluctant debutante at her coming out ball, but in order to do so the hyena devours an unsuspecting maid, keeping only her face to wear over her own. Alice Gambrell dissects the implications of the story for the carefully preserved veneer of gentility amongst the upper classes, where Carrington:

> [S]hows how the debutante's presentation, which is designed plainly to distinguish the upper from the lower ranks, in fact dramatizes the way in which the two are connected: the 'high' defined by means of brutal negation of the "low". In the twilight grey of the party, human and animal, servant and aristocrat, high and low, light and dark – all mix, and become temporarily indistinct […][57]

While Gambrell doesn't employ the theoretical language of performativity, her description of the debutante's 'presentation' suggests the learned behaviours that delineate categories of class and gender identity, in addition to the physical ornamentation of the maid's face and a new ballgown. Drawing also from Gambrell's analysis, Natalya Lusty foregrounds the violent masking of 'The Debutante', introducing also the notion of performativity. She writes:

> The act of passing at the heart of the substitution ploy in the story reveals how the public display of manners works to reinforce the arbitrary codes of power invested in categories of class and gender.[58]

Despite her use of the term 'passing', Lusty does not extrapolate on this topic to encompass the use of that term in gender theory, nor does she differentiate between her use of the term 'performance' and the 'performative', somewhat underselling the latter's importance in poststructuralist cultural theory. Judith Butler examines the idea of 'passing' when considering the implications of drag in exposing the externality of gender identity. The initial success, but ultimate failure of the disguise, once again unveils the inherent

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[57] Alice Gambrell, *Women intellectuals, modernism and difference: Transatlantic culture 1919-1945,* Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1997), pp. 75-76.
[58] Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* p. 27.

performativity, or artificiality, of identity markers, '[w]hen such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal.'[59] In preparation for her performance as the debutante, the hyena must practice, she 'found it difficult to walk in my high-heeled shoes. […] By the time the sun was shining into my room, she was able to make her way around the room several times, walking more or less upright.'[60] During the day before the ball, the young woman and the hyena undertake an accelerated version of the conditioning that is central to the performance of gender and class identities.

'The Debutante' looms large in Carrington studies - disproportionate to its brevity - reflecting an obsession with class that runs through analysis of Carrington's work. This obsession is mirrored however by the outsized emphasis placed upon Carrington's spell as a debutante against, for example, her decades spent living and working in Mexico and the U.S. A photograph of Carrington as a debutante is reproduced frequently in critical texts, referenced not least by Gambrell herself, who dwells on the image as representative of the immense contradictions within Carrington's identity. The mundane conventionality of the high society marriage market is overshadowed by the young woman's imminent departure with a much older, married man; while the serene, opulent image is seemingly incongruous with the woman who would suffer the breakdown depicted in *Down Below*. The disconnect affirms the superficiality of external identity markers, but also distils the way in which Carrington's work has been viewed through the prisms of her gender and class.

Embedded in this obsession is undoubtedly the fabled allure of the British class system. Although the Carringtons were in actuality Northern industrialists, and their country seat at Crookhey Hall merely rented, their proximity to aristocracy sets Carrington apart in the

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[59] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* Routledge (London and New York: 1999), p. xxiii.
[60] Leonora Carrington, 'The Debutante', *The Debutante and Other Stories,* Silver Press (London: 2017), pp. 1-4, p. 2.

more bourgeois environs of the Surrealists. In addition to the refined image of Carrington as a wealthy debutante, this class identity has significance to Carrington's work in prose and art. Marina Warner notes in the case of *Little Francis* that transgressions are underpinned by 'an inconsequent, dry tone and well-bred English manners', adding that this 'English upper class schoolboy style' was 'so admired by the Surrealists, who mostly came from a bourgeoisie that had never known such casual confidence in lawlessness and obscenity.'[61] 'The Debutante' is a striking piece of prose, marrying together many of the key themes and concerns of Carrington's early work in a single potent image, and foreshadowing the prominence of the animal world in much of her later work. It continues to occupy a central position in the consumption of Carrington as an author, and still dominates in the recent resurgence of interest in her work, being notably chosen as the title story for the Silver Press volume of her collected stories (2017).

In Sapienza's autobiographical work, class and regional identity loom large in the author's self-perception and identity building. The active role of the individual in constructing such an identity for themselves is evident. In *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* suffering from memory loss, one of the first returned memories presented to the reader is that of Sapienza's struggles to suppress her Sicilian accent to be admitted to drama school in Rome. 'Non sapevo che c'era un accento buono e uno brutto, ma lì eravamo all'estero';[62] like the hyena at the debutante ball, Sapienza must inscribe new behaviours – here an accent- into her identity in order to successfully 'pass'. This requires an element of study, but also of performance, an absorption of an external voice into her own being. It is important to note the specificity of the Italian context here, where moving to Rome from Catania is felt to be moving 'abroad' and there is an extensive and racialised history of discrimination against the Italian South and particularly Sicily. Sapienza occupies an unclear position amongst this system, as the

[61] Marina Warner, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *House of Fear,* p. 13.
[62] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 18.

daughter of a Sicilian father and a Northern mother, both proud Socialists but also educated and elevated amongst the profound poverty of the Catania of the 1930s depicted in *Io, Jean Gabin.* But transplanted to Rome these nuances are effaced for Sapienza, she is simply 'foreign', her accent wrong, an external feature to be eradicated.

Much later in the timeline of her life, but only written a few years after *Io, Jean Gabin*, the intersection of gender and class is once more at the forefront of Sapienza's work in *L'Università di Rebibbia,* where that text, depicting her time spent in a women's prison highlights again an uneasy position within the class structure where as an educated, sophisticated woman Sapienza is held to be different to her companions in incarceration, but at the same time, as will be explored next in this chapter, there exists a new sense of female solidarity absent in the earlier work on childhood.

‘Sono fra donne’: Reconciling Self-exceptionalism and Solidarity

In the first parts of this chapter I have explored the ways in which a male alter ego is used to create a degree of separation between the authors and other women. This self-exceptionalism at times both elevates and degrades femininity, but ultimately exposes gender identities as performative and external to the self. Sapienza and Carrington both position themselves as existing outside ‘womanhood’ in *Io, Jean Gabin* and *Little Francis.* In this section, however, I will go on to consider how this perception shifts and evolves across their respective work, considering examples from the novels *L’Università di Rebibbia, L’arte della gioia ,* and *The Hearing Trumpet,* as well as the short story ‘My Mother is a Cow’ and the polemical ‘What is a Woman?’.

Written shortly after *Io, Jean Gabin,* Sapienza’s prison memoir *L’Università di Rebibbia* (1983) offers a stark departure from the earlier text, and indeed from the earlier autobiographical novels *Lettera aperta* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno.* Rather than reflecting on her childhood in Sicily at a distance of decades, here Sapienza is focussed entirely on the present, recounting her brief incarceration in the Rebibbia prison in Rome in 1980. The way in which Sapienza describes her own gendered body has radically shifted between the two texts; the child Iuzza inhabits the persona of strength and swagger of Jean Gabin, but as an adult and a prisoner, Goliarda is deeply conscious of the physical disparity between men and women. Surrounded by policemen she feels ‘paura della loro forza fisica’[63] [fear of their physical strength], and crucially she expands this personal experience to reflect on the constancy of this universal truth for all women:

> Quel poco di sicurezza che la donna crede d’avere, tutta la superiorità che a volte t’attribuisce un amante, l’amico, il figlio, spariscono davanti all’inferiorità muscolare – semplicemente muscolare- avvertita in mezzo a due o tre uomini che

[63] Goliarda Sapienza, *L’Università di Rebibbia*, Einaudi (Torino: 2012) p. 3.

> non hanno più bisogno di fingere rispetto, ammirazione, pietà perché sei femmina e piú debole.[64]
>
> [What little safety that woman believes she has, all the superiority that at times is accorded to you by a lover, a friend, a son, disappears when confronted by your own muscular inferiority – merely muscular – felt in the midst of two or three men who no longer need to feign respect, admiration, compassion because you are female and weaker.]

This statement at the beginning of the novel reads as overtly political, aligning Sapienza in solidarity with other women and pointing to a broader landscape of Feminist struggle. The contrast between this solidarity and the way in which Sapienza distances herself from other women in *Io, Jean Gabin* is stark, particularly as the two texts were written almost concurrently. The difference lends weight to the importance of the child's perspective in *Io, Jean Gabin,* where physical freedom (a masculine trait) is accorded to women only before puberty. The child resists seeing herself in models of adult womanhood, but as an adult there is no longer an element of choice or imagined alternatives, as the reality of living as a woman is imposed externally. As well as the shift in perspective between child and adult, these contradicting viewpoints indicate the fluidity and plurality in Sapienza's conception of female identity.

In *L'Università di Rebibbia* the women-only space of the prison reinforces this sense of solidarity, providing a respite from the male oppression of the outside world, as Sapienza confirms when she arrives in the prison and thinks, relieved, that: 'Sono fra donne'[65] [I am among women]. Emma Bond describes how readings of the text have focused on it being 'the ultimate realization of a form of utopian female community,'[66] and although her essay goes on to explore more complex and negative emotional responses to the prison, the mere possibility of a positive community of women within an institution is remote from other depictions in Sapienza's work. Indeed, the use of the women's prison in *L'Università di*

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[64] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[66] Emma Bond, '"A World without Men": Interaffectivity and the Function of Shame in the Prison Writings of Goliarda Sapienza and Joan Henry', in *Goliarda Sapienza in Context,* pp. 101-114, p. 101. Bond goes on to challenge the idea of this 'utopian' setting through the idea of shame.

Rebibbia recalls the convent in *L'arte della gioia* , and the two institutions provide a compelling example of the way in which Sapienza's protagonists (namely herself and Modesta) shift between defining their female identity in terms of being an exception to, or a part of, the wider group.

Sapienza draws the comparison herself between the prison and the convent, invoking the idea of an ancestral tradition of confinement in the female experience in *L'Università di Rebibbia*. Prompted by the turning of a key in a lock she considers that: 'Il gesto è antico, evoca ricordi ancestrali: convento, segreta, cappella mortuaria, ripostiglio buio dove bambina ti chiudevano.'[67] [The gesture is ancient, it evokes ancestral memories: convent, cell, mortuary, a broom closet they would lock you into as a girl.] Sapienza's use of the 'tu' calls out to her readers, and to women in general, identifying them as feminine (*bambina*), to instil a sense of shared inheritance. This familiar, direct tone, recalls the way in which Sapienza addresses her reader in both *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Lettera aperta,* giving the sense that her autobiographic practice is rooted in this community of women, of being *fra donne*. The thread that she establishes here is one of inherited pain, evoking the different spaces in which women have been trapped. Yet there are vast differences between the way that the community of women exists in the 1980s prison and the turn-of-the-century convent in *L'arte della gioia* . In the latter, Modesta exists apart from the other nuns and initiates, who are depicted as an anonymous mass:

> Quelle donne non facevano nessun rumore quando ti passavano accanto o entravano e uscivano dalle loro celle: non avevano corpo. Non volevo diventare trasparente come loro.
>
> [Those women didn't make a sound when they passed you or went in and out of their cells: they had no body. I didn't want to become insubstantial like them.][68]

Modesta seeks out the only male company available to her, the gardener, spending as much time as possible outside, and later repeating this pattern at the Brandiforti's villa, seeking

[67] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'Università di Rebibbia*, p. 5.
[68] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 42. [p. 58.]

out the estate manager Carmine and beginning a sexual relationship with him. The various female characters in *L'arte della gioia* are often described in terms of their difference from Modesta, as she grows and defines herself against other models of femininity that she finds insufficient. Most striking perhaps is Modesta's act of matricide at the beginning of the novel, and its symbolism as a rejection of the conventional family, subverting expectations also of feminine behaviour.[69] Again these most compelling examples of self-exceptionalism come in the earlier scenes of the novel, when Modesta is younger, where later in the text a strong sense of community and kinship is instilled in the setting of a non-traditional family.

The prison in *L'Università di Rebibbia* is much more aligned with these later years of community. This community does not efface differences between individual women, but difference is observed and celebrated between each individual. That is to say, where Modesta sees herself as a nuanced and whole identity, but the other women in the convent as formless ghosts; in *L'Università di Rebibbia,* Sapienza is on the same plane as her cast of other female characters. She lingers on physical descriptors, both positive and negative, seeing nuance in others as well as herself:

> [O]sservo le altre celle che cominiciano a vomitare i loro piccoli esseri colorati. Non sono tanti come la mattina prima avevo creduto, ma così diversi uno dall'altro da destare meraviglia.[70]
>
> [I observe the other cells which begin to spit out their little colourful beings. There weren't as many as I had believed in the morning, but each is so different from one another as to provoke wonder]

The relationships that Sapienza builds with the other inmates are not universally positive, but they are rich and meaningful. Their diversity recalls the way in which Carrington describes the inhabitants of the nursing home for elderly women in *The Hearing Trumpet*,

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[69] For a comprehensive discussion of the maternal figures in *L'arte della gioia,* and their use as role models or anti-models for Modesta, see Aureliana Di Rollo, 'Reforging the Maternal Bond: Motherhood, Mother-Daughter Relationships, and Female Relationality in Goliarda Sapienza's *L'arte della gioia',* in *Goliarda Sapienza in Context,* pp. 33-46.

[70] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'Università di Rebibbia*, p. 13.

where each woman too is named, and described with colourful detail where their physical appearance and presence hints at their personality and histories:

> Natacha Gonzalez was also on the heavy side but looked quite small compared to Mrs. Van Tocht. Natacha wore her hair in a bun. Having Indian blood she had more hair than anybody else and we envied her. Her face was a pale lemon colour, denoting a bad liver. Her eyes were large like prunes, with heavy lids.[71]

> Quando Mamma Roma si accomoda in mezzo a noi, mi rivolge uno sguardo cosí grande che è come se oltre a me guardasse anche tutto il cielo che ci circonda […] anche la voce è quella che avrebbe oggi Marilyn Monroe se avesse avuto il tempo di invecchiare.[72]
>
> [When Mamma Roma sat down in the middle of us, she cast me a look so wide that it was as though as well as me she was looking at the whole sky around us […] even her voice was that which Marilyn Monroe would have today if she'd had time to grow old.]

