

The Divided Nature of Thought and the Problem of Human Darkness: Reading Dacia Maraini's *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* with Mcgilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary*

by

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(Under the Direction of Thomas Peterson)

Abstract

Dacia Maraini's novels *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* contest false notions of essential divisions between individuals and cultures by reconsidering division as coming from within the individual and looking to the dispositions that a person holds, especially in relation to the other, as what informs their intention as an actor in the world. An attempt to understand more about the origin and workings of the darker side of human thought and action emanates in these novels which both take as their theme painful incidences of violence and loss and the insuppressible longing for a reconciliation to the separation that the tragedies have bred. Maraini consolidates certain propensities of one side or voice within the individual that do not attend with care to the other: strict rationality, unreflective desire, and a mentality of use value that signs a purpose to all it sees. The other softer voice attends with openness to the world, all that is new, all that is living. I argue that the two sides or voices that emerge in these novels as dispositions are closely aligned with the dispositions and propensities of the left hemisphere and right hemisphere of the mind as outlined by Iain Mcgilchrist in his seminal work, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. The divisions within the individual that are thematic in Maraini's novels are illuminated by the revelations made in Mcgilchrist's inquiries. It is also true that Mcgilchrist's work is illuminated by Maraini's narratives. The worlds of the hemispheres are very different, and the right hemisphere, the Master, is seen by Mcgilchrist to be

It is also true that Mcgilchrist's work is illuminated by Maraini's narratives. The worlds of the hemispheres are very different, and the right hemisphere, the Master, is seen by Mcgilchrist to be at a perpetual disadvantage, a disadvantage which continues to increase. By finding a voice and following a vision held through right hemisphere propensities, the protagonist of each of the novels redeems something vital that had seemed lost, and it is done through deep meditation on the nature of this world, to which only the right hemisphere can attend.

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Introduction to Thesis

We'll listen without realizing, above all, to that voice that speaks to us, if only in a secret place of the consciousness, with deep strong tones, charged with ancient authority. The other voice, the light one, the keen, leaping one, the voice that smells of kitchen, of bedroom, does not convince even women themselves because of its total lack of prestige. (Maraini, "Reflections on the Bodies of My Sexual Compatriots")

Dacia Maraini's attention to divisions within the individual have long featured in her writing, and have often been organized around voice and voicelessness. In this dissertation I will show how her novels *Colomba* (2003), and *La bambina e il sognatore* (2015) exhibit a more focused attention, one that lends a level of material form to these internal divisions, which in turn permits an inspection of the character of the respective factions, rather than contemplation of the fracture alone. I argue that a greater appreciation of Maraini's work as universally important might be intuited in this pivotal strategy: the materialization of these voices, the objectification of that which objectifies (Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*) and a better understanding of the voice that does not objectify. Beginning with *Colomba*, the novel's protagonists, who are two, make an exposition of an awareness of internal division within the life of the mind, as it relates to truth seeking. The protagonist in *La Bambina e il sognatore* is sophisticated, I would argue, in his approach to his own divided mind, experiencing it as two incongruous personalities that vie for power over his thought and action, but stopping short of giving the left-hemisphere protagonist status. The protagonists of both novels are keen observers of the distinct ways of being in the

world that the divided nature of thought bring about; one that seeks to control, to fix, to dominate, and the other that attends openly to what is, without ulterior motive. The darkness of a will to dominate, control and possess, especially the weak, has been something that Maraini has patiently attended to throughout her career as a writer. But an exploration of darkness is not the end of the story for Maraini in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. Re-birth of the possibility of acceptance, connection, and the fostering of relationships based on care are not only the notes on which the novels conclude, but define the longing for reconciliation and wholeness that has driven the protagonists' journey. It is with this claim that I introduce Mcgilchrist and his work *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* as a work with so many important parallels to Maraini's strategies of representation of the divided self in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. A regeneration of humanity in decline is that which Mcgilchrist insists is necessary if we are to navigate through the current doomsday state of affairs, but also that for which he dares to hope. The following passage encapsulates his main claim, his concern about the effects, a sense of hope.

When Lear cries, 'Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?', we could reply, on one level, yes – a defect in the right prefrontal cortex. But that just illuminates the fact that cruelty does not exist in 'nature': only humans with their left prefrontal cortex have the capacity for deliberate malice. But then only humans, with their right prefrontal cortex, are capable of compassion. (Mcgil. 2, 86)

King Lear's query comes as he recognizes not just the cruelty of others, but his own cruelty, as his will for domination asserts itself against and above another will, that of care, that exists within him. Lear's words are an ideal introduction to the topic and argument of my dissertation,

and a suitable microcosm for introducing the interdisciplinary and interhemispheric tilt of Mcgilchrist's contentions in his book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. Not only is there the recognition that an especially valuable source and journey for truth seeking is found in great literature and art, but Mcgilchrist builds a great part of his argument about the divided nature of our humanity on implicit knowledge derived from the arts and literature. Mcgilchrist's work gives this division a concrete form and origin, the divided brain and its asymmetrical hemispheres, but allows contingency, a resistance to reductionism that is made clear in his assessment of Lear's question. The contingency is demonstrated in the use of language, such as 'could' and 'in part', but also with the introduction of a viewpoint that might resist dualism even while concerned with the divided mind, which one might argue is the genesis of all dualism and dichotomy.

I will use Iain Mcgilchrist's illuminating study to inform my exploration of the divided nature of thought in Maraini's novels. Mcgilchrist's work is understood to make unexpected connections between neuroscience, evolution and culture, and I take advantage of the interdisciplinary considerations to address the novelties of the approach to the social and psychological themes that Maraini has taken in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, which builds on a lifetime of concern about injustices and denunciation of 'might makes right' mentality in her writing career.³

I will now explain the novelty of *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* in the field of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology, with the desire to establish its overarching importance as a seminal work of our time, and to make reference to the specific ways that its subject matter parallels Maraini's attention

³ Maraini has been critically received as a writer who denounces social injustices. See Cannon's *The Novel as Investigation: Leonardo Sciascia, Dacia Maraini, and Antonio Tabucchi*.

to the divided nature of thought in the novels addressed in this dissertation. Mcgilchrist's work is particularly innovative because it makes a brave and vital return to the debased topic of the divided brain after pop-psychology wore away at the credibility of the conceptions revolving around the brain's two hemispheres, namely, the propagation of misleading masculine/feminine essentialist myths. Mcgilchrist has had the courage and patience to resurrect the topic and confront a new choir of authorial spinners of myth, this time scientists, some of whom claim that the debunking of popular assumptions about the essence of the brain's right and left hemispheres means that there are no significant differences between the hemispheres and therefore research and study on the divided brain is neither valuable nor respectable.⁴ Mcgilchrist, a scientist and literary scholar, rejects this reductionism and reminds us that subtle differences are in fact conspicuously consequential, a conclusion easily reachable whether in the sciences or in the humanities.

The similarity of the main plot of the novels *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* is helpful in locating Maraini's expanding exploration of the divided nature of thought. The plots of the novels revolve around the disappearance of a female who has been made vulnerable. This *scomparsa* (disappearance, disappeared person) turns out to not be a death, but may well have been if the person had not been found. The unexpected deviation in the physical presence of the *scomparsa* becomes an engrossing enigma for a particular person, the protagonist of each novel, and what remains in the *scomparsa*'s stead is a hazy web of events and motives that need to be understood fully, through investigation born from the subtleties of the *entirety* of cognition and

⁴ Mcgilchrist discusses being counseled against involving himself with laterality research by colleagues and mentors, "since it was stigmatized within the neuroscience world due to its appropriation by pop psychology". He explained that the neuroscience community who gave up on the topic "reconciled themselves to the lost time and effort by proclaiming loudly their own myth; that there are no significant hemisphere differences" (Preface).

experience, in order to find her and, in some sense, restore order through understanding. The quest for answers in the search for the *scomparsa* is found to have serious limitations when the admission of *all* mental formations, regardless of the ‘division’ of origin, is impeded.

The protagonists in the novels feel an intimate connection with the *scomparsa* (missing girls) and search for them; they find themselves obligated to go beyond words, data, empirical proofs, and seasoned reasoning in their journeys to understand what has happened to this person, in their longing for truth. When the subtleties of experience, those that are usually excluded as part of standard practice into investigation of missing persons, are brought into full light over the course of the narratives, an appreciation of the immense and formerly ‘invisible’ web of provenience for the milieu which accounts for the persons’ disappearances ‘presences’⁵ itself. The protagonist in each novel is a tireless seeker of truth, incapable of neglecting their calling to find out what has happened to the *scomparsa*. Each protagonist struggles in different ways to interpret and integrate divergent ways of knowing and seeing, in their own minds, and contends with a world that primarily discredits and disdains the search for truth that they pursue.

In this dissertation I will detail Maraini’s exploration of how the division of thought and will is experienced phenomenologically in these novels, evidencing both thematic and formal aspects of the works. I will argue that the divided nature of thought increases in palpability owing to the style and content in Mariani’s writing from *Colomba* to *La bambina e il sognatore*. Our author heightens her savvy in representing the positions that people may take in response to

⁵ McGilchrist establishes the difference between the ‘presencing’ that happens in the right hemisphere and the ‘re-presenting’ that the left hemisphere is involved with as being at the core of what differentiates the hemispheres. McGilchrist illustrates the difference; “Abstraction is necessary if the left hemisphere is to re-present the world. (...) The right hemisphere deals preferentially with actually existing things, as they are encountered, in the real world. Because its language roots things in the context of the world, it is concerned with the *relations between things*” (50). I will return to the subject of ‘context’ which is related to this discussion.

the drive, will, and vision of one part of their being as opposed to the other, and in so doing, the strategies of the competing realms of thinking adopted to contend with one another and to legitimize their different ways of being in the world become more discernible. The tension between the divergent dispositions plays out in different ways in each of the novels as the varied circumstances of the protagonists' experiences either allow or inhibit the journey toward the unfolding of truth.

Dreams, stories, and cultural myths, all which require a deployment of the imagination for understanding, are embedded in many of Maraini's works, and are implicated in an enigmatical potential for revealing a more expansive conception of reality and the living world for her protagonists and readers. Maraini has also defined her literary production by lending attention to the various categories of arcane patterns of abuse visited upon *the living*: certain people(s), animals, and the natural world. The identities of the victims and perpetrators differ, and the modes of abuse may vary, nevertheless there is an undeniable connection, impenetrable as it may appear, in the origins of the abuse.⁶

The obscurity of this connection is in part responsible for what I would call a critical oversight in the attention that Maraini's work deserves, an attention that should go outside and beyond the scope of feminist criticism, specifically the variety grounded in identity politics, valuable as this work may be⁷. Mcgilchrist's work provides a frame that bears the promise of a more comprehensive reception of Maraini's style and themes, most significantly, a detailed account of the evolutionary history of the divided nature of thought, and the ramifications in

⁶ There are some interesting feminist theories on relations of domination that play out in the subordination of (and sometimes violence against) women, animals and the natural world. See *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Perspectives*.

⁷ For feminist perspectives on Maraini's writings see articles and books by scholars Augustus Pallotta, Daniella Cavallaro, Tommasina Gabriele, among others.

culture and human behavior determined by the sway of our divided mind(s). McGilchrist's work is relevant to the project of understanding the nature and culture of relations of domination by providing biological/evolutionary contexts as well as a deep cultural historiography that takes into consideration the evolution of the mind in formulating theories about the advent of new ideas and cultural shifts. While Maraini does not attribute the separate drives within an individual, culture, or the world to origination in the brain, the modes employed by the vying factions which appear in her works are stunningly consonant with the difference in the mind's hemispheres and the worlds that they produce. Whether one envisions the division in the individual and the world as external, like a battle between good and evil, or internal by some other measure, such as competing psychological drives, the overlap in observations of the division that the novels of Maraini's discussed in this dissertation serve in legitimating an experiential acknowledgment of the veracity of McGilchrist's work, just as McGilchrist's work bolsters the psychological acumen of Maraini's writing.

Returning now to Maraini's concern with *the living*, among those from the human domain most ripe for disregard and mistreatment, epitomized in the novels by their being disappeared by *un prepotente*⁸, a person who seeks to dominate and subjugate as a primary drive, are women, children, immigrants, refugees, minorities, the naïve or weak, and the psychologically injured.⁹ Considering what these preyed upon groups might share, I would point to their dispossession from participation in the dominant narratives that have influenced

⁸ Maraini uses the term *prepotente* often, at least in her more recent works. *Prepotenza*, defined as disposition of someone who, absolutely arbitrarily, imposes their own will, even resorting to coercion and tyranny ("atteggiamento di chi, in modo del tutto arbitrario, vuole imporre la sua volonta, anche ricorrendo a coercizione e soprusi", Enciclopedia Treccani. translation mine) in my view, does not truly have an English equivalent.

⁹ Being 'disappeared' is not always the fate of the dominated in Maraini's writing. There have been those who are subjugated in different ways who fall under one or more of the categories above. See *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*; *Voci: Buio*; *Donna in guerra*, *Passi affrettati*.

our collective psyches and ideas about people, society, and nature since the beginning of recorded history.¹⁰ That is, the subordinated have remained relatively voiceless when it comes to the codification of knowledge, and silent as subjects who possess sovereign desires.

It is then both what the preyed upon share, and what drives the predatory *prepotente* that are the subjects of the psychological inquiry made in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. The questions that the protagonists ask about the drive to dominate, along with a connection they feel with the *scomparsa* for reasons not clearly articulated, animates the movements and thoughts they make in their respective searches. The protagonists each have lived through tragedy, and as they find themselves alone, they have not just the time, but also the will, to attend with care and reflection to the world and its suffering. The disappearance in each novel involves the confinement and sexual exploitation of a female; in *Colomba*, a young woman, and in *La bambina e il sognatore*, a little girl. The protagonists who search for the girls make the difficult discovery that in some sense, the victims were psychologically primed by society and at least in some measure, by their family circumstances and rearing, for this crisis. The simplistic ‘male-predator, female-prey’ gender dichotomy is not supported by the unfolding of the narratives in the novel, a position congruent with McGilchrist’s work’s rejecting of the notion that there are biological differences in the way the brains of the two sexes are wired to function. There is no argument on this point. It is, however, important to have an understanding of the ways in which certain expressions of a drive to dominate become patterns for masculine subjects.

¹⁰ For a fascinating theory about how this came about from a sociological perspective see Pierre Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination*.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is the embodiment of one's culture that cannot but be lived out through habits and dispositions, which can however vary depending on one's life and experience. In Bourdieu's very relevant work, *Masculine Domination*, he suggests that this *habitus*, or state of being a subject of one's culture, is particularly static when it comes to the bodies and minds of men and women. The following passage explains how what at its origin was arbitrary and socially constructed became, and remains, engrained as having a material or biological causation.

The biological appearances and the very real effects that have been produced in bodies and minds by a long collective labour of socialization of the biological and biologicization of the social combine to reverse the relationship between causes and effects and to make a naturalized social construction ('genders' as sexually characterized habitus) appear as the grounding in nature of the arbitrary division which underlies both reality and the representation of reality and which sometimes imposes itself even on scientific research. (3)

As cultural subjects, males are in the grip of a mythos of masculinity. When they are guided by a drive to dominate, there is a colorful and long history of assertion of power by models that represent the male sex, who objectify, abduct and rape women as well as children, and these abuses have been construed, in some measure, as legitimate.

Although McGilchrist stays clear of gender differences in his examination of what the hemispheres do and how they do it, it is not difficult to extrapolate that ideas of masculinity, as construed by culture, favor some left-hemisphere congruent modes of being in the world, and reject or repress many right-hemisphere congruent ways of being in the world. Maraini's attention to the repression of longing, the right hemisphere

equivalent to wanting, is critical in the readings of how the possibility for sexual predation may develop in men who are precluded from acknowledging some of their own transcendental longings, for example, in *La bambina e il sognatore*, that of having a child. Maternal longing is what has come to be expected of women and associated with this dominated class. Therefore, the unwelcomed longing is ignorantly translated, when felt by men, into desire, which has an object. Objectification is the result, and once this has happened, there are many dark avenues that the mind can take.

The following characterization of Mcgilchrist's thesis is helpful in seeing that masculine domination and left hemisphere domination have come about in much the same way:

[It is] not saying [that] the left hemisphere is getting bigger or denser or better connected than the right. The point is that the left hemisphere's 'way of being' is more culturally contagious than the 'way of being' of the right hemisphere. The suggestion is that, slowly but surely, the left hemisphere's perspective shapes our culture in such a way that the culture begins to respond to it as the dominant one.

(Mcgilchrist and Rowson, 8)

This is a preliminary take on what the 'problem' with the current state of things is for Mcgilchrist. And things don't end there. The danger that Mcgilchrist warns is that the left hemisphere, with the accumulation of power, will at some point enter a 'hall of mirrors' in which its own dominant voice increasingly drowns out the perspective of the right hemisphere, until it goes completely unheard. As it is the right hemisphere that experiences longing for something other, there is no will that remains to escape the distortions.

The way of being in the world that knows longing from desire, that is more implicit and intuitive, that understands things as fluid rather than concrete, is the quiet voice. Those who are more in tune with this way of being may be so precisely because they have been dominated by the loud and confident possessors of authorial and linguistic privilege. The holders of privilege, the dominant, as Bourdieu describes, the ‘masculine’, use the consecrated empirical pathways to bolster and naturalize their own dominance and in so doing, further diminish and dismiss the legitimacy of other ways of being, knowing, speaking, and truth seeking.¹¹

Culture tells us that the quiet voice and intuitive or implicit knowledge is weaker, it is a way of being in the world attributable to the ‘weak’. The fact is that these ways of being in the world, descriptive of the weak or dominated, are no more or less biologically extant in one human being or another. Mcgilchrist lays out the world that the right hemisphere delivers; it is a vast, interconnected, fluid, changing, irreducible whole, and therefore impossible to classify with words, to contain by mapping. This way of being compels one to take a softer voice, to be less certain, and this appears to those with the will to dominate as an affliction. In *La bambina e il sognatore*, Maraini takes aim at false cultural narratives that presume that ‘adult in-group male’ is synonymous with rational subject. The intellectual adult male protagonist in the novel is a prolific *sognatore* (dreamer) who engages with the mysterious content of his dreams. And then, there are cultural others as well as women who display a will for domination via a pretense of strict rationality.

The momentum of evolutionary considerations in reaching preeminence even in the humanities is a development that cannot be underestimated with respect to its transformative

¹¹ Silence, listening to voices of Others, the inner voice, the multiple sources of knowledge and their merits, and integrating the voices are ‘ways’ of knowing available to everybody, but understood, culturally, as feminine strengths or traits in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, a of cognitive development specifically centered on women.

impact on these disciplines, and beyond that, their humanistic concerns for the collective. Thought, in the humanities and social sciences, has become increasingly receptive to the possibility of new perspectives offered by the incorporation of evolutionary biology, psychology, or anthropology into their research and criticism.¹² Evolutionary perspectives have led to fresh ideas concerning human wellness, happiness, relationships, and social ills, by creating awareness of mental process, and offering a narrative based on an impetus, at once evolutionary and cultural, that expands the considerations of cause-effect relationships, especially regarding dysfunctional or harmful patterns and motivations.

A distinction that connects Maraini's and Mcgilchrist's work, although presented by different modes, is a certain perspicacity regarding the need for the emergence of an exemplar for a robust rapport between the two 'ways of being in the world' and healthy management of the different worlds that these modes of perceiving yield. This elusive exemplar would be valid not just for personal/private wellness, but as a cultural model, and as a transcendental moral disposition that is required of us more than ever if civilization, as we have come to know it, has a chance of surviving.¹³ Indubitably, Maraini and Mcgilchrist have both made the audacious leap of explicitly pairing the arts, most significantly literature, for my purposes in this dissertation, with revelations made possible by the incorporation of new understandings about the activity of the mind from, for example, neuroimaging. The pairing of empirical findings with the meandering itinerary of art and literature results in concrete representations of how a balancing of contributions from the divergent ways of being unapologetically alter production heretofore governed by doctrinal formulae which allows one or the other of these modes. Maraini provides

¹² Evolutionary theories and explanations are being incorporated into social sciences and the humanities. See Joseph Carroll's many works on the subject.

¹³ Mcgilchrist's is an existential warning, and Maraini's could be characterized as one that hopes to preserve democracy, decency and civil society.

an instance of such a balancing of contributions in the novels discussed, illustrated in the becoming of the protagonists. They are individuals whose thought and very identity are redefined and reorganized through their relational existence with people, words, ideas, memories, dreams, the whole gamut of experience. Doctrinal formulae that inform production in the various academic disciplines have served to limit form and content for some time and constituted a formidable challenge for academic writers, literary critics, and scientific researchers to engage with knowledge derived from the implicit, because they fall outside the bounds of accepted protocol in their disciplines.¹⁴

The Master and the Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World is divided into two parts; the content of Part Two emerges as a possibility only once a certain threshold of familiarity and acceptance of that which is presented in Part One is achieved. Part One is entitled “The Divided Brain”, and it presents accepted knowledge, and more nuanced insights about the brain’s anatomy, *what* the hemispheres do, or more accurately, *how* they do it. Part One explores the avenues of communication within the brain and among minds, referencing music, gesture and language, and how they relate (or don’t) to knowledge and ‘truth’.¹⁵ An important summation of the very different views or dispositions of the two worlds as delivered by the brain’s hemispheres is given, and the resultant *how* regarding seeing and knowing, determined by those views, is outlined. These views and dispositions of the hemispheres privilege distinct meaning-making strategies which are found throughout Maraini’s works and

¹⁴ Cross disciplinary contact and communication is stunted both by the divergent modes in which they communicate and by their inflexibility to learn the ‘language’ of the other. See John Desmond Bernal’s speech “Science and the Humanities” (1946) for an ardent appeal for collaboration.

¹⁵ McGilchrist aligns his thinking with many of Heidegger’s meditations on ‘truth’ or ‘seeing’. He writes; “For Heidegger. Being (*Sein*) is hidden, and things as they truly are (*das Seiende*) can be ‘unconcealed’ only by a certain disposition of patient attention towards the world- emphatically not by annexing it, exploiting it or ransacking it for congenial meanings, (...) (151).

benefit one or the other hemisphere. Part One concludes by imparting the ‘state of things’ to the reader, posing the primary ‘problem’. The problem is that the right hemisphere must have primacy, as nature and origination have ordained, and yet, the left hemisphere triumphs, that is, it has made strides to erode the right hemisphere’s primacy and is poised to continue the conquest of its ‘master’ by following a roguish self-perpetuating and self-congratulatory logic, helped along in part, by a certain evolutionary fact; the ‘corpus callosum’, the major connection between the two cerebral hemispheres, is getting proportionally smaller and functionally more inhibitory, rather than larger and functionally more facilitatory with evolution (Introduction, xx). The triumph of the left hemisphere can be seen in cultural phenomena, and can be understood as perpetuated by a culture’s values; a vicious cycle that encourages the degradation of all forms of knowledge/wisdom which escape the capacity for comprehension by the dogmatic left hemisphere. This left hemisphere becomes ever more authoritarian as it finds reinforcement in the momentum of culture, when shifts that bring augmented laudation of left-hemisphere dominance occur, such as, but not limited to, leaps in technological advancement which is always followed by greater regard for those responsible for the innovations.

Part Two of McGilchrist’s book is a history of the broad “revolt of the left hemisphere’s way of conceiving the world against that of the right hemisphere” (120). McGilchrist does not attempt to attribute the history of the pendulum swings between right and left hemisphere viewpoints and valuation seen in cultural production to “gross changes in the structure and function of the human brain over the 2500 years or so in question” (Introduction, xx). Rather, McGilchrist examines directions and counter directions in cultural production and the history of ideas, and in so doing, the charting of a power struggle between the hemispheres emerges, a struggle that is not *only* cyclical. Rather, each historical bout in this struggle breeds warping

and the power gained and lost by the hemispheres becomes increasingly incommensurate. Mcgilchrist documents the historical struggle between the hemispheres by considering the prominence and power of such things as the visual image vs. the written word, myth and metaphor vs. fundamentalism in culture and cultural production through various historical periods. Mcgilchrist demonstrates, through this study, the Western trajectory of “gradual assimilation of all cognitive values to scientific ones” (241). In my estimation, Mcgilchrist’s work can be accurately received as one that opposes reductionism and materialism, both in cultural studies and the sciences, but nonetheless grounds empirical research and data in a context that demands an integral approach to (human) experience and conditions.¹⁶

I will now discuss some of the themes and techniques developed in Maraini’s two novels which demonstrate an intense awareness and attention to the danger of the runaway domination by a faction of the internal division that is so absolutely consonant with Mcgilchrist’s characterization of the left hemisphere, its view, disposition and modes of being. *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* show a sharp integration of thematic and formal elements which focus on the divided nature of the mind and thought. Maraini can be seen to pursue a developing revelation in application to one of the outstanding quandaries of her literary career: the aspects of ‘darkness’¹⁷ in human thought and action, and courageous and unflinching contemplation of suffering. The revelation might be characterized as follows: the divided mind, whether within the individual or within a culture, provides a profoundly useful context for comprehending the origins of the ‘dark side’ of human behavior. When considering Maraini’s entire opus, it seems

¹⁶ Mcgilchrist defends his work against the potential charge that linking “the highest achievements of the human mind, in philosophy and the arts, to the structure of the brain” may seem reductive. He explains that rather than reducing the mind to matter, we might be compelled “to sophisticate our idea of what matter is, and is capable of becoming, namely something as extraordinary as mind” (7).

¹⁷ *Buio* (“Darkness”) is the title of Maraini’s collection of stories published in 1999 of disturbing cases of abuse and the dark psychological patterns of those who commit the abuse. Maraini also represented the mental “darkness” or blindness of the community, family, and institutions meant to assist the vulnerable.

that in attending to human ‘darkness’, her intuition has always danced, and what it feels, has only been expressed ‘poetically’, that is, it is only expressible in terms to which the right hemisphere is privy as the right hemisphere deals with the implicit rather than the explicit, the interconnected rather than the abstracted. My understanding of “darkness” as psychological and/or mental blindness or ‘incorrect understanding’, a condition that is present in those who commit abuses *and* in those who ‘cannot’ see them, derives from Maraini’s intention and attention in her exploration of the topic in her collection of stories, *Buio*, published in 1999. Maraini’s approach to the problem of ‘darkness’ in her most recent novels is constituted by an effort to translate the intuition into a representable form.

A ‘personality’ that appears in both of the novels is *il pennuto*, a relatively tame pejorative among the many others he gets called by the protagonists. *Il pennuto* might be translated most literally as ‘feathered one’, and the novels contain a healthy satirical tome dedicated to this bird like quality that they almost recall a conjuring of a medieval bestiary. *Il pennuto* is an occasional visitor to the protagonist in *Colomba*, to whom he periodically offers unsolicited advice. The “voice” of this *pennuto* is experienced as from within the protagonist’s mind, but also as something external, something ‘other’. Although the voice is only audible to the protagonist, and, therefore, is known to her and the reader to reside within her mind, her own sensation is that the voice comes from a place perched above, the shoulder. In *Colomba*, the *pennuto* is in some respects similar to ‘*il grillo-parlante*’ (the talking cricket) from Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, in that his intention is to protect the protagonist, to keep her out of harm’s way. There is a critical difference, however, between *il pennuto* and *il grillo-parlante*, the two would-be guardian angels; *il pennuto* is not concerned with the moral status or emotional well-being of his subject, but with her imminent physical safety and comfort alone. The view from the

shoulder, from above, that *il pennuto* assumes might be best described as one that purports itself to be a ‘view from nowhere’, or more saliently, ‘from everywhere’, endowed with omniscience, and an implied superiority to the view from below it, a ‘view from somewhere’,¹⁸ an embodied view, embedded in the context of its (immediate) present. *Il pennuto*, a figurative being who occasionally gives voice to some concerns of the left hemisphere, is an auxiliary feature in the *Colomba*, but the personality will return and feature prominently in *La bambina e il sognatore*. If *il pennuto* is peripheral to the narrative in *Colomba*, he is a personality who vies for main protagonist status in *La bambina e il sognatore*, particularly at the outset of the narration.

La bambina e il sognatore, a work that has yet to be translated into English, was published in 2015. The novel represents the climax, at least for now, of the unveiling of the patterns of the divided mind in concrete terms in Maraini’s later works. *La bambina e il sognatore* features a clear and demonstrable sub-text in which the divided mind appears as essentially two different characters, one major and one minor. ‘Nani’ is a brilliant teacher by profession, and he identifies with a particular ‘side’ of the self that dreams, imagines, makes connections, and is present for, but not reactionarily judgmental of experience. On the whole Nani identifies with what can be recognized as the life and ways of the right hemisphere of the mind, or at very least, a mind whose master is the right hemisphere. ‘Nani- *il sognatore*’ is visited often by the voice he refers to with use of variously uncomplimentary names, including ‘il pennuto’ (translated as ‘feathered friend’, ‘feather-brained’, as well as ‘fowl’), ‘l’uccellaccio’ (translated as ‘big scary bird’, ‘vulture’, ‘specter’ as well as the ‘Grim Reaper’). This vociferous

¹⁸ Mcgilchrist holds up the Early Renaissance as one of a few historical periods that marked a “great insurgence of the right hemisphere. The ‘perspective’ of the hemispheres in painting(s) of the period brings about the following observations; “Perspectival space is (also) related to individuality, (a) classic element of the Renaissance world view”, in that it “mediates a view of the world from an individual standpoint- one particular place at one particular time, rather than a God’s-eye ‘view from nowhere’ (298).

and insistent visitor interrupts the thoughts of Nani-*il sognatore* with unsolicited opinions and commentary that often contradict what Nani (identified with the right hemisphere) actually experiences as true.

