CHRISTINA SIGGERS MANSON

DONNA IN GUERRA, UOMO IN CRISI: FAMILIAL ROLES AND PATRIARCHAL LEGACIES IN DACIA MARAINI AND NATALIA GINZBURG

PhD in Italian

2006

University of Kent

Donna in guerra, uomo in crisi: Familial Roles and Patriarchal Legacies in Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg

In this study of Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg's literature, which is the first to offer an in-depth comparative analysis of the two authors, I consider their views on patriarchal legacies such as rape, violence, and abortion and how they depict their characters fulfilling familial roles within Italian patriarchal society. In my Introduction, I outline briefly the major changes affecting women and the family in post-war Italy and present Maraini and Ginzburg's reactions to such legal and social changes. I also consider the influence of Fascism and Catholicism on social expectations and behaviour. Then, in the first chapter, I look at the authors' opinions on women's position in Italian society, considering issues such as violence and rape, which are used by patriarchy to control women and their bodies. I then turn to examples of characters in the authors' fiction who attempt to break the chain of patriarchal legacies and strive for personal independence, with varying success.

In the next four chapters, I examine in turn the presentation of husbands, wives, mothers, and fathers in Maraini and Ginzburg's fiction, looking at socio-historical influences that affect characters in these familial roles and expanding on and adding to previous critical evaluation of their characters. I will judge how the pressures placed on individuals by social expectations shape the characters' behaviour and how familial labels constrict the movement of men and women, as they struggle to find an identity that is independent of their familial duties. Throughout this study, I will consider differences and similarities in Maraini and Ginzburg's writing, offering original readings of their characters and novels. I will focus in particular on how their different priorities regarding their literature results in diverse writing styles and choice of subject matter, which make a comparison of their work valid and compelling.

Contents

Introduction

In spite of their positions as two of Italy's most prominent women writers, there has been little comparative analysis of the work of Natalia Ginzburg (1916-1991) and Dacia Maraini (1936-). This thesis hopes to go some way towards rectifying this lacuna, presenting the first sustained comparative study of the two authors. It takes into consideration the authors' standpoints on various issues that recur throughout their work, in particular regarding individuals' roles within the family and the different types of violence against women in patriarchal society. Although these standpoints appear at first glance to be disparate, closer examination reveals that in fact Maraini and Ginzburg share many fundamental beliefs regarding matters such as the role of the family in Italian culture and women's rights to abortion, divorce, and contraception. Their differing treatment of similar subject matter renders a comparison of their work valid and compelling and attests to the different priorities that they have with regard to their work. These different priorities, which I explore in depth, influence each author considerably.

Throughout this study, I have concentrated on the fiction of Ginzburg and Maraini, offering close analyses of the texts which best show their representations of characters fulfilling familial roles and either fighting or succumbing to patriarchal oppression. However, whilst taking my starting point from the texts themselves, my analysis takes into account the socio-historical setting in which the authors were working, appreciating the key legal and social changes that occurred in post-war Italian society. In line with this approach, I have used studies focusing on Italian history and society, for example by Paul Ginsborg, Charles Richards, Adrian Lyttelton, and Martin Clark, in order to broaden out Ginzburg and Maraini's texts with relevant sociological aspects. I have selected works on Fascist policies and propaganda regarding women, maternity, and the family which, in spite of the decline of the Fascist regime itself, continued to influence the lives of Italian women in post-war society. I have given attention also to works concentrating on Sicilian society, which are imperative to understanding Maraini's background and development as an author and specifically her novel *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*.

Given the privileged position and influence of the Catholic Church in Italy and its rhetoric on women and the family, I have utilized studies of Catholicism's stance on sexuality and women, such as that by Uta Ranke-Heinemann, and the seminal work by Marina Warner which focuses on the figure of the Virgin Mary as the ideal to which all Italian women are encouraged to aspire. I have looked widely at the idea of maternal

sacrifice, which both Ginzburg and Maraini reflect on in several of their works. In my chapter on mothers, I have drawn on Jung's writing on the mother archetype, which is particularly relevant to Catholic culture. In addition, Luce Irigaray's theories on relational identity and patriarchy's control of the mother provide a methodological framework in which to set my appraisal of Ginzburg and Maraini's texts. In order to support my reading of the maternal figure in Maraini's writing, I have also considered her literature for children, which has until now been ignored in the critical evaluation of her work. I have discussed how she develops ideas found elsewhere in her fiction for adults and how her use of mythical characters and locations and her adaptations of traditional fairy stories deliver a powerful message to her young readers.

The significant advances made in women's rights in Italy in the decades in which Ginzburg and Maraini were writing cannot be overlooked in a study of their work. For this reason, I have chosen to draw on feminist theory and also the contemporary publication *Effe*, which appeared at the height of the feminist movement in Italy and which so far has been largely overlooked in terms of its critical use. *Effe* aimed to bring to the fore women's issues such as the right to abortion and contraception and to highlight the violence and prejudice inherent in Italy's institutions and the minds of the Italian people. It offered articles and editorials that coincided with the feminist movement's fundamental aims and encouraged women to feel at ease with their bodies and overcome the shame that was the result of centuries of Catholic indoctrination. The magazine therefore proves to be extremely pertinent to my critical treatment of Ginzburg and Maraini's work, providing relevant material that reflects changes in attitudes during the 1970s.

My choice of theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Virginia Woolf, Nancy Chodorow, and Hélène Cixous reflects the impact that their writings had on the development of Italian feminism. Aspects of their work, for example examining women's motivation behind adultery or how women use their bodies to communicate in patriarchal society, have proved valuable in substantiating my evaluation of Ginzburg and Maraini's fiction. I have also drawn on studies dealing with rape, sexual violence, and pornography by writers such as Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Jessica Benjamin, and Susan Brownmiller in order to support my comparison of Ginzburg and Maraini's depiction of violence in their fiction and the opinions that they convey in their essays and interviews. Whilst Ginzburg and Maraini take contrasting approaches to portraying oppression by men, I explore the idea that their characters are driven by the same motivating factor, which however manifests itself with different results. Using studies

that concentrate on the role of fathers within the family, in particular by Victoria Secunda, Sue Sharpe, Jeff Hearn, and Maureen Green, I examine the private versus public nature of fatherhood, which is seen to cause confusion in both the men themselves and their children in Ginzburg and Maraini's works. These studies also provide material to underscore the idea that paternal violence is often sanctioned by society, becoming a family secret that is not to be openly discussed. In relation to the depiction of fathers in the authors' fiction, I have taken into account the effect of the feminist movement and increased legal rights for women on men's role within the family, considering how these changes shape their behaviour.

As well as exploring their views on general themes, in my analysis I offer original readings of several of Maraini and Ginzburg's texts, taking a new perspective on their portrayals of certain characters. With regard to Ginzburg's work, I have explored closely her characters' psychological development, for example with the unnamed protagonist of *È stato così* and her husband Alberto, where I refer to Jungian theory to expand on Ginzburg's representation of their marriage and Alberto's preference of women. Whereas previous analyses of Ginzburg's fiction often concentrate on her depiction of the family as a whole and its disintegration in Italian society, I propose also to examine more closely the individuals in her works and the motivations behind their behaviour. I put forward an original reading of the troubled figures of Carmine, Ninetta, and Olga in *Famiglia* and explore how Ginzburg adopts psychological indicators to categorise the three main women in the novella. I also consider how male characters in several of Ginzburg's works become entangled in an unsuccessful search for love and companionship, as they confuse sexual love with parental love.

Studies of Maraini's work have tended to privilege analysis of her female figures; in my chapters on husbands and fathers, I have given more attention to the often neglected male figure, for example offering a new reading of Giacinto in *Donna in guerra* and of the complex character of Duke Pietro in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, who is often sidelined by critics in favour of examination of the title character. I have also considered Maraini's exploration of the theme of masculinity and the reactions of her characters when they feel that their masculinity is threatened, for example in connection with the character of Cignalitt' in the recently published *Colomba*. I have drawn comparisons between themes explored in this novel, which has yet to have any substantial criticism published on it, and previous works by Maraini, most notably *Voci* and the contradictory character of Glauco Elia. In my analysis of Maraini's ideas in these works, I have also utilized studies outlining

concepts of masculinity in general (for example by John Beynon and John MacInnes) and works investigating Mussolini's overtly masculine image in particular (by Luisa Passerini and Piero Melograni), which enable me to assess Maraini's criticism of the cult of Il Duce in her analysis of *La vacanza*'s Pompeo Pompei. By setting forth fresh insights into the patriarchal figures in Maraini's work, I have shown that her male characters are not as one-dimensional as they may at first appear and, far from playing merely a supporting role to Maraini's female characters, her male characters are worthy of study in their own right. They are frequently presented by the author as being both oppressors and victims of patriarchal society.

As well as taking into account the social and legal changes taking place around them, I have also judged to what extent Ginzburg and Maraini's own personal experiences inform their fiction. Both authors have published widely on their families and have found success with autobiographical publications, which present private aspects of their lives and emotions regarding key events affecting them. Their relationships with their husbands, partners, and parents are well documented and can be seen to underlie many of the characteristics included in their fictional characters. Both Ginzburg and Maraini's lives have been eventful, including time spent *in confino* and in a Japanese concentration camp respectively, and as such are worthy of attention when illuminating their fiction. Similarly, I have also drawn on the authors' numerous essays, interviews, and newspaper articles to expand, compare and clarify key themes that permeate their fiction.

As I have mentioned, a study looking at two Italian women writers such as Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini would not be complete without first considering the cultural and political climate in which they were educated and wrote. This is perhaps rendered even more essential by the peculiarities of Italian law and social attitudes towards women.. The following introduction serves to provide a general overview of the socio-historical setting in which Ginzburg and Maraini were working and also takes into account the Catholic culture which undoubtedly influenced both, notwithstanding Ginzburg's Jewish heritage.

The feminist movement in Italy played a large part in the development of both authors' work. Although Ginzburg was not an active member of the movement, she was influenced by it and reacted to it in her literature and non-fiction, particularly exploring feminism's effect on male-female interaction. By contrast, Maraini was an active campaigner and self-declared supporter of women's liberation, and her literature charts her involvement with feminism and her awareness of contemporary issues regarding women's status in Italy. Both authors' fiction can be seen as a response to social developments in Italy, although

their intentions with regard to their literature differs, which in turn affects the styles and themes explored in their work. As a rule, Maraini's work employs more explicit language and graphic descriptions of violence, as she aims both to shock and inform her readers, whereas Ginzburg's portrayals of family disintegration adhere to more traditional forms of expression and were consequently more palatable to male critics.

Women's role in Italian society has undergone various changes since the beginning of the twentieth century. Although, as in several other European countries, Italian women had earned the respect and admiration of many through their work and participation in traditionally male-driven industries and activities during the First World War, Fascism soon reversed any progress that had been made in the struggle for equal rights.[1] Fascist policies were aimed at driving women from the workplace back into the home. Desperate to increase Italy's population, the government embarked on a sustained propaganda campaign to encourage women to commit themselves to motherhood and passed laws to limit women's employment opportunities and rights in the workplace: for example, a 1927 law established lower wages for women.[2] Nevertheless, Fascist policies were often contradictory. In spite of encouraging women to be stay-at-home mothers, in 1934 maternity leave was extended to support new mothers and the legal age for girls to work was lowered from fourteen to twelve years.[3] However, Miriam Mafai points out that Fascism's attitude towards women's role in society was nothing new:

> Non c'è motivo per ritenere che le donne fossero particolarmente avverse a questo tipo di regime, che proponeva e imponeva un modello di famiglia e di vita già interiorizzato attraverso l'adesione alla cultura cattolica.[4]

Fascism therefore merely compounded Catholic teaching on women, placing emphasis on woman's function as 'mother'.

The end of Fascism, combined with recognition of women's participation in the Resistance effort, gave women the chance of a new role in society.[5] Whilst many of their

---

[1] Ugo Piscopo, *Paese sommerso: Realtà italiana dei giorni nostri* ([Palermo]: Palumbo, 1983), pp. 470-471.
[2] Adrian Lyttelton (ed.), *Liberal and Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 187-189.
[3] Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 108-109.
[4] Miriam Mafai, *L'apprendistato della politica: le donne italiane nel dopoguerra* (Rome: Riuniti, 1979), p. 16.
[5] Piscopo, *Paese sommerso*, p. 479.

European counterparts had been awarded either directly or indirectly for their role in the First World War effort with the right to vote, Italian women had to wait until after the Second World War for their own suffrage which, according to Francesca Romana Koch, was presented to them less as a right than a prize.[6] However, the collapse of Fascism was in itself not sufficient to advance women's position: it had to be combined with a drastic change of attitudes towards women and their role in Italy on both a public and personal level. On a public level, little changed dramatically with regard to the way that women were viewed. The propaganda of the 1946 election was characterized, for women, 'dai temi della famiglia, [...] dall'esaltazione delle qualità femminili e quindi della maternità'.[7] Yet, as Paul Ginsborg points out, this stance actually appealed to many women, who desired a return to the normality of family life after so many years of war, and subsequent Christian Democratic governments found widespread support for policies that resolutely defended the family institution.[8] Whilst, on the whole, the party's policies regarding women were dominated by its desire to safeguard the traditional family set up, they were sometimes contradictory: for example, in August 1950 a law was introduced, which made it illegal to fire women because they were pregnant; yet, the so-called *clausola di nubilato* (cancelled only in 1963) authorized the dismissal of women on marriage.[9]

Italy's long tradition of patriarchal quashing of women's freedom and rights was not only engrained within its legal system, but, perhaps more damagingly, also within the minds of men and women, who had been conditioned over centuries to view women's inferiority as natural and women's sexuality as dangerous. The so-called *delitto d'onore* perhaps best exemplifies this. Until the law was abrogated in 1981, murder or violence against family members was viewed more leniently if the perpetrator was defending the family honour. Many believed that it was men's responsibility to protect a family's reputation and ensure the chastity of female members. This opinion was especially prevalent in Maraini's Sicily where, according to tradition, a girl losing her virginity before marriage should be killed to avoid bringing shame on the family, who were seen as being

---

[6] Francesca Romana Koch, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', in *Storia della società italiana: Il miracolo economico e il centro-sinistra: Parte quinta, Vol. XXIV*, ed. by Ugo Ascoli and others (Milan: Teti, 1990), pp. 223-289 (p. 228).
[7] ibid., p. 229.
[8] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 77.
[9] Koch, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', p. 237.

incapable of controlling its female members.[10] In many respects, male superiority over women, although no longer legally prescribed, remains inherent in social attitudes to varying degrees.

The image of women in post-war Italy was complicated further by the increasing popularity of television and cinema, as well as the use of advertising which indoctrinated Italian women with an ideal of femininity. In reaction to the growing influence of the big screen, Claudia Cese raises the question:

> Quante Anite Eckberg, da quanti cartelloni, sono entrate dentro di noi, maschi e femmine, nelle nostre speranze di identificazione? [...] Quante donne si torturano perché il loro aspetto fisico non corrisponde all'ideale estetico del mondo in cui vivono, l'ideale personificato dall'attrice in voga? Probabilmente noi tutti, uomini e donne, succhiamo questi ideali estetici, queste immagini ideali, insieme al latte materno.[11]

Thus, added to the numerous religious paintings depicting the Madonna as the epitome of perfection, Italian women came face to face with growing numbers of glossy images of perfect television and film stars. Early television in Italy was subject to strict sexual and political censorship and exalted the traditional family model.[12] Advertisements also placed women firmly in the home, lauding the figure of the modern Italian woman as 'tutta casa e famiglia'.[13] To highlight the widespread sexism of advertising, *Effe* symbolically published a blank page in its March 1974 edition, with the words 'Questa pagina attende una pubblicità che non offenda la donna'.[14]

The institution of the family in Italy has often been seen as one of the country's strengths. In his study of Italians, Charles Richards presents a positive picture of Italy as 'a mosaic made up of ten million families,' concluding that 'it is the family that has allowed Italians to raise their standard of living to among the highest in Europe'.[15] However, it is his view that 'the hold of the family on its members is not regarded as a form of tyranny in

---

[10] See Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 89-90.
[11] Claudia Cese, 'La donna e la tartaruga', *Effe*, April-May 1974, pp. 6-8 (p. 8).
[12] See Koch, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', pp. 244-245.
[13] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 244.
[14] *Effe*, March 1974, p. 43. The feminist monthly magazine *Effe* was set up in 1973 and edited by Adele Cambria. By 1974, its circulation had risen to 35,000 copies. It received numerous letters complaining about the advertisements published in the first few editions. It therefore decided to rely on donations for funding.
[15] Charles Richards, *The New Italians* (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 125-126.

Italy',[16] which would be most objectionable to many feminist campaigners, who saw the family's control precisely as tyrannical. Italy's preoccupation with the family and the importance placed on woman's role as mother made it initially difficult for the feminist campaign to win widespread support, as any increased rights for women were seen as a direct challenge to the institution of the family.

Key issues highlighted by Italian feminists included the legalization of abortion and divorce, and the overturning of laws regarding the family that discriminated against women. The campaign for the introduction of a divorce bill was an uphill struggle, opposed continuously by the Church and the Christian Democrats. In his study, *The Italians*, republished in 1968, Luigi Barzini Junior echoes the views of many others when he labels divorce 'a barbarous and ruinous institution' and praises the fact that there is no divorce law in Italy 'and there never will be'.[17] Such confident assertions, merely two years before its legalization, help to explain the shock and dismay that many felt when divorce eventually became law in 1970. Opponents subsequently organized a referendum, which was held in 1974, in an attempt to annul the law; however the surprising majority of 59.1% in favour of the divorce law showed that there had been a gradual change in social attitudes with many people accepting that it was perhaps better to end a failed marriage.[18] Pro-divorce campaigners saw the referendum as a direct challenge to women's rights, even though it affected men's rights as well. In an edition of *Effe* dedicated to the impending vote, the *Gruppi Femministi di Milano* declares unequivocally that 'se l'obiettivo di fondo di questo referendum è quindi di metterci a tacere, [...] noi diciamo: BASTA COL TACERE'.[19] Likewise, on 27th April 1974 in Rome, a pro-divorce demonstration saw women singing and waving banners with pictures of open mouths and the slogan 'Facciamoci sentire', before individual women took to the stage to recount their personal experiences.[20] Such campaigners were gradually breaking the historical silence of women in patriarchal society, forcing the authorities to take notice.

With divorce legalized, feminists' attention focused on abortion and contraception. Up until 1971, Article 553 forbade the promotion or distribution of contraceptives, and even after its abrogation official efforts to help women were not satisfactory in the eyes of many

---

[16] ibid., p. 126.
[17] Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1964]), p. 233.
[18] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, pp. 335-336, 349-351.
[19] *Gruppi Femministi di Milano*, 'Dal matrimonio al divorzio', *Effe*, April-May 1974, pp. 55-59 (p. 58). Emphasis in original.
[20] Lara Foletti, 'Femminismo come festa', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 57-58 (p. 57).

feminist campaigners. In 1973, *Effe* delivered a damning condemnation of the continued juridical, religious, and medical oppression of women:

> La situazione riguardo alla contraccezione è [...] rimasta in Italia delle peggiori, sia per l'ignoranza in cui le donne sono tenute (grazie alla nostra cara chiesa) sia per l'ignoranza della quasi totalità dei medici che al riguardo ne sanno quanto i geologi. [...] Poichè in Italia si preferisce ancora lasciare abortire le donne, malamente, nella paura e nella clandestinità e il potere è rimasto sordo a qualsiasi politica di prevenzione delle nascite, dobbiamo cominciare noi a gestire questa lotta in prima persona, per noi stesse e per tutte.[21]

Increasingly, women felt that they could not depend on official sources for help, but must rely on themselves to effect a change. In 1975 the *Movimento della Liberazione delle Donne Italiane* (MLD) collected the signatures required under Italian law to organize a referendum on the issue, and in 1976 fifty thousand demonstrators marched on Rome in support of an abortion law. After the unexpected success of the divorce referendum, the political parties tried to reach a mutual agreement on abortion to avoid holding another public vote. After much delay and debate both parties made concessions and abortion was finally legalized in 1978. However, many feminists were still unhappy about certain terms of the new law, which denied women the right to abortion 'on demand'. Girls under the age of eighteen still also required parental permission, which did little to improve their previous situation.[22]

Both Ginzburg and Maraini were supporters of legal abortion, although Ginzburg in particular disliked the slogans and language used by the feminist movement. Both agreed that legal abortion was essential to reduce the thousands of life-threatening abortions carried out secretly in Italy each year. They recognized that official and unofficial attitudes towards abortion were conflicting, as Paul Ginsborg stresses: 'there could not have been a greater gap between, on the one hand, the official morality of church and state, and, on the other, social reality'.[23] Ginzburg and Maraini's novels contain various examples highlighting the damage inflicted on women and young girls by the lack of legal abortion. Pregnancies in their books often result either in unwanted children or back-street terminations, with the consequences highlighted in their fiction ranging from Ginzburg's

---

[21] Leslie Leonelli, 'Anticoncezionali: Il diaframma ha 80 anni ma non li dimostra', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 26-28 (p. 27).
[22] Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, pp. 370, 394.
[23] ibid., p. 370.

Anna in *Tutti i nostri ieri*, who has no choice but to marry because she is pregnant, to Maraini's Isolina, who is cut into pieces and thrown into a river after a failed abortion.[24]

Added to the victories of legal divorce and abortion, the feminist movement pressurized the Italian government into reviewing existing family law, and 1975 saw the long-awaited establishment of juridical equality between husband and wife, abolishing the idea of male superiority within marriage and virtually all legal discriminations against illegitimate children.[25] The structure of the Italian family had been changed dramatically. The omnipotence of the Italian male had, at least in the legal sense, been eradicated, although in many households women still struggled to assert their independence.

Feminist views differed greatly on the issue of the reformation versus abolition of the family. However, there was widespread agreement that some change was necessary and that the family as it stood in patriarchal society was detrimental to women's liberty. In reaction to the divorce referendum, an article in *Effe* emphasized that 'è la struttura stessa della famiglia che porta all'oppressione della donna ed è quindi la famiglia che va radicalmente trasformata'.[26] Thus, the family in patriarchal society was seen as a means of controlling women rather than providing men and women with mutual support. The organization *Gruppi Femministi di Milano* believes that the violence intrinsic to Italian society forces women to seek refuge in the family:

> È naturale che, in una società come questa, fondata sulla violenza, [...] si cerchino rapporti personali basati sull'accettazione, sulla reciprocità, sull'affetto. Ma l'unica strada che ci viene indicata per realizzare queste esigenze è quella del matrimonio. Questo comporterà l'assunzione del ruolo di mogli e di madri e la strada che pensavamo fosse quella della nostra esclusione: *la famiglia più che un rifugio sarà il nostro ghetto*.[27]

According to this particular group, in order to find protection from societal violence, women have no choice but marriage and are forced to remain within the family institution: in this respect, targeting societal violence rather than the family would result in women's liberation, as its function would become redundant.

Opinions on whether the elimination of the family would actually liberate women vary. Simone de Beauvoir does not believe that its abolition would necessarily emancipate

---

[24] Dacia Maraini, *Isolina* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1985]).
[25] Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 370.
[26] Anon, 'Hanno vinto le donne', *Effe*, June 1974, p. 39.
[27] *Gruppi Femministi di Milano*, 'Dal matrimonio al divorzio', p. 59. Emphasis in original.

women,[28] whilst Carla Lonzi states that it would, as the family is the founding stone of patriarchal order and marks the unconditional surrender of women to male domination.[29] However, seeing that the elimination of the family is unlikely to occur in the near future, encouraging change of its structure is a more feasible option and, according to Luce Irigaray, the recognition of sexual difference is fundamental to refounding the family.[30] Irigaray writes that in the family as constructed under patriarchy, men and women are required to take on functional roles:

> In the family conceived in this way, each member alienates their own identity in order to compose a single undifferentiated unit. The sexed identity necessary for the constitution of the family is not cultivated for itself, but rather for what it can contribute to the unity of the family. Therein lies the origin of our conception of man and of woman as two halves of humanity rather than as two different identities, and the reason why they are valued more as father and mother than as individuals.[31]

From this we understand that the problem lies in the fact that men and women lose their identity in the family, becoming subsumed into their familial roles. This is something that occurs throughout both Ginzburg and Maraini's fiction, as characters struggle to find an identity outside of their functions of wife, mother, husband, and father.

Ginzburg and Maraini differ greatly on the question of the family. Whilst Ginzburg defends the family institution at all costs, Maraini has reservations about women's ability to achieve true liberty within the restrictive bonds of marriage and maternity. For Ginzburg, family is the answer to many social problems, whereas for Maraini it is the cause. Maraini sees the family as simply another method to repress women, condemning them to a life of drudgery and unpaid slavery. In 1977 she spoke out in favour of a salary for housewives and for recognition of their work in the home, although ideally she wanted to see the end of such work:

---

[28] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949]), p. 89.
[29] Carla Lonzi, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. by Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 40-59 (p. 47).
[30] Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 180.
[31] ibid., p. 179.

> Il fine è l'abolizione del lavoro casalingo [...] per me il fine è quello, e quindi l'abolizione della famiglia. Però siamo ben lontani da questo e finché continua a esistere la famiglia, non vedo perché questo lavoro non deve essere pagato [...] in attesa di eliminare la famiglia.[32]

However, by 1992 Maraini had come closer to the view that the family should be reformed rather than necessarily abolished, stating that the family is suffering because it has not adapted in line with societal changes, adhering instead to the agricultural model of past centuries. It therefore becomes a source of tension in that 'si porta dietro delle nostalgie di autoritarismo e nello stesso tempo di bisogno di libertà'.[33] According to Maraini, the family is still a strong institution in less industrialized societies, where it fulfils its intended role, whilst in industrial countries, it has become outmoded and 'è proprio lì che va male'.[34]

In 'La condizione femminile' (1973), Ginzburg also sets out her views concerning women's housework and childrearing duties. She agrees with the suggestion that family duties should be shared more equally between the sexes but is contrary to the view that such duties are degrading: 'Nel femminismo esiste però l'idea falsa che i lavori di casa, e la cura dei figli, siano un'umiliazione'.[35] She also disagrees with Maraini's call for the abolition of housework, pointing out that it is necessary that someone carries it out. Whilst Ginzburg concentrates throughout her work on the disintegration of the family in post-war Italy, she makes it clear that she considers the family to be an essential element of society:

> Lo sfascio delle famiglie mi sembra una piaga del nostro tempo [...] Mi sembra che una persona abbia bisogno di avere una famiglia—anche cattiva, repressiva, disastrata—alle sue spalle. E l'assenza di questo, mi sembra che faccia sì che le persone crescano con delle difficoltà.[36]

Although she repeatedly depicts families in crisis, Ginzburg's purpose is to keep them alive rather than destroy them. In reference to *Caro Michele*, Ginzburg agrees that she is depicting 'dei resti di una famiglia', maintaining however that 'attraverso lo sfacelo si

---

[32] Ileana Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini* (Verona: Giorgio Bertani, 1977), p. 128.
[33] Angori, Franco, and others, *Incontro con l'autore 1992: Domenico Rea, Dacia Maraini, Alfredo Todisco*, *Quaderni di esperienze didattiche*, 6 (1992), p. 57.
[34] ibid., p. 58.
[35] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La condizione femminile', in *Vita immaginaria* (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), pp. 182-190 (p. 187).
[36] Natalia Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, ed. by Cesare Garboli and Lisa Ginzburg (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 183. Ginzburg repeats this sentiment in *Serena Cruz o la vera giustizia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), p. 76.

possono intravedere le cose che c'erano prima'.[37] Furthermore, Ginzburg asserts that she will never recount the destruction of a family: 'lo sterminio di una famiglia, no, non scriverò mai questa storia'.[38] So whilst many feminist groups saw the family as institutionalised oppression of women, Ginzburg laments its decline in post-war Italy. As I shall consider in Chapter 2, Ginzburg uses the opposing metaphors of country and city to express her opinion that younger generations are rejecting the traditional family set up. In fact, Ginzburg writes that 'probabilmente nel futuro non ci saranno più famiglie, né villaggi, ma ci saranno solo città e collettività'.[39] Ginzburg's view of the family is contradictory: whilst she believes that it provides necessary support for individuals, she recognizes that it is often a source of oppression. Elio Gioanola sums up this contradiction by stating that 'per Natalia Ginzburg la famiglia è [...] un fiore, è una prigione, è un castello, è una ragnatela'.[40]

Attempts to reform the family in Italian society have met with opposition from the Catholic Church, which believes that a family comprises a husband, wife, and children born in wedlock. For instance, the Member of Parliament Angelina Merlin's insistence that an unmarried woman with children still constituted a family was condemned as being anti-Catholic and anti-Constitutional, as it implied that fathers were not a necessary part of a family.[41] The Catholic Church's rhetoric on women's rights and function within society still influences women on a daily basis, as I shall consider in my analysis of Ginzburg and Maraini's fictional mothers (see Chapter 5). The figure of the Virgin Mary is held up as a model of female perfection to which women should aspire, and, according to Charles Franco, is a Jungian archetype that is ever present in the human unconscious and projected into consciousness through an image.[42] In *Alone of All Her Sex* (1976), Marina Warner examines the cult of the Virgin in depth, highlighting that much of the teaching on her does not originate from scripture, but is the invention of various Church leaders over the

---

[37] Natalia Ginzburg, 'C'era una volta la famiglia', Interview with Sandra Bonsanti, *Oggi*, November 1976, pp. 83-86 (p. 85).
[38] ibid., p. 86.
[39] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Cent'anni di solitudine', in *Mai devi domandarmi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002 [1970]), pp. 48-52 (p. 51). This comment is with reference to Gabriel Garcìa Marquez's work, which Ginzburg describes as a story about a 'famiglia in un villaggio'.
[40] 'Tavola Rotonda', in *Natalia Ginzburg: La casa, la città, la storia*, ed. by Giovanna Ioli (San Salvatore Monferrato: Barberis, 1996), pp. 151-164 (p. 155).
[41] See Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters*, pp. 66-67.
[42] Charles Franco, 'The Virgin Mary in Early Italian Literature', in *Maria Vergine nella letteratura italiana*, ed. by Florinda M. Iannace (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum, 2000), pp. 69-75 (p. 70).

centuries.[43] Warner recounts her struggle to reconcile the constructed image of the Virgin as 'the most holy being' and the fact that 'in the very celebration of the perfect human woman, both humanity and women were subtly denigrated'.[44]

Uta Ranke-Heinemann's assessment of the Church's teaching on the Madonna is equally critical, as is her appraisal of its attitude towards sexuality. Ranke-Heinemann notes that in the eyes of the Church, women's sexuality is dangerous and needs to be tightly controlled, arguing that to this day the Church believes that 'danger has a female face'.[45] Exaltation of the Virgin Mary is used to encourage women's chastity and force them to conform to her image: an image that the feminist group *Rivolta Femminile* condemns in its 1970 manifesto:

> L'immagine femminile con cui l'uomo ha interpretato la donna è stata una sua invenzione. Verginità, castità, fedeltà, non sono virtù; ma vincoli per costruire e mantenere la famiglia. L'onore ne è la conseguente codificazione repressiva.[46]

However, it was not only through this ideal of the chaste woman that the Church had an influence on women's lives in Italy; it also spoke out about political and social issues that it deemed detrimental to traditional values. For example, the Church strongly opposed women working outside the home, which it saw as damaging to the institution of the Italian family.[47] Abortion and divorce were also strongly opposed. Emphasizing the connection between religion and the oppression of women, Ranke-Heinemann comes to the conclusion that 'the history of Christianity is likewise a history of how women were silenced and deprived of their rights'.[48] In this respect, the aims of the Church are incompatible with the work of feminism, as the two propose fundamentally opposing views of women. In a 1977 interview, Maraini agrees that 'non si può essere femministe e cattoliche. La Chiesa è un'autorità paterna; anche se desse spazio alle donne resterebbe una gerarchia autoritaria maschilista'.[49]

---

[43] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan, 1985 [1976]), pp. 14, 19.
[44] ibid., p. XXI.
[45] Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991 [1988]), p. 124.
[46] *Rivolta Femminile*, 'Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 57-59 (p. 58).
[47] Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters*, p. 22.
[48] Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 127.
[49] Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini*, p. 143.

Maraini's strong identification with the Italian feminist movement differentiated her in outlook and intentions to Ginzburg. An active member of the struggle for female rights, Maraini used her writing as a mouthpiece for her disgust at society's prejudices and discrimination against women. Maraini found in feminism and its encouragement of practices such as *autocoscienza* and *affidamento* a way of expressing herself and of coming to terms with unresolved issues connected to her role as a woman in Italian society.[50] However, whilst some people wished to present Maraini as a figurehead for the Italian feminist movement, she maintained that she did not want to be 'diversa dalle altre'.[51] Although *Effe* introduced Maraini as 'una delle poche scrittrici italiane che non hanno paura di dirsi femministe',[52] Maraini strongly objected to her 1977 interview with Ileana Montini being published with a well-known feminist logo enclosing her name on the cover. Maraini voices her opposition in a letter to the publisher: 'non ho mai detto che non voglio identificarmi col movimento, ci sono dentro fino al collo, ho detto semplicemente che non voglio rappresentarlo, il che è diverso'.[53] In fact, in many ways, it was the close connection of Maraini's name with the feminist movement that hindered the wider acceptance of her literature and, as Barbara Heinzius points out, Maraini only enjoyed increased literary success when she distanced herself from feminist activities.[54] The language employed in Maraini's early works was largely incompatible with male tastes and, although still championing feminist causes, her most successful novel *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* was more acceptable as a result of its less militantly feminist language.

According to Hélène Cixous, the language employed by female writers perturbs the male reader. She believes that women's writing carries a pre-Symbolic language through the ear of the reader, touching them within. She explains that female text is not linear but an outpouring of words, it is 'vomiting / throwing-up / disgorging' and therefore disturbing.[55] This fearful reluctance to accept women's language is highlighted by the various obscenity trials that were brought against Dacia Maraini in response to her writing. Maraini's groundbreaking portrayals of women's sexuality outraged sections of Italian society, resulting in her being charged under Article 528 of the Codice penale, which threatened up to three years' imprisonment for anyone found guilty of distributing obscene

---

[50] ibid., pp. 111-112.
[51] ibid.
[52] Dacia Maraini, 'Medicina: Baroni all'assalto', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 30-31 (p. 30).
[53] Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini*, pp. 58-59.
[54] Barbara Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?: Zur Darstellung von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Dacia Marainis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1995), p. 15.
[55] Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?', *Signs*, 7 (1981-1982), 41-55 (p. 54).

material.[56] Maraini recognized the fact that a woman openly writing about sexual issues was a taboo area:

> Il fatto che una donna scriva apertamente di sesso è certamente una novità. Nel passato, anche le più grandi scrittrici si fermavano sulla soglia della descrizione sessuale. [...] Il solo fatto di nominare gli organi sessuali era da considerarsi una dimostrazione di libertà. Io stessa ho avuto ben cinque denunce per oscenità in epoche di censura facile e di bigottismo sociale. Sono stata sempre assolta ma quelle denunce mi sono costate preoccupazioni, angosce.[57]

Compared to Maraini's repeated controversial choice of subject matter and modes of expression, Ginzburg was relatively conventional and adhered more closely to expectations of women authors in this area, primarily because of her different literary intentions. Furthermore, in contrast to Maraini, Ginzburg's relationship with feminism was an uneasy one. Although she supported many issues that Italian feminists were campaigning for, she largely disagreed with the language employed by the movement:

> Non amo il femminismo. Condivido però tutto quello che chiedono i movimenti femminili. [...] Il sentimento essenziale espresso dal femminismo è l'antagonismo fra donna e uomo. Tale antagonismo, il femminismo lo giustifica con le umiliazioni subìte dalle donne. Le umiliazioni danno origine a un desiderio di rivalsa e di rivendicazione. Il femminismo nasce dunque da un complesso d'inferiorità, antico di secoli. Ma sui complessi d'inferiorità non si può costruire una visione del mondo.[58]

Ginzburg recognized that women needed greater legal rights and supported feminist campaigns that called for these. However, in a 1976 interview, she condemned some feminists' priorities, maintaining that feminism 'dovrebbe essere tutta una cosa che non è. Una cosa di assoluta praticità, di problemi pratici insomma: le femministe dovrebbero occuparsi di cucine, di bambini, di asili nido. Invece vanno a pensare all'orgasmo, a cretinerie'.[59]

Ginzburg objected to the separatist attitude of the feminist movement, believing that any social change should involve both men and women. In Ginzburg's opinion, women's newfound inner strength was inevitably achieved at the expense of men's self-confidence

---

[56] Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?*, pp. 26, 212.
[57] Dacia Maraini, *Amata scrittura* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000), p. 151.
[58] Ginzburg, 'La condizione femminile', pp. 182, 183.
[59] Ginzburg, 'C'era una volta la famiglia', pp. 83-84.

and feminism was based on the misguided idea that 'le donne, benché umiliate, siano migliori degli uomini'.[60] As she demonstrates in her literature, Ginzburg saw the rise of women as the catalyst behind the so-called crisis of Italian men. She highlights the discomfort she felt with the competitive attitude of feminism in *È difficile parlare di sé*:

> Si è creata nelle donne una mentalità di vincenti. E questo fa sì che le donne, oggi, sentano molto la solitudine, e gli uomini non sanno che ruolo avere, e le donne sanno che ruolo avere, però sentono la mancanza degli uomini [...] nei miei romanzi, ho cercato di raccontare questo: la solitudine delle donne e la fragilità degli uomini.[61]

Ginzburg particularly objected to the feminist movement's spirit 'di competizione' and 'd'orgoglio' because she believed that people cannot be proud of something over which they have no control, for example, being female, Jewish, or homosexual. For Ginzburg therefore, one cannot be proud to be a woman, as so many feminists have declared, but should only feel pride in individual achievements. [62]

There is perhaps a greater willingness on Ginzburg's behalf to consider more fully the motivations and origins behind her male characters' behaviour than is shown by Maraini, especially in her earlier works. Although Maraini believes that a writer must identify with both sexes even if the protagonist is a woman, she admits that she naturally empathizes more strongly with her female characters.[63] Spurred on by her disappointment at the lack of female protagonists in the novels that she had read as a girl, Maraini repeatedly gave the limelight to women in her work.[64] Ginzburg, on the other hand, deems it essential to have a bilateral view of the world, and she considers a purely female outlook to be restrictive and limiting: 'Non riesco a vedere il mondo [...] solo nella dimensione delle donne. Non mi riesce; mi sembra che il mondo vada visto nei suoi due aspetti, degli uomini e delle donne'.[65] It is this belief that led Ginzburg to reject a request to write exclusively on women's problems, explaining that 'non mi piaceva per niente pensare "alla donna", cioè

---

[60] Ginzburg, 'La condizione femminile', p. 189.
[61] Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, pp. 184-185.
[62] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Ragioni d'orgoglio', in *Non possiamo saperlo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 43-47 (p. 43).
[63] 'Italia Fantastica: Dacia Maraini meets P. D. James', Italian Cultural Institute, London, 10th Nov 2003.
[64] Maraini, *Amata scrittura*, p. 45.
[65] Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, p. 185.

pensare ai problemi delle donne isolati da quelli degli uomini'.[66] By contrast, Maraini frequently contributed articles purely on women's issues.

Ginzburg and Maraini have also entered the debate on whether gendered writing exists. Maraini is quite clear in her opinion on the issue of 'feminine' writing:

> Una donna che scrive [...] ha una prospettiva diversa da quella di un uomo che scrive e porrà attenzione ad alcuni aspetti della realtà anziché ad altri. Questo non vuol dire che esiste uno 'stile femminile'; semmai un punto di vista. Chi si accinge a raccontare una storia assume una soggettività che è contemporaneamente personale e collettiva.[67]

Maraini believes that writing is not gendered in its style, plot, or structure but in its point of view, stating that female writers share a certain perspective about sex, marriage, and maternity.[68] Therefore, as a writer usually draws on personal experience for narrative inspiration, it is no surprise that the different positions occupied by men and women in society and history be reflected in their fiction; this does not mean, however, that the quality of writing differs between men and women.[69]

According to Maraini, the body is the fundamental element of artistic expression and carries a great influence on literature: 'alla fin fine risulta che si scrive col corpo e il corpo ha un sesso e il sesso ha una storia di separazioni, [...] violenze, afasie, paure, mortificazioni di cui conserva una memoria atavica'.[70] Maraini's view is similar to that of Hélène Cixous, who also writes that gender affects a writer's viewpoint on certain issues, as writing is connected to the body and the body has a gender:

> If I were to write a historical novel, what would it matter if I were a man or a woman? But if I write about love, then it does matter. I write differently. If I write letting something of my body come through, then this will be different, depending on whether I have experience of a feminine or masculine body.[71]

---

[66] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Due comunisti', in *Mai devi domandarmi*, pp. 113-117 (p. 113).
[67] Maraini, *Amata scrittura*, pp. 174-175.
[68] 'Maraini meets P. D. James'.
[69] ibid.
[70] Dacia Maraini, 'Riflessioni sui corpi logici e illogici delle mie compaesane di sesso', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. V-XXX (p. XIV).
[71] Susan Sellers (ed.), *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), p. 151.

The important aspect that both wish to convey is that although differences exist, they should never be considered as a weakness. On the contrary, difference should be exalted and encouraged. In *A Room of One's Own* [1929], Virginia Woolf advocates the need for women to remain true to themselves in their art, urging them to emphasize rather than underplay gender divisions:

> It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities?[72]

Ginzburg's opinion on the question of feminine writing differs greatly from Maraini's. Ginzburg believes that a feminine style of writing does in fact exist and that furthermore it is a weakness. Early in her career, Ginzburg strove to mould her writing according to what she viewed as masculine traits, such as 'l'ironia e la malvagità'.[73] She admits that she wished to write like a man, adopting a male point of view and opinions:

> Avevo un sacro terrore di essere 'attaccaticcia e sentimentale', avvertendo in me con forza un'inclinazione al sentimentalismo, difetto che mi sembrava odioso, perché femminile: e io desideravo scrivere come un uomo.[74]

However, although her style remained succinct and laconic, Ginzburg realized that her attempts to write using a masculine viewpoint were misguided. In her essay 'Il mio mestiere' (1949), Ginzburg dates this change to becoming a mother. Maternity showed Ginzburg that male and female perspective could not be absorbed completely into one viewpoint, but that female literature should be true to female experience:

> Adesso non desideravo più tanto di scrivere come un uomo, perché avevo avuto i bambini, e mi pareva di sapere tante cose riguardo al sugo di pomodoro e anche se non le mettevo nel racconto [...] in un modo misterioso e remoto anche questo serviva al mio mestiere. Mi pareva che le donne sapessero sui loro figli delle cose che un uomo non può mai sapere.[75]

---

[72] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1990 [1929]), p. 84.
[73] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Il mio mestiere', in *Le piccole virtù* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), pp. 71-88 (p. 80).
[74] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Prefazione', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), p. 8.
[75] Ginzburg, 'Il mio mestiere', p. 83.

In a way, she too had come to the conclusion that writing is connected to the body, which has different experiences if male or female.

Yet in spite of adapting a style better suited to her personality, Ginzburg still ensured that personal feelings and emotions were rarely included in her work. *Lessico famigliare* (1963) is perhaps the best example of this lack of sentimentality. When Ginzburg informs us of her husband's death, it is inserted mid-paragraph in direct, unemotional language: 'Leone era morto in carcere, nel braccio tedesco delle carceri di Regina Coeli, a Roma durante l'occupazione tedesca, un gelido febbraio'.[76] With the exception of the adjective *gelido*, the news of Leone Ginzburg's death reads as though it belongs to the pages of an encyclopaedia. Ginzburg's success as an author owes much to her ability to portray everyday reality, combining the small elements of life with a wider critique of society. As Woolf points out, critical acclaim for women's literature is often difficult to obtain owing to the traditional belief that men's pastimes are more important than women's; therefore books that deal with war are valued more highly than those that portray the home.[77] In the light of these prejudices, Ginzburg's achievements in portraying daily life are of increased significance.

Ginzburg and Maraini's differing attitudes towards women's struggles in Italian society are reflected in their literature and especially in their portrayals of male-female relationships. Maraini's female protagonists often dominate her narrative, whilst men play merely a secondary role; whereas in Ginzburg's fiction the male character, although often negatively portrayed, is more prominent. This diversity in emphasis signals the different priorities that the two authors have in their approach to their work. Maraini's desire to highlight female oppression is counterbalanced by Ginzburg's preoccupation with the disintegration of the family unit. Maraini's literature can be seen as a mouthpiece for her political views, with which she wishes not only to highlight oppression of women, but to effect a change in women's status in society. In contrast, Ginzburg separates her literary and political roles: whereas she feels an 'impegno civile' when in her political role as a Senator, Ginzburg sees her authorial role as merely reporting social conditions rather than attempting to reform them:

---

[76] Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico famigliare* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999 [1963]), p. 154.
[77] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 70-71.

> Penso che i romanzieri raccontano la società, la vita come è, e la amano come è. Gli intellettuali sono quelli che vogliono commentarla e, forse, cercare di migliorarla. Io penso di essere un romanziere dalla testa ai piedi.[78]

This division of roles on Ginzburg's part is a source of major difference in the authors' work. Whilst Maraini deals with issues such as sexual violence and abortion in both her fiction and non-fiction, Ginzburg delivers her opinions on such matters through her political speeches and newspaper articles, using her fiction largely as a reflection of Italian life. In fact, Francesca Sanvitale describes Ginzburg's body of work as a 'lungo racconto, i cui capitoli sono i romanzi, di un'Italia borghese e paesana che ha il suo centro nella famiglia'.[79]

Owing to the vast number of works published by Ginzburg and Maraini, in this study I have decided to focus on the authors' novels and essays, taking into account their poetry and theatrical works only when they are particularly relevant to my reading of their fiction. In my analysis of their literature, I will first investigate the authors' viewpoints on patriarchal legacies such as abortion, violence, and rape, examining the differing representations of such legacies in their fiction. I will then consider various female characters in their fiction who attempt to break the chain of patriarchal legacies and carve out a space for themselves as independent, autonomous women. Finally, I will look at how Ginzburg and Maraini present their characters fulfilling familial roles and how social conditions and expectations regulate the behaviour of these fictional husbands, wives, mothers, and fathers.

---

[78] Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, p. 192.

[79] Francesca Sanvitale, 'I temi della narrativa di Natalia Ginzburg: uno specchio della società italiana', in *Natalia Ginzburg: La narrativa e i suoi testi*, ed. by Maria Antonietta Grignani and others (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1986), pp. 23-40 (p. 25).

1. Fish in Water: Abortion, Rape, and Violence

'A woman [...] is like an egg. The more she is beaten, the better she becomes' (Sicilian proverb)

Before examining how Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg present their characters fulfilling familial roles within the setting of patriarchal society, I would like to consider their depiction of certain patriarchal legacies, taking into account both their literature and their essays and public statements. Legacies such as rape and the control of contraception and abortion have been at the centre of patriarchal power for centuries, being passed down from one generation to the next in a bid to maintain the balance of male superiority and female inferiority. Although these issues affect largely the *female* body, women have repeatedly had to conform to male laws and expectations. In this chapter, I will touch upon each author's reaction to such patriarchal legacies, considering how their treatment of these issues reflects their contrasting styles and their different priorities regarding their work. Maraini's depiction of violence, rape, and abortion is on the whole more explicit than Ginzburg's. These elements are also more recurrent in Maraini's literature, weaving throughout her body of work. So too does the theme of women's metaphorical silence in patriarchal society underlie much of Maraini's work, being depicted as a consequence of sustained institutionalized violence against women. However, both authors believe that women often suffer in silence owing to a history of submissiveness and social conditioning, which entraps them within complex love-hate relationships with their oppressors.

Whereas their portrayals of violence differ significantly, both authors agree that female sexuality is often subject to constraints within patriarchal society, which employs double standards when it comes to male and female sexuality. In their fiction, Maraini and Ginzburg both highlight the growing phenomenon of single mothers, who are ostracized by society and abandoned to their fate by the prospective fathers, who buy their way out of responsibility. Abortion is one option for these unmarried pregnant women who are deemed to be bringing shame on their families; however, whilst several of Maraini's characters do resort to abortion, Ginzburg's do not. This is not because of any condemnation on Ginzburg's part; in fact, like Maraini, she speaks out strongly in favour of legalized abortion. It is instead a reflection on Ginzburg's aim to use her literature to convey her dismay at changing familial values in Italian society.

Throughout the twentieth century, male violence against women was tolerated, ignored, and even actively encouraged in Italian patriarchal society. As the victims of institutional violence, Italian women's legal and sexual freedoms were repeatedly curbed. However, it is not only in legal terms that violence against women was permitted: social attitudes betrayed a significant level of acceptance. In many respects, violence is still seen as a natural part of male-female relationships. In Maraini's Sicily especially, various local folktales and proverbs attest to this. Luigi Barzini provides an example in his study of Italians: 'A woman [...] is like an egg. The more she is beaten, the better she becomes'.[1] However, patriarchy's power over women is not founded solely on sexual violence itself, but also on the *threat* of violence. Precisely because violence has traditionally been considered a natural part of male-female relationships in Italy, women can never be sure when or if they will be attacked. Catharine MacKinnon agrees that 'all women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water. Given the statistical realities, all women live all the time under the shadow of the threat of sexual abuse'.[2] This threat necessarily shapes their behaviour, even if unconsciously, as Liz Kelly recognizes: 'the threat and reality of sexual violence may result in women developing strategies for self-protection which result in apparently voluntary limitations of mobility, territory and encounters'.[3] Many women therefore avoid walking alone in particular areas at certain times. On the whole, the city at night is a space reserved for men. For this reason, various feminist campaigners have targeted night-time violence, urging women to 'reclaim the night'. In December 1976, ten thousand women took to the streets of Rome at night to protest against the number of assaults on women occurring after dark, demanding the right to 'uscire in pace'.[4] After dark, women using the city risk being considered immoral, as it becomes a male space and hostile environment. This self-enforced restriction of movement because of the constant threat of violence, according to Carole Vance, serves as 'a powerful reminder of male privilege'.[5]

---

[1] Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1964]), p. 224. See also Charlotte Gower Chapman, *Milocca: A Sicilian Village* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 36.
[2] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991 [1989]), p. 149.
[3] Liz Kelly, 'A Central Issue: Sexual Violence and Feminist Theory', in *Feminisms*, ed. by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 345-351 (p. 348).
[4] Francesca Romana Koch, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', in *Storia della società italiana: Il miracolo economico e il centro-sinistra: Parte quinta, Vol. XXIV*, ed. by Ugo Ascoli and others (Milan: Teti, 1990), pp. 223-289 (p. 276).
[5] Carole Vance, 'Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality', in *Feminisms*, pp. 327-335 (p. 328).

Just like physical violence, the image of rape in patriarchal society has been based for centuries on the idea that it is a regrettable, but entirely natural part of male sexuality, which is capable of outweighing a man's self-control. Maraini experienced this firsthand in Palermo in the 1980s, when she and a friend were refused entry to a former theatre, then a cinema showing pornographic films. The doormen's reaction is significant: 'ci hanno guardate scandalizzati [...] "No, le donne qui non possono entrare. [...] Come potremmo garantire la vostra incolumità nel caso vi saltassero addosso?"[6] This belief that men cannot control their sexual urges in women's presence is by no means isolated. Carole Vance refers to 'a rag-bag of myths and folk knowledge that [...] depicted male lust as intrinsic, uncontrollable, and easily aroused by any show of female sexuality and desire'.[7] In Maraini's experience, there was no 'show of female sexuality and desire', but simply the introduction of a female presence into an environment deemed to be all male.

The idea that violence against women is in some way justified partly stems from society's preconceptions about male/aggressive and female/passive sexuality. Until the discovery of the ovum, the process of conception was also considered as adhering to these opposing values. It was believed that only men had a role in procreation and were thus the only active participant in the process, whilst women were seen as a kind of empty receptacle.[8] Such preconceptions of aggressive and passive sexuality are visible in Jung's theory that sexuality bursts into a boy's childishness filling him with brute desires and needs; girls' sexuality, on the other hand, continues slumbering until love awakens it.[9] Jung's suggestion is that female sexuality is only awoken by male intervention and is dependent on the woman being in love: female sexual pleasure is inextricably connected with her emotions.

Freud also differentiates between the active, aggressive nature of male sexuality, and the passive, submissive sexual temperament of women. He writes that 'the sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness* – a desire to subjugate;'[10] whereas he believes that female sexuality is based on passiveness and a willingness to obey male domination (an attitude that Maraini condemns through the children's mock rape

---

[6] Dacia Maraini, *Bagheria* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998 [1993]), p. 25. Maraini mentions the same episode in *Il Sommacco: Piccolo inventario dei teatri palermitani trovati e persi* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1993), p. 118.

[7] Vance, 'Pleasure and Danger', p. 328.

[8] See Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991 [1988]), p. 186.

[9] C. G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 32.

[10] Sigmund Freud, 'The Sexual Aberrations', in *On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 45-87 (p. 71). Emphasis in original.

scene in *Donna in guerra*). Jung and Freud's opinions on male and female sexuality exacerbate society's predisposal to consider women as passive; they also provide men with excuses for violent behaviour, as it can be labelled 'natural'. This brings us to John MacInnes's warning that 'masculinity becomes a conceptual dustbin into which everything we dislike is emptied', that is, into which all unsavoury actions can be thrown once labelled 'masculinity'.[11] Andrea Dworkin argues to the same effect: by maintaining that erection is involuntary and that 'woman is the presumed cause', society disseminates the idea that 'man is helpless, the woman is powerful'.[12] Dworkin goes on to say that this then 'conveniently protects men from responsibility for the consequences of their acts'.[13] In an essay inspired by her interviews with rapists, Maraini highlights the influence of such misconceptions on both men and women:

> Tutti [the rapists] sembrano stupiti, convinti in fondo della propria innocenza. Se ci insegnano a scuola, in famiglia, al cinema, in caserma, all'università, nei libri, che la sessualità maschile è aggressiva e quella femminile è passiva, perché poi ci sbattete in galera per avere solo messo in practica i vostri insegnamenti? [...] Il guaio è che anche le donne spesso la pensano così, per pigrizia: il sesso maschile agisce, fa; quello femminile subisce, prende.[14]

It is this imbalance, which patriarchal society and theories such as Jung's and Freud's promote, that encourages sexual violence against women.

The idea that women's *no* is not a real *no* is also one of the excuses given by rapists, who imagine that women's verbal refusal conceals their real consent. Uta Ranke-Heinemann quotes Albert the Great's words that women who seemingly reject men's advances, actually secretly long for them and merely hold back in order to appear chaste. Ranke-Heinemann labels Albert the 'Patron of Rapists', for perpetuating the myth that the more women resist, the more they want intercourse.[15] Men like Albert are unable to accept that women do not constantly long for sexual relations with men. This idea is also fundamental to pornography; as Andrea Dworkin writes, pornographic films frequently

---

[11] See John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), p. 69.
[12] Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p. 22.
[13] ibid., p. 24.
[14] Dacia Maraini, 'Stuprata e stupratore', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 143-146 (p. 145).
[15] Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 179.

depict women being 'gang-banged, whipped, beaten, and begging for more'.[16] She goes on to say that recent technological advances have increased the demand for this 'visual consumption of women being brutalized and loving it'.[17] In this respect, pornography simultaneously depends on and aggravates preconceptions of women enjoying their sexual humiliation at the hands of violent or aggressive men.

Maraini attributes this misconception to the vicious circle of female acceptance and male aggression: because women on the whole accept the view that male sexual aggression is natural and inevitable, and often view it as a sign of a man's sexual interest, 'nasce la convinzione a volte profonda e radicata nella testa degli uomini che in fondo le donne si aspettino e desiderino proprio quella violenza, anche se negata verbalmente'.[18] So because male aggression is seen as 'natural', female acceptance of it is also taken for granted, as Susan Brownmiller agrees: 'Because rape is an act that men do in the name of their masculinity, it is in their interest to believe that women also want rape done, in the name of femininity'.[19] However, Maraini disputes that rape stems from nature, pointing out that 'gli animali non stuprano'.[20]

In *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990), Maraini considers the idea that rape is less an individual offence committed by one person and more a crime of which all men in general are guilty. Maraini establishes the rape of the young Marianna as 'un affare fra uomini' and the Duke Pietro is by no means the only culprit in the matter.[21] When Marianna's father discovers his brother-in-law's attack, he covers up the crime with the help of a family friend, cementing the rape as a secret among men.[22] Although she is the victim, Marianna is the one who 'era stata portata via, sì trascinata dal padre e da Raffaele

---

[16] Dworkin, *Pornography*, p. 201.
[17] ibid., p. 202.
[18] Dacia Maraini, 'La sessualità maschile è un motore a scoppio?', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino*, pp. 79-80 (p. 79).
[19] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1975]), p. 312.
[20] Dacia Maraini, *Un clandestino a bordo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002 [1996]), p. 86.
[21] Dacia Maraini, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1990]), p. 210. Further references from primary editions are given after quotations in the text.
[22] Roberto Faenza's film adaptation *Marianna Ucrìa* (Cecchi Gori. 1997) plays down the idea of rape as a conspiracy between men, as it is in fact Marianna's mother who tells her about the rape. By making her an accomplice to the event, Faenza questions more deeply the mother's lack of loyalty towards her daughter and emphasizes her obedience to patriarchal law. However, whereas in Maraini's novel Maria is seemingly ignorant of the truth, Ursula Fanning has argued that she actually knew what had happened, but chose to ignore it ('Writing the Body, Constructing a Self: Maternal and Paternal Paradigms in the Writings of Sibilla Aleramo, Oriana Fallaci and Dacia Maraini', *Contemporary European Women Writers: Gender and Generation Conference*, University of Bath, 30th March 2005).

Cuffa' while Pietro is free to leave (210). Susan Amatangelo actually attributes the greater blame for Marianna's disability to her father, pointing out that 'the father's cover-up of the rape proves most damaging to the child, [...] since it prevents her from remembering what happened and from healing'.[23] Therefore, whilst Pietro commits the original crime, her father's silencing of the facts contributes more to the permanent silencing of Marianna's voice. The need for catharsis here is similar to the purpose of the *autocoscienza* groups formed at the height of the feminist movement, during which women could talk about their shared experiences of oppression and abuse. Maraini highlights the importance of these groups, saying that not revealing experiences of sexual violence 'era un modo di continuare a subirle [...] mentre il parlarne, il confrontarsi con esperienze simili dà forza e voglia di agire.'[24] By never telling Marianna of the rape, her father denies her this possibility.

Her father later agrees to let Pietro marry Marianna, and it is a shocking insight into Sicilian society that this act is seen as sufficient atonement for Pietro's crime. Marianna's own brother views the rape as 'un delitto forse, ma ormai espiato, sepolto...a che serve infierire?' (210); Maraini's use of the seemingly insignificant word *forse* emphasizes the relative lack of importance attributed to the offence itself by society. The provision of the Codice Rocco, which annulled the crime of rape if the rapist later married his victim, shows the hypocrisy of both the law and social opinion. In 1966, the case of Franca Viola, who refused to marry her rapist and took him to court, marked a break from custom. The shame felt by victims of rape prevented many from speaking out in public about an issue that was traditionally a private matter in the eyes of Italian society.[25] Viola's case had an enormous resonance in Italy and most likely inspired Maraini. Of course, Marianna Ucrìa did not know that she had married her rapist, but the marriage atoned for Pietro's actions as far as Marianna's father was concerned.[26]

Until recently under Italian law, rape was seen as an affront to the men in a family, rather than as a violation of women's rights. In her 1989 article 'La violenza sessuale',

---

[23] Susan Amatangelo, 'Coming to Her Senses: The Journey of the Mother in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Italica*, 79 (2002), 240-256 (p. 240).
[24] Dacia Maraini, 'Presentazione', in *Nostra moglie 'l marito mio: ovvero dialoghi con le donne umbre*, ed. by Gianna Mingrone (Perugia: Umbria Editrice, 1979), pp. 19-26 (p. 21).
[25] Koch, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', p. 257.
[26] Two other key works that deal with this issue are Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996 [1906]) and Anna Banti's *Artemisia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1996 [1953]). Aleramo recounts her own experience of marriage to her rapist, whilst Banti looks at the famous historical case of Artemisia Gentileschi who took her attacker to court when it became clear that he would not marry her. The fact that raping a woman would almost certainly force the couple to marry was sometimes used by men, including Aleramo's husband, as an alternative to wooing and as a quicker route to marriage. Through rape, a man laid unmistakeable claim to a woman.

Ginzburg attacks this element of the Italian legal system, which regarded sexual violence as a crime against morality rather than against an individual person – the word *stupro* itself attests to this, deriving from the Latin for shame and dishonour. Ginzburg is clear in her opinion that rape 'è in realtà un reato contro la persona', which must be acknowledged as such.[27] This aspect of the Italian Constitution was one of the issues taken up in the fight for women's rights. Campaigners demanded that rape be seen as a crime against a woman's person just as murder was, not against social morality. Angela Bottari spoke out along these lines in the parliamentary report on the proposed law: 'It's incredible that if as a woman I am beaten, molested, kidnapped or raped, it is not me but morality that is the injured party'.[28] Like Bottari, Ginzburg was a Member of Parliament voting on the new law on sexual violence and thus had a direct interest in its terms. After long deliberation, she eventually opposed a 'doppio regime', whereby domestic rape would be treated differently from rape by strangers. Ginzburg argued that the law must be equal for all and that although rape by a stranger is different, 'non è però insensato e folle imporre procedure diverse per un delitto, sì di natura diversa, ma identico nella sostanza?'[29]

Whereas Ginzburg spoke on issues such as sexual violence from a political standpoint, Maraini approached them through the feminist movement and her literature. *Donna in guerra* (1975) is a clear mouthpiece for Maraini's views about violence against women. The Pizzocane family's gloating over their abuses of women summarizes Maraini's assessment of patriarchal society's treatment of women. The sons' stories about a young English girl whom they torment and rape, and the gang rape of a German lady meet with the joyous approval of their father who looks on 'con occhi indulgenti, teneri'.[30] Significantly, these women are non-Italian and so are considered to be more independent and emancipated. Barbara Heinzius describes how their rapes are viewed as punishment against women who have broken out of their traditional roles in a patriarchal system.[31] Maraini also sees women's greater liberty as a catalyst for rape:

---

[27] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La violenza sessuale', in *Non possiamo saperlo: Saggi 1973-1990* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 144-148 (p. 144).
[28] Angela Bottari MP, 'Parliamentary Report on the Proposal for a Law by Popular Initiative', in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. by Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 257-259 (p. 257).
[29] Luciano Violante and others, *Ricordo di Natalia Ginzburg* (Rome: Camera dei deputati, 1997), p. 65.
[30] Dacia Maraini, *Donna in guerra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1975]), p. 34.
[31] Barbara Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?: Zur Darstellung von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Dacia Marainis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1995), p. 301.

> L'aumento della violenza contro le donne [...] è una risposta alla presa di coscienza. È la risposta del padrone di fronte alla ribellione dello schiavo. È la risposta più istintiva, più brutale, anche perché è come dire: tu ti ribelli e credi di diventare una persona umana, io ti dimostro che sei soltanto un sesso e che puoi essere soggiogata con la forza. Lo stupro è una risposta molto chiara: è il riportare la donna alla sua esistenza sessuale.[32]

This quotation shows Maraini's belief that rape is a collective response to the perceived problem of women's greater independence. In her analysis of sexual violence, Liz Kelly also refers to the concern that 'increasing demands from women for greater autonomy and equality will increase sexual violence in the short-term as men attempt to reassert their dominance'.[33] Although rape cannot be extricated from its sexual context, it has little to do with sexual pleasure. Susan Brownmiller's research into rape leads her to conclude that 'rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror'.[34] In *Donna in guerra*, the Pizzocane men, with their inflated sense of masculinity, feel threatened in the face of such openly manifested female freedom; they do indeed use rape in an attempt to conquer these women and thereby leave them in no doubt that men are the stronger, dominant gender.