While rich character descriptions such as these might be found across each author's works, the sense of diverse community that they create in the two texts in question are distinct. In *The Hearing Trumpet* Carrington also seeks to establish a lineage to this sense of shared female experience, with the modern day nursing home echoing the convent, as I discussed in the earlier chapter on doctrine and knowledge. Just as Mamma Roma's gaze takes in not just Goliarda, but the whole sky, these texts regard not just this one place or time but a broader perspective. They do this through a sense of history, but also through a plot that does not follow a single 'hero(ine)'s journey', like *L'arte della gioia , Io, Jean Gabin,* or *Little Francis*, where the story is propelled by the actions of their heroes. Instead, the group experiences something together (whether that experience is a Roman prison or the earth tilting on its axis), and the group sustains each other.

In *The Hearing Trumpet*, the group of elderly women are unified by their service of an ancient religion of the 'Great Mother', as Carrington engages with the emergence of a neopagan Goddess movement which would reach its full height in the context of the

[71] Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 35.
[72] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'Università di Rebibbia,* p. 41.

Feminist political project in the 1970s. The idea of a 'true' religion rooted in nature and a female lineage plays directly into the ideas explored above of a shared female ancestry and community. Carrington's fascination with the Goddess movement is expressed also in the short story 'My Mother is a Cow', providing a female centric alternative to both Hellenic Western culture and the Christian religion. The Goddess is opposed by a group called 'the Watchers' who 'thrive on misery'[73] and 'possess unlimited knowledge but have no understanding,'[74] and are described as masculine:

> A sailor from Ulysses's ship, who had been a hero, was also a captive of the Watchers. They had made him a chartered accountant, but his memory was unimpaired. He remembered how my aunt had turned him into a pig for a joke […][75]

This association of women with wisdom and 'Great Nature'[76] as opposed to male logic, is also deeply inflected with the biological function of women as mothers, as suggested by the story's title. Carrington writes that the entrance to the sacred space is a spiral, 'Spiral, she said, like the umbilical ladder out of the human body; this she added, is very holy.'[77] While this might be perceived as empowering towards a group who have been historically marginalised and under-appreciated, it can also be interpreted as reductively associating gender with the body, just as other texts from this era of Feminism have been problematised in recent years as biological essentialism.

Carrington is certainly not immune from the various criticisms of Goddess worship, and elsewhere her work can be perceived as upholding a rigidly heteronormative gender binary even as it seeks to strengthen the position of women. In *The Stone Door,* women who have been denied a seat at the eternal table must take their rightful position in order for universal harmony to prevail. The multi-layered text is read as a rich allegory of Carrington's own

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[73] Leonora Carrington, 'My Mother is a Cow', in *The Debutante and Other Stories,* pp. 112-116, p. 112.
[74] *Ibid.,* p. 112.
[75] *Ibid.,* p. 113.
[76] *Ibid.,* p. 115.
[77] 'My Mother is a Cow', p. 113.

partnership with her husband Chiki Weisz, offering a compelling vision of equality between the sexes. But this vision is still rooted in the notion of distinct male and female identities, which are complemented in a heterosexual marriage. The male and the female are two halves of one whole, and true wisdom will be restored when men recognise women as their other half. Men's error is that, 'Believing that he is one keeps him in perpetual combat with another half of himself. Once he could see and accept that other half without combat, the plan would totter like a ninepin.'[78] Furthermore, this utopian vision also relies heavily upon motherhood as a symbol for the worthiness of women's contributions, where the titular stone door, representing the acquisition of knowledge, is also 'the door of the womb'.[79]

However, although Carrington employs essentialist symbols of gender such as a 'Great Mother' deity, and a utopian balance of the masculine and feminine as two halves of a single whole, in the very same texts she introduces ideas and symbols which challenge and problematise these positions. In *The Hearing Trumpet*, the centrality of elderly women defies a societal norm that marginalises women whose usefulness as wives and mothers has expired. In *The Stone Door* and elsewhere, androgynous and hermaphrodite figures defy simplistic heterosexual boundaries. Ultimately, these questions around gender point to the problem of embodiment: to what extent is identity rooted in the physical body? Carrington offers contradictory answers as to where the true self lies, writing that '[u]nderstanding is only that which is written in living, primary matter',[80] but also that 'we are divided by our separate bodies'[81] and '[h]ow detached we are from our own faces.'[82]

[78] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 112.
[79] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[80] Leonora Carrington, 'My Mother is a Cow', p. 116.
[81] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 13.
[82] *Ibid.,* p. 87.

Conclusion

This tension and plurality are echoed in Carrington's most overtly political text, 'What is a Woman?', she writes:

> *I am* may have been a dishonest invention meaning multitude.
>
> *Je pense donc je suis*, but why? Some kind of pretension of Monsieur Descartes?
>
> If I am my thoughts, then I could be anything from chicken soup to a pair of scissors, a crocodile, a corpse, a leopard, or a pint of beer.
>
> If I am my feelings, then I am love, hate, irritation, boredom, happiness, pride, humility, pain, pleasure, and so on and so forth.
>
> If I am my body, then I am a foetus to a middle-aged woman changing every second.
>
> Yet, like everybody else I yearn for an identity although this yearning mystifies me always.[83]

It is useful, I suggest, to read both Carrington and Sapienza's prose through this idea of 'yearning' for an identity through the process of writing, and not as a fully realised philosophy. The potential of being one's thoughts, feelings, *and* body, each subject to change, reflect the imaginative power of their autobiographical writings. Particularly *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin*, where materiality and fiction combine to allow for a more expansive means of expressing identity. In this multitude of identities, it follows that existing as a woman can take on many different meanings, one encompassing gender as an external performance, and of bodily fact. Within this spectrum, a woman might feel like a detached observer of femininity, but also belong to a community of shared female experience.

These contradictions speak to the period of profound change that both authors lived through and wrote about. This chapter has examined texts ranging from the late 1930s to the early

[83] Leonora Carrington, 'What is a Woman?', in Dawn Ades and Michael Richardson with Krzysztof Fijalkowski (eds.), *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas,* pp. 72-76, p. 72.

1980s, and just as it is difficult to reduce either author to a single position on gender it can be misleading to attempt to align them with one cultural milieu. Both authors are perhaps not associated with the more intense theoretical and political era of women's rights movements in the 1960s and 70s, with so much of Sapienza's work both fictional and non-fictional focusing on inter-war Sicily, and the persistence of Carrington's association with Surrealism. Alice Gambrell chooses Carrington as a subject in her monograph exploring female figures of transatlantic culture from 1919-1945, and this is a common home for scholarship on Carrington. She is held up as the last living bastion of high Surrealism, allowing insight into how the movement was challenged by a non-masculine viewpoint. But while this period is no doubt highly important, it is limiting to try to contain all of Carrington's significance to the period ending in 1945, when she was only 28. Likewise, Sapienza's life spanned many phases and influences, not only the move from Sicily to Rome but also the change from acting to writing, and the long publishing drought of the 1970s, where she writes that:

> [N]on riuscivo piú a pubblicare una riga, ho lavorato per dieci anni a un lungo romanzo e nel frattempo tutto cambiava, tutto: amici, situazioni, rapporti…[84]
>
> I couldn't manage to publish a line, I had worked for ten years on a long novel and in the meantime everything changed, everything: friends, circumstances, relationships…

Carrington had published her polemical 'What is a Woman' in 1971, just at the outset of the ten years in which Sapienza wrote *L'arte della gioia* . In both Mexico and Italy the ramifications of an organised political movement for women's rights would be felt in that decade, creating an intellectual landscape vastly different to the France and Sicily of the 1930s which are described in *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin.*

[84] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'Università di Rebibbia,* p. 20.

Chapter Four: The Edge of Words: Authenticity, Writing and Limits

Introduction

> 'Words are treacherous because they are incomplete. The written word hangs in time like a lump of lead. Everything should move with the ages and the planets.'[1]
>
> '-Mentono le parole, appena hai detto la parola questa ti ricade addosso come il coperchio di una bara.'[2]
>
> [Words are deceiving: as soon as you utter a word, it falls on you like the lid of a coffin.]

Truth, or the lack of it, is often at the centre of analysis of autobiographical writing. In the previous chapter, I examined the relationship between text and reality in *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin* in particular, and suggested how the enriching symbiosis of fact and fiction explored in theory on autofiction can be applied to these texts. Across scholarship on Sapienza and Carrington, critics have speculated on this relationship to reality, enthralled particularly by the compelling stories of both women's lives. Some incisive analysis has been done on Sapienza's *menzogne* [lies][3], and the way her fiction and autobiography play with memory and perspective (not least in *Il filo di mezzogiorno*). The above quotations are remarkable though, in that the fault for dishonesty lies not with the narrator or faulty memory, but with language itself. Describing words as 'lump[s] of lead' or the 'lid of a coffin' conveys the distance felt between the living, breathing, signified (whether it be a life, an idea, an emotion) and the death-like fixity of the signifier. For both writers, this gap is also one of time, where - in the time taken to speak or write - language has already fallen behind the present moment, 'hanging in time' *appena* [as soon as] the word is spoken. This

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[1] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 10.
[2] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 397. [p. 521.]
[3] See particularly the first part of: Gloria Scarfone, *Goliarda Sapienza: un'autrice ai margini del sistema letterario,* Transeuropa (Massa: 2018), pp. 23-50.

gap of time presents a further risk of mistruth, as Sapienza explains 'Non è vero che il tempo fa giustizia, al contrario il tempo mente.'[4] [it's not true that time does justice, on the contrary time lies.] It is striking that, in these examples at least, these problems of mistruth and time appear to apply both to the spoken and written word, despite the patent differences between those uses of language. The idea that *all* language, and communication, itself is inherently dishonest opens up a new line of enquiry into Sapienza and Carrington's work. This chapter will explore each woman's relationship with language in their written work and beyond, considering also the expectation of authenticity in autobiographical texts, and the problems of equating a lived identity with a text.

The previous chapters of this thesis have examined the ways in which both authors assert their own individual will against external authorities or doctrines, namely: religion, psychiatry, and gender norms. At the same time, I have considered the relationship between life and writing, where both the autobiographical and fictional literary subject are expressed with an emphasis on 'lived' experience, centring the body, and the importance of bodily knowledge. In this final chapter these two central elements are combined, by examining writing itself as an 'authority' that is sometimes in opposition to 'life' or 'lived experience'. This phenomenon has been observed by others, at times positively: bell hooks compares the act of submitting entirely to writing to the devotion of asceticism, stating that '[w]hen writing is a desired and accepted calling, the writer is devoted, constant, and committed in a manner that is akin to monastic spiritual practice.'[5] It seems likely that hooks cites monasticism precisely to evoke a sense of disembodiment, suggesting language as a means of denying (or exceeding) the body, and existing on a metaphysical plane. Elsewhere in the same text she writes that one becomes 'immersed so deeply in the act of thinking and

[4] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* Einaudi (Torino: 2011), p. 9.
[5] bell hooks, 'Remembered Rapture: Dancing with Words', *JAC,* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 1 – 8, p. 3.

writing that everything else, even flesh, falls away.'[6] This description has the effect of equating writing to a state of enrapture absent of physicality, where, as we have seen, on the other side of the coin of monasticism there is a sense of limitation, and restraint, which may also be embedded in the act of writing. In her lecture 'La pena e la penna'[Pain and Pen], Elena Ferrante focuses heavily upon the physicality of writing, describing her experience in childhood of being trained to write neatly within the red lines of the margins on the page. She writes:

> Scrivere era muoversi dentro quelle righe, e quelle righe – di questo ho un ricordo nitidissimo – sono state la mia croce.[7]
>
> [Writing was to move oneself between those lines, and those lines – and this I remember very clearly – they were my cross.]

The evocation of the cross implies a kind of inevitable suffering in the act of writing which is bound up in an image of bodily, physical suffering – entirely the opposite of hooks' metaphysical bliss. In a very similar vein to the previous chapter on Catholic doctrine, this chapter then will explore an ambivalent relationship between the demanding authority and the individual writer, only this time with language as the authority. Each writer at times advocates for the living, embodied subject who is left behind by the written word, but equally there is a tangible purpose of language, where writing (especially autobiography) is shown to provide relief from profound mental illness, and as a means of understanding one's own identity. Expanding upon the notion of an ineffable core of subjectivity - the unknowable secret expressed by both authors in their writings on mental health - this chapter will unpack this contradiction, whereby language allows the communication and

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[6] *Ibid.,* p. 1.

[7] Elena Ferrante 'La pena e la penna', in *I margini e il dettato,* E/O (Roma: 2021), p. 14. Ebook. Ferrante's analysis here is particularly pertinent, given her anonymity, to the core question of this chapter of how writing conveys the writer's identity. Reviewing this collection of lectures Katherine Hill has noted that through her work Ferrante presents herself to the reader between the covers of the book, while remaining unseen. See Katherine Hill, 'In the Margins by Elena Ferrante review – a portrait of the artist', in *The Guardian,* 16th March 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/mar/16/in-the-margins-by-elena-ferrante-review-a-portrait-of-the-artist

exploration of identity, but is also felt to be frustrating, limiting, and incompatible with lived experience. The idea of limitation is essential, as in the title of this chapter, this analysis takes us to 'the edge of words', asking how it feels for the writer to walk along this edge and have a sense of it within their writing. Again, Ferrante portrays this convincingly in her metaphor of the margins on a page, where, she says: 'Sono stata punita così spesso che il senso del limite è diventato parte di me'[8] [I was punished so often that the sense of the limit became a part of me], and later, describing what this 'sense of a limit' might mean when writing, she describes 'il desiderio e la paura di viorlarle [le line rosse]'[9] [the desire and the fear of violating them [the red lines]]. This chapter will question how both Carrington and Sapienza might feel limited by the act of writing, and how that sense of limitation might imbue their work with this sense of risk, of an ambivalent mix of fear and desire in trying to wrangle words. To some extent, it appears at times that language, and its sense of limitation, is merely inevitable, in the absence of other ways of satisfactorily communicating experience. The Italian novelist Giuliana Morandini comments on the meaning of poststructuralism for the writer, finding a sense of possibility and also playfulness in being at the edge of words:

> E come la psicoanalisi anche la letteratura che cose può fare sciogliere i nodi dell'esistenza e dell'identità se non misurarsi con il confine delle parole, con il loro gioco di significato.[10]
>
> [And as with psychoanalysis and also literature what can one do to untie the knots of existence and of identity if not measure oneself with the boundaries of words, with their play of meaning.]

This incompatibility between language and experience opens up space for miscommunication, but this chapter will also ask, how important is it to be understood?

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[8] *Ibid.,* p. 14.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[10] Giuliana Morandini, "Il confine delle parole', *Neohelicon: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarium*, Vol.23 (2) (1996), pp. 55-63., p. 59.