Il pennuto is recognizable as the view of the left hemisphere, indeed the “process of the Philosophy of the West” (Mcgil. 2, 137): “verbal and analytic, requiring abstracted, de-contextualized and disembodied thinking, dealing in categories, concerning itself with the nature of the general rather than the particular, and adopting a sequential, linear approach to truth, building the edifice of knowledge from the parts, brick by brick. (...)” (137). McGilchrist explains, “if one had to characterize the left- hemisphere by reference to one governing principle it would be division. Manipulation and use require clarity and fixity, and clarity and fixity require separation and division. What is moving and seamless, a process, becomes static and separate; *things*. It is the hemisphere of ‘either-or’: clarity requires and yields sharp boundaries” (137). Thus, it is my contention that Maraini demonstrates in realistic detail the patterns and tensions between the left and right hemispheres in this novel, and moreover, she espouses the partnership of healthy tension and continuous dissidence between the hemispheres which I believe concord with McGilchrist’s view regarding the correct criterion for a curative course for humanity, and indeed all that is in humanity’s reach.

Maraini’s attention to the divided brain in the novel are seen, in my reading, in the attention given and reaction to the volumes of narratives and texts of all kinds embedded in the novels. Context plays a critical part in the kind of knowing pursued by the right hemisphere. McGilchrist explains: “[T]he right hemisphere sees things as a whole, before they have been digested into parts, it also sees each thing in its context, as standing in a qualifying relationship with all that surrounds it, rather than taking it as a single isolated entity” (49). By contrast, the

left hemisphere identifies things by labels or explicit language, not by connecting implicit information. The divergent attention spans and interest levels of the left and right hemispheres of characters in the novel when listening to such narratives is highlighted. The *scomparsa* in *Colomba* is the protagonist 'Zà's' granddaughter, for whom the novel is eponymous. Zà commits herself to the journey, both physical and psychological, of coming to know what has happened to her.

The volumes of narration are directed toward an internal author in the novel, a writer who resembles Maraini, and who is at first irritated by these personal and historical narratives that are laden upon her by the demanding 'would be' protagonist Zà.¹⁹ The use of an internal author is a formal technique that allows the protagonist to essentially remain in her right hemisphere and not have to translate right hemisphere 'presence' to left-hemisphere 're-presentation'²⁰, at least at first. The stories upon stories that Zà spouts intrude on the internal author's plans for her current writing project and her desire to keep her mind focused on them. At this point, Maraini shows that this internal author is more interested in re-presenting than in allowing that which is present to come into her awareness, and so under these conditions the stories are accompanied by a feeling of annoyance. Nevertheless, because of the insistence by which Zà sought her author, she succeeds in weaving an assemblage of stories that began to give rise to an intrigue, on the part of the internal author, into the mystery of Colomba's disappearance. The intricate and obscure connections that the stories begin to

¹⁹ This strongly recalls Pirandello's play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. Maraini curiously never names Pirandello explicitly as an influence for her work.

²⁰ Mcgilchrist makes an important distinction between 'presence' and 're-presentation', suggesting that they are the two ways of being in the world, and both are essential. When we allow things to be present, (Mcgilchrist often uses the verb 'to presence'), these things are perceived in "all their embodied particularity, with all their changeability and impermanence, and their interconnectedness, as part of a whole which is forever in flux" (93). In contrast, the other way of being in the world is to "step outside the flow of experience and 'experience' our experience in a special way; to *re-present* the world in a form that is less truthful, but apparently clearer, and therefore cast in a form which is more useful for manipulation of the world and one another." (93)

create provide the necessity of a context for ‘finding the way out of darkness’ in this narrative, and end up revealing the circumstances surrounding the *scomparsa*.

Once the internal author accepts that which is present and commits to the journey/story, becoming Zà’s travel companion, her attention provides the opportunity for what was previously not known explicitly to come to light. The full specter of fugacious sensation present during lived events that come together to provide the context for Colomba’s life are (re)narrated by the protagonist Zà via a one-way conversation with the internal author. The (re)narration allows Zà to dig deep into her experiences and reintegrate knowledge originating from non-explicit sensibilities, reconciling them with knowledge and wisdom that she has gained in the time since she experienced them. Once the non-explicit knowledge is acknowledged in word, the direly needed abatement of blind spots latent in Zà’s understanding of Colomba’s lived experience, past and present, is possible. The mental darkness, or omissions in knowledge which have impeded possible routes to coming to know these circumstances is overcome, little by little, and Colomba’s recovery is within reach.

I would point to ‘translation’, a major trope in *Colomba*, as the principal idea that Maraini uses to address communication between hemispheres in the effort to reconcile the divisions of the mind that may be acting as an obstacle to the process of finding truth. Not only is there an internal author who ‘re-presents’ Zà’s experience, but it could be said for Zà herself, who undertakes several translations of plays and books over the course of the narrative. Zà has serious doubts about what truthful translation looks like, and how to be as true to an original text in a world that sometimes clamors for something different.

The urgency that ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ become manifest in *La bambina e il sognatore* involves the disappearance and quest to recover a young girl. The massive failure that

left-brain dominance, enacted and supported by official channels, delivers in efforts toward the girl's recovery is stark. Nani's identification with his right hemisphere generates promising pathways for comprehending the many layers and mediums of awareness regarding the particulars of the girl's disappearance, as well as the many repetitions of other such disappearances which have been normalized, in a certain sense, attributable to the frequency of the 'same old tale': a child or young woman disappears, no premonitions or suspicions entertained before the disappearance on the part of the surrounding community, and a denial that the individual or conditions responsible for her disappearance might lie within the community. These pathways involve intuition and a certain open and present disposition.

The left hemisphere approach, notably defined by its refusal to entertain contributions by the right hemisphere, is revealed to have massive deficiencies in problem solving capabilities when acting alone and routinely refuses to admit valuable information that a right hemisphere approach is in the position to provide. Deficiencies in both a completely right hemisphere or purely left hemisphere advance toward truth and perception of reality, that is, attempts at getting at truth conducted in the absence of assistance of the other hemisphere, are real and recognizable. However, the right-brain disposition does not entail total refusal of left-brain contributions, in fact, as annoying as this persistent *pennuto* is, Nani concedes that he 'might 'have a point' at times. A winning tension is finally realized, notably, not by a new arrangement inside the mind of the protagonist Nani, a *sognatore* (dreamer), guided primarily by his right hemisphere, but through the perfect relational balance of left and right hemisphere views between Nani, the *maestro* (teacher) and his dizzyingly adept yet humble student, Francesco, when they embark on the investigative process together.

The precariousness of what it means to have a usefully and necessarily divided mind,

one with two very different views and specialized proficiencies, is in fact illustrated in a story from Friedrich Nietzsche that gives title to Mcgilchrist's work. The precise language of this allegory is of the utmost consequence and thus merits the following relation in full:

There was once a wise spiritual master, who was the ruler of a small yet prosperous domain, and who was known for his selfless devotion to his people. As his people flourished and grew in number, the bounds of this small domain spread; and with it the need to trust implicitly the emissaries he sent to ensure the safety of its ever more distant parts. It was not just that it was impossible for him personally to order all that needed to be dealt with: as he wisely saw, he needed to keep his distance from, and remain ignorant of, such concerns. And so he nurtured and trained carefully his emissaries, in order that they could be trusted. Eventually, however, his cleverest and most ambitious vizier, the one he trusted most to do his work, began to see himself as the master, and used his position to advance his own wealth and influence. He saw the master's temperance and forbearance as weakness, not wisdom, and on his missions on the master's behalf, adopted his mantle as his own- the emissary became contemptuous of his master. And so it came about that the master was usurped, the people were duped, the domain became a tyranny; and eventually it collapsed into ruins. (Mcgil.2, 14)

The short allegory invites contemplation of the expansion of the world, of culture, of human civilization, of the mind, and of wisdom/knowledge. Those who would hearken their attention to Nietzsche's story and Mcgilchrist employment of it are faced with the following questions: "Where can stability be found?", "What is the 'correct' relationship between the two 'actors' (hemispheres)?", "Is it possible to avoid the cycle of decadence of the rogue

emissary?”, “Are we as individuals, as cultures, as humanity, or as the entirety of ‘the living’ able or willing during and after these times of great expansion, to recognize the existence or even the memory of a ‘wise (spiritual) master?’” and, “What are the consequences if we can or will not remember the supremacy of this ‘master?’” Dacia Maraini has taken different approaches to these quandaries in her writing, but her most recent works can be seen to more directly confront the heart and substance of these questions, integrating the recognition of the paradoxical vitality and precarity that preconditions life, and certainly the life of the mind. The two sides of the coin, vitality and precarity, are unavoidable, and this recognition can only come from the place of acceptance found in the view of the master.

Mcgilchrist

Mcgilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary* engages with nearly every aspect of thought and how the hemispheres go about it that one could name. It is therefore important that I narrow attention on the elements of his work that have the most import in the reading and discussion of Maraini's novels, *Colomba*, and *La bambina e il sognatore*. This narrowed attention will seek to recognize the processes of the divided mind at work, to identify the contradistinction on display in the hemispheric division of thought which facilitate an understanding of the different worlds the hemispheres bring about as experience, an experiential quality I find to be present in Maraini's writing. First, I will provide McGilchrist's summation of the nature of the difference between the hemispheres. I will then give a more detailed account of the points of differences between the hemispheres of which there are particularly striking examples in Maraini's novels. However, it must be said that no part of McGilchrist's work on the specifications of what constitutes the important differences between the hemispheres is irrelevant to the novels. If we think of each hemisphere as a world unto itself, every aspect of its function and history will contribute to the whole picture of its essence. This could be said of any living thing, but it is emphatically the case with the mind and its hemispheres. This is because the mind, but more specifically the mind's hemispheres, in addition to existing in connectivity with the world, are circuits of connection within themselves where activity in one area influences and changes every other aspect of their very constitutions.

There is no substitution for the acumen of the following passage from the conclusion of McGilchrist's chapter, "The Nature of the Two Worlds":

If one had to encapsulate the principal differences in the experience mediated by the two hemispheres, their two modes of being, one could put it like this. The world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static, isolated, decontextualized, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but ultimately lifeless. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known – and to this world it exists in a relationship of care. The knowledge that is mediated by the left hemisphere is knowledge within a closed system. It has the advantage of perfection, but such perfection is bought ultimately at the price of emptiness, of self-reference. It can mediate knowledge only in terms of a mechanical rearrangement of other things already known. It can never really ‘break out’ to know something new, because its knowledge is of its own representations only. Where the thing itself is ‘present’ to the right hemisphere, it is only ‘re-presented’ by the left hemisphere, now become [*sic*] an *idea* of a thing. Where the right hemisphere is conscious of the Other, whatever it may be, the left hemisphere’s consciousness is of itself. (174 -5)

I stated in my thesis that Maraini reproaches what I argue is the exhibition of instances of dominating left hemispheric activity in individuals and in culture in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. Maraini accomplishes this by setting up a contrast of the divergent dispositions of the hemispheres that occurs in a myriad of encounters and

dilemmas that feature many different actors. While the interiority of some characters is available to the reader, the reader is at times cognizant of the tensions between the hemispheres in a single person at a distinct moment, that is, both hemispheres have a 'voice'. At other times, the reader is only able to perceive the course of action or the speech of someone who may be showing what I will suggest are tell-tale signs of hemispheric domination. Hemispheric domination, as it happens, is really only possible by the left. It is the left hemisphere that seeks control and power, and therefore tends to believe it can do without the right hemisphere. The reproach that Maraini makes is rarely specific, although there are times when a rebuke of someone's thought process as 'devoid of imagination', for example, is clearly made. The fundamental reason for the rebuke of left hemisphere dominance is that Maraini finds that it does not lead to truth. Rather, the left hemisphere is shown to occult the possibility of finding truth by parading the confidence of all-seeing objectivity even while willfully banishing pertinent context and information to the recesses of the mind as its verdicts are reached.

The left hemisphere, as Mcgilchrist states in the passage, is presumptuous about its superiority, possesses the will and power to manipulate, and indeed is also blind to what it cannot know and cannot see; a lamentable case when these propensities impede recognition and understanding, but also a dangerous and destructive case if unchecked. I will not go into an explanation of why the left hemisphere is valuable, it clearly is, and its value goes unquestioned by the right hemisphere. But it is the case that the left hemisphere provides the wellspring for human malice. Maraini's approach to human darkness in the novels discussed excavates the origins of enculturated and consecrated coercive control through stories that are embedded within the main narrative; family and

cultural histories, personal memories and influential texts are recalled and retold, and they constitute the 'background', both cultural and individual of the events and their interpretations. The stories embedded in the narrative span generations and provide the context for each branch of a two-tiered intertwined plot; a disappearance to resolve and the effectuation of a new truth born of attention, imagination, and storytelling. These histories and stories find elucidation in distant associations, often from the unconscious, which are dreams, stories of the past, metaphoric language and non-standard word meanings, emotional memories and *gestalt* perception, all in the domain of the right hemisphere. It should be noted that it is the right hemisphere that is best suited to penetrate the pretenses of unequivocal knowledge that the left hemisphere vaunts, with the implicit means of knowing that only it can achieve.

Histories and stories also provide the grounding for a sense of self of the wholesome, right-hemisphere variety. The left hemisphere, for all of the important contributions of its faculties, demonstrates a gross lack of competence in Maraini's novels, even as its parading of confidence is the fundamental ostentation which allows the left hemisphere to establish its dominance in the top seats of the social power structure. The fact is, the left hemisphere is very good at self-promotion, but is thoroughly unable to live up to the great responsibility of leadership when it is attained. Black/white, either/or thinking gives the judgments of the left hemisphere the luster of being absolute and therefore incontrovertible. In the novels, positions of responsibility and leadership implicated in the investigation of the missing, are occupied by officials with 'official' left-hemisphere dispositions, which prove to be flat out dead-ends. The police, the media, and popular opinion function mainly within the parameters of left-

hemisphere modes of operation. With little or no resolutions to problems that fall under their description of responsibilities to tout, these entities still purport to know best and proudly affirm their honorable incontestability.

Reason and Rationality

I will now elaborate on the most salient elements of Mcgilchrist's contestations, as they relate to the plot, structure and themes in Maraini's novels regarding the differences between the hemispheres and how they play out in experience of the world and in meaning making. I will begin with an investigation into how reason and rationality contrast with one another, with important examples of how the hemispheres wield and support their stances. Mcgilchrist quotes Pascal, who gives an adept illustration of how and why the practice of reason is superior to 'rationality', the belief in the conclusions of deductions alone:

The achievement of reason (wrote Pascal – uncongenial as it was to the philosophy of the Enlightenment) is to recognise that there are an infinity of things which surpass it. It is indeed feeble if it can't get as far as understanding that. (354)

The difference is that reason is aware of its own limitations where rationality is not. Rationality becomes a belief in and within the same static system of Rationality. The fallacy of a belief in rationality derives from the following important neurological discovery, confirmed by research:

[N]ew experience of any kind – whether it be music, or words, or real-life objects, or imaginary constructs – engages the right hemisphere. As soon as it starts to be

familiar or routine, the right hemisphere is less engaged and eventually the ‘information’ becomes the concern of the left hemisphere alone. (94)

The left hemisphere succumbs to its own expectations all too readily. While the right hemisphere “presents an array of possible solutions, which remain alive while alternatives are explored” (41), the left hemisphere latches onto a single solution and will even deny discrepancies that deviate from its blueprint, while the right hemisphere is on the lookout for discrepancies “more like a devil’s advocate”(41). Mcgilchrist concludes that the right hemisphere is much more capable of a frame shift:

It (the left brain) positively prefers what it knows. This makes it more efficient in routine situations, where things are predictable, but less efficient than the right wherever the initial assumptions have to be revised [...]. (41)

Possibility is what the right hemisphere attends to, where it is probability that the left hemisphere stakes its bets on, unaware, however, that the likelihood of consistent accuracy is nil should it bet with the odds every time.

When the left hemisphere is confronted with its own errant judgment, or anything else that complicates its position, it exhibits “a strong tendency to confabulate” (81) and “denial is a left hemisphere specialty” (81), whether in regard to physical incapacity or evaluation of its own performance. These propensities are far from harmless, especially when they present in an individual who is in a position of power or authority.

Mcgilchrist explains the process that brings about confabulation and “leads the left hemisphere to make some poor inferences and some mistaken choices” (81):

[I]t thinks it knows something recognizes something, which it doesn't, a tendency that may be linked to its lack of ability to discriminate unique cases from the generalized categories into which it places them. (81)

And denial is even more insidious. Unlike confabulation, which is an incidental error, denial entails left-hemisphere resolve to manufacture a story of success or victory even as the opposite is presently obvious. Mcgilchrist characterizes it as a strategy, not as a “blindness, not failure to see” (85), but rather, that is, it is willful. Research confirms that during periods of hemisphere deactivation of one side or the other, such as a stroke, disturbances of mood can occur. The more optimistic and senselessly cheery left hemisphere denies the person's shortcomings, even when they are obvious, such as physical disability after injury to the brain, while the right hemisphere is “more realistic about how it stands in relation to the world at large, less grandiose, more self-aware” (84). It can be said that the left hemisphere, with its duo of confabulation and denial that undermines the reality in perception, shows that it can be extremely naïve, but that it can also use its resolve to disavow anything that disturbs its naively optimistic point of view, that being, ‘I'm a winner’ (85).

Language

Mcgilchrist asks why is it we have language, for communication, for thinking, or is it for something else. The chapter entitled “Language, Truth, and Music” explores the probable origin of language and in his examination Mcgilchrist makes a critical movement away from a position that says language is the domain of the left hemisphere, the commonly accepted evolutionary explanation for the expansion of the left hemisphere's parietal region in humans. While it is true

that the explicit products of language are rendered by the left hemisphere, McGilchrist challenges the general conclusion. He writes:

[W]e (now) know that it is not actually true that language is subserved by one hemisphere: its functioning is distributed across the two. If it is true that most syntax and vocabulary, the nitty-gritty of language, are in most subjects housed in the left hemisphere, it is nonetheless the right hemisphere which subserves higher linguistic functions, such as understanding the meaning of a whole phrase or sentence in context, its tone, its emotional significance, along with the use of humour, irony, metaphor, and so on. (99)

The right hemisphere is much better at interpreting emotional expression. The following is McGilchrist's account of why we should yet consider the right hemisphere to be the master, even of language and communication, a category of which the left hemisphere seems to be clearly in control:

It is the right hemisphere that identifies emotional expression: it is faster and more accurate than the left hemisphere in discriminating facial expression of emotion. (...). The right hemisphere is the locus of interpretation, not only of facial expression, but of prosody (vocal intonation) and gesture. (59)

McGilchrist goes on to outline the deficits in interpretation that the left hemisphere exhibits:

The left hemisphere operates focally, suppressing meanings that are not currently relevant. By contrast, the right hemisphere processes information in a non-focal manner with widespread activation of related meanings. (41)

McGilchrist's theory is that the origins of expression and language are in the right hemisphere, and justifies his position through a problematization of the idea that it was

indeed an expansion of the left hemisphere that provided humans with the means to wield language; rather, he theorizes, it was a “deliberate *inhibition of expansion* in the corresponding right hemisphere” (100). McGilchrist links the inhibition of the right hemisphere to the onset of right-hand dominance, and accordingly, he attributes this too to an inhibition, of the left hand.

McGilchrist holds that music, non-verbal expressivity woven through intonation and phrasing, was the language of our ancestors (102). He writes: “Ultimately music is the communication of emotion, the most fundamental form of communication, which in phylogeny, as well as ontogeny, came and comes first” (103). McGilchrist recognizes that we will find it hard to accept the primacy of music as language in the right hemisphere, precisely because we feel so reliant on language. But he dismisses the common notion that humans became the thinking beings they are necessarily through language. He corrects the fallacy:

We make sense of the world, form categories and concepts, weigh and evaluate evidence, make decisions and solve problems, all without language, and without even being consciously aware of the process. (107)

McGilchrist proceeds to consider what the import and consequence of language is on thought. While we don’t need words for perception, they can have influence on how we perceive. What language does, McGilchrist writes, is shape the already existing landscape, by “fixing the ‘counties’ into which we divide it, defining *which* categories or types of entities we see there – how we carve it up” (110). Language brings some things into the forefront of our attentional fields, but by the same token, it can also act as a “restrictive force on what and how we think” (110).

It is right hand dominance that now provides a key link to the development of language dominance and the receding profile, as far as reputation, of music and other forms of non-verbal expression: dance and gesture for example. The advent of right-hand dominance, again, need not be construed as an expansion of ability but rather as the inhibition of the left hand. We are most of us aware that the brain controls the body cross-laterally, that is, the left hemisphere informs the movements of the right hand, and the right hemisphere the left. McGilchrist finds recourse to research that informs that “language, gesture and bodily movement are ‘different actualizations of the same process’,” the orienting response (110).

McGilchrist sees a crucial need for a greater understanding of the concept of ‘grasp’ for the use value of language for the left hemisphere, a means to a specified end. Essentially, McGilchrist makes a correlation between the hand’s ability ‘to grasp’, as to utilize as a tool, and the way the term is used to indicate that a concept has been thoroughly known and understood. McGilchrist qualifies the importance of the connection between the uses of grasp for the hand and for the mind, he writes, “The metaphor of grasp has its roots deep in the way we talk about thinking in most languages” (112). Among the many intersections between language and the physical grasp is that they are expressions of the drive of the left hemisphere to gain control in order to effectively manipulate the world. The following is the account of how the fixity that comes through naming gives us power over things:

[L]anguage’s role is in giving command over the world, particular those parts that are not present spatially or temporally (...). Words alone make concepts more stable and available to memory. Naming things gives us power over them, so that

we can use them; when Adam was given the beasts for his use and to 'have dominion' over them, he was also the one who was given the power to name them. And category formation provides clearer boundaries to the landscape of the world, giving a certain view of its greater solidity and permanence. (...).

[Language] hugely expands the range of reference of thought, and expands the capacity for planning and manipulation. It enables the memorialization of more than could otherwise be retained by any human memory. These advantages of memorialization and fixity, that language brings are, of course, further vastly enhanced when language becomes written, enabling the contents of the mind to be fixed somewhere in external space. And in turn this further expands the possibilities for manipulation and instrumentalization. (...). Language in summary brings precision and fixity, two very important features if we are to succeed in manipulating the world. And, specifically, though we may not like to recognise this, it is good for manipulating other human beings. We can't easily hide the truth in *non-verbal* communication, but we can in words. We can't easily direct others to carry out our plans without language. We can't act at a distance without language. Language, it would seem, starts out with what look like imperial aspirations. (114)

A great boon of language is that it provides a conceptual version of reality, a reality sheltered from constant change and contingency. This power of abstraction gives us a chance to focus with clarity on particular aspects of reality so they might be grasped. But the true nature of reality eludes language. McGilchrist writes: "[Language's] losses are in the picture as a whole. Whatever lies in the realm of the implicit, or depends on

flexibility, whatever can't be brought into focus and fixed, ceases to exist as far as the speaking hemisphere is concerned" (115).

Mcgilchrist's explanation of how language becomes a tool for manipulating the world begins to take shape in this account:

All of this (...) grasping, this taking control, this piecemeal apprehension of the world, this distinguishing of types, rather than of individual things – takes place for most of us with the right hand. And so, it is not surprising that hidden in these reflections are clues to the nature of the left-hemisphere processes. In all these respects – not just in the taking control, but in the approach to understanding by building it up bit by bit, rather than by being able to sense the whole, in the interest in *categories* of things, rather than in individuals – grasp follows a path congenial to the operations of the left hemisphere. (112)

Denotative language is the tool that the left hemisphere uses to grasp the world, and the tool it uses to make a demonstration of its exclusive grasp on the world.

Mcgilchrist asks that we do not confuse language with communicating, but rather understand it as a special kind of communicating, its aims and usage correlated with a special kind of thinking, again considering the 'howness', not just the 'whatness' (113-4). Metaphor is a use of language with a depth in meaning that goes outside and beyond the left hemisphere's grasp, it evokes rather than indication with precision. McGilchrist understands metaphoric notions to arise from the world of embodied experience and to return to it, and unequivocally states, "Only the right hemisphere has the ability to understand metaphor" (115). This is no small deficit of the left hemisphere; that is because metaphoric thinking is fundamental; "[metaphor] is the *only* way in which

understandings can reach outside the system of signs to life itself. It is what links language to life” (115). Language for the left hemisphere is something that gives power but brings detachment from the world. The opposite is true of the right hemisphere, through a common embodied existence, metaphor allows connection with others through shared experience in the lived world, where single denotative meanings are passed over for the unrivaled communicative power of intersubjective truths (118).

In Mcgilchrist’s view, common everyday language is unsuited for bringing forth meaning from what is known through implicit avenues. I quote from an interview in which Mcgilchrist advocates for careful and particular employment of language and terms:

Everyday language arose to enable us to utilize the world effectively, and, we have to use a special kind of language to deal with things that are not everyday realities for us, because, unless we are careful, by expressing them in language, we reduce them to familiar things, whereas the whole point about them is that we are trying to convey something unfamiliar. As Nietzsche said, words make the uncommon common. And what [we] are talking about are things that are, generally speaking, unusual but nonetheless very deep in meaning. We wouldn’t expect them to translate easily into everyday words. So, I think that everyday language is a problem for certain kinds of understanding, because it tells us that we’ve got it, it says “I understand that, I’ve grasped it”, where in fact what it needs to do is to abdicate that power, because it’s actually a destructive process, it’s getting between us and understanding something, that maybe, by removing language, we can contact. (Mcgilchrist and Freke)

Indeed, McGilchrist makes certain non-standard choices in terminology and syntax when a common usage of the standard term risks detracting from a deeper meaning of what is being expressed. I will have recourse to these terms throughout the dissertation, which include ‘presence’, ‘re-presentation’, and ‘betweenness’, each of which will be translated in the meanings they take on for McGilchrist further on in this section.²²

Attention and The Visual

The nature(s) of the mind’s attention and the primary modes that the hemispheres use to attend to things is the topic of this section. McGilchrist makes a strong link between the relative dominance of the visual and the kinds of attention that the hemispheres lend to the world. We are well served to apply the notion of difference between ²³*sapere* and *conoscere* in construing the kind of knowing that the two hemispheres partake in. The left hemisphere gives focused attention to things and has ‘knowledge of the parts’, whereas the right hemisphere has ‘wisdom of the whole’ (96). Like the hand, and language, the eye has “the potential to connect and divide” (168). To know someone or something in the sense that *conoscere* entails means that there is connection that one has experienced with something or someone. That something or someone is never really fully knowable, “since it is always changing, evolving, revealing further aspects of itself” (96). *Sapere* means to segment the original, living whole in order to know things *about* it; it is to “pin [something] down so that it is repeatable and repeated, so that it becomes (...) routine, inauthentic, lacking the spark of life” (96).

²² McGilchrist’s use of ‘presence’ is close to and influenced by Heidegger’s use of the term *Dasein*, or ‘beingness’, which is in direct contrast to the perception of the ‘beingness’ of that thing (McGilchrist, 177).

²³ McGilchrist uses *wissen* and *kennen*, the German forms of the verbs ‘to know’, and points to equivalents from across languages, including the French forms (96).

Mcgilchrist introduces the idea of *gestalt* perception, an ‘aha! phenomenon’ that happens all of a sudden, not the piecemeal assembly of information, something that makes for an indelible experience:

Gestalt perception is one of the most reliable and durable of the generalisations about hemisphere differences, [in that] it follows from the differences in the nature of attention. The right hemisphere sees the whole, before whatever it is gets broken up into parts in our attempt to ‘know’ it. Its holistic processing of visual form is not based on the summation of parts. (46-7)

If the whole ‘presences’ to us with the *gestalt* style of the right hemisphere, the flatness of the left hemisphere’s ‘re-presentation’, in contrast, has been likened to the ‘tyranny of the eye’ when the visual dominates the other senses, because of its “tendency to sap the life from the embodied original and substitute a product of the mind” (372). It is the intention that comes along with attention that can either seek out or denigrate the potential for connection between one another. This is what McGilchrist refers to as ‘gaze’, and there are, of course, two kinds of gaze, both of which in any event “alter what [they] find’ (165). Here is McGilchrist’s take on the distinguishing elements that reveal the intention of the gaze:

[T]he relationship implied by the left-hemisphere attention brought to bear through the scientific method, with its implied materialism, is not *no* relationship – merely a disengaged relationship, implying, incorrectly, that the observer does not have an impact on the observed (and is not altered by what he or she observes). The betweenness is not absent, just denied, and therefore of a particular – particular ‘cold’ – kind. (...). The right hemisphere’s gaze is

intrinsically empathic by contrast, and acknowledges the *inevitability* of ‘betweenness’: in fact, it is the fact of gaze normally being an empathic process that makes the detached stare so destructive. (166)

A left-hemisphere dominant gaze not only makes the objectification of the living possible but, it seems, inevitable. Once a living being is flattened, registered by its parts, (s)he is made available for grasp as a static object, for manipulation, and appreciable only for his/her use value. As somber a picture as that is, it is in fact *gestalt* perception that is the primary means for learning about the world, and the only way that we begin learning about the world in our young lives (171); it is perhaps attributable to the rapid passing to the realm of the familiar of things that are new, and alive, that we fall into the routine of the callous left-hemisphere gaze.