The Pizzocane men justify their actions by claiming that the women deserved and even sought their attacks with their allegedly provocative behaviour. They do not class their actions as rape, because they believe that they are merely using the women for their 'natural' function. Angela Dworkin expands on this attitude in her work on pornography:

> The metaphysics of male sexual domination is that women are whores. The basic truth transcends all lesser truths in the male system. One does not violate something by using it for what it is: neither rape nor prostitution is an abuse of the female because in both the female is fulfilling her natural function. [...] The presumption that [a woman] is a whore is a metaphysical presumption: a presumption that underlies the system of reality in which she lives. A whore cannot be raped, only used. A whore by nature cannot be forced to whore – only revealed through circumstance to be the whore she is.[35]

---

[32] Ileana Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini* (Verona: Giorgio Bertani, 1977), pp. 144-145.
[33] Kelly, 'A Central Issue', p. 347.
[34] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 391.
[35] Dworkin, *Pornography*, pp. 203-204.

For the Pizzocane men, these foreign women unashamedly reveal themselves to be 'whores' by their show of independence. Their denial of having committed a crime also echoes Catharine MacKinnon's argument that, for a woman, 'to be rapable [is] a position that is social not biological'.[36] She asserts that the unspoken law of rape divides women into 'spheres of consent' whereby 'virtuous women [...] are unconsenting, virginal, rapable. Unvirtuous women [...] are consenting, whores, unrapable'.[37] In Maraini's novel, the Pizzocane men place their victims firmly in this second category – they have not committed rape, as these women are 'unrapable'.

The Pizzocane brothers view their crimes as noble actions. In this respect, they conform to Brownmiller's 'myth of the heroic rapist', who restores order through rape, conquering both women and the world.[38] The Pizzocane men believe that they have provided a public service by teaching these women a lesson, as their father declares:

> "Una lezione non basta a quelle puttane, e chi le ferma? chi le ferma quelle spampinate? Ogni anno che passa diventano più sfacciate, più sgargianti e scendono tutte impallate a succhiare il sangue di questi poveri isolani nostri." (33)

Whilst the Pizzocane men's views are extreme, they are presented as products of their society. In fact, Sharon Wood asserts that Maraini's novel is hostile less to men than to the system that guarantees their dominance and thus corrupts them.[39] Yet, as Heinzius rightly points out, in this novel Maraini constructs varying levels of male violence: for example, Giacinto is just as shocked as Vannina at the Pizzocane family's tales of rape.[40] So whilst patriarchal society's views on women have influenced all the male characters, they do not all react in the same manner. Brownmiller believes that there are 'rape-minded men' who

---

[36] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 178. A recent decision by Italy's Supreme Court appears to confirm MacKinnon's theory that some women are more 'rapable' than others. In February 2006, the Court ruled that a rapist's sentence should be reduced because his fourteen-year-old victim was already sexually active, declaring that 'se la vittima ha avuto esperienze la violenza sessuale è meno grave'. This ruling provoked widespread controversy and condemnation that Italy had regressed 'di cinquant'anni'. See <http://www.repubblica.it/2005/e/sezioni/cronaca/cassazione/cassagrave/ cassagrave.html> [accessed 28 July 2006].

[37] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 175.

[38] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 289. In her study, Brownmiller looks at various myths and legends glorifying rapists, considering examples from Greek mythology (gods including Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Hades, and Pan) to media-created legends such as Dick Turpin, Pancho Villa, Jack the Ripper, and the Boston Strangler.

[39] Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), p. 223.

[40] Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?*, pp. 300, 305. However, it must be remembered that in effect Giacinto raped Vannina whilst she was asleep, even though it may not have been classed as rape legally and certainly not by Giacinto, as he was merely exercising his conjugal rights.

will readily see 'open invitations' in female behaviour.[41] This suggests that society can only be blamed in part for the men's behaviour – some personal responsibility must be taken into account.

The misogynistic opinions of the Pizzocane family are similar to those held by Filippo's family in Maraini's *Il treno per Helsinki* (1984). Bitterly opposed to all women, Filippo's family attempts to eliminate their presence from its ranks. Choosing only 'serve ballerine prostitute pellegrine bastarde donne senza casa e senza nome', the men can ensure that the family name continues, but that they can easily dismiss the women once their duties have been done.[42] Ideally they would prefer to bypass the woman's involvement entirely:

> La famiglia di mio padre ha avuto questa divina presunzione: fare a meno dell'elemento femminile. Diventare nello stesso tempo padri e madri... dare vita ai figli senza passare per il grembo materno nutrirli educarli renderli simili a sé proseguendo nel tempo questa sfida alla natura. (45)

This denial of the female role in reproduction echoes Hippolytus's call in Euripides's play for men to be able to buy the seed of their children, and thereby avoid relationships with women.[43] In her works, Maraini's condemnation of this rejection of women is apparent. Filippo explains that his male-dominated upbringing has left him unable to love others and 'il risultato è che il mio cuore è sordo come una campana' (46). Both Filippo's family and the Pizzocane family advocate an unusual family set-up, and their proposals that women be largely or even wholly excluded are condemned by Maraini. These men cannot empathize or love freely and indulge the stereotypically aggressive side of masculinity to its extreme, with devastating consequences.

Ginzburg also touches upon the belief that men have a right to treat women as inferior in her play *Fragola e panna* (1968). At one point, Barbara jumps out of a window to escape her violent husband Paolo who was threatening to strangle her; later, when members of the public confront him as he hits Barbara, Paolo announces his position regarding marital equality: 'È mia moglie. Posso batterla quanto voglio, perché è mia moglie'.[44] The

---

[41] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 354.
[42] Dacia Maraini, *Il treno per Helsinki* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1984]), p. 43.
[43] In fact, scientific developments have suggested the opposite of Filippo's family's wish could become true. The successful fertilization of mice using artificial sperm has raised the question of whether men will be necessary at all for reproduction in the future.
[44] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Fragola e panna', in *Ti ho sposato per allegria e altre commedie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), pp. 125-158 (p. 138).

tone of this declaration is unusual in Ginzburg's work and is more in keeping with Maraini's style; for example, in comparison with Maraini's often graphic descriptions of violence, Ginzburg's inclusion of domestic violence in *Famiglia* is summed up in one succinct sentence: 'Egli la batteva'.[45] Ivana, the victim of this abuse, does not elaborate further on what she suffered, and we are told simply that she later sometimes woke at night 'in preda al terrore' (12). These brief statements are characteristic of the laconic style which distinguishes Ginzburg's work. Ginzburg also says of the inclusion of violence in her works: 'la violenza non è mai in scena, nei miei libri. È dietro le quinte, sta per esserci. Non sono capace, non sono in grado di descriverla'.[46] As usual with Ginzburg, the power of her message lies just as much in what she does not say as in what she does, and these three words—'egli la batteva'— encapsulate the essence of Ivana's turbulent relationship with Joachim Halevy. The portrayal of Joachim also gives us an insight into Ginzburg's assessment of violent men. He is later committed to a clinic for psychological illnesses and is said to be 'senza più volontà, né memoria, né voce, un cencio inerte in fondo a una corsia' (12). In this case, Ginzburg links violence to insanity. Joachim is seen as mentally unstable and almost unaware of his actions. As he is described as being without memory or voice, it is unsurprising that he cannot express his emotions effectively; he therefore resorts to beating a woman, which is seen here as a result of his inability to survive in a demanding society, and he is himself portrayed as a victim. In this instance, and contrary to what we see occur repeatedly in Maraini's work, it is the man who is silenced.

Violence occurs in other works by Ginzburg, including *La strada che va in città* (through Delia's relationship with her father – see Chapter 6), several of her plays, and in *Tutti i nostri ieri* (1952). In this latter novel, Ginzburg includes parental violence, although notably it is a mother hitting a son. Danilo, a friend of Anna's family, describes how his mother 'l'aveva tirato su a furia di schiaffi, con l'idea che gli schiaffi fanno bene e rinforzano i muscoli del viso'.[47] The educative aim of the mother's actions conforms to Ginzburg's attitude that sometimes parents must resort to violence when raising children.[48] There is also a typically Ginzburgian touch of irony and undertone of humour in the description. In contrast, Danilo's father 'non si era mai provato a educarlo, era un tipo che in casa contava poco' (44). We can read this 'educarlo' to mean the physical discipline

[45] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Famiglia', in *Famiglia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), pp. 5-69 (p. 12).
[46] Interview with Sandra Bonsanti, 'C'era una volta la famiglia', *Oggi*, November 1976, pp. 83-86 (p. 85).
[47] Natalia Ginzburg, *Tutti i nostri ieri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1952]), p. 44.
[48] I refer to this in my analysis of fathers in Chapter 6. See Dacia Maraini, *E tu chi eri?* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998 [1973]), p. 147.

preferred by the mother and see here a reversal of roles, with the mother as discipliner and a father who does not dish out physical punishments. Perhaps if he did, he would be closer to Ginzburg's ideal of the strong father; instead he is another of her typically weak, incompetent fathers, whom I shall consider in Chapter 6.

With its inclusion of shocking statistics and lists of unsolved crimes, *Voci* (1994) is perhaps the novel that best exemplifies Maraini's concern over the sustained and repeated abuse suffered by women in patriarchal society. Bruce Merry rightly sums up the novel's plot by saying that it seems to cry out 'enough; leave us alone; stop murdering women'.[49] Michela Canova's investigation into the murder of Angela Bari brings numerous issues to the fore, including man's propensity to kill and rape women. Maraini presents various arguments using Michela's tape-recorded interviews. One interviewee argues that 'lo stupro e l'assassinio sono intrinseci all'ideologia paterna che prevede l'assoggettamento e il controllo del corpo del nemico,' with this enemy being a woman.[50] Whilst the idea of violence being a part of man's nature runs throughout the novel, these crimes against women, although committed by individuals, are also seen to be a social construction, 'una malattia che fa la spia alle idee di un'epoca, di un paese, di un popolo' (174). However, rape is not peculiar to one culture or period in history, but has been used for centuries as a weapon against women. Rape is unique in that it is a crime committed wholly by men, unlike murder, physical violence, or other forms of sexual assault, which can also involve a female perpetrator. Interestingly, Maraini dismisses rape as an option for women even if it were biologically possible. She maintains that women would never rape 'perché della sessualità femminile non fanno parte il piacere dell'aggressione, il godimento della disperazione e dell'impotenza dell'altro.'[51] Therefore, in Maraini's view, the absence of aggression which is connected only with male sexuality renders women incapable of rape. With this opinion however, Maraini risks subscribing to the very beliefs that she criticizes. By implying that it is non-aggressive, she too seems to be pigeonholing female sexuality as passive and is denying the possibility of difference among women.

In *Voci*, Maraini also presents a mother's passive acceptance of male violence. Angela and Ludovica's mother would rather ignore her husband's sexual abuse of her daughters than risk losing him. She fails both girls miserably and simply allows the abuse to occur as

---

[49] Bruce Merry, *Dacia Maraini and the Written Dream of Women in Modern Italian Literature* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1997), p. 195.
[50] Dacia Maraini, *Voci* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997 [1994]), p. 82.
[51] Dacia Maraini, 'Castità?', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino*, pp. 101-103 (p. 103). Maraini repeats this sentiment in *Un clandestino a bordo*, p. 87.

though it were inevitable. The mother's acceptance of Elia's dominance recalls Catharine MacKinnon's theory that women often 'embrace the standards of women's place in this regime [of male supremacy] as "our own"'.[52] They do this, according to MacKinnon, 'in order to be loved and approved and paid, in order just to make it through another day'.[53] In Maraini's novel, the mother embraces this idea, placing family members in prescribed roles, even if the father's prescribed role is 'abuser'. The fact that her acceptance of Elia's violent behaviour is deemed essential for its continuation renders her almost as guilty as him, as Ludovica explains:

> "Quello era il sacrificio necessario per tenerlo in famiglia, per mantenere la sua protezione [...] non ci dovevano essere parole fra di noi, ma un consenso cieco e completo, la resa dei nostri corpi alla sua giustificata ingordigia paterna. [...] Mi consideravo morta per me e per gli altri...e accettavo questa morte come l'olocausto necessario per tenere la famiglia unita." (262, 268)

The terms of acquiescence here are clear. Ludovica's mother turns a blind eye to her daughter's plight, a type of behaviour which Maraini sees as worryingly widespread in such cases.

In the short story 'Cinque donne d'acqua dolce' (1993), which tells of five women attending an *autocoscienza* meeting in the late 1970s, Maraini again touches on the theme of child abuse. The women recount how their mothers failed to intervene or prevent the abuse that they suffered. Maraini compares these mothers to stone angels, and this metaphor conveys the idea that although the mothers may believe that they are acting with the best intentions, they are actually inflicting irreparable harm on their daughters by supporting their aggressors. Far from being a daughter's guardian angel, these stone mothers add weight to patriarchy's oppression of women, providing the support needed for the cycle of abuse to continue:

> Le madri [...] erano state troppo spesso pietosi angeli d'amore. Con le loro ali pesanti avevano coperto le intemperanze dei padri, dei mariti, dei fratelli, dei figli come se fossero inevitabili e fatali. Perché quegli stessi padri e mariti e fratelli e figli erano i più grandiosi

[52] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 138.
[53] ibid.

> amanti del mondo. [...] E se qualcosa di torbido era accaduto, certamente era stata provocata da quelle piccole 'canaglie' capaci di tutto.[54]

We see here that even mothers are inclined to shift the blame onto their daughters in order to justify pardoning the men. Victoria Secunda concludes that many of the mothers who ignore paternal abuse have themselves been maltreated in childhood, either emotionally or physically. They therefore suffer from low self-esteem and self-worth; they depend wholly on their husbands and are unable to survive without a man.[55] It is unsurprising that men who abuse their children often choose wives who fit Secunda's description: with their desire for power, these men see a perfect partner in such easily dominated women. Secunda also points out that for many daughters, the greater betrayal is the mother's, as her denial gives the father an open invitation to continue his abuse.[56]

Similarly, in 'La violenza sessuale', Ginzburg writes that sexual violence is tolerated by thousands of women because they are immersed 'in una condizione di servitù secolare, così da non credere di poter chiedere soccorso all'esterno'; these women 'si rimpiattano nella propria sventura come nel fondo di un pozzo'.[57] Her opinion that women suffer in silence owing to a history of submissiveness is similar to that held by Maraini, who writes frequently about social conditioning of women. In *Amata scrittura* (2000), Maraini describes how traditional education forces women to bury their natural aggression deep within themselves, thereby encouraging a submissive nature. She writes that women internalise this education, thus affecting their entire sense of self-worth: 'Non direi che le donne siano naturalmente masochiste, direi piuttosto che abbiano introiettato la storica disistima di sé, l'amore per la punizione e il dolore fisico che sono stati per tanto tempo la base dell'educazione femminile.'[58] Jessica Benjamin considers the problematic question of social conditioning versus the idea of women as naturally submissive: even when they are not coerced into sexual submission, she asks, how can women 'not be what they are?'.[59]

---

[54] Dacia Maraini, 'Cinque donne d'acqua dolce', in *Il pozzo segreto: Cinquanta scrittrici italiane*, ed. by Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Rosaria Guacci, and Marisa Rusconi (Florence: Giunti, 1993), pp. 145-152 (pp. 147-148).
[55] Victoria Secunda, *Women and their Fathers: The Sexual and Romantic Impact of the First Man in Your Life* (London: Cedar, 1993), p. 181.
[56] ibid., pp. 181-182.
[57] Ginzburg, 'La violenza sessuale', p. 145. I will return to Ginzburg's use of a well metaphor to show the emotional low points that women can reach in Chapter 4.
[58] Dacia Maraini, *Amata scrittura* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000), p. 155.
[59] Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 176.

Ginzburg and Maraini share the view that women often have a love-hate relationship with their oppressors. Ginzburg underlines this idea:

> La violenza sessuale può essere accettata dalla donna tristemente e per ubbidienza, ma anche per pazienza, per compassione, per una sorta di tenerezza materna, e simili sentimenti non la rendono meno dolorosa ma in qualche modo pressoché sopportabile.[60]

Women will therefore support oppression when it is combined with a feeling of loyalty to the oppressor. For Maraini, the traditional children's song 'La Cornacchia del Canadà', which she refers to in several of her works, highlights this phenomenon. Just like the crow in the song who actively pursues her beloved armed hunter, women do not fight against their persecutors and even actively encourage them as they are conditioned by society to accept male violence. In *La nave per Kobe* (2003), Maraini writes of her childhood fascination for the song, which her mother used to sing to her:

> Come ci si può innamorare del proprio assassino? Mi sembrava una cosa innaturale che quella cornacchia svolazzasse attorno al fucile di Cecchino ben sapendo che avrebbe sparato. [...] Poi con gli anni ho imparato che in effetti molte donne, per antica abitudine alla soggezione, spesso si innamorano di Cecchino. [...] Tutte le donne che aprono le porte ai propri assassini, e ce ne sono tantissime, non sono inconsapevolmente innamorate di Cecchino?[61]

The character of Colomba, in Maraini's eponymous novel of 2004, certainly fits this description: she remains unswervingly loyal to her oppressor. Colomba's acceptance of Sal's behaviour can be explained in part by her mother's death, which compounds the sense of abandonment that the young girl feels because of her father's desertion. As Jessica Benjamin explains: 'in erotic submission, fear of the master's power takes the place of the deeper fear – of the separation that feels like death'.[62] The loss of her parents underlies Colomba's attitude towards both herself and Sal: she would rather submit to Sal's violence than lose someone else close to her. She conforms to Benjamin's assessment that

---

[60] Ginzburg, 'La violenza sessuale', p. 146.
[61] Dacia Maraini, *La nave per Kobe: Diari giapponesi di mia madre* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003), p. 48. Maraini also includes the story in *Colomba*, although substituting the crow for a swallow – *Colomba* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004), pp. 33-34. I return to Maraini's short story based on this song in Chapter 5.
[62] Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 79.

submission is a 'defensive strategy', employed to protect oneself from further heartache.[63] Colomba is seeking dependency on Sal in order to find the sense of protection and security that she craved from her mother. She therefore chooses to follow her torturer and allows herself to be imprisoned. Benjamin's comments on Pauline Réage's *Story of O* could equally be applied here to Colomba. Benjamin asserts that the 'desire for submission represents peculiar transposition of desire for recognition' and that 'masochism is a search for recognition through an other who is powerful enough to bestow this recognition'.[64] Women, such as O and Colomba, submit to their oppressors willingly because of this desire and in a bid to absorb some of their oppressor's strength. The drug-addicted Colomba represents the ultimate state of female passivity in patriarchal society: she is inert, incapable, and totally subject to a man's control. Raped repeatedly by Sal's friends, Colomba is unable to react or defend herself, epitomizing the submissive female accommodating the sexually aggressive male.[65]

The manner in which Colomba disappears also supports the theories looked at by Maraini with regard to 'La cornacchia del Canadà'. There is no sign that the missing twenty-two-year-old girl has been forced to fight against her kidnapper: in fact she is last seen peddling alone towards the woods on her bicycle. Colomba leaves her bedroom in immaculate condition and abandons a still-full cup of coffee with a spoon of sugar poised by its side. This coffee image, with its intrinsic link to Italian culture, is repeated at other points in the novel with the intention of highlighting the unpredictability and suddenness surrounding many women's disappearances and deaths. In *Voci*, Angela likewise leaves her belongings tidy, with her clothes folded on a chair, and apart from her dead body there is no evidence that an assault has occurred. In both cases, this tidiness implies an element of choice on the part of the victim: there has been no desperate struggle to escape some terrible danger, but instead a passive acquiescence of whatever fate awaits them. Like 'La cornacchia del Canadà', these two victims have sought out violence, falling under the hunter's spell.

In *Colomba*, the detail of Colomba's 'pantofole allineate sul tappetino davanti alla porta' is particularly interesting (12). Shoes are a recurring image in Maraini's work, functioning as a metaphor for women's silence in society (as opposed to Ginzburg's use of

---

[63] ibid., p. 81.
[64] ibid., p. 59.
[65] Maraini, *Colomba*. Further references to primary editions are given after quotations in the text. Parts of my analysis on *Voci* and *Colomba* have already been published - see Christina Siggers Manson, 'In Love with Cecchino: Opening the Door to Violence in Dacia Maraini's *Colomba* and *Voci*', in *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5:2 (2005), 91-102.

shoes to represent maternal responsibility – see Chapter 5). Shoes also represent women's sexual oppression at the hands of men and are of symbolic value through their association with sexual fetishes. Freud writes that 'the shoe or slipper is a corresponding symbol of the *female* genitals'.[66] In *Voci*, the murdered Angela's frequently mentioned blue tennis shoes lined up outside her door remind us that many women leave behind no trace after their death. These women symbolically die barefoot as Angela did: 'fanno così poco rumore, queste donne morte, nel loro andarsene: scalza Angela Bari, scalza forse Sabrina, scalza la bambina trovata sul greto dell'Ombrone' (177). Just as women's voices have been suppressed throughout history by patriarchal society, so too do their footsteps go unheard as they leave. Significantly, both Angela and Colomba's shoes are placed next to doorways, traditionally a point of departure or a gateway to another place. The doors lead the women from the apparent security of the home to the outside world, although in this case the women fail to find protection in their homes, as they have opened their doors to their oppressors.

Maraini developed this metaphor of women's shoes in an essay of 1987, writing that in their struggle for equality, young women set off on the path towards liberation 'con quelle scarpe da montanara, su quella strada di spine, verso quella porta che si aprirà sulla felicità femminile'.[67] With their solid, more militant style mountain boots, the arrival of these enthusiastic feminists is noisily announced, thereby displaying their refusal to blend into the background as their predecessors did. However, reflecting on the success of the feminist movement, Maraini concludes that:

> Le giovanissime soprattutto, oggi portano scarpette leggere e non amano sentire sul collo il fiato di un'altra donna che le incalza, le interroga, le inquieta. Non amano sguardi timidi e domande di solidarietà. [...] Esse hanno l'illusione della parità.[68]

Having achieved some semblance of equality these women have reverted back to wearing the noiseless shoes of their foremothers, preferring to forget the struggles of the feminists and their noisy, attention-seeking footwear. Both Angela and Colomba fall into this

---

[66] Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1905]), p. 67. Emphasis in original. In her play *Memorie di una cameriera* (1997), Maraini includes a character with a sexual shoe fetish. He sleeps with his maid's shoes in his bed, until she discovers him dead and 'fra i denti teneva serrato un mio stivaletto' (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001, p. 15). Maraini based this play on Octave Mirbeau's novel *Le journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900).

[67] Dacia Maraini, 'Riflessioni sui corpi logici e illogici delle mie compaesane di sesso', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino*, pp. V-XXX (p. XXIX).

[68] ibid.

category of 'post-feminist' women who have more in common with their grandmothers' than their mothers' generation. Both women leave their shoes by the door as they walk silently through the world; even when alive these women make little noise as they move about in soft-soled slippers and tennis shoes.

In Ginzburg and Maraini's works, female sexuality is repeatedly portrayed as being subject to social constraints. In particular, the representation of pregnancy out of wedlock conveys the hypocrisy of societal standards. Whereas men who impregnate women are indulged and seen as obeying natural urges, women are condemned as whores and ostracized from respectable society. In *La strada che va in città* (1942), Ginzburg uses Delia's pregnancy as an example of how society judges men and women differently. Whilst Giulio carries on with his life as normal, Delia must hide away in shame at her condition. Teresa Picarazzi draws attention to the idea of the womb as a prison and confining space for women in Ginzburg's work (this is also applicable to Maraini's work). Picarazzi writes that in Ginzburg's literature this metaphor is emphasized further by the positioning of pregnant women in secluded gardens, surrounded by walls to close them off from the prying outside world.[69] In *La strada che va in città*, Delia must spend her 'confinement' (an English term that speaks volumes about society's view of pregnant women) shut away in the countryside with her aunt. The biased judgements and double standards of society are emphasized by Delia's predicament:

> Da quando avevo detto a mia madre che mi doveva nascere un figlio, la mia vita era diventata così strana. Da allora m'ero dovuta sempre nascondere, come qualcosa di vergognoso che non può essere veduto da nessuno. [...] Pensavo a Giulio che studiava in città, senza scrivermi e senza venirmi a trovare, come non ricordandosi di me.[70]

Giulio first attempts to deny that the baby is his, and then his father tries to buy his freedom from his responsibilities, highlighting how much easier it is for a man to distance himself from a mistake which the woman must face her whole life (57, 65). In a 1971 document, the group *Rivolta Femminile* highlights this hypocritical attitude towards pregnancy: 'once they are pregnant, women discover the other side of male power, which makes of

---

[69] Teresa Picarazzi, *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 46.

[70] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La strada che va in città', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964]), pp. 23-81 (p. 53). It is significant that Giulio is studying in the city. In the next chapter, I will consider how the city in Ginzburg's work equates to freedom.

conception a problem of those who have a uterus, rather than of those who hold the culture of the penis'.[71]

The sense of shame surrounding Delia's condition also afflicts the protagonist of Maraini's short story 'Le galline di suor Attanasia' (1999). Pregnant as the result of a rape, Sister Attanasia is forced to remain hidden from public view inside the convent walls, which are purposefully raised to prevent her from being seen. The name Attanasia, with its inclusion of the word *tana*, is indicative of the protagonist's need to hide from society's judgements. Whilst the other nuns do their best to help Attanasia and to protect her secret, the bishop demands that the 'povera fanciulla così gravemente provata dalla violenza subìta' be evicted from the convent immediately.[72] The hypocrisy of the bishop's concern is undeniable and, after learning that the nuns have defied his orders, he has the baby forcefully taken away to an orphanage and declares that Attanasia 'non potrà, per cinque anni, avvicinarsi all'altare' (52). Here the bishop personifies patriarchal authority in a world of women and it is his will that prevails. His refusal to let Attanasia approach the altar is reminiscent of the religious practice of Churching of Women, whereby women must be purified after childbirth before they can attend church again – another example of how the Church deems women to be impure.[73]

Although Attanasia can certainly be said to fall into MacKinnon's category of virtuous, rapable women, her virtue is not enough to annul the stigma of rape. Tommasina Gabriele alludes to the irony of the situation, in that the greatest threat to the nun's pregnancy is from the Catholic Church, which traditionally glorifies maternity.[74] Attanasia's confinement within the convent shows society's harsh judgement of unmarried, pregnant women, and in particular the Church's unwavering stance on unmarried mothers, whereby the shame of an illegitimate child outweighs any potential innocence. As Adrienne Rich writes, motherhood is sacred as long as children are legitimate and bear the name of a father, who through his simple presence makes the mother respectable.[75] Like the cooped-up hens to which she lovingly tends, Attanasia is trapped both emotionally and physically by her pregnancy and the bishop's subsequent decision. This unnatural imprisonment is not

---

[71] *Rivolta Femminile*, 'Female Sexuality and Abortion', in *Italian Feminist Thought*, pp. 214-216 (p. 216).
[72] Dacia Maraini, 'Le galline di Suor Attanasia', in *Buio* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999), pp. 41-53 (p. 50).
[73] See Leviticus 12.
[74] Tommasina Gabriele, 'The Pregnant Nun: Suor Attanasia and the Metaphor of Arrested Maternity in Dacia Maraini', *Italica*, 81:1 (2004), 65-80 (p. 72).
[75] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1984 [1977]), p. 42.

conducive to (pro)creation and those incarcerated suffer the consequences: the hens cease laying eggs, whilst Attanasia's doctor comments that 'una sola cosa non capisce: perché il latte non accenna a scendere nelle mammelle pietrificate della giovane suor Attanasia' (47). The adjective *pietrificato* recalls the stone walls of Attanasia's convent-prison. Appropriately, Attanasia eventually dies in the chicken coop to the sound of the cockerel's 'amaro e squillante canto di dolore' (53). Maraini's short story provides an extreme example of the humiliation attached to pregnancy outside wedlock - a humiliation and sense of disgrace that Ginzburg's Delia is likewise forced to confront.

In Maraini's novel *Colomba*, Zà's boyfriend Roberto is determined to become a pianist and therefore leaves the pregnant girl money for an abortion; he disappears without trace after promising his 'eterno amore' (153). Significantly, whilst the two young lovers discuss the abortion, Roberto kisses Zà repeatedly, and it is with these kisses that he seals his betrayal (152-153). Maraini makes clear the hypocrisy of Roberto's contradictory words and actions, particularly through the biblical overtones. As with several of Ginzburg's young male characters, Roberto has no qualms about walking away from his pregnant girlfriend. In both authors' works, money is seen as the best way for a character to purge their guilt at abandoning a woman to her fate, whether it be an abortion or single parenthood. Having provided for the women financially, these fictional men then see any future suffering as the women's own fault. Once again men are reduced to financial providers, in a society in which money equals freedom, and we repeatedly see male characters substituting financial support for emotional support.

Ginzburg refers to this lack of responsibility towards unwanted pregnancies in *La città e la casa* (1984). When Nadia discovers that she is pregnant by a journalist, 'consultato da lei al telefono, il giornalista le ha detto di abortire'.[76] The prospective father cannot even take the trouble to talk to her in person, and it is clear that if she ignores his advice, she must face parenthood alone. The journalist's comment here also highlights the contradiction between official and unofficial attitudes towards terminating pregnancies, as de Beauvoir recognizes: 'men universally forbid abortion, but individually they accept it as a convenient solution of a problem; they are able to contradict themselves with careless cynicism'.[77] In *La città e la casa*, Giuseppe also repeatedly denies paternity of Lucrezia's son, showing the freedom of choice that men enjoy in such matters. Before the development of scientific

[76] Natalia Ginzburg, *La città e la casa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997 [1984]), p. 45.
[77] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949]), p. 509.

techniques that could prove paternity, men could easily deny that they had fathered children. The slightest suggestion that a woman has not been faithful is enough to place the man in the role of righteous victim, rather than the villain who has abandoned his pregnant lover. This is also the case in *Caro Michele*, where Michele refuses to accept that Mara's baby is his. Mara's fidelity is questioned and although Mara repeats that he is indeed the father, society only hears Michele's denial. In the eyes of the law, Mara's baby is fatherless. Ginzburg shows that paternity, unlike maternity, is a choice rather than an obligation.

It is interesting that none of Ginzburg's single mothers choose abortion as a way of escaping their situations. Although the author believes that abortion should be an option for women, she does not include an explicit example of it in her literature. Instead these girls all keep their babies and associate themselves with a man. Apart from in Delia's case in *La strada che va in città*, these men are not the babies' biological fathers. Having been abandoned by the babies' fathers, Ginzburg's young mothers search for a replacement, and they seem unwilling or incapable of raising the children alone. The tendency of Ginzburg's male characters to abandon pregnant women can also be seen as a sign of the increasing lack of familial solidarity in Italian society. Fathers no longer feel responsible for their offspring and view parenthood as a burden and restrictive influence. Thanks to their greater financial capabilities, men have more freedom to escape parental obligations. Men's abandonment of their children is seen by Italian society as a natural, if less than desirable, occurrence; on the other hand, women who abandon their children are vilified and condemned for renouncing their sacred duty as mothers. This can be seen by the public outcry to Sibilla Aleramo's account of her leaving her child in her autobiography, *Una donna* (1906).[78]

This vilification is exemplified in Ginzburg's portrayal of Olga in *Famiglia* (1977). Olga is a single mother of a two-year-old boy, whom she leaves with her sister whilst she moves about restlessly from one friend's house to another. The protagonist Carmine's opinion of Olga echoes the widespread social condemnation of mothers who leave their children. He disapproves strongly of her actions and this ultimately ends their relationship. Although at first sight Olga appears to be a free and independent spirit, Ginzburg makes it clear that her character is not entirely happy. The fact that Olga has a wealthy, famous

[78] It is also noticeable in Vittorio de Sica's 1944 film *I bambini ci guardano*. The mother, who had abandoned her son and husband for a lover, is condemned by all for her actions and seen as bringing shame on the family. The final poignant scene shows the young, now fatherless Pricò rejecting the mother and choosing to live as an orphan.

father means that she has the financial freedom that many men enjoy, and this provides her with a level of independence which she is not willing to give up for her baby. Olga does not sleep in one place for long and never sleeps in her own apartment, 'perché ne aveva orrore, chissà perché' (47). For Olga to stay in her own apartment would mean settling down and establishing an ordered home life, which would also probably involve closer contact with her baby. It is the responsibility of family life that Olga fears. Although Ginzburg does not provide explicit reasons for Olga's inability to settle, it is evident that Olga's childhood has affected her greatly. Her father's illustrious reputation as the director of an orchestra has instilled in Olga a sense of inferiority and inability to live up to his example. She is never completely satisfied with her life and wanders around trying to escape the boredom and loneliness that she fears in everyday life. The fact that she has no job simply aggravates her boredom. Ivana sums up Olga's restlessness by saying that she 'cerca delle madri, e dei padri, e dei fratelli. Poi si stufa, le sembrano sbagliati quelli che ha trovato, le sembra che è capitata nel posto sbagliato' (60). Like so many of Ginzburg's characters, Olga spends her whole life searching for something that is unattainable as it is constructed on an ideal of family and love. Yet interestingly, she does not seek her baby's love to replace that lacking from elsewhere, as often happens in similar cases. It is also noteworthy that although she clearly has no interest in her baby, Olga did not choose to have an abortion.

In the 1975 essay 'Dell'aborto', Ginzburg clearly states her opinions on the problematic moral issues surrounding abortion, announcing herself to be strongly in favour of its legalization. She does however object to the emotional rhetoric used by feminist supporters in their campaigns on the subject, declaring it 'odioso che si parli dell'aborto come se fosse una libera e allegra festa, [...] odiose le parole "la pancia è mia e ne faccio quello che mi pare."'[79] As far as Ginzburg is concerned, these opinions detract from the seriousness of the choice that women must make and overlook the fact that 'abortire è uccidere'.[80] Ginzburg's condemnation of the hypocrisy of certain feminist groups, which ignore or deny that abortion is a form of killing, does not prevent her from supporting women's right to choose, and she believes it to be the only right to kill that a person should be entitled to by law, as abortion deals 'd'una uccisione del tutto particolare, e assolutamente diversa da ogni altra specie di uccisione; essa non può essere paragonata a nulla, perché non

[79] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Dell'aborto', in *Non possiamo saperlo*, pp. 26-30 (pp. 26-27).
[80] ibid.

rassomiglia a nulla'.[81] Ginzburg's main argument for the legalization of abortion is based on the need for justice. The illegal status of abortion forces women such as Anna in *Tutti i nostri ieri* to risk their lives and health at the hands of ill-qualified surgeons operating in primitive conditions:

> L'aborto legale deve essere chiesto innanzitutto per giustizia. [...] È intollerabile che le donne povere rischino la morte o muoiano procurandosi aborti con i ferri da calza, e le donne ricche possano disporre di comode cliniche e non rischino nulla o assai poco. Questo è intollerabile. [...] La legge dovrebbe essere di pura giustizia; non dovrebbe essere né rigida, né molle, ma soltanto giusta.[82]

In an effort to counteract some of this injustice, the organization CISA (Centro Informazione Sterilizzazione e Aborto) funded abortions in foreign clinics for women who could not pay the necessary 200,000 Lira fee. Established in 1973, CISA campaigned for legal abortion and arranged trips abroad for women desiring abortions and men wanting vasectomies. Very early pregnancies were terminated in their Milan clinic, using a suction technique that brought on women's periods and so was not technically classed as abortion.[83]

However, in Anna's case in *Tutti i nostri ieri* the eventual legalization of abortion in 1978 would not have solved her dilemma, as under the new law girls under the age of eighteen required parental consent before undergoing the procedure, a clause insisted upon by the Christian Democrats in their bid to protect the structure of the family.[84] Therefore, girls such as Anna and Enrica (the seventeen-year-old protagonist of Maraini's *L'età del malessere*) would still have had to resort to illegal abortions, unless they were willing to confide in their families. Although Ginzburg does not mention the specific case of younger girls' rights in her essay on abortion, she does maintain that the ultimate decision to have an abortion should rest solely with the mother and that 'non può dunque essere che individuale, privata e buia'.[85] Ginzburg's insistence on the private nature of the mother's decision implies that she would not have supported the restrictions imposed on the freedom of choice for younger girls. Her view on the legalization of abortion is based on her desire

---

[81] ibid., p. 27.
[82] ibid.
[83] See Virginia Visani, 'Cisa: sfidiamo la galera', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 40-41.
[84] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 394.
[85] Ginzburg, 'Dell'aborto', p. 29.

for equality, just as much of her political campaigning was, rather than because of a belief in women's fundamental right to control their own bodies.

This fundamental right was however demanded by many feminists. *Effe*'s editorial board insisted that legalized abortion was necessary to give back the joy of motherhood and to free women 'dal sentimento del peccato—il peccato di avere un corpo—che l'educazione cattolica, sia pure tra morbide complicità, alimenta'.[86] This is perhaps closer to Maraini's position, which identifies that 'i poteri costituiti, Chiesa e Stato, hanno sempre reclamato a sé la regolamentazione del corpo femminile'.[87] Religious and legal control of women's bodies is condemned throughout Maraini's work and abortion is seen as simply another method employed to exercise power over women. As with Ginzburg, although Maraini was a strong supporter of legalized abortion, she makes it clear that she does not believe that 'l'aborto sia una conquista e nemmeno una bandiera da tirare su con trionfalismo'.[88] Far from being a victory for the feminist movement, Maraini sees abortion itself as 'una violenza sul corpo delle donne' inflicted by patriarchal society.[89] Abortion, and particularly illegal abortion, invades and violates a woman's body, placing her in danger and objectifying her. Maraini concludes that abortion is a historical legacy of patriarchy:

> Mi sono chiesta tante volte se in un mondo costruito a misura di donna l'aborto esisterebbe. Probabilmente no, perché l'aborto è in primo luogo un prodotto storico, la cristallizzazione della servitù femminile.[90]

Yet in spite of viewing it as institutionalized violence against women's bodies, Maraini supports its legalization, which at least removes some of the physical dangers for women.

Unlike Ginzburg, Maraini explicitly uses her literature as a mouthpiece for her views on abortion. Elisabetta Properzi Nelsen identifies abortion as a recurring theme in Maraini's literature and signals it as proof of a character's conscious realization of self.[91] Several of

---

[86] Adele Cambria and Daniela Colombo, 'Aborto: non lo fo per piacer mio', in *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 2-3 (p. 2).
[87] Maria Antonietta Cruciata, *Dacia Maraini* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2003), p. 137.
[88] ibid., p. 136.
[89] Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini*, p. 128.
[90] Cruciata, *Dacia Maraini*, p. 137.
[91] Elisabetta Properzi Nelsen, 'Écriture Féminine as Consciousness of the Condition of Women in Dacia Maraini's Early Narrative', in *The Pleasure of Writing: Critical Essays on Dacia Maraini*, ed. by Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld and Ada Testaferri (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2000), pp. 77-99 (p. 87).

Maraini's characters use abortion to grasp back control of their bodies, having reached a certain level of independence beforehand. It is often a turning point for the characters. In *L'età del malessere* (1963), Maraini provides a vivid description of the traumas associated with clandestine abortion, highlighting the loneliness and suffering endured by Enrica.[92] Maraini admits in a 1977 interview that she had experienced abortion personally when she wrote this novel, although she would never have revealed it at the time because of the prejudices surrounding the issue. However, her involvement with the feminist movement taught Maraini to combat the shame she felt at having had two abortions and a miscarriage: 'per me il femminismo è stato importantissimo, soffrivo di angoscia, [...] di paura, di una specie di tristezza senza ragione: un senso di inesistenza. Il femminismo mi ha tolto questa angoscia'.[93] Like many women, Maraini had internalized society's censure and could not reconcile her inner feelings with her public persona.

The issue of abortion was obviously one of the major areas of concern for the feminist movement and attracted both support and condemnation within Italian society. A report on a pro-choice demonstration in Rome in 1971 recognized that 'parlare di aborto e presentarsi in piazza con i cartelli veniva considerato segno di depravazione collettiva'.[94] Yet in spite of the prejudices that campaigners faced, the abortion debate continued. It challenged age-old attitudes concerning women's supposed duty to have children and tried to combat preconceptions about the use of contraception and the shame associated with enjoying sex. The Catholic Church's refusal to allow the use of contraception was seen as one reason for the fact that abortions were still common, even when the contraceptive pill was an option for women. Ranke-Heinemann points to Pope Paul VI's 1968 declaration that contraception was to be condemned 'just as much' as abortion, as one reason behind the unabated recourse to abortion. She argues that 'by equating contraception with abortion [popes] helped to trivialize abortion. If, as Paul VI says, contraception counts as much as abortion, we can infer that abortion counts as little as contraception'.[95] In a 1973 article, Nicoletta Roscioni, the catholic editor of 'Quale società', considers why many women chose abortion as a form of birth control:

> Prendere la pillola ogni sera [...] significa forse dover fare i conti ogni sera con la propria sessualità; significa ammettere davvero che questa non è solo finalizzata alla procreazione ma

[92] ibid.
[93] Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini*, pp. 111-112.
[94] Cambria and Colombo, 'Aborto: non lo fo per piacer mio', p. 3.
[95] Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 298.

> che va vissuta anche come valore autonomo di crescita e di felicità; significa ammettere che il piacere e la gioia, che dal rapporto sessuale derivano, sono fatti positivi e che la ricerca di quel rapporto al fine della gioia reciproca è fatto non solo legittimo ma *buono in sé*. [...] E allora accade spesso che l'aborto sia *meglio* della pillola: i conti con la propria sessualità si fanno una volta ogni due, tre anni e inoltre l'aborto rivestirà anche l'aspetto di una più severa autopunizione.[96]

Therefore, having been indoctrinated to believe that the sole purpose of sex was procreation, women suddenly had to face the idea that it could be pleasurable in its own right and free from all ties to conception. Roscioni believes that even women who were seemingly liberated still had to battle against these preconceptions, even if unconsciously. The suggestion that the suffering and danger associated with abortion were viewed as punishment for sinning is also interesting.

Part of the Italian feminist movement's aim was to banish prejudices against the use of contraception and abortion. In some respects, the feminist magazine *Effe* tried to normalize abortion for its readers, publishing articles on foreign abortion clinics that serve 'biscotti, tè, caffè' to patients and describing a woman who has had an abortion as 'serena e tranquilla'.[97] It also devotes many pages to the female body, urging: 'riscopriamo il nostro corpo'.[98] One such article details how women can learn about the inside of their bodies using 'uno speculum, uno specchio e una lampada'.[99] The magazine encourages readers to examine themselves internally in order to educate and empower themselves, thereby relying less on male doctors for information. There was also the understanding that women needed to overcome any shame and feel comfortable with their bodies, if they were to benefit from changes in the law regarding contraception and abortion.

Much of this shame arises from patriarchal and religious conditioning. According to Adrienne Rich, patriarchal mythology purports two principal ideas regarding women – whereas woman as 'mother' is pure and asexual, outside motherhood the female body is impure and dangerous.[100] Similarly, with regard to pornography, Andrea Dworkin refers to the widespread view that 'the sexuality of women is dirty and [...] that women's bodies

---

[96] Adele Cambria, 'Aborto: il disagio del mondo cattolico', in *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 40-43 (p. 43). Emphasis in original.
[97] Daniela Colombo, 'Abortire a Washington', in *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 4-6 (pp. 5-6).
[98] Alma Sabatini, 'Self Help Clinic', in *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 48-49 (p. 48).
[99] ibid., p. 49.
[100] Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 34.

(especially women's genitals) are dirty and lewd in themselves'.[101] Interestingly, this idea also forms the basis of the Catholic Church's stance on female sexuality, which throughout its history has repeatedly stressed the importance of women's purity and obedience. In line with Rich's comment, the Church also differentiates considerably between woman as 'mother' and as sexual being, two opposing images that are personified by the figures of Mary and Eve. Women are seen as the downfall of men, enticing them to sin through their unbidden sexuality. For this reason, attempts are made to curb women's sexuality and tie sexual intercourse firmly to procreation. Writing in *Effe*, Rosanna Fiocchetto attacks the way that 'i padri della Chiesa usano con virulenza l'arma dello stigma, ponendo in diretta relazione il peccato con la figura della donna'.[102] Fiocchetto expands on the Church's love-hate relationship with women:

> La tradizione cattolica si pone nei confronti della donna in un rapporto di amore-odio: essa è amata come pietra miliare della famiglia (in quanto viene oppressa) e odiata come veicolo di peccato (in quanto potrebbe ribellarsi all'oppressione).[103]

So whilst mothers are hailed for their role at the centre of the family, women in general are marginalized and even demonized by some religious rhetoric. This demonization of women places them firmly in an inferior role and is sometimes used to justify male violence against them. Jung's theory on women who are 'ridden by the animus' attests to this: these women do not adhere to socially acceptable ideals of passive females, displaying 'masculine' qualities such as opinions. They are therefore labelled by Jung as threatening and abnormal. Jung writes that in order to bring them back into line, men believe that only seduction, a beating, or rape would be powerful enough to purge the women of such supposedly devastating qualities (a feeling that Jung declares is not altogether wrong).[104]

Throughout Ginzburg and Maraini's work, we see numerous women caught up in vicious circles of oppression, passively accepting varying forms of violence against themselves and their daughters. Rape and physical violence are perhaps the most obvious manifestations of oppression of women. Whilst both authors support the notion that rape is an offence against an individual person and not against morality, they do not deal with such issues in the same way in their fiction. Whilst there are various instances of rape and

---

[101] Dworkin, *Pornography*, p. 201.
[102] Rosanna Fiocchetto, 'Il marchio del dominio', in *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 12-14 (p. 12).
[103] ibid., pp. 12-14.
[104] Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, p. 172.

violence in Maraini's literature, the theme is not as widespread in Ginzburg's work. In fact, although she does deal with violence, there is no clear example of rape in Ginzburg's fiction. In Ginzburg's work, violence is of a lesser degree and is more an everyday, subtle oppression of individuals in a family. When Ginzburg includes parental violence, it is of a more disciplinary nature, which is in keeping with the importance she places on strong parental guidance. In contrast, violence is a recurrent theme in Maraini's work and is often depicted more graphically, being of a more oppressive and destructive nature. This diversity can be explained by the authors' different writing styles, but also by their diverse aims with regard to their literature. Whilst Ginzburg wishes to convey her anxiety at the decline of the family in Italian society, Maraini's literature champions women's rights and condemns patriarchal violence. Therefore, although Ginzburg has strong opinions on topics such as abortion and sexual violence, she reserves them largely for her non-fiction and political speeches. Ginzburg is also keen to avoid representing women as the sole oppressed sex in patriarchal society and therefore does not concentrate on violence against women specifically, as Maraini does in her work. Their portrayals of pregnancy out of wedlock also attest to these different priorities. Whilst for Ginzburg, such examples serve to highlight the decline of familial structures and parental responsibility (particularly on the man's part), Maraini is more inclined to condemn patriarchal society's control of female sexuality specifically. Yet, even though their methods vary, their fundamental beliefs are not dissimilar. The authors approach similar issues from a different standpoint. Both writers condemn the violence and oppression inherent in patriarchal society and support greater legal rights for all individuals. Although many of their characters struggle to survive under the weight of these patriarchal legacies, others do manage to free themselves from oppression, even if momentarily, as I shall now consider.

2. The Road to the City: Breaking the Chain of Patriarchal Legacies?

'No woman is free until the majority of women are free' (Dacia Maraini)

In the previous chapter I considered some ways in which patriarchal society attempts to suppress women's sexual and political freedom. In this chapter I will look at examples of characters in Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg's works who try to break from the traditional role of submissive, passive female. Whilst some characters struggle towards greater self-awareness over the course of the novels, others are presented from the beginning as being seemingly liberated from social constraints. However, on closer inspection these women are often more deeply affected by traditional values than they realize or would be willing to admit.

Several of Maraini's female protagonists undergo emotional and psychological journeys in her novels. The reader witnesses changes in the characters, often before the characters themselves are aware of them. The characters achieve greater independence and self-awareness through a variety of measures, most notably through finding fulfilment in their work and escaping oppressive marriages. In contrast, Ginzburg's characters seem to make less of a personal journey in their respective narratives, and several appear to have already won independence; however, it becomes increasingly clear that this independence is largely superficial. Many of Maraini and Ginzburg's more open-minded, so-called 'modern' women use sexual promiscuity in a bid to prove their independence. Yet, their frequent sexual encounters with men merely provide evidence of their emotional reliance: these women are dependent on men for reassurance as to their self-worth and desirability. They are unable to construct their own identity without reference to men and unwittingly place themselves in the role of object. The editor of *Effe* Adele Cambria agrees that many a supposedly independent woman 'è la falsa emancipata, che lavora *come un uomo*, che sceglie il suo partner provvisorio con lo stesso criterio maschile della irresponsabilità'; she concludes that this 'non è una donna indipendente, è una donna che si è castrata imitando

gli uomini'.[1] Through their promiscuity, Maraini and Ginzburg's characters risk becoming simply more disposable, as Grazia Francescato warns:

> La storia della donna indipendente, tra virgolette, che ha il suo lavoro, la sua vita sessuale libera, sempre tra virgolette, ecc. è una gran fregatura, perché questa povera donna indipendente si riduce, in pratica, ad essere un oggetto sessuale consumabile con meno problemi e inciampi [for men].[2]

A difference must therefore be made between the real liberation of women from patriarchal oppression and the mere semblance of emancipation achieved when women take on stereotypically 'masculine' behaviour and attitudes.[3]

Francescato's comments echo theories regarding sexual difference versus equality. In the essay 'Let's Spit on Hegel' (1970), Carla Lonzi writes that equality will not end male domination of women, as it is a world of legalized oppression and one-dimensionality.[4] Lonzi argues that whilst equality is a juridical principle that masks women's inferiority, difference is an existential principle that recognizes individuals' own experiences and possibilities.[5] Sexuate difference is also key to Luce Irigaray's thinking. Irigaray warns that by 'claiming to be equal to man, woman runs the risk of doubling her traditional exclusion from society and culture. Perhaps she will obtain a social or cultural post then, but often by conforming herself to norms or values that are not hers'.[6] What is needed instead to help women, according to Irigaray, is the cultivation of sexuate difference (which Western culture has abolished) and not entry into the existing male-dominated world:

> Wanting to become as man, woman fulfils the secular dream of concealing sexuate difference. She asks for entrance into a history which has expelled her, instead of turning

---

[1] Adele Cambria and others, 'Innamorarsi', *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 12-16 (p. 12). Emphasis in original.
[2] ibid., p. 12.
[3] I will consider so-called masculine behaviour more in depth in my chapter on fathers.
[4] Carla Lonzi, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. by Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 40-59 (p. 41).
[5] ibid.
[6] Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. IX. Irigaray today prefers the term 'sexuate' to 'sexual' difference, which she believes concentrates attention too much on sexual matters and leads to censorship in certain countries. (In conversation with Luce Irigaray, Nottingham, May 2005).

> back to the start of our culture, to the moment [...] when the process of her exclusion still clearly appears.[7]

Irigaray believes that women must look to pre-patriarchal society in order to bring about a culture in the feminine and achieve true liberation from patriarchal values. In many respects, Ginzburg and Maraini's female characters fail to achieve true liberation because they adopt traditionally male values and behaviour and attempt to be equal to men rather than asserting their difference.

Tension is also created in Ginzburg's works by what she sees as the opposing values and morals of the old and new generations, that is, between parents' and children's attitudes. In her essay 'Il figlio dell'uomo' (1946), Ginzburg expands on her belief that her generation is fundamentally different from previous generations, owing to their different experiences of Fascism and the Second World War:

> La gente più vecchia di noi ci rimprovera per il modo che abbiamo di allevare i bambini. Vorrebbero che mentissimo ai nostri figli come loro mentivano a noi. [...] Non lo possiamo fare con dei bambini che hanno veduto lo spavento e l'orrore sulla nostra faccia. [...] C'è un abisso incolmabile fra noi e le generazioni di prima.[8]

In her literature, Ginzburg employs the contrasting images of country and city to highlight this generation gap further. Whilst parents, with their traditional and often more conservative views, remain firmly rooted in the country, the younger generation head to the city in search of change, which in turn mirrors the consistent migration from country to city that was happening in Italian society.[9] However, whilst Ginzburg's characters do indeed appear to achieve greater independence in the city, this is not always seen as positive.

Finally, I will consider the depiction of relationships in both author's works between older women and younger men, which are presented, in part, as a means for women to attain greater autonomy. In contrast with the submissive role expected of many women in relationships, these affairs afford them greater power and influence. However, whilst the women may have gained more control in their relationships, they are presented as being

---

[7] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, p. IX.
[8] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Il figlio dell'uomo', in *Le piccole virtù* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), pp. 67-70 (p. 70).
[9] See Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 217-229.

still subject to patriarchal conditioning, in that these relationships continue to be viewed as hierarchical rather than as the meeting of two subjects of equal worth.

In *Donna in guerra* (1975), Maraini emphasizes patriarchal society's oppression of women, highlighting the political, social, emotional, and sexual repression that they suffered in a society in which abortion and divorce were illegal and in which women were often objectified. A contemporary reviewer called the novel 'il più importante [...] dei romanzi femministi pubblicati in Italia',[10] conveying the impact it had on its release. The protagonist Vannina's journey towards self-discovery is aided by the numerous colourful characters surrounding her. Helped by her meetings with Suna, Tota and Giottina, and her friendship with her unconventional colleague Rosa Colla, Vannina gradually achieves greater self-awareness. Maraini provides two key indicators that Vannina has changed: her dream and her impassioned speech about male-female relationships after her pupils re-enact a rape. Vannina's speech is a clear sign of her new outlook, and she feels an unprecedented sense of satisfaction from her teaching. Her transformation from the passive, conforming woman at the beginning of the novel is evident:

> Parlavo dello stupro, dei ruoli sessuali, con fervore e rabbia, come non mi era mai successo in tanti anni di scuola. [...] Per la prima volta, tornando a casa [...] dopo cinque ore di scuola, non mi sentivo avvilita e svuotata, ma presa da una febbre di allegria.[11]

Although Vannina has been working for years, it is only at this stage that she truly appreciates her role and the influence that she could have on future generations by teaching girls and boys to respect each other. Similarly, Luce Irigaray's work in schools has led her to call for sexual difference to be taught to children: 'why couldn't this be done as part of their civic education, which is supposed to be about learning to live together humanely and civilly, in respect for differences – sexual difference being the most universal difference'.[12] Whilst schools teach religious and cultural difference, they overlook teaching children to respect sexual difference. Irigaray maintains that boys and girls construct culture differently, yet formal education only takes into account boys' culture and ignores female culture; schools should therefore cultivate a culture of the girl, which Irigaray asserts

[10] Giovanni Mameli, '*Donna in guerra*', *L'Unione Sarda*, 30 November 1975, cited on Internet Web Site: <http://www.dacia-maraini.it/critica/TtCr23.html> [accessed 7 August 2006].
[11] Dacia Maraini, *Donna in guerra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1975]), p. 258. Further references to primary editions are given after quotations in the text.
[12] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, pp. 83-84.

already exists in little girls but is lost on exposure to masculine-based education, and, in this way, a culture of two subjects can develop.[13]

Through her teaching, Vannina finally finds the strength to move on from her marriage, and she has successfully made the first step in breaking free from the mental restrictions imposed on her. Betty Friedan emphasizes the importance of work for women, asserting that 'work can now be seen as the key to the problem that has no name'.[14] However, she stresses that the work must be of a fulfilling and not mundane nature, allowing women to grow as subjects in society. Friedan believes that when women, such as Vannina, begin to dispel the myths surrounding the feminine mystique, realizing that neither husbands, the home, nor sex will provide them with a sense of self, they frequently discover that the answer to their problems is simpler than previously thought.[15] It is this recognition of their own condition which is the all-important first step towards liberation and which is therefore the hardest, as can be seen by Vannina's struggle to free herself over the course of Maraini's novel.

The idea of work as a means of liberating women was not shared by all feminists however. In a 1974 article entitled 'Le non femministe: ombre sul muro', Anna Cardàno attacks particular groups of women whom she deems to be detrimental to the feminist cause, including actresses, singers, and career women. Whilst she condemns actresses and singers for perpetuating the myth of 'femminilità, semplificata, enfatizzata, ridotta a una caricatura grottesca', Cardàno criticizes career women for abandoning their femaleness.[16] She claims that career women renounce their gender in order to compete in a man's world:

> 'Farsi uomo' era in realtà l'unico modo che conoscevano per diventare essere umani. [...] Proprio perché hanno rifiutato a livello inconscio il loro essere donne, non si riconoscono in un movimento che quell''essere donne', invece di rinnegarlo, lo recupera orgogliosamente nella sua positività.[17]

Here there is the idea that women must compromise their characters in order to succeed and are only outwardly independent. Instead of trying to achieve a female subjectivity, Cardàno believes that these successful career women reject their own nature:

---

[13] In conversation with Luce Irigaray, Nottingham, May 2005.
[14] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1963]), p. 291.
[15] ibid., pp. 294, 300.
[16] Anna Cardàno, 'Le non femministe: ombre sul muro', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 15-17 (p. 15).
[17] ibid., p. 16.

> Esse provano disprezzo e disgusto per la donna in quanto tale [...] perché in realtà queste donne disprezzano e odiano se stesse: sono anch'esse vittime della generale oppressione femminile, esseri 'colonizzati', che hanno tentato di salvarsi nel modo sbagliato, tradendo le compagne di oppressione e passando dalla parte degli oppressori.[18]

According to Cardàno therefore, in order for work to be the key to Friedan's 'problem that has no name', it has to be undertaken in a way that is true to the woman's self, and women should not have to forfeit their right to subjectivity to enjoy professional success; instead, women like Vannina must cultivate a positive role for women in the world of employment if they are to combat and transform traditional prejudices. Cardàno's comments also echo Luce Irigaray's observation that 'whereas a woman too often abandons her own gender, man is too enclosed in his'.[19]

In *Donna in guerra*, the final confirmation of Vannina's transformation comes after Suna's death with her life-changing, symbolic dream. Vannina imagines herself flying and is filled with a sense of freedom before she feels her body increase in weight, whereby she plummets to the ground, finishing up dead with broken legs and 'senza occhi, senza bocca, disfatta' (266).[20] Vannina's broken body is in keeping with the feminist idea that the female body needs to be reconstructed if women are to (re)gain ownership of it.[21] Germaine Greer asserts that women should use their bodies 'come strumento di espressione della nostra speranza, del nostro futuro, non ricacciarlo un'altra volta dentro il busto di timore e vergogna'.[22] In Maraini's novel, Vannina's body is symbolically remade in her dream, at which point Suna bequeaths her crutches to her, passing with them her strength and her beliefs about female liberation. In her dream, Vannina wants to thank her:

> Volevo baciarla per ringraziarla. Mi sono chinata, ma al posto della sua faccia ho trovato il suo sesso: una conchiglia bianca di marmo dall'interno rosso, palpitante. Dalla conchiglia sgorgava un fiotto di latte dolcissimo. Ho accostato le labbra; ho bevuto di quel latte che sapeva di alghe marine e bevendo sentivo che mi riempiva di forza, di coraggio. (266)

---

[18] ibid.
[19] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, p. 155.
[20] These dreams are reminiscent of Maraini's own frequent dreams of flying. See Dacia Maraini & Piera Degli Esposti, *Storia di Piera* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997), p. 39, and Dacia Maraini, *Dizionarietto Quotidiano* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997), p. 83.
[21] See Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought*, p. 16.
[22] Germaine Greer, 'Il nudo non è in vendita', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 46-49 (p. 49).

Vannina's vision of flying shows her desire to be free of her marriage and impending motherhood. However, as she is merely beginning her journey, she momentarily falters and crashes to the ground. Vannina's death in the dream allows a clean break with her past and her rebirth with Suna's help. Freud claims that dying in dreams is representative of the start of a journey, significant in Vannina's case as she begins a new, unpredictable chapter in her life.[23]

The images surrounding Suna's appearance in the dream are also interesting. Maraini places Suna in a maternal role, constructing a cultural genealogy between the two women and anticipating the feminist practice of *affidamento*.[24] As Vannina drinks milk from Suna's vagina she inherits her strength, gaining nourishment from her legacy and (re)gaining knowledge of her own body. For Vannina the dream is a turning point in her life—'[il sogno] ha cambiato la mia vita' (265)—and she begins to control her own destiny, deciding to have an abortion and thereby severing her final tie to her husband. She has accomplished what Greer sees as a vital step in the liberation of married women, in that she has re-assessed both her own character and the structure of marriage itself, combating the traditional sense of failure that women feel in what Greer labels an impossible set-up.[25] Vannina's dependence on others finally comes to an end as she inherits Suna's crutches, thereby enabling her to walk alone, if unsteadily. *Donna in guerra* ends on a note of optimism as Vannina looks to her future, realizing that 'ora sono sola e ho tutto da ricominciare' (269). These words emphasize the necessity of her separation from Giacinto as a prerequisite for her own personal struggle for freedom. Yet the question of whether Vannina can achieve true liberation in a patriarchal society, where others including Suna have failed, is left unanswered.

Several female characters in the novel are extremely important in showing Vannina that it is not necessary to conform to societal expectations. In a way, this group of women are reminiscent of an *autocoscienza* group, in which Vannina can explore her inner self and the reasons behind her inherent unhappiness. Alma Sabatini, in an article advising readers how to organize such groups, writes that they are not just for letting out frustration, but have

---

[23] Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 130.

[24] Giovanna Bellesia points out that Maraini includes other fictional examples of *affidamento* in the pairings of Marianna Ucrìa and her servant Fila, and Michela Canova and the policewoman Adele in *Voci* – see 'Variations on a Theme: Violence against Women in the Writings of Dacia Maraini', in *The Pleasure of Writing: Critical Essays on Dacia Maraini*, ed. by Rodica Diaconescu Blumenfeld and Ada Testaferri (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2000), pp. 121-134 (p. 131).

[25] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), pp. 14, 323.

'uno scopo ben preciso: quello di individuare le cause che determinano le nostre infelicità'.[26] In Maraini's novel, the female characters constitute an informal example of such a group, with each member contributing to Vannina's quest for liberation, for example, Rosa's eccentricities set her outside society's vision of normality. As Virginia Picchietti explains, Rosa represents difference, but in this case difference is an advantage rather than a weakness, and the bond of entrustment that forms between the two 'situates Vannina in a female space of difference'.[27] The characters of Tota and Giottina are also important in providing Vannina with atypical views of women. Maraini frequently attributes the adjective *grasso* to both women, placing them outside the conventional idea of beauty, and their unattractive physical appearances protect them from the male gaze.[28] In her essay 'La parola corpo' (1996), Maraini considers societal perceptions of female bodies, concluding that the myth of beauty 'gli è stato cucito addosso e [...] l'accompagna come una maledizione lodata mille volte'.[29] Tota and Giottina's lack of traditional beauty frees them from this curse.

Vannina enters into her friendship with these two women grudgingly, which in turn reflects her initial reluctance to face up to her marital situation. On several occasions, the women physically control Vannina's movements, grasping her arms to restrain her or dragging her in their desired direction. The use of verbs such as *trascinare*, *spingere*, and *afferrare* shows the physical persuasion that the two women feel is necessary to bring Vannina closer to her final goal.[30] They understand that her transformation will not be straightforward and that she needs constant guidance until she is ready to walk alone. The laundry room where the two women are based is itself symbolic of their role. As Pauline Dagnino explains in her aptly titled 'Revolution in the Laundry', the room with its dark, damp atmosphere is like a womb where the women can speak freely.[31] Vannina listens in wonder as the two women relate sexually explicit episodes in which female sexuality plays a leading role.

---

[26] Alma Sabatini, 'Il piccolo gruppo: struttura di base del movimento femminista', *Effe*, January 1974, pp. 2-3 (p. 2).
[27] Virginia Picchietti, *Relational Spaces: Daughterhood, Motherhood, and Sisterhood in Dacia Maraini's Writings and Films* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), pp. 123-124.
[28] See pages 5, 9, 13, 18, 23 85, and 142.
[29] Dacia Maraini, 'La parola corpo', in *Un clandestino a bordo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002 [1996]), pp. 37-44 (p. 41).
[30] See pages 5, 9, 10, 12, 74, 75, and 143.
[31] Pauline Dagnino, 'Revolution in the Laundry', in *The Pleasure of Writing*, pp. 232-245 (pp. 237, 240).