Examining Sapienza's intention of 'scrivere per essere fraintesa'[11] [writing to be misunderstood] in relation to both authors, this chapter will examine to what degree their writing practices are reliant on publication. When writing autobiography, is the aim to make our identities readable? How is the relationship between writer and reader affected by this communicative gap? This analysis will consider the gendered expectations of the reader 'identifying' with the writers of overtly feminist texts, and also consider with regard to Carrington, how the authenticity and automatism demanded by Surrealism challenge and contradict the artifice of writing and the creation of artistic personas. Furthermore, with recourse to the less 'formal' artistic output of both women, namely notebooks, cooking, and domestic art, this chapter will consider both Carrington and Sapienza's relationship to their audience, and expectations of communication with them, considering particularly Sapienza's difficulties in seeking publication, and Carrington's resistance to interpretation. Ultimately, this line of enquiry uncovers questions of value, that is, is a text more 'valuable' if it is 'authentic'? Does a text fail if it cannot communicate an identity?

This chapter will therefore explore to what extent it is possible for identity to coincide with the written word, and how important the gap between the two is. The disruption of the relationship between language and meaning has of course been central to the theory of Deconstruction in the twentieth century. With reference to the discussion at hand, how is this disruption felt by Carrington and Sapienza? What ramifications are there for artistic representation, and more specifically on autobiography, when viewed through this lens? In broad terms, the advent of Modernism has been understood as a decline in the importance or desirability of mimesis. Derrida asks the question:

> Is not the most naïve form of representation mimesis? Like Nietzsche - and the affinities do not end there—Artaud wants to have done with the imitative concept of

[11] Goliarda Sapienza, quoted by Giovanna Providenti in 'L'opera di Goliarda Sapienza tra ambivalena e ambizione', in Giovanna Providenti (ed.), "*Quel sogno d'essere" di Goliarda Sapienza*, pp. 289-302, p. 301.

> art, with the Aristotelean aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own.[12]

In light of this overview, Carrington and Sapienza could be said to engage with this modern rejection of mimesis, which features a long pedigree of thinkers from Nietzsche to Artaud and finally to Derrida's destabilisation of language. Certainly it is compelling to think of being done with the imitative concept of art, and to relinquish the possibility of total representation, and what this may mean for Carrington and Sapienza in writing their own stories. For Derrida and Artaud though, there is a true sense of loss in this loss of meaning, in 'the theatre of cruelty', where life and cruelty become interchangeable words.[13]

This loss is reflected quite strongly in the opening quotations of this section, their fearful tone expressing the cruelty of the irrepresentability of life. Elsewhere in Carrington and Sapienza's work though, there is an irrepressibility to the potential of language and art which doesn't seem wholly congruous to the theatre of cruelty. 'Writing to be misunderstood', as we will see, is at times viewed positively: words are rich with multiple meanings, and the variety and flux of life is hinted at although never fully realised, in language. This approach is reflected in much earlier theory on aesthetics and representation, where the relationship between subjectivity and art begins to take shape. As Andrew Bowie aptly summarises on Johann Georg Hamann:

> Language for Hamann involves an endless process of translation […] which never results in total communication between one person and another. Significantly, he thinks that the oldest language is music, and the coincidence of signifier and signified, the moment of identity, of 'representational' adequacy of what we say or write about the world *to* the world, is not his philosophical ideal. If this adequacy were to be achieved, it would prevent language's celebration of the exuberant fullness of existence, a celebration which is the basis of Hamann's conception of aesthetics. The signifying chain can therefore be *celebrated* for its endless differentiality precisely *because* it can never come to an end.[14]

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[12] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* Taylor and Francis (Oxford: 2001), p. 295.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 294.
[14] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche,* Manchester University Press (Manchester and New York: 2003)

Here we encounter several key ideas that will be explored in this chapter, what does it mean for autobiography, and subjectivity, if language 'never results in total communication'? Do Carrington and Sapienza share Hamann's conviction that 'the coincidence of signifier and signified' is 'not [the] philosophical ideal'? Also crucial is the stratification of different modes of expression, indicated here by the reference to music as the 'oldest language'. The shortcomings of written language will be measured in this chapter against the potential and limitations of other artistic forms, focusing on Carrington's visual art and Sapienza's acting career. Between acting, visual art, and writing, then, this chapter will consider both verbal and non-verbal modes of expression, and indeed the way the two can be blended. This will engender discussions relative to their specific contexts, namely the centrality of performance and 'theatrical' language in Sapienza's work, and the influence of Surrealist intermediality in Carrington's works. To illustrate these contexts, this chapter will include intertextual analysis of key predecessors in these realms from the earlier part of the twentieth century, namely Pirandello's avant-garde theatre and the collage autobiography of Claude Cahun. In addition to these varying formal artistic outputs, this chapter will also refer to the more informal, private outputs of both women, with regard to Sapienza's extensive writing of notebooks and diaries in her later life, and Carrington's domestic creativity expressed through murals in her home and stories invented for her children. This analysis will question how these varying audiences and forms shift the demands of clarity and legibility of written language.

Returning to Hamann, in Bowie's work on the history of aesthetics and subjectivity, he separates the early thinkers on aesthetics, Hamann and Baumgarten, from later thinkers precisely through their ability to view the gap between signifier and signified positively, '[celebrating] endless differentiality'. This celebration, I will propose, is central to the writing philosophies of Carrington and Sapienza, they celebrate endless differentiality through their layered returns to images. People, animals, places, memories, re-emerge

through their oeuvres, taking on different aspects and meanings. While the gap between the signifier and signified can be menacing, and communication difficult if not impossible, the value and possibility of the signified remains. This expands upon the conclusion of the previous chapter on mental health, where the unknowable, or uncommunicable, core of identity is the bedrock upon which each writer rebuilds herself. In Bowie's overview of the Western male subject, such positivity is rooted in the unquestioned existence of God, and the loss of such certainty precipitates the modern crisis of identity where plurality denotes meaninglessness:

> Baumgarten reveals the incompatibility between a conception of truth based on sensuous particularity and a metaphysical world order, but this does not become a problem for him. The endless multiplicity of the particular and individual is an occasion of celebration, pointing to an infinity of meaning not, as it will often do subsequently, to a meaningless randomness.[15]

As seen earlier in this thesis in the consideration of doctrine in both authors, Sapienza and Carrington certainly lack this certainty rooted in Christian belief. For Carrington perhaps, the goddess worship paradigm found in some of her texts may allow for this sense of celebration to infuse her writing, providing a bedrock of meaning and spirituality grounding the fragmentation of words. But even for Sapienza, she may have more in common perhaps with this earlier view than the subsequent 'meaningless randomness' of the modern self, due also to a sense of the power and potential of a female imaginary. Alberica Bazzoni illustrates this incompatibility between Sapienza and her contemporaries, but here it is not religion that accounts for the difference, but gender:

> Participating in women's struggle to become subjects, the representation of identity provided by Sapienza appears incommensurable with the trajectory of the modern subject, for there is not the sense of a previously universal and rational subject falling apart, but rather the coming to being of a new subjectivity.[16]

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[15] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche,* p. 6.
[16] Alberica Bazzoni, *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative*, p. 83.

Speaking generally, this new female subjectivity then may be characterised by multiplicity, where the modern male subject experiences the same gap between perception and reality as fragmentation. The possibility of expressing a new female subjectivity through writing has been thoroughly explored by critical theorists writing contemporaneously with Carrington and Sapienza; this chapter will explore intertextual links between Carrington and Sapienza's work and the seminal texts *The Laugh of the Medusa* by Hélène Cixous, and *Stabat Mater* by Julia Kristeva. This analysis will explore to what degree these texts, as well as the works of Sapienza and Carrington, account for a total coincidence of body and text. This will contribute to the overall aim of the chapter to comment on our expectations of authenticity from language, and question whether, if possible, an 'embodied text' is the means of achieving such authenticity.

A Hierarchy of Languages

> 'Words are more useless than the dust of the desert because language has also died, and dead things have movements that are difficult for an eye to perceive.'[17]

If words are dead then what remains? In both Carrington and Sapienza's careers, the written word sits alongside other modes of expression, creating different layers in their attempts at representation. In this section, I will examine the status of writing amongst competing modes of expression, asking whether there is a sense of progression, or hierarchy, between the different forms, or if instead they enrich and inform each other, different sides of the same coin.

Writing as a creative practice is distinguished from other forms of artistic expression, such as visual art and music, at times lauded and at others found lacking due to its reliance on language and inability to depict the depths of non-verbal emotion and beauty. Written language, with its webs of signification, has vastly different parameters to the practice of music, with the latter viewed often as an apex of art, with Bowie arguing that it 'exemplifies how our self-understanding can never be fully achieved by discursive articulation.'[18] Such a view speaks to the profound value of the ineffable, a key notion in aesthetics, that art, and chiefly non-discursive art such as music, speaks to a power that is inaccessible to rational philosophy. Crucially, this value is linked to the particularity of embodied human experience. The self-understanding achieved through music, but not through language, is deeply personal. At the other end of the spectrum, writing is sometimes accorded greater significance precisely because of its disembodied impartiality; 'Hegel creates a hierarchy of the arts on the basis of their increasing emancipation from the need for physical embodiment, the highest art being […] literature (in the form of comedy).'[19] The notion that literature as an art is emancipated from the need for physical embodiment is a curious one

[17] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 22.
[18] Andre Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity,* p. 3.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 141.

that is at turns confirmed and challenged in the work of Carrington and Sapienza. It certainly rings true to the repeated references to language as dead, a reference found also in Cahun who proclaims 'j'écris pour tuer mes sentiments' [writing to kill my feelings].[20] But for Hegel this disembodiment has a far more positive connotation, allowing for a more objective, artistic truth to be reached. Perhaps this echoes the power of detaching oneself from experience through writing, as explored in the previous chapter on mental health, where the transferal of painful lived experience into remote static words brings relief, separating the lived self from an objective authorial subject. This, then, may be the purpose of autobiography as art, transmuting the particular body into universal prose? Yet the existence and presence of the body is relentlessly central to both Sapienza and Carrington's work, seeming to invoke the importance of sensuous particularity even where such sensations may not be fully communicable in prose. This question will be explored at much greater length later in this chapter, with reference to the prominent contemporary feminist theorists on body and text.

For the present discussion, it is important to note that, alongside their chosen modes of representation Sapienza and Carrington, working in the late 20th century, have available to them the still recent revolutionary technologies of film and photography, which have disrupted earlier paradigms of representational value. Where verisimilitude is now so readily attainable (on a superficial level), the onus of art to represent instead the essence of a thing becomes more apparent. How do these newer forms fit into the hierarchy of artistic expression? Does photorealism bridge the gap between signifier and signified that exists in writing? It is notable also that unlike many of her contemporaries Carrington overwhelmingly chose the more analogue forms of writing, painting, sculpture; engaging with but never fully committing to the practice of photography or cinema. This despite

[20] Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenus*, Éditions Milles et une nuits, Fayard (Paris: 2011), p. 17. [Transl. Susan de Muth, *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions*, Tate Publishing (London: 2007) p.6.]

considerable exposure to the two fields through her social and artistic circles, including key practitioners of Mexican neo-realist cinema, and Surrealist photographers such as Lee Miller, and also significantly through her marriage to photographer Chiki Weisz. Lora Markova and Roger Shannon have explored Carrington's cameo appearances in Mexican mid-century cinema, with this analysis taking a primarily thematic approach, comparing for example Carrington's interest in anti-clericalism with the filmmaker Luis Buñuel.[21] While this article demonstrates Carrington's place amongst the intellectual community in Mexico, revealing 'under-recognized aspects of the artist's transdisciplinary creativity',[22] it also somewhat underlines that despite her proximity to cinema (and her abundant visual sensibilities) Carrington never sought to become a filmmaker herself. The authors note that when directly asked if she had ever considered it, Carrington responded with typical bluntness, '[n]o, never… absolutely not.'[23] This refusal is also notable in Carrington's association with photography; despite appearing in portraits by Lee Miller and photographic collage by Kati Horna, amongst others, Carrington is not drawn into the Surrealist practice of photography herself. It can be treacherous to attempt to comment on an absence in someone's work, which may after all exist for many reasons; any individual by necessity alone cannot pursue all interests or professions. Filmmaking in particular continues to suffer from gender barriers in the 21st-century more acutely even than writing or photography. Here though, I would suggest that Carrington's lack of interest in the production of still or moving images highlights her proactive engagement with the written word, painting, and sculpture, as well as less studied forays into set and costume design for the theatre. This choice may indicate to a certain degree her priorities and aims with regard to the representation of reality, where these mediums are less exposed, and can be more

[21] Lora Markova and Roger Shannon, 'Leonora Carrington on and off Screen: Intertextual and Intermedial Connections between the Artist's Creative Practice and the Medium of Film', *Arts*, Vol. 8, No. 11 (2019), https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8010011, last accessed 16/05/2022.
[22] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[23] Leonora Carrington interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist (2005), quoted in Markova and Shannon, 'Leonora Carrington on and off Screen', p. 1.

imaginatively unrestricted than the clarity of cinema. It could be said even that Carrington seeks out a greater distance between signifier and signified than that afforded by photography, reinforcing Hamann's position that 'representational adequacy' is not the 'philosophical ideal'.

There is much more to consider in Sapienza's cinematic career, which for many years constituted both her primary means of employment and creative output. Beyond her roles as an actress, Emma Gobbato has led the way in uncovering the uncredited behind-the-scenes work that Sapienza undertook on many of her partner Citto Maselli's films in the 1950s and early 1960s, revealing that Sapienza was a self-described '"*cinematografara*" (movie making woman),'[24] a 'role more articulate and dynamic'[25] than had previously been attributed to her. Gobbato's compelling analysis is largely reliant on the evidence contained in Sapienza and Maselli's correspondence, suggesting that a large part of this uncredited work has gone unrecorded and has subsequently been forgotten. Gobbato goes on to describe a cinematic sensibility which translates into Sapienza's writing, describing particularly how her sense of place and character are developed through working in film. This expands beyond the use of cinema (and acting) as mere autobiographic subject material, as explored in the previous chapter on *Io, Jean Gabin,* instead becoming suffused into her work to a degree that 'her writing itself is cinematic through its use of language'.[26] Despite this cinematic quality, Gobbato focuses most heavily upon Sapienza's linguistic input to film-making, and in the title of her piece she refers to Sapienza not as *cinematografa,* but as 'scriptwriter', suggesting that Sapienza's main contribution to film is linguistic and not visual. Indeed, despite the cinematic qualities that Gobbato describes in Sapienza's writing, there are other ways in which her writing is distinctly *non*-visual. In one

[24] Emma Gobbato, 'Goliarda Sapienza: The Unknown Scriptwriter', in Bazzoni, Alberica, Emma Bond and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi (eds.), *Goliarda Sapienza in Context*, pp. 75-84, p. 75.
[25] *Ibid.,* pp. 75-76.
[26] *Ibid.,* p. 80.

key aspect Sapienza withholds visual cues deliberately, as Angelo Pellegrino reports she was 'orgogliosa d'essere riuscita a non descrivere mai le fattezze di Modesta nell'*Arte della gioia.* Che ciascun lettore l'immaginasse a suo modo.'[27] [proud to have succeeded in never describing Modesta's features in *L'arte della gioia* . So that each reader imagined her in their own way.] Here there is a very clear sense of what may be gained in writing that is absent for Sapienza in film. The communicative gap of written language can be treacherous, but it also allows for the reader to supplement it with their own interventions.