Emotions, Empathy and Embodiment

Mcgilchrist draws on the 20th century thinkers, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty who both worked on the phenomenology of perception, grounding their philosophical approaches on the closely related notions of intersubjectivity and ‘betweenness’, respectively. As the question ‘what is it in the way that we perceive that makes all of us (human) subjects?’ looms, McGilchrist turns to the study of direct experience, showing an inclination to canvass the embodied world of the right hemisphere. He writes:

For Merleau-Ponty, the ‘object’ of perception cannot be viewed in isolation, because it is in reality embedded in a context, the nexus of relations among existing things which gives it meaning within the world. Thus no one object exists independently of others, but reflects a part of whatever else it co-exists

with, and in turn itself is similarly reflected there. This is related to the intrinsic incompleteness of perspective available on any given entity at a given moment.

(148)

These are the defining attributes of Merleau-Ponty's 'betweenness', a term that McGilchrist adopts, which is very close to Husserl's 'intersubjectivity', used by McGilchrist as well. The words 'viewing', 'reflected' and 'perspective' in the description above evince a certain pre-eminence of vision. It is the grounding role of empathy, alive in the empathic gaze of the right hemisphere that underwrites intersubjective, and therefore subjective experience; all knowledge, including self-knowledge, is derived through relationship, it is a circular process (145). Just as the left hemisphere's gaze is detached, so is the left hemisphere detached from the body; for it, the body is "a thing in the world, like other things, (...) devitalized, a 'corpse'" (67).

Empathy entails imitation. Imitation is a fundamental of learning in which we practice putting ourselves in someone else's shoes. Empathy allows us to imagine someone else's lived experience and to recognize ourselves through connectivity to the other. It is the medium of our 'lived body', our movements, mimicry, connection through the eyes, sensations that are prerequisite for intersubjective experience. Insistence on context, an attention to everything unique that comes together to form the entirety of experience, is what McGilchrist believes is paramount for making meaning and uncovering truth. Again, in accord with Merleau-Ponty, McGilchrist writes:

[T]ruth is arrived at through engagement with the world not through greater abstraction from it; the general is encountered through, rather than in spite of, the particular; and the infinite through, rather than in spite of, the finite. (149)

Truth, then, is contingent upon context, with the body as the mediator. McGilchrist defines his concept of the truest ‘truth’, which he will refer to most commonly as ‘shared truth’:

Our conceptual systems are not totally relative and not *merely* a matter of historical contingency, even though a degree of conceptual relativity does exist and even though historical contingency does matter a great deal... truth is mediated by embodied understanding and imagination. That does not mean that truth is purely subjective or that there is no stable truth. Rather, our common embodiment allows for common, stable truths. (149)

McGilchrist concludes that the principal concerns in Merleau-Ponty’s work are all expressions of the stance or disposition towards the world of the right hemisphere. Here he summarizes the disposition of the right hemisphere in a way that accords with Merleau-Ponty’s work and his own theoretical framework for the concept of betweenness:

In keeping with its capacity for emotion, and its predisposition to understand mental experience within the context of the body, rather than abstracting it, the right hemisphere is deeply connected to the self as *embodied*. [...] It is only the right parietal lobe that has a whole-body image. [...] Importantly this body image is not just a picture. It is not a representation (as it would be if it were in the left hemisphere), or the just the sum of our body perceptions, or something imagined, but a living image, intimately linked to activity in the world – an essentially affective experience. (66)

Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical positions concerning truth born of art are presented later in this section.²⁴

²⁴ McGilchrist esteems Merleau-Ponty’s positions and values the connections that phenomenology has with neurology. It is worth noting that McGilchrist bypasses discussion of prominent 20th century thinkers influenced or

The body is in part under the direction of our *wills*. If the hemispheres can be said to have distinct values and each their own will, then there are two ways that the body might have. The emphasis on the body as that which grounds empathic connection and relationship is in some regards a response to the philosophical, theological, biological and historical idea of the body as passive and material, devoid of divine or spiritual inclination. This conception was then mobilized to reduce anyone to the status of ‘body’ due to the preclusion of full participation in the world of thought, society, politics and religion, an erasure of the possibility for empathic connection. And yet, the reduction of a person to the status of a lowly ‘body’ still allowed the ‘howness’ of the body to be mobilized. It is just that this historical reduction of some people attempted to take away the right-hemisphere howness of those bodies. I cite Mcgilchrist:

For even the body has its different ‘hownesses’: in the realm of utility, on the one hand, it becomes the means by which we act and manipulate the world; but, on the other hand, it is also the ultimate metaphor of all experience, including our experience of the highest realms of value. This is recognized by Laban when he notes that bodily ‘movement has always been used for two distinct aims: the attainment of tangible values in all kinds of work, and the approach to intangible values in prayer and worship’. The body, thus, holds in itself the dispositions of both hemispheres towards the world. (172)

The influence of phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on Mcgilchrist’s thought is in part a remonstrative proceeding against the history of ideas about the body. It is imperative that *all* subjects are seen in their embodiment and that this embodiment is

engaged by Freudian concepts, specifically Lacan. I mention this because Lacan developed certain theories that attend to the divided nature of the individual, ones that Mcgilchrist apparently chooses not to address.

appraised correctly as that which allows all subjects to reach out to the world in a spirit of openness to what is, and to experience relationship that is conditioned by empathic connection between themselves and others.

Destructiveness

There is an exception to the right hemisphere superiority for the expression of emotion, and that is anger (61). McGilchrist informs: “Anger is robustly connected with left frontal activation. Aggression is motivating and dopamine plays a crucial role in the reward it offers” (61). Destructiveness is a by-product of quite a few left-hemisphere propensities. We have touched on the ruination of truth and connection that confabulation and denial disseminate, the divisiveness and alienation that comes of left hemisphere dominant gaze and vision, the motive for giving attention that centers on control rather than care, and then there is anger, to boot. McGilchrist pulls no punches in using Shakespeare’s words to lay bare his warning of the perils of the left-hemisphere quest for dominance as seen in the quotation of King Lear in the introduction.

It is not that the left hemisphere is intrinsically destructive, it is that it is destructive to living beings and their truths. This is of course because the left hemisphere deals in a world of objects; “the left hemisphere is always engaged *in a purpose*: it always has an end in view, and downgrades whatever has no instrumental purpose in sight” (174). Assigning use value to living beings, including humans, born out in different ways over the course of history, has resulted in the most barbarous treatment of the living that the world has ever known. It should not be hard to accept that individuals who assign use value to others follow the same power-hungry left-hemisphere current and itinerary. There is no single feature that the malignant (left-hemisphere dominant)

actor and the malignant (left-hemisphere dominant) machine do not share; it is the will to power, through grasp, control and manipulation. The machine is the product of the snow ball effect; the more momentum power gains, the more opportunity for expansion of power exists as individuals who seek to satisfy a left-hemisphere will to power abet the ambition to dominate. As Mcgilchrist shows, there is a pattern which borders on inevitable, in which civilizations see balance between hemispheric dispositions at their inception, but over time, right-hemisphere inclinations are eroded, and left-hemisphere drives and scopes usurp the status of master previously held by the right hemisphere, the emissary gone rogue. Mcgilchrist's is a caution and an entreatment: restore human thought and perception to the master, the right hemisphere. The farther away from the master we allow the power-hungry left hemisphere to go, the more woeful the outcomes.

Morality and Injustice

When Mcgilchrist quotes King Lear, the flipside of our human capacity for deliberate malice is included; we humans are unique in our ability to refrain from doing harm, and even more, to act charitably without any concrete or immediate reward. The sense of outrage when confronted with inhumane conduct and atrocity is territory of the right brain.

Our sense of justice is underwritten by the right hemisphere (...). The right frontal lobe's capacity to inhibit our natural impulse to selfishness means that is also the area on which we most rely for self-control and the power to resist temptation. (86)

It is also only the right hemisphere which is at ease with the paradox that humanity is uniquely capable of both compassion and malice. The right hemisphere does not demand either/or truths as the controlling left hemisphere which refuses self-reflection does. The lengthy passage that follows takes up the importance of the right hemisphere's welcoming of paradox, a position that contradicts the left-hemisphere means of domination and in so doing makes the acceptance of paradox a moral position:

The left hemisphere point of view inevitably dominates because it is most accessible: closest to the self-aware, self-inspecting intellect. Conscious experience is at the focus of our attention, usually therefore dominated by the left hemisphere. It benefits from an *asymmetry of means*. The means of argument – (...) language, logic and linearity – are all ultimately under left hemisphere control, so the cards are heavily stacked in favour of our conscious discourse enforcing the world view re-presented in the hemisphere that speaks, the left hemisphere rather than the world that is present to the right hemisphere. Its point of view is always easily defensible, because analytic; the difficulty lies with those who are aware that this does not exhaust the possibilities, and have nonetheless to use analytic methods to transcend analysis. It is also most easily expressible, because of language's lying in the left hemisphere: it has a voice. But the laws of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, which have to rule in the left hemisphere because of the way it construes the nature of the world, do not hold sway in the right hemisphere, which construes the world as inherently giving rise to what the left hemisphere calls paradox and ambiguity. This is much like the problem of the analytic versus holistic understanding of what a metaphor is: to

one hemisphere a perhaps beautiful, but ultimately irrelevant lie; to the other the only path to truth. (228)

It could be said, to trust and affirm paradox is to take a stand against the *asymmetry of means*, which is a moral position against domination in all of its forms.

Maternal Connection and Storytelling

The critical importance of the mother-child bond, especially in the first years of life is expressed within Mcgilchrist's framework of the necessary primacy of the right hemisphere. He writes:

The face is the common mediator of two of the most significant aspects of the right hemisphere's world: the uniqueness of the individual and the communication of feeling. The right hemisphere is involved in identifying not just the facial expression of emotion, but the emotion as it relates to an individual face. This begins in children and is the principle [*sic*] medium for the child's growing sense of identity, through interaction with the mother's face. It is also in the right parietotemporal cortex that the child appreciates the mother's voice. (60)

It is also true that the right hemisphere matures earlier than the left, and is particularly dominant in the first two years of life, playing a critical role in developing a sense of self "as a social, empathic being" (88). The right hemisphere also sustains an individual's unified and coherent sense of self throughout their life, which includes their emotions and memory (88). The fact is that disturbances in the mother-child relationship in the first years of life can be damaging to development, particularly to the development of the right hemisphere. Although Mcgilchrist does not delve into behavioral modifications and

prescriptions for disruptions in right hemisphere development and function, one could posit that a primary care giver with an implicit understanding of the psychological needs of a child who positions him or herself in a relationship of care to the child, could, at least in part, make up for a missing or distant mother. It is specifically a maternal nature that must be accessed that best serves the child's development in the first years of life. As the hemispheres are not gendered, maternal nature, rather than referring to the fact of 'being a woman', means to take up the practices that those who mother have long taken upon themselves. One of these responsibilities is storytelling, finding a way to narrate the world to a child whose perceptions are of the *gestalt* variety only. For this, emotional output, including the intonation of one's voice, is of the utmost consequence if communication through betweenness is to pass from the maternal figure to child.

Memory

Although McGilchrist does not directly address the entire mechanism of memory and its mysterious workings, there is an elucidation of some of the finer points regarding the hemispheres' roles in its function. As mentioned, the right hemisphere is more engaged by emotional, autobiographical memories, what is called episodic memory (88), while the left hemisphere is involved where facts are committed to memory, and other items are stored that pertain to the public domain (54). McGilchrist likens time to spatial depth in the visual realm; the appreciation of both depth in time and spatial depth are facilitated by the right hemisphere, they give us the means to perceive where we stand in relation to others (77). McGilchrist also likens time to the ultimate context:

Time is the context that gives meaning to everything in this world, and conversely everything that has meaning for us in this world, everything that has a place in our lives, exists in time. This is not true of abstractions and re-presentations of entities, but all that *is* is subject to time. (...) virtually all aspects of the appreciation of time, in the sense of something lived through, with a past, present and future, are dependent on the right hemisphere, (...). (76)

Narratives also unfold in time, as does music, both arts that depend on implicitness for communication, and are therefore products of and for the right hemisphere. The following observation from Mcgilchrist refers specifically to music, but also holds true for narrative: “its structure extends through and across time, depending on memory to hold it together” (75). Mcgilchrist confirms that the left hemisphere cannot follow a narrative, instead, it is an exclusively right hemisphere skill (76). This is because the left hemisphere does not have an appreciation of time and therefore substitutes “sequencing,” or “the ordering of artificially contextualized, unrelated, momentary events” (76). This sequencing takes over in the left hemisphere and the “undivided flow” of music and narrative as perceived by the right hemisphere gets broken down into units. This substitution has the potential to parade as though it were constitutive of time, but never does it come close to the true nature of time (76). Mcgilchrist sums up the relation of time to the memory of and about individuals:

The critical point here is that the right hemisphere has an advantage where there is fluency of motion, or flow over time, but the left hemisphere an advantage where there is stasis, or focus on a point in time. There is an ambiguity in the idea of permanence. The left hemisphere seems to accept that permanence of something

only if it is static. But things can change – flow – and yet have permanence: think of a river. The right hemisphere perceives that there is permanence even where there is flow. Hence, when it is damaged, living beings have no permanency (...). (76-7)

Merleau-Ponty is credited with the emphasis on depth as prerequisite for attending to embodied experience, to the whole. Mcgilchrist expounds further on depth, affirming that *time is depth* in memory and narrative. Time as depth sees visual representation in the Romantic painter William Blake's spiral staircase in the painting *Jacob's Ladder*, which Mcgilchrist discusses. The spiral staircase is Blake's novel substitution for the traditional ladder in artistic representations of this Biblical story adding dimensions in the representation it makes of the human journey through life, time and space. Although the staircase is circular, unlike the unidirectional ladder, a gradual upward movement is figured, but only possible with a return, implied by the circularity of the course, to 'places' one has already been. Whether it is drive, will, desire or longing that moves one up the staircase, the direction is towards the pinnacle of perspective, although the spiral staircase's end is not in sight.

The Conscious and the Unconscious Mind

In the subsection entitled "The Primacy of Unconscious Will" Mcgilchrist gives a run-down of the three possible meanings of 'consciousness': consciousness as a waking state, consciousness as experience or feeling, and consciousness as something one bears in mind-continuously, and notes that "consciousness in each of these senses is sustainable by either hemisphere in isolation, though the quality of that consciousness might differ" (187). From here

he confirms that there are strong points of correlation between the right hemisphere and the unconscious. It is clear, however, that the assignment of the conscious and unconscious mind to the left and right hemisphere respectively would be in error. Mcgilchrist settles by writing that any “alignment has to be a matter of degree rather than all or nothing” (187). Mcgilchrist makes the following pivotal conclusion which weighs in on the ability of one hemisphere or the other to access the material of the unconscious:

The major difference between the hemispheres lies in their relationship with the *unconscious* mind, whether that means the dream state (thinking of consciousness in the first sense), or what we experience or bear in mind without being aware of it (the second and third senses). Whatever does not lie in the center of the attentional field, where we are focused, is better yielded by the right hemisphere, and the left hemisphere can sometimes show surprising ignorance of it. (187)

The unconscious is most famously associated with Freud’s evaluations through dream interpretation and experimental psychotherapy. Although Mcgilchrist is not a Freudian, he nevertheless seems to agree, at least in some sense, that the two hemispheres can and do have sharply contrasting values and distinct personalities. He quotes Freud on the topic, but not before cautioning that Freud’s is no more than a model, with some benefits and some shortcomings:

The unconscious is a ‘particular realm of the mind with its own wishful impulses, its own mode of expression and its peculiar mental mechanisms which are not in force elsewhere’. (98)

Mcgilchrist is permissive of the unconscious retaining its mysteriousness, that is, he does not attempt to delineate the unconscious mechanistically in terms of origin,

function and purpose. But the idea that the unconscious has its own wishful impulses is ponderous and turns out to be exceptionally important in the big picture. These questions arise: What is the drive toward truth and knowledge, where does it come from? Are there two wills within the individual, one originating from each hemisphere? And if so, should one identify with one of those wills/hemispheres over the other? The question of drive is also implicated here, and so we come to one of Mcgilchrist's novel proposals, what he calls "longing" is the right-hemisphere counterpart to "wanting", a left-hemisphere drive. Here are Mcgilchrist's words on the difference between wanting and longing:

The first is an impulsion, the second an attraction. Wanting is a drive, such as the left hemisphere experiences, or possibly embodies, in which one is impelled, as it were 'from behind', towards something which is inert, and from which one is isolated, something not participating in the process of except through the fact of its existence. In longing, one is drawn 'from in front' towards something from which one is already not wholly separate, and which exerts an influence through the 'division within union'. The first is like a hydraulic force (like Freud's model of drives), a mechanical pressure; the second is more like a magnetic field, an electric attraction (as Jung's model of archetypes would suggest). The first is unidirectional; the second bidirectional – there is a 'betweenness'. The first is linear; the second, as the concept of a 'field' suggests, holistic, round in shape. The first has a clear view of its target; the second intuits its 'Other'. The first is a simple, in the sense of unmixed, force – one either wants or does not. Longing, by contrast, is full of mixed emotions. (367)

Mcgilchrist's detailing of these differences does not, as one recognizes, come from a mechanical sensibility of how the mind works, but rather, is born in the world of artistic and literary expression. McGilchrist specifies certain historical moments, the Early Renaissance and 'the Romantic Revolution', or as McGilchrist characterizes it, 'the Romantic *Evolution*' (353), for example, where the sensibilities of the right hemisphere see expansion, and an emanation of 'longing' in creative depictions takes place.

Another aspect of Romanticism with intimate connection to the topic of the conscious and unconscious mind which McGilchrist highlights is the 'predilection for whatever can be only partly discerned' (368). McGilchrist qualifies his probe into this aspect of creative projects of the Romantic sensibility, making reference to research that finds, consistently, that the right hemisphere is far better than the left hemisphere at making sense of an image or information when it is partial or presented in a degraded form (83). McGilchrist writes that one way we can look at Romanticism is as "the wooing, by whatever means can be brought to bear, of the world as delivered by the right hemisphere" (369). The idea of betweenness, between observer and observed, creator and creation, takes center stage:

[In] the process of completing, or attempting to complete, through imagination the fragmentary impression, one becomes in part the creator of what one perceives. Importantly, *in part*: if the thing were either wholly given, so that we played no part at all, or wholly our invention, there would be no betweenness, nothing to be shared. (...). This reciprocal, evolving process between the world and our minds again suggests the right hemisphere's role here: 'something evermore about to be'. (369)

Of the means to express this partial discernment, the interplay between light and darkness has perhaps seen the most fruitful and widespread metaphorical extension; I mention this because original deployments of the interplay between light and dark stand out in Maraini's work. The significance of half-light or relative darkness, McGilchrist explains, is that the "light of day is associated with full consciousness, and therefore has an affinity with the more conscious explicit processes of the left hemisphere" (369). The resulting unconformity, at least for the left hemisphere, is that limited perception, which recruits the right hemisphere, is less limiting in that it allows truths to presence to us (369). This paradigm is received well only by right-hemisphere sensibilities which do not deny that wisdom is best approached indirectly (369).

Sublimation and Sublation

The relationship between the master and the emissary has been represented heretofore in a way that may seem to highlight its maladjustment. In fact, there is a clear profit in this tension that comes to pass in the process of 'sublation'. McGilchrist adopts and translates Hegel's concept of *aufhebung*, as sublation, which means, literally, "a 'lifting up' of something, and refers to the way in which the earlier stages of an organic process, although superseded by those that come after, are not repudiated by them, even though the later stages are incompatible with the earlier ones" (203-4). Sublation, for McGilchrist, is a process that comes alive as a possibility through the tension between the hemispheres' offerings. It is a unification; the return to the right hemisphere of what first arose there, after undergoing a left-hemisphere intervention. The result of going beyond the division is the stage of becoming, of something not present being born, but which

does not see the cancelation of what existed before (216). In this section on reintegration of left-hemisphere cognition into the right hemisphere's holistic attention, McGilchrist acknowledges that Hegel's spirit is "an unseen presence in the book", and characterizes Hegel's work as an "heroic attempt to articulate" how the mind recognizes its intuition of its own divided structure. Reintegration is then a process towards unity within division; the resolution that sees the cessation of tensions in the division.

Sublation, also happens to be what follows 'sublimation', a term most often used in psychology and psychiatry to describe drives or desires which are first pushed down, or repressed, due to social strictures. One who sublimates does so to avoid incurring social consequences that outweigh or prevent satisfaction of the drive. Although it has been most often theorized as an unconscious process, there is the idea that we must 'learn to sublimate', which borders on seeing sublimation as something we will, a decision in some regard. There is considerable variation in theories of sublimation, including disagreement of the nature of the drive in the first place. Freud first saw the driver as singular, sexual, and the object as singular as well. Freud believed that complete sublimation was possible in the most refined individuals, and even so, he also believed that satisfaction was possible if the object of the drive was carried out. That left almost everyone in the middle; unable to completely sublimate and unable/unwilling to carry out the object of their unacceptable drive, these people were afflicted with neuroses and perverse thoughts.

Lacan, on the other hand, whose theories take on special importance as they appear close to some of Maraini's ideas on the topic, did not believe that complete sublimation was impossible for the individual. Moreover, in contrast to Freud, he did not

see complete sublimation as necessary, because he characterized the drive differently. Although sex has its role in Lacan's theory of drives, the main point is that there is a longing for something that seems to have gone missing. The recovery of this 'object', is connected to a desire for wholeness, the wish for the cessation of the drive wrought of separation from the missing object. What becomes most important in Lacan's theory is the search for the thing, the journey in itself made after this object. This happens, in some measure, because the object of the drive changes perpetually. Once the object is gained, it does not and cannot bring complete satisfaction. It cannot satisfy because Lacan sees the drive not as exclusively biological, but semantic. The drive and the objects come from the limiting landscape of language, where categories are pre-established. The journey after the next object that one convinces him or herself will quench this yearning, becomes the passion in itself. After every delusion, there is a fresh adventure to chase. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because after all, the objects sought were not unacceptable, they just do not satisfy. And so, the abandonment of the longing for a desired object in exchange for the longing of knowing another, is not condemnable. In fact, depending on the circumstances, this can look a lot like the search for knowledge, one that is never completed.

Maraini believes in the need for sublimation, considering it a social responsibility. But, I would argue, she does not believe in the requirement or advisability of total sublimation. Total sublimation would entail the exclusion of the possibility of sublation: if we do not know and honor the nature of the thing, how can a transformation and transcendence of that thing when reintegrated with the whole be fathomed? What is most evident is that Maraini honors what is perceived by Lacan as *jouissance*, the pleasure

derived from the repetition of the search for new truths. Even when one does not find what they expected to find, the inquiry into truth and reality is endless, and therefore provides an endless source of journeys to be taken and discoveries to be made.

Science and Philosophy

Categorizing the various branches of knowledge as belonging to the domain of one hemisphere or the other, has little value for McGilchrist. It is more to the point to question how disciplines are approached in determining a corollary relationship with one hemisphere or the other. However, there are some disciplines that vigorously entrust their procedures and objectives to the skill set of one hemisphere over the other. The thoroughly muddled divide between the arts and sciences has been rehashed on many different fronts and little clarity has come of the debate. The common *how* in the approach to the sciences is what McGilchrist might be said to be more concerned with. As McGilchrist sees it the left hemisphere disposition dominates in some aspects of the sciences and in philosophy, as they are fields of knowledge concerned with what is representational. There are many meanings, some more correct than others, for the word science. McGilchrist prefers to substitute ‘mechanistic’ for what is commonly used to refer to ‘scientific’, as in belonging to the empirical world of science. McGilchrist suggests, in any case, that major breakthroughs in science do not originate in the left hemisphere, but rather intuitions travel unpredictable pathways and involve the kind of right hemisphere attention to the world that allows what is to ‘presence’ (56).

The ‘mechanistic’ or ‘fruits of human invention’, McGilchrist clarifies, would include language, manufacture and a “partwise way of representing objects” (56). McGilchrist sees philosophy overwhelmingly as an activity of the left hemisphere, in which it tries to make sense

of the right hemisphere in its own terms. Nietzsche's assessment of the Hellenistic period that saw the proliferation of philosophy as a branch of knowledge distinct from others is pointed to by McGilchrist. Nietzsche's account draws on the duality of the ambiguous figures of Apollo and Dionysius, and his critique sees Socrates, Plato and the philosophical tradition that followed as a left-hemisphere heist. Nietzsche characterized Socrates' left-hemisphere congruent legacy as a belief that "truth is in principle knowable, that it is knowable through reason alone, and that all truths are consistent with one another" (285). McGilchrist cites Nietzsche's words on Socrates: "far from being the hero for our culture, he was its first degenerate, because Socrates has lost the ability of the nobles to trust intuition" (286). Philosophy as a "hyperconscious cognitive process" (172) was all but solidified in the 'degeneration' described, which "involved the inability to trust what is implicit or intuitive" (286). This development took hold relatively late in the Hellenistic period, thus affording the characterization of philosophy at its inception as a more balanced, right hemisphere involved, generative process. At this critical point, the principles and knowledge of truth were severed from implicit means and became dependent on explicit means alone, a forceful denigration of right-hemisphere mastery and the delivery of powerful machinery for propagation of exclusive left-hemisphere jurisdiction of the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

Art, Drama and the Natural World

If we understand science in the sense of the mechanistic, the distinction of art is that it brings us into intimate contact with the "living, breathing human form", and "can be appreciated only by the whole embodied self" (370-1). Certain cultural conditions and shifts seen in the Romantic era and the Renaissance brought 'longing' into a higher degree of focus, a longing to

transcend what might be characterized as an affinity for the fruits of human invention, the effect of the left hemisphere's attention being directed exclusively to what it has itself made (56). The 'longing' of the right hemisphere is for something that we are not wholly separate from, and Mcgilchrist notes the contrasting affinity it has for "what exists before and after – and beyond – ourselves, namely nature" (56). It is the living world of nature in its infinite variety and its fluctuations that inspired awe in the Renaissance and the Romantic era. Mcgilchrist sees the articulation of this sublime love of nature as suggesting a 'metaphysical depth' in addition to the depth that is posed by time and space. This metaphorical depth entails:

[A] respect for the existence of something at more than one level, as is inevitable in myth and metaphor. It is this respect for context that underlies the sense [...] of the interconnectedness of knowledge and understanding, the uncovering of patterns across different realms, ultimately implying the necessity of the broadest possible context for knowledge. (313)

The rediscovery of the Classical world and a great appreciation of its exemplars of wisdom and virtue corresponded with this 'rebirth', a new appreciation of a resplendent world (312-13). The notion of art as a new truth born into existence through a betweenness felt and carried out in the creative process was avowed. Mcgilchrist cites Merleau-Ponty's notion that the work of art is something "entirely new", a 'truth' not manufactured or remixed of existing material alone, but born into the world as a new, unique being. Mcgilchrist proffers drama as the right hemisphere's correlate contribution to philosophy, originating in Greece:

[T]he necessary distance [of drama] (...) enables us to feel powerfully with, and thus to know ourselves in, others, and others in ourselves (...). And it is also in drama that opposites that can never be reconciled in the explicit discourse of

philosophy come to be, nonetheless, reconciled, through the implicit power of myth. (272)

The phenomenological world that centers on experience is that to which drama attends, and the profound affectual experience that drama as art has the power to bring about has been known throughout the ages.

Imagination

Imagination, as Mcgilchrist sees it, plays a significant role in the world and the life of the mind in many regards. Imagination is that which allows us to be good empathizers. Imitation is a first step to becoming empathic beings, and we continue to practice it through life, but imagination is what brings the other to life. Mcgilchrist finds imagination to be one of the few qualities that is truly remarkable and unique about human beings, dismissing reason and language, ‘the classic answers’, as ultimately erroneous in distinguishing humans from other animals (127). Mcgilchrist writes:

[T]here are many things of which [other animals] show no evidence of whatsoever; for instance, imagination, creativity, the capacity for religious awe, music, dance, poetry, art, love of nature, a moral sense, a sense of humour and the ability to change their minds. In all of these (though as always both hemispheres play a part), a large part, and in most cases the principal part, is played by the right hemisphere [...]. Where the left hemisphere’s relationship with the world is one of reaching out to grasp and therefore to *use* it, the right hemisphere’s appears to be one of reaching out – just that. Without purpose. (127)

Although imagination is one of the distinct qualities of humans, it is not something that can be mobilized to act on command. Creative inspiration is characterized by McGilchrist as a gift that can be “indirectly courted by using chance as a way to limit the power of conscious intention, allowing a cooperation between what is given and what comes to be created by the artist” (310). McGilchrist mobilizes Leonardo da Vinci’s well-known advice to painters in order to bolster the position that artist creation, rather than invention, is more akin to discovery; a birth of something new that comes about between the creator and the created. Leonardo’s advice was that they should take as their starting point, “the shape of a chance outline, created by, for example, damp stains on a wall, ‘because by indistinct things, the mind is stimulated to new inventions’” (310).