However, it is her friendship with Suna that most influences Vannina's self-perception. Yet the character of Suna is problematic. Whilst she appears to epitomize the liberated feminist, she is in fact plagued by problems, both physically and emotionally. She relies heavily on others' opinions, especially her father's. Suna's opinions on men's oppression of women run throughout the novel, and she is highly critical of Vannina's relationship with Giacinto, chastising her friend for acting 'come se fosse il tuo padrone' (138). However, Suna's determination to further the feminist cause is sometimes at odds with her own personality. Whilst she advocates female liberation, she forms an emotional dependency on Santino that rivals Vannina's dependence on Giacinto. Suna becomes depressed when she feels neglected by him and even agrees to share him with his other lover, thereby sacrificing her pride. In an interview, Maraini explains that Suna's paralysis is symbolic 'della donna che non riesce a camminare, sebbene abbia conquistato molte libertà'.[32] From this it is clear that women must not only achieve liberation, but also know how to use it. Maraini writes that if Suna had been able to share her problems within a 'collettività di donne', she would probably not have committed suicide; instead, her role within a political group merely leaves her disillusioned and isolated.[33] Again the importance of consciousness-raising groups is clear.

As Carol Lazzaro-Weis points out, Suna uses sexual promiscuity to counterbalance her disability.[34] Suna herself admits: 'vado a masturbarmi, quando sono giù è l'unica cosa che mi consola' (162). Germaine Greer likewise suggests that self-loathing plays a significant part in nymphomania, which often results from a low self-image and a tendency towards self-degradation.[35] Suna appears, on the surface, to be free from social stereotypes of femininity, and her confrontational style and explicit language contrast her strongly with Vannina. However, Suna's problems could be said to be more deeply engrained than her friend's and therefore harder to resolve. Maraini does not cast Suna as a positive role model, in spite of the fact that she does affect Vannina in a positive manner, and the female genealogy here is problematic.

Coupled with her physical disability is Suna's troubled relationship with her father, from whom she still craves the attention that was lacking throughout her childhood. Suna tells Vannina that her father has beauty and grace and that 'tutti quelli che lo vedono si

---

[32] Ileana Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini* (Verona: Giorgio Bertani, 1977), p. 146.
[33] ibid.
[34] Carol Lazzaro-Weis, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 76.
[35] Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, p. 261.

innamorano di lui' (147). This seemingly innocuous comment betrays the truth behind Suna's insecurities: whilst everyone loves her father, he does not show his love for her. Their personal interaction is limited and her father's main contribution to the family is financial rather than emotional. Maraini's portrayal of Suna's contradictory behaviour and opinions effectively shows the inherent difficulties that women face in combating attitudes that are so deeply engrained in society. Even the most liberated of women cannot avoid being conditioned by their environment. In the case of *Donna in guerra*, the woman who was apparently more emancipated at the start of the novel is the one who cannot ultimately cope with societal and familial pressures, eventually committing suicide; by contrast, Vannina has enjoyed a slower growth and can therefore adjust more fully.

Armida's life in Maraini's *Il treno per Helsinki* (1984) has many parallels with Vannina's, and she too struggles to escape an oppressive marriage. Whereas Vannina takes refuge in her teaching, Armida immerses herself in writing, which provides her with a sense of empowerment and freedom: 'le dita leggere sui tasti un senso di onnipotenza che mi secca la lingua in bocca. [...] L'esaltazione mi tiene sospesa fra soffitto e pavimento in uno stato di lievitazione felice'.[36] Armida rejects procreation in favour of creation, thereby refusing women's traditional role and breaking the historical silence of women: she leaves her legacy through her words. The significance attributed by Maraini to Armida's writing is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's declaration that of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses was when 'the middle-class woman began to write'.[37] Although Armida's increased self-confidence is at times interrupted by bouts of self-doubt, she has begun an important stage in her journey for liberation. Her writing allows her to examine her own character and provides her with the opportunity to travel to Helsinki, where she can continue in her quest for self-growth. Removed from her familiar surroundings, Armida must confront both old and new aspects of her personality. She is shocked when her companions label her the honorary mother of the group and when her boyfriend Miele declares:

> "Sì sei una persona che ha bisogno del bisogno degli altri...in quanto tale materna."
> Colpita. Dalla frase inaspettata. Bisogno del bisogno degli altri. Da dove gli viene questa conoscenza di me? Una cosa che io stessa non so. (167)

[36] Dacia Maraini, *Il treno per Helsinki* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1984]), p. 100.
[37] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1990 [1928]), pp. 62-63.

This sudden realisation forces Armida to re-assess every aspect of her nature, throwing into question the way in which she previously viewed herself and her relationship with others.

Unlike Vannina, Armida leaves her husband not out of a desire for independence but for another man. However, her affair with Miele is also doomed to fail. When he pleads with her to continue their relationship in spite of his pending marriage, Armida finally breaks free from the destructive relationship: 'sento la sua voce che mi chiama disperata dal finestrino della macchina. Non mi volto. Non rispondo' (262). In a way, this is both the end and beginning of Armida's journey. By not responding she puts to rest the first phase of her development and embarks on the next. Armida gradually learns more about herself in the novel through her physical travels, which present her with new experiences, and through her friendships. Armida's meeting with the unconventional Asia is another catalyst in her development. Asia is comparable to Suna in *Donna in guerra*, although the character is less developed. As with Suna, Asia provides the protagonist with an atypical view of women, forcing her to re-think her own position. Asia, with her evocative, exotic name, is also an outsider and apparent non-conformist, and other women avoid her company, as they do not know how to handle her provocative behaviour. However, Armida is fascinated by Asia's attitude and opinions:

> "Con gli uomini ci si gioca non ci si innamora. L'amore è fesso. E porta dritti al matrimonio. Come dire alla tortura a fuoco lento. Beh non guardarmi così non sono una strega. [...] un giorno dirai: aveva ragione Asia l'amore è una cacata e ci sputo sopra." (192)

Asia's words shock Armida out of her comfortable, traditional viewpoint. However, although Asia appears to enjoy greater independence, Maraini again shows that her character has inner insecurities: we learn that Asia attempted to cut off her breasts as a girl, which resulted in her mother committing her to a mental institution. This clear rebellion against her sexuality is in stark contrast to her behaviour as an adult when she uses sex as a means of getting attention.

It becomes clear that although she is highly promiscuous, even admitting openly to prostituting herself, Asia cannot find sexual fulfilment: in fact, she begs Armida to teach her to 'provare piacere' (233). Asia describes how during sex she is a 'spettatrice impassibile' and that it is as though she is not present (233). In an interview, Maraini states that young girls often do not achieve orgasm because of their social conditioning:

> Questa specie di inibizione, di rifiuto della propria sessualità che è stata imposta come qualche cosa di vergognoso, di peccaminoso è la conseguenza di centinaia di anni in cui è stata praticata la clitoridetomia psicologica da parte della nostra società patriarcale.[38]

Asia's experience is in keeping with Greer's theory of self-loathing mentioned above and also Dinora Pines's assessment that girls have an 'overwhelming impulse' to use their bodies in order to prove something, 'such as a sense of self-esteem through being physically attractive, or even a sense of existing because another human being acknowledges [their] body as a source of pleasure'.[39] So, girls like Asia come into existence through the attention of others and by giving, rather than receiving, pleasure: to some extent, they only become visible when the male gaze is on them and therefore become trapped in their constructed image, as Irigaray writes: 'I, too, a captive when a man holds me in his gaze; I, too, am abducted from myself. Immobilized in the reflection he expects of me'.[40] In the novel, Maraini leaves Asia's story unresolved; however, there is little reason to suspect that her fate will be any happier than Suna's.

Voci (1994) is another of Maraini's novels that deals with a woman's personal journey. Michela Canova's opinions of herself and others change through her investigations into crimes against women. Unlike Vannina and Armida however, Michela's life is not altered by a living woman but by a deceased one; Angela Bari's murder forces Michela to re-assess her role as a woman, particularly when she considers that she never really knew her neighbour. Franco Giraldi, who directs the film adaptation, cites this as one of the key messages of Maraini's novel:

> La cosa che più mi affascinava [...] era che due ragazze che vivevano una vicino [*sic*] all'altra [...] in realtà non si conoscevano. Una delle cose tipiche del mondo in cui viviamo è che molte volte abbiamo paura dei rapporti umani; e che non sappiamo leggere cosa si nasconde nel volto di coloro che incontriamo. [...] Non siamo curiosi di capire cosa c'è dietro un sorriso, un rossore, un trasalimento. [...] Forse abbiamo paura di capire chi ci sta di fronte, perché capire significa condividere, accettare magari delle responsabilità occuparci dell'"altro".[41]

---

[38] Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini*, p. 119.
[39] Dinora Pines, *A Woman's Unconscious Use of Her Body: A Psychoanalytical Perspective* (London: Virago, 1993), p. 69.
[40] Luce Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', *Signs*, 7 (1981-1982), 60-67 (p. 66).
[41] Franco Giraldi in a personal letter [14/04/04].

Michela comes to the same realisation, recognizing that crimes against women go unsolved precisely because people pay little attention to the suffering of others. Michela and Angela lived in close proximity, yet never truly met, and this reflects the idea, referred to by Simone de Beauvoir, that women do not say 'we' as they have no shared history or real sense of solidarity; they instead live dispersed among men and more willingly form relationships with men than women.[42] Significantly, it is only after her death that Michela understands Angela when, just as the recently deceased Suna passes on her strength in Vannina's dream, the murdered Angela's voice reaches Michela through her tape-recorded fairytales, which can be seen as her legacy.

Again Maraini uses a dream to highlight the transition that her character is undergoing. Michela dreams of swimming through murky waters towards bright lights, a symbolic, if somewhat trite, image.[43] Freud suggests that water represents birth, and Michela has certainly experienced a kind of rebirth as a more liberated and empowered woman.[44] Maraini's use of dreams in her literature is interesting: it appears that they are largely a privileged female space, which enable women to distance themselves from their fusional relationships and continue the journeys of self-discovery that they tentatively begin whilst awake. Maraini's fictional dreams often involve maternal imagery, thereby allowing her protagonists to construct a female genealogy, which is lacking in patriarchal society: the separation of mother and daughter under patriarchy is remedied temporarily in the women's dreams.[45] Their dreams allow the women to look inside themselves for guidance; in fact, Maraini believes that all women should find the 'hidden woman' who is present inside them in order to achieve liberation.[46]

In their respective novels, Vannina, Armida, and Michela evolve from obedient wives and girlfriends to more self-aware and confident women. In each case, the women have reached a new level of consciousness, which, according to Daniela Colombo, is vital for their continued progress: 'la presa di coscienza è la base necessaria di qualsiasi nostra

---

[42] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949]), p. 19.
[43] Dacia Maraini, *Voci* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997 [1994]), p. 30. Interestingly, Michela's independent stance at the end of Maraini's novel is largely eliminated from Franco Giraldi's film adaptation, in which the final scenes show her setting off on her travels with Nando. There is no mention of the exciting professional challenges that Michela will face and the film suggests less of a development in Michela than in Maraini's novel (*Voci.* Dir. Franco Giraldi. Eagle Pictures. 2001).
[44] Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 128.
[45] For example, Enrica's vivid dream of being in her mother's womb in *L'età del malessere* occurs whilst she is keeping vigil over her mother's body.
[46] Dacia Maraini, 'On *Of Woman Born*', *Signs*, 4:4 (1979), 687-694 (p. 687).

azione'.[47] In an interview with Serena Anderlini, Maraini describes her propensity to make her characters reborn and points to the fact that her characters' defeats strengthen rather than destroy them.[48] I would argue that Vannina, Armida, and Michela's problems are external and therefore more apparent: that is, they originate from outside, from social and marital pressures, and are consequently easier to resolve than the internal problems suffered by the women who surround them. Suna, Asia, and Angela, although seemingly more independent, suffer with deeper-rooted, internal problems, which are initially hidden and slowly devour the women until they break down. Unlike Vannina, Armida, and Michela, who are strong characters fighting external oppression, these three women are all fundamentally weak in spite of their public personas. Death will be their fate, as they are unable to work through their problems and, in a way, they are sacrificed by their author for the other women's liberation.

In contrast, Ginzburg's female protagonists appear to change and mature less in the course of her works. Instead, her characters often go through life relatively unaltered by their experiences and few undergo life-changing journeys in her novels, a fact that perhaps better reflects reality. That is not to say however that her characters do not change, but that they do not experience the kind of symbolic rebirth that Maraini's do. Rather than depicting individual characters' radical transformations, Ginzburg concentrates on generational change, showing that attitudes, behaviour, and aspirations alter from one generation to the next. Several of her younger female characters already appear to enjoy greater independence at the opening of their respective novels than their mothers' generation; in particular, Francesca in *È stato così* and Azalea in *La strada che va in città* indulge in numerous affairs and do not conform entirely to the traditional view of obedient, submissive women. However, as with Maraini's characters, it is questionable whether their freedom is real or merely superficial.

Francesca in *È stato così* (1947) represents what Ginzburg sees as a new generation of women, who do not want to be tied down and therefore reject the institution of marriage. Francesca changes relationships with men frequently and admits: 'Mi piace andare a letto con gli uomini. Ma voglio cambiare spesso. Dopo un paio di volte ne ho abbastanza d'un uomo'.[49] Francesca and her cousin (the unnamed protagonist of the story) react to societal

[47] Daniela Colombo, 'Il piccolo gruppo: fine dell'isolamento', *Effe*, January 1974, pp. 4-5 (p. 5).
[48] Serena Anderlini, 'Interview with Dacia Maraini: Prolegomena for a Feminist Dramaturgy of the Feminine', *diacritics*, 2-3: 21 (1991), 148-160 (p. 149).
[49] Natalia Ginzburg, 'È stato così', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964]), pp. 83-155 (p. 120).

expectations in different ways. Whereas the protagonist's ultimate dream is marriage and children, Francesca has chosen to rebel. Although she previously conformed to the viewpoint of those around her, she soon comes to realize that her true nature cannot be suppressed: 'anch'io credevo allora che mi ci volesse un marito e una vita come tutte le donne. Ma invece a poco a poco ho capito che non bisogna pigliar le cose sul tragico. Dobbiamo accettare noi stessi così come siamo' (121). Her subsequent experience with men simply strengthens her resolve not to be controlled by them. Significantly, Francesca's transformation occurs before the opening of Ginzburg's narrative and is presented to the reader as a *fait accompli*.

The idea that Francesca belongs to a new generation is emphasized by her family's inability to understand her and exemplifies the 'abisso incolmabile' that Ginzburg mentions in 'Il figlio dell'uomo'. Francesca's mother is distraught at her daughter's nonconformity and what she views as promiscuity:

> Non riusciva a capire cosa diavolo voleva Francesca nella sua vita. Non aveva mai capito un'acca di quella ragazza.
> "È la nuova generazione," diceva, "è la nuova generazione." Piangeva e [...] ha detto che non le andava come Francesca faceva con gli uomini, come civettava e come se ne teneva sempre tre o quattro alla volta. [...] Faceva del suo meglio per capire ma non capiva niente. (122)

Ginzburg handles this conflict with characteristic humour, and as the older woman assumes that Francesca is merely dating various men rather than keeping lovers, her response to the whole truth can only be imagined. Francesca's atypical behaviour and reluctance to conform to her parents' expectations cause tension within the family and shock her cousin, who listens to her tales 'con spavento' (120). The protagonist's different attitude to marriage and children affect her capacity to understand Francesca's lifestyle, although she does not condemn it outright. However, in keeping with the belief that women who refuse to marry are daring insecurity and risking poverty and degradation,[50] she feels obliged to warn Francesca: 'sarai sola quando sarai vecchia' (121); this is a situation that she herself dreads and is also reminiscent of Ginzburg's belief that a childless woman will regret not having children when she is older.[51] Whilst Francesca appears to be more liberated than her

[50] See Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, p. 241.
[51] See Natalia Ginzburg, 'Discorso sulle donne', in *Il pozzo segreto: Cinquanta scrittrici italiane*, ed. by Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Rosaria Guacci and Marisa Rusconi (Florence: Giunti, 1993), pp. 27-32 (p. 28). I return to this idea in Chapter 5.

cousin, her outright rejection of marriage and stability is not necessarily any healthier than her cousin's wholehearted embracing of them. Francesca is unable to find happiness within the traditional institution of marriage and has rejected it rather than attempting to reform it.

In *La strada che va in città* (1942), Azalea also enjoys relationships with various men, although marriage gives her a greater semblance of respectability than Francesca. Whilst her dismissive attitude of men is similar to Francesca's, Azalea shows a greater emotional reliance on them. Azalea has a string of lovers, and her happiness and even the state of her house are dependent on the condition of her extramarital affairs:

> C'era Ottavia che stirava in cucina. Aveva un grembiale bianco davanti, e non era in ciabatte. Tutto cambiava in casa, quando le cose di Azalea filavano bene. Anche i bambini sembravano ingrassati. Ottavia mi disse, mentre passava il ferro sopra un reggipetto di Azalea, che adesso andava tutto bene e Azalea era sempre contenta.[52]

Ginzburg's implication that the maid only wears slippers when her mistress is unhappy and the small but significant detail of her ironing Azalea's underwear, as opposed to any other garment, add humour to the scene and are two examples of the author's typical attention to detail. Azalea mainly chooses lovers who are easy to dominate, for example the student who acts on her every whim. Her marriage, like so many in Ginzburg's literature, is suffering after years of monotony and complacency, and Azalea needs her lovers to escape the tedium of everyday reality. Her emotional reliance on men is apparent when she advises her sister that 'il Nini o un altro è lo stesso. Pur di avere qualcuno, perché la vita è troppo malinconica per una donna, se ci si trova sole' (78). Azalea's opinion echoes Friedan's view that girls use sex to erase their lack of identity and seldom worry about who the other person is: they do not 'see' their lovers, as these girls have no sense of themselves.[53] Indeed, although Azalea may at first sight appear to be a more liberated, sexually-aware woman than many of her contemporaries, she is still fundamentally driven by the same beliefs and longings, although she must search for fulfilment outside marriage. She constructs her own identity starting from a man and requires a man's presence to understand her own place in life and her own character. In this respect, Azalea exemplifies Irigaray's theory that woman has no unconscious except the one that man gives her.[54]

---

[52] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La strada che va in città', in *Cinque romanzi brevi*, pp. 23-81 (p. 44).
[53] Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, p. 240.
[54] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988 [1977]), pp. 93-94.

As well as constructing her identity through her lovers, Azalea (and also her sister Delia by the end of the book) uses clothes to establish a desired image, spending all day in bed before dressing up for the evening (80). Women's love of clothes is something considered by Simone de Beauvoir, who outlines some reasons why many women place so much importance on their external appearance:

> It has often been said that woman dresses to inspire jealousy in other women, and such jealousy is in fact a clear sign of success: but it is not the only thing aimed at. Through the envious or admiring approval obtained, she seeks to gain an absolute of her beauty, her elegance, her taste – herself; she shows herself to bring herself into being.[55]

So women like Delia and Azalea establish their identity through their dress and others' opinions. The implication is that these women do not exist without the gaze of outsiders, a result of women's objectification in patriarchal society. De Beauvoir points out that girls are encouraged to dress up and imitate older women; she then identifies a stage in which the girl hovers between the 'wish and refusal to display herself'; however, ultimately patriarchal teaching wins and 'when she has once accepted her vocation as sexual object, she enjoys adorning herself'.[56] Moreover, the style in which a woman chooses to dress conveys her character to the outside world. De Beauvoir mentions the recognition of a prostitute through her choice of clothes, and this shows the power that dress can have: 'a woman who appeals too obviously to male desire is in bad taste; but one who seems to reject it is no more commendable'.[57]

On the other hand, Mary Wollstonecraft attributes women's love of finery to 'want of cultivation of mind'.[58] Discouraged from bettering themselves intellectually, women like Azalea and Delia have little to fill their time but attention to themselves. In fact, neither is interested in finding employment to support themselves; instead, they see marriage as their only chance to leave their oppressive childhood homes, an idea touched upon by the *Gruppi Femministi di Milano* in their document outlining traditional motives for marrying:

> Ci sposiamo per uscire, emanciparci dalla famiglia di origine che ci opprime. [...] Ci sposiamo perché è lo sbocco sociale previsto per noi: l'unico rispettabile, accettabile da chi ci

[55] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 552.
[56] ibid., p. 543.
[57] ibid., pp. 545-546.
[58] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 2004 [1792]), p. 121.

> sta intorno. Perché una donna sola è uno strano animale. [...] Ci sposiamo per tamponare la nostra precaria situazione economica. L'unico lavoro che tutte sappiamo fare fin da bambine, la casalinga, non ha valore.[59]

For many women therefore, marriage was the only path to respectability and economic stability. Friedan also believes that early marriage is often used as a way of resolving the lack of identity felt by many girls; however, committing to marriage prematurely prevents them from undertaking experiences that would help them achieve full maturity and individual identity.[60] Although the young women in Ginzburg's book are still subject to some marital constraints, they are considerably freer in comparison to their female predecessors: both Delia's and Giulio's mothers are virtual prisoners in their own homes, condemned to lives of monotony and servitude by overbearing husbands.

The tension between the oppressive nature of the Italian countryside and the more open-minded atmosphere of the city is another feature used in Ginzburg's work to highlight female oppression and mirror important changes in Italian society in the post-war period. In Ginzburg's literature, life in the countryside adheres to the traditional view of women confined to the home and hidden from public view; whereas city life affords women greater liberty and epitomizes the changing face of a new generation and a way of trying to break the chain of patriarchal legacies. Although, to use Raymond Williams's words, a country community is the 'epitome of direct relationships: of face-to-face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships', it is precisely this closeness which suffocates the younger members of the neighbourhood who feel that they are constantly scrutinized.[61] In such a tight-knit community there is little freedom for the young characters to experiment in any way without bringing shame on themselves and their family. They are therefore driven to the city, with its greater anonymity, in order to find the space to discover more about themselves.

The city signifies different things for the different generations in Ginzburg's literature. For the younger generation it is a source of hope – hope that they can break from the rigid control imposed on them by their families and their community's expectations. On the other hand, the older generation view the city negatively, seeing it as a place of vice and sin where only disgrace awaits their children. This contradiction is summed up by Williams:

---

[59] *Gruppi Femministi di Milano*, 'Documenti femministi: Dal matrimonio al divorzio', *Effe*, April-May 1974, pp. 54-61 (p. 56).
[60] Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, p. 158.
[61] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 165.

> On the country has gathered the idea [...] of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea [...] of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation.[62]

So whilst the older generation in Ginzburg's work adhere to these positive aspects of the country and negative elements of the city, the younger generation subscribe to the opposite beliefs.

Throughout her work, Ginzburg's representation of the city goes beyond a physical description. Instead it is posited as a place, for the most part, constructed in the minds of her characters: young and old form opinions of the city based on their own needs and intentions. Janet Levarie Smarr explains that the city represents different things to different people:

> We need to deal not only with the 'real' or physical city but also [...] with the imagined city: the city as it is experienced and lived differently by different groups, the 'social maps' or 'maps of meaning', perceptions of the city as it is 'decoded' to reveal its symbolic orders [...], the utopian visions of a place of emancipation and the dystopian visions of a place of contagion.[63]

It is precisely this utopian vision of the 'imagined city' that is enticing Ginzburg's younger characters, whilst her older ones cling tightly to the idea of the city as a site of 'contagion', unable or unwilling to change their opinions.

In keeping with the idea of the city as a sign of hope, Giancarlo Borri describes Delia's frequent visits in *La strada che va in città* to the city as pilgrimages to a 'terra promessa', which reflect her desire for independence from her parents and restrictive home life.[64] Significantly, after her father hits her, her first reaction is to head towards the city (36). Picarazzi writes that the title of the short story itself implies a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood, whereby Delia's trips to the city represent attempts to enter

---

[62] ibid., p. 1.
[63] Janet Levarie Smarr, 'Introduction', in *Italian Women and the City*, ed. by Janet Levarie Smarr and Daria Valentini (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 9-17 (p. 9).
[64] Giancarlo Borri, *Natalia Ginzburg* (Rimini: Luisè, 1999), p. 38.

womanhood.[65] However, for Delia it is not so much a case of running towards something as escaping a situation that she deems intolerable. Delia's entry into a new phase of her life is not without its problems, and the city is named as a reason for her troubles, as her aunt explains:

> "Di' pure che era sempre in città. Non faceva che scappare in città, fin da quando era piccolina, e così ha perso la vergogna. Una ragazza non dovrebbe metterci i piedi in città, quando non l'accompagna la madre". (55)

Like many others, Delia's aunt believes that the city, with its more liberal views, is a corrupting influence on young girls who cannot resist its temptations. Significantly, her own daughter Santa has only travelled into the city 'due o tre volte' and her mother strictly controls her (52). Again the city is not so much a physical location as a metaphor for increased liberation, which in this case is viewed as dangerous by the older woman.

Le voci della sera (1961) also utilizes this idea of the restrictive countryside versus the liberated city. Elsa travels to the city regularly to meet her lover Tommasino. Although both of them live in the same village, they only spend time together under the protection afforded by the city's anonymity. However, although Elsa and Tommasino feel freer in the city, Ginzburg implies that they have not broken entirely with their past. As the couple are strolling along the city's riverbank, Tommasino suddenly realizes: 'ma qui è proprio campagna. Veniamo in città, ma poi andiamo sempre in cerca della campagna, non è così?'.[66] The suggestion here is that even when characters want liberation they still desire the traditional values instilled in them from an early age - it is difficult to leave behind the society in which you have grown up.

Ginzburg's representation of the city in this work also serves to emphasize the widening gap between generations. Whereas Elsa finds any excuse to visit the city, her mother 'di rado scende in città' (330). The mother's complete lack of understanding of her daughter's generation is summed up by Ginzburg in her usual succinct manner:

> La zia Ottavia le dice:
> "Perché non andiamo in città, qualche volta?"

---

[65] Teresa Picarazzi, *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 64. However, it must be remembered that Ginzburg did not choose the story's title herself but credits her husband Leone with it (Ginzburg, *Cinque romanzi brevi*, p. 14).

[66] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Le voci della sera', in *Cinque romanzi brevi*, pp. 271-365 (p. 331).

E mia madre dice:
"Per fare?" (330-331).

This 'per fare?' speaks volumes. The mother cannot comprehend why anyone would choose to leave the village to seek new adventures, and she adheres completely to her role as village wife. She cannot begin to imagine how her daughter behaves in the city, as she cannot see past the values that she has been taught. As with Francesca's mother in *È stato così*, Elsa's mother does not dream that her daughter is sexually active, even refusing to believe that she would ever let a man hold her hand in public (349). Ginzburg shows that these fictional mothers are blind to the changes occurring around them and are firmly rooted in the past.

In her essay 'The Man-Shaped City' (1996), Jane Darke describes how cities are shaped by men, in ways that are unnatural to women. Darke divides cities into three categories: the city of property; city of zones; and city of diversity, with only the latter being positive.[67] In Darke's 'city of property', women are owned and not owners, whilst the 'city of zones' is the unnatural separation of the city according to functions – for example, work, leisure, and home life are confined to distinct areas.[68] However, Darke believes that the 'city of diversity' offers inhabitants greater freedom and a choice between anonymity or affiliation.[69] This therefore can provide a positive, liberating experience for women wishing to escape the oppression of family life and in this respect is the view of the city that Ginzburg predominately conveys in her works. On the other hand, Maraini's view of the city adheres more closely to the first two categories and to Darke's opinion that 'our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete'.[70]

For Maraini, the city is also an anonymous place, but in a negative sense, as is clearly shown in her short story 'La ragazza con la treccia' (1993), which charts a girl's lonely search for an abortion clinic. The fifteen-year-old protagonist leaves her convent school to live in Rome, where she is seduced by various older men. Maraini contrasts the girl's naivety with the worldliness of the city around her: she is intimidated by the size and pace of the city and is ruthlessly manipulated by her lovers. Alongside this image of the city,

---

[67] Jane Darke, 'The Man-Shaped City', in *Changing Places: Women's Lives in the City*, ed. by Chris Booth, Jane Darke, and Susan Yeandle (London: Paul Chapman, 1996), pp. 88-99.
[68] ibid., pp. 89-96.
[69] ibid., p. 97.
[70] ibid., p. 88. Maraini's depiction of Palermo as a violent patriarchal seat of power in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* fits in with this theory.

Maraini criticizes the provincial view dominant in the country. The girl's education has in no way prepared her for the reality of city life, particularly regarding sexual relations:

> Sua madre che era una donna moderna, le aveva detto "stai attenta, usa le dovute precauzioni". Ma quali fossero queste precauzioni non glielo aveva spiegato [...] E rimaneva il fatto concreto che la Madonna aveva avuto un bambino senza fare l'amore. E questo dava alle ragazze una certa inquietudine.[71]

There is here an implied criticism of the Church's stance on contraception and sex education. Receiving only ineffective advice from her mother and indoctrinated by her religious teaching, the girl falls pregnant through ignorance. Given that this mother is supposedly 'moderna', the education given to other young girls is presumably even more redundant. Sharon Wood notes that the violence inflicted on Maraini's young character is not the obvious one of rape, but is the more complex violence of a system founded on ignorance, fear, and isolation, which leaves her alone to resolve her situation.[72] The enforced ignorance of girls is likewise criticized by Mary Wollstonecraft:

> Women are everywhere in this deplorable state; for, in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison.[73]

Wollstonecraft's comments highlight that women have for centuries been kept in this state of innocence/ignorance in order to maintain a harmonious balance in patriarchal society, as education encourages people to assess their situation. Nancy Friday also considers the hypocrisy of mothers who pray for their daughters' innocence, whilst also hoping for a man for the 'untutored, unblemished' girls.[74] In this respect, Friday believes that mothers are guilty of pushing their daughters towards men and marriage, without equipping them with the knowledge necessary to conduct themselves appropriately. Similarly, Wollstonecraft differentiates between morals and manners, saying that society teaches women pleasing

---

[71] Dacia Maraini, 'La ragazza con la treccia', in *Italian Women Writing*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996 [1993]), pp. 81-86 (p. 83).
[72] Wood, *Italian Women Writing*, p. 17.
[73] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights*, pp. 46-47.
[74] Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self* (London: HarperCollins, 1994 [1977]), p. 282.

manners to the detriment of morals, that is, it is the surface that counts rather than what is underneath (this brings us back to women's love of clothes). Reminiscent of Luce Irigaray's call for women to bring about a peaceful revolution,[75] Wollstonecraft writes:

> It is time to effect a revolution in female manners—time to restore to them their lost dignity—and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world. It is time to separate unchangeable morals from local manners.[76]

Perhaps one of the most fascinating ways that Ginzburg and Maraini's female characters try to achieve greater independence in relationships is through their choice of younger partners, which occurs in various works. Women like Azalea in *La strada che va in città* are usually submissive and dominated in relationships with more mature men, yet find that they become the more influential partner in affairs with malleable, younger lovers, whom they can easily dismiss when they tire of them. The choice of a younger lover is frequently attributed to society's fascination for the figure of the boy and the greater freedom and control afforded to the woman as superior in age and experience. However, this attitude is condemned in *Effe* as actually conforming to rather than breaking patriarchal legacies. Gabriella G., a forty-two-year-old woman, describes her experiences in a relationship with a man twenty years her junior; she outlines the criticism that she has encountered:

> Forse il modo più indulgente di trattare la donna che va con uno più giovane è dire che lei l'ha 'preso' per poterlo comandare. Questo è così chiaramente una proiezione di due concetti maschili—uno, il rapporto sessuale è basato sul potere, e due, il vecchio comanda il giovane—che non c'è bisogno nemmeno di commentarlo.[77]

Therefore, whereas it appears at first that Ginzburg and Maraini's older women enter into relationships with younger men in order to escape patriarchy, this opinion suggests that they risk merely acting according to age-old masculine concepts. These concepts concentrate on the supposed reversal of power brought about by an older woman's relationship with a younger man, rather than seeing such relationships as mutually

---

[75] Luce Irigaray, 'A Chance to Live', in *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution* (London: Athlone Press, 1994 [1989]), pp. 2-35 (p. 26). I return to this idea in Chapter 4.
[76] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights*, p. 48.
[77] Gabriella G., 'Il ragazzo e la quarantenne', *Effe*, March 1974, pp. 24-27 (p. 26).

fulfilling. Condescending opinions such as Jung's perpetuate this stereotypical image of the controlling older woman:

> Many women like nothing better than a man who is rather helpless, especially when they are considerably older than he is; they do not love a man's strength, his virtues and his merits but his weaknesses. They find his infantilisms charming. [...] As a rule the woman seduces him, and he willingly submits to her mothering.[78]

Jung goes on to warn that 'woman's instinct for possession is a dangerous thing'.[79] For Jung, and others like him, these particular relationships are seen in terms of a power struggle that threatens the traditional balance of patriarchal society. The sensuality of more mature women is therefore negated in order to protect this balance and, as Adrienne Rich points out, is frequently depicted as grotesque, threatening, and inappropriate.[80]

In her article, Gabriella G. recognizes that society's fear and disapproval of older women's relationships with younger men arises from adherence to such patriarchal theories as Jung's:

> L'odio con cui la società si scatena contro la donna che va con uno più giovane deriva dal fatto che ciò viene giustamente visto come una sfida molto pericolosa per il potere maschile e tutti i suoi miti. È un rifiuto dei simboli di potere della società maschile, la ricchezza, il prestigio, il rifiuto dell'uomo come 'maestro'; e rifiutando questo noi rifiutiamo anche la sessualità maschile che è solo virilità uguale a prepotenza. Quando facciamo una libera scelta al di fuori dei ruoli, cala l'organo sessuale maschile che si regge faticosamente con i soldi e con le fantasie di potere autoritario.[81]

Patriarchy therefore depends on women's acquiescence and willingness to conform to certain behavioural patterns, and when women start refusing to conform, the male sexual organ is reduced in value and the usual hierarchy is turned upside down.

The motives behind the fictional women's choices in Maraini and Ginzburg's literature are open to doubt. Although the women themselves believe that they are gaining

---

[78] C. G. Jung, 'The Love Problem of a Student', in *Aspects of the Feminine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 25-40 (p. 36).
[79] ibid., p. 38.
[80] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1984 [1977]), p. 183.
[81] Gabriella G., 'Il ragazzo e la quarantenne', p. 27.

independence, they risk being seen as merely conforming to patriarchal culture and theories such as Jung's - or Freud's theory that every woman longs for a son (real or substitute) in order to compensate for their lack of penis.[82] As older women's sexuality is feared, it is preferable for many in patriarchal society to believe that maternal rather than sexual feelings drive them into relationships with younger men. As Maraini notes, throughout history a 'woman's body has been either a sexual or maternal object', which suggests that the two are mutually exclusive.[83] By labelling such affairs as the desire for a substitute son, Freud is denying the women's sexuality. In fact, Maraini and Ginzburg's characters act out of both sexual attraction and a desire to seize back control of their lives; there is little evidence that they are searching for substitute sons.

A good example of this shift in male-female power is given in Maraini's *Donna in guerra*. Vannina's affair with Orio is an idea repeated from *L'età del malessere* (1963), in which the Countess Bardengo enjoys a relationship with the much younger Remo. However, whereas the Countess's affair results from her desperate need for reassurance and affection, Vannina's is more positive. Vannina's attraction to the younger boy is sexual, but also shows her desire to be in control. Elisabetta Properzi Nelsen writes that the choice of a younger lover in Maraini's work provides a unique situation whereby women can often exercise complete control in the relationship, which they are often unable to do with older men. However, in line with Freud's theory, Nelsen also describes such relationships in terms of the older women's subconscious desire for motherhood, with the younger men becoming substitutes for the absent child.[84] I do not agree with this in relation to Vannina though. Vannina is not substituting cultural maternity for real maternity: her recourse to abortion shows us that she did not actually desire a baby and her interaction with Orio is presented in sexual not maternal terms. Significantly, the control that Vannina experiences in this relationship is more over herself than over Orio.

Anthony J. Tamburri suggests another reason for Vannina's attraction to Orio when he points out that 'at fourteen years old, he has not yet been totally indoctrinated into the patriarchal society in which he lives'.[85] For a similar reason, Vannina feels an emotional

---

[82] See Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Norton, 1989), pp. 139-167 (pp. 165-166).
[83] Anderlini, 'Interview with Dacia Maraini', p. 153.
[84] Elisabetta Properzi Nelsen, '*Écriture Féminine* as Consciousness of the Condition of Women in Dacia Maraini's Early Narrative', in *The Pleasure of Writing*, pp. 77-99 (p. 91).
[85] Anthony J. Tamburri, 'Dacia Maraini's *Donna in guerra*: Victory or Defeat?', in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance*, ed. by Santo L. Aricò (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 139-151 (p. 148).

connection with one of her pupils, and although the classroom rape scene shows the beginnings of society's corruption of children's minds, these boys have still to mature into the men who will dominate women so completely. Carla Lonzi explores the reasons behind women's high valuation of youth, citing the fact that the young are also victims of patriarchal power and therefore share women's role as the oppressed. On a certain level, Vannina recognizes her own vulnerability in Orio; however, as Lonzi points out, although oppressed, young men are primed from the outset eventually to fulfil the role of future oppressor.[86]

In her study *The Boy* (2003), Germaine Greer looks at the figure of the boy in art, trying to discover the reason behind society's fascination. She identifies boyhood as a 'blessed time':

> It is from his mother's caresses that the boy learns to express affection and how to give and take pleasure. By the time he is a man he will have learned how to subordinate that search for mutual pleasure to the exercise of dominance. Boyhood is the blessed time when he still remembers how to give and take pleasure without troubling himself about power.[87]

So boyhood appears to be a fleeting period in which the young male is poised between the male world of dominance and the female world of submission. According to Greer, once he assumes the role of powerful male, the boy will lose his ability to give pleasure in the same way. Compared to their husbands who often simply take pleasure without reciprocation, the women in Ginzburg and Maraini's work find in these boys willing and attentive partners, both sexually and emotionally. However, in the case of *Donna in guerra*, Barbara Heinzius believes that because Orio represents a new generation that is not yet ready to develop fully, he must die, and his death signals the end of hope that permanent change can be brought about at this time.[88]

The greater liberty attributed to women in such situations can perhaps be best seen by Marianna's affair with Saro in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990) (which I will return to again in Chapter 4). The important, differentiating factor of this relationship for Marianna is, as Irene Marchegiani Jones emphasizes, 'la libertà di scelta'.[89] As with

---

[86] Lonzi, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', pp. 43-44, 51.
[87] Germaine Greer, *The Boy* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), p. 33.
[88] Barbara Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?: Zur Darstellung von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Dacia Marainis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1995), pp. 311-312.
[89] Irene Marchegiani Jones, 'La dualità fra individuo e storia: Per una lettura di *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* di Dacia Maraini', *Italian Quarterly*, 151-152 (2002), 45-60 (p. 57).

Vannina and Azalea, it is Marianna who chooses to embark on her affair with the younger man (in stark contrast to the beginning of her relationship with her husband). She also enjoys the position of dominant partner in the relationship, in intellectual, social, and financial respects; significantly, it is Marianna and not Saro who ultimately ends the liaison and takes the unconventional step of travelling abroad, leaving him behind. The level of domination involved is the crucial difference between Marianna's relationship with Saro and her husband. Whereas the Duke commands his wife in almost every respect, Marianna's domination of Saro is slight in comparison. In fact rather than domination, the new relationship that Marianna enters into is more one of mutual respect and esteem, with two more relatively equal partners than in her marriage. This relationship is not a power struggle and is not driven by maternal longing on Marianna's part: it is a meeting of two sexual subjects, and Marianna is now free to act according to her emotions. However, Heinzius points out that, unlike several of Maraini's earlier protagonists, Marianna is unable to leave her husband and must wait for his death before she can enjoy greater freedom. This freedom is therefore merely a consequence of events out of Marianna's control and, according to Heinzius, renders her less worthy as a role model of female emancipation.[90] I would disagree with this opinion, arguing that whilst Marianna may not have defied her living husband, to defy his memory is in itself a courageous act and must be seen in its historical context. The importance placed on a man's honour in Sicily even after death would not have been lost on Marianna, and her actions contravene all societal expectations of a widow's behaviour. She can therefore be viewed as grasping at greater independence through her relationship with Saro.

Aside from their relationships with younger men, many women also gain increased independence as they grow older, owing to patriarchal society's preoccupation with youthful beauty and procreation. For instance, Marianna's sexual relationship with Saro is devoid of any reproductive function, thereby allowing her to indulge in pleasure rather than undertaking her duty. Greer writes that many women can only reflect properly on their lives when they reach the menopause, suddenly realizing how they have been controlled by society's preoccupation with their reproductive function, and once past this age, women become less interesting in the eyes of society and attract the male gaze less. Greer sums up this idea by saying that 'to be unwanted is also to be free'.[91] As I have already mentioned,

---

[90] Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?*, pp. 387-388.
[91] Germaine Greer, *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 4.

it could be said that along with older women, women who do not fit the social ideal of beauty also enjoy some protection from the predatory male gaze.

An example of an older woman in Maraini's work who can enjoy greater freedom because of her invisibility to society is Zà in *Colomba* (2004). Zà is free to roam the woods in search of her lost granddaughter, as few people show interest in the actions of a seemingly deranged older woman. When Zà encounters a young shepherd boy in the woods, she realizes that 'l'unico privilegio dell'età è che non suscito più desideri sessuali inopinati e selvaggi'.[92] Zà becomes almost asexual in society's eyes. In her essay 'Il corpo inesistente' (1981), Maraini writes that:

> C'è una età, che si sposta con la storia (ai tempi di Balzac erano i trent'anni, oggi sono i sessanta) in cui una donna 'perde il suo corpo'. Ma lo perde per gli uomini, [...] non per sé e nemmeno per le altre donne. La sua carne, segnata dalle esperienze, dalle gravidanze, dai dolori, diventa di colpo 'invisibile' al desiderio maschile.[93]

However, far from losing their bodies, de Beauvoir believes that a woman becomes *reunited* with her body after menopause: when she no longer attracts the predatory male gaze, 'she is herself, she and her body are one'.[94] This suggests that a woman's body is returned to her from male possession. De Beauvoir refers to post-menopausal women here as a 'third sex', saying that they are not male and yet are no longer female, in that they have been released from the constraints of female physiology.[95] In *Colomba*, Zà certainly experiences this sense of being *outside* femaleness: she feels more secure in herself because of the veil of protection afforded by her age.

Ginzburg and Maraini's female characters use various methods to try to break with the traditional, patriarchal view of women, which has been forced upon them for centuries. However, in contrast to the belief that sexual freedom is a positive gain for women, both authors show that promiscuity merely provides their female characters with a false sense of liberty. Although they are freer to enter into sexual relationships with men outside marriage, these women remain largely dependent on men for their happiness. It is therefore

---

[92] Dacia Maraini, *Colomba* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004), p. 99. Conversely, Maraini's 1981 play *Mela* depicts the sixty-year-old title character as still sexually active and enjoying a busier social life than her younger relatives (Maraini, 'Mela', in *Maria Stuarda* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001) pp. 47-84).
[93] Dacia Maraini, 'Il corpo inesistente', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 53-57 (p. 53).
[94] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 63.
[95] ibid.

questionable whether this is in fact liberation from control of women's sexuality at all. Rather it takes women's focus away from themselves and concentrates their attention firmly on men. Maraini sums up the idea of the so-called sexual revolution as highly damaging to young girls: 'Direi che la rivoluzione sessuale non è una rivoluzione ma uno slittamento, una spaccatura, un terremoto che portano più verso il caos che verso un progresso definibile'.[96]

Therefore, whereas many female characters in Maraini and Ginzburg's fiction believe that they are asserting their independence through promiscuity and that they are defying traditional, religious ideals of the chaste female, they are merely conforming to the expectations of a particular era. Whilst previous generations were oppressed by sexual restrictions imposed on them, young girls in the authors' fiction are pressured into sexual relations. Whilst apparently rejecting the institution of marriage in favour of greater freedom, the characters are in fact still emotionally reliant on men. In this respect, the characters who hope to achieve freedom through work stand a greater chance of reaching their goal.

As we have seen, characters in Maraini's literature such as Vannina, Armida, and Michela use work as a way of developing their own sense of self and subjectivity, and in this respect exemplify Friedan's theory that work is the answer to the problem that has no name. However, in Maraini's novels, work on its own is not enough to solve these women's problems. Each of Maraini's characters already has a job when the novels begin; the fundamental difference at the end of the novels is that they have learnt more about themselves and society, thereby reaching greater awareness. In this respect, Maraini presents education as the key to changing women's position in society and breaking the chain of patriarchal legacies. Similarly, Greer agrees that it is not enough to provide women with alternatives outside the home, as they will follow them in a 'feminine' way, but that education is vital in teaching women to exploit new opportunities fully.[97] This opinion echoes Maraini's comment (mentioned above) regarding Suna and her metaphorical inability to walk in spite of her freedom. However, as we have seen from Irigaray's comments, education must take into account sexuate difference and not just male culture.

Interestingly, although Vannina, Armida, and Michela break free from oppressive relationships, none of them reach true liberation, which is in keeping with Maraini's claim

---

[96] Dacia Maraini, 'Clitennestra o la perversione', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino*, pp. 7-11 (p. 10).
[97] Greer, *Female Eunuch*, p. 65.

that she does not believe that 'individual liberation exists: no woman is free until the majority of women are free'.[98] Alma Sabatini likewise warns that *autocoscienza* groups will not eradicate women's oppression, as their problems are generic:

> Proprio la consapevolezza che i problemi di ogni singola donna hanno dei tratti comuni e generalizzabili per tutte le donne, ci fa comprendere come siano impossibili soluzioni individuali: come non esistono neri liberi in una società razzista, così non esistono donne libere in una società sessista.[99]

Therefore, although individual women can change themselves to a certain degree, what is needed is a fundamental alteration of societal attitudes. Even though several of Maraini and Ginzburg's characters appear to have won some independence on a personal level, they are still ultimately subject to patriarchal laws and beliefs, which govern attitudes towards women. In this respect, they too have won merely the semblance of liberation.

As previously mentioned, in contrast to Maraini's depiction of her characters undergoing radical transformations, Ginzburg focuses on generational change, using the city as a metaphor to represent her young characters' freedom from family oppression and the small mindedness of country life. However, this change is not necessarily positive and we see characters lose their way and become increasingly unsure of themselves and their role in society.[100] Characters like Delia and Azalea have no real purpose in life, and therefore rely on attracting the male gaze to construct an identity. Ginzburg's depiction of her young characters floundering in new roles is tied firmly to her idea that the Italian family is in crisis. According to Ginzburg, men in particular are struggling to cope when presented with women's greater legal freedom in post-war Italy, as I shall consider in the following chapters on familial roles.

---

[98] Maraini, 'On *Of Woman Born*', p. 689.
[99] Sabatini, 'Il piccolo gruppo', p. 2.
[100] This recalls Ginzburg's mother's view that 'l'aspetto essenziale nei giovani oggi è l'indecisione' – see Ginzburg, 'I lavori di casa', in *Mai devi domandarmi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002 [1970]), pp. 63-67 (p. 65).

3. Shadows in the Mirror: Husbands

"Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Virginia Woolf)

The depiction of husbands in Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg's works is an important indication of how the writers judge men in general and highlights their attitudes towards the institution of marriage. In Maraini's fiction in particular, husbands are often the main source of their wives' oppression and suffering. She frequently includes tyrannical, controlling men, whose chief purpose appears to be increasing their wives' misery. In Ginzburg's literature, on the other hand, the dominant characteristics of her fictional husbands are weakness, insecurity, and incapability. However, although weak, these husbands are no less oppressive than Maraini's, instilling despair in their wives precisely because of their inability to act decisively.

Interestingly, the largely negative image of husbands that weaves through both authors' work is at odds with their own experiences of marriage. Ginzburg has spoken of both of her husbands in positive terms, and when asked from where the inspiration for her inept male characters came, she replies: 'non lo so, non saprei dire: perché io ero circondata da uomini invece non così, per nulla'.[1] Likewise Maraini, although her marriage ended in divorce, describes her husband as 'un uomo sensibile, delicato, intelligente. I caratteri che amo in un uomo'.[2] Their fictional depictions, therefore, appear to be based on a wider, less personal view of the position of men in marriage.

The superiority of husbands over their wives is not only an idea that has been engrained in the minds of many Italians, but was also, for many years, sanctioned by Italian law. The 1803 Code Napoléon, with its strict emphasis on the man as head of the household, gave the basic structure for the first civil code of the united Italy in 1865. Women and children were thereby legally subjected to the man's authority, enjoying few legal rights of their

---

[1] Natalia Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 39.
[2] Dacia Maraini, *Dizionarietto quotidiano* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997), p. 54. Maraini was married for four years to a Milanese painter named Lucio Pozzi, who left to live in New York.

own, as is clear in Sibilla Aleramo's autobiographical novel, *Una donna* (1906).[3] Aleramo has no legal right to her son, her inheritance, or to a divorce from her domineering husband. The law is in all respects on the side of the husband.[4] The Codice Rocco, which was abolished fully only in 1981, further privileged men over women. The controversial code stated that only a wife, and not a husband, could commit the crime of adultery, a provision that was finally overturned in 1968. Furthermore, it declared that a man could escape being prosecuted for rape if he subsequently married his victim, and that infanticide and uxoricide were allowed if deemed necessary to restore the man's honour.[5] This latter provision underlines the way in which, in the eyes of the law, a man's honour was considered to be more important than a woman's life.

Although husbands are oppressors in Maraini's work, she does attempt to show that they are often victims as well. Conditioned and educated by patriarchal society, they feel obliged to conform to certain expectations and patterns of behaviour. Particularly in her later fiction, Maraini provides a deeper insight into the attitudes of her male characters, which is, on the whole, lacking from her earlier works with their predominantly feminist outlook. This idea of men as victims of society is touched upon by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). Precisely because they are expected to oppress women, men become oppressed themselves, because they evoke women's irritation by forcing them into a position of dependence. However, whilst admitting that men are victims, de Beauvoir does not afford male and female oppression equal weight:

> The great difference is that with woman dependency is interiorized: she *is* a slave even when she behaves with apparent freedom; while man is essentially independent and his bondage comes from without.[6]

---

[3] Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 55.
[4] Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996 [1906]).
[5] Francesca Romana Koch, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', in *Storia della società italiana: Il miracolo economico e il centro-sinistra: Parte quinta, Vol. XXIV*, ed. by Ugo Ascoli and others (Milan: Teti, 1990), pp. 223-289 (pp. 256-257).
[6] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949]), p. 500. Emphasis in the original.

According to de Beauvoir, if a man appears to be a victim, it is because his burdens are more apparent to onlookers: they are external factors. With a woman, however, the internalisation of oppression hides her true suffering from others. It therefore follows that by allowing women more freedom in marriage, men would in turn benefit from the more relaxed relations between spouses.

In a submission to the feminist magazine *Effe*, Maraini's all-female theatre group *La Maddalena* also outlines their belief that feminism is working towards the liberation of both men and women. Justifying why they have banned men from working with the theatre company, they explain that they are acting 'non contro di loro, ma senza di loro. Pensiamo che il femminismo abbia come finalità la liberazione dell'intera umanità e non soltanto di una parte di essa'.[7] It is interesting that, in spite of claiming to be working towards the liberation of both men and women, they exclude men from the process. The liberation of men risks being seen as merely a by-product of women's liberation, as the very nature of the feminist movement necessitates increased emphasis on the figure of the woman alone. There is, therefore, less consideration given to any problems for men arising from changes in the male-female relationship. Whilst many feminists recognized the need to help men, their first priority was helping women. There was also the tendency to see men's problems as being largely of their own making: 'Esistendo la questione femminile vuol dire che esiste anche la questione maschile. E il problema maschile è appunto dato dal tipo di società che l'uomo ha creato affermando ed esaltando i propri valori di potenza, aggressività e virilità'.[8]

Whilst Ginzburg's fictional husbands are victims of patriarchal society, they are also victims of the increasingly strengthened position of women. In opposition to the belief that a change in women's role within marriage would result in liberation for men, Ginzburg places the blame for the male identity crisis precisely on women's increased independence. In her essay 'Donne e uomini', written at the height of the feminist struggle in Italy, Ginzburg questions the lack of provision for re-educating men as women's status changes. Whilst Ginzburg certainly agrees with the liberation of women, she expresses reservations

---

[7] *La Maddalena*, 'Documenti femministi: La Maddalena', *Effe*, November 1973, p. 59. Although *La Maddalena* was set up by Maraini, it is not clear whether she had any input in this document.
[8] *Il movimento femminista romano*, 'Documenti femministi: Parliamo di noi', *Effe*, January 1974, pp. 59-60 (p. 60).

that it is at the cost of male identity, with the need to liberate men being overlooked. Man's role in the future is often excluded from feminist plans and discussions:

> Quando Adrienne Rich parla del futuro, un'idea nuova delle donne vi appare, ed è multiforme e chiara. Vediamo donne nuove, forti, libere e piene di coraggio, e finalmente dotate delle facoltà di spendere i doni delle proprie energie vitali. Non vediamo uomini; non appare, nello specchio del futuro, nessuna immagine nuova dell'uomo. O meglio vediamo aggirarsi uomini come forme pallide, privi di ogni fascino, prestigio o mistero: forme spente, larve e ombre, consenzienti, inconsistenti e inutili.[9]

As is clear through her portrayal of men in her literature, Ginzburg laments the loss of the strong male figure, without however condoning male oppression of women. According to Ginzburg, equally strong men and women are needed to bring about true equality and harmony in society:

> Perché non siamo più in grado di raffigurarci gli uomini se non come belve orrende o come ombre? Perché non riusciamo a proiettare nel futuro gli uomini che ammiriamo? E cosa sarà delle donne nuove, costrette a vivere o con delle belve o con delle larve? Che vita sarà la loro, e come useranno, in una compagnia così squallida, la loro libertà? [10]

What Ginzburg sees occurring in Italian society is a reversal of power that condemns men to occupy the weakened position once suffered by women, rather than a harmonious balancing of the sexes.

As Jen Weinstein points out in his study of Ginzburg's male characters, 'la figura maschile dominante [...] è un uomo debole, vanitoso, ozioso, spesso ricco, e decisamente egoista', with the one exception of Cenzo Rena.[11] Weinstein then divides the male characters into three categories, differentiating the self-satisfied men, the suffering men, and the male characters who merely act as a shadow to the protagonist. The men in all three categories, however, share an ineptitude and weakness of character that in turn serve to

---

[9] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Donne e uomini', in *Non possiamo saperlo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 89-92 (pp. 91-92).
[10] ibid., p. 92.
[11] Jen Weinstein, 'Il maschio assente nell'opera narrativa e teatrale di Natalia Ginzburg', in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. by Ada Testaferri (Toronto: Dovehouse, 1989), pp. 89-98 (p. 89).

inflict suffering on their female partners. Ginzburg's male characters do not necessarily set out to oppress their wives, but this does not mean that the effect on the woman is any less devastating than in Maraini's fiction, in which men consciously attempt to suppress their wives' freedom or personality. Ginzburg's husbands' oppression is less obvious and, therefore in some respects, more difficult for the wife to combat.

In her provocatively titled novel *Donna in guerra* (1975), Maraini depicts a husband who repeatedly tries to curb his wife's struggles for independence. The protagonist, Vannina, undergoes a dramatic change during the course of the novel, developing from a subservient wife into a determined, independent woman. Although Vannina's journey towards self-discovery forms the basis of the novel, Maraini's portrayal of Vannina's husband Giacinto is equally interesting. Over the course of the novel, Giacinto's sexuality is called into question. Maraini includes subtle indications that Giacinto's relationship with Santino is not all it seems: for example, Giacinto reacts jealously when others, including Vannina, show attention to Santino.[12] Maraini also alludes several times to a secret that Giacinto is keeping, from others and possibly even from himself. Perhaps the clearest indication of this is when Suna assesses Giacinto's sexual relationship with Vannina:

> "Sono sicura che Giacinto non ti accontenta in amore. [...] Lo vedo da come ti prende il braccio quando viene al bar, lo vedo da come ti parla, da come ti guarda; mi dispiace dirtelo ma tuo marito di te non è innamorato per niente, ti vuole bene sì, ma pensa ad altro." (64)

This final phrase, together with other comments such as 'continuava a occuparsi dei suoi pensieri segreti, opachi' (59) and 'sembrava assorto in un pensiero geloso, lontano' (57), creates the impression that Giacinto is not entirely comfortable with his marriage to Vannina and that he is hiding his true feelings. Maraini includes further references to Giacinto's inner struggle. Suna wonders why Giacinto is always so sad and decides that 'ha qualcosa nella pancia che gli gira, lo succhia' (89). Later Vannina writes that: 'La mancanza di Santino si fa sentire. Giacinto è cupo. Sta sempre con le orecchie tese, aspettando il rumore dei suoi passi sulla strada' (93). At various points Giacinto's reactions to his friend's presence betray his inner emotions. When Santino is unexpectedly absent,

[12] Dacia Maraini, *Donna in guerra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1975]), pp. 61, 66. Further references from primary editions are given after quotations in the text.

Giacinto is described as being 'di malumore' (50), yet when he returns Giacinto immediately cheers up: 'quando l'ha visto ha cambiato faccia. È scoppiato a ridere, l'ha abbracciato' (53). Anthony J. Tamburri draws attention to the lack of emotional or sentimental commitment in Giacinto's attitude to sex, and a contemporary review of the novel by Giovanni Mameli emphasizes Giacinto's 'attrazione animalesca per la moglie'.[13]

By including doubts as to Giacinto's sexual orientation, Maraini goes some way to explaining her character's insecurities and behaviour towards Vannina. Giacinto's relationship with his wife is based almost entirely on his need to dominate her, and he is portrayed as a man suffering from low self-esteem. Giacinto unwittingly exposes his vulnerability through his habit of sleeping in the foetal position, lying 'nella sua solita posizione contratta di difesa' (11).[14] This unconscious display of insecurity betrays Giacinto's need for reassurance and encouragement. Tamburri states that Giacinto's defensive position 'exhibits his fear of losing something', and he is certainly afraid of losing his self-control and dominance over Vannina.[15] Maraini provides small, yet telling details which reveal her character's inner mind: for example, Giacinto is jealous of his wife's superior knowledge and studies an encyclopaedia in a bid to regain his supremacy (21).

Throughout her marriage to Giacinto, Vannina suppresses her own personality and conforms to his expectations of how a woman should behave. When Vannina shows signs of asserting herself more forcefully, Giacinto is not pleased, and his disapproval is a clear reflection on his personality and opinion of women:

> Giacinto è preoccupato della mia svogliatezza sessuale. Pensa che sono malumori passeggeri, dovuti alla cattiva influenza di 'quella demente di Suna'.
>
> "Tu tradisci la tua natura, amore mio."
>
> "Quale natura?"

---

[13] Anthony J. Tamburri, 'Dacia Maraini's *Donna in guerra*: Victory or Defeat?', in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance*, ed. by Santo L. Aricò (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 139-151 (p. 143), & Giovanni Mameli, '*Donna in guerra*', *L'Unione Sarda*, 30 November 1975, cited on Internet Web Site: <http://www.dacia-maraini.it/critica/TtCr23.html> [accessed 21 August 2006].

[14] See also pages 6 and 18 for references to Giacinto's sleeping position.

[15] Tamburri, 'Victory or Defeat?', p. 143.

> "Hai una natura buona, morbida, sensibile, e la vuoi fare diventare una cosa dura, aggressiva. [...] Sei aggressiva contro te stessa, fai violenza al tuo carattere."
> "Forse il mio carattere si era formato sul tuo, non era mio veramente. [...] Volevo essere una buona moglie."
> "E lo sei stata, ma ora stai cambiando, ora rifiuti la parte migliore di te."
> "Migliore perché comoda." (236-237)

Giacinto betrays an astonishing lack of awareness of his wife's true character, failing to realize that the 'buona, morbida, sensibile' Vannina is only one aspect of her personality. As she points out, these are the attributes that are considered to be easier and more comfortable for men to handle. Giacinto discourages other qualities, which he sees as more confrontational and forceful, and which would require an increased effort and engagement on his part.

Giacinto believes that a woman should be 'dolce, femminile', and he feels increasingly threatened as Vannina becomes more aware of her own abilities (141). Giacinto conforms to a classic example of a man subscribing to the traditional view of women and of how they should act. In his essay 'Marriage as a Psychological Relationship', Jung describes how men judge women, albeit unconsciously:

> Every man carries with him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint or "archetype" of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman – in short, an inherited system of psychic adaptation.[16]

Giacinto forms his expectations of women as a result of social conditioning, rather than consciously developed beliefs. His adherence to this feminine archetype is reminiscent of other characters' attitudes in Maraini's work, most notably Pietro Ucrìa in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* and Paolo in *Il treno per Helsinki.* However, it can also be seen in connection with characters in Ginzburg's narrative. Both Delia's and Giulio's fathers in *La*

[16] C. G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 50.

strada che va in città demand certain behaviour of their wives and daughters and expect unquestioning obedience from them. Carmine in *Famiglia* also has his own clear image of how a woman should act, which he shows above all through his relationship with Olga, whom he desperately attempts to make conform to the archetype.

Showing little interest in her career, Giacinto resents the fact that Vannina must work, insisting that 'se guadagnassi di più non ti manderei a lavorare' (240). This choice of words shows Giacinto's belief that he is sending Vannina out to work: he does not want to acknowledge that Vannina chooses to work, as this would threaten his role as provider. Giacinto views Vannina's career aspirations as detrimental to their marriage and as damaging to his wife's femininity. Betty Friedan considers the image of career women in her study *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), detailing how men's view of women was traditionally divided into two distinct categories - virgin and whore. However, the emergence of career women adds a new element to the equation.[17] According to Friedan, on the supposedly positive side formerly occupied by the virginal woman, there is the quintessentially feminine woman whose virtues now also include the desires of the flesh; this pure figure is in stark contrast to the determined career woman, who strives for what is seen as an unnatural separation of her true self from her husband and family. Friedan underlines these changed views, held by many men and even women:

> The new feminine morality story is the exorcising of the forbidden career dream, the heroine's victory over Mephistopheles [...] the dream of independence, the discontent of spirit, and even the feeling of a separate identity that must be exorcised to win or keep the love of husband and child.[18]

Such views condition people to believe that genuinely feminine women do not desire careers and independence, but that femininity is gained only through devotion to the home.[19] A woman's career outside the house also poses problems for a man in that he is unable to control her behaviour in the work place. Whilst at work, a woman is not answerable to her husband and can escape his constant judgement of her conduct.

---

[17] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1963]), pp. 40-41.
[18] ibid.
[19] ibid., p. 13.

Although, in many cases working women simply exchange one man's orders for another, namely their husband's for their boss's, they do manage to attain some independence from the home, considered by many as the chief location of their oppression.

In her children's story, 'Una famiglia in una scarpa' (2001), Maraini refers to the idea of work as a means for women to find freedom from the home. In spite of her husband's disapproval, the mother in the story insists on looking for work, even at an advanced stage of her pregnancy:

> "Ho sempre lavorato," diceva "e non vedo perché non dovrei farlo ancora." Aveva una gran pancia perché aspettava il sesto figlio e il marito avrebbe preferito che restasse a casa. Ma la donna era testarda e usciva da sola ogni giorno, come a dire "Io sono libera e libera voglio restare."[20]

Maraini's message to her young readers is clear – in order to gain freedom, women must forcefully resist any restrictions that men attempt to impose on them and search for a life outside the home. Six children and a husband are not enough to satisfy this woman, and she has to look for work so that she can develop her own sense of identity, away from her role as wife and mother. She refuses to allow these roles to bind her to the family home, which in this case, as the family live in a shoe, is particularly restrictive. The difference in this relationship is not the man's attitude, as he still wishes his wife to conform to his expectations, but the attitude of the woman herself. She will not tolerate being controlled, and it is this resistance that separates her from the hordes of downtrodden women living in similar situations. It is this resistance that Vannina must find in order to discover likewise her own sense of self.