The mediums of cinema and photography may then reveal a space for ambiguity within writing, which for Sapienza and Carrington allows them to reveal, and conceal, exactly what they wish to, celebrating the endless differentiality of language as opposed to the lucidity of image. Yet outside of film and photography, other forms of visual media retain a prominent role in the work of both women. Is writing insufficient? How then do the visual media of theatre and art coalesce with the written word? In the following pages I will explore how intermediality is central to both authors' creative practice, and how both authors invoke the representational force of other media even within their prose, as Monica Farnetti writes:

> *L'arte della gioia* rompe infatti la gabbia (la gabbia «del significante», direbbe qualcuno) dentro alla quale si usa immaginare la letteratura prigioniera; la rompe al pari della statua che si anima del quadro da cui esce la figura, della musica che ci porta alle stelle per farci ritrovare al centro di noi stesse/i.[28]
>
> [*L'arte della gioia* in fact breaks the cage (the cage of the "signifier" one could say) in which we imagine literature is imprisoned; it breaks it just as a statue comes to life, as a figure comes out of a portrait, like music which brings us to the stars to make us rediscover ourselves at our cores.]

This quote is particularly striking as it brings us back to the notion of music as the most euphoric, ineffable form of expression, able to reveal insights about ourselves that are inaccessible through the written word. Yet here Farnetti implies that Sapienza is able to

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[27] Angelo Pellegrino, 'Prefazione: Goliarda e i suoi taccuini', in Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* Einaudi (Turin: 2011), pp. v-xi, p. vii.
[28]Monica Farnetti, 'Introduzione', *Appassionata Sapienza,* p. 10.

achieve such ends through the means of language alone. How can this be possible? Perhaps it is the case that both Sapienza and Carrington, precisely through their awareness of 'literature as a cage', or the death of language, free themselves from the restrictions of the signifier, and come closer to the abstraction of visual and musical art. Their very awareness of the restrictions of language begs the question – what else? Thus introducing an expansive sense of meaning in both authors' work, a blurring of the boundaries between different forms of expression and means of communication.

Sapienza, Audience, and Theatrical Language

In Sapienza's case there is strong evidence that her choice of artistic medium is dictated by necessity. Whether financial or emotional, there is often a clear motivation for writing, and acting. While her early career is shaped first by drama school, and then acting in theatre and cinema, this seems to be eclipsed by the drive to write prose. The act of communicating through writing is thematically central to Sapienza's autobiographical works, particularly her earliest substantial works *Lettera aperta* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno.* As detailed in the previous chapter on mental health, these texts were written rapidly in the context of Sapienza's recovery from suicidal depression, and the role of writing in her recovery is arguably the single largest driving force and theme in each book. Beyond this initially strong motivation to immerse herself in writing however, over the trajectory of Sapienza's career this proves to not always be financially viable, as described by Angelo Pellegrino:

> […] a un certo punto Goliarda fu costretta, a causa delle ristrettezze finanziarie, a tornare a recitare dopo quasi trent'anni dal suo abbandono del teatro per la scelta, che allora era stata un'urgenza irrefrenabile, di dedicarsi alla letteratura. Ma la letteratura era stata a sua volta abbandonata fin dal 1984, anno dell'ultimo rifiuto editoriale che fu disposta a subire.[29]
>
> [[…] at a certain point Goliarda was forced, due to financial constraints, to return to acting almost thirty years after abandoning theatre due to her decision, which at that time had an unstoppable urgency, to dedicate herself to literature. But literature was in turn abandoned from 1984, the year of the last publisher rejection that she was prepared to endure.]

This overview seems to clearly distinguish between the financial necessity of acting and the creative purpose of writing. It also highlights that the progression of Sapienza's career is heavily curtailed by the lack of commercial success achieved by her written works, raising the question of how the presence of the reader can shape the process of writing. Where *Lettera aperta* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, as previously discussed, share a strong sense of dialogue with an audience, this becomes undoubtedly muted by *L'arte della gioia* 's

[29] Angelo Pellegrino, Prefazione, in Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* p. v.

unfulfilled promise. Returning, however, to the other half of Sapienza's creative life; what is missing here, is an understanding of the value of theatre to her creative process, rather than being merely a practical impediment to her 'true purpose' of writing. As outlined above, Gobbato has given a compelling analysis of the *cinematic* qualities of Sapienza's writing, although I have also suggested that in some ways Sapienza resists visuality in favour of the veiled quality of written language. Here though, I will consider the intermedial implications of her acting itself, drawing a distinction between a cinematic intermediality rooted in the visual, and a theatrical intermediality rooted in the physical. I would argue that the profound influence Sapienza's acting experience brings to bear on her prose is physicality, where meaning is anchored in embodiment in a way that is not inherent to written language, or indeed to film. Maria Rizarelli draws the same link between the recurrent physicality of Sapienza's writing and her work as an actress, she writes:

> Il corpo, in effetti, oltre ad essere il tema per eccellenza del codice drammaturgico e di ogni espressione artistica performativa, appare così centrale in tutta la scrittura letteraria di Sapienza, probabilmente proprio perché essa nasce dalle ceneri dell'esperienza attoriale.[30]
>
> [The body, in effect, other than being the theme *par excellence* of the dramaturgical code and of all performative artistic expression, appears so centrally in all of Sapienza's literary work, probably precisely because it was born from the ashes of her acting experience.]

Returning to the relevance of language, Lucia Cardone describes this intermediality in Sapienza's work as 'la parola teatrale' [the theatrical word], and links it precisely to the ability to express the 'inexpressible' [indicibile]:

> La parola teatrale conquistata con grande fatica da Goliarda le permette dunque, in un disegno che attraversa la sua intera opera e biografia, di appropriarsi del linguaggio e insieme del mondo, portandola nello stesso tempo a vedere, a raccontare e a mettere in scena la realtà più intima e indicibile della sua esistenza.[31]
>
> [The theatrical word acquired with great effort by Goliarda permits her then, in a framework which exists across her entire oeuvre and biography, to take possession

[30] Maria Rizzarelli, *Goliarda Sapienza, Gli spazi della libertà, il tempo della gioia,* p. 153. S

[31] Lucia Cardone, 'Goliarda attrice nel/del cinema italiano del secondo dopoguerra', in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* pp. 41-42.

> of language but also the world, bringing her to simultaneously see, narrate and to stage the most intimate and inexpressible reality of her existence.]

Cardone's analysis emphasises the centrality of language to acting, indicating the development of Sapienza's career between 'possessing language' as an actress, and later as a writer. Yet it is striking that there is a persistent duality of 'language' *and* 'world' (the separation of the two indeed could be another iteration of 'signifier' and 'signified') where acting allows quite literally for life to coincide with art. This physicality seems to be linked to a greater authenticity, getting closer to the unknowable core of identity, expressing the inexpressible. Cardone expands upon this sense of duality, summarising that for Sapienza her creative practice is:

> [Una] necessità, divenuta insopprimibile per l'autrice, di far coincidere il dire col fare, di spostare l'asse del racconto dalla finzione alla vita.[32]
>
> [[a] necessity, become irrepressible for the author, to make saying coincide with doing, to shift the axis of the narrative from fiction to life.]

It is interesting that here Cardone uses almost identical language to describe Sapienza's drive to act as Pellegrino does to describe writing (*insopprimibile* [irrepressible] vs. *irrefrenabile* [unstoppable]). Such language feeds into an idea of creative expression as urgent, a 'necessity' as Cardone says, to express the truth of one's experience. Cardone also expresses very clearly the relationship between language and physicality that is central to acting, the coincidence of doing with speaking, which again might narrow the gap between signifier and signified. If language is dead, then perhaps acting brings it alive, invigorating words with a lived body. Both of these elements, the urgency of creativity, and this duality of physicality and language, speak to the perceived importance of authenticity, of communicating one's experience in the most readable mode possible. The creative process exists in the pursuit of truth, as implied in 'shifting the axis of the narrative from fiction to life', where the 'living' art of acting becomes also more 'true' or 'real' than the written word alone. This conflict between the weight of a 'dead' text and the potential of

[32] *Ibid.,* p. 54.

invigorating it through the lived body on stage is explored in Derrida's work on theatre in *Writing and Difference*, where theatre has been constrained by the tyranny of text, where the playwright becomes an absent god, and

> The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance.[33]

Derrida's vision is, I find, similar to Cardone's description of *la parola teatrale*, where both word and theatre much coexist, in a coincidence of doing with saying, and thus not allowing the word to have total supremacy. Derrida emphasises that by de-centring the text and the author the stage can continue to function, but where gesture and the non-verbal are imbued into all: '[t]hus, it is less a question of constructing a mute stage than of constructing a stage whose clamor has not yet been pacified into words.'[34]

Across her written work Sapienza often shows meaning to be rooted in physicality, and crucially it is a physicality which is gestural and not only (or not always) visual. This physicality was explored in the previous chapter, considering the ways in which gender identity is imbued through the gait, intonation, and facial expressions of Jean Gabin. This emphasis on physicality reinforces the idea that language alone is insufficient to communicate identity, even though somewhat conversely Sapienza is expressing these ideas through prose. Her emphasis on the unspoken, on gesture and look, speaks to her training as a stage and screen actress, consider for example this description from *Le certezze del dubbio*:

> […] sorridendo al ragazzo smilzo del bar con una sorta di complicità cosí intensa da suggerire – davanti a me tangibile – tutto un passato di incontri plebei, storie illecite, avventure malavitose, […] Dopo secoli di dialogo muto con quel suo compare – non posso al momento che chiamarlo così […][35]
>
> [[…] smiling at the skinny guy behind the bar with a kind of complicity so intense as to suggest – so tangible to me – a whole past of common encounters, illicit

[33] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* p. 296.
[34] *Ibid.,* p. 306.
[35] Goliarda Sapienza, *Le certezze del dubbio,* Einaudi (Turin: 2013), p. 19.

> affairs, criminal adventures […] After centuries of mute dialogue with her accomplice – in this moment I could only call him that […]]

This moment of *dialogo muto* is reminiscent of any number of scenes in classic cinema, where relationships between characters are established through their gaze. It illustrates the importance of non-verbal understanding, and the breadth of implications gleaned from a single look, that are shared between not only the two characters but also with Goliarda as spectator within the text. The non-verbal communicative cues that are so central to acting then may allow a more complete understanding of character than language alone can offer.

The influence of acting may allow Sapienza to convey in her writing the importance of physicality, of *doing* coinciding with *saying*. Yet the claim that the animation of acting allows a greater access to truth is a curious one. After all, 'acting' is by nature associated with an artifice which could be said to negate authenticity, troubling Cardone's assertion that the *parola teatrale* could shift the axis of narrative from fiction to life. In a striking episode from *Il filo di mezzogiorno* Sapienza recalls being given elocution lessons at drama school in Rome to erase her Sicilian accent, effacing one side of her identity to become more easily adaptable into the different moulds of the characters she would play. The interchange of acting between different stories and different identities destabilises meaning, highlighting the performativity of identity and obscuring 'truth'.

On the association of theatre with authenticity or reality, Pirandello is an essential predecessor to Sapienza, and one she would have been intimately familiar with as a drama student and actress in Italian theatre of the 1940s to 1980s. In Pirandello's seminal *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore,* the status of characters as *realtà create* [created realities] lends them a solidity and 'truth' precisely because of their linguistic fixity, rendering them 'more truthful' than people. What the characters ask for is to be alive through the theatre: 'a essere vivi, più vivi di quelli che respirano e vestono panni! Meno reali forse; ma più

veri!'[36] [to be alive, more alive than these who breathe and wear clothes! Less real perhaps, but more true!] This point raises an important question. So far the analysis of this chapter has presupposed that the communicative gap between writing and life is one where reality is true, and writing can therefore be misleading, or even deceitful. As Sapienza wrote, 'mentono le parole'[37] [words lie], but for Pirandello, the theatrical word is more truthful, even if it is less real. Perhaps as fictional characters exist within the fixity of language, and not the vagaries of lived experience, they are able to express and represent fixed truths. This paradigm shifts the assumption that art exists to replicate life, and that its value can be calculated by the accuracy with which it does so.

This may apply to Pirandello's 'created realities', but how does this relationship between reality and fiction apply to Sapienza's attempts to depict her own life? When a 'real' person becomes fixed as a character in a novel, how do those different entities interact? This relationship between a person and the written version of themselves is explored by Italo Svevo from the perspective of his renowned character Zeno. Zeno's fictional autobiography culminates in the unfinished sequel *Le confessioni del vegliardo,* where looking back on his earlier writings in *La coscienza di Zeno,* the narrator finds that he has undergone a 'letteraturizzazione della vita' [literature-isation of life], where the written version of his life has unwittingly become the 'real identity':

> E so anche che quella parte che raccontai non ne è la più importante. Si fece la più importante perché la fissai. E ora che cosa sono io? Non colui che visse ma colui che descrissi.[38]
>
> [And I know that the part I recounted isn't the most important. It became the most important because I fixed it [in place]. And now what am I? Not the one who lived but the one I described.]

[36] Luigi Pirandello, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore,* in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore ; Enrico IV*, Arnoldo Mondadori (Milan: 1984) p. 35.
[37] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 397.
[38] Italo Svevo, *Le confessioni del vegliardo,* in *Romenzi*, a cura di Mario Lavagetto, Einaudi/Gallimard (Paris and Turin: 1993) p. 922.