Without imagination, one is trapped in the inauthenticity that the left hemisphere traffics in, that is, re-presentation of the familiar. McGilchrist cites the deadening effect of the familiar on thought, and sees imagination as the way to break out of it. McGilchrist makes a distinction between fantasy and imagination purposefully. Fantasy, he writes, makes things novel; fantasy is “lying in a conscious attempt to produce novelty, something never seen before, to invent, to ‘be original’” (374). This is one of the possible responses to the inauthentic, an attempt to alleviate its devitalized and burdensome worn-out familiarity, an escape. Imagination, on the other hand, does not see inauthenticity as a problem with the thing itself, a worn-out resource, but rather, as a problem that lies within our self, and our ability to see it for what it really is (374). McGilchrist delineates the respect that imagination, the right-hemisphere approach to the deadening effect of inauthenticity should inspire:

[T]he solution [of imagination] is to make the everyday appear to us anew, to be seen again as it is in itself, therefore to discover rather than to invent, to see what was there all along, rather than put something new in its place, original in the sense that it takes us back to the origin, the ground of being. This is the distinction between fantasy, which presents something novel *in the place of* the too familiar thing, and imagination, which clears away everything between us and the not familiar enough thing so that we see *it* itself, new as it is. (374)

Mcgilchrist describes various remonstrations against the view of imagination and inspiration as helpful and consequential qualities that humans have the capacity for. For example, he highlights the lack of control that Wordsworth characterized as a ‘wise passiveness’ as “fit[ting] ill with the confident spirit engendered by the Industrial Revolution” (381), and how it conflicted with the need for discernable ‘results’ that the Protestant ethic required (381). McGilchrist acknowledges the blow back against creative work that courted inspiration and relied upon the transitory and fleeting imagination: “In response to this, ‘the Imaginative’, a product of active fantasy, rather than of the receptive imagination, began to encroach on the realm of imagination itself” (381).

In relation to the creative process of writing for Maraini, and to the creative process of approach to knowledge and truth, McGilchrist touches on the phases of the creative process, elsewhere, in a seminar entitled “The Value and Limits of Imagination”. It is here that he outlines the three stages of the creative process – *preparation*, *incubation* and *illumination* – and defines what action or non-action the mind must take in order to see the creative process through in his description of *generative*, *permissive* and *translation* requirements: *Preparation* is a long process involving hard work, skills and knowledge, both conscious and unconscious. *Incubation*

is an unconscious stage which is not under voluntary control that can only be impeded by conscious effort. *Illumination* is when a flash of insight flowers out of unconsciousness (Mackness). While the stages listed above are chronological and there exists the possibility of planning to go through the stages one by one, the phases as described in the following citation are the requirements of the mind's ripeness for creativity, not available for chronological coordination and so they play out haphazardly as the mind and thoughts stray and then make returns when conditions, internal and external are right.

[T]he *generative* phase brings together things that normally can't be brought together. In the *permissive* stage we have to get out of the way so that this can work for us; there is a relaxation of self-imposed constraints. In the *translation* phase, the analytic mind plays a part, but it needs intuition to discover things.

(Mackness)

McGilchrist's notions about the creative process come from a close analysis of the ways and means of creative savants from across history. They are not mere prescriptions but a description of how creativity is stirred and how meaningful and imaginative creation comes to fruition.

McGilchrist suggests that in addition to being open to unconscious experience and inspiration, we must engage in activities that rest and suspend the critical views of the left hemisphere and relax our thought process. We also need to find freedom from interruption from the mind and from what brings about its explicit judgments. Time spent in nature is highly recommended, a practice that invites connection with what is, and relationship with the living world. Maraini's *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* unmistakably feature the three stages and three phases of creativity, and not

just in the main plot. It actually could be said that the main plot-narratives are the imaginative creations of what either a concomitant protagonist or distinct aspect of the main protagonist actualize in their quest spurred by love of and longing for truth.

At the outset of each of the novels, an introspective protagonist with a reverence for the vast and complicated nature of truth is caught in the grips of left-hemisphere stagnation and recognizes it. The protagonists find their way out of the doldrums and begin the penetration of reality with the most salutary designs, to rectify the disappearance of a person. The protagonists are at dis-ease at first, feeling the frustration of having plans thwarted. They each find that they cannot simply pull themselves out of the inauthenticity and commit to something more worthy. The common characteristics are introspection, an imagination fueled by stories and histories, a deep regard for truth, and a belief in the sanctity of the living. For each there comes a moment of intuition which, in spite of their personal circumstances, demands the journey they will undertake, and determines the objective of the longing that they will experience. The stages of the creative process are thus illustrated prior to the main narratives and are established at the center of each of the novels.

We will also see, once the journey is underway, that the phases are all at work as well. The protagonists begin the journey toward truth without much information to go on. The case builds, but not in the way that investigations usually go. Distant associations and some synchronicities occur to the protagonists, associations that defy explanation and are not significant for others, but the fact of the meaningfulness in these connections is undeniable for each of the protagonists. As the most pertinent illuminations arise organically and as understanding into the circumstances accumulates, the protagonists are

able to invite more of this implicit knowing to manifest. Theirs are long and circuitous journeys toward greater perspective. The building of theories when things have only unfolded halfway is resisted, as it proves to be error prone. Possibilities are kept alive as analytic inquiry is made into possible leads, but the protagonists are not ‘good sleuths’; they make missteps and errant judgments, at times they disbelieve what has ‘presented’ and are temporarily drawn back into the left-hemisphere pathways of knowing. But they courageously emerge and continue to reach out for connection with what is, realizing that it is their own inability to see that is keeping them from seeing anew. The common protagonist-philosopher is a seamless way of introducing metaliterary considerations into the works. In this integrated way, Maraini elucidates not only the necessity of imagination in meaningful writing, but pairs it with the value of imagination for those who would seek truth in this world.

Presence, Representation, Betweenness

I have used ‘presence’ and ‘re-presentation’ as McGilchrist uses the terms, throughout this section; their continued use will deserve specification. The ‘common’ way to talk about how things come into our attention would be, ‘became present’, ‘presented itself’, or alternatively, ‘one became aware of its presence’. This common usage is suited to describe the way that the left hemisphere attends to things in the world, in reality by ‘re-presenting’ them, which can only happen after a ‘presencing’ has taken place. When we use the uncommon linguistic choice ‘to presence’, the mind is alerted that it is neither the object alone nor the subject alone that acts. McGilchrist writes, “The right hemisphere deals preferentially with actually existing things, as they are

encountered in the real world. Because its language roots things in the context of the world, it is concerned with *the relations between things.*” (50). The use of ‘to presence’ directs the mind out of abstraction to take account of all that McGilchrist has provided, as far as description, of how the ‘silent right hemisphere’, less able to express in reductive language, does things, and we then can conceive of the ‘presencing’, first and foremost as a moment of connection. That which ‘presences’ comes into being as a relationship, rather than presenting itself in an a priori situation in which either the thing exists ‘out there’ or consciousness exists and brings the thing into being.

I have attempted to highlight the elements of McGilchrist’s work that are most engaged in my reading and analysis of the division of thought and of human darkness in Maraini’s novels. An intriguing expansion of scope that McGilchrist yields as his arguments merge near the end of his work further this objective:

In the opening pages of this book, I wrote that I believed it to be profoundly true that the inner structure of our intellect reflects the structure of the universe. By ‘profoundly’ I meant not just true by definition, as would be the case for those who believe that the universe is in any case a creation of our brains. I think it goes further than that. I believe our brains not only shape the experience we have of the world, but are likely themselves to reflect, in their structure and functioning, the nature of the universe in which they come about. (460)

My belief is that Maraini has been tuned in, not to a mechanistic view of the world, but to the whole of the individual, to the entirety of experience, to life as interconnectedness and betweenness, for a very long time. Maraini’s writing brings new truths into existence as she translates life in so many different expressions and brings the lived world to life in

word. It is Heraclitus who McGilchrist says should be recognized as the original purveyor of the following charge:

[W]e must learn to use a different kind of seeing; to be vigilant, not to allow the right hemisphere's options to be too quickly foreclosed by the narrower focusing of the left hemisphere. [...] It is the task of the left hemisphere to carry the left beyond, to something new, to something 'Other' than itself. (164)

Maraini has written these lengthy and more recent novels with a perspicacity of what 'presences' masterfully, and is even able to elucidate the reintegration of the left-hemisphere extrapolations to the right hemisphere, a process discernible in the action of the narrative in the novels discussed, but also in the process of building a narrative that successfully delivers a new truth into the world.

Archetypes

I will show a particular use of archetypes in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* that tends to focus on the circularity of the journey toward truth. The presentation of the original archetypal figure is not recognized until several episodes of *gestalt* perceptions of resonance between something in others that harkens back to the archetype, which include vocabulary use, unusual tactics or actions, and some unique postural countenances that defy all depiction. Generations, that is, persons and their forebearers, feature in Maraini's novels, and so the example that McGilchrist uses to illustrate the difference between the identification of type by the left hemisphere and the identification of archetype by the right hemisphere, is fitting; it is the perception of 'family resemblances':

‘Family resemblances’ (...) associate individuals without there necessarily being any one defining feature that all members of the group have in common. It implies a sense of something that has never yet been seen, and yet that something nonetheless has meaning in relation to each of the exemplars that is experienced, and it becomes clearer only with more and more experience. (171)

Maraini’s use of archetypes, as ‘families’ rather than ‘categories’ into which things are placed in order to understand them is understated, but prolific in the novels. It is a question of the way of being that living things enact in the world that is the basis of the archetype in Maraini’s works, and that way of being is never defined explicitly, it cannot be deduced by applying rules. It is rather a matter of insoluble ligation, a case of *je ne sais quoi*, an enigma that binds them together.

The problem with the identification of types which proceeds from the left hemisphere is that so much is lost in the categories. The intent is not to understand but to act and feel as if understanding has concretely taken place. Mcgilchrist raises Bateson’s contestation that ‘all knowledge is knowledge of difference’ and concludes that the right-hemisphere way of the archetype rather than the type ends up being “the only way to know anything” (172). Mcgilchrist explains how the identification of archetypes as a way to organize knowledge is bound up with an individual’s will:

Some of the most powerful drivers of human behavior are such ideal types – not ‘character types’ which are effectively stereotypes, but something akin to archetypes, that have living power in the imagination and can call us towards them. (...). They are not reductions (downwards), but aspirations (upwards); they are derived from experience, but are not encompassed by it; they have affective

meaning for us, and are not simple abstractions; their structure (...) has much in common with narrative; they cannot be derived from or converted into rules or procedures. In fact one of the things that would most surely invalidate them would be a tendency for them to become just that – a set of rules or procedures (...). (172)

So the will as longing, as the right hemisphere experiences it, is implicated in an individual's relationship with archetypes that speak to their experience. Mcgilchrist specifies one of the residual outgrowths of Jung's archetypes:

[They] carry over to us affective or spiritual meaning from an unconscious realm. In their presence we experience a pull, a force of attraction, a longing, which leads us towards something beyond our own conscious experience and which Jung saw as derived from the broader experience of humankind. (172)

They are not “bloodless abstractions,” but emerge from places beyond conscious experience and are steeped in affectivity, and the lived world” (172).

The Nature of the Two Worlds and False Equivalence

Mcgilchrist's subsection entitled “*Faux Amis*” takes account of certain words and the concepts they denote. These words work differently for the two hemispheres, and the consequences of the divergent meanings that Mcgilchrist outlines are highly relevant to the spirit and direction of the novels. The terms that Mcgilchrist evidences in the section, each of which transforms in meaning as understood in the context of one hemisphere as opposed to the other, are: knowledge, truth, belief, will, familiarity vs newness, and activity vs passivity. What lies at the heart of the divergent meanings are the fundamental dispositions that each hemisphere has

toward the world. McGilchrist encapsulates “the principal differences in the experience mediated by the two hemispheres” in the following way:

[T]he world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static isolated, decontextualized, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but ultimately lifeless. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things, never fully graspable, always imperfectly known- and to this world it exists in a relationship of care (rather than use value). (174)

The words that McGilchrist introduces as *faux amis* are pregnant with meaning when taken from a right-hemisphere disposition. Both hemispheres are involved with identifying type; the left hemisphere finds a common denominator that determines its *sameness*, names the type, and categorizes it, while the right-hemisphere perceives wholeness and rather looks for the essence of its distinctness. The right hemisphere’s process of identification resists reducing something to a type based on a narrow view of its ‘whatness’. I quote once more from McGilchrist’s section “*Faux Amis*”:

The different ontological status of the two hemispheres impinges on the meaning of all philosophical terms that are used by us to understand the world, since both hemispheres think they understand them, but do so in different ways, each transforming the concept or experience by the context (that of left or right hemisphere world) in which it finds itself. Like the left-hand or right-hand worlds

seen by Alice on either side of the looking glass, each has its own version of reality, in which things superficially look the same but are different. (169)

Mcgilchrist suggests that the right hemisphere is involved in the identification of archetypes, rather than types which entails a *gestalt* perception for understanding.

It will be beneficial to give full attention to the variation in the meanings, as determined by the dispositions of the two hemispheres, of a few of the philosophical terms that McGilchrist addresses in the section. I will begin with “belief,” which he affirms is closely related to the two versions of “knowledge” and “truth”; “one purporting to be impersonal, static, complete, a thing, and the other personal, provisional, a matter of degree, a journey” (170). “Belief,” as experienced by the left hemisphere, is really just a word that stands in for a “feeble form of knowing,” a fact that one is not absolutely certain about (170). An example provided of the use of belief by the left hemisphere is “I believe the train leaves at 6:13.” (170). For the right hemisphere, a belief is something one can never be certain of. There is a betweenness that acts in the relationship of the believer and the believed, a relation of care rather than control, which alters the world, but also alters the believer (170).

‘Will’ or ‘to will something’ is also seen by McGilchrist as a disposition towards the world rather than a ‘thing’. For the left hemisphere will “is about control” (171), and is commonly thought of as such. But, as the right hemisphere has an open attention to the world and to the other (175), its will is more akin to a ‘longing’ towards something “beyond itself, towards the other” (171). The quandary that exists in McGilchrist’s view is “how can one field of consciousness accommodate two wills” (220), two wills accepted provisionally as factual, based on observation of split-brain subjects and on neurological imaging that shows activity in the right

hemisphere before a conscious decision is arrived at in the left, a demonstration of the primacy of the unconscious will (188).

This is a difficult question that McGilchrist points to though he does not weigh in on the debate over the existence of an essential ‘self’. Showing a bit of neuroskepticism, McGilchrist is careful not to preclude the possibility of a fundamental ‘self’. He shares Panksepp’s conception of ‘the fundamental sense of self’ that lies “at a level below the hemispheric divide” (221) which would explain why split-brain patients do not report a “fragmentation of the self, but merely some difficulty inhibiting inappropriate conflicts of action” (221). Without confirming a belief in the idea of the origins of a ‘self’, McGilchrist makes clear that he rejects the idea that mental processes “are akin to those of a computer” (223), and leaves room for provisional beliefs about the origin of consciousness and ‘self’, while remaining a soft agnostic on the subject.

McGilchrist concludes with a stark observation:

There is no such thing as the brain, only the brain according to the right hemisphere and the brain according to the left hemisphere; the two hemispheres that bring everything into being also, inevitably, bring themselves – like Escher’s hands. So to some the brain is [...] a particular type of *thing*, a machine; which is only to say that it is something we understand from the bottom up and which exists for a purpose we can recognise. To others it is something the nature of which is unique, which we can understand, therefore, only by being content with a degree of *not*-knowing, which opens the mind to whatever is, and whose purpose is not so easily determined. (175)

It is, perhaps, fortified with this image of the mind itself that the ‘howness’ of the right hemisphere understanding of these words can be extended to other terms imbued with philosophical tenor in a discussion of Maraini’s novels.

Maraini: Observations of Dualism in Her Writing

“To write like a woman” must not constitute a limitation but a richness. How can we say that a unique and recognizable style must be created for all women? What we can expect from a woman who writes today is that she must always remember she is a woman and not pretend that she has a man’s head and body and identify herself with the imaginations, fantasies, and visions of the world of the fathers. (...) not pretend be the only free woman, miraculously escaping the conditioning that weighs upon other women. (Maraini, “*On Of Woman Born*”, 689)

The ethos of the above passage is emphatically one that Maraini lives and writes by. In the steady attention to the divided nature of our beings nurtured in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, these values and habits of mind, writing from one’s experience, are detectable in their interposition on the strikingly consonant relationship with McGilchrist’s analysis of said divisions. Gender difference lies outside of the scope of the argument made in *The Master and His Emissary*, but in no way does that mean that engagement with McGilchrist’s arguments should exclude emotional and corporeal experience such as being woman. McGilchrist, in discussing his upcoming book, *The Matter with Things*, has recourse to the thoughts of many noted physicists who reject the idea that matter is more real than experience. He quotes Strawson on the subject who makes the claim that the denial of experience is “the strangest thing in the whole history of human thought, not just philosophy” (McGilchrist, “Matter and Consciousness.”). The following is the full explanation that Strawson gives for understanding the critical foundation that only experience provides:

Full recognition of the reality of experience, then, is the obligatory starting point for any remotely realistic version of physicalism. This is because it is the obligatory starting point for any remotely realistic (indeed any non-self-defeating) theory of what there is. It is the obligatory starting point for any theory that can legitimately claim to be ‘naturalistic’ because experience is itself the fundamental given natural fact; it is a very old point that there is nothing more certain than the existence of experience. (4)

It is thus that I propose Maraini’s engagement of gender experience does not pose a conflict with the relational correspondence of representations of divided thought in the novels discussed in this dissertation, but rather may be seen as an expected and meritorious direction of expansion in application of McGilchrist’s study. For, the structures of sexual division have been ‘eternalized’ by a “set of oppositions that organize the whole cosmos” (Bourdieu, 7). Many dualities are understood through the insertion of the symbolic categories of male and female into a system of opposites; the sexual division is truly the original binary social organizing principle (7).

Dacia Maraini’s social and cultural engagement, in and through her writing, has spanned seven decades and has delivered an estimably variegated oeuvre for readers to enjoy and critics to study. The many genres of literary expression she has pursued include theater, film, poetry, short stories, critical essays, historical fiction, testimonials, documentary, children’s literature, and the novel. No matter the genre, Maraini has struck a markedly insurgent tone, born of the unhesitating female inflection of her written word. Maraini has characterized the sway of her

gender on her literary production as *dalla parte della donna*²⁵, that is, as coming from “the side of the woman” rather than accepting the characterization of ‘feminist’ writer. Maraini recognizes the inescapability of systemic repression in addition to that encountered in personal life that women confront, and does not attempt to extract herself as a public figure, intellectual, or writer, from the resulting milieu. Her authorial voice is, therefore, unabashedly sexed, and it is for this reason that some surmise her work has not been received with the critical reception that it merits, at least at the loftiest levels, particularly in Italy.²⁶ I would contend that Maraini’s work, particularly the dense novels of recent decades, have not been considered fully for the special kind of universalism they render, nor for the structural and stylistic innovations of the novel as genre that they showcase.

As a socially engaged writer, Maraini’s work has always stayed abreast of the evolution of issues that condition life for women and girls. The vulnerabilities experienced by her characters are ‘real’ in the sense that they are consistent with what life could feel like for plausible fictional characters considering the extant historical, environmental, and internal circumstances of their lives. Maraini’s realism has been posited as one that addresses the real issues that women face, but I would suggest that in assaying the novels which this dissertation takes as its subject, we should, above all else, look to the ‘form of life’ and the ‘affective reality’ in her writing, rather than the ‘material’ as that which delivers her realism and informs the

²⁵ The phrase is found, among other places, in “Dacia Maraini: Ho raccontato un milione di donne”, an interview published in *L’espresso* in 2017. Maraini thinks it well to avoid limiting ideologies, feminism included. *Dalla parte della donna* has become the preferred replacement when highlighting the writer’s attention to women.

²⁶ Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld concludes that Maraini’s attention to the “discourses of theoretical feminism and to the experiences of women” and is “the reason that the lack of sustained critical attention to the work of an author so widely read in Italy must be understood in its full political force” (Introduction, 3). Maraini herself comes to a similar conclusion in “Reflections on the Logical and Illogical Bodies of my Sexual Compatriots”.

reader's immersion into the ambience of the literary world.²⁷ Maraini has objected to the characterization of her writing as naturalism, and critic Justo Serna sees her novel *Colomba* as demonstrating "l'impossibilità di narrare in maniera naturalistica" ("the impossibility of narrating in a naturalistic manner"), in its narrative conception (123). The form of life, then, is an affective reality which indeed changes with time, place and circumstance, but that also has a historical memory. Maraini returns often in her writing to reflect on the different types and function of memory, and the fundamental importance it holds for a novelist.

The depth of Maraini's curiosity and thought about memory is expounded in her essay "Inadeguatezza" ("Inadequacy"), in which she describes the debilitating voicelessness she felt as a young girl and how writing became a project of recouping repressed memories, and redressing voicelessness for her, as well as helping to temper her sense of inadequacy. In the piece, Maraini approaches memory in its many facets, beginning with Bergson's distinction between the autistic and the personal memory. The reader of the essay is hearkened to the collective memory and learns how our personal memory must interact and interpret through a reckoning with historical forces and conditions. Maraini calls the passage of time "il più grande mistero con cui noi ci troviamo a confrontarci" ("the greatest mystery that we find ourselves confronting") (380), and goes on to echo observations made by Ortega y Gasset regarding physical profile and tempo in his *Notes on the Novel*:

[L]a narrazione, il romanzo, sono forme di interrogazioni infinite su questo grande arcano. Il romanzo soprattutto ha questo andamento interrogativo. (...) la memoria come indagine sull'enigma tempo, nel suo moto, nella sua liquidità, è

²⁷ Ortega y Gasset made these observations about how Dostoevsky's realism was misconstrued in his critical essay "Notes on the Novel", which will surface again in this dissertation as a work that has clearly influenced Maraini and provides many key insights into her work in its connection to the critical lens of Mcgilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary* that I employ.

proprio del romanzo. Lo possiamo constatare anche sulla durata del romanzo stesso: (...). Il fatto è che il romanzo mima anche fisicamente il passaggio del tempo. (380)

(Storytelling, the novel, they are forms of never-ending interrogation of this great enigma. The novel above all has this interrogative tendency. (...) memory as investigation of the mystery of time, in its movement, in its fluidity, is specific to the novel. We can verify this also by the lengthiness of the novel itself: (...). The fact is that the novel mimics even physically the passage of time.)

The fluidity of time and the new interpretations that every generation must arrive at, could, from a certain perspective, seem arrested when fixed in a literary work. This expectation is overturned however by ‘the miracle’, that Maraini relates, of the encounter that the author and reader make, even while separated by time, an anomalous betweenness that can occur if the moment is right, and the necessary conditions of “una particolare disponibilità” (“a particular availability”), “una intesa” (“a comprehension”), and “un riconoscersi l’un l’altro” (“recognizing oneself in the other”) are met (“Inadeguatezza”, 382).

The *memoria di genere* (memory of gender) is hailed by Maraini as that which, having been denied for so long, caused her to seek out women from the past and tell their stories. Although memory of gender has always existed, a memory that recalls the experience of women’s violent repression and the resulting physical and psychological wounds, the women’s movement of the past century constitutes, for Maraini, a re-birth, a revisiting of history and its creation, via a reinsertion of women’s voice and experience. Inadequacy, is then, a shared condition, a collective memory of gender, which Maraini

identifies in herself. It is painful to experience, but is recognized by Maraini as perhaps the very thing that spurred her and other women to write. However, trauma experienced in childhood resists the memory's effort to retrace and revive. Maraini references her experiences as a child in a concentration camp as a case in point. Repressed memories, while often not available for direct expression are fruit for the creation of myths, which might translate as an advantage of the imagination furnished by the memory of gender for one whose experience lies *dalla parte della donna*. Maraini intimates her appreciation of the fact that the memory of gender is not dismissible for writer, reader, or protagonist, but she imparts to the reader of the essay "Inadeguatezza" that its consequences are not deterministic, that potentialities abound for she who bears this circumstance.

Maraini's writing alerts us to the intuition of a connection, impenetrable as it appears, in the psychological and social origins of the inclination to domination and abuse.²⁸ In *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, storytelling, dreaming, and the function and power of myth are held up as valuable ways of understanding and communicating important truths. They are also held up to scrutiny. Accessing *verità* (truth) is the inspiration for the efforts made by the protagonists who weave together the snippets of material that become the narrative quilt of the novels. They are those who tend with openness to what dreams may communicate, and those who reflect on myth and that which is mythicized, truths that are not absolute, but that change and evolve. These are *verità* (truths) with a lowercase v, which change and evolve, and require, restraint and caution as well as collaboration between reader and author in their *svelamento* (unveiling).²⁹

²⁸ There are some interesting feminist theories on relations of domination that play out in the subordination of (and sometimes violence against) women, animals and the natural world. See *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Perspectives*.

²⁹ Cavani, Liliana. "Il passo leggere della verità".

La bambina e il sognatore is the first novel that Maraini has written in the male voice, and yet Maraini's writing *dalla parte della donna* is, in many ways, sustained. The fragmentation of female subjects, born of the memory of gender, who experience a world still "fatto a misura d'uomo" ("made in the measure of men") (Maraini and di Paolo, 50) has been appreciated in its many manifestations as a wound inflicted on women in Maraini's writing over the years. Even as equality before the law is a lauded 'achievement' in many Western nations, liberation of speech, action, space, movement and opportunity continue to be curtailed for those of the female sex. Maraini sees women's "mancanza della parola" ("absence of the word") as a condition that still abounds even after the feminist movement; it is the separation of the sexually liberated female body from a women's desire, which has yet to be emancipated from the codes of male desire, leaving her "voiceless," a mythicized and objectified body.³⁰ Fragmentation of this kind is felt in a split between private and public, or inner and outer worlds, which can become detached, unanchored one to another. When continuity of one's life is stifled by fragmentation, Maraini shows that there can be woeful consequences. Nani, the male protagonist of *La bambina e il sognatore* is also, quite tangibly, an internally divided subject, but his condition differs from the fragmentation in women due, at least in part, to the effects of a gendered collective memory. Nani's division is perhaps closer to the *doppiezza* (doubleness).

Doppiezza and Frammentazione

In terms of the divided nature of thought as it relates to the fragmentation of women and *doppiezza* (doubleness) of men, the existence of a darker side is denied to women by codes that tell us what it is to be female. It is then the licit dark side of men which is reinforced by these

³⁰ Maraini, Dacia and di Paolo, Paolo. *Ho sognato una stazione: gli affetti, i valori, le passioni*. (50-57).

codes, that recoils and strikes out against those to whom darkness has been denied. Complexity of the individual, something that has been disavowed as a possibility for women in contemporary Western culture, is the subject of the essay “Padre e figlia” from the collection of essays. *La bionda, la bruna e l’asino* (1987) in which Maraini looks at how women’s wholeness and coherence is denied and precluded in the uniform nature prescribed them by culture. In “Adulterio” from the same collection, she writes: “Tornando alla famiglia tradizionale, quella più comune, di fatto essa ha una doppia morale: una permissiva per l’uomo e una repressiva per la donna” (“Turning to the traditional family, the most common kind, in fact it has a double standard: one that is permissive for the man and one that is repressive for the woman.”) (44). And in “Una madre dai denti di lupo” Maraini traces the historical distortions that have led to a one-dimensional casting of womanhood, beginning with the disinheritance of female gods and a disappearance of the veneration of their powers, Kali being central to her contemplation, as seen here:

Col passaggio dalla religione delle madri a quella dei padri, le dee sono state castrate, rese miti e docili, pallide appendici di minacciosi e onnipotenti dei dalla prorompente virilità. (14)

(With the passage of the religion of the mothers to that of the fathers, the female gods were castrated, made timid and docile, pale appendages of fearsome and omnipotent gods of unbridled virility.)

And regarding the men of today, Maraini writes in “Uomo oggi” (Man Today), again from *La bionda, la bruna e l’asino*, the following about their double-dealing when comparing statistics that reveal the divergence in the work, home and sex lives of men

and women, with what men give as answers in surveys, that is, how they like to be seen in public life.

[D]a questi uomini viene una richiesta doppia: di essere creduti moderni, sicuri, partecipi, gentili, e di coltivare in segreto dei sogni di onnipotenza e di assolutismo che sanno benissimo quanto sono inattuali, persi, stupidi. Una commovente richiesta di doppiezza lecita, riconosciuta. (77)

(From these men comes a two-faced request: to be believed modern, secure, participants, kind and to secretly cultivate dreams of omnipotence and absolutism that they know very well are outdated, lost, stupid. A pathetic request for legitimate, recognized duplicity.)

Maraini seems to suggest that a woman's fragmentation results from the withholding of a rightful recognition of the totality of her person, and is exacerbated by the misbegotten duplicity that culture has afforded men.