In *Donna in guerra*, when Giacinto realizes that he is losing Vannina's unquestioning devotion he suggests that they start a family, seeing a baby as the perfect opportunity to bind her to him. After she shows reluctance at his request, he rapes her whilst she is sleeping, desperately hoping that a child would cause her to revert back to 'la donna dolce, remissiva, disponibile, arresa di prima' (261). In *The Female Eunuch* (1971), Germaine Greer discusses this idea whereby men attempt to curb a woman's self-sufficiency by

---

[20] Dacia Maraini, 'Una famiglia in una scarpa', in *La pecora Dolly e altre storie per bambini* (Milan: Fabbri, 2001), pp. 87-103 (p. 90).

making her pregnant.[21] The belief that a wife with children has less opportunity to leave her husband strengthens the view of maternity as a means of controlling women in patriarchal society. Reinforcing the idea that it is natural and instinctive for a married woman to desire children, Giacinto asserts that 'una donna sposata senza figli è come una gatta senza gattini, che piange, si dimena, si mangia la coda che fa pena' (246). Even when it is clear that his wife has moved on in her life, Giacinto begs her to return to him as 'la dolce Vannina' that he married, magnanimously willing to forgive her for all her supposed faults and misdemeanours (268). Yet, Giacinto is unable to satisfy Vannina sexually, intellectually, or emotionally and has little chance of saving his marriage once Vannina has found the strength to escape his control. She has changed beyond recognition from the passive, obedient wife of the novel's opening.

Similarly, Maraini's *Il treno per Helsinki* (1984) tells the literal and metaphorical journey of a young woman, trapped in the daily routine of a comfortable but oppressive marriage. After only four years together Armida and Paolo Bianchi more closely resemble 'fratelli' than husband and wife.[22] Armida's story is reminiscent of her predecessor Vannina's in *Donna in guerra*, prompting one contemporary reviewer to suggest that 'questo suo nuovo romanzo poteva correre il rischio della ripetizione'.[23] Maraini utilizes several ideas and themes in relation to both women, for example they both have dreams that they are flying. Both women also wake up to find their husbands on top of them, invading their bodies without their consent. Whilst Vannina's husband's aim is to impregnate her, Paolo has simply decided that he wants sex immediately, whether Armida is awake or not. The idea that men believe that it is their prerogative to demand their wife's body whenever they desire is coupled with the image of sexual intercourse as a male-dominated, predatory, and proprietary action:

> Mi sveglio con un senso di peso sul ventre. Paolo sta cercando di spingersi dentro di me. Con quella cocciutaggine cieca che gli conosco troppo bene. [...] vuole entrare in me anche con il bacino anche col sedere anche con le gambe e perché no rinculando e pestando anche con la testa. Non una parola un bacio. (10)

---

[21] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), p. 244.
[22] Dacia Maraini, *Il treno per Helsinki* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1984]), p. 9.
[23] Antonio Porta, '*Il treno per Helsinki*', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 July 1984, cited on Internet Web Site: <http://www.dacia-maraini.it/critica/TtCr25.html> [accessed 21 August 2006].

As though he were a dog marking his territory, Paolo attempts to stamp his ownership on Armida, wishing to infiltrate every part of her body, so that she has no secrets left. The juxtaposition of this episode with her preceding dream of flying gives a powerful indication of Armida's position in her marriage.

Jung theorizes that most men believe that they completely possess a woman if they have a sexual relationship with her, whereas in fact this is completely contrary to the truth.[24] Ignorant of a woman's mind, men confuse the concept of Eros, which is a psychic connection, with sex, not understanding that for women the Eros relationship takes precedence over a sexual one. Jung writes that women consider marriage to be a relationship that simply happens to include sex, whereas for men sex is a major factor.[25] Both Paolo and Giacinto, with their emphasis on sex to control their wives, follow Jung's pattern, showing man's tendency to resort to physical displays of love when in fact an emotional approach would be more effective. They do not understand that their wives are looking for an increased appreciation on an intellectual and mental level, rather than simply being judged for their bodies and what their bodies supposedly represent. In their desperation to have power over women's bodies, these men actually succeed in driving them further away.

The belief that the key to controlling a woman lies in the manipulation and ownership of her body is evident in Paolo and Giacinto's behaviour. They both view sexual intercourse and maternity as methods of restricting their wives' freedom (Paolo also suggests having a baby when he fears Armida will leave him). They are blind to the fundamental flaws in their marriage and believe that their problems are common to all relationships and therefore should be ignored. As with Giacinto in *Donna in guerra*, Paolo will not concede that his wife has broken free of him, begging her to join him in New York with the promise that he is 'disposto a perdonarti tutto' (144). These words echo Giacinto's similar pardon of Vannina's 'faults', and both men, even when their wives have left them in no doubt of their intentions, still persist in believing that the women are merely experiencing a transient difficult phase. Their arrogance prevents them from accepting that their wives no longer

[24] Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, pp. 65-66.
[25] ibid.

want them, and their entire reaction to the wives' departures is coloured by a sense of sheer disbelief.

Germaine Greer highlights this major difference between men and women's varying levels of self-confidence concerning their relationships. She writes that women often worry deeply about the possibility of their loved one's departure, which they believe to be extremely likely (as is explicitly portrayed in Ginzburg's *È stato così*). According to Greer, men enjoy a stronger sense of self-worth and possess greater egos, so they rarely expect their wives to leave them until faced with irrefutable evidence that this is the case.[26] Both Giacinto and Paolo conform to Greer's assessment. Unwilling to accept the true extent of their marital problems, the men choose to turn a blind eye; they are emotionally unprepared for such an occasion and resort to petty accusations and commands in an attempt to prevent the women from leaving.

In *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990) Maraini looks deeper into the reasons behind men's possessive and domineering natures. Whereas little is known about Giacinto's and Paolo's early childhood and the events and experiences that have influenced their opinions, Maraini provides a more detailed analysis of Duke Pietro (whom Marianna calls 'il signor marito zio'). Pietro is a complex character, who, throughout the course of the novel, evokes feelings of pity, disgust, and anger in both his wife and the reader. He displays negative and positive qualities and, in spite of his violent and controlling nature towards Marianna, is himself a victim of patriarchal society. Sharon Wood points out that Pietro's name is indicative of his inability to struggle against the rigidity of society's constraints, highlighting the fact that patriarchy can signify petrification for the oppressor as well as the oppressed.[27] The inflexibility of his beliefs and his high expectations of those around him weigh down like stone on all involved, including himself. Here we see again the idea that the liberation of men could be a consequence of the liberation of women, as Betty Friedan writes:

---

[26] Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, pp. 154-155.
[27] Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), p. 230.

> Equality for woman was necessary to free both man and woman for true sexual fulfilment. For the degradation of woman also degraded marriage, love, all relations between man and woman.[28]

Pietro knows no alternative to his treatment of women and, whilst he will make small concessions at Marianna's request, he considers his judgement superior in all matters of importance. Only by relaxing his strict view of women's role both in society and marriage can he hope to liberate his own character from the patriarchal bonds that are restricting his sexual and emotional liberty.

Maria Ornella Marotti alludes to the idea that Maraini connects Marianna and Pietro to two different centuries, bestowing the two distinct eras with gender features: Pietro personifies the male seventeenth century, whilst Marianna is representative of the eighteenth century with its more female characteristics.[29] This assessment is reminiscent of Luce Irigaray's belief that men's discourse relies more on the past tense and 'existing definitions of a truth, concept, or reality', whilst women use the present or future tenses more readily in a 'desire for communication'.[30] In Maraini's novel, the lack of affinity between husband and wife is symbolized by the two different periods' incompatibility. Marianna realizes that 'per lui la moglie è una bambina di un secolo nuovo, incomprensibile', whilst Pietro is the product of a more rigid, unforgiving era that is resisting the foreign influences that are seen to be threatening traditional Sicilian values.[31] Furthermore, Alba Amoia draws attention to the difference in Maraini's style when writing about each century, which 'reflects the change of atmosphere, from plodding heaviness to heady lightness'.[32] Through this change in style, Maraini enables a stronger contrast of the two main characters and the eras that they represent.[33]

---

[28] Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, p. 76.
[29] Maria Ornella Marotti, '*La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*: A Feminist Revisiting of the Eighteenth Century', in *The Pleasure of Writing: Critical Essays on Dacia Maraini*, ed. by Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld and Ada Testaferri (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2000), pp. 165-178 (p. 176).
[30] Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 64.
[31] Dacia Maraini, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1990]), p. 53.
[32] Alba Amoia, *Twentieth Century Italian Women Writers: The Feminine Experience* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1996), p. 98.
[33] The end of the Duke's era is conveyed in Faenza's film adaptation in the scene in which Marianna visits the family tomb. The embalmed, yet decaying, relatives of the Duke are reminiscent of the

Pietro's relationship with his wife is largely characterized by aggression and attempts to oppress her freedom, and yet there are clear moments of affection towards Marianna. This tenderness perhaps results from the substantial age gap between husband and wife, and Pietro naturally takes on a fatherly role at times. These moments are rare, and for this reason they strike Marianna more forcefully. When Pietro rushes to her aid after her brother has knocked her to the ground, and when he declares that she is 'coltivata [...] bella e regale', Marianna is shocked (70, 117). His open display of emotion on Felice's entry to the convent is another indication that he is capable of greater feelings of love and pride than he is usually willing to display (120). Maraini suggests through her portrayal of Pietro that there are affection and cruelty in equal proportion in his character.

It is only after Pietro's death that we understand more fully the driving factors behind his behaviour concerning Marianna. As a child we learn that he was generous and kind and, although Pietro changes dramatically in character as an adult, some of the child that he was still shows through his harsh exterior, for example when he bequeaths clothes and possessions to Saro in his will (147-148). As a boy Pietro is devoted to his sister Maria, Marianna's mother. His reliance on Maria's love reflects the young Pietro's attempts to find a mother figure in order to experience the love and adoration which his own mother had neglected to show him. Pietro seeks this maternal love from his sister, bestowing his unswerving loyalty on her. When Maria marries, her role as sole object of Pietro's love is filled by his pet goat, which becomes a replacement in his daily affections.[34] Pietro's emotional dependency on the goat makes his mother's subsequent order to kill it more traumatic for the young boy.

---

grey, ghost-like family members in the church scene in Visconti's *Il gattopardo*, and likewise point to the decay of Sicilian aristocracy.

[34] Likewise in *Colomba*, when her son leaves home, Zaira transfers her affections to a goat, which lays its head on her lap 'come fosse un bambino'. Here the goat also symbolizes Zaira's son's fate in war: he will have to sacrifice his life for his country (Maraini, *Colomba* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004), p. 122.). This idea in Maraini's work, of a goat filling a human need for affection, can perhaps be traced back to her own experience in a Japanese concentration camp. After months of physical and mental deprivation, the arrival of a goat, in recognition of Fosco Maraini's act of *yubikiri* (whereby he cut off his own finger as a show of courage) was an important moment for Maraini and her two younger sisters. With few toys and no other children in the camp, 'la famosa capretta' became a focus for their attention and provided a valuable distraction (Toni Maraini, *Ricordi d'arte e prigionia di Topazia Alliata* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003), p. 112.).

Just as the rape is the turning point for the young Marianna, his goat's death profoundly affects Pietro, as does the accompanying public whipping by his mother. The change in Pietro is immediate:

> Da quel giorno il paziente Pietro era diventato 'reticu e strammu'. Spariva per settimane e nessuno sapeva dove andasse. Oppure si chiudeva nella sua stanza e non lasciava entrare neanche la cameriera che andava a portargli il cibo. Con la madre non parlava anche se nel vederla si inchinava come era suo dovere. (152)

The significance of this episode in Pietro's childhood is emphasized by his mother's death-bed plea for forgiveness for her actions and by Pietro's subsequent reply: "Spero che abbiate la fortuna di incontrare i vostri parenti Scebarràs all'inferno" (153). Both Pietro's attachment to the goat and its death at his mother's request are episodes rich in symbolism, and Maraini uses the animal to highlight the opposing elements of Pietro's character.[35] Associated with Satan, who is often represented with a cloven foot, goats also have both sexual and sacrificial connotations. Whilst devilish and sinful they also embody victimization, in this case both Pietro's and Marianna's. By killing his goat, Pietro's mother symbolically attacks his blossoming sexuality, abruptly quashing any tenderness and sensitivity. Marianna tellingly describes her sexual encounters with her husband in animalistic terms:

> Quante volte ha ceduto a quell'abbraccio da lupo chiudendo le palpebre e stringendo i denti! Una corsa senza scampo, le zampe del predatore sul collo, il fiato che si fa grosso, pesante, una stretta sui fianchi e poi la resa, il vuoto. (89)

His search for love leads an adult Pietro back to his sister's house where, as he cannot have Maria herself, he chooses the next best thing, her daughter. He refuses to marry any

---

[35] Roberto Faenza's film adaptation of Maraini's novel emphasizes further the connection between the Duke and the goat. The two appear together throughout the film and their simultaneous death underlines the idea that they are intrinsically connected. The first thing we see of Marianna's groom in the church is a close up of his red shoes, which produce a sound similar to that later made by the goat's hooves on the villa floor. Furthermore, the colour red recurs throughout the film, symbolizing love, lust, and betrayal; it is also a reminder of the goat's blood that Pietro describes as being smeared over his hands as a boy. (*Marianna Ucrìa*. Dir. Roberto Faenza. Cecchi Gori. 1997).

other woman, declaring 'che lui non avrebbe mai dormito nello stesso letto con una donna salvo che non fosse una delle figlie di sua sorella Maria' (152). Pietro's almost incestuous desire for his sister is transferred to Marianna, who is an offshoot both in name and blood of her mother Maria, and their marriage originates from his obsession for his sister. Maraini includes a similar idea in her 1967 novel *A memoria*, in which Giacomo, because he cannot marry the protagonist, marries her mother instead. He makes his intentions clear: 'Io sposo tua madre. Perché in lei tu [...] ci deve essere un futuro di noi tre. In cui ti sarò padre'.[36] Giacomo cannot marry the woman he loves, so he chooses to become her father instead, just as Pietro marries the daughter as he is forbidden to marry her mother, his sister.

As well as being irrevocably damaged by his mother's actions, Pietro is the victim of society's expectations concerning men's behaviour: he absorbs much of his society's arrogance and sense of class pride. Marianna comes to understand that Pietro's aggressive sexual advances towards her stem from this conditioning: 'aveva ereditato dai padri un'idea dell'amore da rapace: si punta, si assale, si lacera, e si divora. Dopo di che si va via sazi lasciandosi dietro una carogna, una pelle svuotata di vita' (150). It is noteworthy that Pietro does not immediately initiate a sexual relationship with Marianna after their wedding but instead waits, almost as though he is unsure how to approach her or how to react to her in his bed. His habit of lying on the edge of the bed facing away from her conveys his inability to interact with his wife and his lack of a true understanding of relationships with women. Unable to act any differently, Pietro finally resorts to occupying the familiar role of predator, disengaging the act of sexual intercourse from emotion and choosing a time when Marianna is asleep and therefore passive:

> Fin dalla prima notte quell'uomo freddo e timido aveva preso l'abitudine di dormire sul bordo del letto, voltandole la schiena. Poi una mattina, mentre lei ancora era immersa nel sonno, le si era buttato addosso e l'aveva violentata. (33)

'Freddo' and 'timido' are the key descriptions here, hinting that Maraini's fictional rapist is himself fundamentally troubled.

Maraini's portrayal of Pietro Ucrìa is extremely effective, in that she evokes mixed reactions to his character that would have been impossible had the reader known from the

[36] Dacia Maraini, *A memoria* (Milan: Bompiani, 1967), p. 204.

outset his crime against Marianna. Before the truth about the rape is discovered, Pietro's story inspires sympathy for his childhood and for his inability to relax his rigid perception of the world. In this novel, Maraini attempts to appreciate more fully the reasons behind a husband's actions. By painting a psychological portrait of the character, Maraini renders him more vulnerable and also more believable, coming closer to Ginzburg's view, expressed so clearly in *Famiglia* and *È stato così*, that both men and women are the victims of patriarchal society. The idea that men also suffer because of society's conditioning is perhaps more widespread in Ginzburg's work than in Maraini's, which tends to show more sympathy towards the issue of male oppression of women, rather than towards the struggles of men in patriarchal society.

Whilst Alberto in Ginzburg's *È stato così* (1947) does not tyrannize his wife in a physical sense like Pietro Ucrìa, he is nevertheless a source of emotional oppression. Although ostensibly oblivious to the harm he is inflicting on his wife's psyche, Alberto's attitude to his marriage is just as damaging as Pietro's is in Maraini's novel. Again the oppressor is portrayed in a three-dimensional manner, drawing attention to his own emotional shortcomings and failings and looking at the explanations for his behaviour. Ginzburg conveys the idea that Alberto is a man who is by nature primarily drawn to strong and often cruel women, even though they have the power to hurt him. However, his marriage to the unnamed protagonist of the story is a reversal of this tendency, and she suffers as a result.

The two main women in Alberto's life, his wife and his lover Giovanna, differ greatly in personality, and Alberto's opinions on the nature of lakes and the sea could be seen to represent their characters. Whereas Giovanna's nature is reflected by that of the sea, which is 'qualcosa di troppo grande e crudele con le sue luci e i suoi colori violenti', the protagonist's character is more comparable to that of a lake.[37] Alberto describes the serene nature of a lake, claiming that 'non c'è nessuna violenza nella luce e nel colore di un lago' (93). Ginzburg continues with this metaphor through Alberto's opinion that he is 'come un tappo di sughero che galleggia sull'acqua del mare e le onde lo cullano piacevolmente ma non potrà mai sapere cosa c'è in fondo al mare' (95). As well as underlining his preference of women, this image also goes some way to describing Alberto's position in his

[37] Natalia Ginzburg, 'È stato così', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964]), pp. 85-155 (p. 93).

relationships. Like a cork, Alberto is helplessly carried along by the whims of his lover; he is dominated by Giovanna and is powerless to control his feelings for her, no matter how much he tries. The use of the verb *cullare* betrays his underlying need to find security. Yet, he also hopes that Giovanna's passion can ignite his own: Alberto suffers from an inherent sense of boredom (like many other characters in Ginzburg's literature) and relies on Giovanna to bring him to life, just as the cork needs the sea's waves to give it motion. It is interesting to consider de Beauvoir's words here that:

> Woman has often been compared to water because, among other reasons, she is the mirror in which the male, Narcissus-like, contemplates himself: he bends over her in good or bad faith. But in any case what he really asks of her is to be, outside of him, all that which he cannot grasp inside himself, because the inwardness of the existent is only nothingness and because he must project himself into an object in order to reach himself.[38]

This comment certainly applies in Alberto's case, as he looks to Giovanna for the strength that he is lacking. Furthermore, Jen Weinstein points out that Ginzburg's use of water images in connection with her male characters is not usually seen as a positive metaphor but rather depicts the man as 'frivolo, superficiale, leggero, languido, annacquato'.[39]

The nature of Alberto's relationship with his wife is reminiscent of that described by Jung in his essay 'Marriage as a Psychological Relationship', in which he details how marriage is composed of one person who can be said to be 'contained' and another who is the 'container'. The characteristics Jung attributes to each partner resemble those that Ginzburg bestows on Alberto and the protagonist, with the former 'containing' the latter. Jung states how the spouse who is contained, namely Ginzburg's female protagonist, lives entirely within the boundaries of the marriage, having no outside interests or commitments and is usually of a simpler nature than her 'container'. The effect that she has on her husband is one of restriction and suffocation, whereas she herself is not given the comfort and protection that she craves.[40] Jung's words sum up their marriage:

---

[38] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 217.
[39] Weinstein, 'Il maschio assente', p. 90.
[40] Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, pp. 47-48.

> The simpler nature works on the more complicated like a room that is too small, that does not allow him enough space. The complicated nature, on the other hand, gives the simpler one too many rooms with too much space, so that she never knows where she really belongs.[41]

Yet the contained is not the only partner in the marriage to suffer, the container also experiences emotional and psychological problems, 'seeking completion, seeking the contentedness and undividedness that have always been lacking' in their lives.[42] For both partners the situation is an unhealthy one. The mechanisms behind the protagonist's dependency on Alberto, and his frequent rejections of her attempts at establishing a closer bond within their marriage, are summarized by Jung in his essay:

> The more complicated contains the simpler. The former cannot be absorbed in the latter, but encompasses it without being itself contained. Yet, since the more complicated has perhaps a greater need of being contained than the other, he feels himself outside the marriage and accordingly always plays the problematical role. The more the contained clings, the more the container feels shut out of the relationship. The contained pushes into it by her clinging, and the more she pushes, the less the container is able to respond.[43]

According to Jung, the outcome of this excessive dependency is often adultery on the part of the container, and this is certainly the case in *È stato così*, with Alberto's renewal of his affair with Giovanna. The protagonist therefore 'discovers that in the rooms which apparently belonged to her there dwell other, unwished-for guests. The hope of security vanishes, and this disappointment drives her in on herself'.[44]

Alberto does attempt to make his marriage work and even distances himself from Giovanna for long periods, but to no avail. His state of mind is often conveyed through the drawings in his notebook. He draws the protagonist frequently during their early courtship, which is the happiest time of their relationship, but she explains that 'dopo che ci siamo sposati non disegnava più la mia faccia. Disegnava degli animali e dei treni' (103). This change highlights the mental and emotional changes that Alberto undergoes as he distances

---

[41] ibid., p. 48.
[42] ibid.
[43] ibid.
[44] ibid.

himself further from his wife. His notebook is the main outpouring for his feelings and acts as a sort of window to his mind. When he does again draw the protagonist, it is significant that she is portrayed in her role as mother rather than wife. The protagonist describes the sketch, saying that she is drawn 'con gli spilli di sicurezza in bocca e l'aria spaventata e affannata e la cintura della vestaglia sciolta che strascicavo per terra e i capelli stretti in una reticella' (117).

The protagonist recognizes the importance of Alberto's drawings and becomes jealous of his portrayals of her cousin Francesca. He is clearly attracted to Francesca, who bears a close resemblance to Giovanna in character. The protagonist explains his reaction to their house guest:

> Ero un po' gelosa di Francesca. Alberto era molto gentile con lei e disegnava sempre la sua faccia. Lei lo trattava con un fare sprezzante ma quando ha cominciato a disegnare la sua faccia nel taccuino è diventata un po' meno sprezzante. (123)

For Francesca's benefit, Alberto also resumes his readings of Rilke, which significantly he had abandoned after marriage. Bruce Merry notes that the fact that Alberto reads Rilke to his wife, his mistress, and also Francesca, suggests that men are uninventive and lazy in their relationships and especially when committing adultery.[45] Alberto is engrossed by Francesca in spite of her disdainful attitude towards him. The protagonist sums up Alberto's reactions to the two strong-willed, domineering women and goes some way to explaining why he does not regard her in a similar manner: 'aveva un po' paura di Francesca, credo. Ho pensato che forse anche Giovanna gli faceva paura. Di me invece non aveva paura e questo era il male. Non aveva niente niente paura di me' (122). This lack of fear also manifests itself as a lack of respect for the protagonist.

Interestingly, whilst Alberto is attracted to the wilder Giovanna, he marries the safer, weaker woman, choosing security over passion. Alberto is naturally drawn to strong women, who could be said to counterbalance his own weak character. This is the reason why his marriage has no chance of success – both spouses are weak and cannot therefore

---

[45] Bruce Merry, *Women in Modern Italian Literature: Four Studies Based on the Work of Grazia Deledda, Alba De Céspedes, Natalia Ginzburg, and Dacia Maraini* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1990), p. 166.

draw on each other's strength. There is also a suggestion that Alberto enters into this marriage in order to find a replacement for his mother. Alberto's relationship with his mother is only touched upon briefly by Ginzburg, but the information we do receive is significant. Alberto's mother plays an important role in his life, and he lives with her until her death. The fact that the protagonist only visits Alberto's house when his mother has died lends weight to the idea that she is filling the older woman's shoes. When she arrives at the house she finds Alberto unshaven, in his pyjamas, and unable to light the fire. The protagonist tells us that 'ho acceso io la stufa' (96), and she slips easily into the mother's role. The continued power of the deceased mother over her son is also implied when the protagonist comments: 'dappertutto ho sentito il suo odore' (96). Descriptions of the mother's character are contradictory: whereas we are told that she was 'una vecchia pazza piena di quattrini', Alberto describes his mother in positive terms, conveying an image of a 'creatura gentile e sensibile' (89, 97). These characteristics, I would argue, are what his new wife brings back into his life after his mother's death.

Alberto's inability to perceive that the protagonist is falling in love with him is highly questionable. When she finally tells him of her love, his reaction clearly portrays his own ignorance of women's emotions: 'era pallido e pieno di spavento e m'ha detto che non aveva mai pensato che poteva succedermi questo [...] m'aveva fatto del male senza saperlo, mai aveva pensato di potermi fare tanto male' (98). This emphatic denial that he knew of the protagonist's feelings instils in both the reader and the protagonist a sense of incredulity, which is heightened further when he asks if he can see her again the next day. He is unable to appreciate that such a relationship, which he viewed as merely a platonic friendship, could be seen any differently by the woman. Alan Bullock observes that, whilst there is no intended malice in Alberto's actions, his immaturity and inability to form any long-term emotional commitment are far worse traits than if he had knowingly seduced the protagonist.[46] It is clear that Alberto never really understands his wife and fails to appreciate fully her desperate state of mind, as is conveyed through his actions moments before his death:

---

[46]Alan Bullock, *Natalia Ginzburg: Human Relationships in a Changing World* (Oxford: Berg, 1991), p. 181. I consider the protagonist's reaction to their courtship in Chapter 4.

> Aveva fatto quel disegno quando sono tornata nello studio. Me l'ha mostrato, e rideva. Un treno lungo lungo con una grossa colonna di fumo. [...] Rideva e si è voltato a guardarmi per vedere se io non ridevo. Gli ho sparato negli occhi. (155)

His laughter shows how little he expected his wife's actions, and it is significant that his notebook is the catalyst for his death, with the sketch of a train implying his departure (at least in his wife's eyes).

Perhaps one of the most arrogant of Dacia Maraini's fictional husbands is Pompeo Pompei in *La vacanza* (1962). 'Imitando l'atteggiamento di Mussolini', Pompeo asserts his sense of masculine superiority in all aspects of his relationship with his wife Mary.[47] He belittles her opinions and treats her as inferior in intellectual, social, and financial respects. The assumption that women have no interest in social affairs is not peculiar to Pompeo, but is widespread in patriarchal society; yet it is hardly surprising because, as Luce Irigaray points out, why would women be interested in a society that denies them as subjects and in which they have no stake?[48] Pompeo's belief that his opinion is the only one of any importance is explicitly shown when his wife questions his command that they eat indoors. When she asks the reason for his decision, he testily replies: 'Perché sì. Perché lo dico io. Ora vedi che non sono libero di fare quello che voglio' (48). Pompeo ignores the fact that Mary has never had the pleasure of being able to do what she wants, but is instead forced to conform meekly to his demands. He shows no respect for his wife, criticizing her behaviour as a woman and as a mother, muttering 'che scema' when she is speaking (121). The source of greatest conflict between the couple is their contrasting attitudes towards their eighteen-year-old son. Pompeo wishes to instil in his son his Fascist values and heightened sense of masculine superiority, criticizing the open affection that Mary shows towards her son: 'La disciplina. Patire il freddo e il caldo. Non gli farà male. È figlio unico e viziato. Dico a te, che lo credi sempre un pupo e lo tieni attaccato alle tue gonne' (122). Pompeo blames Mary for their son's shortcomings and criticizes her parenting skills,

[47] Dacia Maraini, *La vacanza* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000 [1962]), p. 68.
[48] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989 [1974]), p. 119.

ignoring the fact that he must take some responsibility for the manner in which his son's personality has developed.[49]

Pompeo is the quintessentially masculine man, aspiring to be like his hero Mussolini, an 'uomo dalla testa ai piedi' (68). His high opinion of Il Duce is precisely what the Fascist propagandists would have hoped for. In his essay looking at the cult of Il Duce in Italy, Piero Melograni distinguishes between Fascism and Mussolinianism. He stresses that the two were not identical, but were separate entities, and that supporters of Mussolini did not necessarily condone Fascism, or vice versa.[50] The Fascist propaganda machine continuously strove to create an image of Mussolini that did not always reflect his true personality, which was therefore probably unknown to many Italians. Whilst Melograni talks of Mussolini as 'a man full of uncertainties' and 'so gullible that he always agreed with the last speaker', the public were presented with an image of Il Duce as 'the man sent by Providence, the saviour of the country'.[51]

Italy's fascination with Il Duce was the result of this highly effective propaganda, which created an almost religious, rather than political, figure.[52] The overriding image that Fascist propagandists wanted to portray of their leader was that he was, precisely as Pompeo declares, an 'uomo dalla testa ai piedi'. This aim is reflected in some of the writings collected in the study, *Mussolini: Il mito*. One Fascist journalist declares unequivocally, 'Benito Mussolini non è un uomo: è l'uomo', whilst another extols Il Duce's talents, referring to him throughout as 'l'Uomo'.[53] This capitalization of 'Uomo' echoes Mussolini's insistence that the Italian press capitalize his title, IL DUCE, and strengthens the idea of him as the pinnacle of manhood. Luisa Passerini comments that the terms

---

[49] Pompeo's reproach of his wife's role as a mother is comparable to the attitude of Ginzburg's father towards his wife's maternal proficiency. Ginzburg elaborates on how her father attributes her own inadequacies to her mother's handling of her upbringing. Repeated assertions that flaws in Natalia's personality are due to her mother's treatment of her, eventually convince even the young Natalia that her mother should be held accountable: 'Ormai ero un impiastro per sempre. Avevo sentito mio padre dichiarare che ero un impiastro per sempre: e che la colpa non era mia, ma di mia madre, che m'aveva tirato su male e m'aveva viziato. Anch'io pensai che la colpa era di mia madre e non mia' - 'I baffi bianchi', in *Mai devi domandarmi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002 [1970]), pp. 145-158 (p. 146). Just like Pompeo, Giuseppe Levi chooses to overlook his own influence in shaping his offspring's imperfections, preferring instead to blame his wife.

[50] Piero Melograni, 'The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini's Italy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), 221-237 (p. 223).

[51] ibid., pp. 223, 234.

[52] ibid., p. 224.

[53] Renzo De Felice and Luigi Goglia, *Mussolini: Il mito* (Rome: Laterza, 1983), pp. 108, 110.

'maschio' and 'virile' were adjectives that were constantly connected with Mussolini's name, appearing at times almost obligatory for the writer to use.[54] Mussolini's projected image was carefully constructed to emphasize his masculinity and sexual prowess and to appeal to his ideal of men as strong, powerful, and dominant over women. Pompeo exemplifies this ideal.

Maraini further connects Pompeo with his hero through her significant choice of his name. Mussolini frequently makes references in his speeches to Italy's Roman heritage, exalting the time of the Roman Empire, and Pompeo Pompei's name links him strongly with this Roman past. Just as the doomed city of Pompei lies frozen in time following the eruption of Vesuvius, Maraini's character is trapped by his attitudes towards women and his unswerving adherence to the equally doomed Fascist regime. By investing total belief in Mussolini's greatness, Pompeo places himself under continual pressure to fulfil his own expectations.

Through Pompeo's rigid façade it is possible to see chinks of weakness and uncertainty, and hints of more vulnerable emotions than he would ever be willing to admit to (in fact the very emotions that Fascist propagandists concealed for Mussolini). Similarly, John Beynon maintains that what is often portrayed as the flawless surface of masculinity is more likely a 'false skin' hiding deep insecurities.[55] Indeed, on learning of his son's conscription into Mussolini's army, Pompeo has a momentary lapse of bravado. His tone is at odds with his words, which are typically critical of his wife and which he uses as a defence mechanism against his underlying emotions:

> "Povero figlio mio," strepitò la signora Pompei.
> "Lascialo stare. Fare il soldato è un onore," incalzò il marito poco convinto, con voce tetra.
> "E se muore?" strillava la moglie.
> "Ma che dici, cretina. Un buon soldato non muore, combatte." Guardava il figlio come per convincerlo di quello che stava asserendo. (95-96)

Pompeo has been conditioned by Fascist ideology to such an extent that he is no longer capable of allowing any opinion or emotion, which could be considered as a weakness, to

[54] Luisa Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario* (Rome: Laterza, 1991), p. 99.
[55] John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), p. 66.

show through his carefully controlled exterior. In spite of his seemingly unwavering confidence in his masculinity, Pompeo is actually riddled with doubts, which in turn affect him more strongly than if he were a man capable of admitting his limitations. In her portrayal of Pompeo as a loyal supporter of Il Duce, Maraini's criticism of Mussolini and his attitude towards women is clear.

In her seminal essay, 'A Room of One's Own' (1929), Virginia Woolf looks at the practice, whereby men ensure that women are kept in a position of inferiority in order to boost their own self-esteem and self-confidence in patriarchal society. She asserts that the enforced inferiority of women is essential for patriarchy to survive, enabling men to enjoy a sense of superiority over half the human race. Woolf employs the metaphor of a mirror to emphasize her argument:

> Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. [...] Whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action.[56]

Therefore, according to Woolf, in order for men to engage successfully in fighting wars and governing over thousands of people, their egos must receive a constant supply of reassurance and confirmation that they are worthy and capable of such responsibility; they obtain this partly from the inferiority that they impose on women, citing natural and intellectual advantages over the supposedly weaker sex. As Fascism relied heavily on such ideas, Woolf's analysis is particularly useful here.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), Luce Irigaray also argues to this effect. She writes that Freud's theory of 'penis-envy' is crucial in maintaining male superiority over women and without it man would be reduced in value:

> If woman had desires other than 'penis-envy,' this would call into question the unity, the uniqueness, the simplicity of the mirror charged with sending man's image back to him — albeit inverted. [...] For the 'penis-envy' alleged against woman is—let us repeat—a remedy for man's fear of losing one. If *she* envies it, then *he* must have it. If *she* envies what *he* has,

---

[56] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1990 [1929]), pp. 35-36.

> then it must be valuable. [...] Woman's fetishization of the male organ must indeed be an indispensable support of its price on the sexual market.[57]

For Irigaray, female inferiority is an essential component of patriarchal society, forming the basis on which man can build his world. The suggestion is, however, that should women's support be taken away, man is not strong enough to maintain his power, but patriarchy would crumble – woman as mirror is therefore essential.

This desperate need for continuous support to prop up their self-worth results in men's inability to accept women's criticism with good grace. Carmine in *Famiglia* and Giacinto in *Donna in guerra* are examples of such men. Woolf refers to the idea that if women tell men the truth, then the male figure in the mirror will shrink and fade. She explains that some leaders, such as Mussolini and Napoleon, persistently maintain that women are inferior in all respects, in order to enlarge their own reflections.[58] As a staunch follower of Mussolini's principles, Maraini's Pompeo acts in a similar way, using his wife as a mirror to amplify his self-image. Similarly, Passerini sees Mussolini's publicly close relationships with his mother and eldest daughter as simply another means of asserting his maleness: 'l'immagine del duce, accoppiata ad esse, sembra [...] voler accentuare la propria maschilità'.[59] Mussolini is using this female presence to put his own masculinity into relief and enhance the image of his superiority.

This idea of male supremacy is repeated in Maraini's story for children 'Dalla cucina di un re' (2001). The story tells of how 'un coperchio di vetro elegante e bellissimo' finds himself in a King's kitchen, only to be 'sposato con una pentola di alluminio da quattro soldi tutta storta e ammaccata'.[60] Convinced of his supremacy over his new wife, the lid continually belittles her, despising her because of what he describes as her inferiority 'di cultura' and 'di intelletto' (27). Their literal positions in the relationship, with the lid on top and the pot underneath, reflect the actual status of men and women in patriarchal society. As with Pompeo's constant disparagement of his wife Mary, the lid's criticism erodes his wife's confidence: 'La pentola era mortificata da queste continue punzecchiature e si

---

[57] Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 51, 53. Emphasis in original.
[58] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 36.
[59] Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario*, p. 94.
[60] Dacia Maraini, 'Dalla cucina di un re', in *La pecora Dolly* (Milan: Fabbri, 2001), pp. 26-41 (p. 26).

faceva sempre più piccola e storta' (27). Eventually she comes to believe his assertions that she is unworthy, although this merely serves to reinforce her determination to prove her love for him: 'Io certo non me lo merito [...] ma io lo amo e farò di tutto per mostrarmi degna di lui' (28). Although the story ends happily with the lid returning her love, it is only through her unwavering loyalty that the pot succeeds in obtaining his affection. She teaches him that 'l'amore è contagioso' and is enough to bind two people, in spite of their cultural and intellectual differences (40). This story exemplifies Irigaray's theory that women must be the ones to initiate 'relational life' and teach men how to cultivate sexual difference; to do this they must discover that the other is 'horizontally transcendent, and not vertically transcendent' to themselves, as Maraini's lid comes to realize.[61]

Unlike the lid in Maraini's short story, who does not actively seek out female company but rather has it thrust upon him, several male characters in Ginzburg's work engage in a search for love and companionship. In many cases, this search and any subsequent relationships are depressing and disheartening experiences for the characters. In *Borghesia* (1977), Pietro suffers mentally and emotionally as a result of his relationships with women. Although continually searching for female friendship, Pietro descends into a state of melancholy whenever he falls in love, which interestingly is stereotypically a female reaction: 'Pietro era uno che quando si innamorava, diventava molto triste'.[62] Pietro sums up his emotions when he falls in love with *La monachina*: 'Lui rispose che non gli riusciva più di vedere il meglio e il peggio, aveva la testa molto confusa, non aveva più dei pensieri ma solo tristezza e ansia' (86). His priority in marriage is not love but companionship, a desire to which Ginzburg subtlety calls attention through the simultaneous action of Pietro stroking a cat, whilst announcing that he will marry (86). The therapeutic comfort that Pietro derives from petting the cat is the feeling that he longs to replicate in a relationship, suggesting that, rather than sexual love, he craves the protection of parental love.

As with other characters, such as Maraini's Pompeo Pompei and Pietro Ucrìa, Pietro attempts to appear outwardly strong, bowing to social pressure that says men showing emotions are weak and effeminate. Ginzburg highlights his multi-faceted personality: he is 'secco e brusco, ma di animo sensibile e buono. Si fingeva duro e forte, ma era dentro così fragile, una foglia sul ramo' (81). This brings us back to Beynon's comments regarding the

[61] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, pp. XII, 27.
[62] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Borghesia', in *Famiglia*, pp. 73-115 (p. 81).

'false skin' of masculinity. Pietro is a subscriber to masculine ideals, although to a lesser extent than Pompeo. He too must adapt his true nature to fit in with social attitudes and expectations connected with masculinity. Unable to give full expression to his inner feelings, Pietro cannot relate easily to the opposite sex and can therefore hope only for companionship rather than establishing a sincere, emotional bond with a woman.

Giuseppe in *La città e la casa* (1984) likewise marries for companionship rather than love. Although initially Giuseppe cannot tolerate Anne Marie, he gradually becomes closer to her, driven by his desire for female friendship. After their marriage has failed, Giuseppe admits that he never really knew his wife and that 'mai una sola volta ho avuto la sensazione che mi dicesse veramente cosa pensava'.[63] In her handling of this marriage, Ginzburg delves further into the theme of communication as an important factor in a successful relationship. Unlike several of her other characters who wake during the night to discuss their problems, Giuseppe and his wife merely share 'un rapporto fatto di sorrisi e di sussurri' and speak 'poco' to each other (115).

Having been adversely affected by his disastrous first marriage to Alberico's mother, who 'era una stupida, e la noia con lei era pesante', Giuseppe is determined to avoid a repeat of the monotony that he previously felt (10). According to Giuseppe, if a couple do not converse regularly they can evade this feeling of boredom. His and Anne Marie's attitude to each other bears out this opinion:

> Ci ritroviamo la sera, in cucina, e ciascuno di noi dice qualcosa di quello che ha fatto nella giornata, ma pochissimo, per non annoiare l'altro. La noia, nella convivenza, è il rischio peggiore. La noia nasce quando ciascuno sa tutto dell'altro, o crede di saper tutto dell'altro, e se ne infischia. (128)

Whilst this method of non-communication may prevent the onset of tedium, it does however preclude the relationship's development to a deeper emotional level, driving a psychological wedge between them. The relationship's lack of longevity is therefore unsurprising. Giuseppe's attitudes towards himself, his son, and the women in his life are

---

[63] Natalia Ginzburg, *La città e la casa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997 [1984]), p. 225.

determined by his constant desire for change in order to ward off boredom, and he accordingly restricts the emotional commitment that he is willing to invest.[64]

Boredom is one of Giuseppe's great fears, and the words *annoiare*, *noia*, and *noioso* run like a thread through his letters. The opening letter sees Giuseppe admit to his brother: 'temevo sempre che ti annoiassi, temevo sempre che la mia compagnia per te fosse poco' (3). Giuseppe is afraid of boring others but also of being bored by others. His self-declared fear of monotony hints at a lack of inner depth: because he is not comfortable with himself as a person, he constantly needs reassurance of his worth from external sources. He has spent his entire life moving from one relationship or job to another in a bid to find emotional fulfilment.

Emigration is Giuseppe's final attempt to find happiness in the mistaken belief that he can outrun his troubles. In their study of the metaphor of journey, Georg Roppen and Richard Sommer indicate two archetypes associated with traditional metaphors of travel. The first 'stems from an impulse toward renewal, restoration, rejuvenation' and often the journey is an effort to find salvation.[65] The second archetype concerns 'an impulse after unity of knowledge, or understanding; in this respect it is, very simply, the product of man's desire to make sense out of his world'.[66] Giuseppe could certainly be said to embody both desire for change, whilst also needing to understand better his relationship with himself and the outside world. He cannot hope to lead a satisfying life without first comprehending more deeply his role in the world. However, Giuseppe is ultimately unsuccessful in his search for companionship as he is searching for an ideal and consequently is destined to remain disappointed - what he longs for is unattainable. Frequent mentions of his love of whisky, coupled with the observation that 'ha gli occhi di quelli che bevono superalcolici in misura eccessiva', suggest that Giuseppe is attempting to

---

[64] This self-enforced silence is in stark contrast to Giuseppe's attitude towards his stepdaughter Chantal, with whom he falls in love and enjoys a relationship based on sharing thoughts and opinions: 'Io con Chantal parlo molto e molto volentieri, e quando lei è al suo lavoro e io sono a scuola raduno nella mia mente un mucchio di cose che le voglio dire e che infatti le dico appena siamo di nuovo insieme' (166). It appears as though Giuseppe may have found his ideal partner in Chantal, although she does not reciprocate his feelings.

[65] Georg Roppen and Richard Sommer, *Strangers and Pilgrims: An Essay on the Metaphor of Journey* (Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press, 1964), p. 17.

[66] ibid., p. 18.

numb his loneliness (231). By hinting at alcoholism, Ginzburg shows the true extent of her protagonist's misery and inability to find the happiness that he craves.

Another character who searches in vain for love is Carmine in Ginzburg's *Famiglia* (1977). We see Carmine presented in relation to several women, including his former lover Ivana who he meets again after several years. Carmine realizes that Ivana and their mutual friend Matteo are 'le persone con le quali si sentiva meglio al mondo. Stare con loro era semplice' (25). The ease that Carmine experiences in Ivana's company is in stark contrast to how he feels when with his wife Ninetta or those connected to her:

> Quando stava con tutti gli altri, con la Ninetta, con i vari amici della Ninetta, con i vari parenti della Ninetta, e anche con gli architetti che lavoravano con lui allo studio, si sentiva costretto a rannicchiarsi in una positura rattrappita e complicata, e si sentiva diventare nello stesso tempo stupido e tortuoso. (25-26)

In spite of the greater length of time that Carmine has spent with Ninetta, he is able to relate more freely to Ivana. He concludes that: 'era Ivana, e tutto quello che la circondava, la parte migliore della sua esistenza, e la sola zona da cui gli provenisse qualcosa che lo rendeva più intelligente, più strano e più forte' (41). Carmine prefers Ivana because he can feel superior to her, whereas with Ninetta he feels inferior and unintelligent, and he struggles to maintain the level of intellectual interaction needed to communicate with his wife and colleagues. As Carmine always strives to be the best in any situation, he places increased pressure on himself; in Ivana's company he does not feel threatened and can relax his self-expectations a little. In line with Virginia Woolf's theory, Carmine uses Ivana as a mirror to increase the size of his reflection and boost his self-esteem; conversely, Ninetta causes his reflection to shrink and fade.

Although Carmine and Ivana were ultimately incompatible when living together, their habit of waking during the night to talk is seen as positive behaviour. It is significant that when 'non discutevano più, la notte, sia per non svegliare la bambina, sia perché adesso li annoiava moltissimo scambiarsi qualunque pensiero', Carmine and Ivana's relationship reaches a turning point, after which it gradually deteriorates (11). Ginzburg conveys the idea that these night-time conversations are a vital part of a healthy relationship, and the importance that she places on them is emphasized by similar episodes in *Tutti i nostri ieri*

(1952). It is no coincidence that we see Ginzburg's one truly positive male character, Cenzo Rena, waking at night to discuss his worries with his wife.[67] These nightly musings show a deeper level of communication than normally enjoyed by Ginzburg's characters and allow the couples to provide each other with emotional support. The practice is obviously inspired by Ginzburg's own father's behaviour, and in *Lessico famigliare* (1963) she repeatedly tells of him waking to share his fears with his wife: 'mio padre era preoccupato per l'avvenire di tutti i suoi figli maschi, e svegliandosi la notte diceva a mia madre: "Cosa farà Gino? Cosa farà Mario?"'[68] Waking during the night to talk requires an active participation in the marriage and shows a willingness to confide fears, rendering oneself vulnerable in another's company. Night is significant as both a time and space, in which characters can drop their defences and socially constructed masks under the shadow of darkness, revealing the truth beneath (this is reminiscent of Irigaray's writing on women who can strip off their day-time mother/daughter disguises in the evening, which I shall discuss in Chapter 5).

In comparison, Carmine's attitude towards his wife is characterized by jealousy and a sense of unease in her company. Yet he is unable to make a clean break from the marriage. Ginzburg tells us that 'l'uomo non amava più sua moglie, ma era geloso di lei. Pensava che a Venezia doveva avere qualcuno' (6). Carmine's possessive nature towards Ninetta shows that he does not want her to move on from the failed relationship, although he no longer desires her himself. Carmine's insecurities clearly show through his veneer of self-confidence, as he moves from woman to woman in search of affection. His affair with Olga is portrayed as a desperate last attempt to find happiness, as Ivana acknowledges: 'lui, Carmine, se l'era inventata, avendo un'assoluta necessità di inventarsi una ragazza, e situarla nel centro della propria esistenza' (56). Carmine's picture of Olga is not real: it is merely the projected image of his perfect woman. Like Giacinto in *Donna in guerra*, Carmine exemplifies Jung's theory that every man carries with him an eternal, archetypal image of woman. In each of his relationships, Carmine judges the women according to this feminine archetype. On another level, Carmine views his affair with Olga as revenge for Ninetta's adultery and competes with his wife, taking pride in his ability to deceive her:

---

[67] Natalia Ginzburg, *Tutti i nostri ieri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1952]), p. 249.
[68] Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico famigliare* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999 [1963]), p. 63. See also pages 60, 70, 174 for other examples.

'adesso, era lui a coltivare, al fianco di lei ignara, un adulterio. Pensava che era molto più furbo di lei, e più ipocrita, perché da fuori, sulla sua persona e sulla sua faccia, probabilmente non doveva leggersi nulla' (50). This competitiveness arises from Carmine's low self-esteem, and he feels a sense of empowerment from secretly betraying Ninetta.

Carmine's lack of self-confidence and his continuous desire for affection result in part from his inability to reconcile his adult life with his childhood spent in a poor, peasant country with a mother 'con i denti rotti e neri, quasi analfabeta' (10). His relationship with his parents is complex, fluctuating between love and hate. When they visit him, Carmine goes through a wide range of emotions, realizing that 'li amava, ma li avrebbe strangolati' (52). With their departure he experiences both 'una enorme liberazione e una lacerante malinconia' (53). In his study of family life, Donald Gilbert McKinley concludes that 'the family remains the dominant social situation in which an individual can be himself', and he can therefore love and hate freely, as social pressures are excluded.[69] Indeed, it is only with his parents that Carmine escapes from social expectations and can be his true self.

Unable to resolve his complex feelings for his parents, heritage, and background, Carmine cannot find the inner peace that he craves so deeply and his personality cannot fully mature. He has moved out of the social class into which he was born, with devastating effects on his identity. With his uncle's help he was given opportunities that his parents were unable to offer him, such as an education. However, the result is a lack of any sense of social belonging. He is no longer a part of the peasant class, and yet neither does he feel at ease in his new elevated position. These unresolved issues are clearly highlighted when, on his deathbed, his final thoughts are of his mother, and he sees himself as a child in her arms once again:

> Si ricordava d'una volta che lui era molto piccolo, in braccio alla madre, ed erano in città alla stazione, di notte, con una gran pioggia, e c'era tanta gente che aspettava il treno, con gli ombrelli, e il fango ruscellava fra le rotaie. (69)

In spite of the daunting atmosphere, the young Carmine finds comfort from his mother's protection, a security that he will seek in vain throughout his adult life. McKinley looks at this ongoing attachment to childhood, stating that:

---

[69] Donald Gilbert McKinley, *Social Class and Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 16.

> The individual in any society is continually being pried loose from emotionally meaningful social situations of his earlier life, he can never completely escape from the need to recapture the gratifications of those past situations.[70]

Carmine tries to revisit his past, which prevents him from moving on with his life. His relationship with his mother also exemplifies Luce Irigaray's theory of mother-son fusion, which I consider in Chapter 5.

Carmine's longing for affection is reminiscent of Pietro Ucrìa in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*; both men suffer because they fail to rediscover the feeling of protection that they experience in childhood - Carmine from his mother and Pietro from his sister. However, in spite of their longing for female companionship, both men betray varying levels of arrogance in their relationships, assuming that women should adapt to suit their ideals. Carmine, especially during his affair with Olga, shows clearly that he has concrete ideas of what is acceptable behaviour for a woman. He cannot accept the unconventional nature of Olga's relationship with her son and feels threatened by her atypical behaviour - he is afraid of the unknown and uses his self-constructed sense of superiority as a defence mechanism. Olga fails to meet Carmine's high expectations of a mother, and it is this subscription to a mother archetype that comes between them. Carmine is projecting his own fantasies onto his mother and subsequently all the women in his life, which ultimately leads to disappointment. According to Jung, one result of a man's mother complex is the unending, unconscious search for his mother in every woman he meets; this could certainly be said of Carmine and is also inherent in Catholic cultures.[71] In this respect, it is also significant that Carmine's one male friend in the novella is homosexual: Ginzburg suggests that he has surrounded himself with feminine personalities.[72]

Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg's portrayal of husbands in their literature varies considerably. In many of her early works, Maraini's emphasis on the female voice results in her often overlooking the male perspective in a relationship or merely furnishing it with

---

[70] ibid., p. 17.
[71] Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, p. 113.
[72] I will return to Ginzburg's equation of homosexuality and femininity in my chapter on fathers.

a passing glance. In her later works, however, Maraini delves deeper into the male mind, attempting to explore the motivating factors behind men's controlling attitude towards women. This is particularly the case in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, in which Maraini provides an in-depth analysis of the psychological and social causes of Pietro's behaviour, in stark contrast to her depictions of husbands in her early works, which frequently deal with actions rather than causes. Several of Maraini's characters use sex and maternity as a means of controlling their wives' bodies, whilst others belittle and criticize their wives until they become convinced of their inferiority. Husbands such as Pompeo Pompei project their own weaknesses onto their wives rather than confront their insecurities.

Whereas Maraini's fictional husbands are often tyrannical and controlling, Ginzburg's are, in comparison, weak and ineffectual. In spite of this, the husbands portrayed by Ginzburg are equally oppressive of women. Their inability to understand themselves prevents them from understanding their wives, who therefore suffer from feelings of neglect and insecurity. Perhaps it could be said that Maraini emphasizes the physical and sexual control that men have over their wives, whilst Ginzburg concentrates more on emotional and psychological control. Her weak husbands use more subtle methods to dominate their wives and carry over their own insecurities into their marriages, thereby making the union unstable. Several of Ginzburg's male characters are driven into marriage by a need to find affection and assuage their loneliness: as they have little inner strength and few real interests in life, they cannot satisfy their own needs and therefore look to a woman to complete them. Characters such as Carmine in *Famiglia*, Pietro in *Borghesia*, and Giuseppe in *La città e la casa* are examples of the 'forme spente, larve e ombre, consenzienti, inconsistenti e inutili' that Ginzburg warns will be the result of excluding men from feminist plans for the future.[73] Significantly, her comments were made in the same year as the publication of *Famiglia* and *Borghesia*.

The principal problem for both Ginzburg and Maraini's literary husbands is the tension created between expectations and the reality of married life. Having subscribed to feminine archetypes and been taught that women behave and should be treated in a certain way, these husbands are unprepared for any rebellion or change in their wives. A woman stepping out of her prescribed role throws these husbands into turmoil, as they are unable to

[73] Ginzburg, 'Donne e uomini', p. 92.

accept that the archetype is false. Feminism has forced issues out into the open that men would rather have ignored. However, the legal changes regarding women's role in society necessitate a change in men also. Husbands must come to terms with their wives' newfound role in society and marriage if they are to adapt successfully to their own new role:

> Non spetta però forse principalmente agli uomini il compito di inventare un'immagine nuova di sé, nuova, sradicata dai costumi antichi e votata ad un nuovo rapporto con le donne e con l'esistenza? Non ne ha forse un'estrema necessità il futuro, e non ne hanno un'estrema necessità i nostri sogni senza padre?[74]

However, Ginzburg and Maraini both seem to doubt men's ability to adapt and perhaps, as Luce Irigaray writes, men must wait to be saved by women.[75]

[74] Ginzburg, 'Donne e uomini', p. 92.
[75] See Irigaray, *Key Writings*, pp. 147, 151.

4. Short-lived Queens: Wives

"Se mi parlasse, se fosse diverso! Se fosse diverso, più come l'altra gente! Allora anch'io sarei una donna diversa, più buona." (*Le voci della sera*, Natalia Ginzburg)

The question of who is to blame for a wife's unhappiness is one that is considered by both Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini in their fiction. Is it the husband's fault, the wife's own fault, or is marriage as an institution to blame? In most cases both authors come to the conclusion that it is probably all three. Although husbands are often condemned as the villains in an unhappy marriage, Ginzburg and Maraini propose that wives are also frequently to blame for their own oppression. So whilst men are the catalyst for female depression, women must accept some of the blame for *allowing* themselves to be placed in such situations: an idea echoed by Germaine Greer, who criticizes women who repeatedly blame men for their discontent, thereby sacrificing their personal responsibility.[1]

In her essay 'Discorso sulle donne', Ginzburg attributes women's inherent unhappiness to their tendency to fall into a metaphorical 'well'. According to Ginzburg, women 'hanno la cattiva abitudine di cascare ogni tanto in un pozzo, di lasciarsi prendere da una tremenda malinconia e affogarci dentro'.[2] She writes that the factors that trigger a bout of melancholy vary from woman to woman; however, all share this emotional habit, partly because of the 'temperamento femminile', with its inclination towards introspection, and partly because of 'una secolare tradizione di soggezione e di schiavitù'.[3] Furthermore, until they learn to conquer these fears and emotional crises women will never be free individuals.

Alba De Céspedes's response to Ginzburg's essay is equally interesting. Agreeing with the concept, De Céspedes asserts that it is not a woman's fault but 'sono sempre gli uomini a spingerci nel pozzo; magari senza volerlo'.[4] Conversely, De Céspedes believes that these *pozzi* are women's strongpoint, allowing them to face their weaknesses and fears, as opposed to men, who never confront these issues, having no emotional retreat of their own. She states that you can only judge yourself impartially when you are at your lowest

[1] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), p. 244.
[2] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Discorso sulle donne', in *Il pozzo segreto: Cinquanta scrittrici italiane*, ed. by Maria Rosa Cutrufelli and others (Florence: Giunti, 1993), pp. 27-32 (p. 27).
[3] ibid., p. 28.
[4] Alba De Céspedes, 'Lettera a Natalia Ginzburg', in *Il pozzo segreto*, pp. 33-36 (p. 34).

possible point - when you have hit the rock bottom of the well. Gaston Bachelard talks of the fear of falling in his work *Air and Dreams* (1943):

> Even before any reference to morality, metaphors of the fall are fixed [...] by an undeniable psychological reality. These metaphors all produce a psychic impression that leaves indelible traces in our unconscious: the fear of falling is a *primitive fear*. We find it as one component in fears of many different kinds. [...] At the slightest regression, we tremble with this infantile fear. Our dreams themselves know vertiginous falls into bottomless pits.[5]

Part of the fear of falling is, according to Bachelard, a fear of being unprotected. His opinion is useful in considering Ginzburg's fictional wives. The fear of falling into *pozzi* colours all their actions and interactions with others. Ginzburg's wives live their lives waiting to fall. In her literature, these *pozzi* are one way in which Ginzburg's female characters escape temporarily from the oppressive life around them. Those that manage to climb out of the well do so stronger and more self-aware, whereas others perish at the bottom.

Throughout both Ginzburg and Maraini's works their female characters use various methods either to opt out of patriarchal society or to aid their struggle for liberty. Escaping from an oppressive marriage was difficult for women, especially before the legalization of divorce. The high number who sought divorce immediately following the law's introduction speaks for itself. In the three and a half years between the passing of the law and the 1974 referendum, which hoped to abolish it, 90,000 divorces were granted.[6] However, after the initial flood of divorce requests, Italy settled into a rate of divorce that was, and still is, one of the lowest in the world. So even when divorce became legal, many women chose not to exercise their right to end a relationship with a domineering partner. Many of the works considered in this chapter, however, precede the divorce legislation, and therefore the authors' female characters have no choice but to seek other solutions to their problems.

Death, either their own or that of others, is one such solution. Ginzburg's unnamed protagonist in *È stato così* (1947) uses murder and then suicide to end her suffering: unable to direct her husband's or her own life, she ends both. Having lost control of her body, suicide enables her to wrench back control, even though this means her own death. Suicide

---

[5] Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas: The Dallas Institute, 1988 [1943]), p. 91. Emphasis in original.
[6] Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1987-1995*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1997), p. 382.

is the escape route chosen by several characters in Ginzburg's fiction, both male and female, who can no longer cope with the violence of society: it is the ultimate escape from the oppressive world around them.[7]

Marianna Ucrìa's preferred method of withdrawal on the other hand is silence, both imposed and self-imposed. Luce Irigaray asserts that enforced silence, for example that which is caused by abuse, 'is not a real silence, but is a paralysis of speech'.[8] Real silence is a choice that Irigaray believes is necessary to access interiority and your own becoming. Silence is regenerating and 'to undervalue silence is a masculine position. Silence is sometimes more powerful than language itself'.[9] In Marianna Ucrìa's case, her silence is initially simply a paralysis of speech, but gradually develops into a real silence, which she can use positively to initiate her becoming. The victim of violence at a young age, Marianna's silence and deafness are her way of protecting herself from future pain in a patriarchal society. Hand in hand with silence is women's descent into madness and hysteria. The issue of female mental disorders and madness is dealt with in Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*. One reason given for the high numbers who suffer from psychological illness is patriarchal society's oppression of women and its confinement of them in the restrictive and dependent roles of daughters, wives, and mothers.[10] In *È stato così* we see the protagonist fall victim to hysteria, before she commits suicide. For her, madness was just a temporary release from oppression.

Other female characters choose to rebel against patriarchal society, rather than to succumb to its psychological violence. The oppressed wives in Maraini's *Donna in guerra* (1975) and *Il treno per Helsinki* (1984) choose work as the first step towards personal liberation. In fact the period dealt with by Maraini in these two novels saw a sharp increase in the number of women in employment in Italy. Between 1970 and 1985 the number of women working rose by almost fifty per cent, with many women returning to work when

---

[7] Other suicide victims in Ginzburg's works include the protagonist of 'La madre', Kit in *Valentino*, the husband in 'Mio marito', and Ippolito in *Tutti i nostri ieri*. Of course, Ginzburg also experienced the suicide of her close friend Cesare Pavese in 1950, and in reaction to Primo Levi's suicide, she comments: 'penso che ogni suicidio ha mille cause, mille origini, mille motivazioni' (*È difficile parlare di sé* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 200).

[8] In conversation with Luce Irigaray, Nottingham, May 2005.

[9] ibid.

[10] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 3-4.

their children started school.[11] Women were gradually being given more options and were no longer expected to remain housewives.

Rather than work, some characters, including Cate in Ginzburg's *Le voci della sera* (1961) and Elena in Maraini's 'Il quaderno rosso' commit adultery in a bid for liberation.[12] Adultery, however, is represented as a double-edged sword and often merely results in a change of the woman's oppressor. These wives are attempting to break free from their psychological bonds by using their body, as do the younger female characters in Ginzburg's *La strada che va in città* (1942) and Maraini's *L'età del malessere* (1963), who resort to promiscuity in a search for love. The married women in Ginzburg and Maraini's fiction are no different: all they desire is their husband's respect and affection, and if he does not provide it, they look elsewhere.

In *È stato così* Ginzburg shows how a husband's inattentiveness, added to his wife's latent insecurities, can produce fatal effects. The protagonist's marriage to Alberto is very much one-sided. He detaches himself emotionally, and when the protagonist, who significantly remains nameless throughout, does attempt to discover something about his life, 'la sua faccia diventava come assorta e lontana e gli occhi gli si appannavano come succede agli uccelli ammalati'.[13] Alberto constructs a mask to conceal his true emotions, and the protagonist can only hope to glimpse his thoughts; she desperately tries to interpret his every phrase in a bid to understand him.[14] The shocking realization that she will never be the priority in her husband's life only comes after their wedding. Whilst Alberto remains strongly attached to his former life, she has completely immersed herself in the marriage, abandoning many aspects of her past:

> Era stata una vita abbastanza mediocre e incolore fino al giorno che l'avevo incontrato. E avevo lasciato cadere da me tutto quello che non aveva rapporto con lui. Avevo smesso d'insegnare. Francesca la vedevo di rado. (104)

---

[11] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 410.

[12] The examples of wives who commit adultery in Ginzburg and Maraini's works are numerous. Other female adulterers in Ginzburg's literature include Lucrezia in *La città e la casa*, Azalea in *La strada che va in città*, Ninetta in *Famiglia* and La monachina in *Borghesia*. Examples in Maraini's works are Vannina in *Donna in guerra*, Armida in *Il treno per Helsinki*, Giuseppa in *Marianna Ucrìa*, and Elda in 'L'altra famiglia'.

[13] Natalia Ginzburg, 'È stato così', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964]), pp. 85-155 (p. 90). Further references to primary editions are given after quotations in the text.

[14] Alan Bullock, *Natalia Ginzburg: Human Relationships in a Changing World* (Oxford: Berg, 1991), p. 83.

Elena Clementelli points out that loneliness is a constant theme throughout Ginzburg's fiction, and that it is 'una solitudine tanto più spietata e pesante proprio perché alimentata e custodita nell'apparenza di una vita coniugale'.[15] This certainly applies in the case of *È stato così*. The protagonist is lonely as she has invested everything in her husband to the detriment of her previous friendships. When she finally realizes that her dreams of marriage and children need not have been exclusive, and that women should have interests outside the family, it is too late.