Unlike Pirandello's characters, this is not a positive vision but a terrifying one, where the act of writing about a life has distorted its true nature, emphasising certain things unintentionally and weaving an unrepresentative narrative. Svevo shares with Carrington and Sapienza a mistrust of the fixity of language, it is the act of writing a narrative that *fixes* [*fissare*] experiences into place, distorting their significance amid the broader spectrum that is 'real' life. This problem is perhaps more specifically related not to language but to form, where *letteraturizazzione* implies not only written language but also narrative, where episodes of a life are accorded a symbolism and pattern which may be inorganic. This point raises the spectre of a whole other field of inquiry, where theorists such as Peter Brooks have investigated the psychology of storytelling, and the need to parse experiences into narrative.[39] The blame, however, for this distortion of 'truth' seems to lie most firmly with Zeno himself, as befits the notoriously unreliable narrator, the disconnect between life and writing seems to have sprung out of his own actions, his choice to 'fix' certain events and ignore others. We might reasonably question not the ability of the novel to convey real life but rather the subject's willingness to do so.

This distorting power of literature can also be seen in Sapienza's writings, yet it seems to be more clearly caused by form itself and not the author's choices. Pellegrino indicates that she experienced a strikingly similar sensation to Zeno - of distance between her written and real self - specifically in her autobiographical novels. He draws a distinction between the fictionalising character formation found in that mode of writing as opposed to other more intimate forms like her notebooks:

> Ecco, l'intimità assoluta, qui si può dire finalmente raggiunta. Dove nei romanzi autobiografici Goliarda usciva fuori come personaggio malgrado la sua volontà, nei *Taccuini* emerge invece come donna pura e semplice senza piú la drammatizzazione impegnata propria di quei romanzi.[40]
>
> [Here, absolute intimacy, we can say, is finally achieved. Where in the autobiographical novels Goliarda emerged as a character despite her efforts, in the

[39] Peter, Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*, Blackwell (Oxford: 1994)
[40] Angelo Pellegrino, Prefazione, in Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* p. ix-x.

> *Notebooks* she emerges instead simply as a woman without the committed dramatization characterising those novels.]

This *drammatizzazione* has the echo of Svevo's *letteraturizazzione,* and also reinforces Pirandello's distinction between characters and real people. The implication is that by 'emerging as a character', Sapienza's written self is different to her 'real' self. How exactly the real self differs from the written is something of an unanswered question here, especially as we are reliant on Pellegrino's second-hand account. Perhaps, like Zeno/Svevo, the act of writing is found to distort the importance of certain events. However, crucially, this distortion occurs 'despite her efforts', and is 'imposed by the novels themselves'. This sense of inevitability is articulated by David Punter in his work on metaphor, when he writes that:

> When writing a diary, one inevitably writes in a form which accords with one's inner suppositions of what a diary is like, and thus the possibilities of imaginative freedom are simultaneously foreclosed by the 'unfreedom' of the dictates of a specific form; what is revealed is that, only too frequently, our metaphors are not our own.[41]

It is interesting that Punter chooses the example of a diary to illustrate this point. The implication that 'our metaphors are not our own' is perhaps more pertinent when considering the various forms of life-writing. It is one thing for an idea to be distorted by the web of preconceptions of written language, but what does it mean if one's own identity is at risk? Pellegrino seems to offer a respite through the 'formlessness' of Sapienza's notebooks, but can they escape these linguistic 'unfreedoms'? It should be noted that Sapienza does not seek out the form of a notebook in order to evade this *letteraturizzazione della vita,* instead it is the same pragmatic force that brought her back to acting that makes her abandon the novel: her failure to find a publisher for her novels. Completing his overview of Sapienza's career Pellegrino suggests that the notebooks exist not in their own right but almost as phantoms of would-be novels:

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[41] David Punter, *Metaphor*, Routledge (London: 2007), p. 71.

> Ma la letteratura era stata a sua volta abbandonata fin dal 1984, anno dell'ultimo rifiuto editorale che fu disposta a subire. Da quell'anno, fino alla sua morte nel 1996, si può dire che scrisse soltanto taccuini che, come si può intendere, riflettono qua e là anche i romanzi che meditava di scrivere e non poté. [42]
>
> [But literature was in turn abandoned from 1984, the year of the final publisher rejection that she was prepared to endure. From that year, until her death in 1996, you could say that she only wrote notebooks which, as one can understand, reflect here and there the novels that she thought about writing and couldn't.]

While the spectre of the notebooks as 'failed novels' might preclude any claim to true formlessness, it does highlight another key characteristic of the notebooks as opposed to the novels: they are not intended for an audience. Does the lack of an audience break the dictates of form? The notebooks, edited and published posthumously, bear the evocative title *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa* [The Vice of Speaking to Myself], which evokes a sense of inferiority or self-indulgence in this form of writing, and not an elevated sense of intimacy. Can we be more truthful, and achieve true representation when recounting ourself to ourselves? Again returning to Pellegrino's assertion, that in the notebooks Sapienza unveils herself 'simply as a woman', achieving 'absolute intimacy', the indication is that the prized authenticity longed for in autobiography is finally at hand. Particularly by this extraordinary assertion of 'absolute intimacy', what seems to be suggested is that there is no gap whatsoever between text and truth, and that here in written form we have Sapienza's very being. But in speaking to herself is it true that Sapienza accesses a greater authenticity? In truth, this assertion doesn't seem to be supported by the text, where Sapienza expresses instead a new form of self-distortion through writing without an overt narrative structure, where '[q]uesto scrivere per se stessi finisce sempre con l'ammorbidire troppo i propri sentimenti e portarti all'autocompiacimento'[43] [this writing for yourself ends up always with softening too much one's own feelings, it leads one to self-complacency].

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[42] Angelo Pellegrino, Prefazione, in Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* p. v.
[43] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* p. 12.

Elsewhere, in perhaps her most heavily dramatized narrative, the fictional *L'arte della gioia* , Sapienza explores more fully the value of naming a feeling, giving it a form, 'materializing it' in a way that is resolutely bodily, thus demonstrating the power of *la parola teatrale*. She writes:

> [A]nche se non ho il coraggio di confessarlo ad alta voce, so che ha un nome: gelosia. L'ho detto, e questa parola della quale prima non sapevo il significato, si stacca dalle mie emozioni per an attimo e la vedo, la posso toccare come un vaso, un bicchiere, un oggetto che puoi rigirare e osservare da tutte le parti. Ecco l'utilità di dire le cose: quel tarlo materializzato dalla mia voce è più subdolo, informe e molliccio di tutte le emozioni che fino a quel giorno avevo provato. E, cosa che prima non avrei mai immaginato, era una emozione carnale, un dolore sordo e continuo come un pungolío, un mal di denti…[44]
>
> [Though I lack the courage to admit it out loud, I know it has a name: jealousy. I said it, and for a moment this word, whose meaning had been unfamiliar to me before, stands apart from my emotions and I can see it; I can touch it like a vase, a glass, an object you can turn and look at from all sides. That's the value of saying things: materialized by my voice, the worm is more nebulous, formless and ineffectual than all the feelings I had experienced up until that day. Moreover, something that I would never have imagined before, it was a carnal sensation, a constant dull ache like a tingling, a toothache…]

This quotation is particularly striking in that it goes some way to negating the distance between word and body as described elsewhere in this chapter. Although Sapienza 'would never have imagined' it, the experience of naming a sensation is physical, 'carnal', reuniting the spoken and the physical. Representational inadequacy persists across different forms of writing, but for Sapienza the physicality of *la parola teatrale* goes some way to narrowing the gap between world and word, between life and language, and there is certainly value in language and audience, of seeking a communicative congress even if not always achieving it.

[44] Goliarda Sapienza, *L'arte della gioia,* p. 290. [p. 386]

Surrealism's Authenticities: Carrington and Cahun

Carrington takes quite the opposite trajectory to Sapienza in terms of her relationship to writing. Where Sapienza begins with acting, and comes to writing later, the first recognition that Carrington gains as a creator is as a writer, before going on to achieve far greater acclaim as a painter and sculptor. Indeed, if it is useful at all to identify a 'dominating' form for their creative output, it would appear that writing was an imperative for Sapienza throughout her life, even without publication; while for Carrington she moved gradually away from writing to focus entirely on visual art, and seemed consistently unconcerned with, or even disdainful of, publishing for an audience, although she once told Susan Rubin Suleiman that 'when I write, it's for others; when I paint, it's for myself'[45]. Henri Parisot, the French publisher who discovered and printed Carrington's earliest short stories, observed this progression in her career in his foreword to her play *Une chemise de nuit de flanelle*, published in 1951:

> Léonora semble délaisser quelque peu la poésie écrite au profit de la poésie peinte. À en juger par les trops rares reproductions de ses toiles qui nous sont parvenues au cours de ces dernières années, il semble que son imagination féerique en passant de l'un à l'autre de ces modes d'expression si différents, n'ait rien perdu de sa fraîcheur originelle ni de son merveilleux pouvoir de seduction.[46]
>
> [Leonora seems to be slowly leaving written poetry in favour of painted poetry. To judge by the scarce reproductions of her canvases which have come our way in recent years, it seems that her otherworldly imagination, in passing from one to the other of these such different modes of expression, has lost none of its original freshness, nor its marvellous power of seduction.]

1951 is still an early point in Carrington's career which continued with remarkable productivity until her death in 2011, and while she continued to write and publish to some extent, it is true that the focal point of her work had shifted from written to visual art already at this time. It is striking that Parisot seems to seek to highlight the great similarity

[45] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'The Bird Superior Meets the Bride of the Wind: Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst', in Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership,* pp. 94-113, p. 98.
[46] Henri Parisot, 'Avant-propos', in Leonora Carrington, *Une chemise de nuit de flanelle,* p. 9 – 10.

of Carrington's work as an author and painter even while emphasising that these modes of expression are 'so different' to one another. In light of the comparison with Sapienza, there does indeed seem to be a much shorter distance between painting and writing than there is between acting and writing. Acting for Sapienza is an economic necessity, and a collaborative form which relied upon the narratives of others. For Carrington, however, the passage from written to painted 'poetry', as suggested by Parisot, allows for a transposition of the same concerns, themes, and symbols, and retains a very similar level of authorial ownership. Indeed, whereas above my analysis focused upon identifying the interdisciplinary features of Sapienza's work which unified writing and acting, in Carrington's work the interdisciplinarity of her output is so abundantly evident as to render such analysis somewhat redundant. Throughout this project and in almost all analyses of Carrington's written work, the interconnectedness of her writing and painting looms large, not least in the illustrations she drew for her novels and stories, but also in the shared names of paintings and books (*Down Below*), the depictions in text and painting of the same symbols (animals, Catholic imagery, enchantresses), and the depiction of art and painting as a theme itself ('Pigeon, Fly!').

This interconnectedness is not unique to Carrington, but links her to other Surrealists, a movement that Anna Watz characterises as 'radically interdisciplinary.'[47] Watz's edited collection *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration,* seeks to highlight the importance of writing that has been under-explored as a crucial element of Surrealism, but she also emphasises that the critical distinction that often exists between writing and painting may be an artificial product of academia, and that 'the surrealist women discussed here did not necessarily see the fields of the visual and the textual as distinct and separate from each other.'[48] This central interdisciplinarity is of particular interest, I will argue, to

[47] Anna Watz, Introduction, in Anna Watz (ed.), Surrealist Women's Writing*: A Critical Exploration,* p. 2.
[48] *Ibid.,* pp. 2-3.

the overarching topic at hand of representation, and the gap between art and life. This is because Surrealism's interdisciplinarity stretches beyond our common understanding of the word, becoming, as Watz describes it, 'radical'. In this context, the interconnectedness of writing, painting, but also photography, sound, and film, seep into the everyday lives of many of the key practitioners of Surrealism. This manifests in less formal artistic outputs, such as games, cooking, home decoration, parties and more, resulting in an overwhelmingly collaborative and all-encompassing vision of art, in a way which has been central to critics' interpretations of Carrington particularly. Anecdotes of Carrington's Surrealist exploits are often recounted alongside analysis of her works, encompassing many of the same themes and concerns as her work itself. Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra provide an excellent overview of these anecdotes[49], warning also that they 'often [reduce] the artist to a mere specimen of idiosyncratic behaviour; yet they nonetheless offer a telling series of snapshots of Carrington's artistic relations, as well as her sense of the ungovernability of artistic practice.'[50] The 'radically interdisciplinary' nature of Surrealism and the 'ungovernability of artistic practice' seem to coalesce in a vision of Carrington where she is indivisible from her art. Hers is a mythical persona, a cult of personality where her autobiographical writing seems entirely natural and almost incidental, so suffused is her identity into her art. An episode where Carrington covered her feet in mustard at the table in a smart restaurant, or where she cut her houseguests' hair in the night to serve in their breakfast omelettes the next morning, could so easily be scenes from a short story. This, I would argue, accounts for why it has seemed so vital in criticism on Carrington to associate her with the label of Surrealism, despite her own protestations to the contrary. Unlike other artistic categories such as Impressionism or Modernism, Surrealism seems to demand a total consumption of the artist, melding into their very subjectivity.