What occurs in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* is, in my view, momentous in the works of Maraini. It is a realistic, yet very magical, process of reckoning with fragmentation and division through sublimation in the individual. It is through this reckoning that truths, unavailable to the normative/male social and cultural milieux, are made manifest for protagonist and reader. Then, it might be said, that a demonstration of the rejection of the limitations of any ideology, which Maraini has repeated when pressed on her relationship to feminism, is quite clear. Women are not the only divided subjects in a world dominated by masculine ascendancy, nor have they ever been, in Maraini's writing and thought, or in the real world. Rather, it is a question of the availability of the choice to adopt the disposition that the subject will take when

reckoning with their circumstance of division. Nani models the overlooked disposition available to a male subject, and this choice revolves around the *accudimento* (caring for and taking care of others). I quote from the published interview “La cipolla era un sogno celeste” in which Maraini annotates the apparent contradiction that masculinity and *accudimento* bring about:

[L]’*accudimento* è (anche) una forma di pietà. Vuol dire riconoscere il corpo dell’altro a andargli incontro (...). L’amore è anche *accudimento*, riconoscere che l’altro ha dei bisogni, dare loro una forma visibile. (...). E siccome l’*accudimento* è legato – in una maniera stereotipata, certo, che però appartiene ai nostri codici storici e mentali – alla maternità, naturalmente si pensa che l’*accudimento* materno potrebbe invece essere una suggestione bellissima per il mondo maschile, non necessariamente deve essere legato alla fisiologia della maternità. Infatti gli scrittori hanno tutti, chi più chi meno, questo sentimento dell’*accudimento*, se non altro verso i loro personaggi, verso il mondo che descrivono. Uscire dallo stereotipo senza negarlo è stata una mia scommessa. (Maraini and Cesari, 30-31)

(Caring is (also) a kind of reverence. It means recognizing the body of the other, to go to meet it (...). Love is also caring, to recognize that the other has needs, and to give them a visible form. (...). And since caring is connected – stereotypically, certainly, but nonetheless part of our historical and mental index—to maternity, naturally one might consider motherly care to be a lovely suggestion for the masculine world, it need not be linked to the physiology of maternity. In fact all writers have, some more some less, this feeling of care, if

for nothing else, for their characters and for the world they describe. To take leave of this stereotype but without denying its existence has been my challenge.)

Maraini's engagement with fragmentation and *doppiezza* in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* as psychologies of division develop Mcgilchrist's canvassing of the divided mind in a direction that opens up application to experiences of gendered subjects, while averting biological determinacy.

In my judgment there has been an excess of critical attention on Maraini's relationship to feminism and on the identities of those who suffer abuse in her novels. As bravely corporeal as Maraini's portrayals are, and as dire as the continuation, diversification and amplification of violence against women and children is in our contemporary world, an appreciation of Maraini's literary work should not end with valuation of its mimetic impulse. Maraini's clear commitments in her writing and in her life to exposing and denouncing violence done to women and children are no small contribution to movements toward social justice, and the outstanding posture she strikes in facing concrete disillusionments of the feminist revolution, including the uninterrupted patterns of violence, are forceful and commendable. Nonetheless, I think it is still true that the attention lent to these rightfully popular themes may contribute to a critical blindness in recognizing the dazzling artistry and construction of Maraini's literary works, especially what is found in the denser novels written in her mature years. Maraini has integrated so much detail into the hermetic world of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, as well as other works, that the immersed reader might have the illusion that writer's intent extends into a reality outside of the novel. The construal of Maraini as a political crusader is a misapprehension when one considers her artistry, especially in the novel. Ortega y Gasset, whose work has significant consequence for the perspectives on Maraini as novelist that I take in

this dissertation, describes how the novelist must commit to insulating the literary world she imagines and constructs, and specifies how the novel comes to have “symbolic meaning” when impressions arise in the reader’s mind, *after* or *outside* of its reading.

Imperviousness is but the special form taken on in the novel by the generic imperative of art: to be without transcending consequence. (...). By virtue of a purely aesthetic necessity, the novel, must be impervious, it must possess the power of forming a precinct, hermetically closed to all actual reality. From this condition there follows, among other consequences, that the novel cannot propagate philosophical, political, sociological, or moral ideas; it can be nothing beyond a novel. (...). This does by no means preclude that the novel, once it has been “lived” in a delightful sleep-walking way, may afterwards evoke in us all sorts of vital repercussions. (*Notes on the Novel*, 86-7)

The suggestiveness of dreams, myths and stories and even pieces of a historical record which are found embedded in Maraini’s novels is not indicative of the author’s focus on horizons beyond the world of the novel, but rather are the very methods that the interpreter uses to create a unified understanding of the things of the novel. Said another way, the material of the novels in discussion is seized upon by the reader’s web of mental connection, which is itself nourished by the unconscious, by dreams, myth, stories, and histories that come to him or her from within the work and without. For Ortega y Gasset, the disposition that the writer must take in order to make the fictional world central, is a spirit of care and dedicated attention (*Notes on the Novel*, 88-89).

Maraini’s Realism

It is difficult to step back from the themes that are apparent in Maraini's writing, first off, because many readers encounter strong reverberations and association with the experience of the collective unconscious, particularly of women. But if we do not step back, we cannot fully appreciate the multi-tiered realities that overlay each other in Maraini's writing, which stubbornly emulates the rich complexity of all things in its design. We must draw back from the mighty affective response, not to deny it or denigrate, but to see from whence it came. In order that we are not left only with simplifications as descriptions of the novel, we must appreciate what each novel 'does'. In the spirit of looking at 'how' each of Maraini's novels in question 'does' what it does, I introduce my sense that there are not a few elements of Maraini's *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* that might be described as belonging to the genre and style of magical realism, or more precisely, magical feminism (Hart 1). I make the comparison of elements in these works to the genres named in order to identify aspects of magical feminism that operate in these recent novels by Maraini in the service of uncovering of reality, and truth. I will give a brief account of Maraini's relationship to realism, and then specify how certain aspects of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* traverse some limits of realism and cross over into something rather magical.

In the preface to Maraini's first published novel, *La vacanza*, Alberto Moravia refers to Maraini as "soprattutto una scrittrice realista" ("above all a realist writer"), and goes on to supply his conception of *realista*: "lo scrittore che ama la realtà per quello che è e non per quello che dovrebbe essere, cioè soltanto e appunto perché è realtà; e che non si ritrae di fronte ad alcun aspetto per quanto imprevisto di questa realtà" ("the writer who loves reality for what it is, not for what it should be, that is only and precisely because it is reality; and who does not recoil when facing some aspect of reality, however unexpected"). Nicola Chiaramonte, an influential

Italian intellectual of the 20th century wrote, “while realism is certainly a constant trend, in the Italian tradition it is nevertheless rarely disjoined from imagination and from the attempt to relate the perception of sensuous reality to a view of the world as a whole and of its possible order” (238). This clarification about the character of Italian realism should be taken into account when making appraisals of the qualities of Maraini’s writing. I acknowledge that a categorization of magical realism, most often associated with New World writers, would be in error.

I will qualify my contention that Maraini’s novels in discussion might, however, be assayed for the ‘magical’, by discussing the elements consistent with what one finds in magical realist fiction that appear in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. First, myth and fables are introduced in their capacity to further the understanding of present events. Second, there are characters in the novels who experience telepathy, and the unexplained events are narrated with no break in the realistic tone of narration. Third, the setting of the novels is the real world, and the ‘magical’ occurs just there, in the familiar world, rather than somewhere else. Fourth, plenitude is a feature of the novels; there is an extravagant amount of disorienting detail which mirrors the scope and operation of *lo real maravilloso* in the style of magical realism, baroque in its layering, mutation, and repetition. Fifth, action takes place on a multi-plane reality, and in divided arenas; in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* the oscillation of realities takes place, for example, between town and forest, between the home or classroom and the world outside, between moments of solitude and moments of exchange. Sixth, the use of metafiction is “paramount” in arriving at textualization, which creates a self-consciousness in the readers of their role as reader and highlight, through various techniques, the porous boundaries between author, narrator, protagonist, and reader. These boundaries are impinged upon in the novels in various ways, but a continual allusion to other literary works, including recollection of Maraini’s

own past works, reward, when probed by the reader, with fathoms of psychological reflection, authorial commiseration and discovery of perspectives previously unseen. Seventh, an affectation of the reader produced by works of magical realism is the intensification of the sense of life's mystery, and therefore, the writing must rouse in the reader an openness to letting go of conventional modes as a precondition to heightening his or her awareness of prodigious meanings and connections. And finally, a decentering of dominant discourses that takes shape via marginalized voices.

Even with inclusion of the aspects of magical realism named, it is the disposition of the author and narrator in the presence of the magical and mysterious which the style called magical realism truly hinges upon. The narration of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* are not in fact completely devoid of bemusement at the unexplained, that is, the marvelous is not presented as common. When the extraordinary occurs in the novels, the narrator seems to stealthily acknowledge that both the protagonist, and by implication the reader, regard them as such. That which is extraordinary remains outside of proper explanation for both reader and protagonist, but neither is overly disquieted about these events. I now introduce what Patricia Hart calls magical feminism, a writing style not unrelated to magical realism, but one that demonstrates a commitment to a woman's perspective³¹. Isabel Allende's unique approach, which combines the magical and the real, is the impetus for Hart's delimitation of this sub-genre of magical realism. I see many of Maraini's works as incorporating the spirit of magical feminism: a merging of two very distinct ways of seeking truth and interpreting, which has the effect of altering and evening the playing field in terms of the status that these ways of being and thinking are bestowed. It is a

³¹ Magical feminism is distinct from feminism. The 'feminism' in Hart's terminology is used to describe stylistic techniques, not an ideology.

genre that is subversive of conventional structures and values, and the approach is *dalla parte della donna*.

Returning to the question of the author's disposition in the presence of the magical and mysterious, Hart examines the narratorial and authorial disposition when confronting the 'marvelous' in Allende's novels and proposes Allende's fiction, "in certain instances, (...) uses magic to demonstrate a truth about the female condition" rather than employing a magical realist approach within a feminist discourse (32). Hart's working definition of magic is, "any phenomenon which produces a sense of wonder in us that cannot be dispelled by what we think, we know or what we assume *somebody* knows of natural law" (19). Hart goes on to cite examples in Allende's fiction of phenomena that fall in this category, specifically clairvoyance, and her observations have worthy application to Maraini's narration of this kind of 'vision' in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. Clairvoyance, in some senses, fails the female protagonist, Clara, of *The House of the Spirits*. Rather than "a clear 'truth' brought to her by supernatural power of vision, a concealed reality, or an acute insight or perception", Hart writes, she sees "a fantastic tableau constructed from a blend of reality and her childish imagination, which has been colored by her readings" (41). While I would not describe the mysterious moments of clairvoyance experienced by the protagonists in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* as failure, they do not deliver anything like clarity, nor do they prevent very bad things from happening even when the timing of such visions suggest that they might have had the power to. Similarly to what Hart points out about the ways of clairvoyance in Allende's novel, these moments of clairvoyance in Maraini's works often mingle things active in the protagonist's mind, such as episodes from texts recently read and stories and their impressions absorbed in childhood, with some aspect of the material reality of the moment in which they occur. The

episodic visions in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, do not always disclose an immediate consequence or meaning. The protagonist who has the vision is stirred, but knows that the correct interpretation of the vision is something for which they must expend further effort to extract. This effort is not purely mental and deductive; there must also be continued receptivity to things from the unconscious in order that the intricacies of the particular mesh of interconnections be further apprehended. Hart goes on to explore the relationship between an apparently unproductive clairvoyance, passivity, determinism, and the question of whether certain events are inevitable, given the circumstances. It has been my intention to introduce magical feminism as well as the description of the clairvoyance that it entails, in Hart's view, as profitable frames through which some elements of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* can be read, helpful in developing a sense of the balancing act that dreams and reality, and the magical and the real, perform in the novels.

Intertexts

One of the primary ways that Maraini approaches the divided nature of thought is by drawing, directly and indirectly, from texts that come from an array of places and times which attend to internal and external division via singular themes and unique design. What all of the texts which I argue have sweeping consequence for an observant interpretation of the whole of each of Maraini's novels have in common is that they take the complication of a certain conventional duality as their theme. Maraini locates the inquiry into the conventional dualities in these works first by promoting attentive reading and interpreting that considers the whole of the work in appraisal of the parts. Maraini engages these texts in various ways with agility and playfulness. Rarely if ever is the metatextual content taken at face value. Maraini's intertextual

references see recontextualization as the novels progress. The texts, even those from long ago, seem to take on new life as a result of this movement. Not only do their themes appear to thrive again, but even forms, styles and techniques employed in these texts are emulated by Maraini which accords a sense of intimacy, even a collusion, with the original writer, even for the reader.

The texts that I will discuss have bearing on the themes found in both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. Nonetheless, it is the case that these intertexts have more or less magnitude within the narrative of one or the other of Maraini's novels as the emphasis placed on the interwoven themes is distinct in each narrative and pose unconscious apprehensions, as they relate to the action of the novel, that lurk in the recesses of the protagonist's and possibly the reader's mind. The texts that Maraini corresponds with in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* that I will discuss at length are Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, Collodi's *Pinocchio*, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Proust's *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. An array of fairy tales see meaningful involvement in the novels as they are known to nearly all, for the sake of argument, and need only be mentioned or allusion in order to elicit a wealth of images. Stories of the lives of mystics and martyrs, parables, legends and pieces of historical record that come from across time and from various cultural traditions are also found in the novels and take on metaliterary functions. Some of these stories see meticulous recounting within the novels, offered so that we might see and know what the specifics of the symbolic content are that are our inheritance. In regard to the entirety of intertextual content in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, it is more or less consequential for the individual reader depending on his or her familiarity with the texts, and the extent to which the familiarity evokes impressions that support his or her imagination connecting their form and content with things that take place within the novels. A more in-depth discussion

of how these metaliterary keys act in the novels will be found in the chapters that follow, but here I will expound generally on the most salient aspects of Maraini's advertence of these works.³²

La vida es sueño

Calderón de la Barca's play *La vida es sueño* looms in the penumbra of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. The epigraph to *Colomba* is taken from the play; "Se questo è un sogno, sospendimi la memoria; come possono in un sogno accadere tante cose?" (If this is a dream, relieve me of the memory; how can so many things happen in a dream?). The intertextual relations and bearing that the play has for both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* is formidable. The differentiation between the 'real' and the 'illusory', and the dire consequence the distinction has for order, both in the life of an individual's mind and in the public sphere, is unarguably the theme of this classic play. Maraini has long entertained the subtleties of the major theme of Calderón's work, undertaking an 'intriguing rewrite' of Calderón's play, *A memoria*, an avant-garde novel that "disturbs its audience, unsettling its beliefs and instilling (...) 'the shock of recognition'" (Lombardi, 162). Calderón's play is recalled to the minds of the readers of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* through structural elements, themes, and by direct reference. Perhaps the most enriching basis for the revisitation to this 17th century play found in Maraini's novels in discussion is the transformation of thinking patterns in the protagonist, Segismundo. In the transforming of his thinking, he becomes human, master of

³² Maraini's attention to these particular texts in her works is not limited to her writing in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. *Il treno dell'ultima notte* for example alludes heavily to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The children's literature is clearly what Maraini herself read as a child, and thus impacted her developing imagination.

himself, is recognized as heir to the throne, and overcomes the darkness that the unhealthy divide in his mind visited upon himself and others as disorder and violence.

A valuable reading of Calderón's text which highlights his conversion is laid out in Soufas' "Thinking in *La vida es sueño*". Segismundo's conversion amounts to the ability to take responsibility for his actions, to understand that his actions are real, and that they have consequence. Segismundo comes to appreciate this reality as the conditions of his rigid, detached, and narrowly focused thought processes, present at the outset of the play, are transformed through experiencing life among others, outside of isolation (Soufas, 287). The parallel with Mcgilchrist's work is immediately apparent; the different ways that the hemispheres have of being in the world effect dispositions, thinking and behavior, ways of being that cannot find separation from paradigms of morality and immorality and human relationship. The 'monstrousness' of Segismundo's thought and action, which Soufas argues is born of detachment from the living, breathing, changing flow of the real that he is subject to in his imprisonment, is, from a Mcgilchristian perspective, just what you would expect from a runaway left hemisphere that has been bereft of input that one normally receives from the right hemisphere, from human contact and sympathies.

Soufas, to be clear, makes no mention of physical lateralization of the mind, and yet the functions, propensities and resultant dispositions of the hemispheres as outlined by Mcgilchrist see nearly exhaustive parallels. These parallels include: the role of imagination, the inclination to understand through betweenness rather than to try to understand through categorization and on the basis of apparent difference, the shortcomings of rationality, probability and expectation over what is new and present, the mistake of disembodied logic rather than recognizing the full humanity of oneself and of others, all of them impairments born of sensual deprivation and exile

from the human emotional realm. Maraini's metaliterary adaptations of this text from the Siglo de Oro (Spanish Golden Age), have a great deal of relevance to the suggestiveness that literature, as well as other art forms, be considered an act of creation born of an openness to all that is part of the contemporary world to which one belongs. Maraini's attentiveness to the vanguard of psychological inquiry and the great expansion of the ways we have to see human thought and action anew, specifically in how we adapt ourselves to *obrar bien*³³ (to do good, to act well) is, in part, what makes her literary production over the last two decades so illuminating, again, this is outstandingly the case regarding Maraini's dense and "sluggish" novels.³⁴

Jose Ortega y Gasset's literary criticism, sociological inquiry and the philosophical underpinnings upon which the former are supported, as mentioned, lurk in the shadows of both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, and might be considered to inform, in some measure, the impetus of their creation.³⁵ Appertaining to Maraini's structural approach in the novels, to the psychological profiles of her fictional characters, to the authenticity of action that her writing endeavor involves, I would call attention to the deep influence the oeuvre of Ortega y Gasset has had, especially in her most recent efforts at the novel. A satisfactory interpretation of the elusive phrase, *la vida es sueño*, specific to Calderón's play, consistent with what Soufas illuminates in his essay, becomes discernible in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* by virtue of an inspection of the Orteguian concepts by which her writing is in part guided. Ortega y Gasset began his inquiry into the "imperative of authenticity" in one's life in his first published work, *Meditations on Quixote*, where he wrote "Soy yo y mis circunstancias, y si no la salvo a ella no

³³ Segismundo's conversion in his thought patterns bring balance to his rational faculties, and allow his re-birth into an intellectual and moral order that will allow him to *obrar bien*. (Soufas, 295.)

³⁴ Ortega y Gasset, *Notes on the Novel*. p.61

³⁵ Of Ortega y Gasset's tome of works, I have looked mainly to the following texts: *Meditations on Quixote*, *The Dehumanization of Art and Ideas about the Novel*, (*Notes of the Novel*), *The Revolt of the Masses*, *Self-absorption and Alteration: Meditation on the Technique*.

me salvo yo.” (“I am I and my circumstance; if I do not save it, I do not save myself.”). In order to unpack how this famous assertion informs the *Orteguian self*, and the model self that emerges through a process of a personal effort, the effort to *salvar* (to save) in Maraini’s recent novels, I look to Magalhães’ work on circumstance in Ortega y Gasset, and how it relates to the unconscious.

Beyond Magalhães’ consideration of how the self can only understand itself through laborious seeking of its unique radical reality, the “limiting disability” the self faces is addressed in his work; this is understood as the wealth of unconscious content, repressed, forgotten or inaccessible upon demand, also what Ortega y Gasset refers to as the *co-present* (latent). Seeking, then, is both limited and expanded by the functions of the unconscious, and this tension constitutes, in some sense, the fundamental drama of Maraini’s recent novels. Mcgilchrist considers the somewhat conventional notion that an alignment of the right hemisphere with the unconscious mind exists, not to be incorrect, but he clarifies that the alignment must be a matter of degree, rather than an absolute (Mcgil. 2, 187). In order to get a sense of the degree, it is necessary to specify what is meant by ‘unconscious’ and the ways it might be experienced, and how the unconscious mind affects our conscious thinking and action.

The quickness and accuracy by which the right hemisphere processes tomes of non-verbal content, and the fact that this goes on without our noticing are among the reasons Mcgilchrist calls it ‘the master’, and yet a master whose legitimacy is, from her³⁶, continuously wrested. The left hemisphere is ignorant of what lies outside of the focus of its attention, and so the impetus for actions or *the will* is misconstrued by the conscious thinking subject as belonging

³⁶ One inadvertence in Mcgilchrist’s writing, in my mind, is the gendered estimation present in the dictum “The Master and *His* Emissary”. I only mean to do something to amend the imbalance with my use of the gendered possessive pronoun.

to the domain of the left hemisphere and the cognizance it has of its deliberations. Mcgilchrist's characterization of where the balance of power must lie between the hemispheres is expressed again in the recognition that "meaning does not originate with an interpreter", the consciously processing left hemisphere, and "all one can hope for from the interpreter is that in his or her hands the true meaning is not actually lost" (188). And so it is that meaning is not ever misapprehended by the right hemisphere, where gesture, tone and emotional material is apprehended, but has the potential for being so in the left hemisphere, where speech comes in, and the rationalizing tools such as 'the familiar' and 'the conventional' encroach on that which was simply present for the right hemisphere. As we learn from Calderón's play, an "excess of imagination" is not at fault, rather, it must be emphasized in its capacity to represent the physical and the sensory to other centers of thought, absolutely essential for making judgments in and about the real world (Soufas, 289-90).

Among the aspects of the human unconscious most relevant to Magalhães' study is that the human individual, (with emphasis on the etymology of the Latin word 'in-dividuum' or 'indivisible thing'), including the conscious self, is extrapolated from unconscious material and processes. It is then easy to arrive at the fact that the unconscious is the most fundamental part of the individual. The unconscious manifests itself in chaotic, unsystematic and seemingly illogical ways because it lacks a conscious regulator, it is not filtered through the construction of *self*, which it precedes, and which it is capable of overwhelming (Magalhães, 62). Sudden unexpected emergence of unconscious content, in dreams with powerful images for example, show that we must understand the unconscious as already alive and operating.

Memory is a faculty that sees the unconscious spill over, becoming palpable, unexpectedly. Invoking Plato's notion of the three kinds of memory, Maraini emphasizes the

potential revelations that lie in the experience of the third kind, even when things of the past have seemed irretrievable.

[La] prima è fatta di pietra, è incisa nella pietra: è più duratura, ma ingombrante. La seconda è fatta sul calco, come il gesso o l'argilla: se viene un po' di pioggia, si scoglie. La terza (metafora bellissima, per me una folgorazione) è come un albero su cui gli uccelli si posano come e quando vogliono loro, senza sottostare alla volontà dell'albero. Io mi riconosco in questa terza memoria: la mia memoria non è volitiva, ma viene quando le pare e mi riempie di cose straordinarie senza seguire l'itinerario della volontà. (...) ho imparato a conoscerla (la terza) che è ricchissima e che non può essere forzata. Mi piace questo lavoro sotterraneo e istintivo della memoria. (Maraini and Cesari, "La cipolla era un sogno celeste", 43-44)

(The first is made of stone, it is inscribed in stone: it is enduring, but cumbersome. The second is made of limestone, like chalk or clay: if it bit of rain comes, it dissolves. The third, (a beautiful metaphor that for me was a eureka moment) is like a tree upon which birds rest whenever and however they decide to, without submitting to the will of the tree. I recognize myself in this third kind of memory: my memory is not deliberate (volitional) , rather it comes when it wants to and fills me with extraordinary things without following any itinerary of the will. (...)

I have learned to know its richness and that it cannot be forced. The instinctive and underground working of the memory please me.)

Maraini's writing in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, in many ways, mirrors the ways of both dreams and this third kind of memory in its form. De Miguel encounters

the reflection of the dispersive memory in the organization of Maraini's acclaimed work *Bagheria*, he writes:

Il filo conduttore è piuttosto tenue ed è interrotto da mille digressioni (...). Si va avanti nel tempo, ma svariati ricordi, annodati come ciliegie, intervengono senza un ordine preciso a ogni pagina, interrompendo ripetutamente il filo principale. (...). La materia del libro è volutamente disorganizzata, i riferimenti cronologici spesso sono vaghi. (De Miguel, 74-5)

(The connecting thread is rather tenuous and is interrupted by a thousand digressions. (...) It goes ahead in time, but assorted memories, entangled like cherries, intervene without any precise order at every page, interrupting, repeatedly, the principal thread. (...). The material in the book is purposefully disorganized, the chronological references are often vague.)

De Miguel's description is neatly befitting of the winding path the reader of *Colomba* takes as it to is a 'novel of the family' and by some measure, *La bambina e il sognatore* proceeds in a similar way.³⁷ The memory of the protagonist, Nani, of *La bambina e il sognatore* resurrects voices of others as well, but they are largely filtered through his own (multiple) perceptive faculties rather than constituting a temporary departure from the main protagonist's existence. De Miguel goes on to specify the replication of the way of the memory that he detects in form, and also in the abundance of sensory features.

Però, se ci pensiamo, non è proprio la memoria a funzionare dispersivamente?

Non procede per salti, appoggiati in scintille verbali, grafiche, olfattive, sonore,

³⁷ De Miguel classifies *Bagheria* as a 'novel of the family', indeed, that of Maraini's family, as autobiographical elements about her family's past abound. There are also many parallels in *Colomba*, especially seen in the internal author, to the things of Maraini's own life, to the people in it and their experiences.

tattili, ecc.? E insieme alla frammentarietà, va sottolineata la natura polifonica e dialogica. (De Miguel, 16-17)

(However, if we think about it, is it not precisely the memory that functions in a disorganized way? Does it not proceed in leaps, sustained in flashes of expressions, designs, smells, sounds, touch, etc.? And along with the fragmentation, the polyphonic and dialogic nature must be highlighted.)

And then what about deception, including self-deception? Memories in stone, the ones that are told again and again, make no guarantee of being ‘true’. Even more troublesome is repressed memory. It has no corroborating witness, and the fact that it has been inhibited can suggest that the mind’s mechanisms do not want the truth to be known. Any recognition of the veracity of dreams and visions is conventionally distrusted in today’s world as well. These themes, self-deception versus an unveiling of what was hidden that can arise unexpectedly in the memory, and the deceptive capacity versus the symbolic premonitions of dreams, are contemplated with intention in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*.

Another Jungian perspective that harkens back to a discussion of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, are the experiential qualities and limitations encountered when exploring the two kinds of unconscious, the personal and the collective. The personal unconscious is repressed or forgotten experience, while the collective unconscious is hereditary, never existing before in the consciousness of the individual, it is the “biopsychological load” that one is born with, as well as the potentialities specific to the individual (Magalhães, 63). Memory, both the personal and collective, can be an additionally troubled domain for women, according to Maraini.

Per memorizzare bisogna pur amare il proprio passato e quindi in qualche modo se stessi. Ma le donne preferiscono morire piuttosto che dimostrare della tenerezza e indulgenza per se stesse. (Maraini, “Riflessioni sui corpi logici e illogici dei miei compaesane di sesso.” Translation from Diaconescu-Blumenfeld, 37)

(To build memories, one must love her own past and therefore in some way herself. But women prefer to die rather to show tenderness and indulgence for themselves.)

The defeated memory of women has inter-generational repercussions in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, some of them tragic. But a will to amend the passing of personal and collective injury is laid out in the efforts of the protagonists, not just in their action, but in their interpretive orientations.

Conrad

Affinities exist in much of Maraini’s writing with celebrated Conradian metaphoric motifs, most notably ‘the contrast between darkness and light, and a looming sensation of imminent danger’ (Maraini and Cesari, 45). Maraini has acknowledged the influence of Conrad’s work, even beginning in her adolescence.

Mi viene subito in mente l’innamoramento per Joseph Conrad che ha riempito di gioie la mia adolescenza di lettrice instancabile. Ho sentito poi il bisogno di andare a “vedere” quella mano di scrittore per capire dove cominciasse l’intenzione di un progetto di vita dedicato alla scrittura. (Maraini and Di Paolo, *Ho sognato una stazione*, 131)

(My falling in love with Joseph Conrad, something that filled my adolescence as an insatiable reader with joys, comes quickly to mind. I then felt the need to go “see” the writer’s hand in order to understand where the intention for his life’s work dedicated to writing began.)

In her translation of a short novel by Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*, Maraini emphasizes the detection of a divided self as a thematic element. In *The Secret Sharer*, this ‘other self’, someone who is material to the protagonist and those who seek him, is at once so intimately connected to the sensibilities of the captain, and yet so distinct in circumstance that it is incumbent on him to protect, to save this other self. Maraini specifies in her book *Un clandestino a bordo* that the text itself was the upshot of her reflections on symbolism culled in her translation of Conrad (10). A reading of Maraini’s adaptation furthers the notion, on the question of the divided self, that the division in unity extends beyond the conventional limits of the individual. By invoking the mother-child interrelation, Maraini stretches the metaphor of nascent awareness of the other self in *The Secret Sharer* to the mental, spiritual and material generative process of bringing a new life into the world. In *Un clandestino a bordo*, Maraini mulls over the perplexity of the issue of abortion, including the psychological determinants surrounding a woman’s choice to use or not to use contraceptives. Maraini does not believe that external factors cited by many as that which determines a woman’s decision on this point add up. She arrives at the possibility that there exists a deeply buried need for women to know, through experience, that she does indeed possess the incredible prerogative to give birth to new life. Maraini writes:

A volte mi sono chiesta se rimanere incinta non sia per una donna un modo per provare a se stessa di essere dotata di un potere forte, il solo di cui siano state storicamente dotate le donne: si tratta di un potere che ha perso la sua vera

essenza, ma che rimane nell'ombra come il mito di una forza recondite e vitale. La maternità, nella cultura dei padri, è stata trasformata in un evento di estrema passività per le donne. (18)

(At times I have asked myself if becoming pregnant is not, for a woman, a way of proving to herself that she possesses a tremendous power, the only one that women have been historically credited with. It is a power that has lost its true essence, yet remains in the shadows, like a myth with an obscure vital force.)

The same sort of power is experienced by the protagonist of *The Secret Sharer* on his maiden voyage as captain, on an unfamiliar ship. From the deck of his new ship, alone with the sea, he feels the night pregnant with previously unimaginable possibility. He is receptive to the vastness and the mystery of the night, the unknown. From the sea emerges a nude man, his double. He is unknown to the captain, and has his own unique blemished circumstance. The captain immediately intuits that his response to the stowaway's presence will determine this man's, his other self's, vital status. The captain is an active agent and his choice to harbor, to indulge, to understand the fugitive who admits to committing a murder at sea, is made possible by a prodigious sense of responsibility to do so, even when it means taking great risks himself, just as Maraini recognized a mother does for her child.