The protagonist in this story allows her life and self to merge into her husband's. She is guilty of not maintaining an irreducible difference between them, which Luce Irigaray deems essential in the relationship with the other. In *Key Writings*, Irigaray talks of the need to keep a space between two subjects, with each subject remaining within themselves; they can then communicate across the space, for example, through desire. It is not necessary to invade the other's space, but one leaves one's personal space to meet with the other in the middle, before returning to oneself. Recognizing this space between subjects, Irigaray says, is vital:

> The negative is [...] of use in preserving the transcendence of the other – a 'you' who is not, and will never be, me or mine, remaining irreducible to 'I', to me, to mine. [...] A 'you' with whom relation and all exchanges, including linguistic communication, must always maintain an indirectness, as in 'I love to you', for example. The 'to' here secures a space and a possible mediation between 'I' and 'you', be they only silence. The 'to' is the guarantor of two different subjectivities or intentionalities, without reducing or sacrificing the one to the other.[16]

In the case of Ginzburg's protagonist, she fails to maintain this space between her and Alberto, and never fully becomes a subject. Instead of respecting both of them by using Irigaray's 'I love to you', the protagonist's 'I love you' is indeed to consume and possess Alberto and, in turn, be possessed by him. Irigaray asserts that a subject must preserve their borders, in order not to spread into infinity: borders safeguard the subject's interiority and provide them with a dwelling in their subjectivity.[17] Ginzburg's protagonist has not protected her own borders and has subsequently allowed her life to be absorbed into her

---

[15] Elena Clementelli, *Invito alla lettura di Natalia Ginzburg* (Milan: Mursia, 1972), p. 51.
[16] Luce Irigaray, 'Part One: Introduction', in *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 3-7 (pp. 3-4).
[17] In conversation with Luce Irigaray, Nottingham, May 2005.

husband's, losing both herself and him in the process. She has devoted herself to her marriage to the exclusion of everything else, an attitude that proves to be extremely unhealthy. This idea of borders resonates with Jung's theory of the container and contained, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Maraini includes an example of this loss of borders in her children's story 'Scarpe di vernice' (2001). She writes of a pair of shoes—'marito e moglie'—who, owing to the fact that they must spend all their time together and can have no private thoughts or distractions, argue constantly and 'avevano l'abitudine di inciampare l'uno nell'altra'.[18] Their enforced closeness means that they even share identical dreams, and they have no chance of experiencing anything alone. Maraini's metaphor of shoes could similarly apply to Ginzburg's protagonist in *È stato così*, who invests all her dreams in Alberto, thereby gradually destroying her own sense of self. According to Simone de Beauvoir, some women attempt to imitate their husbands, going so far as to adopt his mode of speaking and gesturing, and even his opinions and friends; their ultimate aim being to identify completely with their partner: 'She is another incarnation of her loved one, his reflection, his double: she is *he*. She lets her own world collapse in contingence, for she really lives in his'.[19] Whereas Maraini's shoes are forced to spend every moment together, Ginzburg's protagonist actively chooses to tie herself emotionally and psychologically to her husband, unable to understand that other approaches to marriage are possible.

As with many of Ginzburg's female characters, the protagonist of *È stato così* is failed by her parents in the example that they have set her, encouraging her to believe that her ideal destiny is simply marriage and a family.[20] Looking back with regret the protagonist understands that had she followed other pursuits maybe things would have been different. The repetition of *pensare* here shows the new awareness and moment of clarity that the protagonist reaches:

> Mi dicevo che nella vita d'una persona non c'è forse soltanto amore o bambini ma uno può fare cento cose e perfino mettersi a scrivere un libro [...] Pensavo com'era povera la mia vita ma pensavo che ormai era troppo tardi per provare a cambiare e in fondo a tutti i miei pensieri trovavo sempre quella rivoltella. (150)

---

[18] Dacia Maraini, 'Scarpe di vernice', in *La pecora Dolly e altre storie per bambini* (Milan: Fabbri, 2001), pp. 19-25 (p. 19).
[19] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949]), p. 663. Emphasis in original.
[20] Bullock, *Human Relationships*, p. 78.

Left with no other way out of her unhappy marriage, the protagonist turns to the only option she feels is left to her – killing Alberto. She is pushed to the limit by his adultery and deception, and the breaking point comes when she is convinced that he is going to leave her. Germaine Greer discusses women's attitudes to men's adultery in *The Female Eunuch*, explaining that women are often willing to tolerate their partner's infidelity, as what they really desire is actual security and not the apparent security of a seemingly ideal marriage.[21] Indeed, we see several of Maraini and Ginzburg's literary wives turn a blind eye to infidelity in order to maintain a secure home and income; for example, the protagonist of *È stato così* who, although she was prepared to forgo the comfort of apparent security, takes drastic action when she fears that she is going to lose this actual security if Alberto leaves. The protagonist has been pushed into one of Ginzburg's *pozzi* and, as De Céspedes points out: 'spesso è proprio nel fondo del pozzo che le donne uccidono, rubano, compiono insomma tutti quei gesti che le umiliano'.[22]

Jung writes that a woman who allows herself to be convinced by a man's projected feelings, as Ginzburg's protagonist does, is not naïve but intends to let herself be deceived. She naturally relegates her ego and desires to the background, in order to allow her husband's personality full reign. However, for Jung, this contrived passive attitude ultimately damages the woman, as 'at the same time she is caught in her own toils, for whoever digs a pit for others falls into it himself'.[23] Jung's pit is comparable to Ginzburg's *pozzo*: both are traps for women, largely of their own making. In keeping with Jung's theory, Alberto's wife is seemingly willing to be deceived by the emotions that she believes him to possess, rather than seeing the true situation. Giancarlo Borri also argues that the protagonist has tricked herself into believing that a bond could develop between them and that, whilst Alberto has certainly lied to her during their marriage, the protagonist is also guilty of lying to herself.[24] Whilst this is a possible reading, I would argue that the protagonist is merely reacting to Alberto's attention in the only way that she knows how: she is a product of a society in which a woman's ultimate aim is finding a husband. We are told that the protagonist used to lie in bed imagining herself married, with a nice home and that, significantly, 'l'uomo che avrei sposato aveva ora una faccia e ora un'altra' (87). With such dreams colouring her every contact with men, it is difficult to imagine that she could

[21] Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, p. 154.
[22] Alba De Céspedes, 'Lettera a Natalia Ginzburg', p. 35.
[23] C. G. Jung, 'Woman in Europe', in *Aspects of the Feminine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 55-75 (p. 59).
[24] Giancarlo Borri, *Natalia Ginzburg* (Rimini: Luisè, 1999), p. 38.

interpret Alberto's frequent visits to her home as anything else than preparation for marriage. She is therefore more guilty of delusion than self-deception. It is only through her relationship with Alberto that she begins to learn more about the reality of marriage.

Teresa Picarazzi argues that the protagonist of *È stato così* is a classic example of a hysteric, who has sacrificed her own personality in favour of someone else's. Identifying totally with her husband and drawing from his personality her own sense of identity and self-worth, she therefore plunges into a suicidal state of despair when her distorted view of Alberto is shattered.[25] Hysteria is a means of escape for Ginzburg's protagonist and for many other literary women, including Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, Elsa Morante's Ida Ramundo, and Noemi in Grazia Deledda's *Canne al vento*. Unable to express their emotions freely, all these women suffer damage to their psyche. Taken from the Greek word for uterus, hysteria is seen as a traditionally female illness. Similarly to Ginzburg, Showalter identifies woman's inherent nature as an explanation for their susceptibility to mental disorders, highlighting how many believe women to be synonymous with irrationality, natural instincts, and the body; whilst men represent reason, discourse, and the mind. Woman is therefore often traditionally seen as the face of madness, even when the sufferer is male.[26]

In her short story 'L'uomo tatuato' (1990), Dacia Maraini turns on its head this image of women representing emotions and men symbolizing the mind. Sara and Giordano, the couple who embark on an affair in the story after meeting at a play, are characterized by the style of theatre that they favour. Far from being synonymous with irrationality and the body, Sara personifies logic and order. On the other hand, Giordano is atypical of the masculine image of reason and judgement, demonstrating an ardour and emotion lacking in Sara's theatrical works:

> Sara che fa un teatro scritto, di parole, infilandole con pazienza come perle nel filo del pensiero, andandole a cercare col laccio e l'esca per mari profondi, era incantata da quello

[25] Teresa Picarazzi, *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 77.
[26] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, pp. 3-4. A vast body of writing on hysteria exists. One notable example is Freud's *Case Histories I: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans'* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). Of particular interest in literary criticism is Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

> spettacolo in cui la parola era stata abolita, persa. [...] Giordano non dava nessuna importanza al teatro di parola. Per lui il dialogo era una pratica superflua, un poco sciocca.[27]

Maraini uses these two contrasting approaches to theatre—'una votata al caos e una all'ascesi militare' (21)—to reverse the traditional patriarchal view of men and women's natures, granting the intellectual, reasoning monologues to Sara, and the wordless, passionate, physically-orientated drama to Giordano. Maraini successfully reverses Jung's theory of Eros and Logos, passion versus reason.

Continuing with the image, Maraini likens her characters' different natures to night and day: 'Lo stupore di un corpo bruno che aderisce perfettamente a quello bianco di lei. La notte e il giorno' (22). Sara's white body is connected to the cold brightness of daylight, whilst Giordano's darker skin is evocative of the night and its closer association with passion and intrigue. It is also significant that in this story the man is silent, and it is the woman who has been given speech, unlike other female characters in Maraini's work, such as Isolina and Marianna Ucrìa, who suffer the loss of their voice. Similarly, had Ginzburg's unnamed protagonist of *È stato così* been afforded the benefit of a voice, maybe her destiny would have been different. Without such means of release, however, the young wife's only salvation from her intolerable situation is a sort of madness, which is cloaked in chillingly rational action.

In an interview with Serena Anderlini, Dacia Maraini gives her own opinions on the cause of female insanity. She tells Anderlini that as the world is made according to the requirements of men, many women find it difficult or even impossible to integrate themselves with ease. The most sensitive-natured of these women, who feel that violence has been inflicted on their psyche, are the most susceptible to madness, using it as a means of escaping the damaging harshness of reality.[28] This is certainly true of Ginzburg's protagonist in *È stato così*. Trying to adapt her personality to fit society's expectations of how a wife should behave, she loses herself to her husband. Hélène Cixous asserts that 'silence is the mark of hysteria', explaining that hysterics 'are pushed to the point of choking, nothing gets through. They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body'.[29] Ginzburg's protagonist is deprived of the chance of speech as a solution to her problems,

---

[27] Dacia Maraini, *L'uomo tatuato* (Naples: Guida, 1990), p. 12.
[28] Serena Anderlini, 'Interview with Dacia Maraini: Prolegomena for a Feminist Dramaturgy of the Feminine', *diacritics*, 21:2-3 (1991), 148-160 (p. 150).
[29] Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?', *Signs*, 7 (1981-1982), 41-55 (p. 49).

instead resorting to action. The concept of women communicating through their bodies, rather than through language, will be examined more closely later in this chapter.

In his essay 'Femininity', Freud also names society's restrictions on women as a cause of their masochistic willingness to accept their often harsh and degrading treatment by men. As is clear in the case of the protagonist of *È stato così*, society's expectations play a large part in shaping women's characters:

> The suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially favours the development of powerful masochistic impulses, which succeed, as we know, in binding erotically the destructive trends which have been diverted inwards. Thus masochism [...] is truly feminine.[30]

This 'feminine masochism' is also evident in the characters of Enrica in *L'età del malessere* and Anna in *La vacanza*, and to a certain extent also in the behaviour of Anna in Ginzburg's *Tutti i nostri ieri*. The latter is only saved by the intervention of Cenzo Rena's guidance, in short, saved with the help of a man.

Their self-sacrificing attitudes towards sexual relations with men show these girls in a negative manner, highlighting a significant level of passivity on their part. They accept men's control of them, both sexually and emotionally, neglecting to question their own motives for their willingness to suffer hurt and degradation. In relation to *È stato così*, Picarazzi writes that the protagonist's masochist tendencies are shown by her reaction to Alberto's love-making, in that her initial infatuation does not extend to sexual attraction, and, as is common with sufferers of depression and hysteria, she feels mortified and repulsed by Alberto's advances.[31] The turning point in their sexual relationship comes after she discovers Alberto's infidelity, and she only derives pleasure from their lovemaking after she has been humiliated and betrayed by her husband.[32] Exactly at the point when her marriage appears at its most unstable, the protagonist begins to invest more of herself and her emotions into the physical side of the relationship, therefore setting herself up for even greater anguish when the marriage eventually ends. Her newly discovered physical enjoyment is less about sexual pleasure and more about a continuation of her masochistic determination to self-destruct. In this way, Ginzburg's protagonist is a victim of patriarchal

---

[30] Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Norton, 1989), pp. 139-167 (p. 144).
[31] Picarazzi, *Maternal Desire*, pp. 87-88.
[32] ibid.

society, which has instilled in her unattainable expectations and ideals that will ultimately lead to her destruction. She is unable to survive in a world dominated by male order, for which she was mentally and emotionally ill equipped.

Ninetta in *Famiglia* (1977) is another of Ginzburg's fictional wives who is a victim of traditional ideals of femininity, using her body to communicate in line with patriarchal expectations. In this short story Ginzburg uses psychological indicators to convey several characters' emotions. Ninetta's state of mind in particular is often revealed through the quality of her smile, voice, and hair. Ninetta considers her smile to be of great importance and one of her best qualities. Alan Bullock believes that Ninetta views her smile as a method of gaining superiority over others, and there is almost a sense of condescension on her part when she chooses to grant it.[33] This opinion is supported by Ginzburg's use of the verb *offrire* to underline the idea that Ninetta is bestowing a great favour on the receiver of her smile, describing 'il sorriso che essa offriva come si offre un oggetto di pregio' and again how Ninetta 'offriva il suo sorriso' to her husband's parents.[34] De Beauvoir details how women have been taught to overestimate the value of their smile, using it almost as a weapon or means to obtain special favours. Problems can arise because 'no one has told her that all women smile'.[35] Mary Wollstonecraft also recognizes the danger of women relying entirely on a pleasing appearance:

> The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day [...]. Will she then have sufficient native energy to look into herself for comfort, and cultivate her dormant faculties? or is it not more rational to expect that she will try to please other men?[36]

Even though Wollstonecraft's comment was written two centuries before, it still applies to Ninetta. Ninetta is conscious of the impact that a smile can have on the onlooker and uses this to her advantage, projecting a desired image. She is aspiring to emulate the powerful smile of her female predecessors, such as Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa and Dante's Beatrice, whose smile is portrayed as luminous, comforting, and divine. As Charles Williams points out, it is Beatrice's laugh, such is its impact, which recalls Dante's

---

[33] Bullock, *Human Relationships*, p. 166.
[34] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Famiglia', in *Famiglia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995 [1977]), pp. 5-69 (pp. 8, 13).
[35] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 628.
[36] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 2004 [1792]), p. 22.

attention when it wanders from her presence for the first time.[37] Here Beatrice exerts the power that Ninetta is longing for: a power for which da Vinci's Mona Lisa is also renowned through her 'enigmatic, iconic' smile.[38] This legacy of influential female smiles, added to the modern phenomenon of television presenters and actresses with dazzlingly white smiles, supports to some extent de Beauvoir's comment that women have come to place too much emphasis on this particular feature.

In her essay 'Corpo diviso, corpo doppio' (1996), Maraini writes that women have two languages, one of speech and one of the body. Women like Ninetta often rely upon their bodies for communication, because 'l'altro linguaggio, quello della parola e del pensiero, è una conquista recente e quindi poco familiare'.[39] They have employed this language throughout history to interact with others, utilizing flirtatious mannerisms to attract male attention. Of the two languages, Maraini believes that the language of the body has more impact 'proprio perché appoggia le sue forze su duemila anni di storia e certamente comporta una antica sapienza del "dire senza dire" che appartiene al corpo femminile' (67). Women resort to smiles and gestures, which do not need accompanying speech to render them powerful; on the contrary 'il linguaggio del corpo [...] agisce meglio nel silenzio. La sua mutezza ne garantisce la potenza' (67). This reliance on the body is an inevitable consequence of the way in which women are forced by patriarchal society to assume the role of sexual prey to the male predator.

As Wollstonecraft points out, women have been placed in the role of plaything, and, according to patriarchal society, 'pleasure is the business of woman's life'.[40] However, she suggests that many women willingly accept this inferior role, even feigning a greater physical weakness than they actually possess, with the aim of arousing men's so-called

---

[37] Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943), p. 205 (in reference to *Paradiso*, Canto X. 60).

[38] Darian Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What art stops us from seeing* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 154-155. Darian Leader considers the popularity of the Mona Lisa, coming to the conclusion that her power lies in the fact that 'her smile was sinister, dangerous, unfathomable, opaque and lethally beautiful'. Leader draws attention to the comment made by Peruggia, the thief who stole the painting in 1911 from the Louvre, who said that he had originally intended to steal another picture until he had the strange sensation that Mona Lisa was smiling at him (17). However, it is not only women who recognize the importance of smiling. Stephen Gundle's article 'Il sorriso di Berlusconi' looks at how the politician has perfected his smile in order to enhance his appeal (*Altrochemestre*, 3 (1995), 14-17). Adopting a 'sorriso dei divi hollywoodiani' (15), Silvio Berlusconi hopes to convey an image of honesty, reliability, and general happiness. Gundle comes to the conclusion that Berlusconi's smile is in fact the smile of a woman, and therefore 'più seducente e quindi efficace' (17). In patriarchal society, the smile is feminine.

[39] Dacia Maraini, 'Corpo diviso, corpo doppio', in *Un clandestino a bordo*, 7th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002 [1996]), p. 67.

[40] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights*, p. 61.

protective instincts. Wollstonecraft warns of the dangers of relying too heavily on the attraction of a beautiful, helpless female:

> Inheriting in a lineal descent from the first fair defect in nature—the sovereignty of beauty—[women] have, to maintain their power, resigned the natural rights which the exercise of reason might have procured them, and chosen rather to be short-lived queens than labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality. Exalted by their inferiority (this sounds like a contradiction), they constantly demand homage as women, though experience should teach them that the men who pride themselves upon paying this arbitrary insolent respect to the sex [...] are most inclined to tyrannize over, and despise the very weakness they cherish.[41]

So, while it appears that beauty and fragility attract men's attention, the attention is only fleeting. As Wollstonecraft asserts, women would do better to cultivate their minds instead of relying on and aggravating patriarchy's obsession with their bodies. Throughout history women's bodies have been appropriated by men, and in order therefore to be truly free, women must reclaim their bodies for themselves.

In Ginzburg's *Famiglia*, Ninetta establishes her identity through her smile. It is also a signifier of her emotional state at particular points in her life. During her comfortable, yet passionless, marriage to Carmine, Ninetta's smile remains stable but significantly falters when she experiences strong feelings of love for Giose Quirino. Always having viewed adultery as a 'cosa triste e indegna', Ninetta's affair renders her deeply unhappy, both as a result of her tumultuous emotions, and because she can no longer enjoy a sense of moral superiority. There is a visible change in her smile: 'l'antico sorriso della Ninetta, radioso e immobile, era scomparso e c'era adesso, al suo posto, un sorriso piccolo e umile, dolente e tremante' (35). Similarly, when her affair ends and she recovers from the initial disappointment, 'era riapparso sul viso della Ninetta il vecchio sorriso largo, radioso e immobile, *offerto* come un gioiello' (44, my emphasis). Ninetta's smile once again changes after learning of Carmine's affair with Olga, and from then on 'sorrideva poco, e solo quando c'era molta gente' (51). That she only smiles in the company of others underlines the social function of Ninetta's smile and also its hollowness – Ninetta smiles for others, not for herself.

---

[41] ibid.

Alongside this idea of smiles as indicators, Ginzburg also details fluctuations in her characters' voices to reflect the condition of their relationships. Ninetta's voice follows similar patterns to her smile, charting her emotional involvement with Giose Quirino and betraying her true feelings. Prized by Ninetta just as highly as her smile, her usually soft, appealing voice takes on harsh tones during her affair, becoming 'un mormorio lamentoso' (35), before returning to normal when the relationship has ended: 'nella voce le era tornata quella soave cantilena infantile, che lei certo dentro di sé idoleggiava, e che era svanita nell'epoca dell'adulterio' (44). The use of the adjective *infantile* reinforces Ninetta's desire to be perceived as innocent and pure. However this innocence proves to be merely superficial, and by committing adultery Ninetta's self-perception is shattered.

De Beauvoir sums up the negative effect on women who have affairs, explaining that 'what makes adultery degrading is the compromise of character made necessary by hypocrisy and caution'.[42] Confronted with genuine, passionate emotions, Ninetta's mask slips, revealing her true nature. Again the importance placed on Ninetta's voice is reminiscent of Dante's portrayal of Beatrice, with her pure, angelic tones. Ninetta wishes to imitate the melodic tones of Dante's ideal woman, controlling her voice in a similar way to her smile. For Ninetta the *sound* of her voice is the important factor: it is quality of tone and not quality of ideas that she is striving for.[43]

Added to her use of voices and smiles, Ginzburg categorizes the three main women in *Famiglia* through her descriptions of their hairstyles, establishing three different levels of independence and homeliness. This focus on physical aspects is often considered a typical attribute of women's writing, the so-called *visione dal basso*, and yet Ginzburg uses it in an unconventional sense. Long, descriptive passages of characters' facial features, dress, and physical stature are uncommon in her works. When she provides physical details of characters it is usually to highlight an aspect of their personality. The details are often repeated until, as in *Famiglia*, they come to represent the character themselves. This technique is used widely in *Lessico famigliare* and *Le voci della sera*, in which family members become synonymous with their favourite phrases. Just as sayings are associated with people in these works, body details are personified in *Famiglia*. In her essay 'Un

---

[42] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 566.

[43] The success of Marilyn Monroe also shows the impact that the cadence of a voice can have. Monroe trained herself to talk in breathy, seductive tones, in order to accentuate the overtly feminine body image that she had constructed. Similarly, Eliza Doolittle was forced to change her voice in order to find social and personal happiness (George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1912]).

concerto di voci', Maria Antonietta Grignani writes that this technique depersonalizes Ginzburg's characters in *Famiglia*:

> Ci si tiene a distanza da personaggi e vicende tramite la frammentazione in particolari che pongono sullo stesso piano esseri animati e non. Un umorismo ormai glaciale trasforma la donna in 'una frangia nera'.[44]

However, I believe that Ginzburg's repetition of individual details, although breaking a character into parts, lends them an air of realism in a society in which appearance is all-important. The attention to detail brings each of Ginzburg's characters to life. Concentrating on their individual foibles and insecurities, Ginzburg's story is a study of human character.

In *Famiglia* frequent mention is made to Ninetta's 'frangia nera'. When Ninetta is upset, Ginzburg describes how 'Carmine si chinò a consolare, sul cuscino, quella frangia nera', personifying this physical feature in order to connect it more closely with Ninetta's character (18).[45] Seen in comparison with the homelier and more maternal '*chignon* scolorito' of her lover's wife, Ninetta's fringe, with its striking black colour, seems almost worldly and immoral (45). Giose Quirino's decision to return to his wife is seen in terms of their contrasting hairstyles, with Ninetta suspecting that 'forse egli in fondo preferiva, alla frangia nera, il quieto *chignon* della moglie, domestico e materno, e così scarsamente impegnativo' (43). Giose Quirino chooses the safer, less demanding relationship with the less independent and more obedient woman.[46]

For once Ninetta's appearance is insufficient for her to obtain what she desires, leaving her with a crisis of identity. She has lost both her lover and her husband's fidelity, and is mortified that Giose chooses to return to a woman, who is her inferior in both beauty and elegance (45). In her essay 'Il corpo inesistente' (1981), Dacia Maraini highlights the difficulties faced by women such as Ninetta, who rely so heavily on their appearance and body for their identity. As they grow older and lose the power that their beauty formally afforded to them in the eyes of men, many suffer badly. Maraini describes 'le "bellissime" [...] abituate a ottenere tutto usando le loro attrattive fisiche' and their shock when the moment arrives 'in cui si accorgono che la vista del loro corpo nudo, una volta arma

---

[44] Maria Antonietta Grignani, 'Un concerto di voci', in *Natalia Ginzburg: La narratrice e i suoi testi*, ed. by Maria Antonietta Grignani (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1986), pp. 41-56 (p. 55).
[45] See pages 8, 50, 57, 68 for further references to Ninetta's hair.
[46] This also echoes Vannina's observation in Maraini's *Donna in guerra* that Giacinto prefers her former passive nature because it is 'comoda', as I mentioned in Chapter 3.

infallibile di seduzione, non suscita più voglie'.[47] Stripped of this assurance of her beauty, Ninetta cannot reconcile herself to her new self-image. She must accept the fallibility of her body's power over men. Ginzburg conveys this transformation in her character's self-esteem through the changes in her voice and smile, which are clear external signs of Ninetta's emotional turmoil.

Continuing with the metaphor of hairstyles, Ginzburg moves towards the other extreme in the case of Carmine's lover Olga, whose 'capelli guizzavano rapidi e molli all'indietro' (53). Her undomesticated, self-regulating character is symbolized by her free-flowing, unbound hairstyle, in contrast to the neatly bound *chignon*. Just like its owner, Olga's hair is wild and untamed. Carmine's inability to accept Olga's unconventional lifestyle and the high level of freedom that she enjoys is expressed through his preference for his wife's fringe. Through her descriptions of their hair, Ginzburg places each of the three women at different levels on the scale of independence and self-awareness, with Olga being the most liberated in this area and Giose Quirino's wife remaining tied to the traditional image of the maternal, submissive woman. In an interview, Ginzburg alludes to her tendency to include three types of women in her books; referring to *Caro Michele*, she says: 'ci sono tre personaggi di donne e ho pensato che questi personaggi di donne li ho descritti per tutta la vita. Ho fatto sempre quelli. C'è una donna che corre sempre, una che sta ferma e una che cammina'.[48] In *Famiglia*, this certainly applies to Olga, Giose Quirino's wife, and Ninetta respectively.

Ninetta uses her body as a means of gaining confidence and superiority over those around her. Her reliance on her femininity betrays a fundamental lack of identity, which she desperately tries to create by exploiting her body, as she knows no other way. However, Ninetta's constructed social image disappears when she experiences true, passionate emotions, whether of love or betrayal. In contrast Olga is an unpretentious, natural woman. Published in 1977, *Famiglia* coincided with the highpoint of Italian feminism, and Olga can be seen as a product of the feminist movement: she belongs to the new generation of women, who are prepared to break society's rules and expectations. Towards the end of the novella, Ninetta takes steps that bring her closer to Olga's position. She enrols on an art course after learning of Carmine's adultery and, in her quest to fulfil her passion for art, Ninetta 'della casa non si occupava' (51). Ginzburg conveys the idea,

---

[47] Dacia Maraini, 'Il corpo inesistente', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 53-57 (pp. 54, 55).

[48] Natalia Ginzburg, 'C'era una volta la famiglia', Interview with Sandra Bonsanti, *Oggi*, November 1976, pp. 83-86 (pp. 84-85).

which is explored extensively by Maraini in her work, that artistic expression and mundane family matters are incompatible. However, whereas we see female characters, centuries before, forced to abandon their artistic pursuits as a result of family responsibilities in Maraini's *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, Ninetta reverses this trend, choosing to sacrifice domestic duties for artistic pleasure.

As mentioned above, adultery is seen as one way that a woman can exert her independence from her husband, and there are numerous examples in both Maraini's and Ginzburg's works of women having affairs. However, adultery often takes on the form of bondage itself, affording the woman only the semblance of independence from the marital home. This is especially evident in Maraini's short story, 'Il quaderno rosso' (1968). Reading her husband's diary entries, with their cryptic messages indicating that he is expecting some action on her part, the protagonist becomes increasingly frustrated. Unable to decipher the messages, Elena eventually rebels by committing adultery with Aldo. Her shock comes when she reads the subsequent diary entry and realizes that her adultery was what her husband was contriving to bring about, introducing her to Aldo and encouraging her affection towards him:

> Ho letto: 'Giovedì 22. Elena ha ceduto. Dopo avere resistito a lungo, finalmente ieri sera è andata da lui. Pomeriggio esaltante. Mi sento veramente bene.' Ho rimesso a posto il quaderno. [...] Ecco cosa voleva mio marito da me. Voleva che lo tradissi.[49]

Elena's husband successfully manipulates her, as though he were playing a game of chess, and drives her to adultery with his ambiguous diary entries. To him she is merely a pawn or puppet to be controlled, providing him with amusement to alleviate his boredom. By committing adultery, Elena has strengthened her husband's hold over her, encouraging his sense of power and superiority:

> E io che credevo di manifestare la mia indipendenza nell'adulterio, mi accorgevo che dipendevo più che mai da lui, perché il mio tradimento non era altro che un compimento della sua volontà. (50)

---

[49] Dacia Maraini, 'Il quaderno rosso', in *Mio marito* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1968]), pp. 45-51 (p. 50).

In this story Maraini turns on its head the idea that adultery is a method for women to gain independence, portraying it instead as simply another outlet for male manipulation. In this respect, we also see echoes of Alberto Moravia's fiction.

Just as Elena's adultery results from her frustration and inability to communicate with her husband, so too Cate resorts to having affairs when her marriage to Vincenzino deteriorates in Ginzburg's *Le voci della sera*. Much like *Famiglia*'s Carmine, Cate comes from a simple, country family and sees her marriage to Vincenzino as a positive step, although she does not love him. His behaviour however soon dispels any hope of happiness. Vincenzino returns home late each evening 'e lei, nell'aspettarlo, si era addormentata sulla poltrona'.[50] In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan highlights the debilitating effect that waiting each night for the husband's return has on an already discontented wife. With no real life of their own, women such as Cate wait all day for their husbands to come home and make them feel alive.[51] Cate's existing problems are aggravated by Vincenzino's behaviour, which robs her of this opportunity to feel alive and loved. Desperate for attention, Cate 'cominciò a far l'amore con quelli che capitavano' (315). Ginzburg makes it clear that Cate derives little pleasure from her adultery, and her actions make her even more despairing. It seems that all she craves is her husband's interest and affection:

> A volte, si metteva a piangere, quand'era sola; e diceva: "Ma perché sono così disgraziata? [...] Se il Vincenzino non fosse così strano! Se mi parlasse, se fosse diverso! Se fosse diverso, più come l'altra gente! Allora anch'io sarei una donna diversa, più buona!" (315)

Cate's happiness is entirely dependent on Vincenzino, and she has no life of her own. She uses adultery as a cry for help but is devastated by Vincenzino's indifferent reaction: 'Il Vincenzino sapeva tutto. E lei lo vedeva bene che sapeva tutto; e lo odiava, perché sapeva, eppure continuava ad essere quello di sempre' (315). All her attempts to shake him from his lethargy are unsuccessful.

In her novel *A memoria* (1967), Maraini includes a woman, who, although seemingly content in her marriage, commits adultery on a frequent basis. Maria actively seeks out strangers to have sex with, partly because of her husband Pietro's impotence, which in this novel is symbolic of his lack of control in patriarchal society. Pietro has the habit of taking

---

[50] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Le voci della sera', in *Cinque romanzi brevi*, pp. 271-365 (p. 305).
[51] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1963]), p. 26.

his tie off by loosening it slightly and then pulling it over his head whilst still knotted, giving the impression of a noose. This action calls into mind both castration and suicide, a theme discussed elsewhere by Maria. Maraini reverses the traditional sexual roles of passive female and active male; however, Maria's sexual emancipation is viewed by those around her more as an illness than a triumph. One of her conquests condemns her behaviour: 'La tua malattia ha un nome: erotomania. Non lo sapevi? È una aberrazione psichica. Dovresti farti curare'.[52] Renato Barilli writes that Maria's 'continua ricerca di avventure erotiche' is the only thing that lifts her out of her daily passivity, liberating her, albeit momentarily, from society's oppressions.[53]

Added to her sexual protest, Maria withdraws from society through her lack of social memory, as hinted by the novel's title. While other women react against oppression with madness, silence, or suicide, Maria mentally retreats from the world around her. Barbara Heinzius emphasizes that 'Maria opts out of society, in that she loses her social memory, but keeps her motor and autistic memory'.[54] By having no social memory, Maria is defying society's power over her mind. Heinzius also points out that Maria does not suffer at the hands of an oppressive husband but 'under society's pressure to conform and obligations to adapt'.[55] In fact, in this story both husband and wife are victims of society. Maria instantly forgets the pain inflicted on her as a woman in patriarchal society, by simply erasing memories from her mind.

A memoria is similar to Maraini's short story 'L'albero di Platone' (1968), in which the protagonist also has no short-term memory and must keep a diary to chart her day-to-day activities. Her ability to remember is so poor that she does not even realize that her husband has died days before; she is then uncertain whether he committed suicide or if she murdered him. Maraini quotes Socrates's theory that there are two types of memory: one resembling an everlasting stone and one which is comparable to a tree covered with birds,

---

[52] Dacia Maraini, *A memoria* (Milan: Bompiani, 1967), p. 97. *A memoria* is the only one of Maraini's novels no longer in print. The message contained in the book is not radically different from the author's other works, and we must therefore presume that it is the style, in which the novel has been written, that has led to its lack of success. Maraini experiments with language and syntax in the book, an innovation that now appears dated. Maria's lack of memory means that dialogue repeats over again with only slight variations and conversations resemble a monotonous chanting, at times frustrating for the reader.

[53] Renato Barilli, 'Introduzione', in *A memoria*, pp. 7-15 (p. 8).

[54] Barbara Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?: Zur Darstellung von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Dacia Marainis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1995), p. 250. ['Maria verweigert sich der Gesellschaft, indem sie ihr soziales Gedächtnis verliert, jedoch ihr motorisches und ihr autistisches Gedächtnis behält'] [All translations from Heinzius are mine].

[55] ibid., p. 257. ['unter dem gesellschaftlichen Konformismusdruck, unter Anpassungszwängen'].

where the first gust of wind will blow both birds and memories away.[56] These two stories, published just a year apart, use lack of memory as a metaphor for the female condition. Elsewhere in her work Maraini includes women, whose voices have been silenced by society, as a symbol of women's silence throughout history. Similarly the lack of memory suggests that women do not have a common history on which they can draw, an idea expounded by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*: 'women do not say "we", [...] they have no past, no history, no religion of their own'.[57] This lack of a shared history is one reason why many feminists, including Maraini, placed great importance on cultivating a female genealogy in order to provide women with common ground. On the other hand, Ginzburg objects to feminist rhetoric that represents women as a social class, emphasizing her belief that women are only tied together biologically and not culturally, and that women do not have the same needs and problems.[58]

In the essay 'Adulterio' (1987), Maraini looks at women's motivations when entering into extramarital affairs. She writes that women are often acting out of 'una richiesta filiale', searching for a paternal or even maternal figure to provide them with the comfort that they crave.[59] In Maraini's work, this longing for comfort is in direct contrast to the men's motivations behind infidelity, which in most cases is driven by sexual desire; women's adultery is based less on the physical act of intercourse and more on a need for intimacy, both emotional and sexual. However, in spite of an initial euphoria of independence, adultery often simply substitutes one type of oppression for another. De Beauvoir emphasizes the double nature of adultery, arguing that as long as women are regarded as objects, rather than subjects, they will be fated to domination by any man who chooses to take control of them. On the other hand, by selecting to be a willing participant in adultery, a woman can demonstrate that she is no man's property. De Beauvoir labels women's infidelity as 'the sole concrete form her liberty can assume'.[60] However, this view is not entirely supported by the adulteresses in Ginzburg and Maraini's literature.

Adultery is rarely the real solution to these wives' discontent. It proves to be merely a temporary measure to alleviate boredom or loneliness, which simply covers over the cracks of deep-rooted unhappiness. Maraini's essay 'Le donne con la pelliccia' (1987) examines

---

[56] Dacia Maraini, 'L'albero di Platone', in *Mio marito*, pp. 97-106 (p. 98).
[57] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 19.
[58] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La condizione femminile', in *Vita immaginaria* (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), pp. 182-190 (pp. 182-183).
[59] Dacia Maraini, 'Adulterio', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 43-45 (p. 43).
[60] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 220.

the apathy of bourgeois women, who do not have to work for a living but who also do little housework because they have maids and nannies. This description could apply to several of Ginzburg's female characters, in particular Azalea in *La strada che va in città*. These women have little purpose in life and, according to Maraini, 'il bisogno di indipendenza della moglie in pelliccia finisce quasi sempre nell'adulterio, la soluzione personale più immediata a un problema collettivo'.[61] Examples of adultery in both authors' works support this opinion: extramarital relationships are the easiest method of enjoying temporary liberation; however, the collective problem of married life needs to be addressed by society as a whole if a permanent solution is ever to be achieved. Neither author includes an example of adultery as a happy ending for their fictional, frustrated wives.

At the other end of the spectrum is the effect on women of their husbands' infidelity. Maraini's short story 'Le lenzuola di lino' (1968) deals with a wife's humiliation at the hands of her husband and his mistress, whom he invites to live with them. All that remains of Ada's marriage is the public appearance of a happy marriage, and she is treated as a stranger in her own home, bringing the lovers breakfast like a servant. Nevertheless, Ada is so committed to the idea of marriage that she will not leave her husband in spite of his blatant lack of fidelity: 'credo che il mio posto sia accanto a lui'.[62] Maraini explores the absurdity of Italian society in this story, exposing its hypocrisy and male-orientated legal system. Although Ada is the victim of Giorgio's adultery, should she choose to leave him she would be considered the guilty party. As his mistress Elena points out, Giorgio 'può denunciarti per abbandono del tetto coniugale' (66).

Italian society's attitude towards male and female adultery differs greatly, and although Catholic doctrine officially denounces both men and women's adulterous behaviour as sinful, there is a widespread belief that extra-marital sex is simply a natural element of man's character and even a positive display of a healthy, sexual, Latin male.[63] Woman's adultery, however, is frowned upon severely and for many years was the only adultery recognized by Italian law. Martin Clark draws attention to the 1903 ruling by the Supreme Court of Cassation that a woman could be guilty of adultery even if the man 'lacked, through amputation, his male organ'; he also cites the regularity with which marriages were annulled when it was discovered that the new bride was not a virgin.[64] The hypocrisy that Maraini highlights in 'Le lenzuola di lino' is clearly a reflection on these double standards.

---

[61] Maraini, 'Le donne con la pelliccia', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino*, pp. 47-51 (p. 49).
[62] Maraini, 'Le lenzuola di lino', in *Mio marito*, pp. 61-67 (p. 67).
[63] Adrian Lyttelton (ed.), *Liberal and Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 190.
[64] Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871-1995* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 164.

Although Giorgio and Elena are guilty of treating Ada with humiliating condescension, Maraini also condemns the protagonist herself for her superficial and materialistic worries. Ada is above all concerned with the material advantages that she enjoys as Giorgio's wife, rather than with the emotional or sexual side of the relationship. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir talks of how some housewives surround themselves with luxury items, in order to satisfy a tactile sensuality, which their sexual life is unable to fulfil. These prized possessions are both a reflection of the woman's individual personality and a public display of her social status and living standard. De Beauvoir explains that these material goods are necessary for some women in providing them with a sense of self: 'Because she *does* nothing, she eagerly seeks self-realization in what she *has*'.[65] In fact, Ada's main annoyance is that Elena will now be able to enjoy her much-valued linen sheets (64).

The linen sheets are a metaphor representing both her marriage and the marital bed. Ada is not concerned about the bed's new occupant but simply what is covering her - just as she is not worried about the true nature of her marriage but simply how it appears to the outside world. As with the protagonist of *È stato così*, Ada is an example of one of the women described by Greer, who will gladly ignore adultery, as long as their actual security is not threatened. Finally, Ada makes a momentous decision – not to leave her husband, as she probably should, but to act decisively to save her linen sheets:

> Stasera ho preso una grande decisione. Gli dirò che si compri un paio di lenzuola di cotone per il letto dove dorme con Elena. Non sopporto che le mie lenzuola di lino vengano ridotte a brandelli. (67)

Ironically, Ada will not admit that her marriage has already been reduced to this state. She is at the same time a victim of adultery, but also guilty of allowing herself to remain a victim, choosing the hypocritical security of marriage over her own self-esteem and pride.

In Ginzburg's *Tutti i nostri ieri* (1952) Anna's relationships with Giuma and Cenzo Rena show different instances of interactions between men and women. Anna and Giuma's relationship is based on his need to control events and her passive acceptance of his superiority and serves as a stark contrast to Anna's subsequent marriage. Giuma dominates Anna both mentally and physically, for example, he frequently ties her to a tree when they are children and determines how they spend their time together. Anna often mentions

---

[65] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 469. Emphasis in the original.

Giuma's wolf-like teeth, which are symbolic of his unsociable and sometimes violent behaviour towards her.[66] Although Anna finds Giuma extremely tedious, her most important consideration is that she has *a* boyfriend: his identity does not matter. Their relationship is highly superficial, almost resembling a childhood game of pretence at being married. In fact Ginzburg uses the term *fingere* repeatedly in her descriptions of Anna's behaviour towards Giuma:

> Stava attenta a non dirgli niente che potesse fargli dispiacere o dispetto. *Fingeva* di credere a tutto quello che lui le diceva, *fingeva* di credere che non andasse più da Danilo per via dell'odore. *Fingeva* di credere che non volesse stare con i suoi compagni di scuola perché si lavavano male, [...] *fingeva* di non sapere che gli voltavano le spalle quando s'avvicinava.[67]

The fragile nature of Anna and Giuma's relationship is proven when it crumbles with the news of her pregnancy. Reminiscent of the contrasting ways in which Delia's pregnancy affects her and Giulio in *La strada che va in città*, Anna's condition highlights the greater impact a baby has on a woman's life than on a man's. Giuma's only attempt at taking responsibility for his actions is to give Anna the money that he was saving in order to buy a boat, which, as he bitterly points out, he will now have to sacrifice (138). Giuma's loss of his boat is insignificant compared to the changes that Anna must face, and immediately the different effects on their lives are clear: 'Le pareva d'essere diventata grande da quando s'era accorta che doveva avere un bambino, e le pareva che lui fosse invece ancora un ragazzo piccolo' (128-129). Anna is scared to seek out a midwife on her own, and yet she is too afraid of the consequences to admit the truth to her family. Her only choice is a potentially life-threatening, back-street abortion.

Ginzburg emphasizes the inequality present in Anna's involvement with Giuma, thereby clearly underlining the different nature of her relationship with Cenzo Rena. Although Anna and Cenzo Rena initially marry because of the baby, they grow to love each other, and their relationship is founded on mutual respect. The idea that Anna and Cenzo Rena are equals is emphasized by Ginzburg's choice of structure for the novel, with the narrative being shared between the two characters. Anna provides the narration for the first part of

---

[66] Bettina L. Knapp, *Women in Twentieth Century Literature: A Jungian View* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 80.
[67] Natalia Ginzburg, *Tutti i nostri ieri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1952]), p. 110. My emphasis.

the novel, with Cenzo Rena commenting on later proceedings.[68] During an interview with Ginzburg, Marino Sinibaldi makes the point that rather than Anna or Cenzo Rena leading the action, it is a 'romanzo in cui da un lato la memoria diventa protagonista'.[69] The title itself is an important indicator of Ginzburg's intentions to this effect. Taken from *Macbeth* it clearly shows that Anna and Cenzo Rena's story is merely a small contribution to a wider history:

> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more.[70]

Ginzburg makes neither Anna nor her husband the true protagonist, and it is clear that both must succumb to whatever fate history has in store for them. In spite of their actions whilst alive, they will both fade into the past, becoming simply a memory once their story is over.

Whilst their marriage may be lacking passion and excitement, it provides Anna with security and stability, elements which are seen to be as important, if not more so, than overwhelming emotions that can fade over time. Cenzo Rena warns that people should be wary of being enticed by what appears exciting, and he understands that his relationship with Anna is based on something more solid:

> Per loro non c'erano stati squilli di fanfara, lui disse. E questo era il bello, perché quando il destino s'annunciava con alti squilli di fanfara bisognava sempre stare un po' in sospetto. Gli squilli di fanfara di solito non annunciavano che cose piccole e futili, era un modo che aveva il destino di canzonare la gente. [...] E invece le cose serie della vita coglievano di sorpresa, zampillavano a un tratto come l'acqua. (165)

In her 1953 essay 'I rapporti umani', published a year after *Tutti i nostri ieri*, Ginzburg touches upon this idea of temporary passion as opposed to lasting companionship. She

---

[68] Corinna Del Greco Lobner, 'A Lexicon for Both Sexes: Natalia Ginzburg and the Family Saga', in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance*, ed. by Santo L. Aricò (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 27-43 (p. 31).
[69] Natalia Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, ed. by Cesare Garboli and Lisa Ginzburg (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 71.
[70] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Alexander (London: Diamond, 1994), V. 5. 22.

describes the numerous occasions when people believe that they have found their true love, when 'cadevamo travolti da un tale impetuoso tumulto che quasi non ci restava più la forza di pensare: ci trovavamo a vivere come al centro d'un paese incendiato'.[71] However, just as Cenzo Rena's fanfares die down, so do these initial flames of passion, and eventually when 'di colpo si spegneva il fuoco, non restava che un po' di brace tiepida'.[72]

On the other hand, it is not always easy to recognize a genuine, lasting relationship at the beginning and, as with Anna and Cenzo Rena, the recognition of true companionship comes over a longer period of time. Ginzburg explains that when people find the right person to spend their life with, they initially only experience 'un piccolo sussulto al cuore', which is so insignificant that it is disregarded. The relationship is long established before its permanency becomes clear to those involved:

> Scoppiano fra noi e questa persona, ogni tanto, violenti contrasti: eppure non riescono a rompere quella pace infinita che è in noi. Dopo molti anni, solo dopo molti anni, dopo che fra noi e questa persona si è intessuta una fitta rete di abitudini, di ricordi e di violenti contrasti, sapremo infine che era davvero la persona giusta per noi, che un'altra non l'avremmo sopportata, che solo a lei possiamo chiedere tutto quello che è necessario al nostro cuore.[73]

Ginzburg's use of the word *sopportare* here is interesting, implying that a successful marriage is based not so much on love, as the ability to tolerate your partner's presence.

This is an idea shared by Wollstonecraft, who maintains that 'love, from its very nature, must be transitory'.[74] Therefore, it is what comes after love that determines the success of a marriage:

> Friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love. [...] Passions are spurs to action, and open the mind; but they sink into mere appetites, become a personal and momentary gratification when the object is gained, and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment. The man who had some virtue whilst he was struggling for a crown often becomes a voluptuous tyrant when it graces his brow.[75]

---

[71] Natalia Ginzburg, 'I rapporti umani', in *Le piccole virtù* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), pp. 95-118 (p. 110).
[72] ibid.
[73] ibid., p. 111.
[74] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights*, p. 25.
[75] ibid., p. 26.

In most cases, it is indifference that succeeds love in Ginzburg's fictional marriages; husbands and wives suddenly realize that the initial excitement of being in love disguised the fact that they were ultimately incompatible. Only Cenzo Rena and Anna appear set to form a lasting friendship that would ensure their marriage was a happy one.

Although Anna does mature to a certain extent as a result of her marriage to Cenzo Rena, he doubts whether he has been successful in helping her to develop fully into a woman.[76] He does suggest, though, that his death would be the catalyst needed to enforce a change in Anna, transforming her into 'una donna dura e forte, coi denti stretti e con un passo ardito e libero' (265). Cenzo Rena's prediction adds an element of hope for Anna's future, and her experiences may provide her with a strength of character, which she has never known before. Cenzo Rena has often been described as the one truly positive male character in Ginzburg's work. Jen Weinstein's study of Ginzburg's representation of men singles him out as the only example of an honest, courageous, and vivacious man in her work – 'una specie di Robin Hood italiano.'[77] Cenzo Rena's sacrifice of his own life to save his friend's at the end of the novel is an isolated selfless action amongst Ginzburg's men, elevating him in Weinstein's eyes to the role of a martyr, who dies to save the people of his village.[78] However, Cenzo Rena's own prediction of the effect of his death on Anna lends support to the idea that he dies to save her as well, rendering her stronger and more self-aware. The image is of Cenzo Rena as a strong, selfless, even Christ-like figure. Whether this was a conscious decision by Ginzburg is unclear and, whilst acknowledging that 'certamente [Cenzo Rena] è un eroe positivo', in response to Sinibaldi's question as to how she finally decided on a positive male role model, Ginzburg simply replies, 'E chi lo sa? Non lo so'.[79] Parallels can be drawn, however, between the character and Ginzburg's first husband Leone, who likewise died at the hands of German soldiers and was known for his courageous activities. In fact, *Tutti i nostri ieri* has many autobiographical overtones. The character of Anna shares various traits with Natalia Ginzburg, and Concettina is comparable to Ginzburg's sister Paola Levi, whilst the father in the novel is clearly inspired by Giuseppe Levi (an idea which I will return to in Chapter 6). Several plot elements are

---

[76] Cenzo Rena repeatedly compares Anna to an insect, whereas he has merely been 'una foglia e non le aveva dato che un po' di riposo' (p. 264). Bettina Knapp examines this analogy in detail, writing how Rena believes that, like an insect, Anna lives her life on a very primitive level, largely ignoring the world around her and concentrating only on the small area where she is sitting (Knapp, *Women in Twentieth Century Literature*, p. 84).

[77] Jen Weinstein, 'Il maschio assente nell'opera narrativa e teatrale di Natalia Ginzburg', in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. by Ada Testaferri (Toronto: Dovehouse, 1989), pp. 89-98 (p. 96).

[78] ibid., p. 96.

[79] Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, p. 72.

also reminiscent of Ginzburg's life, for example, the time spent in a southern village (although for the Ginzburg family this was an enforced stay 'in confino', rather than a choice as in the novel).

In my opinion, Cenzo Rena's fundamental role in the novel is as a support to Anna. His positive strength of character is important in forcing a development in Anna's personality. It is doubtful whether she would have transformed from the passive girl, who was masochistically willing to accept Giuma's demands, had it not been for her marriage to Cenzo Rena. Without his guidance, Anna almost certainly would have struggled to break free from her submissive role and would probably have faced further ill-fated relationships. Whereas Maraini's female protagonists, such as Vannina Magro in *Donna in guerra*, Armida Bianchi in *Il treno per Helsinki*, and Enrica in *L'età del malessere*, can ultimately only depend on themselves to be the catalyst of their own transformations, Anna is helped by her husband. Vannina, Armida, and Enrica's problems largely stem from their oppression at the hands of their partners, and their struggle is to break free from these male bonds. Anna, on the other hand, has little reason to fight against her marriage, as she enjoys a greater level of equality. Conversely, whilst Maraini questions the men's worthiness in regard to her female characters, the question arises in the case of *Tutti i nostri ieri* of whether Anna is in fact worthy of such a man as Cenzo Rena, a situation that is unusual in both Ginzburg and Maraini's work. It is an equally uncommon occurrence in their work that, had Cenzo Rena not died prematurely, the couple would in all probability have enjoyed a happy marriage, continuing in their mutual esteem; it could be argued that they maintained an Irigarayan irreducible difference.

In stark contrast to Anna's role in her relationship with Cenzo Rena is Marianna Ucrìa's position in her marriage, which is founded on inequality and powerlessness. Whereas Ginzburg conveys the impression that Anna enjoys equality in her marriage, Maraini makes it clear that Marianna, living in seventeenth-century Sicily, does not benefit from this luxury. Although Duke Pietro allows his wife to decide on minor matters such as interior decoration, in all issues of importance his will prevails: Marianna enjoys merely a superficial independence. Pietro's attitude towards Marianna is summed up by his reaction to the notes, which she uses to communicate with him: 'È raro che lui legga quello che gli scrive la moglie sebbene ne ammiri la grafia nitida e veloce'.[80] He affords Marianna only an apparent regard of her opinion, tolerating her opinions rather than actually heeding them.

---

[80] Dacia Maraini, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1990]), p. 52.

However, Marianna recognizes that 'lo zio marito era in fondo più tollerante di tanti altri mariti che lei conosceva' (32), and this surprising admission by Marianna provides some idea of the inferior positions which many of her female contemporaries occupy within their marriage, for example her sister Agata, whose husband insists on interfering 'in ogni decisione della sua giornata' (32). This extent of control is characteristic of the period that Maraini is dealing with in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, and yet it is also relevant to many of the characters in her novels set in contemporary Italy, highlighting the relative lack of progress made by women in their battle for equality within the institution of marriage. Marianna's daughters, born into the new century, do enjoy greater freedom in some respects but on the whole their position in marriage and society resembles their mother's. Whilst Giuseppa resists her father's orders for her to marry an uncle and instead chooses her own husband, this victory of independence is later overshadowed by her husband's violent behaviour in his quest to assert his supremacy over her.[81]

It is only through her affair with Saro and her intellectual affinity to Don Camalèo that Marianna achieves a greater sense of equality and freedom in the company of men. From their first meeting Marianna is drawn to Saro, compelled by feelings that she cannot comprehend (as I mentioned briefly in Chapter 2). She discovers that it is possible to enjoy intimate relations with a man, a concept that had seemed inconceivable during her marriage. Barbara Heinzius goes so far as to claim that she was forced to lead the life of a sex slave for her husband.[82] Heinzius's opinion is borne out by Pietro's reaction to the first time that Marianna keeps her eyes open during intercourse (itself an indication of Marianna's blossoming awareness):

> Nel ricevere i suoi abbracci ha sempre chiuso gli occhi. Ora invece lo osserva e lo vede distogliere lo sguardo infastidito. [...] Lui alza una mano lunga e ossuta come se volesse colpirla. Ma è solo per chiuderle gli occhi. (89)

By shutting his wife's eyes Pietro is refusing her active participation, both on a sexual and emotional level. He does not want Marianna observing him at a moment when he perhaps feels vulnerable, when his usual, rigid mask is in danger of slipping. Rather than an equal sexual partner, Pietro desires a passive, almost faceless woman, who must simply receive his advances and not attempt to return them. When Marianna finally finds the courage to

---

[81] Joann Cannon, 'Rewriting the female destiny: Dacia Maraini's *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Symposium*, 49:2 (1995) 136-146 (p. 138).
[82] Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie*, p. 381.

refuse her husband's sexual demands, he is shocked and disbelieving. Her refusal alters the nature of their relationship, and Pietro no longer seeks out his wife, suddenly unsure of himself now that his obedient sexual partner has a voice. Pietro's termination of their sexual relationship at this point adds weight to Heinzius's idea that he merely wanted a sex slave rather than a consensual spouse.

In light of her negative experiences with her husband, the ease with which Marianna enters into her sexual relationship with Saro shocks her:

> Come abbia fatto a trovarsi spogliata accanto al corpo spogliato di Saro, Marianna non saprebbe dirlo. [...] Sa che si sono abbracciati come due corpi amici e accoglierlo dentro di sé è stato come ritrovare una parte del proprio corpo che credeva perduta per sempre. Sa che non aveva mai pensato di racchiudere nel proprio ventre una carne maschile che non fosse un figlio o un invasore nemico. (238)

Marianna must fight all her preconceptions of men in order to overcome her fear of intimacy. Susan Amatangelo points out that Marianna only acquires the courage to kiss Saro when he is apparently unconscious after a fall from his horse and will only touch him later when he is injured with stab wounds and therefore passive. The traditional gender roles of passive female and active male are truly reversed, and 'in this crucial encounter, Marianna inverts the pattern of her rape by "attacking", however gently, a younger, weaker, and even mutilated body'.[83] There are also echoes of mythology here, with the moon goddess kissing the young, sleeping Endymion.

Saro's effect on Marianna's perception of her own sexuality and body are vital in her journey towards greater self-awareness. The experience that she shares with Saro provides Marianna with something so new that it affects her profoundly. As Irene Marchegiani Jones asserts:

> È appunto proprio attraverso l'amore (soprattutto fisico) per Saro [...] che la presa di coscienza e la maturità-emancipazione di Marianna gradualmente raggiungono la più piena consapevolezza. In questa passione si unificano i motivi della riscoperta del corpo in tutte le sue valenze e quindi di se stessa in una più completa unità, secondo una sensibilità tutta femminile e femminista.[84]

---

[83] Susan Amatangelo, 'Coming to Her Senses: The Journey of the Mother in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Italica*, 79 (2002), 240-256 (p. 250).
[84] Irene Marchegiani Jones, 'La dualità fra individuo e storia: Per una lettura di *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* di Dacia Maraini', *Italian Quarterly*, 151-152 (2002), 45-60 (p. 56).

Marianna's intellectual exchanges with Don Camalèo complement her physical relationship with Saro and allow her to converse on subjects, such as philosophy and history, which she cannot do with others.[85] Unlike Marianna, most women had difficulty obtaining books and therefore never had the opportunity to increase their knowledge through reading. Don Camalèo talks to Marianna as an equal, intelligent partner in their conversations and respects her opinions, which increases her belief in her own ability. Simona Wright describes Saro and Don Camalèo as being at opposite ends of cultural and historical discourse, representing the contrasting functions of body and mind.[86] Together they therefore provide Marianna with a complete example of a man, who would respect her both physically and mentally. Through her association with both men Marianna gains in self-awareness, giving her the confidence needed to leave the family home and explore the unknown. It is interesting that Maraini does not present one man capable of fulfilling both roles, which calls into question whether this is possible or whether women must always look to different men to satisfy different needs.

In Ginzburg's *La città e la casa* (1984) Lucrezia and Piero's marriage is also based on inequality, although it is the woman who enjoys the upper hand. Piero explains that Lucrezia 'ha un carattere forte. Io sono un debole', and this difference of character determines their behaviour within the marriage.[87] In this novel, Ginzburg condemns the modern phenomenon of "open" marriages, showing that the only possible result is grief and heartache for at least one of the spouses. Lucrezia admits:

> Eravamo una coppia aperta, ti ricordi che lo dicevamo sempre, però in verità era aperta solo dalla mia parte, Piero non ha mai amato nessuna donna oltre a me. Del resto le coppie aperte a un bel momento o si chiudono, o vanno a pezzi. Piero e io come coppia stiamo andando a pezzi. (102)

Whilst attempting to bring adultery out into the open and strip it of the appeal of secrecy and deception, "open" marriages are presented as merely reinforcing fears and shortcomings within the relationship and aggravate any existing weaknesses. For Ginzburg,

---

[85] Cannon, 'Rewriting the female destiny', p. 144.
[86] Simona Wright, 'Dacia Maraini: Charting the Female Experience in the Quest-Plot: Marianna Ucrìa', *Italian Quarterly*, 133-134 (1997), 59-70 (p. 66).
[87] Natalia Ginzburg, *La città e la casa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997 [1984]), p.112.

this practice appears to be one deplorable reason for the disintegration of family life in modern society.

Lucrezia chooses to leave the comfort and security of married life in a desperate final attempt to find the love that she has been craving all her life. Lucrezia is in many ways a female counterpart of Carmine in *Famiglia*. Raised according to traditional patriarchal teaching, she desired from a young age 'vivere in campagna e avere molti bambini' (23). However, just as Delia finds country life too restrictive in *La strada che va in città*, so too does Lucrezia soon find that she is not suited to this existence. Here Ginzburg again uses the metaphor of the countryside to symbolize the restrictions of maternity and marriage. Lucrezia longs for passionate love and believes that she has at last found it with Ignazio Fegiz, although her friend suspects that it is simply 'un periodo di crisi, come succede alle donne sui quarant'anni' (109).

Having been part of a comfortable, yet passionless marriage to Piero, Lucrezia searches continuously for excitement and fulfilment, moving from one affair to another. She yearns for something to lift her out of her dull life and, as she has few interests of her own, she automatically looks to a man to provide the solution to her problems. Lucrezia convinces herself that Ignazio Fegiz is her soul mate, asserting that her life 'ha cambiato colore' and that compared to her previous, insignificant affairs 'adesso invece il mio adulterio è di quelli che spandono sangue [...] ci amiamo da morire' (101). Similar to Ninetta in *Famiglia*, when Lucrezia's lover returns to his long-time girlfriend, she suffers a crisis of identity and confidence, caused likewise by the blow to her assurance in her own beauty. Just as Ninetta prizes her voice and smile, Lucrezia takes pride in her pale skin: 'Avevo un amante e mi ha lasciato. Mi sento brutta e vecchia. Mi cascano i capelli, ho delle rughe. Ho la faccia non più pallida, ma gialla. Non c'è più "il mio splendido pallore"' (169). Both women have fallen prey to the hollow fanfares that Ginzburg warned against in *Tutti i nostri ieri*.

Many of Ginzburg and Maraini's female characters suffer in marriage largely for the same reason: they have failed to develop their own personality fully before committing themselves to a man. Jung emphasizes the vital prerequisite of self-recognition before a relationship can succeed. He maintains that a true relationship can only exist when each partner has first successfully distinguished themselves from others, reaching a level of consciousness, whereby they see themselves as an individual.[88] The consequences of a failure to do this are perhaps most dramatically shown in Ginzburg's *È stato così*, but are

[88] Jung, 'Marriage as a Psychological Relationship', in *Aspects of the Feminine*, pp. 41-53 (p. 42).

also seen in varying guises throughout both authors' works. Irigaray also stresses the importance of a woman reaching her own becoming before entering into a culture of two. She sees women's self-recognition as the key to the future of male-female relationships:

> Women have to discover their word(s), be faithful to it and, interweaving it with their bodies, make it a living and spiritual flesh. This stage is not just necessary for their divine becoming, but also for that of man. It is as two, through respecting their difference(s), that man and woman are co-redeemers of the world: of their bodies, [...] of society and of history.[89]

The institution of marriage itself comes under fire from both authors and is seen as a major contribution to the oppression of women. In Ginzburg's play *Ti ho sposato per allegria*, the protagonist Giuliana announces unequivocally that 'il matrimonio è un'istituzione infernale! Dover vivere insieme sempre, tutta la vita!'.[90] Trapped in marriages based on inequality, Ginzburg and Maraini's female characters struggle to find solutions to their problems, often mistakenly looking to other men for an escape route. Sergio Pacifici writes that at the heart of Ginzburg's fiction is the failure of marriage, provoked by the lack of understanding of its true meaning when it is entered into.[91] This opinion could equally be applied to Maraini's fiction. Whilst patriarchal society teaches young girls that marriage is their ultimate goal, it neglects to examine more closely the true nature of marriage. These wives are unprepared for reality, realizing too late that marriage means being treated as inferior and having to accept restrictions in their behaviour. As Sue Sharpe writes, women become their husbands' possessions according to a wedding's symbolic ritual of passing them from their father's keeping to another man's.[92]

Even the few marriages in Ginzburg and Maraini's work that are entered into out of love are condemned eventually to follow the same fate as those that arise owing to other motives, such as pregnancy, because 'it is a commonplace that marriage kills love'.[93] De Beauvoir condemns the institution of marriage, blaming its inherent shortcomings rather than individuals for its frequent failure. She writes that the traditional view of marriage,

---

[89] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, p. 151.
[90] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Ti ho sposato per allegria', in *Ti ho sposato per allegria e altre commedie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), pp. 9-74 (p. 34).
[91] Sergio Pacifici, *A Guide to Contemporary Italian Literature: From Futurism to Neorealism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 137.
[92] Sue Sharpe, *Fathers and Daughters* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 98.
[93] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 219.

which necessitates each spouse being duty bound to satisfy the other in every aspect of life, is its downfall:

> Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspect *as* bodies, not as persons.[94]

For de Beauvoir the real fault of marriage is not its inability to provide women with the happiness that is promised to them by society's teachings, but its reduction of their life to the mundane and the fact that 'it mutilates [them]; it dooms [them] to repetition and routine'.[95]

This routine existence in Ginzburg's work is symbolized by the practices of knitting and embroidery, and Picarazzi points out that Ginzburg's characters usually sew when they are pregnant and therefore confined.[96] De Beauvoir condemns women's knitting and crocheting as a poor answer to their boredom: the end product is unimportant, and she dismisses it as a waste of time, stating that a woman sadly weaves the very nothingness of her days.[97] As opposed to writing and painting, which are outlets for women's creativity, embroidery and knitting are seen as negative pursuits, perhaps because of the closer adherence to a pattern, which eliminates the woman's imaginative input in the activity. There are also, of course, echoes of Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey* and Tennyson's Lady of Shalott: Penelope, the faithful wife who passes twenty years waiting for her husband to return from war, weaves a shroud in order to delay choosing a suitor, whilst the Lady of Shalott is condemned to view the world through a mirror and passes day and night weaving the reflected scenes.[98]

The wives in the works looked at above cannot fight against this tedious existence without fighting against their marriages at the same time, because the two are inextricably linked. In order to change their own lives and their position within the marriage they must first change attitudes towards the role of marriage on a social and private level. This was something that various feminist groups also recognized: whilst some called for the outright

---

[94] ibid., p. 463. Emphasis in the original.
[95] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 496.
[96] Picarazzi, *Maternal Desire*, pp. 62-63.
[97] De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 604.
[98] See Homer, *The Odyssey* (London: Penguin, 1987), and Alfred Lord Tennyson, *A Choice of Tennyson's Verse*, ed. by David Cecil (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 79-85.

abolition of marriage, others simply desired it to be reformed. In its 1970 Manifesto, the Milan-based feminist organization *Rivolta Femminile* states clearly: 'Riconosciamo nel matrimonio l'istituzione che ha subordinato la donna al destino maschile. Siamo contro il matrimonio. Il divorzio è un innesto di matrimoni da cui l'istituzione esce rafforzata'.[99] This hostile view to marriage is shared by *Le femministe grossetane*, who encourage women to '[piantare] in asso vostro marito'. They clearly place the oppression of women at the hands of husbands and believe that women should break from their marriages, no matter what state they are in:

> Se vostro marito è sempre 'stanco' ed usa il letto solo per farvi lavare le lenzuola, PIANTATELO IN ASSO, [...] Se vostro marito non è mai stanco ma usa il letto solo per il suo egoistico piacere, PIANTATELO IN ASSO, perché i diritti del vostro corpo sono sacrosanti e irrinunciabili. [...] Se vostro marito non fa nulla di tutto questo e vi sembrerà di non aver nulla da lamentarvi di lui, PIANTATELO IN ASSO ugualmente, perché è sempre un MARITO, e come tale ottuso, meschino, noioso, sfruttatore, pigro, pettegolo, falso, bugiardo, ipocrita, commediante, debole, vile, lascivo, guardone e sessualmente incapace.[100]

These extreme opinions were aimed at shaking women out of their lethargy, forcing them to fight against, what Betty Friedan labels, 'their comfortable concentration camps'.[101] By challenging traditional views of marriage and male-female relations, these statements force women to re-assess their lives and role as wife. Although calling for the end of marriage, however, these feminist groups do not suggest a viable alternative.