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[49] Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra, Introduction, in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde,* pp. 1-16, pp. 6-8.
[50] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

The key voice of resistance to this cult of personality has thus far been Carrington's son, Gabriel Weisz Carrington, who warns against taking such anecdotes 'seriously.'[51] The very suggestion of inhabiting a persona seems entirely at odds with the automatism of Surrealism. If the Surrealism of these anecdotes is a 'theatrical' performance, then it follows that there is a 'real', private, Leonora who is not an inherently Surrealist being, and is therefore not being communicated in her work. Weisz has published his own memoir of his mother in 2021, evocatively titled *The Invisible Painting*, it responds to this need to demythologise his mother, and reiterating a private identity beneath her artistic persona.[52] Compellingly, Weisz Carrington's understanding of his mother's 'persona' is multifaceted, a source of strength as well as a mask, and capable of being exploited by an adoring contemporary readership as much as by an infantilising and sexist Surrealist gaze. As well as being fodder for the Surrealist vision of the femme-enfant, he warns against these anecdotes contributing to 'a consumerist kind of image that could be sold as "Leonora the witch" or "Leonora the personality".'[53] Furthermore he argues that the persona could be something greater than the individual, writing that this 'creative persona' is an entity 'who we can only understand through her art', that

> Leonora was more than the person present in our lives; she was also a creative character, a kind of visionary self who was the product of trial and error in a variety of artistic endeavours.[54]

Certainly, the understanding of Leonora as two separate beings - on one side the 'person present', and on the other the 'creative character' - chimes with Sapienza's experience of writing herself into a character, albeit perhaps here with a more positive connotation,

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[51] Jonathnan Eburne and Catriona McAra, Introduction, in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde,* pp. 1-16, p. 8.
[52] Gabriel Weisz Carrington, *The Invisible Painting: My Memoir of Leonora Carrington,* Manchester University Press (Manchester: 2021)
[53] Gabriel Weisz Carrington quoted by Kate Dwyer in "Why Leonora Carrington's Work Feels So of the Moment", *W Magazine, https://www.wmagazine.com/culture/leonora-carrington-venice-biennale-books-history*, February 4th 2022, last accessed 28th March 2022.
[54] Gabriel Weisz Carrington, *The Invisible Painting,* p. 67.

expansive and not reductive. Weisz Carrington's allusion to 'trial and error' is essential in parsing Carrington's artistic process from the Surrealist ideal of automatism, and goes some way to undoing the gendered assumptions around female creative practice. The rhetoric around the instinctual *femme-enfant* often effaces the real work of artistic creation. By erasing the gap between signified and signifier, one also erases the work of the artist to bridge that gap. Watz reminds us that the male Surrealists' experimentations with automatism and 'passive' artistic creation were 'conceived as simulating a "feminine" subject position.'[55] By highlighting the places in their work where Sapienza and Carrington find language to be restrictive and difficult, this chapter challenges the idea that 'passive' artistic creation is possible, let alone representative of the ''feminine' subject position'. Crucially, André Breton identified the *femme-enfant* as 'the only one in whom resides the state of absolute transparency of vision'.[56] This is intended as effusive praise, where utter clarity is achieved through guileless authenticity. Transparency of vision seems to imply the opposite of lying or misleading webs of linguistic signification. Instead the ideal that Carrington reaches as a *femme-enfant* is total clarity, as demanded by the automatism of Surrealism; there is no gap between thought and word, because automatism is conceived to overcome it. This unfettered access to the female creative stream is embedded in a wider cultural context of viewing and representing female bodies in Surrealist art, where we might see this 'total clarity' as an extension of this voyeurism, and the expectation of the availability of women for 'conspicuous visible consumption.'[57]

[55]Anna Watz, 'Identity Convulsed: Leonora Carrington's The House of Fear and The Oval Lady' in Anna Watz (ed.), *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration,* pp. 42-67, p. 46.
[56] André Breton, Quoted in Anna Watz 'Identity Convulsed: Leonora Carrington's The House of Fear and The Oval Lady', from *Arcanum 17* (1944), transl. Zach Rogow, Sun and Moon (Los Angeles: 1994).
[57] Mary Ann Caws, 'Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art', in Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.), *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, Harvard University Press (Cambridge MA and London: 1986), pp. 262 – 287, p. 262.

This praise of 'total clarity' is very close also to Pellegrino's description of Sapienza's 'intimità assoluta'[58] [absolute intimacy] in her notebooks, demonstrating that expectations of total authenticity from female writers may be a more widespread phenomenon, and not confined only to Surrealist rhetoric. This adulation of total intimacy/transparency has again a distinct sense of voyeurism, which may be endemic to the interpretation of women's autobiographical writing, contributing to a lingering uneasiness around the persistent association of women with that category of writing. As Carrington and Sapienza are both writing for the most part autobiographically, the expectation of authenticity demands access to their very identities. In this context, Carrington's separation of her 'real' self from an artistic persona reasserts her right to a private self, an identity that is lived, but unwritten and uncommunicated. The desire for such privacy is reiterated in Carrington's indifference to publication, evidenced by the manuscripts Carrington left unpublished for years, such as *The Hearing Trumpet*; and also perhaps best demonstrated in her remarkable letter prefacing the French edition of *Down Below*, where she shows total disdain for the reader, and no expectation that they might understand her. Carrington's preference for privacy can also be seen in her well-maintained distance from interviewers, and her resistance to interpretation. Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra note that '[w]hile generally amenable to discussing her life and work, she patently refused to explain it',[59] finding a significance in this refusal in that Carrington's work overall explores 'openness to uncertainty and non-knowledge'.[60] While Eburne and McAra are referring here equally to both Carrington's written work and visual art, it may also go some way to explaining her increasing preference for the latter. The shift towards visual art may itself further the aim of protecting a private self, where Carrington's evocative paintings still possess a spirit of autobiography, of deeply personal sentiment, but retain an ambiguity and deniability, unfettered by the

[58] Angelo Pellegrino, 'Prefazione', in Goliarda Sapienza, *Il vizio di parlare a me stessa,* p. ix-x
[59] Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra, Introduction, in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde,* p. 1.
[60] *Ibid.,* p. 1.

commitment of narrative. As Sapienza gradually moves away from the constraints of form to write her notebooks, Carrington's trajectory moves away from language altogether.

Without a comment from Carrington on the differences between textual and visual expression, these observations are largely speculative, however her written work does contain clues about finding meaning in the unspoken, and the greater potential for ambiguity in unspoken communications. These ideas are particularly apparent in *The Hearing Trumpet*, where, suffering from poor hearing, Marian Leatherby is required to rely upon the non-verbal much more than those around her. She is enraptured particularly by the painting of the mysterious Abbess, and the uncertainty around her expression, and later by the humming of bees, and by the 'collective hallucination'[61] of dancing. In contrast to this potential found in the non-verbal, the written or spoken word can feel hollow, insufficient, or awkward. Faced with the apocalyptic shifting of the poles, and descending into the bowels of the earth Marian finds that while the mind attempts to translate these overwhelming thoughts and sights into language, language falters. She thinks: 'Questions started to form, without my permission they jumped into my mind, each seemed sillier than the other. "Which of us is really me?"'[62] Spoken language in Carrington's work is often too restrictive, too bound by convention and societal niceties, providing a comical foil to the expansive and extraordinary surroundings of her characters. The result is that spoken language begins to sound 'silly', and fails to reproduce the complexities and potential of an imaginative life. This effect can be traced to the influence of British humour and class in Carrington's work, as explored by Marina Warner and discussed in the previous chapter on performativity. Marian and other characters often respond to the most marvellous situations with conventional, dispassionate, and pragmatic speech, highlighting a disconnect between experience and language, and also betraying a societal convention that limits our ability to

[61] Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 117.
[62] Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet,* p. 137.

process and express the absurd. Crucially, this effect seems to be strongest in Carrington's work in English, raising the complicating factor of her multilingual output. Does Carrington's attitude to the potential of language differ according to the language she is working in? This question is too broad to address fully here, but in brief, despite the obvious restrictions of writing in a more unfamiliar language (French or Spanish, for Carrington), these uncertainties could be *more* freeing than writing in one's own native language, allowing the writer to escape the dictates of linguistic convention, a national literary canon, and even preconceptions of class.

Returning to the idea of language and writing more generally however, the awareness of words as slippery and difficult broadens the gap between signified and signifier, between the body and the text, and therefore can destabilise the Surrealist sensibility of immediacy and instinct. By reaffirming the difficulty of traversing the gap between life and art, instead of viewing the two concurrently, the present analysis seeks to reassert the value and insight of Carrington's work by emphasising this struggle to attain representational adequacy through prose, and, while losing something of the guileless authenticity of the *femme-enfant*, arrive at something more 'real'. In the previous chapter on *Down Below*, my analysis centred upon the oppositions between spoken and written language, and the significance of speaking in the context of psychiatric treatment. The convoluted production of *Down Below* takes on a further significance, however, when considered as symptomatic of this difficult relationship between life and language, and the complexities of translating one into the other. Conversely, this text which cemented Carrington's acclaimed position within the Surrealists also undermines her position in that group, as, I would argue, the immensely difficult artistic process of writing that text clashes with the idea that truth or insight is gained through automatism.

This argument is strongly supported by existing scholarship on Carrington's predecessor Claude Cahun; another artist and writer who has been labelled as Surrealist, a peripheral

association which seems to have been suggested most forcefully by Breton. Cahun's own astonishing contribution to autofiction is the collage text *Aveux non avenus* (1930) [published in English as *Disavowals (or Cancelled Confessions*)]. Made up of essays, poems, photographic collages and philosophical dialogues, this work is more abstract, fragmentary, and formally challenging than any of Carrington's published works. This certainly coheres with the intermediality of Surrealism, yet, as Felicity Gee thoroughly explores, Cahun's process of writing also challenges Surrealism; she writes:

> This is not automatism, as the decade it took to develop *Disavowals* clearly demonstrates, but a critical practice predicated on layers, repetition, and by turns reasoned and aesthetically overloaded language.[63]

The prolonged writing process of Cahun's *Disavowals* then echoes in Carrington's own autobiographical text some years later, suggesting that Carrington is not disrupting a paradigm of Surrealist women's practice, but rather confirming that the lauded 'passive' artistic creation never truly existed. Furthermore, Gee's emphasis on the layered repetitions of Cahun's language speaks to the same ambivalence towards the representational potential of language that is found in both Sapienza and Carrington's careers. The idea of an autobiography of repetition is deeply resonant particularly with Sapienza's work, where her autobiographical texts have been noted for their cycles of return to her childhood, a continual process of re-evaluating the same people and places through slightly different lenses.[64] Despite vast formal differences, this dovetails closely with the effect Gee finds in Cahun's work, which, she writes 'is marked by the poetic refrain of an eternal return back to the self. Each return is predicated on difference, on a shift, a new layer, a new twist of perspective.'[65] The idea that meaning is not fixed but instead is 'predicated on difference'

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[63] Felicity Gee, '"The dung beetle's snowball": the philosophic narcissism of Claude Cahun's essay-poetry', in Anna Watz (ed.), *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration,* pp.17-41., p. 32.
[64] See Gloria Scarfone*, Goliarda Sapienza: Un'autrice ai margini del sistema letterario*. Scarfone establishes the cyclical nature of Sapienza's autobiographic practice, see particularly pp. 32-33 for analysis of shifts and repetitions in *Lettera aperta* and *Io, Jean Gabin.*
[65] Felicity Gee, '"The dung beetle's snowball": the philosophic narcissism of Claude Cahun's essay-poetry', p. 32.

aligns very clearly with a poststructuralist understanding of language. Carrington's work is less definitively cyclical perhaps, as she characteristically resists nostalgia, but her amalgams of alter-egos and animal ciphers throughout her work hew very closely to yet another feature of Cahun's linguistic layering, described by Gee as 'the refusal to cement identity in a single likeness of the self but rather to present it in a series of human and non-human entities'.[66] These two features of Cahun's work allow us to observe a bridge between Carrington and Sapienza, where Carrington's autobiographical self takes radically different, and hybrid forms, as Little Francis, a debutante, a psychiatric patient, an old crone, while Sapienza returns again and again to the past, and to a more mimetic depiction of her life and circumstances; yet both authors share with Cahun 'the refusal to cement identity in a single likeness of the self', resulting in a sense of unfixed meaning, fluidity and layered identity. As Sapienza writes,

> Piegando la testa a quell'ennesima prova che nessuna persona e nessun luogo sono «veri» per sempre[…][67]
>
> [nodding one's head at yet another piece of evidence that no person and no place are "true" forever[…]]

This shared concern with identity is central to the question of language and the possibilities of representation. That is, the predominant issue at stake in the current analysis is not the wider concern of language found in deconstruction, but more specifically how disruptions between language and meaning impact on our understanding of autobiography. Is it possible to see the self through writing? For Cahun, at least, the answer seems to be no, with critics landing on a spectrum somewhere between caveated potential and total impossibility. Introducing the English translation of *Aveux non avenus,* Jennifer Mundy considers the benefit to the writer of transcribing themself into language, even if that self is 'incomplete',

[66] Felicity Gee, '"The dung beetle's snowball": the philosophic narcissism of Claude Cahun's essay-poetry', p. 32.
[67] Goliarda Sapienza, *Le certezze del dubbio,* p. 13.

as 'at least she [Cahun] can see herself now, through writing, as in a freeze frame.'[68] This description seems to reflect the problem with language that we saw with Carrington and Sapienza at the beginning of this chapter, in that a 'freeze frame' cannot move with time, and is therefore doomed to be incomplete. Gee is somewhat harsher, suggesting that 'Cahun did not believe that the hallowed and fetishized form of autobiographical writing could constitute a life lived.' [69] This comment though seems to be more germane to the question of form than to writing in general; as we saw with Sapienza and Svevo the constraints of writing within the framework of an autobiography or novel can further distort identity or 'life' than mere writing alone. Gee's description of 'fetishized' autobiography is particularly striking, evoking the voyeurism suggested above which may be a product of expecting the self to be on total display to the reader. Gee then may be suggesting that Cahun's fluid use of form sets her work apart from a more hackneyed or clichéd form of autobiographical writing, but equally she could also be arguing that Cahun's aim in writing autobiographically is not to present a text that is *equal* to a life lived. If such an aim is impossible, then why write? What value does Cahun find in writing about their life? The process of writing itself is central to *Disavowals,* at the opening of the text Cahun writes:

> J'ai beau me mettre à l'aise. L'abstrait, le rêve, sont aussi limités pour moi que le concret, le reel. Que puis-je? Dans un miroir étroit, montrer la partie pour le tout? Confondre une aureole et des éclaboussures? Refusant de me cogner aux murs, me cogner aux vitres? Dans la nuit noire.
>
> En attendant d'y voir clair, je veux me traquer, me débattre. Qui, se sentant armé contre soi, fût-ce des mots les plus vains, qui ne s'efforcerait, ne fût-ce que de mettre en plein dans le vide? [70]
>
> [No point in making myself comfortable. The abstraction, the dream, are as limited for me as the concrete and the real. What to do? Show a part of it only, in a narrow mirror, as if it were the whole? Mix up a halo with spatters? Refusing to bump into walls, bump into windows instead? In the black of night.

[68] Jennifer Mundy, Introduction, in Claude Cahun, *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions,* Tate Publishing, (London: 2007), transl. Susan de Muth, p. xvi.
[69] Felicity Gee, '"The dung beetle's snowball": the philosophic narcissism of Claude Cahun's essay-poetry', p. 17.
[70] Claude Cahun, *Aveux non Avenus,* pp. 13-14 [p.1.]

> Until I see everything clearly, I want to hunt myself down, struggle with myself. Who, feeling armed against her own self, be that with the vainest of words, would not do her very best if only to hit the void bang in the middle.]