It is then, *dalla parte della donna*, by which Maraini relates to the discovery of a second self upon one's vessel, encountered in her translation of Conrad's tale; she considers translating, along with writing to be "un'attività squisitamente femminile."³⁸

³⁸ In the interview with Elena Paruolo on her translation of *The Secret Sharer*, Maraini likens the work of translation to another women's activity; taking care of children: "Lo stesso gesto fisico del chinarsi a lungo, con emozione, sulla pagina, non lasciando sfuggire neanche un piccolo segreto del testo, sempre pronti a coglierne le necessità più minuziose, non ha caratteristiche prima di tutto materne."

The active role is the pregnant woman who makes a covenant to harbor this other, who is inseparable from her. Maraini's *Un clandestino a bordo* (1996), begins with *Lettera sull'aborto* in which Maraini reflects on what more there is to say on the topic of abortion. Maraini recognizes the significance of the intense secret sharing between a mother and her child that begins as a connection of the senses as the child grows inside her (16).

Maraini accentuates that maternity is an active pursuit, like the captain's harboring of the fugitive in *The Secret Sharer*, and that the passive character that it has been given by the culture of the father represents the primary site of women's dispossession of power, as reproduction was the only power with which they were historically imbued. To recognize the other as one's self is, by some measure, to reclaim this power, this intimacy, this tremendous secret. It is through this lens that the struggle a grandmother makes to reconnect intimately with her own child, even after she has departed this earth, in order help her imprisoned grandchild take repossession of herself in *Colomba* can be seen. It is also through this lens that the extraordinary maternal capacity, the ability to *accudire*, that the male protagonist of *La bambina e il sognatore* radiates, which allows him a stark look at the power plays and thinking patterns of the dominant, the active agents, the alpha-male, and the abhorrent captivity of those who have been rendered voiceless and powerless: women and children.

The incorporation of stories familiar to many people, including children, into Maraini's works has been noted by critics:

La sua passione per il racconto la porta tuttavia a servirsi di fonti letterarie in cui l'infanzia viene frequentemente raffigurata: le favole, le fiabe, e i miti. Come

scrittrice celebre ma anche avida lettrice di storie, la Maraini ama far scoprire ai lettori le somiglianze fra le sue storie e le storie appartenenti alla tradizione.

(Amantangelo, 216)

(Her passion for storytelling leads her to make use of literary works in which childhood is frequently depicted: fairy tales, fables, and myths. As a famous writer but also an avid reader of stories, Maraini loves to let her readers discover the resonance between her stories and the those that belong to tradition.)

Maraini recontextualizes stories from tradition that speak of and to children, as they draw on the intuiting mind for meaning, re-presenting them in a way that bears upon the day, whether a specific event or a current topic in the news. Amantangelo describes the renewed force of the message that the retold tales hold, “un messaggio che consola e allo stesso tempo turba chi legge” (“a message that consoles and at the same time unsettles the reader”), about the continued vulnerability of the youngest, smallest, weakest and most innocent (216).

Pinocchio

Maraini regards the enduring popularity of Collodi’s *Pinocchio* as attributable, in part, to the representation of paternal longing that is otherwise generally absent in culture unlike notions of maternal longing and passive receptivity to the maternal state. She explains: “nelle società occidentali il desiderio maschile di un figlio è stato censurato, cancellato come se fosse una vergogna e demandato al corpo della donna.” (“in Western societies, a male’s desire for a child has been censured, erased, as though it were shameful and transferred [solely] to the female body.”) (Maraini, *Tre sguardi su*

Pinocchio). Geppetto's wish to be a father is not extinguished by his condition; he is poor, old and alone, but nonetheless he wants to have a child, to experience fatherhood. He constructs a son out of wood and his world is turned upside down by the freedom of the disobedient Pinocchio. Geppetto is imperiled trying to deliver Pinocchio from the consequences of his naive decisions. *La bambina e il sognatore* discloses a commemoration of paternal longing and paternity understood as sympathizing with 'maternal' ways, as they have been conceived, that is, a bond forged upon *accudimento*. And then on the flip side, there is an inculcating look at the calamitous repercussions of the cultural tendency to deny and repress paternal longing, a theme which ties the various spheres of action in the novel together.

It is the absence of the expression of paternal longing that marks the lives of generations of women in *Colomba*. Maraini is not condemnatory of the men in the novel who left their longings unexpressed, but rather laments the cultural and historical circumstances that led to the apparent inexpressibility of the paternal longings felt through the generations. Again in *Colomba*, the cultural notion of paternity as something that opposes the expression of *accudimento*, understood as a mother's charge, is emphatically implicated in the harm that has conditioned the lives and minds of the female characters. Likewise, Maraini interrogates the damaged lives and minds of the male characters who, rather than expressing paternal longing, join the chase after 'objects of desire' which contributes to hardship and sometimes tragedy in the lives of the generations of women. The return of the presence and expression of paternal longing is a strong source of redemption, that which allows the continuation of a story of the generations to go on, as seen in the conclusion to *Colomba*.

Collodi's *Pinocchio* depicts another duality that is perhaps a model for Maraini's idea for *il pennuto*, that of *il grillo parlante* and *la fata dai capelli turchini*. These characters are 'real' in the fantastical tale, but speak only in advising or reacting to Pinocchio. They are those who try to keep children safe and on the right track, but also one's inner voices that develop in their formation which often resemble the voices of guardians and caregivers. The scenes with *il grillo parlante* are often comical in their ribaldry. The voice of *il grillo parlante* is grating, pejorative and judgmental. On the other hand, *la fata dai capelli turchini* models *accudimento* and acceptance, she is forgiving and loving, and draws conclusions about what is good and what is bad on the consequences they bring about; if they cause harm, they are to be avoided.

It will be noted that *la donna dai capelli corti*'s name strongly recalls that of *la fata dai capelli turchini*. In fact Zà and *la donna dai capelli corti* are seen, over the course of the novel, to have many similar dispositions, habits of thought, and pastimes. They come to understand that they are interconnected and that we share our joys and our sufferings with others and with the world. This is the very understanding that Pinocchio benefits from after the many times he has gone astray and then nursed back to health and wholeness by *la fata dai capelli turchini*, who, although burdened with sadness, reassures him of her love.

The interactions between *il pennuto* and the protagonists of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, Zà and Nani recall the exchanges between Pinocchio and *il grillo-parlante*. The following is a sample of the slapstick tone of the back and forth between the two in *Pinocchio*.

«Io sono il Grillo-parlante, e abito in questa stanza da più di cent'anni.» — «Oggi però questa stanza è mia» — disse il burattino — «e se vuoi farmi un vero

piacere, vattene subito, senza nemmeno voltarti indietro.» — «Io non me ne anderò di qui,» — rispose il Grillo — «se prima non ti avrò detto una gran verità.» — «Dimmela e spicciati.» — «Guai a quei ragazzi che si ribellano ai loro genitori, e che abbandonano capricciosamente la casa paterna. Non avranno mai bene in questo mondo; e prima o poi dovranno pentirsene amaramente.» — «Canta pure, Grillo mio, come ti pare e piace:(...).» (Chapter 4)

“I am the Talking-Cricket, and I have lived in this room a hundred years or more.” “Now, however, this room is mine,” said the puppet, “and if you would do me a pleasure go away at once, without even turning round.” “I will not go,” answered the Cricket, “until I have told you a great truth.” “Tell it me, then, and be quick about it.” “Woe to those boys who rebel against their parents and run away from home. They will never come to any good in the world, and sooner or later they will repent bitterly.” “Sing away, Cricket, as you please, and as long as you please.”)

And the following is a sample of Zà’s reaction to her *pennuto*’s voice, who has offered a unbudging criticism of her thoughts and actions: “È sempre la voce del pennuto dietro le spalle. Si volta per zittirlo e si trova davanti una faccia segnata da rughe profonde. È sua madre.” (“Like always it is the voice of the *pennuto* behind her shoulders. She turns to shut it up and finds herself in front of a face marked by deep wrinkles. It is her mother”) (91). Like in Pinocchio, the presence of this ‘animal’ is felt as a disruption by the protagonist, unsolicited criticism of her actions or thoughts is given and it comes from a voice that takes on a tone of authority as to a child, and then there is a desire on Zà’s part to arrest the commentary but with a foreknowledge that it will persist. And again, an

exchange between Nani and his *pennuto* in which the haughtiness of the tone elicits a desire in Nani to purge himself of this voice.

Non darti troppe arie, mi sussurra il volatile, che è sempre lì quando penso in grande. Sei un povero maestro dell'anima stanca, depresso, pieno di acciacchi e dolori, non puoi insegnare un granché. Vuoi umiliarmi? No, voglio solo ridere di te, del coglione che sei. Cerco di stringere le spalle e cacciarlo da quella fossa che si è scavato fra la spalla e la nuca, dove gli piace tanto accucciarsi per osservarmi e criticarmi, ma sento che si è appollaiato ben bene e non intende andarsene. (41)

(Don't put on airs, the winged animal who is always there when I think big whispers. You are a poor teacher with a tired soul, depressed, full of aches and pains, there is not a whole lot you have to teach. You want to humiliate me? No, I just want to laugh at the fool that you are. I try to clench my shoulders and remove him from that trench he has dug out between my shoulder and my neck, where he likes so much to crouch so he can observe me and criticize me, but I feel how he is well settled on his perch and does not intend to leave.)

While the style and tone of *il grillo-parlante* is very similar to that of *il pennuto*, for the sake of argument, in both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, the content, the moral timbre of *il grillo-parlante*, while imitated, especially by Nani's *pennuto* at times, becomes farcical. It is a short-sighted desire for immediate pleasure and comfort that his *pennuto* bids for. The admonishing voice is taken on by the *pennuto* because of its affect, not because there is truly some moral lapse that needs pointing out and correction.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland begins with the disappearance of Alice from the world that she knows. Maraini is quoted as such:

Sono quasi ossessionata dal tema della scomparsa. È un fenomeno che riguarda migliaia di persone ogni anno e a me interessa moltissimo, non saprei dire perché. Questo essere sospesi tra il qua e l'al di là, tra la vita e la morte, tra l'essere e non essere, è una strana condizione che mi inquieta. D'altra parte il mistero è qualcosa che chiede sempre di essere approfondito, compreso, risolto. (Maraini and Di Paolo, 194)

(I am almost obsessed with the theme of disappearance. It is a phenomenon that regards thousands of people each year and it interests me very much, I don't know that I could say why. This being suspended between here and the beyond, between life and death, between being and not being, is a strange condition that disquiets me. On the other hand the mystery is something that always begs to be examined in depth, understood, and resolved.)

'Alice' of Carroll's works is evoked in both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, as she was in the story *Alicetta* from the collection *Buio*³⁹. By the third paragraph in Carroll's work, Alice has disappeared "down the rabbit hole". She is not abducted, but becomes lost due in part to her curiosity and guilelessness. The disappearance of the title character of *Colomba* is revealed within the first three pages. Her grandmother, the protagonist Zà, intuits that she has become lost in the symbolic forest. Her perdition has

³⁹ Alicetta, a girl of 9 with tragic family circumstances is taken to a clinic by her ailing grandfather. She is diagnosed with something like schizophrenia, her physical condition declines and she dies. It is found that she was being heavily sedated by the male nurses who were abusing her so that she could not object and could tell.

come about due to a deep compulsion to take leave of her confused sense of who she was and in how she does or does not belong in the world, as a woman. Colomba is curious about the possibilities of the marvelous world of the forest, seeing it as a refuge, but she is naïve to the threats that stalk an innocent once they leave the public view and the social order. She, like Alice is swallowed up by what lurks in the shadows of the forest when a spontaneous inquisitiveness brings a child to want to explore the natural world. The event of Colomba's disappearance is abrupt, but it is somehow tinged with something vague that foretells it. Carroll's 'Alice' first appears within the context of dream symbolism in *La bambina e il sognatore*, again appearing within the first two pages of the novel that reveal the disappearance of a young and innocent girl. 'Lucia' is lost in a quarter of the city called *Pozzobasso* (Deep pit) without a trace, other than the prophetic dream that the protagonist Nani has, which links her with Carroll's Alice. The child Nani passes on a clouded street resembles Carroll's Alice. He narrates, the impression as it occurs in his dream: "Una piccola Alice, penso, quasi avessi davanti la ragazzina delle meraviglie che sa attraversare gli specchi e calarsi senza pericolo dentro i pozzi più profondi." ("A little Alice, I think, I almost have in front of me the little girl of wonders who knows how to pass through mirrors and fall without risk into the deepest holes") (8).

The continuation of the similitudes of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in *Colomba* revolve around the fruits of the natural world that are imbued with transformational and wondrous properties. Maraini remarks elsewhere, while speaking on her sensual approach to the consumable in her writing.

[I]l cibo promette qualcosa che attira i nostri sensi e che non è solo puro nutrimento, ma attraverso l'incanto degli odori, dei sapori, dei colori, promette

una metamorfosi magica. Come il fungo di Alice. Può farci diventare grandissimi o piccolissimi. Ma direi che il mito del cibo è molto vicino al mito della metamorfosi. Che può essere pericolosa, inquietante: la promessa della morte, o esaltante e felice: la promessa di un piccolo paradiso dei sensi. (Maraini and Cesari, 47)

(Food promises something that attracts our senses, something that is not purely sustenance, but through the lure of smells, tastes, colors, a magical metamorphosis is promised. Like Alice's mushroom. It can make us become very big or very little. I would say that the myth of food is very close to the myth of metamorphosis. It can be dangerous, disquieting: the promise of death, rousing or happy: the promise of a little paradise of the senses.)

Innate curiosity, the desire to experience despite risk is an important aspect and symbolism of the fungo (mushroom) which Maraini draws on adeptly throughout *Colomba*. In *La bambina e il sognatore* a foreboding apprehension regarding the author of Alice's disappearance is pivotal to the significance of the dream, and to what is later understood to have happened to the Lucia, the missing girl. The entanglement of the positionality of author, dreamer, thinker and actor as roles to which culpability is or is not conferred in the disappearance of an innocent, or the 'taking of innocence' becomes a topic for reflection throughout both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. An array of divergent perspectives on whether those who fulfill the roles of author, dreamer, thinker and actor are condemnable or valiant is raised in each novel.

Maraini approaches the author of *Alice in Wonderland* with an unbigoted yet unfettered scrutiny. Alice's adventure, as written by Rev. Dodgson, aka Lewis Carroll, is

regarded by Maraini implicitly as among the most marvelous and meaningful pieces of children's literature that circulate. To recognize the perspective that Carroll takes in this fantastical fiction that tells of the disappearance of the young Alice, a story written in dedication to the real Alice, Alice Pleasance Liddell, is to begin to understand the distinctive positionality the inventor takes with respect to the story of disappearing innocence.⁴⁰ The author's imaginative capacities, his appreciation of what might interest, drive, fascinate, scare, and harm a young girl's frank approach to the world in his writing, her innocence, is rooted, at least in part, in empathy.

Maraini's thought on the necessary distinction between pedophilia and pedophobia takes aim at the misguided disallowance of a legitimate love for children that is detected in the sloppy prehension of the term pedophilia in its common modern usage. She writes:

Molti dicono che la pedofilia c'è sempre stata, che in fondo si tratta di un fenomeno minoritario, presente nella storia e quindi in effetti non c'è poi tanto da preoccuparsi. A me sembra invece che ci sia da preoccuparsi. Probabilmente è vero che l'abuso sessuale nei riguardi dei bambini è sempre esistito, però non costituiva un punto nevralgico come oggi e non aveva quel valore simbolico che ogni epoca dà ai propri mali. Il nostro male oggi si chiama pedofilia. Nome che fra l'altro proporrei di cambiare in *pedofobia* o meglio *misopedia*. La *filia* infatti presuppone amore e amicizia per i bambini. Ma i pedofobi di oggi sono esseri mortuari che vogliono distruggere oscenamente la giovane vita che nasce,

⁴⁰ See *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-glass* for an unbiased and unapologetic historical inquiry of Dodgson's love of Alice Liddell, the nature of Dodgson's relationship with Alice and other children, the suspicions people held, and the dissolution of Dodgson's friendship with Alice and her family.

inferendo su una innocenza che sfugge da loro con la rapidità di un lepre. I pedofobi di oggi sono dei lupi solitari, dei rapinatori che cercano di soddisfare con mostruoso egoismo i loro istinti sessuali ai danni di che è fragile, minuto, incapace di difendersi e di reagire, incuranti delle gravi conseguenze psichiche e fisiche che i loro atti producono. (Maraini and Di Paolo. 191-2)

(Many people say that pedophilia has always existed, that it is a phenomenon that exists in a minority of people throughout history and therefore it is not something we need to worry too much about. But to me it seems that there is reason to worry. It is probably true that sexual violence done to children has always existed, but it wasn't a crucial point like it is today and it didn't have the symbolic value that each epoch gives to their ills. The ill of our day is called pedophilia. A name, by the way, that I would propose be changed to *pedophobia* or *mispoedia*. *Philia* in fact presupposes love of and friendship with children. But the pedophobes of today are lugubrious beings who want to destroy, obscenely, young life that is born, acting cruelly upon an innocence that escapes them with the speed of a rabbit. The pedophobes of today are lone wolves, thieves who try to satisfy their sexual instincts, with monstrous egotism, to the detriment of those who are fragile, small, unable to defend themselves, to react, heedless of the grave psychological and physical consequences that their actions produce.)

In *Colomba*, a grandfather figure becomes the abuser of the young Angelica, after a life of performing as a 'decent' father figure. The story is told from the perspective of Angelica's mother, Zà, who did not know of the abuse at the time, but after the fact feels as though she should have. Her perceived misstep along with the solidarity she exhibits

in carrying Angelica's burden after she has died becomes part of Zà's personal circumstance that must be resolved in order to *salvar* (save) herself, Colomba and the saga of her family's history. In *La bambina e il sognatore* the various disappearances of young girls are considered from the perspective of the beliefs and conventions of the social world in which they occur, and are juxtaposed with Nani the dreamer's perspective, a man who dares to interrogate that which conventions repress, and whose approach to pedophilia, or rather 'pedophobia', as a primary social ill of our epoch, resembles Maraini's as construed in the citation in the preceding paragraph. Both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* recount the thought patterns and attempted justification that the abuser gives or is understood as giving. This 'giving voice to the violent' has real value, Maraini explains:

Ho cercato di dare voce anche ai violenti, agli assassini, perché in ogni persona, anche nel peggiore dei tipi, c'è qualcosa da intendere e da capire. Questo non toglie niente alle responsabilità di chi fa violenza, naturalmente, Caratteri complessi, ragioni ambigue, problemi difficili. (Maraini and Di Paolo, 186-7).
(I have tried to give voice to the violent, to murderers as well, because in each person, even in the worst types, there is something to interpret, to understand.
This does not take away any of the responsibility of those who commit violence, naturally. Complex personalities, ambiguous reasons, difficult problems.)

It is not just those who murder who Maraini identifies as pedophobes, but those who betray the trust of innocents in their family and friends' homes, those who buy the bodies of the young who are trafficked on the streets, at home and abroad. The confusion disseminated by the common usage of 'pedophile' is stark when considering Lewis

Carroll and his works. He has been called, rightly in some sense, a pedophile, friend of and admirer of children. Suspicions have broadly circulated about his motivations, and rightly so. He left behind visual evidence in photographs he took that infringe on the privacy and sovereignty of innocents. Carroll's private journals and other various writing confirm that he did indeed feel a particular attraction for Alice Liddell, age 7, and fantasized about perhaps marrying the little girl when she grew older. Alice, then, is evoked in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, in a way that attends to Rev. Dodgson's problematic attraction to Alice, and how her innocence, threatened by this attraction, led to an account of her disorienting and frightening trip 'down the rabbit hole', in the imagination of the author.

The sense of the danger that Alice felt is important to the connection between her and the young girls that appear in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. The protagonists from each of Maraini's novels who are taken by a spontaneous ideation of a semblance between a young girl and Alice are avid readers and dreamers, and the hunch that the child is in danger is each time correct. It is important to realize that one who receives this message from a reading of *Alice in Wonderland*, receives it from the author himself. Rev. Dodgson is not in the practice of outright repression of his desires. We will not know his successes and failures in sublimating his desire as we are privy to his thoughts put in writing, but not all of his actions. Lewis Carroll, Dodgson's pen name, may be something like a benign alter ego that he cultivates in order to aid in the sublimation of unpropitious instincts. This alterity, however, does not negate the possibility that Carroll could function as an alias, a cover for socially proscribed conduct, harmful to the young and innocent, and Dodgson/Carroll are the ones who alert us to the

threat. The whisper and buzz surrounding Dodgson's intentions and comportment has gone on for over a century, and yet some scholars have suggested that the intrigue has much more to do with contemporary culture which "sexualizes youth, especially female youth, even as it is repulsed by pedophilia" (Woolf), than they are about the man.

It is then the repulsion, simplification, mystification and reactive fear that surrounds the nature of the relationships between adults and children, which has led a culture down the rabbit hole when it comes to confronting the social ill of what is deemed pedophilia, a dangerous misunderstanding which obscures a critically divergent 'pedophobia', which corrupts the view of even those who are most vocal in their crusade against sexual violence done to children. Repression of paternal longing, or a sense that it has been lost, often in combination with the misguided conflation of 'love of children' with 'violent use of children's innocence', are perpetually detectable in the foundations of the psychological and lived circumstance of many of Maraini's young and vulnerable characters from throughout her works.⁴¹

Fairy Tales

Well known fairy tales, *Cappuccetto Rosso (Little Red Riding Hood)* for example, are understood as stories with enduring popularity, and a more or less clear and important message. Images and scenes of little girls wandering alone through foreboding places and the threats that stalk them are found throughout *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, the symbolism being pre-established, regardless of which of the many

⁴¹ From the earliest novels and the young protagonists Anna of *La vacanza* and Enrica of *L'età del malessere*, to Angela of *Voci*, and on to the stories from *Buio* and *L'amore rubato*.

versions of the tale one is familiar with.⁴² Our cultural memory informs our common understanding that the tale is about abduction, rape, tyranny of the strong over the weak, unchecked appetite, and trickery and deceit that prey upon innocence. It should be recalled that Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother do, in the Brothers Grimm version, extricate themselves from the disaster, and Maraini does remind that it is a tale with a moral, however difficult its realization: “una bambina intelligente e vivace non si fa mangiare dal lupo” (“an alert and intelligent little girl does not let herself be eaten by the wolf”) (*La bambina e il sognatore*, 33).

Myth

The retelling of classic myths found embedded in the novels are abundant, and they remind the reader of the origin of rich metaphor and symbolic meanings that we have inherited, and specifically, of the strong influence of the Greek world on Italian culture and Western culture. As myths, at their inception, were narratives that helped people to organize some understanding of events that they could not otherwise understand, by inserting myths, old and new, Maraini demonstrates a conviction that we as humans needed myths, and still do. The expansive complex that is Greek myth sets the scenes in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* and then myths and parables from other cultures tend to, in some way, challenge the common assumptions that we moderns draw from those myths.

Mcgilchrist considers the developments of the world of Ancient Greece as having pivotal importance for apprehension of the changes in the brain and its hemispheres, and from then, on

⁴² *Little Red Riding Hood* has many versions from many cultures. The oldest versions circulated in France and Italy go back to the 10th century. An adaptation from Abruzzo, the region that figures prominently in *Colomba* is *La finta nonna*.

the directions of thought for the next two millennia. Mcgilchrist's section on the ancient world begins, more or less, with the conclusions he draws from his studies regarding the historical state of the brain.

Greek civilization brought many things that we would have to, at one level, associate with a sudden efflorescence of the *left* hemisphere, at least as much as the right: the beginnings of analytic philosophy, the codification of laws, the formalization of systematic bodies of knowledge. These require the ability to stand back from and detach ourselves from the crowd, from nature and from ourselves, that we may objectify. This is in my view also the basis for the *forging of bridges* with others, and with nature, which classically and according to much of the neuropsychological literature, is mediated by the right hemisphere. (...) union cannot exist without separation and distinction, but separation and distinction are of no use unless they form the prelude to a later, greater, union or synthesis. (...). I would therefore say, what happened was this. Initially there was a symmetrical, bihemispheric advance at this time (in Ancient Greece)—an advance in the functioning of the frontal lobes of both hemispheres. (...). But this development, permitting as it does a far greater capacity to speculate (by standing back in distance and time from our world, to consider the lessons of the past and to project possible worlds into the future, to build projects and schemes for the better governing of the state and for the increase of knowledge of the world at large, requires the ability to record: to make externalized, therefore more permanent, traces of the mind's workings, to fix, to freeze the constantly passing flow of life (...). It requires, therefore, a huge expansion of the realm of the

written word, as well as the development of diagrams, formulas, and maps; and records (...) [T]his necessitates reliance on the left hemisphere, not the right. (...). (259)

Mcgilchrist then reminds us that expansion of the ability to observe the world of objects, by achieving a “necessary distance” (242) was mediated by the left hemisphere, but the impetus invariably came from the right, creating a situation which McGilchrist describes as the left hemisphere acting as a ‘midwife’ to the right hemisphere developments seen in the art of the Greek world. He writes:

[P]ortraiture which is more individualized, varied, emotionally expressive and empathetic (...). (...) the evolution of a body of highly expressive poetry rich in metaphor, the evolution of the idea of the individual as having legitimate claims to be balanced with those of the community at large, and a sense of empathy with others in general, as well as an interest in the natural world—(...) a sense of humour based on ironic appreciation of the pathos of man’s position in the world as ‘being towards death.’ (257-8)

The great bloom of advancements in nearly all areas of human culture enjoyed an era of harmony. This specific period of growth in mental activities and a certain harmony between the hemispheres, is by McGilchrist’s account, a very small interval which cannot be neatly encompassed within any of the main periods of measure in the division of ancient Greek culture.

While it is true that predilections and credos that remained more faithful to the right hemisphere did not disappear entirely after the brief period of optimal harmony, McGilchrist is thorough in arguing that the legacy of left hemisphere-congruent beliefs

which emerged was decisive, that “truth is in principle knowable, that it is knowable through reason alone, and that all truths are consistent with one another” (285). Among the thinkers of the Greek world, Heraclitus (535-475 BCE) and Aeschylus (523-456 BCE) whose lives span the divide between what are commonly called the Archaic and Classical world, are for McGilchrist among the greatest.

McGilchrist holds Heraclitus up among pre-Socratic philosophers, since more of his work, although fragmentary, has been preserved. He writes of the philosopher:

Heraclitus seems to me to have grasped the essence of the balance between the hemispheres, while remaining aware of the primacy of the right hemisphere’s world. I see this in, amongst other things, his insistence on the hidden, implicit and unbounded nature of the primary reality; in his ‘paradoxical’ use of language in an attempt to transcend the normally confined (because left-hemisphere-congruent) expressive possibilities of language; in his insistence on the importance of perception, despite the difficulties of truly understanding what it is that we perceive; in his prioritising of experience over our theories about experience; in his insistence that opposites need to be held together, rather than inevitably cancelling one another out; in his sense that all is in the process of change and eternal flux, rather than stasis or completion; and in his sense that all things contain an energy or life. In addition he sees logos as something ‘shared’, reciprocal, perhaps even reciprocally coming into being, rather than, as he says we tend to see it, something achieved through ‘private’, isolated thought processes; and he emphasizes that things change depending on context. (270-1)

What is remarkable is just how small the window of the time that harmony between the hemispheres abided, when there was something more like a partnership that encouraged them both to flourish. This pattern of a bloom that reaches its heights, immediately followed by a pilfering by left hemisphere-congruent means and dispositions which become indelibly installed for many generations of humans to come sees repeating over the course of history. Nonetheless, McGilchrist sees the world, post-Plato, as never really casting off the chains of the imperative of “codification, rigidity and solidity” (291), in the service of reason and only knowable through it, which harnessed “flexibility, imagination, and originality” (291) by subordinating and degrading the phenomenal world. While acknowledging certain examples of a retention of Heraclitan influence in Roman literature, with Virgil, Horace, and especially tangible in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, McGilchrist archives the drift toward “homogeneity and uniformity” (292), as well as the proliferation of hierarchies, in short, a bureaucratization seen in all arenas of public life, not just laws and governance, but architecture and the arts. McGilchrist’s discussion of the depiction of the human face is a particularly interesting case in point. I quote:

Until the end of the third century, portraiture had sought to convey a lifelike individuality, revealing its subject as situated ‘in time, in the very moment of life... the play of the features in the nervous face ... the very flash of personality’. Asymmetry played a part in achieving this. Around AD 300, however, a fundamental change took place in the depiction of the face. Portraits in stone began to show a ‘peculiarly abstract’, distant gaze, unconcerned with the elusive, changing, complex world in which we live, fixed on eternal abstractions (...). In the portraiture of the period, the richly complex plastic modelling of the face sinks

into something symmetrical, regular, crystalline, (...). This change was to see no reversal until the Renaissance. From now on through the Middle Ages face and body are symbols only (...). (292-3)

As far as the advent of Christianity, Mcgilchrist rejects Freeman's thesis in *The Closing of the Western Mind*, which gained traction, a closing Freeman attributes to Christianity, in that it made a casualty of reason. Mcgilchrist points out the rich tradition of the early Church Fathers, who co-existed with others, and had flexibility in their thinking, more like the Ancient Greek world in its prime than the Roman world of their time. Anyhow, the spirit of early Christianity was replaced by a dominant strain with a passion "for control, for fixity, for certainty; and that came not with religion alone, but with a certain cast of mind, the cast of the left hemisphere." (295). So it is that the mythos of the ancient Greek world and the mythos of Christianity became so corrupted by left hemisphere appropriation that the dominant culture came to resemble the opposite of the mythos, even condemning and punishing those who would exercise independent thought (295).