It is perhaps more fruitful to consider marriage as an institution and examine ways in which it can be adapted to suit better both spouses. The wives in Ginzburg and Maraini's fiction try to *escape* marriage, and their reactions to its oppressive nature are, for the most part, negative, for example, hysteria, adultery, and suicide. If men and women, however, are to be successful in transforming marriage from an oppressive union to a mutually fulfilling and desired relationship, then each partner must be able to recognize and respect themselves and the other, preferably before entering into the legal agreement. Irigaray

---

[99] *Rivolta Femminile*, 'Manifesto', in *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 56-59 (p. 58). This manifesto originally appeared in 1970 when *Rivolta Femminile* was established. It has been attributed to Carla Lonzi.

[100] *Le femministe grossetane*, 'PIANTATE IN ASSO VOSTRO MARITO', in *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 59-60 (p. 59). Emphasis in original.

[101] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 293.

encourages women to enact a 'peaceful revolution' in order to halt the world's destruction by men:

> It is therefore up to [women] to say *no*. Without their *yes*, the world of men cannot continue to develop or subsist. Women must learn when to say *no*, and why; they must also know how to say it. This requires them to become fully conversant with the subjectivity-objectivity relationship – a learning experience that women are particularly lacking as a result of their cultural past of identification with the object of desire. Women can acquire this knowledge. It must be included in the political and cultural syllabus for girls.[102]

Irigaray places importance on educating girls in order to break the vicious circle of monotonous, oppressive marriages. This idea could perhaps be seen as the key to solving the underlying unhappiness of many wives. Having been taught to desire marriage from infancy, many of Maraini and Ginzburg's characters enter into it with false ideals; when these preconceptions are shattered, the damage to their spirit is worse than had they initially been told the truth. As Irigaray writes, if girls can learn to say *no*, and boys can learn not always to demand women's *yes*, then greater harmony could be achieved. Whilst some of the wives in Maraini and Ginzburg's works do attempt to say *no*, most fail to change their situation effectively. Their female characters must learn to question more forcefully society's expectations of them as wives, preferably reaching a certain level of self-awareness before they enter into commitment. Any journey towards greater self-consciousness taken during the actual marriage is likely to result in greater difficulties, as expectations already exist on both sides that are not easily overcome.

---

[102] Luce Irigaray, 'A Chance to Live', in *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution* (London: Athlone, 1994 [1989]), pp. 2-35 (p. 26). Emphasis in original.

5. Broken Shoes and Dogmatic Corsets: Mothers

"And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" (Luce Irigaray).

Both Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini examine the role of mothers in the family and society in their literature, including positive and negative examples of approaches to motherhood. Although their depictions of mothers vary, both authors agree on the basic principle that maternity is often oppressive for women. Italian society sees motherhood as the duty of all women, and there is much pressure on a woman to bear children. In a conversation in 2003 with Maraini, the journalist Maddalena Tulanti admits that 'ancora oggi, adulta, più o meno realizzata nel mio lavoro, sento che il mio dovere di donna non l'ho compiuto perché non ho avuto bambini'.[1] In spite of a successful career, a woman is judged as incomplete and a failure if she remains childless. It was this attitude that feminist groups had opposed thirty years previously during their campaigns for women's right to choose maternity and right to abortion. The group *Rivolta Femminile* places the presumption that women must have children at the top of their list of grievances:

> Il primo elemento di rancore della donna verso la società sta nell'essere costretta ad affrontare la maternità come un aut-aut. Denunciamo lo snaturamento di una maternità pagata al prezzo dell'esclusione. La negazione della libertà dell'aborto rientra nel veto globale che viene fatto all'autonomia della donna. Non vogliamo pensare alla maternità tutta la vita e continuare a essere inconsci strumenti del potere patriarcale. In una libertà che si sente di affrontare, la donna libera anche il figlio e l'umanità.[2]

The crucial aspect for this group is that maternity must be a choice. Unless it is a choice, maternity will always be seen as restrictive and as a way of controlling women. The right to contraception, abortion, and sex education are seen as vital in turning maternity from a burden to an informed decision. The slogans on placards of pro-choice demonstrators shown in photographs in the feminist magazine *Effe* attest to this idea: 'Mia madre non voleva più avere figli – Quando io sono nata mi ha odiato'; 'Figli desiderati = figli amati';

---

[1] Dacia Maraini, Anna Salvo, Silvia Vegetti Finzi, *Madri e figlie: Ieri e oggi*, ed. by Maddalena Tulanti (Rome: Laterza, 2003), p. 20.
[2] *Rivolta Femminile*, 'Manifesto', in *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 56-59 (p. 58).

'Questo figlio l'ho voluto io e perciò lo amo'.[3] These slogans challenge patriarchal teaching that mothering is a natural function of women, placing women's ability to love unwanted offspring into question.[4] Such slogans attract Ginzburg's disapproval: 'dicono: i figli desiderati si amano, gli indesiderati non si amano. Non è vero. Gli indesiderati si amano a volte più degli altri'.[5] For Ginzburg, similar slogans in support of abortion are redundant because 'in verità [l'aborto legale] è un fatto incontestabile. Non gli servono dei sostegni'.[6]

The importance placed on reproducing lends an almost unnatural aspect to women who have decided against having children. Ginzburg herself admits that she finds it easier to talk to women who have children, as they immediately have a common interest that is absent from a friendship with a childless woman.[7] Her attitude towards motherhood is reminiscent of her opinion of the family, which she believes is indispensable even if it is oppressive. According to Ginzburg, women should have children despite the burden placed on them as mothers, otherwise they will find themselves alone when their youthful enthusiasm for life has diminished:

> Ci sono donne che non hanno figli e questa è una grande disgrazia, è la peggiore disgrazia che possa avere una donna perché a un certo punto diventa deserto e noia e sazietà di tutte quelle cose che si facevano prima con ardimento, scrivere e dipingere e politica e sport e diventa tutto cenere nelle mani e una donna consapevolmente o inconsapevolmente si vergogna di non avere fatto dei figli.[8]

---

[3] See *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 6, 9.

[4] The mother in *Cuore di mamma* (Dir. Salvatore Samperi. Cineriz. 1968), the film written by Maraini and Salvatore Samperi, is an excellent example that belies the idea that mothering is natural. Lorenza goes through life with a passive, unemotional attitude. She cannot function in society and has withdrawn completely, appearing at times almost catatonic. The two youngest of Lorenza's three children are killed by their brother, who then taunts his mother, saying that she is actually relieved that they are dead. His words hint at the oppression that Lorenza is feeling: 'Adesso sei libera'. Lorenza then murders her eight-year-old son, rendering the title of the film both ironic and tragic.

[5] Natalia Ginzburg, *Serena Cruz o la vera giustizia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), p. 79.

[6] ibid.

[7] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Discorso sulle donne', in *Il pozzo segreto: Cinquanta scrittrici italiane*, ed. by Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Rosaria Guacci, and Marisa Rusconi (Florence: Giunti, 1993), pp. 27-32 (p. 28). It is interesting that there have been calls in the United Kingdom for a move from the term 'childless' to 'childfree', which takes into account the woman's conscious choice not to have children.

[8] ibid., p. 31.

This idea that a woman is incomplete without children substantially differentiates Ginzburg's view of motherhood from Maraini's. Whilst recognizing that motherhood is restrictive, Ginzburg deems it better than not having children. In some respects, her opinion resembles that of Maraini's character Giacinto in *Donna in guerra*, who likens childless women to cats pining for kittens (see Chapter 3).

Ironically, as Maraini points out, motherhood is one aspect of nature that entirely belongs to women and yet they often have least control over it. She condemns patriarchal control and manipulation of maternity for its own means, whereby it becomes merely another method of suppressing women and keeping them tied to the home: 'what was once our absolute privilege, a moment of creativity and strength, was transformed into weakness and slavery'.[9] What should be seen as one of women's greatest achievements is in fact used against them by men. For Maraini, the idolization of children and the importance placed on a mother's sacrifice for their welfare are methods employed by society in order to keep under control the institution of the family.[10] Throughout history, society has championed the so-called maternal instinct of women, citing biological reasons why a woman undertakes the larger share of childcare in the home.

In her study *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow, while stripping the word *mother* of its gender and using it to describe a child's primary carer, dissects two typical arguments used to explain why women, and not men, take on the role of mother. In answer to the assertion that women mother owing to a natural, biological condition, Chodorow is clear:

> That women have the extensive and nearly exclusive mothering role they have is a product of a social and cultural translation of their childbearing and lactation capacities. It is not guaranteed or entailed by these capacities themselves.[11]

In this analysis, it is therefore society that uses biology as an argument against women, rather than biology itself being restrictive on women. The second explanation that Chodorow considers, that women's maternal instinct drives them to care for their offspring, is equally disregarded. Simone de Beauvoir likewise denies that a maternal instinct exists,

---

[9] Dacia Maraini, 'On *Of Woman Born*', *Signs*, 4 (1978-1979), 687-694 (p. 688).
[10] ibid., pp. 688-689.
[11] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 30.

saying that the word can scarcely be applied to the human species.[12] She maintains that a woman cannot be labelled an unnatural mother simply because 'there is no such thing as an "unnatural mother", [...] since there is nothing "natural" about maternal love; but, precisely for that reason, there are bad mothers'.[13] However, if patriarchy recognizes that maternal love is merely a myth employed to repress women, its entire structure would be undermined. Conversely, Ginzburg believes that maternal instinct does exist, but that it is not connected with a particular gender: 'è un istinto naturale e [...] appartiene alle donne come agli uomini. Anche negli uomini è insediata una madre'.[14]

Jung looks at length at the idea of the Mother Archetype, coming to the conclusion that all the influences supposedly exerted by the mother are in fact the result of the archetype attributed to her, which invests her with an almost mythological power. According to Jung, it is necessary to distinguish between the effects on children that are caused directly by character traits that the mother actually possesses and between effects produced by traits which the mother only seems to possess. In the latter case, these characteristics are often merely the imagined, that is archetypal, projections of a child who is seeing in his mother the qualities that he deems typical of maternal figures.[15] Although not exclusive to Italy, this theory of a mother archetype is particularly relevant in looking at Italian culture, as expectations of what constitutes a mother are firmly entrenched in its society, largely owing to the influence of the Vatican and Catholic theology. In fact, Alba Amoia goes as far as to say that Italy is 'unique in its appreciation of maternity and the mother figure'.[16]

For centuries, the Catholic Church has moulded an ideal of the 'mother', encouraging women to devote their lives to maternity through the dual approach of forbidding contraception and lauding the joys of motherhood. For the latter purpose, the Church has found a powerful weapon in the figure of the Madonna. Amoia discusses the impact of depictions of the Virgin Mary on ordinary Italian women:

> Images of the Holy Family became a paradigm of the Italian family itself. In the centuries of Madonna worship, the idea of the sanctity of motherhood was so inculcated by the Church that women unable to conform to the maternal ideal were overwhelmed by feelings of sin and

[12] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949]), p. 526.
[13] ibid., p. 538.
[14] Ginzburg, *Serena Cruz*, p. 33.
[15] C. G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 111.
[16] Alba Amoia, *No Mothers We! Italian Women Writers and Their Revolt Against Maternity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), p. 11.

> guilt. Their very reflexes were conditioned by religious art and by the ceremonial forms of Marian devotion. The material Madonna image became deeply embedded in the Catholic woman's psychocultural life.[17]

Over the years, Italian women have faced day-to-day reminders of the purity and perfection of the Madonna, which merely serve to highlight their own shortcomings as mothers. In her study on the Catholic Church and sexuality, Uta Ranke-Heinemann criticizes the Church's teaching on Mary; she argues that traditional Mariology has become an anti-Mariology, in that it claims to exalt the dignity of woman, whilst really suppressing what represents feminine dignity in particular (in the figure of Mary) and women in general. Ranke-Heinemann points out that through Catholic dogma Mary has been turned into a sexless creature, devoid of pleasure and reduced to her function in salvation history: significantly, 'the gentlemen of the Church wish to teach about her, not to be taught by her'.[18] Herein lies much of the contradiction surrounding the figure of Mary – the image that is portrayed of her to women is wholly developed by men, and, as Ranke-Heinemann declares, 'it is a grim fate for a woman to have to live in a dogmatic corset made by men'.[19] Whilst the Church intended the figure of the Madonna to guide women towards ideal motherhood, the fact that women could not empathize with her actually made their experiences of maternity more problematic. The emphasis placed by the Church on Mary as *mater inviolata* alienates ordinary women who are, in comparison, 'violated, mistreated, besmirched, defiled, injured, shamed and desecrated - by maternity'.[20]

It is this paradoxical, dogmatic portrayal of the Virgin that attracted the condemnation of many feminist campaigners who saw in the depiction of the Madonna everything that was to be challenged in Italian society. Conversely, Luce Irigaray calls for a reassessment of Mary, rather than an outright rejection of her. In Irigaray's opinion, there is already a lack of renowned women in history, and we must avoid simply discounting the most celebrated. Instead, women should reassess Mary's role and (re)claim her for themselves. Irigaray particularly calls for a re-reading of the Annunciation, based on her theories regarding virginity. Irigaray rejects the physical, biological sense of virginity (namely the presence of the hymen), advocating instead a spiritual virginity:

---

[17] ibid., p. XV.
[18] Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991 [1988]), pp. 345-346.
[19] ibid., p. 345.
[20] ibid.

> How can we succeed in loving the different [...] while staying ourselves? [...] It is a question of keeping and above all cultivating one's *virginity*. This is not received simply by birth. And it should in no way be confused with the existence of a part of the human body (even one representing a symbol of interiority). Virginity here could be the name for a return of the feminine to the self, for a spiritual interiority of woman, capable of staying woman and of becoming more and more woman. [...] Keeping one's virginity means not losing oneself in the attraction for the other, nor letting oneself be ruled by the other. [...] It is to give oneself a feminine mind or soul, an internal dwelling, which is not only physical but also spiritual: linked to breath, to speech, to the mind.[21]

With this emphasis on virginity in a spiritual sense, Irigaray encourages a revision of the Annunciation. Criticizing theologians for continually looking for proof of Mary's virginity in her physiological hymen, Irigaray asserts that, in fact, 'Mary is a virgin because she was able to keep and to cultivate a spiritual relation to breathing, to the soul'.[22] Furthermore, Irigaray discards criticism of Mary as a passive receptacle for the Father's seed, maintaining that without Mary's consent, there would have been no birth: 'her "yes" is what makes the advent of a divine conception possible'.[23] Irigaray's view of virginity is reminiscent of Greek mythology, whereby the adjective *virgin* was applied to several deities (such as Artemis and Aphrodite) in spite of their various lovers. Here, their virginity symbolizes autonomy and independence rather than a biological condition.[24]

Alongside its interpretation of the Madonna, the unswerving defence of the institution of the family frequently placed the Church in direct opposition to increased women's rights in the post-war period. Even improvements such as nurseries and canteens in workplaces were condemned as destroying the family. Lesley Caldwell refers to the Church's unwavering belief that women's first duty was to the family and that working women neglected these duties to the detriment of their children.[25] Such beliefs lead Caldwell to conclude that 'in Italy, the privileged place of the Catholic Church has contributed to the

---

[21] Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 161. Emphasis in original.
[22] Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 [1999]), p. 78.
[23] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, p. 135. See also Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You* (London: Routledge, 1996 [1992]), pp. 123-124.
[24] See Amoia, *No Mothers We!*, p. 9.
[25] See Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 22, 46.

idea of women as primarily biological reproducers and nurturers'.[26] Religion figuratively and literally binds them to the home.

The added influence of Fascism in the twentieth century strengthened the Church's teaching on motherhood (see Introduction). This was, of course, the period when both Maraini and Ginzburg were born and educated. The Fascist government pursued an aggressive campaign of policies designed to enforce childbearing, such as the ban on abortion, contraception, and sex education.[27] Mussolini was determined to increase Italy's population to support his endeavours to build an empire. To sum up this policy, Amoia cites the fascist slogan: 'War is to the man what maternity is to the woman'.[28] Fascist propaganda and laws encouraged women to have numerous children and stay at home rather than work. Discourses on maternity were less about how mothers should behave towards their children, but concentrated more on childbirth, namely producing as many children as possible. In 1974, the feminist magazine *Effe* attacked Italian society's view of motherhood, which it saw as a remnant of this Fascist propaganda. Criticizing the Nazi slogan 'Kinder – Kuche – Kirche' ('Children – Kitchen – Church'), *Effe* published a drawing by Lydia Sansoni, which depicts a woman in Nazi dress, lifting up her skirt whilst a steady stream of fully-armed, mini soldiers pour from her vagina. Set against the large letters "KKK", the woman is clutching a broom and frying pan and appears to be merely pausing from her housework to repopulate fascist armies.[29] Although thirty years had passed since the end of Fascism, *Effe* considered it necessary to draw attention to the relative lack of change regarding social expectations of women. The effects of the Fascist regime's tireless encouragement of maternity continued long after it had itself been quashed.

What both the Fascist regime and the Catholic Church continuously advocated was sacrifice on the part of the mother. The Catholic Church's position regarding any potential threat to a woman's life during childbirth is a prime example of this. In the event of medical experts having to decide between the mother's life and the life of the unborn baby, the woman is expected to sacrifice her own life to save her child. As Ranke-Heinemann

---

[26] ibid., p. 5.
[27] See Victoria de Grazia, 'How Mussolini Ruled Italian Women', in *A History of Women: Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Françoise Thébaud (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 120-148.
[28] Amoia, *No Mothers We!*, p. 50.
[29] See *Effe*, April-May 1974, p. 32. Ranke-Heinemann argues that the premise of 'KKK' is 'an idea that still has life in it, in fact it continues to be the Catholic hierarchy's primary theological position on woman' (*Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 88).

points out, baptizing a baby to ensure its eternal salvation is more important than saving the mother's earthly life.[30] Maraini writes of this archetype projected onto mothers: 'sembra la cosa più naturale, normale, perché si presume che una donna debba dedicarsi ai figli, mentre nessuno chiede a un uomo di scegliere fra la professione e la famiglia'.[31] This double standard reflects the image that is tied to motherhood, but also hints at an archetype projected on to men as well. Whether or not they would prefer to remain at home and care for the children, fathers are expected to go out to work, just as mothers are expected to stay at home. The continuation of these classical roles is perpetuated by the members of the family itself. Chodorow identifies women's mothering of infants as the catalyst behind particular conscious or unconscious attitudes in children towards their parents:

> Girls and boys expect and assume women's unique capacities for sacrifice, caring, and mothering, and associate women with their own fears of regression and powerlessness. They fantasise more about men, and associate them with idealized virtues and growth.[32]

By sheer virtue of the man's frequent absences from the home, the father becomes a more respected and desirable figure for the children, who view the mother negatively precisely because she cares for them daily. The mother's role is seen as inferior and observing her brings out negative emotions in the children, thereby causing them to distance themselves from what she represents.

Throughout Maraini's work, there is the recurring suggestion that maternity equals sacrifice. This sacrifice takes different forms and is often connected with the enforced renunciation of artistic pursuits and the loss of the woman's body to her role as mother. This is especially evident in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990), in which maternal sacrifice is repeated from one generation to the next. Sibilla Aleramo is a precursor here for Maraini. In *Una donna* (1906), Aleramo queries why 'nella maternità adoriamo il sacrifizio? Donde è scesa a noi questa inumana idea dell'immolazione materna? Di madre in figlia, da secoli, si tramanda il servaggio. È una mostruosa catena'.[33] Aleramo's autobiographical novel provides important documentation of the many sacrifices demanded of a mother in patriarchal society and is a seminal work in the history of Italian feminism.

---

[30] Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 310.
[31] Maraini, Salvo, Finzi, *Madri e figli*, p. 23.
[32] Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 83.
[33] Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996 [1906]), p. 193.

In Maraini's novel, Marianna Ucrìa gives over her body to her children, immersing herself totally in motherhood. She realizes that: 'nella maternità ha messo la sua carne, i suoi sensi, adeguandoli, piegandoli, limitandoli'.[34] Whereas she had held back her body from her husband, on the birth of her children Marianna relinquishes it to them. Significantly, Marianna abandons her passion for painting when she becomes a mother, losing the time and opportunity for her hobby. Irene Marchegiani Jones incorrectly attributes the end of Marianna's painting to the oppression suffered as a result of her marriage:

> Se ne deve implicitamente dedurre che è il matrimonio a soffocare nelle donne qualsiasi possibilità e volontà di esprimere se stesse: ad esempio, come Marianna ha abbandonato la pittura, così la figlia Manina ha dimenticato la musica. In quel mondo non c'è posto per la fantasia, l'immaginazione, la creatività delle donne.[35]

In fact, Maraini accredits the end of Marianna's talent to the birth of her first child and not directly to her marriage: 'Peccato avere perso la pratica dei colori. Ma è successo senza una ragione, alla nascita della prima figlia' (110). Whilst Marianna's marriage is certainly not conducive to artistic production, it is only when she becomes a mother and therefore surrenders her body to her children that she loses her creativity.

Similarly, her daughter Manina continues to enjoy performing in front of dinner guests during the first few years of her marriage, and it is only after the death of several of her children that she loses her enthusiasm for music:

> Dopo la morte del secondogenito e i due aborti che erano seguiti, i Chiarandà avevano smesso di ricevere [...] e poi Manina veniva spinta quasi con la forza al clavicembalo. [...] In seguito ha rinunciato del tutto. Ora al clavicembalo siede la figlia Giacinta di sette anni. (143-144)

Manina relinquishes her talent, and therefore also her sexuality, as a consequence of her role as mother, symbolically handing over her legacy to her daughter. However, unlike Marianna, Manina rejoices in motherhood, happily admitting that 'il mio corpo è una sala d'aspetto: c'è sempre qualche infante che entra o che esce' (140). In *La lunga vita di*

---

[34] Dacia Maraini, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1990]), p. 87. Further references from primary editions are given are quotations in the text.

[35] Irene Marchegiani Jones, 'La dualità fra individuo e storia: Per una lettura di *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* di Dacia Maraini', *Italian Quarterly*, 151-152 (2002), 45-60 (p. 54).

Marianna Ucrìa, Maraini establishes a clear link between creativity and sexuality, both of which are curbed by motherhood, which serves to reinforce the oppressive nature of the institution of marriage. Whilst marriage suppresses women's freedom, it is motherhood (as controlled by patriarchy) that finally condemns them to a life void of innovation and imagination.

Unable to paint in reality, Marianna paints imaginary pictures in her head, looking at her children playing as though they were an artistic composition. Her inclusion of herself in the illusory painting is important:

> La madre sarebbe ritratta seduta sopra un cuscino, come sta ora lei [...] Ma perché ha quella faccia stupita e dolorosa la madre di quei figli, in quel quadro che ritrae un felice momento familiare? Cos'è quella stranita meraviglia? (74)

The sadness that Marianna reads on the face of her painted counterpart is an expression of her own inner regret at abandoning her art, and the imagined painting acts as a mirror for her emotions. Tellingly, Marianna is still dissatisfied even though her husband is not present in the painting, which suggests that motherhood rather than marriage is the catalyst behind her artistic frustration. However, her husband is the shadow that darkens her everyday happiness: 'Una ombra si intromette fra il suo quadro immaginario e il sole che allaga gioiosamente il pavimento [...] È il signor marito zio che li osserva da dietro il vetro' (75). The glass, which physically divides the Duke from his family, in turn emphasizes his own sense of exclusion and isolation.

In Roberto Faenza's film adaptation, Marianna's lack of freedom is also expressed through her painting. After her marriage, we see a young Marianna painting a picture of an arched window with a sea view. The choice of subject reminds us that Sicily is an island, therefore restrictive both physically and mentally. The director then focuses on the profile of the heavily pregnant girl against her own painting; Marianna can only glimpse freedom through her painted window. The sea metaphor in Faenza's film is continued when we see Marianna reading Hume's book on the beach by firelight and when the English visitor Grass teaches Marianna's children sign language: among the three words he shows them is

veliero. The other two, *tigre* and *libertà* are both reminders that there are aspects of life outside of Sicily, exotic and unattainable unless the Island is left.[36]

Supporting the idea of motherhood as sacrifice, Maraini writes in *Un clandestino a bordo* (1996) that every child symbolically kills their mother, particularly in the case of more devoted mothers such as Manina:

> Il proprio figlio [...] potrebbe anche diventare un assassino. E un poco lo è già perché ogni figlio uccide la propria madre, anche se non col coltello, nel proprio cuore, quando avrà bisogno di crescere e farsi spazio. E più la madre è amorosa, sollecita e sacrificale, più il figlio avrà la tentazione di ucciderla, con grandissimo amore.[37]

The creation of a child in patriarchal society unavoidably frustrates artistic creation. Maraini's portrayal of Marianna Ucrìa's sacrifices is inspired in part by her own experiences. Maraini's mother, a skilled painter, felt obliged to discontinue with her art when she became a mother. Maraini tells us of the direct link between maternity and her mother's choice to give up painting:

> Mia madre ha considerato naturale sacrificarsi, sacrificare la sua professione perché fra l'altro lei era una pittrice originale e brava. [...] dipingeva con uno stile sensuale e lirico, che ha messo da parte quando sono arrivate le figlie: avendo avuto tre bambine, non ha più potuto continuare.[38]

In an intensely conservative society, such as in Sicily, a woman's sexuality was deemed to be dangerous and uncontrollable when not confined to marriage or motherhood. Whereas unmarried women were believed incapable of controlling their sexual impulses, once a mother a woman was no longer considered as possessing this seductive sensuality but became almost asexual.[39] Considering this stripping of a woman's sexuality, it is difficult to imagine Maraini's mother continuing with her 'stile sensuale' afterwards. In her own case, Maraini also found pregnancy incompatible with writing, describing how whenever

---

[36] *Marianna Ucrìa*. Dir. Roberto Faenza. Cecchi Gori. 1997. Later in the film Marianna is again seen painting a sea scene, this time including a boat. Significantly she is joined by her maid Fila, with whom she will embark on her journey by boat away from Sicily.

[37] Dacia Maraini, *Un clandestino a bordo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002 [1996]), pp. 15-16.
[38] Maraini, Salvo, Finzi, *Madri e figlie*, pp. 44-45.
[39] Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 89, 91.

she sat at her desk to write, she would vomit and would therefore have to stop immediately.[40] This physical manifestation of the incompatibility of art and motherhood reinforces the message underlying Maraini's work, that motherhood negates female sensuality.

Similarly, Ginzburg found it difficult to write after she became a mother, both because she found motherhood physically and emotionally tiring and because she could not envisage being able to rely upon her imagination again. In the essay 'Il mio mestiere' (1949), Ginzburg tells how she abandoned writing after her children were born:

> E poi mi sono nati dei figli e io sul principio quando erano molto piccoli non riuscivo a capire come si facesse a scrivere avendo dei figli. Non capivo come avrei fatto a separarmi da loro per inseguire un tale in un racconto. [...] Ma avevo una feroce nostalgia e qualche volta di notte mi veniva quasi da piangere a ricordare com'era bello il mio mestiere.[41]

Ginzburg could only resume her writing when she had reconciled herself with her complicated feelings for her children and the changes brought about in her by maternity.[42] Whilst investing her body and mind in her children, Ginzburg had nothing left to use as inspiration for her work, compelling Cesare Pavese to send her a postcard urging her to return to writing: 'Cara Natalia, la smetta di fare bambini e scriva un libro più bello del mio'.[43] The incompatibility of the two is clear, and it was only when Ginzburg hired someone to watch the children every afternoon that she found the time to write her first novel after their births.[44] Ginzburg therefore needed the room of her own, which Virginia Woolf deemed so essential for women, before she could recommence her literary career.

In her essay 'Le scarpe rotte', written in 1945, Ginzburg looks more closely at the changes that occur in a woman's character when she fulfils her role of mother. Ginzburg noticed a transformation in her own character depending on whether she was with her friends or children. She considers how she will feel on returning home after a short stay away:

---

[40] Dacia Maraini, 'On *Of Woman Born*', p. 690. Maraini's pregnancy ended in a miscarriage.
[41] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Il mio mestiere', in *Le piccole virtù* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), pp. 71-88 (p. 81).
[42] ibid., pp. 81-82.
[43] Natalia Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 28.
[44] ibid., pp. 28-9.

> E io a mia volta mi prenderò cura dei miei figli, vincendo la tentazione di buttar la vita ai cani. Tornerò ad essere grave e materna, come sempre mi avviene quando sono con loro, una persona diversa da ora, una persona che la mia amica non conosce affatto.[45]

This sentiment appears to be in direct contrast to her belief that all women should have children, in order to complete their lives. Significantly, Ginzburg's temptation to throw her life to the dogs was uttered when she had infant children at home; whereas the other comment was expressed almost half a century later, when her family had grown. Motherhood for Ginzburg is therefore a problematic issue, appearing somewhat as a necessary evil. Her attitude could perhaps be compared to an inoculation – the injection hurts and may become temporarily inflamed, but the long-term benefits outweigh the initial pain. Ginzburg recognizes that the responsibilities associated with motherhood necessitate a certain adjustment on the part of the woman, which results in a change of behaviour and outlook on everyday life. She uses the image of broken shoes to accentuate the difference between her two lifestyles. Away from the family home she is free to wear broken shoes, just as she is free to do many other things that are either explicitly or implicitly prohibited when she has to fulfil her duty as a mother. At home Ginzburg is unable to wear broken shoes, even though she is an adult, as her mother forbids it; she describes how she must return from visiting her friend, 'da mia madre e dai miei figli, in una casa dove non mi sarà permesso di portare le scarpe rotte'.[46] These shoes are a symbol of freedom for Ginzburg, emphasizing also the fact that her childless friend is free to travel unrestrictedly.

Luce Irigaray refers to this split personality of mothers who construct an artificial mask when they are in their maternal role. Only when the women are alone, away from their children, do their true feelings surface:

> You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, what are you? What space is yours alone? In what frame must you contain yourself? And how to let your face show through, beyond all the masks? It's evening. As you're alone, as you've no more image to maintain or impose, you strip off your disguises. You take off your face of a mother's daughter, of a daughter's mother. You lose your mirror reflection. You thaw. You melt. You flow out of your self.[47]

---

[45] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Le scarpe rotte', in *Le piccole virtù*, pp. 22-25 (p. 24).
[46] ibid., p. 24
[47] Luce Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', *Signs*, 7 (1981-1982), 60-67 (p. 63). This theory also fits with Ginzburg's descriptions of her characters waking at night to discuss their problems, as I mentioned in Chapter 3.

A woman becomes trapped between the labels of mother and daughter, losing her individuality in the face of society's expectations. These expectations prevent a woman from revealing her true self within the context of the family. Irigaray's idea of mothers and daughters as 'living mirrors' emphasizes the repetition of archetypal views of maternity; the two women become merged into one and the sacrifices required of mothers are repeated without end.

The theme of sacrifice also has a strong presence in Ginzburg's short story 'La madre' (1957). This particular story of Ginzburg's has been much discussed, perhaps because of the comparisons with the author's life. Living back at home with her parents and sons after her husband has died, the young mother is repressed emotionally and sexually, only coming alive when she is free from family pressures. Forced to share a bedroom with her sons, the mother loses her privacy and her sexual identity: she must ask them to turn away whilst she is undressing and when she washes, 'cercava sempre di non farsi vedere da loro'.[48] These small details are significant, betraying a lack of space reserved just for the mother. It is only when she is cycling away from the home, 'col suo corpo libero e la sciarpa che svolazzava nel vento', that the mother appears free in both body and spirit (406). Sharon Wood draws attention to the unresolved tension arising from the incompatibility of woman as mother and sexual being, saying that this tension naturally results in the mother's suicide in Ginzburg's story.[49] In fact, it is the withdrawal of the mother's hope of an individual sexual identity, when her lover abandons her, that finally drives her to kill herself.

In 'La madre', the mother is considered by all around her to be lacking in maternal skills and incapable of providing even basic care for her sons. However, her ability as a mother is severely hindered by the fact that she must live with her parents. Living once again at home, as Ginzburg was also forced to do following her husband Leone's death, the mother regresses back to the role of daughter, dependent on her parents and uncertain of herself as a woman capable in her own right. Ginzburg provides a glimpse of an alternative way of life for the mother and her sons, when the mother's boyfriend Max visits during her parents' absence. The sons feel unusually happy in their mother's company and she acts

[48] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La madre', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964]), pp. 397-407 (p. 401).
[49] Sharon Wood, *Italian Women Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 5.

differently, away from her parents' expectations and free to express herself as a woman rather than just a mother/daughter:

> La madre era nervosa e allegra, voleva dire tante cose insieme: voleva parlare dei ragazzi all'uomo e dell'uomo ai ragazzi [...] [I ragazzi] erano straordinariamente contenti e non capivano bene perché. (403, 404)

The main obstacle to a bond developing between the mother and her sons is the intervention of others, in particular her parents. The sons' opinion of their mother is directly influenced by what they hear others say about her and, as a result, they judge her to be lacking as she falls short of the mother archetype. Following the mother's death, Ginzburg conveys the boys' supposed realization that: 'del resto adesso capivano che non l'avevano amata molto, forse anche lei non li amava molto, se li avesse amati non avrebbe preso il veleno' (407). There is a strong suspicion here that these words are merely adult words repeated by a child's mouth, and it is hardly surprising that the memory of their mother's love never has a chance to endure in the face of so much outside criticism. Adalgisa Giorgio rightly describes the children's viewpoint as 'made to reflect a chorus of other voices which shape and define the mother'.[50] In this story Ginzburg's message is two-fold: patriarchy oppresses women as mothers and also begins its indoctrination of children from a young, impressionable age, shaping their beliefs and opinions on how a mother should behave.

The idea that the true victim of this story is the mother is reinforced by the image that Ginzburg conjures up through her description of the woman's body. Her sons go to see her corpse, comparing it to 'una piccola bambola morta' (405). This comparison to a doll has echoes of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), a work that had a great influence on early Italian feminism, as is documented in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna.* Both Nora and Ginzburg's fictional mothers are victims of patriarchal society, choosing to escape the oppressiveness of family life either through suicide or leaving home. Nora's husband is horrified that she can even contemplate the 'monstrous' action of abandoning her 'sacred duties' as a wife and mother, just as Ginzburg's character is condemned for abandoning her children, rather than pitied that she had no alternative but suicide.[51]

---

[50] Adalgisa Giorgio, 'Natalia Ginzburg's "La madre": Exposing Patriarchy's Erasure of the Mother', *MLR*, 88 (1993), 864-880 (p. 866).
[51] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996 [1879]), p. 101.

The specific examples of mother-son relationships in Ginzburg and Maraini's works differ greatly. Ginzburg does not expressly explore the uniqueness of a mother's love towards her son, as opposed to her daughter, as Maraini does. The short story 'La madre', for example, does not depend on the gender of the children, although the mother's privacy is perhaps impinged on further through sharing a room with sons. Perhaps the best example of a mother-son relationship in Ginzburg's literature is that between Adriana and Michele in *Caro Michele* (1973). Separated from his mother at an early age following his parents' divorce, Michele's relationship with Adriana is almost nonexistent. The emotional distance between them as adults is emphasized by the fact that they do not meet in the book, but only interact through correspondence. In the novel, Michele writes only two short letters to his mother, compared to the numerous, lengthy letters that she sends to him. It is obvious that, whilst Michele has learnt to cope without his mother's presence, Adriana still has unresolved issues regarding her son. Her letters are her way of making sense of her emotions and are an outpouring of grief for their lost years. Looking back on their separation is 'un ricordo tremendo' for Adriana and her letters have a distinctly confessional air.[52]

On the other hand, although outwardly Michele appears to have successfully excluded his mother from his emotional life, there are signs that unconsciously the effects of the separation have affected him strongly. In particular, Michele's choice of an older wife betrays his unfulfilled need for a mother figure. Adriana herself suspects this:

> Il fatto che questa donna che tu sposi abbia trent'anni, non mi sembra un fatto negativo. Tu evidentemente hai bisogno di aver vicino una donna più vecchia di te. Hai bisogno di affetto materno. Questo perché quando eri piccolo, tuo padre ti ha tolto a me. (94)

Michele is searching for the maternal love that he lacked as a boy and that he saw bestowed on his sisters; he has not experienced a normal relationship with his mother and cannot therefore relate to her easily. Even when there is no separation between parent and child, Luce Irigaray believes that sons find it hard to identify with their mothers owing to their inability to empathize with someone of the female gender. The difference in a son and daughter's relational identity is key to Irigaray's thinking:

---

[52] Natalia Ginzburg, *Caro Michele* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001 [1973]), p. 42.

> It is not the same to be born a girl from a woman—that is, from a person of the same sex—or to be born from a person of a sex that is different, as is the case for a boy. Neither is it equivalent to be able, or not to be able, to engender as the mother, or even to engender in oneself or outside of oneself. And, furthermore, to make love within oneself or outside of oneself. These features determine different worlds which cannot communicate with one another before being conscious of their difference(s), and having found the means of respecting each other. [...] In fact, sexuate difference does not only result from biological or social elements but from another way of entering into relation with oneself, with the world, with the other(s). [...] The main difference of identity between girl and boy, woman and man, appears as a relational one. The relational identities of the boy and the girl, of the man and the woman, are not the same. Their behaviours are different except for when they obey or conform to norms or rules imposed on them.[53]

So according to Irigaray, the fact that a girl is born of someone of the same gender, whereas a boy is born of a different gender, lies at the heart of their difference. For this reason, man finds it hard to differentiate himself from his mother because he cannot identify with his own origin or work out an intersubjective relationship with her; Irigaray details how he instead merges with her in an 'impersonal someone'.[54] Fusion between mother and son is provoked by his inability to leave the maternal world without recourse to artificial means, and here Irigaray challenges traditional psychoanalytical views of mother-child relationships:

> The justifications given for breaking up mother-daughter love are that this relationship is too conducive to fusion. Psychoanalysis teaches us that it is essential to substitute the father for the mother to allow a distance to grow between daughter and mother. Nothing could be further from the truth. The mother-son relationship is what causes fusion, for the son does not know how to situate himself in regard to the person who bore him with no possible reciprocity. [...] He can only artificially identify with the person who conceived him. To separate himself from his mother, man must therefore invent all sorts of objects for himself, even transcendental ones – gods, Truth – in order to resolve this insoluble relationship between the person who carried him inside her and himself.[55]

---

[53] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, p. X.
[54] In conversation with Luce Irigaray, Nottingham, May 2005.
[55] Luce Irigaray, 'The Forgotten Mystery of Female Ancestry', in *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution* (London: Athlone, 1994 [1989]), pp. 90-112 (p. 110). Irigaray's theory of mother-son fusion could also be applied to Carmine's relationship with his mother in *Famiglia* (as discussed in Chapter 3).

In Michele's case, it could be argued that his relationship with his mother is unresolved as he does not reach the point where he has to learn to distance himself from her - she is ripped from him prematurely, leaving him still caught in a state of fusion.

Whereas Ginzburg does not usually focus on the gender of the child when she considers parental-filial interaction, instead looking at the impact of children in general on women as mothers, Maraini deals with the specific exploration of mother-son relationships in much more depth. Particularly in the novel *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, Maraini investigates the close union that can exist between mother and son, but also draws comparisons to the bonds between mothers and daughters in a male-driven society. Marianna Ucrìa reacts differently to each of her children, sharing a much closer affinity with her youngest son Signoretto. She has difficult relationships with her eldest son Mariano and Felice, the daughter who enters a convent at eleven years old. Significantly, these are the two children who most closely resemble their father and who identify with him more strongly than with their mother. Separated from her mother at a young age just like Marianna, Felice suffers the lack of a strong bond with Marianna, a separation that echoes the enforced separation of Demeter from her daughter Persephone in Greek mythology.[56] This separation of mother and daughter, before the latter has fully matured as a woman, hinders the understanding that can develop between the two. It is only when the daughter herself becomes a woman that she can fully empathize with her mother, thereby appreciating her as an individual and as a woman.

Maraini herself admits that her early years were dominated by her love for her father, to the detriment of her relationship with her mother. Only when she had matured into a woman and could therefore identify with her mother did she value her more highly. Maraini explains that in her poetry collection 'Demetra ritrovata', she is celebrating:

> Il ritrovamento di mia madre che mi ha cercata quando io ero persa dietro mio padre [...] Ho riscoperto mia madre e oggi per me mia madre significa anche tutte le altre donne, significa proprio la ragione delle donne e in un certo senso ho ripudiato mio padre.[57]

It is interesting that through the reuniting of mother and daughter, Maraini felt that the female world had opened up to her, showing her that paternal love was merely half of the

[56] Susan Amatangelo, 'Coming to Her Senses: The Journey of the Mother in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Italica,* 79 (2002), 240-256 (p. 244).
[57] Ileana Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini* (Verona: Giorgio Bertani, 1977), p. 105.

equation. There is also the suggestion here that it is not possible to love both parents simultaneously – when Maraini rediscovers her mother, she rejects her father, thus reversing the preceding situation. This idea of being obscured from her mother's view by her love for her father is reminiscent of Marianna Ucrìa's relationship with her mother, which suffers as a result of her passionate feelings for her father.

In 'Femininity' (1933), Freud ponders why a girl's initial attachment to her mother often ends in hostility and the transferral of affection to the father. He concludes that the underlying desire for a penis encourages the girl to reject her mother, who is unable to supply her with what she wants, and turn instead to the father. This hate for the mother could either be temporary or permanent, depending on the girl's subsequent experiences.[58] There is of course also the element of absence to be considered in the relationship with the father. Maraini, like many children, longed for her father's love and attention, which was not a constant presence in her life because he travelled frequently; her mother, on the other hand, was always present and therefore Maraini did not crave more time with her. Rather than being motivated by an underlying desire for a penis, Maraini's preference for her father arose because he was an absent, elusive figure, travelling the world and leaving his young family behind with their mother.

Certainly both Maraini and Ginzburg admitted to troubled relationships with their mothers, and both authors include characters in their literature who reject their mothers in favour of their fathers. Maraini places great importance on reading her mother's diaries, which provided her with a key to re-enter her mother's world and thereby understand better her own life:

> Rileggendo i diari di mia madre è come se avessi riscoperto questi ricordi della pre-coscienza e sono ricordi di un grande calore, di una grande presenza carnale. [...] sono arrivata alla conclusione che probabilmente la parte più intensa di questo rapporto si consuma prima che noi prendiamo coscienza.[59]

Maraini rediscovered her mother through reading her testimony. It is interesting, though, to consider how Maraini presents her mother's diary for publication compared to that published by Toni Maraini.[60] Whereas Toni Maraini publishes her mother's diary in full,

---

[58] Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Norton, 1989), pp. 139-167 (pp. 151-154).
[59] Maraini, Salvo, Finzi, *Madri e figlie*, p. 5.
[60] Toni Maraini, *Ricordi d'arte e prigionia di Topazia Alliata* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003).

accompanied by an introduction and interview, Dacia Maraini starts off printing her mother's words (for example, the first sentence of an entry) before taking over the story and finishing it in her own words. Ironically, she does exactly what she condemns in patriarchal society: she takes away her mother's voice.

Ginzburg likewise only came to appreciate her mother fully when she was older. The young Natalia resented and even despised her mother, absorbing her father's criticism of his wife: 'tutto il rancore lo destinavo a mia madre, che aveva fatto di me un impiastro e poi mi abbandonava nella strada' [a reference to her mother making her walk to school alone].[61] Ginzburg found it difficult to accept her mother as she was, longing for her to be more maternal and homely, which was how she thought mothers should be: 'avrei voluto una madre che la sera cucisse sotto la lampada. La mia non cuciva, o troppo poco per i miei gusti'.[62] Interestingly, Maraini makes a similar comment, declaring that as a girl she wanted a father with a regular job and 'una madre grassa e rassicurante'.[63] Whilst it appears that both authors are themselves subscribing to Jung's mother archetype, care must be taken here as with many of Ginzburg's comments: Ginzburg's love of irony and dry sense of humour frequently leaves the reader in doubt as to the verity of her statements.

Similarly in Maraini's novel, Marianna Ucrìa only fully empathizes with her mother as she reaches womanhood, and finally understands the reasons why her mother lost her independent spirit. As a girl Marianna determinedly vows 'non diventerò mai come lei [...] mai, neanche morta' (8). This opposition to her mother can be related to one of the four outcomes that Jung attributes to a daughter's reaction to the mother archetype, namely 'resistance to the mother'. Jung explains that the daughter reacts negatively to the mother archetype, developing a determination to become 'anything, so long as it's not like Mother'. He expands this by saying that, whilst the younger woman has a fascination for her mother, the relationship is characterized by jealous resistance and provides her with little instruction on how to build her own life.[64] In Marianna's case, her overwhelming love for her father prevents her from bonding with her mother. However, she later recognizes the oppressive life that Maria Ucrìa leads, understanding the reasons behind her mother's

---

[61] Natalia Ginzburg, 'I baffi bianchi', in *Mai devi domandarmi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002 [1970]), pp. 145-158 (p. 150).
[62] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Cuore', in *Mai devi domandarmi*, pp. 102-106 (p. 105).
[63] Dacia Maraini, *La nave per Kobe: Diari giapponesi di mia madre* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003), p. 120.
[64] Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, pp. 118-119. Of course Jung's views have been challenged and disagreed with, as have Freud's and Irigaray's, but they are useful in my reading of Ginzburg and Maraini's works as all are critiquing traditionally patriarchal societies.

decision to 'farsi morta per non dovere morire' (28). Joann Cannon discusses the once vivacious Maria's change of character:

> Recognising that her script was written in advance, the mother slowly sinks into absolute passivity. Marianna's mother epitomizes the ideal Sicilian noblewoman, whose inactivity is her only achievement.[65]

Using drugs to escape the harshness of reality, Marianna's mother exemplifies the ultimate passive woman, resigned to patriarchy's domination and conditioning of her mind, body, and spirit. Her complete acceptance of patriarchal law is shown when she instructs the newly-wed Marianna to return to her husband after he rapes her. Desperate for her mother's help, Marianna is instead told that 'aveva fatto malissimo ad andarsene dal suo posto' and that she has brought disgrace on the family (33). Her mother's refusal highlights the lack of solidarity between women in the face of male violence, and with no support Marianna must return to face her abuser. Marianna in turn sends her own daughter Giuseppa back to her domineering husband, showing that her own experiences have failed to provide her with the strength to defy tradition. Marianna continues the vicious circle of maternal acquiescence with her adherence to traditional expectations.

Tradition also comes between Marianna and her son: Marianna's bond with Mariano is hindered immediately by his status as the first-born male heir. The intervention of others prevents Marianna developing a strong relationship with her new baby, and he is metaphorically taken from her owing to the expectations that his birth creates. In Sicily especially, a male child was prized highly, with people considering the birth of a daughter as an unfortunate event.[66] In her study of a Sicilian village in the 1930s, Charlotte Gower Chapman draws attention to the increased value afforded to the birth of a male, as shown by local proverbs, which are a good indication of popular beliefs in a given period: 'Blessed is the door out of which goes a dead daughter'.[67] Chapman includes a quotation to underline the common attitude to daughters, which she attributes to the dowry system that

---

[65] Joann Cannon, 'Rewriting the Female Destiny: Dacia Maraini's *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Symposium*, 49:2 (1995), 136-147 (p. 138).

[66] Even Maraini's mother, on the birth of her second daughter Yuki, wrote in her diary: 'papà e mamà disillusi perché non era maschio' (Maraini, *La nave per Kobe*, p. 73).

[67] Charlotte Gower Chapman, *Milocca: A Sicilian Village* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 30.

places the daughter in the role of a debt: 'my sister has six children, two boys and four burdens'.[68]

Mariano is spoilt from birth and treated by his father and relatives 'come fosse il bambino Gesù', which highlights society's preoccupation with continuing the male lineage (46). This preferential treatment has instilled in Mariano an inflated sense of arrogance and self-worth, and Marianna worryingly recognizes his father's traits in him as an adult: 'Le pupille fosche, le labbra serrate: uno sguardo insistito e penetrante. Quel luccichio le ricorda il signor marito zio. Riconosce in esso l'occulto improvviso desiderio di stupro' (201). From a young age Mariano has been conditioned by patriarchal expectations to follow closely in his father's footsteps. Occupying his predestined role as head of the family following his father's death, Mariano disapproves strongly of his mother's behaviour. Intolerant and ashamed of his mother and her disability, Mariano would prefer her to adopt a lower profile and avoid potential scandal, reminding her that it is customary for a widow to remain in mourning for her husband for the rest of her life. Men's importance in society is reflected by this elevated level of respect that Sicilian custom demands be shown to them after their deaths, a respect that is not granted to a woman on her own death.[69]

Marianna's immediate connection with her second son Signoretto, on the other hand, is unique in her experience of maternity. Signoretto escapes the adulation afforded to Mariano and is free to form an instant bond with his mother, as Susan Amatangelo recognizes:

> The mother's immediate preference for this boy cannot be attributed solely to his gender, as would be customary, since he is her second male child. Rather, it is Signoretto's seemingly innate understanding of his mother's condition and his creation of an exclusive and sensual language that delight her.[70]

Unlike her other children, Signoretto appears instinctively to understand his mother's disability and he communicates with her through touches and gestures. Whereas Marianna 'lost' her body when she bore her other children, with Signoretto's birth it is restored to her. The link between the two is so strong that Marianna realises that it is doomed to end

---

[68] ibid.

[69] According to traditional Sicilian custom a widow is expected to wear black until her own death, and remain at home with windows and doors closed for between one and two years, only being permitted to leave the house before dawn (Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy*, p. 91).

[70] Amatangelo, 'Coming to Her Senses', p. 243.

before Signoretto reaches adulthood, because 'il loro è stato un amore che andava al di là del rapporto madre e figlio, per sfiorare quello di due amanti. E come tale non poteva durare' (87). Had Signoretto survived his infancy, the relationship would probably have suffered greatly, because the love shared by mother and son would have struggled to adapt to his blossoming sexuality and Marianna's acceptance of her son's individuality.

The young Signoretto, as well as sharing his name with Marianna's father, replaces him in her affections, enjoying the same level of devotion and undivided loyalty that Marianna bestowed on her father. Signoretto is almost an appendix or reincarnation of Marianna's beloved father, an idea that is emphasized by the fact that the new baby is introduced to the reader immediately following the chapter in which the father's death is announced; Marianna also dreams of her father after her son's death. The arrival of the baby at such a desolate time for Marianna provides her with some comfort and with a focus for the love that she is no longer able to direct at her father.[71]

Signoretto and Marianna's intensely close attachment is echoed in Maraini's short story 'Madre e figlio' (1968). Here she develops the almost incestuous love between mother and son one stage further, describing the adult Adolfo's complete adoration of his mother and total dependence on her. The title itself suggests that Maraini intends to comment on what she sees as a generality, and the name Adolfo carries with it the weight of Nazi doctrine and propaganda regarding the figure of the mother. Maraini begins the story with details of how the mother dresses her son and warns him of all the potential dangers that face him in the real world, away from her maternal protection. It is only halfway through the story that Maraini betrays the fact that Adolfo is not a child but actually an adult. With this new perspective on preceding events, actions such as the mother's insistence that she puts on Adolfo's underwear are seen in a different context, becoming intimate rather than functional. Behaviour that is regarded as natural between a mother and her infant son becomes grotesque when the son is fully-grown. According to Barbara Heinzius this overprotective, intimate relationship with her son is the mother's method of replacing the sexual contact of a departed husband. This close relationship therefore takes on an 'erotic-

[71] Interestingly, this key maternal-filial relationship in the novel is excluded completely from Roberto Faenza's film adaptation, *Marianna Ucrìa*. The character of Signoretto is absent and furthermore when Marianna leaves on her travels, Mariano is still a child. Neither the problems associated with Mariano's opposition to his mother, nor the idea of Signoretto sharing a special bond with Marianna, are dealt with in the film. Instead the character of Mariano seems to combine both roles, embodying various characteristics of the two sons. He is still hailed as the first born, whilst also sharing a closer bond with his mother than is implied in Maraini's novel.

obscene character'.[72] With no husband to fulfil the mother's need for comfort and companionship, she uses her son as a means of maintaining bodily contact with someone else, blurring the distinction between maternal and sexual touch. Nancy Chodorow emphasizes that 'mother-son relationships in which the mother is looking for a husband create problems and resentments in both', and this is certainly applicable to Maraini's story; problems arise from the fact that the mother 'expects from infants what only another adult should be expected to give'.[73]

The mother in Maraini's story uses various means to ensure that Adolfo does not have the courage to leave home. Her severe warnings of the fate that awaits him, if he does not follow her advice, are comical exaggerations of the method employed by many mothers, who force their children to envisage the most extreme consequences of normally harmless actions. However, whereas most mothers typically warn of the risk of tooth decay if too many sweets are eaten, Adolfo's mother details increasingly horrific consequences of not heeding her advice:

> Se non ti abitui a stare dritto, ti si storcerà la spina dorsale. E dopo dovrai andare in giro con un busto di ferro. [...] E non potrai neanche sederti, perché la spina dorsale finisce sulle natiche e sarai tutto avvolto nel ferro. Per fare la pupù ti infileranno un tubo di plastica nel sedere. [...] Sì, un tubo di plastica lungo un metro. E non potrai neanche piegarti per fare la pipì. E te la farai tutta sulle gambe.[74]

The mother's attempts to scare Adolfo into obedience convey her domineering approach to motherhood and her warnings are intended to serve her own purpose, rather than instruct Adolfo on the true dangers of life. She has created a kind of suffocating womb of their apartment, out of which he is unprotected and vulnerable. Adolfo can only feel safe inside this womb and must therefore constantly return. He has not been able to break the fusion

---

[72] Barbara Heinzius, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?: Zur Darstellung von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Dacia Marainis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1995), p. 259. ['erotisch-obszönen Charakter'] [My translation].

[73] Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 212, 213.

[74] Dacia Maraini, 'Madre e figlio', in *Mio marito* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1968]), pp. 25-32 (p. 27). Maraini includes a very similar episode in her 1969 play *Recitare*, repeating phrases from the short story. Set in a theatre, the opening scene sees the character Aldo mimicking an obsessive mother worrying over her son (played by the character Bo). When Aldo/the mother washes the son/Bo, Miranda interrupts the scene, shouting 'Un'oscenità!' - 'Recitare', in *Il ricatto a teatro* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), p. 119. In the play we have an active observer who comments on the scene that is only implicitly condemned in the short story. The fact that the mother is played by a male actor makes the situation even more grotesque.

with his mother, which Irigaray describes as a necessary step in sons becoming independent adults.

'Madre e figlio' portrays a negative image of motherhood, concentrating on its potential to be oppressive and controlling. Adolfo's humiliating situation is not so much the son's fault as his mother's. The mother controls every aspect of his life, preventing him from breaking his complete dependence on her. The success of her endeavours is evident when Adolfo is unable to cope on his own following his mother's death. The narrator of the story, who has been listening to her neighbours' relationship through the wall, decides to become his substitute mother:

> Poi, mentre l'acqua si scaldava, ho aiutato Adolfo a spogliarsi. Gli ho sfilato la giacca, gli ho sbottonato la camicia, i pantaloni, mi sono chinata per slacciargli le scarpe e quindi sono tornata di corsa in cucina perché l'acqua bolliva. (32)

These closing words are a condemnation of obsessive nurturance. Contrary to being viewed as an act of salvation, the neighbour's decision to knock down the dividing wall between their apartments to look after Adolfo is simply the next step in the oppression of him as an individual. Maraini's story is both a criticism of over-oppressive mothers and a glimpse at a role-reversed, matriarchal society, in which men are restricted to the level of an incapable child, controlled and dependent on women.

The mother's desire to prevent Adolfo leaving highlights the plight of the so-called 'empty-nest syndrome', which is also referred to by Ginzburg in *La strada che va in città* (1942). The protagonist Delia is an observer to her aunt's strict control and domination over her daughter Santa. In spite of her claim that she is not preventing Santa from marrying her childhood sweetheart, the aunt is obviously afraid of losing her last child living at home. As Luce Irigaray writes, this loss of the daughter would take away the mother's certainty about her own worth: 'you've lost the place where proof of your subsistence once appeared to you'.[75] Delia describes the mother and daughter's tense relationship:

> La zia aveva avuto nove figli, [...] In casa c'era solo Santa, che era la minore e aveva ventiquattro anni. La zia non la poteva soffrire e le strillava dietro tutto il giorno. Se non si

[75] Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', p. 64.

> era ancora sposata era perché la zia, con un pretesto o con l'altro, le impediva di farsi il corredo. Le piaceva tenersela in casa e tormentarla senza darle mai pace.[76]

The implication is that the aunt cannot bear to relinquish her youngest child and thereby also her role as mother. The lack of any outside interests in her life means that Santa's departure would leave her with a void and little purpose in her daily life. Betty Friedan labels this the double deception of the feminine mystique, whereby the more a woman is deprived of a function in society, the more she will resist relinquishing her role as mother.[77] Like many women whose whole existence and identity are dependent on their role within the family, Delia's aunt will have nothing left when all her children have grown up and departed. Therefore, she would rather share the house with a daughter who irritates her, than live without any children to control.

Both Delia's mother and aunt express negative views about marriage and children. Delia's mother 'diceva che i figli sono come il veleno' (25), whilst her aunt asserts that 'quando una donna si sposa le cominciano i guai' (63). Yet in spite of their strong feelings, neither woman attempts to change her situation nor would they consider that their daughters could live their lives any differently, expecting them simply to suffer in silence like many generations of women before them. Both are guilty of perpetuating the vicious circle of female oppression through passively accepting their fates, as Chodorow stresses:

> Women in their domestic role as houseworkers reconstitute themselves physically on a daily basis and reproduce themselves as mothers, emotionally and psychologically, in the next generation. They thus contribute to the perpetuation of their own social roles and position in the hierarchy of gender.[78]

The circle of repression will repeat itself until one mother recognizes that her daughter's fate need not mirror her own. Delia's mother fails to stand up for her daughter when she becomes pregnant and must marry a man whom she does not love: by adhering to patriarchal expectations, her mother condemns Delia to the same fate as her.

The strain of raising a family has taken its toll on Delia's mother, both mentally and physically. She is jealous of her husband's youthful looks and the fact that he can simply leave the house when the noise and pressure become too unbearable (25-26). She, on the

---

[76] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La strada che va in città', in *Cinque romanzi brevi*, pp. 23-81 (p. 52).
[77] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1963]), p. 211.
[78] Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 209.

other hand, is condemned to a life of drudgery and boredom, trapped in a home where she has no authority over her children. They show her little interest or respect, and Delia admits that 'mia madre non faceva che parlare, ma io non le rispondevo. Nessuno le rispondeva' (25). The mother's struggle to maintain the upkeep of the busy household goes almost unnoticed and certainly unappreciated by all around her. She does not have the luxury of escape, but must stay and cope with the daily pressures no matter how exhausted she is.

Adrienne Rich highlights the fact that a mother's victimization does not simply degrade the mother but also affects the daughter who is looking to her for guidance in becoming a woman. She argues that a mother's self-hatred and low expectations colour the daughter's view of herself and that the nurture of daughters in patriarchal society requires a keen sense of self-nurture in the mother. By refusing to be a victim, mothers can help their daughters to break from the restrictive bonds that society imposes.[79] Maraini also raises the issue of daughters repeating their mothers' mistakes in *Voci* (1994). Ludovica Bari ponders 'perché le figlie tendono a ripetere pari pari la storia delle madri. Anche quando non vogliono, anche quando le rifiutano, anche quando le giudicano con ferocia'.[80] Maraini recognizes the magnitude of a mother's attitude and beliefs in influencing her daughter and the fact that her mistakes will affect both their lives. Irigaray also underlines the importance of mothers' teaching by example, saying that the best education that a mother can give her daughter is to show her that she herself is truly alive.[81] A mother who merely tries to encourage her daughter to live her life differently from her own will not succeed unless she herself battles against her oppression: the real example that she sets negates all her words. Irigaray likens this type of mother's legacy to paralysis:

> By pouring your ice into me, didn't you quench my thirst with your paralysis? And never having known your own face, didn't you nourish me with lifelessness [...] You wanted me to grow up, to walk, to run in order to vanquish your own infirmity.[82]

One of the mothers in Maraini's work who does attempt to alter her daughter's destiny, so that it does not resemble her own miserable existence, is Enrica's mother Teresa in *L'età del malessere* (1963). Throughout the novel Teresa is described as exhausted and lifeless, merely alternating between her office job and her housework. She has nothing to distract

[79] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1984), pp. 243-246.
[80] Dacia Maraini, *Voci* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997 [1994]), p. 191.
[81] Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', p. 67.
[82] ibid., p. 64.

her from this tedium and appears to be empty inside: 'quando si infilava la vestaglia da casa, dopo il lavoro, il suo corpo si accasciava su se stesso. Perdute le forme e la solidità, si ripiegava sulla sedia come un sacco sgonfio'.[83] Maraini repeatedly describes Teresa as struggling to breathe as she nears the end of her life. Teresa's death from lung cancer is symbolic: stifled by everyone and everything around her, she is suffocated as her entire being is starved of air. This is in keeping with the importance placed by Irigaray on the cultivation of the breath in order to reach self-affection and maintain spiritual virginity. In *Key Writings*, Irigaray writes that in certain traditions woman is divine from birth, however to remain divine:

> She must preserve her autonomy and virginity by cultivating her breath, which is the matter of her interiority, of her soul. Being able to keep her breath in herself, woman can reach her liberty and preserve her integrity, which cannot amount to conserving a physiological hymen but to protecting her own interiority.[84]

The image of Teresa's body as an empty sack emphasizes her failure to protect her own interiority and spiritual virginity. Teresa has given her whole being to others, until nothing but emptiness remains inside her.

Teresa uses her work clothes as a mask or disguise, in particular her corset, which she quickly removes on coming home. Significantly, Teresa's corset restricts her breathing as she fights to survive in a male-dominated workplace. The corset symbolizes women's restrictions and objectification in patriarchal society: they offer no benefit to women, but are intended to alter a woman's body shape to please the male gaze. It also acts here as a barrier between Teresa and the outside world, allowing her to construct an identity that is not true to her real nature: 'her clothes, her makeup, and her jewels are the things with which she tries to create her container(s), her envelope(s). She cannot make use of the envelope that she is, and must create artificial ones'.[85] As Teresa nears death, she ceases wearing her corset, allowing her natural body shape to show through once more; she thereby inhabits for a short time her natural container/envelope, which she was forced to renounce in order to participate in patriarchal society.