Here Cahun seems to suggest an awareness of the fallibility of autobiography, underpinned by the fallibility of language itself, where in attempting to appreciate and experience in full both the abstraction and the concrete, one is doomed to fail one way or the other, by 'show[ing] a part of it only'. Cahun's image of 'mix[ing] up a halo with spatters' read in this context evokes the spatter of ink (or paint) where seeking to represent a pure emotion or experience sullies it. And yet the answer Cahun seems to find here is that despite the fallibility of the endeavour the only possible recourse is to continue in the pursuit of partial representation, and find meaning in the process. This process is conveyed as deeply difficult, a 'struggle with myself' but, Cahun argues, even with little hope of overcoming the problem of representation entirely, there is 'no point in making myself comfortable.' This idea of a painful personal process of writing aligns with both Sapienza and Carrington, particularly in their writings on mental health, which reinforce this idea of writing as a struggle to 'hunt myself down'. Crucially, this struggle is with oneself to obtain representational accuracy, but the imagined reader is almost entirely absent. The problem is not one of communication, which seems not even an afterthought. It is notable that the artistic ideals of 'intimità assoluta' and 'transparency of vision' pertain to the experience of the reader more than the experience of the writer, which seems a troublesome priority in the realm of autobiography. Are these three writers concerned with their legibility to an audience? Cahun, like Carrington, appears to anticipate and to reject any responsibility to the reader, writing:

> Que m'importe, Passant, de te tendre un miroir où tu te reconnaisses, fût-ce un miroir déformant et signé de ma main? Je ne suis pas marchand d'armoires à glace, ni de psyches comiques […] Du moins je connaîtrai mon visage – et peut-être me suffira-t-il assez pour me plaire. [71]
>
> [What does it matter to me, Passer-by, if I provide you with a mirror to see yourself in, albeit a distorting mirror and signed by my own hand? I'm not a dealer in

[71] Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenus,* p. 37. [p. 25.]

> mirrored wardrobes, or comical swing mirrors […] At least I will know my own face – and maybe that will be enough to please me.]

Cahun's project then is too difficult to concern herself with anything other than seeing her own face, and the reader is, at best, an afterthought, at worst an encumbrance whose own identity struggles add an unnecessary further burden on the writer.

Sapienza seems to embrace the existence of the reader in a very different way, particularly in her earlier texts which were published promptly on completion. Both the second person address in *Lettera aperta* and the conversational recovery described in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* offer a role for the reader in the process of self-discovery through writing. The reader is clearly the anticipated receiver of that process, instead of merely incidental. However, in the closing pages of both these texts Sapienza seems to reserve a core space for the role of the individual in their own story, doubting the reader's ability to truly understand in *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* and also in *Lettera aperta* ultimately prioritising the personal act of writing over the collective act of communication. At the book's close she writes: 'Vi lascio per un po': con questo poco di ordine che sono riuscita a fare intorno a me.' [72] [I will leave you for a while: with this little amount of orderliness that I have managed to create around myself.'] It is only a slim detail, but Sapienza could very easily here have credited the reader with the act of creating order in her life, but instead it is a personal act, predicated on her own terms, actions and volition.

Through Cahun's work then we can reconsider the process of autobiographical writing for Carrington and Sapienza, where the process of searching, of ordering, of writing, supersedes the automatic intimacy of supposed artistic inspiration or genius. At the end of this process, the self may still be illegible to the reader, and even to the writer, but there is a kernel of meaning in the process itself. Carrington's grandson Daniel Weisz Carrington emphasises also this element of his grandmother's work, that the creative process in itself is

[72] Goliarda Sapienza, *Lettera aperta,* p. 147.

'the point', destabilising the value or expectation of a meaning or result. Cahun finds meaning also in the most prolonged act of writing:

> S'exprimer : s'humilier? – Oui, mais pour le bon motif. […]
>
> «Âme». J'ai abuse du mot. Superstition, manie de l'inconnaissable. Ce que je ne puis mâcher, voilà ce que j'aime à mettre sous la dent. «Amour», «conscience», «Dieu», «désintéressement»!... Moi, juive au point d'utiliser mes péchés à mon salut, de mettre en oeuvre mes sous-produits, de me surprendre continuellement, l'oeil en crochet, au bord de ma propre poubelle!
>
> Et quoi que ce soit que je ramène à moi, je le manipulerai, je lui appliquerai toutes mes formules, je lui essayerai tous mes noms, tous mes trucs, je lui cede la place. Ma fausse clef tentera toutes les serrures. N'en peut-elle forcer aucune? alors je la plante là. Mais devant moi.
>
> Elle servira quand même. Un fil de fer noir ou vif, une tige. Une corolla de papier plissé, une robe. Une belle idole.
>
> En fin de compte: la paresse. Un instant je m'en contente. Je m'arrête. Tu m'a prise en flagrant délit d'orgeuil, pour si peu prosternée. [73]
>
> [Express oneself: humiliate oneself? – Yes, but for the right reason. […]
>
> 'Soul.' I misused the word. Superstition, obsession with the unknowable. What I cannot chew is precisely what I like to bite off. 'Love', 'Conscience', 'God', 'selflessness'!... I, Jewish to the point of using my sins for my salvation, of putting my by-products to work, of always surprising myself, my eye hooked over the edge of my own waste-paper bin.
>
> And whatever I gather to myself, I will handle it with care, subjecting it to all my formulas, try out all my names, all my things on it, make room for it. My skeleton key will try all the locks. Can't it get any of them to open? I'll plant it there. Right in front of me.
>
> It will still be of use. A wire, black or living, a stalk…A corolla of folded paper, a dress. A beautiful idol.
>
> At the end of the day: laziness. For a moment I am happy with it. I stay where I am. You caught me in the throes of pride, grovelling for so very little.]

This passage is a wonderfully evocative and multi-layered description of the act of writing about oneself, or about anything with any attempt at nuance and depth. The 'waste-paper bin' image centres the fact that the lived self is an amalgam of that which has been successfully rendered in writing and that which could not be, the rejected metaphors and

[73] Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenus,* p. 38. [pp. 26-27.]

failed stories. The point is to try to express the inexpressible, 'to bite off precisely what I cannot chew'. Some experiences will not be rendered in text, but the act of writing, of filtering through all the potential names, of trying all the different keys to the lock, allows one to come closer to the unsayable. The limits of writing show us the outline of the core, inexpressible self, so that the result of autobiography is not a legible, written self, but instead a void, where the author has succeeded 'de mettre en plein dans le vide'[74] [hit[ting] the void bang in the middle.]

[74] Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenus,* p. 14. [p. 1.]

Language, Writing, and Gender

For Carrington and Sapienza, the difficult process of writing seems to arrive at the answer that there is a portion of ourselves which is profoundly non-verbal, represented in each authors' work as a stripped body, a naked, skinless being.[75] In Sapienza this state of nakedness is reached after the process of writing has stripped parts of the self away. In this passage at the end of *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, she describes her emotional state after writing the *lettera* that would be published as *Lettera aperta*:

> Per mesi vissi con loro e con la gioia di vedere i loro tratti, le loro membra ricomporsi sulla carta ed intorno a me… poi imbucai quella lettera che vi avevo scritto e fui convinta di avere ritrovato il mio corpo e il mio passato… e andai al mare… ma il mare era troppo freddo e salato per il mio corpo senza pelle. Con terrore nell'acqua mi accorsi che non avevo piú pelle né carne. I nervi e le vene snudate vibravano dolorosamente, graffiati dal sole troppo forte.[76]
>
> [For months I lived with them and with the joy of seeing their faces and limbs come back together on the page and inside of me… then I sent that letter I had written to you, and I was convinced of having rediscovered my body and my past… and I went to the sea… but the sea was too cold and salty for my skinless body. I was terrified to discover in the water that I no longer had skin or flesh. The naked nerves and veins vibrated painfully, clawed by the too-powerful sun.]

The complexity of this passage indicates the difficulty of associating the body with the text. On the one hand, Sapienza embraces the notion that physical life can be imbued into writing, where her friends' and family's faces and limbs are joyfully reanimated on the page. Their physical being, and her own flesh, is present in the text. This mirrors the more distressing image earlier in the text of the dream horse,[77] representing Sapienza, whose flesh is cut away with a knife but transforms – from contact with tears – into pages and pages of dense handwriting. Indeed, although here the physicality of writing does have a more

[75] This image exists also in Cahun's text but relates more to performativity and masking than to language, they write: 'But the make-up I had used seemed indelible. I rubbed so hard to remove it that I took off all the skin. And my soul, like a flayed face, naked, no longer had a human form.' Claude Cahun, *Disavowals,* p. 14.
[76] Goliarda Sapienza, *Il filo di mezzogiorno,* p. 178.
[77] See pp. 111 – 112. of this thesis for analysis of this passage.s

positive connotation, in the second part of the passage there is still a seemingly negative consequence. The pain Sapienza feels at being naked and exposed could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the painful vibrating nerves may be a necessary and positive return to feeling and sensitivity after a long period of absence in mental illness, where writing has allowed Sapienza to re-engage with her own body and self at its core. Secondly, and more negatively, the act of writing is found not to be a panacea, and indeed misleading, as Sapienza believes to have rediscovered her body, but finds a disconnect between her written and lived self, and is struck with horror that she has lost some part of herself in the process of writing. She has put herself and her body into the text, but she still has to *live,* begging the question: if the body, or the self, is placed into the text, what is left of the living person? What happens after the last page?

It is fitting that Sapienza introduces this note of doubt into the text through the image of the sea, as Alberica Bazzoni has explored particularly with reference to *L'arte della gioia* , the sea is a powerful recurrent image throughout Sapienza's work.[78] Bazzoni writes that in *L'arte della gioia* the act of learning to swim is, 'on a quite direct symbolical level, to accept the impossibility of full control and the openness to fluidity',[79] a metaphor which resonates strongly with the act of writing, and the notion that life too evades the full control of language. In light of this analysis, the act of swimming at the end of *Il filo di mezzogiorno* represents the fluidity and ungovernability of lived experience in conflict with the control gained through the written text. This is a striking image on which to end the novel, and conveys an idea of keen interest to the study of autobiography. Here Sapienza seems to show the reader that her written self has been communicated, to some positive

[78] See pages 116-117 and also p. 174 of Alberica Bazzoni, Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative.
[79] Alberica Bazzoni, *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative*, DPhil Thesis, Oxford University, 2014, p. 117.

effect, and yet the living unknown self continues on, fittingly shown swimming in a sea representing the great fluidity and ungovernability of life, unbeholden to language.

For Carrington too the image of a skinless being is used to convey a core, non-verbal self, as she explores in the short story 'My Mother is a Cow':

> Then there is no learning?
>
> There is none. Understanding is only that which is written in living, primary matter. The primary shadowless beings are letters that make words you can't read. Their condition is constant suffering because they're naked and skinless. Their bloodstream is without defence.
>
> Who are they?
>
> Those who no longer pretend to know who they are.[80]

There is a striking similarity here to Sapienza's painful over-exposure to the elements, where being non-verbal, despite possessing 'understanding', is a condition of 'constant suffering'. In the context of her other autobiographical texts, Carrington's assertion that the 'primary beings' are 'those who no longer pretend to know who they are' is particularly interesting, affirming that selfhood is fluid and unknowable even to the subject themselves, thus diminishing the idea that identity should be writable or legible. It also suggests that all identity is performative, and that 'truth' consists of abandoning the performance to become, not a void exactly, but a 'shadowless being'. Earlier in the story, Carrington explores further this idea of identity as performance, or disguise, aided and abetted by language. The 'horned goddess' advises the narrator that '[t]o be one human creature is to be a legion of mannequins […] Every individual gives names to his mannequins and nearly all these names begin with 'I am' and are followed by a long stream of lies.'[81] The male gender of 'every individual' here is certainly deliberate, contrasting with the female goddess bestowing this wisdom. Importantly, 'My Mother is a Cow', is one of the author's most

[80] Leonora Carrington, 'My Mother is a Cow', *The Debutante and Other Stories,* pp. 112 -116, p. 116.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

esoteric and overtly feminist pieces. The story depicts a struggle against the machine-like logic of a society run by 'Watchers', who 'possess unlimited knowledge but have no understanding',[82] in contrast with the maternal figure of the ancestral cow. This is perhaps the most explicit example in Carrington's work of an ecofeminist goddess worship paradigm, an idea which is also explored in *The Hearing Trumpet* where the true religion of Mary Magdalen and Mother Earth has been usurped by patriarchal Christianity. These images of the potential for female power and knowledge have been analysed already in the previous chapter on religious imagery in *The Hearing Trumpet*, and also in the previous chapter on gender where I discussed collective female identity more broadly in Carrington's work. Where this topic intersects with the more precise question at hand of language and gender is that Carrington chooses to align this awareness of a feminine primary truth or knowledge with the absence of language, or rather a *different*, non-verbal language, of 'letters that make words you can't read'. The binary which is set up in 'My Mother is a Cow', of an elemental, non-verbal femininity, in conflict with an artificial, linguistic masculinity, is also explored at great length in the novel *The Stone Door.* In this text, women are depicted as having been excluded from the group of caretakers (or gatekeepers) of human knowledge and society. In order for balance and harmony to be restored the two genders must be reunited (through 'the stone door' of the womb), and feminine knowledge to be restored, '[t]o hack away the crust of what we have forgotten and rediscover things we knew before we were born',[83] an image that recurs in 'My Mother is a Cow' where maternity, or 'the umbilical ladder'[84] is the most apparent paradigm for holiness and truth.