In *The Nature of the Novel*, Ortega y Gasset gives an assessment of how Greek tragedy confounds us, writing, "perhaps there is no production more interspersed with purely historical, transitory motives" (35). He goes on to give his view on what those transitory motives were for Aeschylus, whom he refers to as a *theopoet*, as he sees his work as "a progressive series of attacks on [the] divine questions" of "good and evil, of liberty, of justification, of order in the cosmos, of universal causes" (35). Aeschylus was inspired by a reformer's spirit, and wielded his creative impulses to write a poetry that might "modernize" and "perfect" popular conception of these lofty themes. According to

Ortega y Gasset, Aeschylus did so because he saw popular religion as “insufficient for the maturity of the times.” (35). In Ancient Greece, where the poetic already mingled with the philosophical, the theological and the political, as all areas of life were imbued by the cardinal myths, this kind of reform had everything to do with thought in all areas of life. Ortega y Gasset writes that “all we see clearly is that the tragic poets of Greece speak to us personally through the masks of their heroes” (35).

The observations made by Ortega y Gasset are instrumental for situating the discussion of Maraini’s interest in Aeschylus’ drama and in inspecting how they intersect with Mcgilchrist’s ideas about Aeschylus’ work. Maraini has incorporated the understanding, put succinctly by Ortega y Gasset, that Aeschylus’ tragedies registered shifts in the world of thought and popular perceptions. His tragedies are foundational for understanding the history of the growth and outgrowths of thought, a unique and primeval thought that pervaded the life of the *polis* and the life of the individual mind. Mcgilchrist finds another work attributed to Aeschylus⁴³, *Prometheus Bound*, to in fact tell the story of the struggle of the hemispheres of the mind to coexist as they develop, grade by grade, in their awareness of one another.

Mcgilchrist singles out *Prometheus Bound*, as the epitome of tragedy in that it “recounts the history of its hero’s downfall from the height of glory to the depths of despair through the consequence of hubris” (273). Mcgilchrist sees Aeschylus and his plays as belonging to right hemisphere revelation, commenting that “his intuitive and imaginative art, ambiguous as Dionysus himself, (...) came to him via divine inspiration, announced to him in his sleep, and

⁴³ There is some scholarly disagreement regarding the authorship of *Prometheus Bound*. I do not argue one way or the other. I conclude that as the tragedy comes from the small window of time which Mcgilchrist points to as ‘balanced’ in the expansion of the knowledge derived from both hemispheres, an era that had reverence for the ways of knowing originating from each hemisphere, it is worthy of consideration regardless of its authorship.

was inextricably bound to the world of religion and its mysteries” (274). Mcgilchrist arrives at the following conclusion regarding what Aeschylus’ tragedy of Prometheus represents, as it focuses on a character whose nature is divided between the rationalizing intellect and intuition that arise from ‘intoxication’, in the sense of a departure from this intellectual grasp,

[T]he mind coming to know itself; ‘without knowing it’: it is the mind (in fact the brain) cognitising itself. The tragedy of Prometheus is a tale of two hemispheres. And, in more general terms, the Greek invention, or discovery of tragedy, based as it is on the ever-recurrent theme of downfall through *hubris*, represents the paradox of self-consciousness: the beginnings of the mind coming to know and understand its own nature. (274)

Mcgilchrist qualifies this interpretation, in brief, by recalling the cult of Prometheus, the god, not of wisdom, but of technical skill. He was a trickster who thought to bring hope to the mortals of defending themselves against Zeus by stealing fire from heaven.

Mcgilchrist sees this endeavor, symbolically, as “the emissary taking to himself the power of master”. Prometheus’ punishment is to live in agony each day, and the tragedian’s treatment of the tortured man does not lack sympathy. Drama, however, developed as an art that held the capacity to reconcile the opposites of the hemispheres as they began to come into awareness of themselves, and it was through the power of myth that they did so.

Notwithstanding, Maraini affirms that all of the values alive in the brief period of harmony were overturned conclusively with Orestes’ acquittal in his trial for killing his mother, as it was decided that a woman’s body is just a container, and that the true crime is to kill the father (Maraini, Presentation 2016). Maternity had previously been an

absolute value, and with this case, things were turned upside down, and maternity counted very little before the law of the land and the codes that were being established for this first burgeoning democracy would make its importance clear.

Mcgilchrist, while forgoing Nietzsche's bluster, is largely in agreement with his observations that a "degeneration", beginning with Plato, took hold, which involved the "loss of the power of the intuition" and by which accepted thought became "absurdly rational" (*The Master and His Emissary*, 286). McGilchrist catalogues in detail the changes in culture and thought which together portended the condition of harmony lost between the hemispheres: the written word, currency and exchange, a devaluation of poetry, drama, myth, and metaphor and derisiveness toward the artist as well as the reduction of music to utilitarian employment⁴⁴, and a strong rebuff of Heraclitan metaphysics (263-289).

In *Colomba* "The Golden Apples of Hera and Zeus" a story of metamorphosis that conveys much about the relative power of the sexes derived from the Hellenistic culture is told. An origin myth of how the Earth was born according to the ancient *pelasgi* (Pelasgians), pre-Hellenic Greeks presumed to be the ancient ancestors of the *abruzzesi* according to the local historian, 'Cesidio', in the novel, perhaps as a point of comparison to the roles assigned to the sexes in the various episodes in the relationship between Hera and Zeus. In *La bambina e il sognatore* we find the following myths recounted: "Zeus and the abduction of Europa", "Orpheus and his trip to the underworld to find Eurydice", "The Birth of Orion". The myths are recounted with a dual purpose;

⁴⁴ See Plato's *Republic*. An aside is that Plato, according to McGilchrist remained somewhat ambivalent to the banishment of all that is not cold logic, recurring to myth at times himself to get at that which "resist(s) formulation in language or dialectic" (288), but ultimately doubles down on a left-hemisphere version of the world as that which he passed down.

the first is to familiarize the students, the children in teacher Nani's class, with these ancient templates. In some cases, *prepotenza*, the tyranny of the strong over the weak is legitimized, and Nani recounts the myth in order that a discussion about rights and justice take place. The second purpose is that the myths adumbrate acts of *prepotenza* that occur within the narrative of the novel, and give the reader and the students a source of context for reflecting on the emulative aspect of such acts of tyranny that derive, in some sense, from these myths which were created by the Greeks, and subsequently became a template for much of the enduring culture of the Western world.

The Oresteia

Among other considerations that a contrast between the myths "The Golden Apples of Hera and Zeus" with the origin myth of the *pelasgi*, is that the latter is pre-Hellenic while the former develops in the heyday of Greek civilization and can be seen to provide a blueprint for treachery against and depreciated regard for the figure of the female; whether it is figurative, as in the 'female side of things' or literal, 'the female figures themselves'. It is evident that Graves' argument, which posits matrilineal succession as well as the dominance of the feminine essence in pre-historic and archaic religion, has many parallels to Maraini's occupation with the diminishing state of the female deity, and brought about the degradation of the sacrality of female essence with the changes in political and religious culture and direction in philosophical bearings that asserted themselves decisively in the 4th and 5th centuries BCE. Graves writes "Tradition has (...) preserved the memory of a strenuous conflict which ended with the victory of the new gods", and then asks, "What was it that they overcame on that occasion?" ("Religion and Myth in High Antiquity", 2). The answer that Graves gives, briefly, is that "the new motif

that the child is born of the father himself, and in very peculiar fashion, from the head” (“Religion and Myth in High Antiquity”, 4) arises, and with the decisiveness and pervasiveness of the new motif comes the end of the age of the fantastic narrative myth. Graves makes his view clear: “Patrilineal descent, succession and inheritance discouraged further myth-making; historical legend then begins and fades into the light of common history” (*The Greek Myths*, Introduction, 6).

One more consequential occurrence which Graves points out is that Hera, at one time the one goddess whose powers, associated with the moon’s phases and the seasons, became three persons in a trinity, “spring a maiden, summer a nymph, winter a crone” (Introduction, 3), after being accused of conspiring against Zeus for his *prepotenza* along with others, became subservient to him, and their co-sovereign rule under the Olympian system was no longer.⁴⁵ The subordination of the goddess Hera came in lock step with the advent of the domination of the male essence in religion. Graves comments that in the primal world of the gods, “children are wholly on the side of the mother, and the father seems to be a stranger with whom they have nothing to do. Things are very different in the realm of Zeus, where the outstanding deities describe themselves emphatically as children of their father” (Religion and Myth in High Antiquity, 2). Maraini has contemplated the weight and consequence of the *Oresteia*, as have many feminist theorists⁴⁶, as the “mythical rendering of a patriarchal takeover” (Case, 322) and an outstanding cultural symbol of the historical usurpation of maternal rights. Maraini is pointed in stressing that Aeschylus, the first of the tragedians to write an *Oresteia*, is not the inventor of the themes. I quote: “This was what had been happening in Greek society for centuries. It was

⁴⁵ Not only did Zeus use trickery to gain Hera’s hand in marriage, he punished her attempt to curb his ironhanded behavior by chaining her from the sky so that her cries might serve as a warning to all her fellow Olympians never to resist his power and authority.

⁴⁶ These theorists and writers include Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray among many others.

not a new thing. He simply registered it, giving wonderful words to it. Mythological history tells us about this kind of struggle between man and woman which is a struggle for power” (Sumeli Weinberg, 341). Maraini’s *I sogni di Clitennestra* is a revision of the *Oresteia*⁴⁷ which, staged in modern times, attests continuation of mythology that supports patriarchy, and that the annihilation of the female relationships, particularly the mother-daughter bond is a strategic goal of the patriarchal tradition (Cavallaro, 345).

In the essay “Clitennestra o la perversione”, Maraini looks at the so called ‘modern’ studies of women’s sexuality and aims to challenge or at least rethink the conclusions. The first presupposition that Maraini takes on is the idea that sexuality only became a thing, for women, once it was separated from reproduction, which began to happen, according to some theorists, during the Renaissance. Maraini points to Clytemnestra as an example of a strongly sexed character, condemned as it were for her sexuality, which evidences that the Greek were well acquainted with sexual pleasure as an end in itself. Maraini sees the killing of Iphigenia, her beloved daughter, as a murder of part of Clytemnestra herself. And Maraini says this of Clytemnestra’s subsequent assassination of her husband, Agamemnon:

[È] un atto di rivolta, in nome del libero governo di una città e del piacere sessuale che Clitennestra vuole prendersi, fuori dalle regole e dalle limitazioni del matrimonio, proprio come farebbe un uomo. E di questo viene punita, dai figli e dagli dèi, più che del suo delitto. (“Clitennestra o la perversione”, 8)

(It is an act of revolt, in the name of free governance of a city and of sexual pleasure that Clytemnestra would like to take for herself, outside of the rules and

⁴⁷ For the purpose of this discussion, reference to the events in the *Oresteia*, will include what takes place in any of the three tragedies by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles on the events surrounding Orestes and his parent’s murders. I will cite the author of the tragedy when making a specific point about one over another.

the limitations of matrimony, just like a man would do. And it is for this that she is punished, by her children and by the gods, more so than for her crime.)

Maraini finds that the tragedy makes it plain; “il piacere sessuale è legato alla libertà e la libertà al potere” (“sexual pleasure is tied to freedom and freedom to power”) (8).

But Maraini returns to Clytemnestra to look at the enormity of the murder of Iphigenia, which was done willingly by Agamemnon to serve himself. He took their daughter as his, mere property, and destroyed her flesh as well as the bond that she shared with her mother. And this was supposedly necessary for the prosperity of the city. He gave no regard to the mother-child relationship, but only to his status of proprietor of his daughter. Maraini sees something similar in modern times: the inhibition of the desire for maternity and the emancipation from it, delivered by birth control, as she sees it, may be a moment in which the fight for female rights turns on itself. She announces to women everywhere, “Il vostro destino di madri è più profondo e radicato di quanto pensiate” (“Your destiny to be mothers is more deeply rooted than you think”) (10).

Maraini reminds the reader of her essay that the women’s movement has recognized that the patriarchy first interferes in a girl’s life by coarsely interrupting the “primo rapporto d’amore carnale” (“the first relationship of carnal love”) (10), that is, that of mother and daughter, with the exigency of educating the child in a yearning and passion for the masculine, sexuality mediated by male desire, first directed toward the father.

Se posso azzardare una riflessione niente affatto scientifica 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.
 (“Clittenestra o la perversione”, 10)

(If I may venture to make a reflection that is not at all scientific I would say that the sexual revolution is not a revolution but a slippage, a cracking open, an earthquake that leads more toward chaos than toward definable progress.)

Maraini points to the lacerations of the maternal endowment that need psychological and emotional mending as well as recognizing the need for extension of the attribution of the connection nourished by ‘maternal’ *accudimento* to males.

Desire and Longing in Ariosto and Proust

Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* ‘hidden in plain sight’ is the outstanding intertext at work and play in *Colomba*. The unique interconnection of themes, the narrative structure, and the style of the *Furioso* reverberate in Maraini’s novel, setting up comparison and contrast between the protagonists as well as the consciousness of the authors. Deanna Shemek’s articles, “That Elusive Object of Desire: Angelica in the *Orlando furioso*” and “Of Women, Knights, Arms and Love: The *querelle des femmes* in Ariosto’s Poem”, contribute greatly to an understanding of the basis of Maraini’s mobilization of Ariosto’s epic. Specifically, Maraini picks up on Ariosto’s exploration of dualistic notions of how desire operates in men and women from a binary view of the sexes, and the poet’s scrutiny of absolute categories and abstractions that perpetuate dualism in thought. Shemek proposes the myriad of ways that Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* demonstrates the dangers of the either/or thinking on display in Italy’s *querelle des femmes*, which was in full swing during the period in which Ariosto lived and wrote. The *Orlando* sees repetition of the arguments made in the *querelle des femmes*, which come from the mouths of men in the epic, who take warring positions that make generalizations about women, regardless of the detractor/benefactor position they take up. Ariosto’s portrayal of women and their actions in the

epic, however, is antithetical to the arguments made against them, as well as those made in their defense. In the representation of this incongruity, Shemek argues that Ariosto “indicates a profound skepticism regarding the rigid logical structures of these debates” (117), and the absolute category of man/woman.

Maraini’s approach to these themes leads to agreements with Mcgilchrist’s analysis and conclusions in *The Master and his Emissary*. Specifically, I argue that both Ariosto and Maraini indict the practice of thinking in absolute terms and categories, and in so doing, reject dualisms while embracing contingency, opting for a ‘plexus of perspective’ as the way toward inventive and necessary understandings. Maraini, through the refractory application of elements of Ariosto’s epic poem, drives home an assemblage of other Mcgilchristian points that stem from the unity within division. These points include: the value of reciprocity and *betweenness*, the destructive force of mimetic desire, a distrust of appearances, and the confluence of reason and unreason.

Proust’s perseverant inquest into what is behind human desire yields, in the end, its imitative nature and radical banality. The understandings that Proust may have come to regarding the mechanism and force of desire in his own life and the life of all the characters found in his immense novel are wonderfully described in Grande’s “Proustian Desire”, an article that deeply informs my discussion of desire in Maraini’s novels, and has allowed me to see redeeming aspects of Proust’s thought as applied by Maraini to the configurations of desire in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. The meaning of the whole of the personal journey of the protagonist, Marcel (Proust) that is narrated in the ultimate “sluggish novel” (Ortega y Gasset), *In Search of Lost Time*, is foundational for understanding the perverse gaze that brings about ‘darkness’ in Maraini’s view; it is a gaze that has convinced itself of the opposite of

Proust's conclusion; that desire is unique, and if followed, will bring about one's creative 'god-like' identity. The mimetic quality of desire is glibed at with a healthy amount of irony in *La bambina e il sognatore*, in a character who idolizes Proust and grievously misinterprets his work, mistaking Proust's volumes for an exhortation to make desire the ultimate guiding principle. 'Mammucchi', the man who has formed his identity around a bad reading of Proust, premeditates and carries out the abduction of a young girl Lucia, holding her prisoner with future designs and desires that he projects obsessively.

The death drive is implicated by Maraini as corollary to the (incorrect) conceit that one's own desire is that which defines one's creativity and uniqueness. Raymond Riva's article "Death and Immortality in the Works of Marcel Proust" elucidates a discussion of the presence of death in Proust's works, by formulating a distinction between a superficial 'romantic' reading of the sense that death has with a comprehensive reading where physical death is really just the final renunciation of attachment; it means no more desire. True death for Proust is not physical but relational. Death does not truly come until oblivion subsumes the memory of a person, that is, until no one remembers them with love. The confused notions of what death is and what it means in terms of identity, which are contrary to the heart of Proust's message, are evident in those who act with *prepotenza* in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. Longing, as opposed to desire, goes on despite death. Rather than mimetic, longing is intrinsic to our nature; it is however first learned through imitation, which leads to the ability recognize others in their wholeness and to experience betweenness.

The Tao

Non-Western fables and myths in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* contain important anecdotal counterpoints to those that stand at the foundation of

Western culture. The spirit of *The Chuang Tzu*, the Taoist text devoted to the problems of chaos and suffering, and specifically to liberation from these ills from a mystical perspective, is alive in both of Maraini's novels. The famous "Butterfly Dream" from the *Chuang Tzu* is listed, offhandedly, by *il pennuto* during an impromptu internal competition on familiarity with great literary works with protagonist Nani of *La bambina e il sognatore*. With this mere mention, one's awareness might be set in motion as to how Taoist principles and the ways of understanding promoted by the Tao are ubiquitous in Nani's 'unconventional' ways of being. The directions that Nani, Zà, and *la donna dai capelli corti* take in their meanderings through human suffering and the way things are, seem genuinely informed by the Tao (the journey), the important Taoist precept of *Wu wei* (mindful non-action that breeds spontaneous action and achievement), and the rejection, expounded by the Tao, of conventional values and wisdom.

A concise presentation of the innovative style of *The Chuang Tzu* is made by Burton Watson in the introduction to his translation of *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, and I look to the characterizations of the writing style and devices of the ancient work made therein. It might be said that not a few passages in Maraini's novels mimic the unique devices used to communicate in *The Chuang Tzu*, including non-sequiturs found in the anecdotes of many who possess and defend cultural and social convention. Diatribes by those with strong ideological viewpoints abound in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. The arguments appear at first to be restrained and clear-headed but become disjointed, devolving into contradictoriness and illogic.⁴⁸ Consistent with

⁴⁸ Watson writes that Chuang Tzu "employs every resource of rhetoric in his efforts to awaken the reader to the essential meaninglessness of conventional values (...). One device he uses to great effect is the pointed or paradoxical anecdote, the *non sequitur* or apparently nonsensical remark that jolts the mind into awareness of a truth outside the pale of ordinary logic (...)." (5). Watson writes that the "other device most common in his writing is the

the mystical approach, a critique of language, specifically the fact that it is “grievously inadequate” to illustrate what is true, is implied in the style and form of *The Chuang Tzu* (6). Watson writes “these mystical passages, with their wild and whirling words, need not puzzle the reader if he recognizes them for what they are” (6-7), passages of “highly poetic and paradoxical language that in fact conveys little more than the ineffability of such a state of being” (6).

Another understanding gained from the mystical rhetorical devices employed in *The Chuang Tzu* is that it is not good practice to force unnatural distinctions between rationalism and superstition, or between magic and philosophy. It is better to observe how these supposedly opposing categories mingle, and as the observer draws back from the categorizations made by language, he or she may find refuge in an intuitive sense of the movements of the world and of thought (7). The protagonists of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* often lapse into dream states replete with involuntary memories when dogmatism attempts to assert themselves through the forging of strict and unnatural distinctions. Dream and memory are refuges of the intuitive mind, and in Maraini’s works, the protagonists emerge from the refuge with stories to tell, like those in *The Chuang Tzu*, that constitute an indirect assault of the conventions of language, errant categorization, and faulty conception.

And then there is another element of *The Chuang Tzu* that has resonance in the overall texture of Maraini’s *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, and it is that of a certain humor and lightness that infiltrates these novels. Watson writes “Chuang Tzu uses throughout his writings that deadliest of weapons against all that is pompous, staid,

pseudological discussion or debate that starts out sounding completely rational and sober, and ends by reducing language to a gibbering inanity” (5).

and holy: humor” (5). The moments of playfulness, joint affairs between author and protagonist, do not detract from the earnestness of their devotion to seeking the missing girls in these novels, but rather constitute a feature of the life of thought that is necessary to sustain their journeys, and provide fodder for a spontaneity that leads to unforeseeable breakthroughs in understanding and in the search for the missing. It is the length and slowness of these long novels which provides the spaciousness for all things, and the spaciousness itself welcomes the possibility for humor⁴⁹. *Il pennuto* is an occasional visitor to Zà of *Colomba*, while he is presented as a perpetual thorn in Nani’s side in *La bambina e il sognatore*, and the conversations that take place between the Nani and *il pennuto*, a kind of internal dialogue, are at times, quite funny. The interludes of lightness and jest in *Colomba* are found in the stories told about ideas held and actions undertaken by family members throughout the generations., but also in moments when Zà is alone, in nature, just following whichever trail she happens to be on in her search for Colomba. Her meeting and struggles with the dog ‘Fungo’ provide an opportunity for some inner banter to emerge: Fungo is in some ways like *il pennuto*, a difficult and shifty personality who one must resolve to live with, but cannot bring completely under control. Speaking with animals is a recurring motif in the novels that offers a sense of playfulness to serious considerations. The tale that I will return to, “The Stag with the Golden Horns”, which is recounted at length in both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* is, in my view, a recasting of the puzzle of “The Butterfly Dream”, a fable from *The Chuang Tzu*, to which much philosophical musing has been devoted, by Western and Eastern minds alike.

⁴⁹ The stories from Maraini’s collection *Buio* treat the same tragic themes, but interludes of jesting and gaiety are precluded due to the brevity of the stories.

Mystics and martyrs

One might say that the principal protagonists of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* are mystics. *Zà*, *Nani*, and *la donna dai capelli corti* welcome and invite absorption into the great sources of truth that lie beyond the intellect. Each of the protagonists shows conscious reflection on their senses and their states, and do not react to life on auto-pilot. Maraini mentions her respect for Hume's revolutionary thought on the central role of the senses in the generation of all knowledge and affirms that mystics have always known how to "esaltare certe sensibilità del corpo, per essere poi capaci di avvicinarsi a Dio" ("enhance certain bodily sensibilities, in order to get closer to God") (Maraini and Cesari, 29). Female mystics who become martyrs have been featured as protagonists in Maraini's works, some historical accounts and others fiction.⁵⁰ For Maraini, the relationship that these women have with the church as institution is underwritten by a sense of refuge from the sacrifices asked of women "sull'altare della famiglia e, soprattutto, della maternità; sacrificio che in ultima analisi dovrebbe appagare le ambizioni e le aspirazioni di qualsiasi donna" ("on the altar of the family and, above all, of maternity; a sacrifice that in the final analysis should placate the ambitions and the aspirations of any woman") (Mauri, 69). In her works on Catherine of Siena, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Chiara of Assisi, Maraini emphasizes the significance of the intellectual impulse of these women in the eras in which they lived over and above expressions of renunciations routinely expected of nuns of their times (Carotenuto, 187). Nonetheless, self-abnegation is witnessed in their lives and stories. Maraini reflects on the enigma of why the female intellectual's spiritual seeking so often is paired with self-

⁵⁰ *Suor Juana* (1979), *I digiuni di Catarina da Siena* (1999), "La gallina di suor Attanasia" from *Buio* (1999), "Una suora siciliana" from *La ragazza di vi e Maqueda* (2009), *Chiara d'Assisi: Elogio della disobbedienza* (2013).

renunciation and harm in the following lines from *Suor Juana*: “Strana sorta di martirio il mio, in cui sono la martire e nello stesso tempo il boia” (“Mine is a strange sort of martyrdom, in which I am the martyr and at the time, the executioner”) (Carontenuto, 190). The ideal of sublimation becomes an imbroglio for female seekers as their corporeality is despised and at the same time sublimated, the body becoming a site of struggle and striving (Carotentuo, 192).

Maraini finds that the pain of abnegation of the body often becomes a welcome expression of transcendence of the body in the striving for spiritual union with the divine.

Le mistiche, con il loro disprezzo per il corpo ne [di anoressia] soffrivano ancora allora. Eppure è curioso perché quelle stesse mistiche che umiliavano e mortificavano il loro corpo di donne, quando scrivevano poi ne parlavano come del centro di tutte le delizie. La sensualità, cacciata a forza dalle membra trepide di queste giovani donne votate alla castità, andava a nascondersi nel corpo spirituale, ovvero nel corpo della scrittura in Cristo. (“Anni Novanta”, 329)

(The mystics, with their disdain for the body suffered from it [anorexia] even then. And yet it is curious because these same mystics that humiliated and mortified their female bodies, when they wrote about it, spoke as if from the center of all delights. Sensuality, expelled by force from the anxious limbs of these young women sworn to chastity, went to hide in the spiritual body, that is to say, in the body of their writings on Christ.)

I propose to look critically at how the ideal of sublimation impacts women differently. The ideal of sublimation and the ideal of martyrdom see confusion for those who have been taught that their own bodies and desires are inadmissible. Women face

the difficult paradox of sublimating that which they have always been asked to repress; self, voice, liberty, body, and desire.⁵¹ The fact that conventions, such as chastity demanded by the church, can be wielded to stifle a woman from extricating herself from a certain form of modern secular martyrdom is not missed in Maraini's representation of a demand for female martyrs in her writing. In the essay "Si può amare la propria prigionia?" ("Can One Love Their Own Prison?"), Maraini specifies her concerns about the way in which women who are segregated, isolated, and silenced can often develop an affection and attachment to their condition of oppression. She writes:

Ed è questa acquiescenza, accompagnata da rassegnazione e forse anche da inconsapevole affezione alla propria condizione di schiavitù che mi comunicano un senso di inquietudine. L'inquietudine che si prova di fronte alle tante donne segregate che in qualche modo si attaccano alla propria prigionia. (155)

(And it is this acquiescence, accompanied by resignation and maybe also of unwitting affection for their own condition of enslavement that give me a sense of apprehension. The apprehension that one feels when they take account of the many segregated women who somehow become attached to their own prisons.)

Maraini goes on to remark on how all women know something of this emotional situation, in which loves becomes confused with hate, and pleasure with pain. (155).

And then there is the martyrdom of maternity that is expected of women, in which very little room for sympathetic reactions to an individual woman's subjective experience, as painful as it may be, is entertained. Maraini writes in an article in praise of

⁵¹ *At the Root of All this Longing* by Carol Lee Flinders is a heartfelt disclosure of her own experience as well as those of other women, past and present, who, as spiritual aspirants, have tried to negotiate how to follow the precepts for conduct of their respective traditions while struggling to feel a distinction between the choice to do so and a personal and historic past of oppression of the self, voice, body, thought, and desires of women.

Adrienne Rich's book, *Of Woman Born*, that "[a] mother acquires respect through her suffering, especially if by suffering she eliminates herself as a person in favor of her children" (Maraini, Ciccarello, 691). Maraini then supplies the reasons for this rhetoric that issues from the "patriarchal institution of motherhood" (Rich, 15): "[it] functions, above all, to hide the process of reification of the female body which is necessary for the appropriation of human reproduction by the patriarchy" (691). The myth of self-sacrifice as a free choice that comes instinctually to women is as utilitarian as it is cruel (691).

The context of the martyrdom seen in the lives of almost all of the female characters found in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* occur first "on the altar of the family", and then for some, by interlopers who would participate in their confinement and exploitation. 'Colomba', the eponymous *scomparsa* of the novel, is named after the popular figure Santa Colomba of Abruzzo, who, as legend has it, left the comforts of her father's castle to live as a hermit on a precarious cliffside location, long familiar to mountaineers of Abruzzo, *il Gran Sasso* (the Big Rock). Santa Colomba, a figure of the 12th century, sees a yearly pilgrimage, still popular among the *abruzzesi* to the hermitage where she mortified her flesh. In the novel, this pilgrimage to the *Cimone di Santa Colomba* (Santa Colomba's Peak) is the site of an encounter that will have reverberations through the generations between the protagonist Zà's mother, who is pregnant with her, and the man who will become her stepfather. The meaning of the young female hermit's life and legacy holds different meanings, stated and unstated, for the various characters who live across the generations in the novel. For Zà's stepfather-to-be, Cignalitt', the saint is imbued with a use value, and he 'cuts a deal' with the saint in which he bestows worldly treasure upon her, and in exchange asks to receive Zà's mother, Antonina, as his

wife. Cignalitt' sees others, especially women, as objects of exchange and feels emboldened to do so by the transactional relationship he sees himself as having with this popular saint. Cignalitt' vows to name the child that Antonina carries after the saint, but in the end is unable to influence his wife to do so. Colomba is eventually born two generations later, after Cignalitt' departs from this world, but not untouched by his base understanding of Santa Colomba's legacy and the expression of free will that her spiritual journey symbolized.