Unlike many other mothers however, Teresa recognizes that her daughter could have different opportunities and avoid the mistakes that she has made. Having herself abandoned

---

[83] Dacia Maraini, *L'età del malessere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1963]), p. 37.
[84] Irigaray, *Key Writings*, p. 147.
[85] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (London: Continuum, 2004 [1984]), p. 12.

her university studies half way through the course, Teresa is aware of the significance of qualifications in allowing greater freedom of choice and the chance of fulfilment. She actively encourages Enrica to complete her studies:

> "Hai studiato?" domandò alla fine dopo un lungo silenzio.
> "No."
> "Vorrei sapere come farai a prendere il diploma se non studi mai."
> Io non risposi. Lei andò a prendere i miei libri e me li aprì sul tavolo.
> "Studia", insistette spingendomi verso la sedia. (14)

Such is the importance attributed to her studying, that Teresa physically pushes Enrica towards her books, making it clear that education can give Enrica a different life. The advice that Teresa gives her daughter, however, is conflicting and initially adds to Enrica's confusion rather than providing her with clear guidance. Teresa's primary concern is that Enrica finds a powerful, rich husband to support her; meanwhile Enrica should advance with her studies in case this is not possible. Education, although seen by her mother as important, is merely a back-up plan – a suitable marriage is the ultimate goal. Teresa realizes that some of her own oppression is down to her choice of husband. She insinuates that Enrica should choose a husband on the basis of his future prospects rather than out of love. Marrying a poor man for love would eventually wear down Enrica in the same way as her mother, whereas marrying someone richer would free her from the oppressive bonds of poverty. Although, at first, Enrica appears to ignore her mother's advice, she eventually does break free from her destructive relationships, choosing instead to concentrate on herself and her career.

Ginzburg's characters implement different approaches to motherhood and their children. In *Tutti i nostri ieri* (1952), Ginzburg provides opposing examples of women's outlook on maternity, comparing Concettina and Anna's behaviour as mothers. Concettina's attitude towards motherhood is reminiscent of the protagonist's in *È stato così*: both commit themselves fully to their children and motherhood becomes an all-consuming, overbearing experience. Concettina undergoes a significant change in character when her first child is born. Whereas Concettina is said to have 'l'aria di una *cocotte*' at the outset of the novel, as she matures she conforms to the traditional role assigned to women, assuming instead 'l'aria d'un'istitutrice'.[86] She devotes herself to her baby to the exclusion

[86] Natalia Ginzburg, *Tutti i nostri ieri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1952]), pp. 11, 86.

of all others and is criticized for her increasingly narrow field of vision. Concettina is a classic example of another of Jung's categories relating to the mother-complex in daughters, in this case, what Jung labels a hypertrophy of the maternal element. This exaggeration of the maternal instinct relegates the husband to a secondary, procreative role, and sees the woman's own personality sidelined in favour of her children's. Without children, the woman has no life and she therefore clings to them determinedly.[87] Ginzburg draws our attention several times to Concettina's changed nature, implicitly expressing her disapproval of the transformation. A friend laments the difference in Concettina's attitude:

> Certo era diventata un po' noiosa Concettina, aveva sempre insieme il bambino e non si riusciva a fare con lei un discorso sensato, tutta assorta com'era a pettinare il bambino e a pulirgli le mani con il fazzoletto e a chiamarlo se si allontanava di un passo. (211)

As happens in *È stato così* with Alberto and the protagonist, Concettina gradually distances herself from her husband in favour of the baby, behaviour that does not go unnoticed by him, as he complains that 'con Concettina ormai non c'era modo di fare un discorso sensato, lei non sapeva più parlare che di latte e bambini' (151). Again Concettina is criticized for her sudden inability to carry out a *discorso sensato*, and through the repetition of these particular words, Ginzburg is highlighting the idea that an overly devoted approach to motherhood can often prevent women from talking of anything else but their children.

Concettina's approach to parenthood is portrayed in a negative light, as she sacrifices her own personality and individuality. She is likely to suffer the same sense of emptiness when her children leave home as other women who invest themselves completely in their offspring. In her essay 'I rapporti umani' (1964), Ginzburg warns of the danger of living your life through your children rather than for your own personal enjoyment, losing 'ogni facoltà di godimento o di contemplazione', and therefore feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled.[88] With regard to Concettina, fear is a motivating factor behind her approach to motherhood, aggravated by the loss of her own mother. Ginzburg claims that all women develop a deep-rooted sense of fear and anguish when they become mothers, although the fear manifests itself in different ways: 'Le donne fanno dei figli, e quando hanno il primo bambino comincia in loro una nuova specie di tristezza che è fatta di fatica e di paura e c'è

---

[87] Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, pp. 115-116.
[88] Natalia Ginzburg, 'I rapporti umani', in *Le piccole virtù* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), pp. 95-118 (p. 113).

sempre anche nelle donne più sane e tranquille'.[89] These often irrational fears that are associated with maternity are aggravated in someone such as Concettina, who devotes herself so entirely to her offspring.

Having lost her own mother at such a young age, Concettina wants to ensure that her children do not lack maternal attention and she therefore smothers them with affection. Bettina L. Knapp writes that Concettina's perception of a woman's maternal role has been badly affected by her strong sense of rejection and desertion at her mother's death: she cannot comprehend why her mother left her.[90] Similar to the enforced separation between Marianna Ucrìa and her mother and then her own daughters, Concettina's mother is taken from her prematurely. She therefore compensates for her own feelings of loss and desertion by indulging in exaggerated love for her offspring. Anna, on the other hand, never knew her mother, who died giving birth to her, and thus did not have a taste of what it is like to enjoy maternal love. Anna had no mother to help her develop through her formative years, and, although she felt the lack of a maternal figure, she perhaps did not understand, as Concettina did, how great their loss was.

Anna's experiences of motherhood and marriage are in direct contrast to her sister's. Whilst Concettina changes almost beyond recognition, Anna's character is fundamentally unaltered by married life. Although Anna dedicates herself to her baby's welfare, she does not do so at the expense of every other aspect of her life. Unlike Concettina, Anna does not abandon her ideals but retains her passion for the 'revolution', continuing to dream of the day when she can participate in liberating Italy:

> Ci pensava ancora quando la bambina dormiva, invece quando la bambina era sveglia non sapeva pensare che alle cose che facevano bene ai bambini [...] Ma appena la bambina s'addormentava si rimetteva subito a pensare a tutte le storie che pensava una volta, lei Anna che sparava sulle barricate, saliva col fucile sulle barricate appena la bambina s'addormentava. (221)

This willingness to fight for a cause she believes in is at odds with Ginzburg's own attitude towards revolution. Unlike Anna, Ginzburg would choose not to fight: 'Se un giorno ci fosse una rivoluzione e io dovessi fare una scelta politica, preferirei molto essere

[89] Ginzburg, 'Discorso sulle donne', p. 30. These fears include worrying over children's health, fears over loss of the mental and physical freedom enjoyed before having children, and fears of dying or falling ill and leaving children alone and motherless.
[90] Bettina L. Knapp, *Women in Twentieth Century Literature: A Jungian View* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 72.

ammazzata piuttosto che ammazzare qualcuno'.[91] However, Ginzburg leaves us in no doubt that Anna's attitude to motherhood is preferable to Concettina's, and her brother advises Anna that she should not worry about resembling their mother, but 'l'importante era non assomigliare a Concettina' (315).

If some of the approaches to motherhood in Ginzburg's works are frowned upon, in her children's literature Maraini openly condemns mothers' exploitation of their children. In 'La pecora Dolly' (2001) the mother sheep profits financially from her daughter, accepting money from a stranger who wants to clone her. The mother then rejects this second, cloned daughter, forcing her out of the home.[92] Similarly, in 'Spil, figlia di nani' (2001), Maraini includes a dwarf mother who sells her giant twelve-year-old daughter because she is too big for the small household.[93] Maraini's negative judgement of this woman as a mother is emphasized by details of her inability to satisfy the baby with her breast milk, which is seen as a tangible sign of her lack of maternity and inadequacy in general. This use of children for financial gain shows an abuse of the power that a mother holds over her offspring. Both Dolly and Spil's mothers exploit their children for selfish motives, failing to protect or shelter them.

In her children's stories, Maraini uses fanciful settings and characters in order to highlight maternal shortcomings and undesirable traits. The mothers in Maraini's children's stories resemble the archetypal evil stepmother in traditional fairytales, for example in Snow White and Cinderella. However, by substituting stepmothers' neglect for that of biological mothers', Maraini shows that a lack of blood ties is not the only motivating factor for maternal cruelty. The impact of Maraini's criticism of mothers is significant, and her intention is presumably to shock and provoke thought in her young readers. Jack Zipes emphasizes the importance of adapting traditional stories in order to highlight social issues, stressing the strong impression that they can have on children. He writes that, while it is difficult to gauge the effect of emancipatory literature on a young audience, who often resist changes to the classical fairytale structure, it can successfully encourage discussion of social concerns:

> [Liberating fairytales] interfere with the civilizing process in hope of creating change and a new awareness of social conditions. [...]. The quality of emancipatory fairytales cannot be

[91] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Due comunisti', in *Mai devi domandarmi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002 [1970]), pp. 113-117 (p. 117).
[92] Dacia Maraini, 'La pecora Dolly', in *La pecora Dolly* (Milan: Fabbri, 2001), pp. 51-64.
[93] Maraini, 'Spil, figlia di nani', in *La pecora Dolly*, pp. 115-139 (p. 127).

> judged by the manner in which they are accepted by readers but by the unique ways they bring undesirable social relations into question and force readers to question themselves.[94]

Maraini's stories of cruel and neglectful mothers certainly highlight these 'undesirable social relations', both disturbing the child's traditional view of mothers and challenging patriarchy's control of motherhood.

Similarly, in 'La cornacchia del Canadà' (2001), Maraini criticizes a mother's rejection of her child in favour of her lover. The symbolism in this short story, which is based on the eponymous traditional Italian children's song, is striking. A young mother is reciting a story about a crow to her daughter in the park, when she suddenly stops, having caught sight of her lover. In vain the daughter begs to know what happens to the crow: she has lost her mother's attention and the bond between the two has been broken by the arrival of this man. To aggravate the girl's loss, the lover finishes off the story, maliciously describing how a hunter called Cecchino shoots the crow. The two lovers then abandon the girl:

> La bambina notò che il giovane aveva la camicia bianca come il cacciatore Cecchino. Con un braccio coperto da quella camicia bianca scintillante l'uomo cinse la vita della giovane bella mamma e si allontanò, lasciando lì la bambina, seduta sulla panchina dei giardinetti, col cadavere della cornacchia in grembo.[95]

Although the man is to be criticized in this story, Maraini makes it clear that the mother is at fault for allowing someone to come so easily between her and her daughter. The connection of the lover with the hunter Cecchino, through the repeated detail of his white shirt, is clear. Just as the hunter kills the crow, so too does the young lover metaphorically kill the daughter, severing her union with her mother. The crow represents the daughter, an idea that is strengthened by the bird's corpse lying in the girl's lap as the lover steals her mother away.

The themes explored by Maraini in these three children's stories are similar to those more explicitly considered in her anthology of stories for adults, *Buio* (1999). Whilst the

---

[94] Jack Zipes, *Fairytales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1991 [1983]), pp. 190-191. (Emphasis in original). The importance of rejecting established fairytales was also clear to the feminist movement. During a pro-divorce demonstration on 27th April 1974 in Rome, a group of women staged a puppet show. *Effe* tells us that 'tutte le donne hanno applaudito il rifiuto di Biancaneve di svegliarsi al bacio del principe' - Lara Foletti, 'Femminismo come festa', in *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 57-58 (pp. 57-58).

[95] Maraini, 'La cornacchia del Canadà', in *La pecora Dolly*, pp. 42-50 (pp. 48-50). I referred to the impact of the song on Maraini in Chapter 1.

message in the children's literature is subtler, being cloaked in fantasy and unreality, it is perhaps stronger precisely because of its being more mythical and archetypal. Significantly, in the case of the children's stories mentioned, it is a daughter rather than a son who is rejected by the mothers. There is a widespread lack of maternal affection and the mothers have no qualms about relinquishing their daughters for the love of a man or money. It is therefore in her children's stories that Maraini best sums up her attitude regarding the disintegration of the mother-daughter relationship, which is weakened by man's influence.

The influence exercised by mothers in Ginzburg and Maraini's works on their children is great; however, it should not be taken out of the wider context of social and paternal influences on the offspring. The fathers' role in their literature is of equal importance in the children's development, although perhaps in different ways (as I shall consider in Chapter 6). Similarly, Betty Friedan urges caution in overestimating the power of a mother over her children. She says that with the widespread popularity of Freud's theories:

> It was suddenly discovered that the mother could be blamed for almost everything. In every case history of troubled child; alcoholic, suicidal, schizophrenic, psychopathic, neurotic adult [...] could be found a mother.[96]

Other factors, independent of the mother's influence, must therefore be taken into account to explain the children's insecurities in both authors' works.

Whether negatively or positively, there is no doubt that mothers play a vital role in their children's lives in the literature of Maraini and Ginzburg. Characters' attitudes to motherhood range from overprotective and obsessive, to neglectful and uninterested in their children's welfare. The depiction of relationships between mothers and sons and daughters specifically is more common in Maraini's work, with Ginzburg preferring not to focus on the child's gender. Instead Ginzburg's main preoccupation is with the universal effect of children on mothers, an attitude in keeping with her opinion that men and women should not be treated differently. In spite of negative portrayals of maternity, both authors make it clear that mothers are essential to their children's emotional and psychological development. What is also present in both author's work is the idea that mothers' oppression is hereditary, passed down from one generation to the next.

---

[96] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 165.

The solution to this vicious circle is the adaptation of motherhood to a state that is more conducive to women's liberty, because as Julia Kristeva rightly concludes, the total refusal of maternity cannot be a mass policy.[97] If maternity cannot be eradicated then it must be adapted to relieve women of the oppression that they suffer as a result of social and familial expectations. Society must reject mothering as an exclusively female domain, realizing that it is merely a function and not an innate part of woman. It is vital that women eradicate the connection between maternity and sacrifice, refusing to remain slaves to societal and religious expectations. Alba Amoia advocates a reappraisal of maternal subjectivity through exploring and enjoying pursuits outside the house. If women learn to assert their 'womanness' rather than their 'motherness', Amoia believes that they can carve out a space between themselves and their children.[98] This space would enable women to view the mother-child relationship from a different perspective, allowing them to take a step back and not become fused into one with their offspring – a theory in keeping with Irigaray's call for an irreducible difference between oneself and the other.[99] As Irigaray advocates, a woman must keep her spiritual virginity in order to remain within herself. In this way she would not lose herself to her children, as we see with several of Ginzburg and Maraini's fictional mothers. Perhaps the greatest gift a mother can give herself and her children can be summed up by Irigaray's closing words in the seminal essay 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other':

> And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive.[100]

This is something that none of the mothers in Ginzburg or Maraini's fiction manage to do with any success.

---

[97] Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7 (1981-1982), 13-35 (pp. 30-31).
[98] Amoia, *No Mothers We!*, p. 57.
[99] See Irigaray, *Key Writings*, pp. 3-7.
[100] Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', p. 67.

6. Luxurious but Optional Extras: Fathers

"Il terrore aveva per me i tratti di mio padre" (Natalia Ginzburg)

Fathers in Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini's fiction are as diverse as the mothers. The fathers range from tyrannical and abusive, to weak and ineffectual men. Whilst portrayals of mental, emotional, and sexual abuse by fathers of their children have a great impact on the reader, the presentation of emotionally repressed fathers also provokes feelings of disquiet, albeit through subtler methods. What is clear from both authors' fiction is that they believe that the figure of 'father' is far from positive in post-war Italian society: men fail their children and themselves through their inability to reconcile their own needs with social expectations of fatherhood.

Their opinions about fathers are perhaps the greatest area of conflict for Ginzburg and Maraini. The two authors fundamentally disagree about the role of fathers and their future within the family. Whereas Ginzburg asserts that 'uomini e donne insieme dovrebbero ricostruire la figura del padre, dovrebbero rimettere nel mondo la virilità',[1] Maraini sees these 'virile' fathers as a major source of familial oppression. Far from supporting Ginzburg's claim that 'la chiave di tutto sarebbe ricostruire la figura del padre',[2] Maraini believes that fatherhood needs to break from its traditional format and re-invent itself if it is to cease oppressing men, women, and children. For Maraini, fatherhood is patriarchy incarnate; for Ginzburg, it is the answer to numerous social problems.

However, both authors agree that the role of father is undergoing a period of significant change in the time in which they are writing, even if they disagree on the desired outcomes of this change. In many respects, the representation of deficient fathers in their works is tied up with the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' in recent decades. The tension between how men want to act and how they feel they must act causes many of the fathers' problems in Ginzburg and Maraini's literature. The characters strive to confront expectations that have arisen owing to socially constructed theories of masculinity; but they often find themselves inadequate to the task required. Stereotypical views of masculinity oblige men to withhold displays of 'effeminate' emotion, to consider themselves superior to women

[1] Natalia Ginzburg, 'C'era una volta la famiglia', Interview with Sandra Bonsanti, *Oggi*, November 1976, pp. 83-86 (p. 84).
[2] ibid., p. 83.

and children, and assert themselves professionally as the family breadwinner. Masculinity in this respect, according to David Morgan, is what men *do*, and not what they *are*: 'we should think of doing masculinities rather than of being masculine'.[3] In Ginzburg and Maraini's literature, we see male characters struggle to achieve the personal and professional success that they feel is expected of them; they therefore suffer feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, which in turn affects their families. The concept of masculinity is particularly relevant when looking at post-war Italian society because of the continuing influence of Fascist propaganda. Whilst perpetuating the myth of femininity and maternal sacrifice (as I discussed in Chapter 5), the Fascist regime lauded the virtues of the Roman man. Hence the hegemonic masculinity of the Fascist period was based on a cult of virility and sexual prowess epitomized by Il Duce himself and his wish for a country of war-loving, unemotional, 'real' men.[4] Fascism's concept of masculinity continued well into the post-war period, informing the lives of Italian men, until it was challenged by Italy's feminist movement. The much-discussed crisis of masculinity has frequently been described as a reaction to the change in women's roles brought about by second-wave feminism.[5] On the other hand, John MacInnes argues that 'masculinity' has always been in crisis, and that what we have witnessed over recent decades is an unprecedented challenge to men's privilege.[6]

Certainly, men's role in society has been altered by women's greater legal and personal independence in recent decades (as I outlined in the Introduction). On a public level men have had to accept women's entry into the workplace on an unprecedented scale. Fathers no longer uniquely fill the traditional role of breadwinner, but now share the financial burden of families with their partners. Barbara Hobson and David Morgan trace the concept of the male breadwinner back to the Industrial Revolution when men left the home behind to earn a living elsewhere. This male dominance in the workplace continued until the significant rise in female employment changed the face of the labour market. With a move away from heavy to light industry, which allowed greater choice for women, Hobson

---

[3] David H. J. Morgan, *Discovering Men* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 47.
[4] For discussions of Mussolini and masculinity, see Renzo De Felice and Luigi Goglia, *Mussolini: Il mito* (Rome: Laterza, 1983) and Luisa Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario* (Rome: Laterza, 1991).
[5] See for example Deborah Lupton and Lesley Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood: Discourses and Experiences* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 2-3. As John Beynon points out, it is important to distinguish between the crisis of 'masculinity' and the crisis of 'men', as the two are very different concepts - *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), p. 96.
[6] John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), p. 11.

and Morgan claim that the age of modernity has witnessed the collapse of men's economic authority, resulting in widespread male unemployment and underemployment.[7]

John MacInnes also takes up this argument, connecting the changes provoked by modernity with what he terms the 'end of masculinity'. MacInnes states that 'masculinity was an ideology produced by men as a result of the threat posed to the survival of the patriarchal sexual division of labour by the rise of modernity'.[8] Whereas men had for centuries claimed to be superior owing to their biological sex, the rise of modernity necessitated a different explanation for their superiority, namely 'some undefined natural difference' that was masculinity.[9] MacInnes simultaneously recognizes that masculinity is in crisis, whilst denying the existence of the category at all. He maintains that it is a wholly constructed ideology 'about what men *should* be like, which men and women develop to make sense of their lives'.[10] This social difference between men and women was intended to maintain male superiority: however, it has inflicted just as much damage on men as on women. The characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity restrict men's emotional and psychological development. Taught to be unemotional and 'unfeminine', and told that masculinity equals aggression and strength, men are forced to conform to social constructions that do not necessarily relate to their individual needs or personalities. Throughout Ginzburg and Maraini's literature, fathers and husbands struggle to reconcile their inner selves with the outer image demanded by societal expectations of male behaviour. In many of their works, the 'crisis' of the father is linked directly to the pressures of conforming to socially constructed ideals of masculinity.

These men have gradually had to accept a new role in the home, and problems arose because 'father had begun to become simply one of the family, instead of its undoubted head'.[11] New Italian laws affecting the family, such as the legalization of abortion and divorce, altered fathers' self-perception and the expectations of men as the head of the household. A wife's right to divorce meant that a husband could no longer autocratically dominate his family, safe in the knowledge that the law prevented his wife from rebelling. The potential threat of the disintegration of the family necessarily shaped these men's behaviour, making them more insecure. As Maureen Green points out in her study

---

[7] Barbara Hobson and David Morgan, 'Introduction', in *Making Men into Fathers: Men, Masculinities and the Social Politics of Fatherhood*, ed. by Barbara Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-21 (p. 6).
[8] MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity*, p. 45.
[9] ibid.
[10] ibid., p. 2.
[11] Maureen Green, *Goodbye Father* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 2.

Goodbye Father (1976), for many years a divorced or unmarried mother and illegitimate children were socially unacceptable problems, a comment that is particularly relevant to Catholic cultures. However, changes in social perception have led to greater acceptance. This is important as far as the role of the father is concerned, as 'when starvation and stigma no longer lie in wait for the fatherless, and mothers on their own earn respect from their friends and the state for their heroic efforts, fatherhood is not what it was'.[12] Fathers are no longer necessary to give families respectability or provide unique financial support; even in Catholic Italy, the phenomenon of *ragazze madri* does not provoke the same stigma and outrage that it did decades ago. Back in 1976, Green warned us: 'father is beginning to appear as a luxurious but optional extra'; therefore, society must adapt the role of father to suit better changing social conditions if the role itself is to survive, because 'father [...] is an endangered species to be preserved'. [13]

Whilst changes in the structure of the family may be a good thing for men's personal development, they do however leave many unsure of their positions. As Green remarks:

> The number of men who would now enjoy playing the role of stern Victorian paterfamilias is probably very few. [...] They much prefer being a modern father. *If only they could be a little more certain what that is*. For the Victorian situation did have one advantage for father [...]: in those days, he knew what he was for.[14]

According to Green, part of the problem is that changes affecting fathers have been too many and have occurred too quickly, leaving them floundering in unknown waters.[15] Certainly it could be argued that women have been working towards liberation for some centuries, winning new freedoms in stages over a longer period of time, which allows them to adapt and accept each new advance. On the other hand, men have experienced a comparatively rapid change in society's expectations of them over the last few decades. As a result they have found it harder to adapt to their new role within the family.

In Ginzburg and Maraini's works, the same fundamental flaw can be seen to underlie and motivate the behaviour of both their weak and abusive fathers - namely, a latent insecurity. These men suffer a lack of belief in their parental ability and also find it increasingly difficult to adapt to men's new place in post-war society. To cite Green, few

---

[12] ibid., p. 8.
[13] ibid., p. 8, 12.
[14] ibid., p. 5. Emphasis in original.
[15] ibid., p. 45.

of these fathers know what they are for. However, where the two authors differ greatly in their representation of fathers is in the fault placed on the men. Ginzburg takes the view that fathers suffer because of their lack of self-confidence and guidance from society, whereas Maraini is more ready to accuse fathers of being a source of social violence. In her 1969 essay 'La critica', Ginzburg compares literary critics with modern fathers:

> I critici sono oggi, come sono oggi i padri, fragili, nervosi e sensibili all'altrui rancore; temono di perdere degli amici, o di offendere dei conoscenti; [...] come oggi i padri, essi hanno paura dell'odio: hanno paura di trovarsi soli a dire il vero in una società ostile.[16]

As her literature shows, Ginzburg considers a nervous, fragile father to be one of the worst kinds, and equally culpable as one of Maraini's abusive fathers in affecting their offspring negatively.

Ginzburg highlights the greater responsibility placed on fathers by modern society as one of the reasons behind their struggle to cope: whilst society now demands that fathers act differently, it provides little guidance. As Jeff Hearn explains, there has been a historical shift, provoked by the change in male-female societal relations, from fathers enjoying automatic rights to fathers having both rights and duties.[17] On the other hand, Green sees this shift as positive, as by renouncing some of their 'awesome privileges' father has also 'shifted some of his burdens'.[18] Changes in fathers' roles therefore provide both positive and negative elements for the men and their families. However, many men experience difficulty in understanding their new responsibilities and it is then that problems arise.

In Maraini's work, fathers often revert to abuse in a bid to control and dominate their children as they are unable to communicate with them on an equal level. This abuse can take the form of sexual, physical, or mental cruelty, or indeed involve a combination. Although the origins of the abuse can often be found in society's pressures and expectations of men as husbands and fathers, this does not absolve them of blame in Maraini's eyes. In Ginzburg's work however, we see insecure fathers who tend to retreat from their problems. Ginzburg's portrayal of abusive fathers is largely limited to their ranting and raving, and physical and sexual violence are not common themes in her

---

[16] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La critica', in *Mai devi domandarmi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002 [1970]), pp. 77-81 (p. 78).

[17] Jeff Hearn, 'Men, fathers and the state: national and global relations', in *Making Men into Fathers*, pp. 245-272 (p. 255).

writing. Instead, it is through their weakness and emotional absence that Ginzburg's fathers harm their children, which is indeed also the case with several of Maraini's fictional fathers. This absence takes two forms: physical absence, and mental or emotional absence. Some of the fictional fathers, particularly the younger men, simply leave their children behind, thereby highlighting the ease with which a man can renounce parental responsibility compared with a woman; whilst other men stay in the family home but choose to retreat mentally, constructing emotional armour around themselves. In her depiction of these weak fictional fathers Ginzburg is lamenting the loss of strong fathers like her own.

Ginzburg's relationship with her own father is well known. *Lessico famigliare* (1963) leaves no room for doubt about Giuseppe Levi's character: he is at once overbearing and dominating, but also aware of his role as protector and head of the household. Ginzburg's view of her father is contradictory. In the essay 'I baffi bianchi', published in 1970, Ginzburg details how she was often too frightened to talk to her father: 'non avevo il coraggio di rivolgergli mai la parola: avevo di lui una sacra paura.'[19] In fact she asserts unequivocally that 'il terrore aveva per me i tratti di mio padre.'[20] However, she also recognizes that he was a strong role model for his children and far from the fragile, nervous fathers whom she criticizes in her literature. Ginzburg's brother Gino describes their father as belonging 'to a generation, in which the head of the household knew exactly what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, what one may do and what one should avoid'.[21] These characteristics, according to Ginzburg, are essential in effective parenting.

In this book, Ginzburg shows that her father is an outsider in the family, unable to participate in the activities that the others enjoy. He often refers to his wife and children as 'voialtri', thereby underlining his belief that he is different from them and not guilty of the faults that he attributes to them.[22] Ginzburg portrays him as a man who is never satisfied with people or situations: he can always find fault somewhere. As well as having a generally critical nature, Giuseppe exercises a strict control on all members of his family, dictating every aspect of their family holidays, including what they can wear and eat (as

---

[18] Green, *Goodbye Father*, pp. 4-5.
[19] Ginzburg, 'I baffi bianchi', in *Mai devi domandarmi*, pp. 145-158 (p. 147).
[20] ibid., p. 148.
[21] Quoted in Sabine Höhenwarter, *Die Dinge in mir: Leben und Werk der Natalia Ginzburg* (Vienna: Wiener Frauenverlag, 1992), p. 31. [My translation from the German: 'der einer Generation angehörte, in der das Familenoberhaupt ganz genau wusste, was gut und schlecht ist, was richtig und was falsch ist, was man tun darf und was man vermeiden soll.'].

does the father in *Tutti i nostri ieri*). In *Lessico famigliare*, we see a family that today would probably earn the label 'dysfunctional'. However, in spite of the many problems that Ginzburg relates, it is clear that each member of the family can rely on support and security in times of need. Like killer whales, which communicate using distinctive dialects to recognize members of their own pods, the Levi family are tied together by their common *lessico*. A key quotation from Ginzburg's account attests to the fact that this shared form of dialect binds them irrevocably:

> Una di quelle frasi o parole, ci farebbe riconoscere l'uno con l'altro, noi fratelli, nel buio d'una grotta, fra milioni di persone. Quelle frasi sono il nostro latino, il vocabolario dei nostri giorni andati, sono come i geroglifici degli egiziani. [...] Quelle frasi sono il fondamento della nostra unità familiare, che sussisterà finché saremo al mondo, ricreandosi e risuscitando nei punti più diversi della terra, quando uno di noi dirà – Egregio signor Lipmann, – e subito risuonerà al nostro orecchio la voce impaziente di mio padre: "Finitela con questa storia! l'ho sentita già tante di quelle volte!" (22-23)

Even though Ginzburg's father's voice is described as being *impaziente*, it is significant that it is what the siblings instantly recall. Far from being absent (like so many of Ginzburg's fictional fathers), Giuseppe Levi is positioned firmly in the centre of the family, being the constant, if ambivalent, presence around which they all revolve. Ginzburg's father falls into the category that Victoria Secunda labels 'the demanding father', who leaves family members in no doubt about what he expects; demanding fathers set the family rules and believe they have all the answers. Such fathers, according to Secunda, cast a very long shadow over their children's lives: 'In some cases it is a benevolent shadow indeed, rather like that of a protective oak. In other cases the shadow can be terrifying'.[23] For Ginzburg, the two shadows need not be mutually exclusive - her father's shadow is both terrifying and protective at the same time. Without her father's shadow, Ginzburg makes it clear that she would risk being burnt by the sun, that is, the world outside the family home.

It could be argued that Ginzburg's father reappears in various guises in many of her literary fathers. Most notably, an analogy can be drawn between Giuseppe Levi and the

---

[22] Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico famigliare*, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1999 [1963]), pp. 3, 11. Further references to primary editions are given after quotations in the text.
[23] Victoria Secunda, *Women and their Fathers: The Sexual and Romantic Impact of the First Man in Your Life* (London: Cedar, 1993), pp. 146-147.

father in *Tutti i nostri ieri* (1952). The two men share many traits and each commands his family with unwavering determination. Yet, however domineering, the father in *Tutti i nostri ieri* is not portrayed entirely negatively and is an example of Ginzburg's belief that fathers need to be strong. When the father dies, there is an immense void: 'c'era una grande libertà nella casa. Ma era una libertà che metteva un po' di spavento. Non c'era più nessuno a comandare'.[24] In spite of the initial sense of freedom, the father's ability to bind the family unit together is sorely missed. It is after their father's death that their real difficulties begin, with Anna's pregnancy and Ippolito's suicide, and the family begins to disintegrate. Small troubles provoked by their father's presence are replaced by serious ones resulting from his absence.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, *Tutti i nostri ieri* contains various autobiographical parallels, including Concettina's and Paola Levi's relationships with their fathers.[25] In *Tutti i nostri ieri*, the father frequently reduces his daughter Concettina to tears with his criticisms and his tyrannical control of his children's lives. In *Lessico famigliare*, Ginzburg considers her sister's choice of husband, coming to the conclusion that 'la Paola si fosse innamorata di lui, perché lui era l'esatto contrario di mio padre' (61). Unsurprisingly, Giuseppe is furious and attempts to forbid Paola from leaving the house. Ginzburg suggests that her sister marries to escape the family home, an idea repeated through Concettina's marriage to a Fascist. This is a clear rebellion against her anti-fascist father, as she chooses a man whom she knows her father would never have accepted. Significantly, as Bettina L. Knapp points out, Concettina exchanges the patriarchal environment of her childhood for a matriarchal household, consisting of her husband's mother, grandmother, aunts and maids.[26] As with Giulia in *Sagittario* who marries a poor doctor to the dismay of her ambitious mother, Concettina is utilizing the little control that she has over her own life to rebel against her father's demands and expectations.[27]

---

[24] Natalia Ginzburg, *Tutti i nostri ieri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1952]), p. 31.

[25] In an interview Ginzburg says of *Tutti i nostri ieri* that 'è tutto inventato, ma con l'autobiografia che esce dalla porta e entra dalla finestra' - Natalia Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 72.

[26] Bettina L. Knapp, *Women in Twentieth Century Literature: A Jungian View* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 73.

[27] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Sagittario', in *Cinque romanzi brevi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964]) pp. 195-269. This method of rebellion is not exclusive to Ginzburg's female characters. Lorenzo, in the play *L'inserzione*, explains that he married Teresa partly out of a sense of pity for her, but also as a way of angering his mother, making a powerful statement of independence. Conversely, Vincenzino in *Le voci della sera* chooses to marry Cate in the hope that it will win him his father's approval, and Lucrezia in *La città e la casa* marries Piero purely because her mother approves of him.

Fathers in Maraini's fiction are also often tyrannical; however, unlike Ginzburg, Maraini includes instances of sexual abuse. Whilst Ginzburg's fictional fathers rant and inflict emotional damage on their children, Maraini's are more likely to use physical or sexual abuse in an attempt to control their offspring. Maraini expresses her opinion clearly in the essay 'La famiglia uccide', written in 1977, in which she considers the Oedipal theory that every son is a potential killer of his father and rapist of his mother, stating that:

> La verità, perfino nei miti più arcaici, è rovesciata; è il padre che uccide e castra i figli, sia materialmente con l'assassinio rituale e politico, sia metaforicamente con l'educazione, le leggi, l'autorità, la religione. È il padre che si arroga il diritto di stuprare le figlie, metaforicamente, ma anche a volte materialmente.[28]

With this opinion Maraini differs considerably from Ginzburg's view that the father acts as protector against external dangers, seeming to suggest instead that fathers themselves are a family's major threat, destroying it from within.

According to Maraini, a girl's persecution within patriarchal society often begins at home. This is especially the case in her novel *Voci* (1994).[29] Glauco Elia's relationship with his stepdaughters in *Voci* is complex, and Maraini presents two contrasting sides of Elia's personality in the novel. On the one hand he is a respected member of society, a loving father and husband, and on the other he is abusive, violent, and controlling. Ada Testaferri examines the impression conveyed by the powerful imagery surrounding Glauco Elia's name, with its reference to the colour of the sky, significantly the dwelling place of deity. His surname recalls the Hebrew prophet Elijah, and combined with the illustrious reputation that he has earned for his sculpting, Glauco Elia is seemingly at the pinnacle of society. [30] Paradoxically, Elia's superficial respectability actually increases his victims' suffering as they fear that their accusations would be disregarded, because only they have ever glimpsed the darker side of their stepfather's personality. This dual personality causes confusion in the girls as they try to resolve their feelings towards the man who has raised them.

---

[28] Dacia Maraini, 'La famiglia uccide', in *La bionda, la bruna e l'asino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 115-118 (p. 117).

[29] Parts of my analysis on *Voci* and *Colomba* have already been published. See Christina Siggers Manson, 'In Love with Cecchino: Opening the Door to Violence in Dacia Maraini's *Colomba* and *Voci*', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5:2 (2005), 91-102.

[30] Ada Testaferri, 'De-tecting Voci', in *The Pleasure of Writing: Critical Essays on Dacia Maraini*, ed. by Rodica Diaconescu Blumenfeld and Ada Testaferri (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2000), pp. 41-60 (p. 56).

Sue Sharpe's study, *Fathers and Daughters*, highlights the emotional contradictions felt by girls who see a positive, public side to their fathers, whilst they experience his cruelty at home. These children long to love their father unconditionally and to gain his love in return, but are prevented by his abusive actions.[31] In *Voci*, Ludovica is seeking affection and attention from her parents, a natural childhood desire, and she therefore accepts and even welcomes the nightly visits from her 'carnefice', which she sees as her one chance of receiving this attention.[32] Elia's treatment of her alters her entire self-perception and self-esteem, as is shown when she shockingly admits to Michela: 'il fatto è che io lo amavo, amavo la mia degradazione in lui, la mia umiliazione, io ero innamorata dell'orrore e volevo solo che continuasse' (269). Ludovica's contradictory emotions are not uncommon with sexual abuse victims, as Secunda explains:

> Within the incestuous relationship exists one component that is unique to this form of abuse: unlike being beaten, or ignored, or rejected, there is a degree of pleasure, however much it has been wrung from the child, however much it has been corrupted by the abuser. The victim does not merely identify with her aggressor; she also *loves* him, and in some way may even love his touch, since that may be the only attention she gets from *anyone*. The horror of her 'love' may send her reeling into denial, since she is unable to sustain two strong emotions simultaneously: pleasure and disgust, love and betrayal.[33]

Secunda goes on to say that one result of this inner struggle is that victims often 'split' themselves into 'good' and 'bad' parts. Eventually the 'bad' self risks becoming the dominant side: 'the badness becomes herself, not her father. [...] she simply takes on his culpability'.[34] Victims begin to believe that they deserve the abuse or that they have encouraged it in some way. In Maraini's novel, we witness Ludovica's shame and inability to work through her feelings for her rapist/father. She does indeed take on much of his culpability, resulting in a succession of disastrous relationships and mental health problems.

One common element of domestic and sexual abuse is the reluctance of outsiders to get involved. As Hearn writes, the violence of husbands and fathers has been sanctioned and

---

[31] Sue Sharpe, *Fathers and Daughters* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 66.
[32] Dacia Maraini, *Voci* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997 [1994]), p. 270.
[33] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 186.
[34] ibid.

ignored by individuals and the law for centuries as it is considered a 'private matter'.[35] Secunda also questions many people's unwillingness to denounce abuse: 'the sanctity of the home often virtually overrules moral law. Any outside interference with parental authority is almost as socially taboo [...] as abusing a child in the first place'.[36] The idea that violence which occurs behind closed doors is not a public concern has gradually changed with growing awareness, in part through the feminist movement's campaign to make the personal political.[37] This move from what Hearn labels a private patriarchy to a public patriarchy is given as one of the reasons behind the crisis of the father, and increasingly a father's private role is determined by the intervention of the State and its laws.[38] Ginzburg highlights a negative aspect that has emerged since this move towards greater intervention in the family. She says that precisely because abuse in families is so widespread, authorities now 'ne scorgono in ogni angolo qualche segno', resulting in innocent families being accused.[39] However, many individuals still choose to look the other way when faced with the abuse of neighbours' or relatives' children.

This tendency to turn a blind eye to fathers' mistreatment of children allows them an almost unrestrained power within the home. A father's economic contribution is still seen by many as essential to a family's survival, and therefore a wife will pardon certain behaviour so as not to risk the withdrawal of this income. In 'Ha undici anni, si chiama Tano' (1999), Adele Sòfia (Maraini's detective who champions the oppressed in both *Buio* and *Voci*) sums up this financial dependence on men:

> "Perdendo il marito perdono anche la sussistenza: la famiglia si sfascia e loro che fanno? Hanno paura della verità come della più rovinosa delle tempeste, e la nascondono anche a se stesse, con maniacale perseveranza."[40]

Paternal abuse therefore becomes a family secret—'la legge di famiglia' (122)—whether consciously or not. In this short story, Maraini includes sexual abuse of both sons and

---

[35] Hearn, 'Men, fathers and the state', p. 256.
[36] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 95.
[37] For example, see Alma Sabatini, 'Il piccolo gruppo: struttura di base del movimento femminista', *Effe*, January 1974, pp. 2-3.
[38] Hearn, 'Men, fathers and the state', p. 256.
[39] Natalia Ginzburg, *Serena Cruz o la vera giustizia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), pp. 56-57. She cites the example of doctors who attribute children's problems to rape rather than illness, putting their families through torment as they prove their innocence.
[40] Dacia Maraini, 'Ha undici anni, si chiama Tano', in *Buio* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999), pp. 95-135 (p. 101).

daughters, however whereas the mother is willing to acknowledge her husband's abuse of the girl—"Lo so che è brutto, ma è più normale"—she determinedly denies that he would ever touch his sons as he is not homosexual (133). This opinion betrays the common misconception that abuse has purely sexual motives rather than being driven by a need for dominance on the part of the abuser.

In the case of *Voci*, Elia's prestigious public persona and domineering private behaviour are linked. He is driven by an obsession to remain in control, whether publicly by excelling in all he does, or privately by exercising ultimate power over his family. Even when his crime has been discovered and there is no escape, he refuses to relinquish control, recording a cassette to outline his actions. Diaconescu Blumenfeld explains how, using this 'narcissistic extension of himself', Elia is attempting to manipulate other's opinion of him. He does not need to face questions but can simply deliver his self-interpretation of events without the interference of outsiders.[41] Secunda's research into 'seductive fathers' leads her to conclude that they share one common characteristic – narcissism. She states that most fathers who sexually abuse their children are not psychotic, but are simply incapable of empathy and can only feel for themselves; they furthermore believe that what gives them pleasure also gives their victim pleasure.[42] Whilst perhaps not applicable to all abusive fathers, Secunda's conclusion is relevant with regard to Maraini's novel, in which Elia's abuse is ultimately about power rather than sexual gratification. Elia craves control over himself and others, and again low self-esteem and latent insecurity motivate the abuse, as Secunda recognizes:

> What drives the incestuous father to behave this way is a basic and unappeasable need to be admired. [...] He is still a ravenous child, emotionally dependent on constant, instant gratification. He turns to others to provide validation of his worth, or power, or lovability.[43]

Elia's confession tape betrays much of his true personality. In line with Secunda's theory that incestuous fathers believe that they are giving their victims pleasure, Elia's taped confession shows his unwavering belief that he was acting purely in the girls' interests, providing them with a good, firm upbringing; any transgressions on his part are blamed on the girls' behaviour 'che era terribilmente provocante, ai limiti dell'intollerabile'

---

[41] Rodica Diaconescu Blumenfeld, 'Body as Will: Incarnate Voice in Dacia Maraini', in *The Pleasure of Writing*, pp. 195-214 (p. 206).
[42] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 183.
[43] ibid.

(283). In her essay 'Corpo di bambina', published two years after *Voci*, Maraini writes that fathers 'sono attratti fatalmente dalle figlie ribelli in cui si riconoscono e si rispecchiano'.[44] This attraction is perhaps encouraged by the desire to tame these rebellious daughters. In *Voci*, Elia certainly uses the excuse of his stepdaughters' behaviour to justify his own: by claiming that they are sexually rebellious he shifts the blame on to them.[45] Maraini condemns this attitude again in *Colomba* (2004). The protagonist Zà refutes her stepfather's claim that young girls sometimes place temptation in front of men, almost inviting abuse. Zà asserts that these girls do so innocently, without realizing the significance of their actions. Furthermore, she argues, anyone with a conscience would refrain from taking advantage of the girls, even if they literally threw themselves at the man.[46] Indeed, Joel Covitz writes that children are naturally incestuous and that they test out their budding sexuality, reliant on the parents' ability to control their own more developed sexual impulses.[47] This experimentation is seized upon by some abusers as a justification for their own actions which shows how patriarchal society's conditioning of women to be flirtatious and coquettish is turned and used against them when it suits their oppressors.

In *Voci*, Elia views his sexual abuse of his stepdaughters as a mere extension of his love for them and states with certainty that he has been 'un ottimo padre' (282). He has successfully infiltrated both girls' entire beings, making himself the centre of their lives using violence and force. It is only when Angela finally stands up to him that Elia, shocked at the new elements in her behaviour and fearful of losing his grasp on her, resorts to murder. He is unable to bear the thought of Angela finding the strength to break free from his influence and commits his final act of oppression against her, ensuring that she will never have the chance of a life without him. While he was willing to tolerate her rebellion against others, he was not willing for her to rebel against him.

It is interesting that in Franco Giraldi's 2001 film adaptation of *Voci*, although Glauco Elia is still seen as guilty of abuse, he is not Angela's murderer. In an extreme deviation from Maraini's original text, Angela's friend Sabrina is eventually unveiled as the murderer. Thus, Giraldi's film plays down Maraini's message concerning the oppression of women in patriarchal society. Sabrina's murder of Angela, motivated by jealousy over a

---

[44] Dacia Maraini, 'Corpo di bambina', in *Un clandestino a bordo* (Milan, Rizzoli, 2002 [1996]), pp. 47-53 (p. 48).
[45] The father in 'Ha undici anni, si chiama Tano' also excuses his abuse of his daughter by declaring that 'lo voleva lei' and describing her as 'una pervertita' by the age of ten (125).
[46] Dacia Maraini, *Colomba* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004), p. 344.

man, emphasizes a different aspect of society's control of women. Forced to be in continual competition with each other for male attention, it is difficult for women to form strong bonds. Mary Wollstonecraft considers that women 'are all rivals. Before marriage it is their business to please men; and after, with a few exceptions, they follow the same scene with all the persevering pertinacity of instinct'.[48] In Giraldi's film, Sabrina is unable to compete with the prettier woman and therefore eliminates her rival. However, Giraldi does not excuse Elia, emphasizing that 'il vero colpevole è sempre il patrigno, ma che il delitto materialmente non l'ha commesso lui'.[49] It is noteworthy that Giraldi suggests that although Elia did not murder Angela in the film, he might well have done had Sabrina not killed her first. According to the director, Elia's abusive treatment of his stepdaughter renders him just as guilty as if he had actually killed her.

Maraini returns to the idea of a father's split personality in her novel *Colomba*, with the protagonist Zà's stepfather Cignalitt'. At first he appears to be one of Maraini's most positive male characters, 'stimato in paese' and a loving husband and father (130). Marrying Zà's pregnant mother after she has been abandoned, Cignalitt' is seen as the saviour of the family, providing financial support and respectability. It is only after his death that Zà discovers the hidden side to his nature, when her own daughter reveals that he had abused her. The shocking revelation belies everything that Zà had believed whilst growing up: the man, in whom she '[fidava] ciecamente', suddenly falls from his pedestal (178). Zà considers whether it is possible to love and hate someone at the same time and realizes that the positive image that she has of Cignalitt' is so embedded in her memory that 'malgrado tutto non riusciva a vederlo come un nemico' (175).

Through the character of Cignalitt', Maraini examines more closely the sexual abuse of children by father figures. In spite of the early, gracious depiction of Cignalitt's character, Maraini hints at his double personality: his nickname is a diminutive of *cigna*, the Tuscan

---

[47] Joel Covitz, *Emotional Child Abuse: The Family Curse* (Boston: Sigo, 1986), p. 106.
[48] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 2004 [1792]), p. 121.
[49] *Voci*. Dir. Franco Giraldi. Eagle Pictures. 2001. Franco Giraldi explains the film's significant plot change: 'era un libro bello e appassionato, soprattutto per quel che riguardava la violenza contro le donne, ma era molto difficile da trasformare in film per una ragione molto semplice: nella versione cinematografica fin dall'inizio sarebbe stato chiaro che l'assassino era il patrigno della ragazza, Angela. E questo, in un film che inizia con un delitto, sarebbe stato un limite narrativo molto serio. La soluzione che ho adottato è che il vero colpevole è sempre il patrigno, ma che il delitto materialmente non l'ha commesso lui. Il delitto, come succede molte volte nella vita reale, è casuale, frutto di un raptus momentaneo, di un momento di annebbiamento mentale. Un delitto stupido. Il fatto che a commetterlo sia una donna non ha nessun significato "ideologico", è un meccanismo puramente drammaturgico, narrativo.' (In a personal letter [14/04/04]).

for *cinghiale*, and this connection to a boar, which is an attribute of Lust personified, is noteworthy. In art, boars are often traditionally depicted being trodden underfoot by Chastity, one of whose attributes is a dove, significant here because of the title character's name which was chosen by Cignalitt'.[50] Furthermore, Maraini describes Cignalitt' as being 'ignorante come un caprone' (150), which can be read as an allusion to his future sins.[51] These indicators however are only clear with hindsight, and Cignalitt's role as abuser comes as a surprise to both his stepdaughter and the reader.

One of Zà's greatest perplexities is the fact that Cignalitt' did not abuse her as a child, and it is this contradiction that lies at the heart of Maraini's character. Zà comes to the conclusion that his loss of physical superiority owing to old age is what transforms Cignalitt' into an abuser. As an uneducated man Cignalitt' relies heavily on his strength, and so as he grows older he enters into a period of crisis. Born in 1909, Cignalitt' was a child of Fascism, indoctrinated by its teachings on masculinity. Having seemingly lost the physical attributes deemed necessary to be 'masculine', Cignalitt' cannot function as he did previously. Zà considers her stepfather's behaviour shortly before his death:

> E tu perché con Angelica ti sei comportato diversamente che con me? [...] Lo so che da ultimo ti eri messo a bere, ma non tanto da perdere il controllo. So anche perché bevevi: non sopportavi di avere perduto quella forza che ti aveva fatto vincere sempre, da ragazzo e da adulto, come un torello [...] È per questo che te la sei presa con la più piccola, la più debole? (178-179)

Zà ponders whether he was in fact two men in the same body, whether 'l'uno poteva contenere l'altro?' (344). This suggestion that Cignalitt's personality is split into two, with one part of him capable of abuse when his masculinity is threatened, recalls MacInnes's caution about consigning all unsavoury behaviour to the conceptual dustbin of 'masculinity', thereby diminishing personal responsibility and allowing us to split bad aspects of ourselves (such as Cignalitt's abusive side) and project them onto others once they have been labelled 'masculinity'.[52]

In contrast to this enigmatic stepfather, Maraini presents Zà's biological father who returns home to die. Having left before his daughter was born, Pitrucc' i pelus' is only

---

[50] See James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Icon, 1979), p. 49.
[51] This connection to a goat also recalls Maraini's portrayal of Pietro Ucrìa in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* – see Chapter 3.
[52] MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity*, p. 69. I discussed MacInnes's theory in Chapter 1.

reunited with her when she is herself reaching old age. Throughout Zà's adult life she dreamed of meeting her real father, but on his return she is surprised at her lack of emotion. He was 'l'uomo per cui era pronta a lasciare tutto pur di potergli parlare un momento. Ora è qui, stanco, arreso e non le suscita nessuna commozione' (312-313). This lack of an immediate connection suggests that their blood ties are not necessarily sufficient to bond the two strangers together. It is only after some time that Zà begins to care for her father. What is interesting is that in spite of growing up with a loving stepfather, Zà was always aware that someone important was missing from her life. The image that she had of her absent biological father was constructed from false hopes and expectations as to what a real father should represent. Hearn labels this the historical 'paradox of patriarchy', in that fathers can exert power and authority over their children precisely through their absence.[53] In Zà's case, not even Cignalitt's love could erase her longing to be with her absent father.

Ginzburg's inclusion of a father's physical reprimanding of his daughter in *La strada che va in città* (1942) differs from the paternal violence in Maraini's works, in that it can be seen as a disciplinary action taken as a last resort, rather than wholly out of a desire for dominance or power on the part of the father. In a 1973 interview with Dacia Maraini, Ginzburg expands on her view of violence:

> Io per mia natura sono contro ogni forma di violenza. Anche se capisco che in certe occasioni non se ne può fare a meno. Per esempio nell'educazione dei figli. In un certo senso l'educazione è una violenza continuata.[54]

It is unclear whether Ginzburg is referring to physical or psychological violence, or both, in this comment. Her opinion however does suggest that violence is sometimes necessary to discipline children who ignore other methods employed by their parents; she seems to tolerate a certain level of what could be labelled 'educative violence'. Her idea that raising children is a continuous violence also emphasizes the frequent lack of understanding in her work between parent and child: as each struggles to understand the other, frustration can spill over into violence.

Delia's relationship with her father in *La strada che va in città* is a difficult one. Unable to understand or control his daughter, Attilio resorts to using violence in an attempt to assert his authority over her. However, the idea that he is acting more out of a sense of

---

[53] Hearn, 'Men, fathers and the state', p. 255.
[54] Dacia Maraini, *E tu chi eri?* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998 [1973]), p. 147.

frustration and helplessness rather than a genuine desire to hurt is implied by his actions after hitting Delia: 'si mise a sedere tutto pallido, passandosi le mani sulla testa'.[55] Sharpe writes about the expectation of fathers as the main enforcer of discipline in a family, irrespective of whether the man wishes to or is naturally inclined to fill this role; society expects men to exercise control over his family, and this responsibility often makes it difficult to establish a strong bond with children, as it discourages the display of emotions which are often viewed as feminine and weak.[56]

It is significant that when Attilio learns that Delia is pregnant, which confirms his worst fears, he does not take the course of action that everybody expects. Whilst Delia is certain that 'ora viene e mi ammazza', her father actually does nothing (46). He appreciates that he has lost any chance of changing his daughter's destiny and that further violence is useless, preferring instead to distance himself physically and emotionally from her. Sharpe writes that pregnancy is the ultimate fear of fathers such as Attilio, as it is unmistakeable visual evidence of their daughters' sexual activity and loss of innocence. She also claims that men react more strongly to the news of a teenage pregnancy than mothers, with many feeling personally hurt and betrayed.[57] In fact, Attilio's deep sense of disappointment and shame over Delia's condition upsets her more than any of his previous actions, and Ginzburg highlights the irrevocable change in their relationship. At her wedding, Delia is reunited with her father:

> Mi baciò imbarazzato e voltò via la testa. Era molto cambiato in quei mesi e gli era venuta un'aria sempre offesa e triste. [...] non pareva più la stessa persona che m'aveva picchiato per Giulio. Pareva che ogni forza di picchiare, di urlare e di arrabbiarsi l'avesse lasciato. [...] Pareva che si vergognasse di me. (69)

Ultimately, the relationship between father and daughter is hindered by their inability to communicate.

Throughout both Ginzburg and Maraini's fiction, fathers are seen to be ineffective in their parenting skills, encountering similar criticism to the mothers portrayed in their works. While women are seen to be guilty of accepting their inferior position within the family, fathers are guilty of not rebelling against societal demands. Led to believe that they must be the strong head of the household, fathers either over-emphasize the disciplinary

---

[55] Natalia Ginzburg, 'La strada che va in città', in *Cinque romanzi brevi*, pp. 23-81 (p. 35).
[56] Sharpe, *Fathers and Daughters*, p. 168.
[57] ibid., p. 89.

element of their relationship with their children, or withdraw completely from such expectations and become utterly incapable of asserting any control over their family. Paternal remoteness is, according to Secunda, not the same as a father's outright rejection, although the effects on children can often be as damaging. In many of Maraini and Ginzburg's works we see remote fathers who have not consciously rejected their children, but who cannot handle familial pressures and therefore retreat into themselves. Secunda writes that what appears to be paternal indifference is commonly a defence mechanism, whereby the father represses his emotions and is unable or unwilling to express feelings openly towards family members. She sees the key difference here to be the fact that these fathers do not want to *be* alone, they want to be *left* alone.[58] They are therefore not rejecting the family outright, but withdrawing their own participation, which is something we see recurring throughout both authors' fiction.

One example of this latter type in Maraini's fiction is Enrica's father in *L'età del malessere* (1963). His inability to cope in a demanding society leads him to retreat mentally from the outside world and his family. Maraini uses birdcages as a metaphor in this novel to deliver two messages. Throughout the book the father builds elaborate birdcages and, although beautiful objects, they do not bring any financial gain to the family who must rely solely on the mother's wage. These birdcages can be seen as the male version of knitting and embroidery, which are often viewed as menial female tasks, and are a symbol of the father's lack of self-esteem and his desire to create something tangible. He seeks his daughter's approval, asking her repeatedly if she likes his creations.[59] However, his obsession leads him to neglect Enrica, and he barely notices her presence when engrossed in his work. He is unable to express his feelings and cannot show affection towards his daughter: 'Venne vicino per abbracciarmi ma poi cambiò idea e mi salutò con la mano' (119). In her study of fathers and daughters, Secunda examines the various effects of fathers on their offspring. She concludes that fathers who construct such emotional armour are in fact inflicting almost as much damage on their children as if they had physically left the home: 'the distant father tyrannizes his family through an endless, unyielding silence that speaks louder than words – a silence that leaves a gaping hole in his children's lives'.[60] These emotionally distant fathers give nothing to their children in the way of psychological support, leaving them confused and desperate for attention, a

[58] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 129.
[59] Dacia Maraini, *L'età del malessere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1963]), p. 25.
[60] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 142.

situation that we see repeated throughout Maraini and Ginzburg's literature. One of the side effects of such fathering, according to Secunda, is that daughters are unable to reach orgasm easily as they associate love with rejection.[61] Indeed, in Maraini's novel, Enrica fails to reach fulfilment in any of her sexual encounters. She sleeps with a string of unsuitable and unreliable men, exchanging her body for their attention. Enrica's promiscuity can be read as her search for the affection lacking from her father, which would fit with Secunda's analysis that 'fathers have as great an impact, if not greater, on their daughters' romantic choices by their emotional absence as by their presence'.[62] Furthermore, Henry B. Biller writes that an inadequate father is also often an inadequate husband and may therefore indirectly influence his daughter's personality development through his interaction with his wife: he believes that if a man satisfies his wife's needs, then her relationship with her children will improve as a result.[63] Certainly, in the case of *L'età del malessere*, the example set to Enrica by her parents' marriage is less than favourable, and the father is unable to carry out either his role as husband or father: he therefore affects Enrica both directly and indirectly with his behaviour, in line with Biller's theory.

Enrica's father's birdcages are comparable to Aldo's fascination with making puppets in Ginzburg's *Borghesia* (1977). When Aldo separates from his wife he begins constructing puppets as a means of distracting himself from his pain.[64] Like Enrica's father, Aldo retreats into his own world, attempting to create something so as not to feel worthless as a man. It is only when he begins another relationship that Aldo ceases his activities, that is, when his emotional needs have again been met. The puppets are a miniature version of their creator, serving as a masked face behind which Aldo can hide from the world. They are also easy to manipulate, symbolizing Aldo's lack of control over his own life and the fact that his happiness is dependent on the women around him. Aldo's friend Rirì sums up Ginzburg's idea that men are too reliant on women when she compares men to leeches: 'Noi povere donne [...] ci succhiano il sangue' (82). The idea that men are like parasites living off women suggests both men's inability to survive on their own in society and also the draining effect on women of the constant demands placed on them by men and society

---

[61] ibid., pp. 140-141.
[62] ibid., p. 236.
[63] Henry B. Biller, 'The Father and Personality Development: Paternal Deprivation and Sex-Role Development', in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, ed. by Michael E. Lamb (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), pp. 89-156 (p. 131).
[64] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Borghesia', in *Famiglia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995 [1977]), pp. 73-115. See pages 89 and 109 for descriptions of Aldo's puppet making.

in general: as the men in Ginzburg's fictional world get weaker, they increasingly depend and draw on the strength of the women around them.

In *L'età del malessere*, the birdcages also serve as a metaphor for patriarchy's oppression of women and of Enrica in particular - a metaphor that Wollstonecraft likewise uses: 'confined, then, in cages like the feathered race, [women] have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch'.[65] After her mother's death, Enrica dreams that she is trapped inside one of her father's cages, which then converts into her mother's womb. When her father tries to talk to her, 'un'infinità di chiodi' come out of his mouth (62). These nails are potentially harmful to Enrica but also represent simultaneously the father's desire to build and his inability to express himself in words. Through the transformation of the paternal cage into the maternal womb, Enrica is forced to confront her complex feelings for her mother, finally empathizing with her only when the latter is dead. However, the womb is cold, just like a church, and significantly neither her mother nor the church will be there to help Enrica when she faces an unwanted pregnancy. Maraini talks of the impact that a painting by Frida Kahlo had on her, which depicts 'una donna dalla giovane e bella testa chiusa in una specie di gabbia metallica che le stringe la fronte, il naso, la bocca con strisce di metallo, lasciandole scoperti solo gli occhi grandi, neri e dolenti'.[66] The similarities between Kahlo's work and Enrica's confinement in her father's birdcage are clear. Similarly, another well-known Kahlo painting, 'The Broken Column', shows the artist's body perforated by nails, which can be compared to the father's spitting of nails at his daughter in Maraini's novel. Unable to find true happiness or fulfilment through his birdcages, Enrica's father finally turns to alcohol in a bid to numb his suffering and withdraw from society.

In Maraini's *La vacanza* (1962) we see another ineffectual, absent father. Anna and Giovanni's father sees them for two months every summer; the rest of the year the children stay at a boarding school. The children react to this lack of a permanent father figure in different ways. Anna seeks alternatives in other men, whilst her brother finds refuge in a gang of boys who wander aimlessly in search of amusement. These different reactions would support Secunda's theory that 'while boys affirm their masculinity in terms of being accepted by other boys, girls test their femininity not in terms of how acceptable they are to

[65] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 62.
[66] Maraini, 'Corpo felice', in *Un clandestino a bordo*, pp. 91-94 (p. 92).

other girls but in terms of *how males react to them*'.[67] In Maraini's novel, we see Anna test the reactions of various men, including her father, to her blossoming sexuality.

The fact that their mother died when the siblings were young increases the impact on them of their father's behaviour, as they look to him to fulfil both the maternal and paternal role. Yet instead of guiding his children emotionally and psychologically, Aldo Mumuri entrusts them to strangers. He does not have the ability to bond with his children in the way that they desire and need. Green suggests that such fathers often realize that they are deficient but do not know how to change:

> Fatherhood is a job for which there is no training programme. Girls are brought up to look forward to marriage and child-rearing as part of their future achievement. Boys often have it subtly indicated to them that they will be fulfilling expectations if they avoid marriage for as long as possible and take a cautious amount of interest in their children once they arrive. The involved and affectionate father is that rarity, an individual who ignored the general expectations.[68]

Green's comments could absolve some of the blame placed on Mumuri for his lack of paternal attention, citing society's lack of support for fathers' inability to bond with their offspring; her comments could also however be seen as a convenient excuse for men like Mumuri, who can then claim that they did not know any better. During the two months that Mumuri does share with his children, he constantly seeks their approval, an attitude that highlights his own lack of self-esteem and insecurity: he pleads 'vuoi bene al tuo papà, Giovannino?' and later asks Anna to give 'un bacio a papà. Vero che gli vuoi bene?'[69] The repetition of the word 'papà' and the use of the third person show Mumuri's attempts to reconcile himself with a role in which he feels uncomfortable. Covitz writes that inadequate parents require their children to encourage them and increase their ego, coveting the children's approval in order to boost their own low self-esteem.[70] Mumuri definitely falls into this category: he cannot find his niche as a father, alternately trying to befriend and discipline his children, which necessarily fails to earn their respect for him. Nancy Chodorow writes that society expects fathers to provide, above all, financial security for their families, whereas their emotional contribution is seldom seen as of equal

---

[67] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 269. Emphasis in original.
[68] Green, *Goodbye Father*, p. 110.
[69] Dacia Maraini, *La vacanza* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000 [1962]), pp. 7, 70.
[70] Covitz, *Emotional Child Abuse*, p. 45.

importance.[71] Certainly Mumuri's financial support of his children and their education cannot be questioned; however, the lack of emotional support suggests that one cannot succeed without the other: money cannot fill the gaps left by lack of parental affection. Mumuri is practising what Covitz labels 'institutional abandonment', that is he sends his children away to school with the declared intention of providing them with the best education, whilst actually doing so to be free of the encumbrance of child care.[72]

Anna's behaviour throughout *La vacanza* can be traced back to her relationship with her father and the absence of a mother. The title itself is indicative of Anna's lack of guidance: Maraini explains that 'vacanza' is used not to imply a holiday but 'un vuoto'.[73] Far from offering her protection, Anna's father is blind to the exploitation that his daughter suffers from the men around her. Having led a sheltered life, the eleven-year-old Anna is easy prey for these men who immediately recognize her vulnerability and inexperience. Anna is desperate for affection; at her school the nuns console unhappy children with food as a substitute for love (115). Anna's relationship with the much older Gioacchino Scanno epitomizes her quest for a father figure. The age difference is emphasized by Scanno himself, who repeats the words 'come sei giovane' almost as a chant and frequently applies the adjective *fresca* to her (51-55). Like Anna's father, Scanno longs for her approval: 'Dimmi: ti voglio bene. Dimmelo, per favore, anche se non è vero' (53).[74]

Talking about his own youth, it becomes clear that Scanno feels the loss of his physical strength. The importance placed on male physical superiority by society leads to a crisis of identity for Scanno and others like him as old age approaches, a theme that Maraini returns to forty years later in *Colomba*. Both Anna's father and Scanno are slightly ridiculous figures: instead of providing Anna with encouragement, they look to *her* for respect. The idea of Scanno as a surrogate father figure for Anna is emphasized further by his constant questions about whether she is cold, hungry, sleepy, or has need of money (115-118). His enquiries lend him the air of a worrying father, and to some extent he takes the place of Anna's father who is too preoccupied with his new girlfriend Nina to devote time to his daughter.