This association of female identity with the physical or non-verbal, and especially with the female function of motherhood, has an uncomfortable connotation of biological essentialism, very much in line with the key feminist texts of this period. While analysis of

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[83] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 14.
[84] Leonora Carrington, 'My Mother is a Cow', p. 113.

gender has become more plural in recent years (seeking to evade more and more the binaries of mind and body, where these are correlated with male and female) still Carrington and Sapienza, it can be understood, are writing within an historical context, and have indeed been neglected for their contribution to the developing understanding of women's identity and its relationship to language taking place in the 1950s, 60s and 70s when they are writing many of their most important works. Anna Watz has explored Carrington's intersection with poststructuralist feminism of this period, noting particularly that where Carrington's text *The Stone Door* predates many key texts of that movement, and that consequently Carrington 'does not always have access to the terminology that would come to characterise the discourse of critical theory.'[85] They share however the overarching feminist belief of this period that the prevailing linguistic structures have not been constructed for women, and that therefore a woman's writing comes from a dislocated place outside of language, or form an entirely new conception of language, drawing on 'a language buried at the back of time'. [86] In this context, beyond the disruption of language and meaning found in deconstruction theory, there is a further disruption for the woman writer, for whom the disconnect between life and language is exacerbated by the lack of space for female experience within the written or spoken word. Of course, there are a great many voices in feminist thought from this period, and it is not my intention to present the writings of Cixous and Kristeva, as my key examples here, as homogenous and interchangeable, or wholly representative of their peers. Just as this project does not intend to efface the many differences between Carrington and Sapienza, or to present them as ideologically analogous simply as a result of their gender. Indeed, to give just one example, Sapienza's treatment of motherhood and pregnancy differs drastically to Carrington's, depicting more ambivalent and detailed personal relationships between mothers and

[85] Anna Watz, 'A language buried at the back of time: *The Stone Door and Poststructuralist Feminism'*, in Eburne and McAra (eds.), pp. 90-104, p. 92.
[86] Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door,* p. 26.

daughters in both her fiction and autobiography, and not engaging in the archetypal or historical dimension of Carrington's symbolic mother nature. By considering the meaning of their work as 'women's writing', I mean to consider their differing contributions to a plural ecosystem, recalling Cixous as she writes:

> But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible.[87]

Cixous here evokes the interdisciplinary output of both Carrington and Sapienza, who seem to both confirm the inexhaustibility of women's imaginary. Yet, as Cixous will also sustain, the imaginary may not always be supported by the tools of representation, especially language, resulting in a sense of uncommunicated and frustrated female identity. While Carrington is certainly more overt and lavish in her imagery of goddesses and cows, Sapienza's non-verbal core of identity also has a gendered dimension. Let us return to her recurrent use of the sea as a metaphor, which Bazzoni has identified not only as a symbol of fluidity and loss of control, but also, in *L'arte della gioia* at least, 'assumed overtly as an image representing women.'[88] Building on this idea, the association of the sea with women relates also to the problem of representation, and more specifically here of the ability of language or art to depict female experience. This can be seen very explicitly in *Io, Jean Gabin,* where, as previously discussed, Sapienza places herself outside of the female identity by identifying with Jean Gabin, and observes womanhood as she does the beauty and wilderness of the sea:

> […] e per me la donna è stata sempre il mare. Intendiamoci, non un mare delineato da un'elegante cornice dorata per fanatici del paesaggio, ma il mare segreto di vita, avventura magnifica o disperata, bara e culla[…][89]

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[87] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 876.
[88] Alberica Bazzoni, Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Goliarda Sapienza's Narrative, p. 174.
[89] Goliarda Sapienza, *Io, Jean Gabin,* p. 3

> [And for me woman has always been the sea. By that I mean, not a sea sketched within an elegant golden frame for admirers of landscapes, but the secret sea of life, a magnificent or desperate adventure, coffin and cradle[…]]

Sapienza's reference to landscapes and visual art here offers a compelling metaphor for the disconnect felt between lived female experience and that manipulated version presented by cultural representations, with the evident implication that those most celebrated landscapes would be invariably created by men. 'The secret sea of life' suggests again a core of identity that is uncommunicable through the traditional means of art. This quotation also importantly centres the act of communication with an audience, referencing the typical preferences of an audience, the *fanatici del paesaggio,* in contrast to the secret truth, unseen by any spectator. Meanwhile, Cixous goes on from her praise of the richness of women's imaginary to bemoan the restrictions of typical artistic representation with strikingly similar language to Sapienza, writing that 'Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune.'[90] 'Torrents' evokes a pleasing parallel to the adventurous untameable sea in Sapienza's metaphor, and again here there is the sense that the most celebrated or typical forms of artistic expression are insufficient to truly represent female experience. The mention of the frame in both quotations is important in that it suggests an element of the representation which is external and separate to the image depicted, but which restricts the scope of the vision and also signals the value to the spectator. Art, both Sapienza and Cixous remind us, is an economic proposition, and this as well as language has excluded the full and equal participation of women.

Turning back again to language, how can it account for these 'luminous torrents'? How do Carrington and Sapienza attempt to make a space for female identity in their writing? In large part, this is done by drawing attention to the deficiencies of language and alluding to the uncommunicated core self, as we saw with Cahun, reaching the limits of words to

[90] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 876.

demonstrate the outline of a shadow identity. Carrington's own feminist polemical 'What is a Woman?' where she purports to not identify with the label of woman, is a key example of this kind of writing which draws conclusions through outlining an absence of meaning, ensuring representation by demonstrating the ways in which language is not representative. Compellingly, Cahun also is a very early advocate for a new form of language, asserting that neither the male or female pronoun is entirely accurate, and instead employing the French neutral pronoun 'on'.[91] Julia Kristeva explores this inability of words to depict life, returning again to embodied experience as a counterpart to 'remote words':

> Words always too remote, too abstract to capture the subterranean swarm of seconds, insinuating themselves into unimaginable places. Writing them down tests an argument, as does love. What is love, for a woman, the same thing as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash of the unnameable, woven of abstractions to be torn apart. Let a body finally venture out of its shelter, expose itself in meaning beneath a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, fragmented, visions, metaphors of the invisible.[92]

Kristeva here captures precisely the tension at stake throughout this chapter between living, moving time, 'the subterranean swarm of seconds' and the 'remote', 'abstract', word. Yet her description also alludes to the immense power of language to communicate life, if only briefly, or incompletely, as 'flashes of the unnameable' or 'metaphors of the invisible'. Perhaps her most striking assertion is that words might assist the body to 'venture out of its shelter' (for what purpose?). Such a body is both hidden behind, yet visible through, a 'veil of words'. The veil is a useful metaphor to consider the barrier that the text forms between the author and their reader, yet it is only through the veil that the former can be seen at all. The veil of writing obscures and reveals the body.

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[91] In line with scholars such as Felicity Gee, I have used 'they/them' pronouns to refer to Cahun throughout, based on Cahun's own assertion in *Disavowals*: 'Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me.'

[92] Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', transl. by Arthur Goldhammer, in Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.), *The Female Body in Western Culture,* pp. 99-118, p. 100.

Sapienza's writing is frequently visceral and physical in a way that chimes with Kristeva's descriptor 'WORD FLESH'. Yet, as Sapienza goes through the process that Kristeva describes, of veiling the body in words, it seems unclear whether meaning is derived from the physical or the linguistic, or where the line can be drawn between the two. Angelo Pellegrino admits the struggle in reconciling this tension as he writes that: 'Mi rendo conto che può apparire abnorme sostenerlo, ma scrivere col sangue per Goliarda non era propriamente una metafora.'[93] [I realise that it may seem strange to say it, but writing in blood wasn't really a metaphor for Goliarda.'] Here, body and text become one and the same, the body being central and essential to the act of writing. This language is notably more violent than Kristeva's veiled body, with the blood indicating suffering and pain. Maria Arena expands this analysis of bodily writing, and violence, to include the reader, describing her own reading experience of *Il filo di mezzogiorno*:

> […] lettura crudele su scrittura crudele, ne ripercorro l'enigma che nasconde e che mi rapì ossessionata dalla ferita che Goliarda ha inciso sulla pagina con una tale poesia che ad ogni lettura sanguina prepotentemente.[94]
>
> [[…] cruel reading on cruel writing, I recall the enigma which hides and which fascinates me, obsessed with the wound that Goliarda has cut into the page with such poetry that at each reading it bleeds overwhelmingly.

Arena's analysis here is compelling, and refers primarily to a personal experience, but it elides the potential for divergence between author and reader, in the way that the reading experience is layered upon the writing experience, so that they mirror each other. Such an approach may rely too heavily on identification as the main driver in the act of reading, a more present danger perhaps for women's writing where the solidarity of the feminist cause can underpin the presumed readership of the text. Arena also adds to Pellegrino's association of writing with bleeding, but here the page itself is wounded, cut by the author and then reopened to bleed each time that it is read. These examples indicate an extreme act

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[93] Angelo Pellegrino, 'Un personaggio singolare, un romanzo nuovo, una donna da amare per sempre', in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* La Tartaruga (Milano: 2011), p. 69.
[94] Maria Arena, '*Il filo di mezzogiorno:* Morte e rinascita attraverso la scrittura', in Giovanna Providenti (ed.) '*Quel sogno d'essere' di Goliarda Sapienza*, pp. 149 – 156, p. 150.

of inscribing the physical body into the text, where the meaning, and value, of the text seems to be located precisely in its proximity to the body, in what Pellegrino describes as 'intelligenza del cuore'[95] [intelligence of the heart]. And yet, simultaneously, Sapienza seems to derive meaning from the written word, sometimes seeing it as more solid, more *real* than the physical, she writes that: 'Per me quella che chiamiamo vita, prende consistenza solo se riesco a tradurla in scrittura.'[96] [For me that which we call life, only takes form if I manage to translate it into writing.] Her choice of the word 'translate' here seems pertinent, life and writing are not of the same substance, one has to be translated into the other. For all of Sapienza's fluid lived experience, the solidity of words here provides form, and therefore meaning.

[95] Angelo Pellegrino, 'Un personaggio singolare, un romanzo nuovo, una donna da amare per sempre', in Monica Farnetti (ed.), *Appassionata Sapienza,* p. 69.
[96] Goliarda Sapienza, *Le certezze del dubbio,* p. 139.

Conclusion

> 'The skeleton was as happy as a madman whose straitjacket had been taken off. He felt liberated at being able to walk without flesh. The mosquitoes didn't bite him anymore. He didn't have to have his hair cut. He was neither hungry nor thirsty, hot nor cold.'[97]

In pursuit of liberation Carrington and Sapienza have railed against Catholicism and other doctrines, the straitjacket of psychiatric treatment, and the rigid binary of gender roles. Often, this resistance is expressed through an affirmation of embodiment, and at other times through the liberating act of writing. The potential of both body and text have been evident throughout this thesis, yet these entities have also been found to sometimes be at war with one another, with my final chapter finding that the written word can be another form of constraint on individual subjectivity. But is the embodied self the answer, the ultimate riposte of the subject to external control? Not really. In one of her most whimsical stories 'The Skeleton's Holiday', Carrington finds another means of unburdening the self from constraints. In this story the skeleton is liberated from the flesh, happier, lighter and freer for not having the weighty encumbrance of body, and in tune with the wider universe for being so unencumbered. The few short pages of this story demonstrate the open-endedness of Carrington's philosophy. Like the written word, the embodied self can at times be liberating but also another form of limitation, another external object to be cast aside. Yet the remaining bones of Carrington's skeleton still affirm the importance of a physical presence, and the story relishes in the details of being in the world as bones, echoing Sapienza's open nerves and veins when she too described herself as a being without flesh, yet still deeply attuned to the physical experience of being in the world. In this paradigm identity is not equivalent to body, but expressing identity without reference to the physical self is doomed to failure. Circling back to the first chapter of this thesis, which explored the indivisible nature of body and mind, we find again that for Carrington and Sapienza bodily

[97] Leonora Carrington, 'The Skeleton's Holiday', in *The Debutante and Other Stories,* p. 38.

freedom is inextricably linked to intellectual freedom. This thesis has shown that at every turn, Carrington and Sapienza share a relentless resistance to all forms of limitation, embracing uncertainty, new experience, and an incommunicable core of identity. In reaching this conclusion, my analysis has unearthed new approaches to several of the key texts in each author's oeuvre.

At the outset of the thesis, I identified that the unorthodox comparative pairing of this project would open new avenues in Sapienza's work in the light of Carrington's Surrealist sensibilities. In the first chapter this introduced a focus on the anti-clericalism of Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet*, drawing out a similar approach to Catholicism in *L'arte della gioia* , a previously underexplored aspect of that text despite its original subtitle of *un Romenzo anticlericale*. The heroines' journeys of each text also suggested an original focus on the importance of learning to both narratives, an approach that complements existing research on freedom and maturity in these texts.

Subsequently, in the second chapter the intersection of the spoken and written word in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Down Below* prompted an in depth philological analysis of the latter text, whose complex composition had hitherto been almost entirely neglected in favour of thematic analysis. This approach also allowed for a better understanding of the effect of bilingualism in Carrington's work. Once again, the comparison of a Surrealist and 'non' Surrealist text was pertinent here, where the boundaries between the two became particularly permeable in the context of the narration of madness.

The third chapter of this thesis drew upon extensive existing research on the depiction of gender in each author's work. The most fruitful observation to emerge from the comparison between Carrington and Sapienza here is the remarkably unusual choice to depict themselves as male alter egos in texts on their adolescence or childhood. This allowed for a novel approach to *Little Francis* and *Io, Jean Gabin* where each text was read in the context

of theory on drag performance, and also allowed for a detailed analysis of the ways in which each author plays with the boundary between fact and fiction in their autobiography.

The final chapter took a much broader approach, not centring on a direct, sustained comparison of two works, but instead attempting to offer a new perspective on the significance of writing, language and narrative to Carrington and Sapienza. This analysis was borne of the observation that criticism of Carrington as a Surrealist author often effaces the sense of authorial intention and deliberate artistic practice which is overwhelmingly apparent in criticism of Sapienza. Thus by bringing Carrington out of Surrealism in this way, a new approach is gained that aligns her with a wider tradition of women's autobiography, and the shared expectations of authenticity and truth that have accompanied each woman's artistic career.

Out of these different points of comparison emerges a pattern of resistance, one that is particularly characterised by a shared sense of dynamism. The texts of both authors are marked by this dynamism, by an openness and - at times counterintuitive - feeling of joy. Manifesting in such diverse forms and styles even within each author's works, from Sapienza's cyclical returns to childhood in *Lettera aperta, Il filo di mezzogiorno* and *Io, Jean, Gabin*, to her epic and expansive self-history in *L'arte della gioia* , and from Carrington's sprawling mythology in *The Hearing Trumpet* and *The Stone Door,* to her unravelled personal dreamworld in *Little Francis* and *Down Below*. Although resistance emerges only in response to external forms of constraint, any period of stasis or entrapment is sure never to last for long. Across their works is a distinctive ethos of cumulative, open-ended potential. In the first chapter I described the approach of each author as a limitless depiction of personal identity, and indeed each chapter has demonstrated the overcoming of a different form of limit. That chapter also focused upon knowledge, which is a useful framework here for considering the interdependence of bodily and intellectual experience, and the importance of overcoming limitation on both planes. As Carrington writes in *The*

Stone Door: 'I feel small and ignorant and this pleases me not at all. I cannot accept this, I want to feel enormous and powerful.'[98] For me, this is the single most important aspect of both Carrington and Sapienza's work, the *refusal* to accept the status quo, and the will to enormity. It is manifested in their thematic, stylistic and formal choices as authors. Reminiscent of the child Goliarda's identification with the larger than life film-star Jean Gabin, in their writing they become enormous, powerful, and limitless.

Following on from this project, I hope to see a continuation and expansion of interest in both Carrington and Sapienza. As I finish this thesis Carrington's work is on display in the Tate Modern under the title 'Surrealism without Borders', in recognition of the remarkable work she undertook in Mexico. This project has in part been limited by my Eurocentric viewpoint, and no doubt future scholars may be able to expand upon the themes explored here with reference to a more diverse range of voices. Furthermore, it would be wonderful to see Carrington's writing explored further, perhaps without the borders of Surrealism itself, in recognition of the expansive and fluid worldview taken up by Carrington and by Sapienza.

[98]Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door*, p. 15.

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