Anna's observation of this new girlfriend is another catalyst to her own increasing sexual awareness. Without any female role models, Anna has had no preparation for

---

[71] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1978), p. 179.
[72] Covitz, *Emotional Child Abuse*, p. 111.
[73] 'Premessa', in *La vacanza*, pp. IV-VIII (p. VI).
[74] Scanno repeats this request on pages 55 and 113.

womanhood. Lupton and Barclay's assertion that girls who are deprived of a permanent father figure seek inferior men as partners is applicable to Anna (and also to Enrica in *L'età del malessere*). They state that girls need a father to 'validate' their femininity and thereby increase their self-esteem. Without this, the girls do not develop a high level of self-respect.[75] This theory is borne out by Freud's writing on the female Oedipus complex, in which he identifies three stages of a girl's reaction towards her discovery that she is 'castrated'. Firstly, there is a sense of revulsion of sexuality, then an attempt to retain her 'threatened masculinity'. According to Freud, this final stage is crucial to 'reach the final normal female attitude, in which she takes her father as her object and so finds her way to the feminine form of the Oedipus complex'.[76] Therefore, according to such theories, girls without a father, or with one who is in all but physical respects absent, are interrupted before they can complete their development. In fact, we do see Anna in Maraini's novel suffer emotionally and sexually because of her lack of a constant father figure.

Without the possibility of learning more about being a woman from interacting with her father, Anna is forced to look elsewhere for guidance, being influenced greatly by the new example set by Nina's sexuality: 'Nina si stiracchiava indolente, lasciando che le mammelle bianche traboccassero dall'orlo slabbrato della seta rosa' (44). Anna also compares Nina to a cat, thereby emphasizing her languorous sexuality. Sharon Wood points out that the characters of Nina and the obedient, submissive wife Mary are emblematic of the two roles conferred on women by patriarchal society: that of whore and Madonna.[77] At the crossroads of her life, Anna must now choose which path to follow, and it appears that she has opted to imitate Nina. The suggestion in the novel is that a strong father may have been able to guide her more effectively. Biller attributes children's feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem in part to poor fathering, claiming that his research shows that when fathers do not play a sufficient role in their daughters' childhood, the girls are likely to suffer problems in their sexual and emotional development. According to Biller's theory therefore, Anna is finding it difficult to adjust to the transition between child and woman, as she has not had the benefit of witnessing a positive father-mother relationship.[78]

---

[75] Lupton and Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood*, p. 50.
[76] Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', in *On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1905]), pp. 367-392 (p. 376).
[77] Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing* (London: Athlone, 1995), p. 218.
[78] Biller, *Father and Personality Development*, pp. 106, 123-125.

Fathers are presented as weak throughout Maraini and Ginzburg's works, and the authors are concerned to portray the negative effects that these men have on their children. In her short story 'Valentino' (1951), Ginzburg lays much of the blame for Valentino's faults on his father's failure to discipline him. Valentino's father wants his son to find the professional success that has evaded him, and he therefore instils in his son an inflated sense of self-worth. Added to the negative effect on Valentino of this promotion of false hopes is the father's lack of authority. He is described as being 'molto timido' with his son and that 'mai aveva osato rimproverarlo'.[79] Just as Enrica's father's voice was silenced in her dream, Ginzburg describes how this father is deprived of speech: 'mia madre non gli lasciava mai finire i discorsi a mio padre e lui restava con le parole strozzate in gola e s'agitava e soffiava' (163). Without a strong figure to guide and advise him, Valentino encounters many problems in his adult life. He is unable to see anything through to its conclusion, moving from relationship to relationship and never completing his studies.

Valentino's father shares many faults with the father in *Caro Michele* (1973). Ginzburg portrays both men as favouring their sons to the exclusion of their daughters, an attitude that proves detrimental to all the family. Valentino's sister Clara resents the vast amounts of money spent by their father on her brother's education, whilst she must work long hours in a mundane job in order to survive. Clara transfers her resentment of her father's preferential treatment onto Valentino: when she thinks of her brother, her face becomes 'amara e cattiva' (163). According to Freudian Oedipal analysis, this sibling rivalry is a clear example of 'envy for the penis', whereby girls openly show their hostility towards their favoured brothers.[80] However, as Betty Friedan points out, Freudian 'penis envy' is often a cultural rather than biological reaction, as patriarchal society gives women numerous reasons to envy men.[81] This is clear in Ginzburg's story, as Clara is jealous of what Valentino's penis appears symbolically to bestow on him, namely greater attention and love from their father. Both fictional siblings suffer because of their father's unrealistic expectations of his son. Clara is left with a sense of bitterness at being excluded from her father's affections, whilst Valentino can never live up to his father's over-inflated opinion of him, failing professionally and emotionally.[82]

---

[79] Natalia Ginzburg, 'Valentino', in *Cinque romanzi brevi*, pp. 157-193 (p. 165).
[80] Sigmund Freud, 'The Taboo of Virginity', in *On Sexuality*, pp. 261-283 (p. 278).
[81] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1963]), p. 104. Karen Horney and Luce Irigaray have also criticized Freud's theory on penis envy, as have many others. However, it is useful in considering Ginzburg's story, which occurs within a patriarchal setting.
[82] The father's excessive belief in Valentino is comparable to the story of Willy and Biff Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Premiering two years before *Valentino*'s publication, *Death of*

Likewise in *Caro Michele*, the father leaves his children in no doubt that his son is 'la sua stella'.[83] Ginzburg's use of the word *stella* reflects the high hopes that the father harbours for Michele. Green stresses the traditional difference in a father's aspirations for his sons and daughters: 'whilst inspiring their sons to aim for the stars, fathers have reared their daughters just to fit in'.[84] In Ginzburg's novel, Michele's mother explains that the father favours him above his sisters, and after the parents' divorce the father insists that Michele lives with him whilst the daughters stay with their mother. Like Valentino's father, Michele's nurtures great expectations for his son's future. However, it is clear that his image of Michele is unrealistic and can only lead to disappointment, being based on 'un'altra persona che si era inventato e che non [gli] rassomigliava niente' (40). Believing his son to have been 'nato educatissimo' (42), the father neglects to instil in Michele a sense of value and respect for others: he grows up without discipline and is constantly told that he is special. Ginzburg provides an extreme example of Michele's seeming infallibility - when he runs over and kills a nun, the author's ironic voice can be heard telling us that 'era morta, ma non ne aveva colpa Michele. Assolutamente non ne aveva colpa. Aveva da poco imparato a guidare e andava veloce perché la madre l'aveva chiamato sentendosi depressa' (34). The irony of this comment is increased by the suspicion that the inherently selfish Michele, who does not even attend his own father's funeral, is unlikely to have been racing across town to rescue his depressed mother. Secunda outlines the difference between children who are treated well by their parents and those who are constantly and disproportionately praised, as in Michele and Valentino's case. According to Secunda, whereas the former develop a permanent sense of well-being, children whose every need is instantly gratified often feel angry or depressed when this gratification is later withheld or when they do not receive the same degree of attention from others as adults.[85] This might

---

a Salesman charts the downfall of a family owing to the father's subscription to the American Dream. At the play's climax Biff accuses his father of being the reason for his failure to hold down a steady job: 'And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody!' (London: Penguin, 1961, p. 104). This accusation could be applied to the fathers in both *Valentino* and *Caro Michele*. Similarly, Happy, the younger Loman son, suffers as Ginzburg's fictional younger sisters do, because of the importance attributed to the elder siblings. That Michele's inability to find his true path in life arises in part from his father's unrealistic hopes can perhaps be best seen when Michele writes that he does not want to return home with his wife, as all the family would stare at him. His wish to avoid his family's gaze sums up his life: he has spent his entire life fleeing the hopes that his family has pinned on him. Michele knows that his family's judgmental gaze evaluates everything he does.

[83] Natalia Ginzburg, *Caro Michele* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001 [1973]), p. 5.

[84] Green, *Goodbye Father*, p. 72.

[85] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 247.

suggest one reason why neither Michele nor Valentino can settle or reach personal fulfilment.

In both *Caro Michele* and *Valentino*, the only people to whom the sons turn are their sisters. Valentino goes to live with his sister Caterina (the narrator of the story) following the end of his marriage. Likewise, Michele's only close family relationship appears to be with his sister Angelica. It is to her that he entrusts the task of disposing of his rifle and whose telephone number he gives as a contact when he is dying. However, both relationships are one-sided. Michele exploits Angelica's loyalty whilst giving nothing in return, and Valentino ignores the fact that it was his sister's boyfriend with whom he had a homosexual affair: he expects her to comfort him, not appreciating that she is suffering too. Ginzburg tells Marino Sinibaldi that she only realized whilst writing the story that Valentino was homosexual:

> "Io avevo in mente una persona fisica, ma che non era affatto omosessuale. E l'omosessualità l'ho scoperta mentre scrivevo il racconto: io sapevo che c'era qualcosa, qualcosa di nascosto, ma non sapevo cos'era. E proprio mi si è sciolto in mano...Ma era omosessuale!"[86]

There is also a suggestion, arising mainly from Osvaldo's final letter to Angelica, of a homosexual relationship between Michele and Osvaldo in *Caro Michele*, another factor that links Ginzburg's two male protagonists.

Ginzburg's inclusion of homosexual characters is both interesting and problematic. It appears that she includes homosexual male characters to strengthen her message that masculinity is in crisis, with the once domineering male head of household disappearing from the scene. In *È difficile parlare di sé*, Ginzburg comments on the world that she has constructed in *Caro Michele*:

> In questo mondo prevalentemente femminile che è *Caro Michele* [...] c'è un uomo solo, che è Michele, che non si vede mai e che muore. Poi c'è l'altro, che è un omosessuale [...] Il padre muore subito, Osvaldo è un omosessuale: quindi è l'assenza dell'uomo, sì'.[87]

Ginzburg's opinion here suggests that she equates homosexuality more with this *mondo femminile* than with the figure of 'man', in particular the strong men and fathers of whom

---

[86] Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*, p. 119.
[87] ibid., p. 144.

she laments the loss. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, it is also significant that in *Famiglia* Carmine's one male friend is homosexual. Homosexuality is seen as merely another aspect of the disappearance of Ginzburg's 'traditional' men. In both *Caro Michele* and *Valentino*, the title characters' homosexuality can also be read as the sons' attempts to rebel against their domineering fathers' excessive expectations. By opting out of 'masculinity', they can escape the future that their fathers have planned for them, in much the same way as characters who marry against their parents' wishes.

Both Angelica and Caterina act as witnesses and narrators of their brothers' stories. Ginzburg's choice of titles, with the inclusion of the men's names, highlights the central role played by the men in the respective works, which were published twenty-two years apart. However, ultimately the men's sisters prove to be stronger and more dependable. The women's loyalty towards their irresponsible brothers perhaps results from their search for love, which was denied to them by their fathers, or could be seen as an extension of the maternal instinct that has been encouraged in them from childhood. Covitz asserts that in families where the parents are inadequate, children, especially daughters, often assume the role of parent towards their other siblings, filling the gap created in nurturing and responsibility; we see this occur with both Angelica and Caterina.[88]

Ginzburg also deals with sibling love in an early story entitled 'Settembre'. Published in 1935 under her maiden name, 'Settembre' touches upon a theme that is unusual for Ginzburg, namely incestuous love. In spite of the immature style in which the story is written, it shows interesting ideas that would be developed in much more depth in the brother-sister relationships in *Valentino* and *Caro Michele*. The young Anita's love for her brother Filippo borders on incest. When Filippo must leave to study abroad, Ginzburg's description of their farewell leaves us in no doubt of the siblings' feelings:

> Filippo chiama Anita e la prende a braccetto. [...] Egli la tiene stretta a sé, le parla ed essa cerca di ascoltare. [...] "...dimmi tutto, sempre". La sua voce, la sua voce. Come sarà triste l'inverno, la casa senza la voce di Filippo, calma, tenera. E solo le sue mani sanno carezzare così. [...] Filippo si china a baciarla, stringendole la testa fra le mani. La casa, illuminata e rumorosa è lontana. Essi sono soli nel giardino buio. Si baciano. Oh, è terribile che ci sia questo fra loro. Due fratelli. Anita a un tratto ha paura di sé, di lui: di lui che la bacia, come un amante.[89]

---

[88] Covitz, *Emotional Child Abuse*, p. 42.
[89] Natalia Levi, 'Settembre' in *Natalia Ginzburg: La casa, la città, la storia*, ed. by Giovanna Ioli (San Salvatore Monferrato: Barberis, 1996), pp. 55-58 (p. 58).

The language employed and the tender images, such as Filippo cupping his sister's head whilst kissing her, combine to create one of the most provocative stories in Ginzburg's career. The overly close relationship between brother and sister is a forerunner of the later portrayals, which are however dealt with by their author in a more subtle and in-depth manner.

On the other hand, appropriate and inappropriate love between family members is a frequent theme in Maraini's work, and fathers often merge with other male characters, being equated with lovers or sons.[90] Fathers become objects of desire for their daughters and vice versa: they are seen in a sexual light, and the line between filial and incestuous love becomes blurred. This interchangeability between male characters is important in Maraini's work and links in with her relationship with her own father, which she describes as bordering on inappropriate. In *Bagheria* she writes: 'L'ho amato molto questo mio padre, più di quanto sia lecito amare un padre, con uno struggimento doloroso'.[91] This relationship with her father underlines much of Maraini's work, recurring in various guises, especially in her poetry. Fosco Maraini is a mixture of father, lover, and son for his daughter. In an interview, Maraini explains the extent of her father's influence on her as a child:

> Da bambina ho avuto un violentissimo amore per mio padre, proprio un amore appassionato, virulento. Era un padre volante, il mio, una specie di sogno irraggiungibile, desideravo sempre la sua presenza, la sua bellezza [...] Quindi, evidentemente, c'è stato un amore fisico, sensuale, nei riguardi di mio padre e che è durato parecchi anni. E si trova continuamente in quello che scrivo.[92]

Furthermore, Maraini's sister Toni explains how the three sisters witnessed first hand their father's act of *Yubikiri*, whereby he cut off his finger in order to earn the respect of the

---

[90] With regard to the play *Fede o perversione matrimonale* (in *Lezioni d'amore* (Milan: Bompiani, 1982), pp. 129-149) Maraini instructs that the roles of husband, father, and doctor are all played by the same actor. Likewise, in her 1976 film *Mio padre amore mio*, the father and lover are interpreted by the same actor. Maraini also describes Alberto Moravia as her 'compagno, padre, marito e figlio' (*La nave per Kobe: Diari giapponesi di mia madre* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003), p. 19).

[91] Dacia Maraini, *Bagheria*, 6th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998 [1993]), p. 43.

[92] Ileana Montini, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini* (Verona: Bertani, 1977), pp. 104-105.

Japanese concentration camp guards. This strong image stayed with each of them throughout their lives and made their father 'mitico'.[93]

One of the reasons often given by Maraini as to the strength of her filial love is her father's frequent absences from home. As Secunda argues, if a father is absent a daughter will 'invent him', instinctively filling in the blanks of his emotional and physical absence by placing him in the role of hero. In this way she maintains a close bond with the absent man.[94] Maraini's father's absences from home certainly affected her deeply and contributed to her hero-worship of him. She writes that whilst her mother was 'la roccia a cui mi aggrappavo per non cadere dalla montagna, mio padre mi rapiva con le sue assenze e il suo affetto fluttuante'.[95] Her mother/rock was a constant, dependable presence in Maraini's life, and yet it was the absent parent for whom she longed. Sharpe writes that precisely because fathers tend to be more distant, they are the parent whom the daughter strives to please the most, whilst the presence of mothers is taken for granted, and their love is consequently often viewed as unconditional and so not as valuable.[96] Chodorow has a similar theory on father-child relationships. She argues that the intensity and exclusivity of the relationship is much less than with the mother, and because fathers are viewed by their children as separate and special, relationships do not become so internalized and prone to ambivalence and repression, as in the case of relations with the mother.[97] Through their constant availability, mothers are therefore devalued in the eyes of their children. In contrast, whether it is permanent absence like in *Colomba*, or frequent shorter absences as with Maraini's own father, a father's non-presence impacts on his children's emotional development.

Father absence is also a key theme in Ginzburg's *La città e la casa* (1984). The protagonist Giuseppe suffers because he lacked the protection and guidance of a strong father figure, and Lucrezia constantly seeks a replacement father in the men she meets. In an interview, Ginzburg describes Giuseppe's journey to America as a search for 'un altro padre'.[98] She says that the search for fathers and sons is crucial to this novel:

---

[93] Toni Maraini, *Ricordi d'arte e prigionia di Topazia Alliata* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003), pp. 61, 197-198.
[94] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, pp. XIX, XXII.
[95] Maraini, *La nave per Kobe*, p. 70.
[96] Sharpe, *Fathers and Daughters*, pp. 164-165.
[97] Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 96-97.
[98] 'Appendice', in Natalia Ginzburg, *La città e la casa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997 [1984]), pp. 237-244 (p. 240).

> Ma è un'altra storia [...] di ricerca di padri e di ricerca di figli. Sia Alberico che Giuseppe cercano figli. C'è un parallelismo nel destino del padre e del figlio. Dal canto suo, anche Lucrezia cerca padri, protettori, e non trova nessuno. I padri non ci sono più [...] Credo sia una storia di ricerca di padri.[99]

Considering Ginzburg's belief that 'i padri non ci sono più', it is hardly surprising that Giuseppe fails to find the sense of security that he desires. As her own father died when she was a baby, Lucrezia has also developed a longing for security and paternal protection which repeatedly goes unfulfilled as it is based on unrealistic ideals. Giuseppe tells her: 'tutta la tua vita hai cercato un padre, in tua madre, in tuo marito, e in me' (36). This suggestion that Lucrezia viewed her mother as also filling a paternal role is supported by details of their relationship. Similar to one of Ginzburg's patriarchal fathers, Lucrezia's mother dictates every aspect of her daughter's married life, seemingly at the latter's request: 'mia madre mi comandava e io le ubbidivo. Le telefonavo dieci volte al giorno e le chiedevo come mi dovevo vestire e cosa dovevo cucinare' (24). The traditionally masculine terms that Lucrezia uses also emphasize the mother's role as surrogate father: she is said to be 'forte, robusta, energica', with a 'passo militare' and 'una voce grossa, profonda, rauca' (24). Lupton and Barclay highlight the traditional belief that each parent contributes different aspects to their child's development, which complement rather than emulate those provided by the other. According to this reasoning, the absence of a father leaves a gap in a child's education that cannot necessarily be filled easily by a mother's efforts.[100] In Lucrezia's case, her mother tries to play both roles but ultimately fails to satisfy her daughter's wishes for a father figure. Lucrezia admits that she always falls in love with her doctors and her relationships with Giuseppe, her husband Piero, and Ignazio Fegiz can all be viewed as attempts to find a surrogate father figure. It is noteworthy that Lucrezia's experience belies Ginzburg's later opinion that a single parent can fulfil both roles for a child: 'una donna sola può essere, per un bambino, padre e madre insieme. Così un uomo'.[101] In this quotation, Ginzburg is referring specifically to single people adopting children. Perhaps surprisingly, given her commitment to the traditional family structure, Ginzburg can see no reason why single men and women should not enjoy the same adoption rights as couples.

---

[99] ibid., pp. 240-241. Likewise, in the play *Ti ho sposato per allegria*, Giuliana admits that she has been searching for a father figure in her partners.
[100] Lupton and Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood*, p. 45.
[101] Ginzburg, *Serena Cruz*, p. 71.

In this novel, Ginzburg portrays Lucrezia's attachment to her mother as unhealthy. Moving from man to man, Lucrezia can never find complete emotional fulfilment because what she seeks is unattainable. The main outcome of losing her father at so young an age is an underlying sense of insecurity that determines all her actions and every relationship that she enters into. Lucrezia openly talks about her need for 'protettori' (36), and it is clear that she has never fully developed into an independent adult. Ginzburg shows that each of the main characters has failed to mature emotionally, remaining instead what Giuseppe calls 'una nidiata di bambini' (37). On the whole, *La città e la casa* is a damning report on the disintegration of the family in post-war Italian society.

Ginzburg uses Lucrezia's home *Le margherite* as a metaphor for the changing state of the family. Although Lucrezia is at times unhappy in this house, it is a meeting place and focal point for friends and family, enabling them to maintain strong bonds and interact with each other. *Le margherite*, whose name itself is noteworthy as daisies represent both innocence and loyal love, resembles a womb where it is possible to find security and peace. However, the demise of Lucrezia and Piero's marriage sees the sale of *Le margherite* and with it the end of this shared sense of affinity; significantly, the house is turned into a hotel and will no longer serve as a family home. Characters who previously came together to talk in the house now communicate chiefly by letter. Ginzburg chooses the structure of an epistolary novel to emphasize the idea of family disintegration and emotional distance: each character uses their letters as a means of confession and catharsis for their anxieties. Face to face conversation is replaced with detached, self-obsessed letters.[102]

Lucrezia and Giuseppe's lack of strong father figures will in turn affect their own children. Covitz studies the effect of insecure parents on their offspring, coming to the conclusion that 'breaking free completely from one's family curse is almost impossible'; he continues by saying that when parents are so in need of reassurance themselves, because their early narcissistic needs were unmet, they are subsequently unable to meet their own children's needs.[103] This is the case with Giuseppe, whom Ginzburg portrays as incapable of being a good father: he refuses to acknowledge an illegitimate son, and repeatedly fails his other son, Alberico. Giuseppe's failure as a father takes us back to Green's claim that there is no training programme for fathers. As with numerous other characters in Ginzburg

---

[102] Parts of my analysis of *Caro Michele* and *La città e la casa* have been published in Christina Siggers Manson, 'Family Disintegration and Emigration in Natalia Ginzburg's Epistolary Novels *La Città e la Casa* and *Caro Michele*', in *Politics and Culture in Post-War Italy*, ed. by Linda Risso and Monica Boria (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 34-48.

[103] Covitz, *Emotional Child Abuse*, pp. 3, 6.

and Maraini's literature, Giuseppe has been ill equipped by society and cannot subsequently fulfil his role as father; in fact Green suggests that 'many men seem unaware that there is a role attached to the name "father"'.[104] Certainly, this appears true in Giuseppe's case as he repeatedly refuses to accept responsibility for his children. He does however develop a close relationship with his stepson-in-law in America, and it is ironic that both Giuseppe and his son Alberico search for substitute fathers and sons rather than develop their natural relationship.

Alberico attempts to break the vicious circle of paternal absence by adopting his friend Nadia's baby and is generally viewed by Ginzburg in a more positive light: 'Alberico è un personaggio certamente migliore, più generoso, più disponibile di Giuseppe'.[105] In line with Secunda's theory, which claims that many men who have suffered damaging relationships with their own fathers prefer having a daughter, it could perhaps be argued that is easier for him to bond with the child, as it is a baby girl rather than a boy.[106] In this respect, Alberico can try to avoid replicating the disastrous father-son relationship that he has personally experienced (although his death cuts short his attempt at fatherhood). Lupton and Barclay claim that men who decide to take an active role in fatherhood often do so out of a desire for closeness with their own fathers: they want their children to love them as they were prevented from loving their fathers.[107] Writing to his father, Alberico is very clear about his motives for taking on this responsibility:

> Voglio esserle padre, non soltanto di nome ma di fatto. Voglio darle quello che io non ho avuto, una *protezione* paterna. Tu non sei stato mai molto presente nella mia vita. Come padre, sei stato deficitario. (94, My emphasis)

The implication here that Giuseppe was merely a father 'di nome' is crucial to Ginzburg's representation of her flawed character. His inability to provide his son with 'protezione paterna' lies at the heart of what Ginzburg sees as the crisis of the Italian family, namely the disappearance of strong, authoritarian fathers like her own. Without these fathers, her characters can only repeat their longing for protection in vain. Alberico's adoption of the baby is also an example of the shift from 'biological' fatherhood towards 'social'

---

[104] Green, *Goodbye Father*, p. 105.
[105] Ginzburg, 'Appendice', in *La città e la casa*, p. 239.
[106] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 85.
[107] Lupton and Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood*, p. 144.

fatherhood, with the increase in adoption and step-parenting.[108] His actions gain Ginzburg's implicit approval, when she states clearly that blood ties are not vital in parent-child relationships:

> Però è in verità così diverso essere un vero padre di sangue, o non esserlo? Quando un uomo assume, con se stesso e davanti agli altri, l'impegno severo di fare da padre a un bambino, è così diverso se esistono o non esistono fra lui e quel bambino dei legami di sangue?[109]

Throughout Ginzburg and Maraini's work, sons and daughters search for their fathers' approval and blessing, which they often fail to achieve because of the fathers' emotional unavailability. A father's love is seen as conditional and is often withheld. We also see clearly the influence of both Ginzburg and Maraini's own fathers on their work: the presence of Giuseppe Levi and Fosco Maraini looms large in their daughters' creative output, underlying the depiction of several of their literary father figures.[110] In spite of this, it is hard to find one single, truly positive example of a selfless, loving father in the whole of the two authors' works. Each father, whether intentionally or not, harms the development of his children in some way. The exception perhaps is Cenzo Rena in *Tutti i nostri ieri*, who could have potentially become a good father. Lorrie Goldensohn goes as far as saying that in Cenzo Rena Ginzburg 'proposes the fathering that seems best to represent her vision of what people need'.[111] Rena embodies a combination of authority, understanding, and affection as a husband and as a father, which is lacking in the other fictional men.

---

[108] See Hearn, 'Men, fathers and the State', p. 255.

[109] Ginzburg, *Serena Cruz*, p. 30. In this book, Ginzburg lays out a controversial defence of a family who illegally obtained a child from the Philippines by claiming that she was the husband's biological daughter. When Italian authorities discovered the truth, they removed the young girl from the family with whom she had lived for many years, placing her in the care of strangers. Ginzburg argues that although the father had committed the crime of deception, the greater crime was depriving Serena of the only family that she had ever known. Ginzburg believed that the authorities had effectively punished the girl for the parents' well-intentioned mistakes. The case of Serena Cruz split Italian public opinion.

[110] Elena Clementelli and Teresa Picarazzi also note that Ginzburg's own mother and father recur throughout her literature – see Elena Clementelli, *Invito alla lettura di Natalia Ginzburg* (Milan: Mursia, 1972), p. 120, and Teresa Picarazzi, *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 28.

[111] Lorrie Goldensohn, 'Natalia Ginzburg: The Days and Houses of her Art', *Salmagundi*, 96 (1992), 96-129 (p. 106). Goldensohn also raises the point that Cenzo Rena serves as a surrogate father to his wife Anna, an idea borne out by the age difference between the couple and Rena's rescue of Anna from an impending scandal owing to her pregnancy.

As we have seen, however, there are several dissimilarities in the two authors' assessments of fathers. Maraini largely takes the view that fathers are the perpetrators of social and domestic violence, exploiting their privileged position as the dominant gender in patriarchal society to abuse their children physically and sexually. It is this tendency towards violence, and indeed the threat of potential violence, that is one of the sources of men's power.[112] This is an idea that Maraini expands on throughout her literary career. The fathers portrayed in her earlier works are, on the whole, inept and weak (and in this way more closely resemble those in Ginzburg's works), whilst the later fictional fathers turn to abuse to cover their lack of self-esteem. Particularly in works such as *Colomba* and *Voci*, Maraini investigates more deeply the reasons behind paternal abuse, concluding that it is seldom motivated by sexual desires but by a need to control. On the other hand, Ginzburg places great importance on fathers being strong and commanding. Whilst Maraini condemns fathers' authoritarian treatment of their children, Ginzburg bemoans the fact that fathers can no longer effectively control or protect their offspring. The theme of paternal protection runs like a thread through Ginzburg's work.

Forced to change by societal demands and women's greater freedom and rights in Italy over the last few decades, fathers have been left unsure of their function within the family home. Lupton and Barclay give their opinion that modern society wants fathers to resemble mothers more closely, that is, assume more 'feminine' qualities and become less aggressive, developing their capacity for caring and empathizing.[113] Whereas they write that women are often believed to possess a natural instinct for motherhood, Lupton and Barclay point out that little is regarded as 'instinctive' about fatherhood, and that on the whole, patriarchal society does not consider men to have an innate understanding of the emotional needs of a child, which is however deemed an essential prerequisite for a 'modern' father.[114] As the men in Ginzburg and Maraini's literature have not been taught how to develop this new style of parenting, the once autocratic fathers are condemned to flounder in their new role: no longer are they the head of the household but have suddenly become, at least by law, equal partners with their wives.

Ginzburg and Maraini's literature presents two main reactions to the increased pressure on fathers: absence and abuse. Absent fathers either physically remove themselves from an uncomfortable situation or retreat mentally, showing their children little of their true self,

---

[112] See Hearn, 'Men, fathers, and the State', p. 249.
[113] Lupton and Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood*, p. 44.
[114] ibid., p. 147.

whereas abusive fathers choose to remain at home but attempt to change or control their children. Both reactions stem from the men's own lack of self-esteem and inability to cope in a demanding society. It is only recently that the impact a father has on his children has been examined in depth. For years, psychology discounted a father's role as unimportant and secondary to the mother's. Now however, partly owing to the feminist movement, the significant influence of paternal actions has been recognized.[115] Ginzburg and Maraini attest to this in their literature, showing that along with mothers, fathers are responsible for shaping their children's personalities and future behaviour. Whether absent or present, fathers greatly influence their offspring who are then likely to carry over any fears and shortcomings into their own experience of parenthood. The challenge to fatherhood is one of adaptation, otherwise men will continue to perpetuate the cycle of deficient fathers, for 'how do you get a man to become the father he probably never had?'.[116]

[115] See Ross D. Parke, *Fathering* ([London]: Fontana, 1981), p. 14.
[116] Secunda, *Women and their Fathers*, p. 429.

Conclusion

As I have shown over the course of this study, Dacia Maraini and Natalia Ginzburg's different priorities regarding their literature resulted in very different writing styles and saw them emphasize different aspects of post-war Italian society. Whilst Ginzburg wished to document changing familial values and the disappearance of the traditional family structure in Italy, Maraini's aim was to highlight and condemn patriarchal society's oppression of women in particular. This difference in aims meant that Ginzburg's opinions on controversial issues such as legalized abortion and sexual violence were largely confined to her essays, interviews, and public statements as a Member of Parliament; whereas, Maraini's desire to condemn patriarchal violence against women saw her use her fiction as a platform for her views.

During their literary careers, Maraini and Ginzburg evolved to different extents as writers: Maraini's early style differs greatly from that of her later works, with their more complex imagery and syntax, whereas Ginzburg's style, characterized by laconic sentences and irony, remains more constant throughout her body of work and she makes less of a stylistic journey. Whilst Ginzburg did experiment with her style in her early work (for example, attempting to write in a male voice), once she had settled upon a way of expressing herself that she felt best suited her, she remained true to it. The most significant change in her style occurred after the success of the autobiographical *Lessico famigliare*, when she no longer felt able to write novels in the first person without risking over-identification with her actual person. Ginzburg therefore turned to plays and the epistolary structure. These gave her the freedom to adopt several first person narrators, thus avoiding excessive reader association with herself.

Maraini on the other hand experimented throughout her career with both theme and language. On the whole, Maraini's early works tend to overlook the male perspective in a relationship, giving emphasis to the female voice; her later works investigate the male mind more in depth, exploring motivating factors behind their behaviour and presenting causes rather than just actions. Maraini also experimented with language to an extent that Ginzburg did not – key examples being the absence of punctuation in *Il treno per Helsinki* and the frequent repetition of entire sections in *A memoria*. Furthermore, Maraini also used poetry as a means of exploring and developing her style, which was something that Ginzburg avoided owing to her desire for her message to be understood easily. Ginzburg

therefore turned away from the allegorical language of poetry and preferred to write with a clarity of expression that left no doubt as to her meaning.

The authors' portrayal of their characters fulfilling familial roles also differs owing to their diverse priorities regarding the messages they wish to convey. Whereas Maraini's fictional husbands are often tyrannical and abusive, Ginzburg's men are characterized by weakness and ineptitude. Maraini's men dominate their wives, whereas Ginzburg's men exemplify her anxiety that the strong head of the family has disappeared from the Italian scene. However, almost all of their husbands are portrayed as oppressing their wives to some extent, whether consciously or unconsciously. Conflict is created in these fictional marriages by the male characters' inability to live up to societal expectations and adapt to the greater legal and personal rights that women have gradually gained in post-war Italian society. Nevertheless, the authors' depiction of wives suggests that they are often equally to blame for their own unhappiness and oppression, passively accepting their inferior role in marriage. They show that tension arises from the characters' failure to reconcile their previous expectations with the reality of married life, as the women are taught to desire marriage from infancy and enter into it with false ideals. Dissatisfaction occurs when these preconceptions are shattered. These fictional wives then use various methods to try to escape unhappy marriages, including murder, suicide, hysteria, silence, and adultery – all of which ultimately fail to solve their problems. The only reactions that are portrayed as positive are work and education; through choosing these particular paths, the characters can hope to achieve some level of personal fulfilment.

Both Ginzburg and Maraini were strong supporters of increased rights and liberty for women. In their literature, however, we see characters often fail to gain liberation as they simply adopt male values and behaviour, thereby achieving merely the semblance of emancipation rather than developing their own sense of self. The characters' attempts to break the chain of patriarchal legacies are not always successful: methods such as adultery and promiscuity, which at first appear to bestow greater independence on the women, are actually seen to compound their oppression. Young female characters in both authors' works are pressured into sexual relationships, as opposed to choosing their own paths consciously, and the women are still ultimately dependent on men.

Maternity is seen as another way of controlling women in both Ginzburg and Maraini's literature, with the authors agreeing that it demands sacrifice and compromise on the woman's part. Ginzburg noticed a transformation in her own character on becoming a mother, believing that her personality differed depending on whether she was in her role as

woman or mother; in turn, we see several of her literary characters change with motherhood. Ginzburg likewise found it hard to return to her writing after becoming a mother. Maraini similarly links the enforced renunciation of artistic pursuits with motherhood. As well as having seen her own mother and grandmother abandon their creative outlets, in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* Maraini explores in depth the idea that motherhood negates female sensuality in patriarchal society. Through her work, Maraini comes to the conclusion that the idolization of children and the importance placed on maternal sacrifice (especially prevalent in Catholic and Fascist cultures) are methods employed by society to keep the institution of the family under control.

Both authors admitted to troubled relationships with their own mothers and the fact that they only appreciated them later in life. However, their approaches to portraying motherhood vary, in that Ginzburg does not concentrate specifically on the gender of the children, preferring instead to consider parent-child relationships in general and the universal effect of children on women. Conversely, Maraini often focuses specifically on mother-son and mother-daughter interaction. She includes examples of almost incestuous mother-son relationships in her work, which are oppressive and all-consuming for both parent and child. Her fictional mother-daughter relationships (particularly those in her children's fiction) often see the mother neglecting her daughter and, whilst being oppressed herself, the mother in turn oppresses her daughter, continuing the vicious circle encouraged by patriarchy. Mothers in Ginzburg and Maraini's works range from overprotective and obsessive to neglectful and cruel; whilst some characters resist relinquishing their role as mother to an unhealthy extent, others appear barely to attribute any significance to the role at all.

Yet, it is in their attitudes towards the role of fathers that we see the area of greatest conflict in their views. Both agree that the figure of 'father' in post-war Italian society is in crisis and undergoing significant change, however they disagree on the future of the father. Whereas Maraini depicts fathers as a source of oppression, Ginzburg sees them as playing a vital part in educating and guiding children. For this reason, Maraini is more inclined to view the institution of the family as detrimental to women and children, whilst Ginzburg considers it to be an essential support network, even if it is flawed. For Ginzburg, the father acts as protector, and a strong father is the answer to numerous social problems; for Maraini, fathers destroy a family from within, controlling and threatening other members. In line with these different standpoints, paternal violence in Ginzburg's fiction appears to be of a more disciplinary nature, being a more everyday, subtle coercion, whereas in

Maraini's work, it is more destructive with fathers using violence to oppress and terrorize their families. In Ginzburg and Maraini's fiction, the greater responsibility placed on men and societal pressure to adapt to expectations of their new role means that they suffer from a latent insecurity and lack of belief in their parental ability, which result in either absence (which can be either physical or emotional absence) or abuse (which takes the form of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse). The tension created between how men want to act and how they feel they must act causes many of the fathers' problems in Maraini and Ginzburg's work. Furthermore, several characters view fatherhood as a burden, whilst others display a significant lack of any sense of responsibility, purging their guilt at abandoning their offspring by bestowing money on the child's mother.

The feminist movement affected both men and women in Italy and also strongly influenced Maraini and Ginzburg. In some respects, whilst Maraini's work supports developments in the feminist movement, Ginzburg reacts against them. Ginzburg saw the crisis of men in Italian society as a result of women's increased liberty, although she was a strong supporter of women's greater rights and juridical equality. Ginzburg objected to the exclusion of men from feminist rhetoric and was careful to avoid solely depicting women's problems in her literature, focusing instead on the oppression of both men and women in patriarchal society. Her support for the feminist movement's aims was based on her belief in the need for justice, namely that rich and poor women should have equal access to contraception and abortion, rather than a belief in women's fundamental right to control their bodies. Maraini, on the other hand, did support this fundamental right and repeatedly used her literature as a mouthpiece for her views on men's domination of women and what she saw as the institutionalised violence inherent in Italian culture.

As shown by my analysis of her use of the metaphors of the city and country in her work, Ginzburg is more wary of change as she links it firmly with the disintegration of the traditional Italian family structure and the loss of the strong father figure. In contrast, Maraini is a strong advocator of change, believing that without significant change women will not be able to achieve independence and greater legal and personal rights. These conflicting opinions manifest themselves in the authors' works through the development of several of their characters. Overall, it could be argued that Ginzburg concentrates more on generational change than individual change, and her characters make less of a personal journey than Maraini's, who tend to evolve in a more positive manner and are often presented as being reborn by their author. Despite these differences, Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini share fundamental beliefs regarding women's role and rights in society.

Bibliography

Natalia Ginzburg

Caro Michele (Turin: Einaudi, 2001 [1973])

Cinque romanzi brevi, 7th edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1993 [1964])

È difficile parlare di sè (Turin: Einaudi, 1999)

È stato così (Turin: Einaudi, 1974 [1947])

Famiglia, 7th edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1995 [1977])

Il racconto di Peuw bambina cambogiana: tradotto e presentato da Natalia Ginzburg (Turin: Einaudi, 1986)

La città e la casa, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1997 [1984])

La famiglia Manzoni, 5th edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1994 [1983])

La strada che va in città (Turin: Einaudi, 1975 [1942])

Le piccole virtù, 4th edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1964 [1962])

Lessico famigliare, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1999 [1963])

Le voci della sera (Turin: Einaudi, 1961)

Mai devi domandarmi, 2nd edn (Turin, Einaudi, 2002 [1970])

Non possiamo saperlo (Turin: Einaudi, 2001)

Opere: Volume primo (Milan: Mondadori, 1986)

Sagittario (Turin: Einaudi, 1975 [1957])

Serena Cruz o la vera giustizia (Turin: Einaudi, 1990)

Teatro (Turin: Einaudi, 1990)

Ti ho sposato per allegria e altre commedie, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1968)

Tutti i nostri ieri, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1952])

Valentino (Turin: Einaudi, 1968 [1951])

Vita immaginaria (Milan: Mondadori, 1974)

Essays

'Il discorso sulle donne', in Cutrufelli, Maria Rosa, Rosaria Guacci, and Marisa Rusconi, eds, *Il pozzo segreto: Cinquanta scrittrici italiane* (Florence: Giunti, 1993), pp. 27-32

Dacia Maraini

Amata scrittura (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000)

A memoria (Milan: Bompiani, 1967)

Bagheria, 6th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998 [1993])

Berah di Kibawa: Un racconto con dodici finali (Rome: Gremese Editore, 2003)

Buio, 11th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999)

Cercando Emma (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1993])

Colomba (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004)

Crudeltà all'aria aperta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968)

Delitto (Lungro di Cosenza: Marco, 1990)

Dialogo di una prostituta con un suo cliente (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001)

Dizionarietto Quotidiano (Milan: Bompiani, 1997)

Dolce per sè, 15th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1997])

Don Juan (Turin: Einaudi, 1976)

Donna in guerra, 4th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1975])

Donne mie (Turin: Einaudi, 1974)

E tu chi eri? (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998 [1973])

Il bambino Alberto (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1986])

Il ricatto a teatro (Turin: Einaudi, 1970)

Il Sommacco: Piccolo inventario dei teatri palermitani trovati e persi (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1993)

Il treno per Helsinki, 3rd edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1984])

Isolina, 11th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1985])

La bionda, la bruna e l'asino (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987)

La casa tra due palme (Salerno: Sottotraccia, 1995)

La donna perfetta / Il cuore di una vergine (Turin: Einaudi, 1975)

La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa, 27th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1990])

La pecora Dolly (Milan: Fabbri, 2001)

La vacanza (Turin: Einaudi, 2000 [1962])

L'età del malessere, 7th edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1996 [1963])

Lettere a Marina (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1981])

Lezioni d'amore (Milan: Bompiani, 1982)

L'uomo tatuato (Naples: Guida, 1990)

Mangiami pure (Turin: Einaudi, 1978)

Maria Stuarda (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001)

Memorie di una cameriera (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001)

Memorie di una ladra, 12th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1973])

Mio Marito, 2nd edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000 [1968])

Piera e gli assassini (Milan: Rizzoli, 2003)

Se amando troppo (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998)

Storie di cani per una bambina (Milan: Fabbri, 2000 [1996])

Un clandestino a bordo, 7th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002 [1996])

Veronica, meretrice e scrittora (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001)

Viaggiando con passo di volpe (Milan: Rizzoli, 1991)

Viva l'Italia (Turin: Einaudi, 1973)

Voci, 4th edn (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001 [1994])

Maraini, Dacia, and Salvatore Samperi, *Cuore di mamma* (Milan: Forum, 1969)

Maraini, Dacia, Anna Salvo, and Silvia Vegetti Finzi, *Madri e figlie: Ieri e oggi*, ed. by Maddalena Tulanti (Rome: Laterza, 2003)

Maraini, Dacia, and Piera Degli Esposti, *Storia di Piera* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997)

Secondary Sources

Aleramo, Sibilla, *Una donna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996 [1906])

Amoia, Alba della Fazia, *Women on the Italian Literary Scene: A Panorama* (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1992)

——, *20th Century Italian Women Writers: The Feminine Experience* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1996)

——, *No Mothers We! Italian Women Writers and Their Revolt Against Maternity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000)

Aricò, Santo L., ed., *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990)

Bachelard, Gaston, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 1988 [1943])

Balletta, Felice, and Angela Barwig, eds, *Italienische Erzählliteratur der Achtziger und Neunziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002)

Baranski, Zygmunt G., and Shirley W. Vinall, eds, *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History* (London: Macmillan, 1991)

Barzini, Luigi, *The Italians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1965])

Benjamin, Jessica, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1990)

——, *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)

Berger, Maurice, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds, *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

Beynon, John, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002)

Bono, Paola, and Sandra Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

Borelli, Clara, *Notizie di Natalia Ginzburg* (Naples: L'Orientale Editrice, 2002)

Borri, Giancarlo, *Natalia Ginzburg* (Rimini: Luisè, 1999)

Brownmiller, Susan, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1975])

Bullock, Alan, *Natalia Ginzburg: Human Relationships in a Changing World* (Oxford: Berg, 1991)

Caldwell, Lesley, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan, 1991)

Cattaruzza, Claudio, ed., *Dedica a Dacia Maraini* (Trieste: Lint, 2000)

Centre Aixois de Recherches Italiennes, *Les femmes écrivains en Italie aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1993)

Chodorow, Nancy, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978)

Cicioni, Mirna, and Nicole Prunster, eds, *Visions and Revisions: Women in Italian Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 1993)

Clark, Martin, *Modern Italy: 1871-1995*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1997 [1996])

Clementelli, Elena, *Invito alla lettura di Natalia Ginzburg*, 8th edn (Milan: Mursia, 1999 [1972])

Covitz, Joel, *Emotional Child Abuse: The Family Curse* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1986)

Crocenzi, Lilia, *Narratrici d'oggi* (Cremona: Mangiarotti, [1966])

Cruciata, Maria Antonietta, *Dacia Maraini* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2003)

Cutrufelli, Maria Rosa, ed., *Nella città proibita* (Milan: Saggiatore, 2003 [1997])

De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex,* ed. by H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1949])

De Felice, Renzo, and Luigi Goglia, *Mussolini: Il mito* (Rome: Laterza, 1983)

De Giovanni, Neria, *Carta di donna: Narratrici italiane del '900* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1996)

De Nicola, Francesco, and Pier Antonio Zannoni, eds, *Scrittrici d'Italia* (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1995)

——, eds, *Scrittrici, giornalista: Da Matilde Serao a Susanna Tamaro* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001)

Diaconescu-Blumenfeld, Rodica, and Ada Testaferri, eds, *The Pleasure of Writing: Critical Essays on Dacia Maraini* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2000)

Dworkin, Andrea, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981)

Falzone, Michele, *La mia Sicilia: interviste a Dacia Maraini* (Rome: Il ventaglio, 1995)

Felman, Shoshana, *What does a woman want?: Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993)

Filangeri, Carlotta, *Femmine di Sicilia: Società e cultura nella storia della Sicilia* (Siracusa: Ediprint, 1995)

Freud, Sigmund, *Case Histories I: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans'* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977 [1905, 1909])

——, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968 [1922])

——, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Norton, 1989 [1933])

——, *On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1905])

Friday, Nancy, *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity* (London: HarperCollins, 1994)

Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1963])

Gaglianone, Paola, ed., *Conversazione con Dacia Maraini: Il piacere di scrivere* (Rome: Omicron, 1995)

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000 [1979])

Ginsborg, Paul, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990)

Gower Chapman, Charlotte, *Milocca: A Sicilian Village* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973)

Green, Maureen, *Goodbye Father* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976)

Greer, Germaine, *The Boy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003)

——, *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (London: Penguin, 1992)

——, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971)

Grignani, Maria Antonietta, and others, *Natalia Ginzburg: La narratrice e i suoi testi* (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1986)

Hall, James, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Icon, 1979)

Hearn, Jeff, and David Morgan, eds, *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990)

Heinzius, Barbara, *Feminismus oder Pornographie?: Zur Darstellung von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Dacia Marainis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1995)

Hobson, Barbara, ed., *Making Men into Fathers: Men, Masculinities and the Social Politics of Fatherhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Höhenwarter, Sabine, *Die Dinge in mir: Leben und Werk der Natalia Ginzburg* (Vienna: Wiener Frauenverlag, 1992)

Homer, *The Odyssey* (London: Penguin, 1987)

Humm, Maggie, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994)

——, ed., *Feminisms: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992)

Iannace, Florinda M., *Maria Vergine nella letteratura italiana* (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum Publishing, 2000)

Ibsen, Henrik, *A Doll's House* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996 [1879])

Ioli, Giovanna, ed., *Natalia Ginzburg: La casa, la città, la storia* (San Salvatore Monferrato: Barberis, 1996)

Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (London: Continuum, 2004 [1984])

——, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 [1999])

——, *Elemental Passions* (London: Athlone, 1992 [1982])

——, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History* (London: Routledge, 1996 [1992])

——, *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004)

——, *Prières Quotidiennes / Everyday Prayers* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose; Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2004)

——, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989 [1974])

——, *The Way of Love* (London: Continuum, 2002)

——, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution* (London: Athlone Press, 1994 [1989])

——, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988 [1977])

Jeannet, Angela M., and Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, *Natalia Ginzburg: A Voice of the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000)

Jesurum, Stefano, *Essere ebrei in Italia* (Milan: Longanesi, 1987)

Jung, C. G., *Aspects of the Feminine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982)

Kemp, Sandra, and Paola Bono, eds, *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1993)

Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires, eds, *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Knapp, Bettina L., *Women in Twentieth-Century Literature: A Jungian View* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987)

Lamb, Michael E., ed., *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976)

Lazzaro-Weis, Carol, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993)

Leader, Darian, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)

Lederer, Laura, ed., *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (New York: William Morrow, 1980)

Lefkowitz, Mary R., *Women in Greek Myth* (London: Duckworth, 1986)

Lupton, Deborah, and Lesley Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood: Discourses and Experiences* (London: Sage, 1997)

Lyttelton, Adrian, ed., *Liberal and Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

MacInnes, John, *The End of Masculinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998)

MacKinnon, Catharine A., *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991 [1989])

Maclean, Marie, *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Maraini, Toni, *Ricordi d'arte e prigionia di Topazia Alliata* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003)

Marchionne Picchione, Luciana, *Natalia Ginzburg* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1978)

Marotti, Maria Ornella, ed., *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996)

McKinley, Donald Gilbert, *Social Class and Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1964)

Merry, Bruce, *Dacia Maraini and the Written Dream of Women in Modern Italian Literature* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1997)

——, *Women in Modern Italian Literature: Four Studies Based on the Work of Grazia Deledda, Alba De Céspedes, Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1990)

Mingrone, Gianna, *Nostra moglie 'l marito mio: ovvero dialoghi con le donne umbre: Presentazione di Dacia Maraini* (Perugia: Umbria Editrice, 1979)

Mirbeau, Octave, *Le journal d'une femme de chambre* ([S.I.]: Fasquelle, 1937 [1900])

Montini, Ileana, *Parlare con Dacia Maraini* (Verona: Giorgio Bertani, 1977)

Morgan, David H. J., *Discovering Men* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Pacifici, Sergio, *A Guide to Contemporary Literature: From Futurism to Neorealism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972)

Panizza, Letizia, and Sharon Wood, eds, *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Parke, Ross D., *Fathering* ([London]: Fontana, 1981)

Passerini, Luisa, *Mussolini immaginario*, 2nd edn (Rome: Laterza, 1991)

Passione, Lina, *Sulle orme di Marianna Ucrìa* (Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 1997)

Petrignani, Sandra, *Le signore della scrittura* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1984)

Pflug, Maja, *Natalia Ginzburg: Una biografia* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 2004 [1995])

Picarazzi, Teresa, *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters* (London: Associated University Press, 2002)

Picchietti, Virginia, *Relational Spaces: Daughterhood, Motherhood, and Sisterhood in Dacia Maraini's Writings and Films* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002)

Pines, Dinora, *A Woman's Unconscious Use of Her Body: A Psychoanalytical Perspective* (London: Virago, 1993)

Piscopo, Ugo, *Paese sommerso: Realtà italiana dei nostri giorni* ([Palermo]: Palumbo, 1983)

Probyn, Elspeth, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Proust, Marcel, *La strada di Swann: di Marcel Proust nella traduzione di Natalia Ginzburg*, ed. by Natalia Ginzburg (Turin: Einaudi, 1990)

Ranke-Heinemann, Uta, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991 [1990])

Rasy, Elisabetta, *Le donne e la letteratura* (Rome: Riuniti, 1993)

Restivo, Angelo, *L'occhio e la parola: La 'Bagheria' di Dacia Maraini attraverso le immagini* (Palermo: Thule, 1997)

Rich, Adrienne, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1984 [1976])

Richards, Charles, *The New Italians* (London: Penguin, 1995)

Rizzarelli, Maria, *Gli arabeschi della memoria: grandi virtù e piccolo querelles nei saggi di Natalia Ginzburg* (Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 2004)

Roppen, Georg, and Richard Sommer, *Strangers and Pilgrims: An Essay on the Metaphor of Journey* (Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press, 1964)

Russell, Rinaldina, *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994)

Schneider, Jane, and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York: Academic Press, 1976)

Scianna, Ferdinando, *Sicilia ricordata: Testi di Dacia Maraini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001)

Secunda, Victoria, *Women and their Fathers: The Sexual and Romantic Impact of the First Man in Your Life* (London: Cedar, 1993)

Sellers, Susan, ed., *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988)

Sharpe, Sue, *Fathers and Daughters* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Shaw, George Bernard, *Pygmalion* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1912])

Sherry, Ruth, *Studying Women's Writing: An Introduction* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988)

Showalter, Elaine, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1997)

——, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987)

Smarr, Janet Levarie, and Daria Valentini, *Italian Women and the City* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003)

Soldati, Mario, *La finestra* (Prefazione di Natalia Ginzburg) (Milan: Rizzoli, 1991 [1950])

Sumeli-Weinberg, M Grazia, *Invito alla lettura di Dacia Maraini* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1993)

Tennyson, Alfred Lord, *A Choice of Tennyson's Verse*, ed. by David Cecil (London: Faber and Faber, 1981)

Testaferri, Ada, ed., *Donna: Women in Italian Culture* (Toronto: Dovehouse, 1989)

Violante, Luciano, and others, *Ricordo di Natalia Ginzburg: Commemorazione nel quinto anniversario della morte* (Rome: Camera dei deputati, 1997)

Von Trotta, Margarethe, Dacia Maraini, and Laura Novati, *Paura e amore* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988)

Warner, Marina, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan, 1985 [1976])

Williams, Charles, *The Figure of Beatrice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943)

Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973)

Wilson, Rita, *Speculative Identities: Contemporary Italian Women's Narrative* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000)

Wollstonecraft, Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 2004 [1792])

Wood, Sharon, *Italian Women's Writing: 1860-1994* (London: Athlone, 1995)

——, *Italian Women Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)

Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1990 [1929])

Zipes, Jack, *Fairytales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1991 [1983])

Articles and Chapters

Almond, Ian, 'The Appalling Richness of Reticence: Silence in the Work of Natalia Ginzburg', *Italian Quarterly*, 151-152 (2002), 27-34

Amatangelo, Susan, 'Coming to her Senses: The Journey of the Mother in *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Italica*, 79 (2002), 240-256

Anderlini, Serena, 'Interview with Dacia Maraini: Prolegomena for a Feminist Dramaturgy of the Feminine', *diacritics*, 21:2-3 (1991), 148-160

Angori, Franco, and others, *Incontro con l'autore 1992: Domenico Rea, Dacia Maraini, Alfredo Todisco*, *Quaderni di esperienze didattiche*, 6 (1992)

Cannon, Joann, 'Rewriting the female destiny: Dacia Maraini's *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*', *Symposium*, 49:2 (1995), 136-147

Cixous, Hélène, 'Castration or Decapitation?', *Signs*, 7 (1981-82), 41-55

——, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs*, 1:4 (1975-76), 875-893

Crane, Rufus S., 'Buio', *World Literature Today*, 74 (2000), 129-130

Darke, Jane, 'The Man-Shaped City', in *Changing Places: Women's Lives in the City*, ed. by Chris Booth, Jane Darke, and Susan Yeandle (London: Paul Chapman, 1996), pp. 88-99

De Céspedes, Alba, 'Lettera a Natalia Ginzburg', in Cutrufelli, Maria Rosa, Rosaria Guacci, and Marisa Rusconi, eds, *Il pozzo segreto: Cinquanta scrittrici italiane* (Florence: Giunti, 1993), pp. 33-36

De Grazia, Victoria, 'How Mussolini Ruled Italian Women', in *A History of Women: Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Françoise Thébaud (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 120-148

Di Pace-Jordan, Rosetta, 'Viaggiando con passo di volpe: Poetry 1983-1991', *World Literature Today*, 67 (1993), 166-167

——, 'Voci', *World Literature Today*, 69 (1995), 341-342

Gabriele, Tommasina, 'From Prostitution to Transsexuality: Gender Identity and Subversive Sexuality in Dacia Maraini', *MLN*, 117:1 (2002), 241-256

——, 'The Pregnant Nun: Suor Attanasia and the Metaphor of Arrested Maternity in Dacia Maraini', *Italica*, 81 (2004), 65-80

Gala, Candelas, 'Identity and Writing: A Lacanian Reading of Alba de Céspedes' *Quaderno proibito* and Dacia Maraini's *Donna in guerra*', *Forum Italicum*, 37 (2003), 147-160

Gathercole, P., 'La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa', *World Literature Today*, 65 (1991), 286

Giorgio, Adalgisa, 'Natalia Ginzburg's "La madre": Exposing Patriarchy's Erasure of the Mother', *MLR*, 88 (1993), 864-880

Goldensohn, Lorrie, 'Natalia Ginzburg: The Days and Houses of her Art', *Salmagundi*, 96 (1992), 96-129

Gundle, Stephen, 'Il sorriso di Berlusconi', *Altrochemestre*, 3 (1995), 14-17

Hughes, H. Stuart, 'The Families of Natalia Ginzburg', *Salmagundi*, 96 (1992), 157-167

Irigaray, Luce, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', *Signs*, 7 (1981-82), 60-67

King, Martha, 'Dolce per sé', *World Literature Today*, 71 (1997), 570

Koch, Francesca Romana, 'Le donne dal dopoguerra a oggi', in *Storia della società italiana: Il miracolo economico e il centro sinistra: Parte Quinta, Vol. XXIV*, Ugo Ascoli, and others (Milan: Teti, 1990), pp. 223-289

Kristeva, Julia, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7 (1981-82), 13-35

Maraini, Dacia, 'On *Of Woman Born*', *Signs*, 4 (1978-79), 687-694

——, 'Report from Italy', *Signs*, 1:2 (1975-76), 553-554

Marchegiani Jones, Irene, 'La dualità fra individuo e storia: Per una lettura di *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* di Dacia Maraini', *Italian Quarterly*, 151-152 (2002), 45-60

Melograni, Piero, 'The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini's Italy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), 221-237

Pallotta, Augustus, 'Dacia Maraini: From Alienation to Feminism', *World Literature Today* 58 (1984), 359-362

Ragusa, Olga, 'Bagheria', *World Literature Today*, 67 (1993) 799

——, 'Isolina', *World Literature Today*, 68 (1994), 102

——, 'Un clandestino a bordo', *World Literature Today*, 72 (1998), 115

Rosenberg, Marion Lignana, 'Silence and Violence: The Silent Duchess', *Women's Review of Books*, 16:6 (1999), 7

Santagostino, Giuseppina, 'La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa: tessere la memoria sotto lo sguardo delle chimere', *Italica*, 73 (1996), 410-428

Siggers Manson, Christina, 'Family Disintegration and Emigration in Natalia Ginzburg's Epistolary Novels *La città e la casa* and *Caro Michele*', in *Politics and Culture in Post-War Italy*, ed. by Linda Risso and Monica Boria (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 34-48

——, 'In Love with Cecchino: Opening the Door to Violence in Dacia Maraini's *Colomba* and *Voci*', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5:2 (2005), 91-102

Signorelli-Pappas, Rita, 'Serena Cruz o la vera giustizia', *World Literature Today*, 65 (1991), 690

Simborowski, Nicoletta, 'Music and Memory in Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico famigliare*', *MLR*, 94 (1999), 680-690

Soave Bowe, Clotilde, 'The Narrative Strategy of Natalia Ginzburg', *MLR*, 68 (1973), 788-795

Tesio, Giovanni, 'Natalia Ginzburg', *Studi piemontesi*, 13:1-2 (1984), 447-459

Vollenweider, Alice, 'Natalia Ginzburg oder die zerstörte Familie', *DU-Die Zeitschrift der Kultur*, 10 (1989), 42-46

Wilde-Menozzi, Wallis, 'Anchoring Natalia Ginzburg', *Kenyon Review*, 16:1 (1994), 115-130

Wood, Sharon, 'The language of the body and Dacia Maraini's Marianna Ucrìa', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2:2 (1993), 223-238

Wright, Simona, 'Dacia Maraini: Charting the Female Experience in the Quest-Plot: Marianna Ucrìa', *Italian Quarterly*, 133-134 (1997), 59-70

——, 'Intervista a Dacia Maraini: Pescasseroli, 13 luglio 1996', *Italian Quarterly*, 133-134 (1997), 71-91

Newspaper and magazine articles

Anon, 'Hanno vinto le donne', *Effe: mensile femminista autogestita* (Bari: Dedalo) June 1974, p. 39

Cambria, Adele and Daniela Colombo, 'Aborto: non lo fo per piacer mio', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 2-3

Cambria, Adele, 'Aborto: il disagio del mondo cattolico', *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 40-43

Cambria, Adele, and others, 'Innamorarsi', *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 12-16

Cardàno, Anna, 'Le non femministe: ombre sul muro', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 15-17

Colombo, Daniela, 'Abortire a Washington', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 4-6

Fiocchetto, Rosanna, 'Il marchio del dominio', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 12-14

Foletti, Lara, 'Femminismo come festa', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 57-58

Gabriella G., 'Il ragazzo e la quarantenne', *Effe*, March 1974, pp. 24-27

Ginzburg, Natalia, 'C'era una volta la famiglia', interview by Sandra Bonsanti, *Oggi*, November 1976, pp. 83-86

Greer, Germaine, 'Il nudo non è in vendita', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 46-49

Gruppi Femministi di Milano, 'Documenti femministi: Dal matrimonio al divorzio', *Effe*, April-May 1974, pp. 54-61

Il movimento femminista romano, 'Documenti femministi: Parliamo di noi', *Effe*, January 1974, pp. 59-60

Le femministe grossetane, 'Documenti: PIANTATE IN ASSO VOSTRO MARITO', *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 59-60

Leonelli, Leslie, 'Anticoncezionali: Il diaframma ha 80 anni ma non li dimostra', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 26-28

Maraini, Dacia, 'Con Pasolini e altri amici in una città amata e odiata,' interview by Antonio Debenedetti, *Corriere della Sera*, 15 July 1984, p. 2

——, 'Medicina: Baroni all'assalto', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 30-31

Rivolta Femminile, 'Documenti femministi: Manifesto', *Effe*, November 1973, pp. 56-59

Sabatini, Alma, 'Self Help Clinic', *Effe*, December 1973, pp. 48-49

——, 'Il piccolo gruppo: struttura di base del movimento femminista', *Effe*, January 1974, pp. 2-3

Visani, Virginia, 'Cisa: sfidiamo la galera', *Effe*, June 1974, pp. 40-41

Internet Articles

Giovanni Mameli, '*Donna in guerra*', *L'Unione Sarda*, 30 November 1975, cited on Web Site: < http://www.dacia-maraini.it/critica/TtCr23.html> [accessed 21 August 2006]

Antonio Porta, '*Il treno per Helsinki*', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 July 1984, cited on Web Site: <http://www.dacia-maraini.it/critica/TtCr25.html> [accessed 21 August 2006].

Anon, 'Se la vittima ha avuto esperienze la violenza sessuale è meno grave', on Web site <http://www.repubblica.it/2005/e/sezioni/cronaca/cassazione/cassagrave/cassagrave.html> [accessed 28 July 2006].

Films

Marianna Ucrìa. Dir. Roberto Faenza. Emmanuelle Laborit, Roberto Herlitzka. Cecchi Gori. 1997

Voci. Dir. Franco Giraldi. Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Miki Manojlovic, Gabriella Pession. Eagle Pictures. 2001

Cuore di mamma. Dir. Salvatore Samperi. Cineriz. 1968

I bambini ci guardano. Dir. Vittorio de Sica. Scalera. 1944