La bambina e il sognatore sees further engagement of the topic of martyrdom, in fact the theme of modern martyrdom becomes a principle topic of investigation for the protagonist, Nani. Lucia, the missing child who Nani dreams of, is named after Santa Lucia, a Christian martyr of fame who is celebrated throughout Italy and the world. Lucia's mother, Carmela Treggiani, lives in isolation and works as a dressmaker in her home. She accepts her husband's abuse as part of a woman's lot and sacrifices herself without protest, indeed she refuses to acknowledge that anything is wrong. Nani becomes acquainted with the Treggianis in his quest to find out what happened to Lucia. He finds that Mrs. Treggiani has been sewing Lucia a wedding dress since the child was very small, envisioning the child as a bride. It is in the absolute yielding to the martyrdom of her own marriage, modeled on patriarchal models of the past, that influences her view of her daughter's future. The view that Lucia could learn to accept a life of bondage if it were made attractive enough by a sumptuous wedding dress was apparently forecasted and communicated. The idea that Lucia would make the perfect child bride seems to have in some way been received by Mammucchi, a predator who stalked her for years before he struck.

Nani visits the neighborhood *Chiesa di Santa Lucia* and becomes interested in the popular veneration of the martyr, Santa Lucia, in juxtaposition with the community's inability to see the contemporary martyrdom of children, many of them girls, that happens all around them. As Nani considers the story of the popular and venerated female martyr while looking at a painting of her and observing don Antonio, a protector of the status quo who presides over her church, he asks the local priest about martyrdom.

«Ha senso il sacrificio della propria vita quando non c'è una persecuzione in atto?» (...). «Il martirio era un modo da imitare Cristo, il primo ad essere martirizzato » (...). «Ma cosa significa un martirio oggi, in tempo di libertà e di pace, quando nessuno ti costringe a praticare per forza una fede? Il martirio non è forse una rivolta contro le imposizioni? Ma se le imposizioni non ci sono, il martirio non diventa ricatto e vendetta e volontà di potenza? » «Esiste anche un martirio dello spirito» ribatte don Antonio (...). (243)

("What is the reason for the sacrifice of one's own life when there is no ongoing persecution?" (...). "Martyrdom is a way of imitating Christ, the first to be martyred" (...). "But what does martyrdom mean today, in times of freedom and peace, when no one constrains you to practice any faith by force? Isn't martyrdom a revolt against imposition? But if there are no impositions, doesn't martyrdom become extortion, vendetta and will to power?" "There also exists a martyrdom of the spirit" don Antonio rebuts (...).)

Nani sees the perverse effects of holding onto the paradigm of martyrdom without seeing the world anew, as it is in contemporary times. Nani explores the popular notion that children are only martyred in the Muslim world in the modern era, where promises of

paradise are made, in order to coerce children to turn themselves into human bombs. Nani is struck, in his investigation into Lucia's disappearance and involvement in the case of another lost girl from the community, 'Fatima', that children, many of them girls, are similarly martyred by Westerners. The will to power, the *prepotenza* of modern martyrdom that Nani suggests, is enacted in abuse within the family, in the domination of wives and daughters, and in the rampant sexual exploitation of children. Case upon case of missing women and children pile up but the community fails to see them in relation to one another, preferring to see each as a tragedy to be blamed on things outside of the sphere of the community, with a victim that must be laid to rest. A re-envisioning of the redemptive sense of the legacies that Santa Colomba and Santa Lucia truly leave behind are discovered by the protagonists in each novel. I will return to a discussion of the specific ways that Maraini bids us to see the lives of saints with fresh awareness, disassociating mysticism from martyrdom, especially for women, in the chapters that follow.

Other Texts

Other subsets of texts are found within each novel, groupings of written and spoken material that contextualize particular themes and situations that are markers of the time or place in the novels. The action in *Colomba* happens over the span of generations, but what remains a constant is the connection to Abruzzo and the deeply felt historical plight of the *abruzzesi*. Therefore, in *Colomba*, I would identify a subset of stories and documents nestled within the narrative as a history of the region, part real and part imagined, which goes back to pre-Roman times. There are historical encounters with *i*

sanniti (the Samnites), an ancient warrior people who were crushed by the Romans in the 4th century BCE. There are a variety of historical, personal, narrative and poetic accounts of the pain of social and political strife, and of war, that have touched the lives of the *abruzzesi* over the last centuries. There is the tragic story of the Genco Venco, a *brigante* (bandit) of the mid-1800s and a historical account of the social conditions that contributed to the *brigantaggio* (banditry) of the underclasses in Italy's neglected south (242-49). A poem by Giovanni Pascoli is repeatedly recited aloud by a young man from town who returns from battle in the First World War confused, even crazy, and tells the townspeople tales from the trenches and about the monstrous absurdities of the war (124). The story of the tyranny and oppression of the fascist era, and the oppressions, and then the story of communism, with the hope and promise it made to be the remedy for such tyranny, are told through the lives of Pitrucc' i pelus', and Antonina, Zà's parents, and Angelica, Zà's daughter. Pitrucc' and Angelica both had personal relationships with texts and authors of their times who inspired their political and social views. The corruption of communist ideals brought personal despair, crushing the utopian longings that both Pitrucc' and Angelica harbored.

A subset of texts named and cited in the *La bambina e il sognatore* have to do with the social ill of child sexual abuse of our time. The protagonist Nani is an avid reader and stories such as *La brava terrorista (The Good Terrorist)*, *Io, Nojoud, dieci anni, divorziata (I and Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced)*, and *Il silenzio della innocenza (The Road of Lost Innocence)* feature in his mind and in the novel while he and the reader pursue the case of the missing girl, Lucia. Dostoevsky's *Memorie dal sottosuolo (Notes From the Underground)* is proposed in the novel as a point of departure for

(re)considerations regarding the institution of prostitution and the defining features of those who work as prostitutes. The discussions held between Nani and Lucia's father on the subject of Liza, the 18th century Russian prostitute feature in Dostoevsky's work, fix a certain scrutiny upon the idea that prostitution of oneself is a right, and therefore a freedom, rather than a question of complicity with oppression on the part of one who pays for sex (152, 165-66).

This idea of seduction that predators rely on as they lure their naive victims into a web from which they cannot escape is a prominent theme throughout both novels, and one that is ever-present yet so neglected in the common understanding of the tale of *Cappuccetto Rosso*. But seduction also has a playful side and is contingent, as many things are shown to be in Maraini's writing. A storyteller also relies on a certain kind of seduction to draw people in; it is the intent behind the pageantry that divides virtuous invention from duplicity and deceit, and this art is highlighted in the way that the storytelling mother in Colomba narrates and in how Nani draws his students in with deliberate and polished technique (104). Seduction is also implicated in the way a new protagonist of an unwritten story carries a writer's attention away from their plans, (Colomba, 61). Seduction is the technique used by *la preside* (the principal) of Nani's school, carried out in the attempt to foil his incorruptible disposition seen in his teaching philosophy by using his natural physical desires to thwart his resolve. *Il pennuto*, who is in the end a part of Nani, encourages the dethroning of his master, and encourages him to take advantage of the opportunity for pleasure that *la preside*'s seduction promises (58-60, 90-91, 140-51).

A testimonial of the treachery of the Nazi SS guards of Jewish children and their mothers as they step off the trains at the concentration camps is recounted in *La bambina e il sognatore*. The friendly gestures made by the SS officers in the account disarms the innocents of their worries at which point they are led directly and expediently to their deaths (47). The traumatic memory of the years that the internal author, *la donna dai capelli corti*, in *Colomba*, spent in a concentration camp and the visit to Auschwitz made by the protagonist of another novel that she has begun writing, leave them both without words, unable to act.⁵² Neither of them knows how to pursue the story of a young boy who was last known to be at Auschwitz, a childhood friend of the protagonist whom she believes to be alive and searches for. The cruelty of the memories and relics of the concentration camp are beyond expression, and so the internal author of *Colomba* resolves to take on Zà's story, and come back to the novel she has started at another time (63-64).

The puzzlement over the word *sparire* (to disappear), “la parola arcana che indica l'eclisse di un corpo” (“an archaic word that indicates the eclipse of a body”) that the internal author encounters in *Colomba* leads her to recall the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo of Argentina, who still look for their *desaparecidos* (loved ones who disappeared), who may be alive or dead (66-7). Pirandello's treatment of the disappearance of the character Mattia Pascal is given air as well with the suggestion that those who disappear, including *Colomba*, may not want to be found. The position expressed fails to take into account that one cannot run away from their circumstance, in fact a disappearance adds a layer to one's circumstance rather than removing it. Pirandello's novel bears this Orteguian position out by the end of the novel, as well as examining

⁵² Again Maraini refers to the story of her subsequent nove, *Il treno dell'ultima notte*.

the contours between reality and illusion, most specifically, any illusion that the individual might extricate him or herself from society, its codes and its customs, as seen in *La vida es sueño*.

Hero or Model

Understanding the death drive and the drive toward living is, as we have seen, a complicated endeavor, and the direction they take can sometimes be counterintuitive. A meaningful inquiry of how Maraini's writing gives shape to and develops the quality of these drives can be undertaken in an inspection of what, for her, constitutes the difference between the spirit behind the making of a hero, and that of a model. I cite a passage from Mariani's *Sulla mafia. Piccole riflessioni personali*, in which she compares the afterlife or legacy of people when envisioned in two different ways:

Spesso, a una esaltazione puramente formale di chi agisce con generosità e slancio e viene ucciso per questo, segue una rapida dimenticanza. (...) onorati e inneggiati, ma stentano a diventare modelli di comportamento. Un modello è diverso da un eroe che si mette su un piedistallo e lo si dimentica là sopra per la gioia dei piccioni che lo usano come cacatoio. Un modello è vivo, partecipe, esempio quotidiano che guida i nostri pensieri, le nostre azioni. (Montalbano, 12)

(Often, following the purely formal exaltation of someone who has acted unselfishly and passionately, and is killed for it, there is a quick forgetting. (...).they are honored and paid tribute to, but they struggle to become models for behavior. A model is different than a hero put on a pedestal and left there forgotten for the pigeons to crap on. A model is alive, participant, an everyday example that acts as a guide to our thoughts and actions.)

A martyr is in some senses rather like the tragic hero as specified by Ortega y Gasset in *The Nature of the Novel*. The hero, like the martyr, was discontented with reality; both acted to distinguish themselves from others. The hero's will was none but his own. A difference can be noted in the martyr's deviation to adhere to the will of a higher power, rather than his or her own. But it could be argued that that is a matter of perception. I have used the past tense in reference to these figures of hero and martyr because, as Maraini expresses, they are both figures from the past and of the past. Modern attempts to reproduce these same heroic ideals or to attain martyr status are problematic.

Ortega y Gasset embarks upon the topic of 'hero as protagonist' of the epic (myth), who sees a bygone state of the hero status in the books of chivalry, and who becomes obsolete by the time the novel becomes the preferred literary form. In the mythical epic, what is willed, and the will of the hero are "of the same world", they are considered, by popular consciousness, 'possible'. Reality as the Greeks saw it was very different than what we take for reality today, as we have remarked. Jose Ortega y Gasset provides his similar take: "for us the real is the perceptible, what our eyes and ears pour into us. We have been brought up in a spiteful age which has beaten the universe into a sheet and made of it a surface, a mere appearance. When we search for reality we search for appearances. But the Greek took reality to be the opposite: the real is the essential, the profound, the latent; not the external appearance but the living sources of all appearance" (*Nature of the Novel*, 18). Anyhow, by the time that the books of chivalry were in vogue, what was believed or believable had changed, and the epic hero became split between two worlds, according to Ortega y Gasset, his will belonged to reality, but what he willed did not. He finds himself halfway outside of reality. The theme of these

works is still the ancient past, and something of the sublime remains. But it is the desire of writer and audience to depart from everyday reality, on great adventures, in search of the sublime.

Ortega y Gasset insists on this: it is a mistake to believe that fate is the downfall of the hero in tragedy. Rather, it is the free will of the hero that brings about his own downfall. Fate might enter the picture at some point, but what happens fatalistically happens because the hero has set things in motion with his actions. And anyhow, even when he is overcome by the fatalistic unfolding of the consequences of things, it does not take away his heroism. Far from the tragic originating in fate then, it is essential for the hero to want his tragic destiny. This is precisely how he becomes a hero. Free will starts and produces the tragic process. But the author famously has put forth *Don Quixote* as a turning point in which the tragic hero is no longer viable as protagonist. The state of popular consciousness has come to this, but has not really accepted it. The novel shows them the way, and as it does, the tragic hero evolves into a comic character. In reality, he is the same, it is just the subjective position of writer and reader that have changed. In this Ortega y Gasset finds that “comedy lives on tragedy” (38). “Now, tragedy supposes a predisposition towards great actions in our spirit; otherwise it will appear to us like boasting,” (37) writes Ortega y Gasset. Even when there *is* greatness behind a vision, those seen as pretenders to heroism are often met with contempt and even mocked. The saying “from the sublime to the ridiculous” describes the danger that has always threatened the hero, that of being on the edge of falling into ridicule, besides misfortune. When a hero is dragged back to reality and forced to leave the world they envision, they fall into ridicule.

Returning to the comparison between model as protagonist and those whose thoughts and deeds are forgotten, Montalbano affirms that “Raccontare significa ricordare e offrire modelli da imitare” (“to narrate means to remember and to offer models for imitation”) (164), and it is through this telling and narrating that cultural metamorphoses become possible (165). Codes of silence, like *omertà* (manly refusal), lifeblood of the mafia, are broken through what Maraini calls “la cultura della parola” (“the culture of the word”), and the newly spoken words can give rise to paragons for thought and action that stand in open contrast to the conditions that came before (170). Be it *la mafia*, human trafficking, or the epidemic of violence against women and children, Maraini sees the courage to narrate, to tell, as the first step in a change, and a denunciation is made in this very act. The possibility of change is proposed through the act of telling, and then, models for the traits that would support the change come to be. The conversation surrounding whether Maraini’s writing is in its essence “una denuncia” (“a denunciation”) has focused, to a large degree, on whether Maraini is classified as a feminist writer, and a militant one at that.⁵³ That which Maraini denounces is *prepotenza*. It is not a thing, or a person, but the attitude ‘might makes right’, and she does it not through words of denunciation, but through *la cultura della parola* and the creation of model protagonists who see *prepotenza* for what it is in all of its forms, who interrogate its reason for being, and then choose to operate differently.

Importantly, the model is not a discreet personality. Although a model might be epitomized in an individual figure, the model is one of disposition, perspective, and intention, that inform thought and action. The protagonists of *Colomba* and *La bambina*

⁵³ See Cannon.

e il sognatore are just that; their discreet actions are not so informative for modeling comportment, but the dispositions they take of reflectiveness, openness, being in the present, and how they welcomed these dispositions in the choices they make for their mind and body: reading, dreaming, storytelling, remembering, listening, time outdoors, what they consume and how. The efficaciousness of literary protagonists who become models for thought and intention behind action is arresting in Maraini's *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. In her critical essay "Raccontare al presente: Messaggio sociale e temporalità" from *Curiosa di mestiere*, Letizia Giugliarelli explains how Maraini's use of verbal tenses, specifically the alternation between past and present tenses as used in *Chiara d'Assisi: Elogio della disobbedienza*, *Bagheria*, and *Voci*, allows the author's voice and perspective to be half-present, and to communicate a sense of urgency which extends to the extra-literary sphere, in regards to the themes found in the novels (131). Giugliarelli connects style and syntactic choices in Maraini's novels to the author's capacity to demonstrate a resolve to make "un uso esemplare" ("an exemplary use") of the material of the novel (132-3). With reference to Maraini's use of temporality, and the ability to bring awareness to the initiation of "una denuncia" that this alternation facilitates, Giugliarelli writes,

Davanti alla peculiarità delle singole situazioni, la voce della scrittrice interviene a suggerire la necessità di un atteggiamento attento e riflessivo, disposto a farsi carico degli eventi circostanti e a sentirsi coinvolto negli spunti di riflessione che suscitano. (131)

(In the presence of the peculiarity of singular situations, the writer's voice intervenes to suggest that necessity of an attentive and reflexive outlook, one

disposed to take account of the surrounding events and to feel involved in the points for reflection that they raise.)

While the use of tenses and temporality in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* differs from what Giugliarelli's criticism points to as the commonality between Maraini's novels, the author continues to carry the same intention: delivering *un uso esemplare* through *una denuncia di prepotenza*. I would argue that the stylistic and syntactic devices Maraini employs in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* are innovations that attend to this same aspiration. Giugliarelli also suggests a certain betweenness of reader, writer and protagonist in her assertion that Maraini's novels, as part of the proposal of a model for thought and action, aim to give birth to "un lettore modello" ("a model reader") (Eco, *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi*). An outstanding quality that the texts of *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* have in common is a design in which the internal dialogue of the protagonist does not adhere to the boundaries of his or her person, that is, they are not strictly his or her own. Unresolved issues that arise in the protagonist become the property of others, the reader and the writer included. There are many examples of questions which the protagonist poses internally that are taken up by others in the texts. This is one of the stylistic benefits of the inclusion of an alter ego of the protagonists in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. I argue that the protagonists' 'other selves', their *pennutos*, exhibit qualities and tendencies that point to the left hemisphere of the brain. The 'other self' supplies the mirror for those who have suffered

loss, and enables them to identify and act upon the deepest expressions of their spirit.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ A Tibetan Buddhist prayer: “Grant me enough suffering that I might truly learn compassion for myself and for all beings who go through difficulty. Grant me enough suffering that I might truly learn to trust that which is in my heart an inviolable spirit that can’t be touched by that which I go through.” (Kornfield)

Colomba

The patient journey in search of truth that takes shape in the novel *Colomba* comes close to being a near peregrination through Mcgilchrist's canvassing of the different worlds of the two hemispheres of the brain. Divided thought resounds in the first pages, before the novel can even get off the ground, as a division in the wills of two potential protagonists brings about a row over what and whose story deserves to be told. The contest happens between a novelist, '*la donna dai capelli corti*' (the woman with short hair) and Zà, a stranger who asks for the author's help in finding her missing granddaughter Colomba by writing her story. This internal author is a form of "model author" whose collaboration with the protagonist and with Eco's "model reader" is explicit (*Role of the Reader, Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi*).

Next, one has the abridged life story of a young man, Pietr' i pelus' whose divided internal thinking not only marks the successful launch of the collaborative effort that is the story of the missing Colomba, but establishes an archetype for those to whom his story is known and preserved. Pietr' is a primogenitor of the family line that includes Colomba and the protagonist of the novel, Zà. The stories of others in the family line are told as well, but Pietr's story becomes widely known beyond the family, and is representative of the consciousness of the internal division of thought that is common to all humanity. An awareness of the dueling ways of thinking, both internal to the individual and manifest in the world, is what allows Zà and the internal author to navigate the truth of Colomba's situation by comprehending the circumstances of the family through the generations.

Next, an awareness of the worlds of the two hemispheres is born of the divisions of the protagonist's thought, as observed in conversations Zà holds with '*il pennuto*' (the feathered

one). *Il pennuto* is an entity that is part of the self, but elicits rebuke because Zà does not identify with 'his' will to action. Most of *il pennuto*'s hubristic commentaries lead to unsound conclusions, and are inconsequential to the unfolding narrative save for the insight they provide into the flattened reality and predictable views of the left hemisphere. The internal voice of the left-hemisphere way of being in the world is given material form in *il pennuto*, after which the thoughts that are perceived as vocal commentary are organized into a 'personality' with a certain outlook and objectives. *Il pennuto* is known for what he desires and fears, and for his tactics. The aggregate form of *il pennuto* resulting from the commentaries that Zà's mind produces serve to advance her purpose: to retrieve Colomba and rescue the family story, and all that she has held dear, from oblivion. Since the left-hemisphere ways of being and thinking are not externalized, when Zà encounters them in the world, she is more able to identify the objectives and strategies that they conceal.

Finally, Zà's journey to find Colomba, narrated by *la donna dai capelli corti*, takes both women face to face with the two ways of being in the world. The confrontation between the two dispositions in seeing and understanding, the dominant left-hemisphere way and the more 'open' right-hemisphere ways are instrumental in the protagonist's search for hidden and silent truths about what has led to Colomba's disappearance. The incremental revelation of these truths can be seen as aligning with Mcgilchrist's ideas about what is 'true' and how to come to an awareness of truth, degree by degree (Mcgil. 2, 151). Zà and *la donna dai capelli corti* seem to recapitulate Mcgilchrist's process of unconcealing truth. Rather than putting things together, building a case, truth is a process of removing what stands in the way of the awareness of what is concealed, Truth is never fully disclosed but it can be approached, and its radiance deeply felt (Mcgil. 2, 151-2).

Throughout *Colomba* Maraini returns to subjects that are put to extensive metaphorical use, and serve to highlight the two drives and ways of being in the world; they include *la caccia* (the hunt), the forest, the curious life of *funghi* (fungi) and storytelling. The breadth of metaphorical application that these subjects effect in the novel include the relationships between desire and longing, darkness and light, conscious and unconscious influence, memory and oblivion, and the ways of getting at truth as opposed to the ways of avoiding it. I argue that the metaphorical applications of these subjects become an implicit reproach of the perfidiousness of a dominant left hemisphere. The traits and patterns consistent with the appraisal that McGilchrist gives of a dominant left hemisphere are consistent with the ‘dark’ or ‘repressive’ side which refuses to acknowledge the flicker or ‘light’ of what is presencing. Investigation of the subsoil, roots and outgrowths of a *prepotenza* which denies whatever it does not want to acknowledge, lays bare a dangerous trajectory. The novel suggests, however, that if the components and processes of the left hemisphere’s opting for darkness are understood, redemption and perhaps circumvention of harm wrought by the tyranny of the left hemisphere is possible. I will show that the harm that comes from *prepotenza* in the novel is not only identifiable, but better guarded against, with the honing of the intuitive capacity of the right hemisphere.

Structure

The organization of the discourse and themes will be attended to in this section. In *Colomba*, an entity who concords with Umberto Eco’s concept of the model author is present, vigilant and explicitly self-aware regarding the task of bringing the model reader into being. In Eco’s paradigm, the model reader is “a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create” (*Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*). The model author is a

“voice [which] is manifested as a narrative strategy, as a set of instructions which is given to us step by step and which we have to follow when we decide to act as the model reader” (15), “the model author reveals Itself in the way It organizes the story: not by means of a plot, but through a narrative discourse” (36). It is through style that the model author becomes known to the reader (14-15). The style of *Colomba* advertises uncertainty, acknowledging a vexation with it on the part of the internal author who serves as an example of an explicit yet enigmatic model author. *La donna dai capelli corti* is gripped by provocations to tell this story, alongside the reader, who would accede to the challenge and accept the disorienting terms of the text. Events and thoughts of the past and present are introduced one by one and at a distance from one another in a layered and circular pattern which often ignores chronology. This creates the effect of a “mist” (as Eco locates in Proust) in the narrative, an effect of a prevailing temporal disorientation:

[A]s if we were looking at a landscape through half-closed eyes, without clearly distinguishing the shapes of things. But it is not that the things cannot be distinguished; on the contrary, the descriptions of landscape and people (...) are very clear and precise (...). What readers cannot grasp is where they are in time.
(*Six Walks*, 29)

The themes do not emerge, then, in a unidirectional manner, but shift as awareness of what was previously obscured, such as insights from the past, accumulate for protagonist and reader. Flashbacks materialize in the text unannounced, and at times it is not stated whether they belong to *Zà*, *la donna dai capelli corti*, or perhaps another entity that is introduced in reveries that crop up regularly which feature a ‘storytelling mother’ and her daughter, who is insatiable for stories. This grouping of “embedded flashbacks” (*Six Walks*, 29) are marked by the phrase «*Racconta*,

ma '» (“Ma’, tell a story”), and as the novel progresses the flashbacks evolve into episodes understood as nothing other than an intermingling of consciousnesses shared by those who have participated in the storytelling together.



Above is William Blake’s work ‘Jacob’s Ladder’ (1806). It delivers a new conception in artistic representation of the ‘ladder’ found in Genesis. The spiral staircase appears to have been consequential in Blake’s thinking as he used it again in the same form in his sketches of the Pilgrim’s journey in Dante’s *Commedia*. Mcgilchrist finds Blake’s artistic style and thought consequential to his project and observes that Blake’s right-hemisphere leanings shine in his creative production and orientation toward truth and ‘the real’.

What Blake’s work shares with *Colomba* is the idea that imagination draws on what has ‘presenced itself.’ Rather than an escape from reality like fantasy, imagination welcomes it continuously; with each turn in the staircase, things that were previously unseen are revealed. It is not a unidirectional route with a starting point from which an escape is attempted toward a designated end point. As an ascension is made, only changing to happen over the lapse of time,

and a more expansive view of the whole is gained. Eco writes of the “two ways of walking through a wood” which he likens to “the two ways of going through a narrative text” (*Six Walks*, 27). One is to pick a path in hopes of getting from point A, in the woods, to point B, out of the woods, as quickly as possible, while the other is “to walk so as to discover what the wood is like and find out why some paths are accessible while others are not” (27). The circularity of the spiral staircase and the wandering in the wood involve a return to subjects and experiences previously encountered, and with each new meeting a higher stratum is reached, at which point there is at once a reconnection with things of the past and an advancement in perspective. Eco calls the reader who wanders with curiosity a “second-level reader” (27), who positions him or herself to discover the model author, and to become a model reader.

What lies at the center and pinnacle of the circles of Blake’s staircase is perhaps the ultimate view of ‘truth’, but the pinnacle is not only out of sight, but is not directly aimed at. It is not the end point, but the process of ascension, the search for truth, that is the impetus for the journey. *La donna dai capelli corti* becomes a secondary protagonist as an expressive and expressed internal author as she travels the spiral staircase with Zà. There is an intersubjective comingling of mental content, of understanding, between the two as they see what lies below (or in the past) with each revolution upwards that they make. The path they travel together as intimates, a path that the model reader traverses as well, leads not only to Colomba, to a shared truth, but an understanding of how her disappearance came to be and what will be required for her rehabilitation.

Another allegorical/metaphorical symbol of how the discourse of *Colomba* proceeds is the tapestry. While an in-depth discussion of how the tapestry becomes woven into the work will be found later in this chapter, I will point out that Maraini takes up the literary trope of

writer as weaver of tapestries in the tradition of Ariosto and Cervantes, and extends the trope to a consideration of the arrangement and display of tapestries in series of episodes or ‘cycles.’ A tapestry hung in a cycle gained readability by building meaning from the other tapestries, and there was always the potential for new scenes that could add to or alter the interpretation of cycles. While Ariosto compared his artistry to a master weaver’s, who controlled the message of the complicated scene depicted in his text/tapestry, the indeterminacy of Maraini’s novel advertises its incompleteness in the manner of “*l’opera aperta*” (“the open work”) as described by Umberto Eco (*The Open Work*). In this openness, Maraini highlights the notion that her work is one in a series of tapestry-like scenes, each scene meaningful in its own right. When a panoramic view of each scene is taken, as in a cycle, there is an extension of meaning through the many scenes that preface the work as intertexts, and a notion is illuminated that there will always be more texts/tapestries to come.

Story/Plot

The story is as follows. Colomba, leaves her grandmother’s house one morning, goes into the woods and does not return. She is missing for a time and her grandmother does not give up the search, finally finding her deep in the forest, she carries her down the mountain, back to the safety of her home. This is the story, the fabula or fairytale of “Little Red Riding Hood” which Eco mobilizes as an example of a story “without a plot” (*Six Walks*, 34). The plot or *sjuzet*, meaning the events in the narrative in the sequence in which they are presented can be distinct from the linearity of the fabula, and this is the case in *Colomba*. The moments of dramatic action require a very scarce discourse time; it is the journey into the literal, literary and metaphorical forest in search of Colomba which the grandmother makes that constitutes the

preponderance of the novel and the intrigue that is otherwise absent from the fabula. The project of constructing *Colomba's sjuzet* becomes a story, featuring *la donna dai capelli corti* as protagonist. This text within a text is the story of how a writer, her subjects and her protagonists find each other, and how the way that she writes does or does not do justice to the truths of the themes and the lives she writes about.

In Mcgilchrist's first book, *Against Criticism*, in which he airs his concern about the deconstructive and categorizing approach to art and literature, he contends that works of art are "pushed forward by the building of a design upon chance, and by the eruptions of chance out of design" (19). Mcgilchrist sees that chance and design reciprocate one another, and that it is the author's imaginative reaction to the agents of chance that are her contribution to the birth of the new and unexpected work of art (19). Wandering in the wood, one's imagination and one's chance discoveries sustain and support one another circularly or as Mcgilchrist suggests, "obliquely" (*Against Criticism*, 62), because they cannot be expressed directly by language. Mcgilchrist sees understanding of the work of art as a progression that occurs "not in a straight line but by a kind of process of reverberation, back and forth, reassessing what we thought we already knew." (31) But there is an intention behind the wanderings. The protagonist Zà has an intention to find her granddaughter, but she does not see a direct path to lead her there. Likewise, the model author, made explicit in *la donna dai capelli corti*, and the model reader wander, not directionless, are asked to wander and in so doing, must "take a risk" (48):

We can see more or less where we are going, but not any direct path leading there.

There is no way of arriving to there from here without taking a risk, without making a jump outside of one's own meanings. But that jump is no more random

than a jump from rock to rock in midstream is random: it requires a combination of skill, good judgment and faith. (*Against Criticism*, 48)

The indirectness of the approach to knowledge suggested by Eco and Mcgilchrist is periphrastically thematic in the *Colomba* and I argue, periphrastically constitutive of the directions that the model reader detects in an exchange with the model author, a process by which they bring each other into existence.

So *Colomba* begins in a fog of uncertainty. Maraini embraces contradiction, contingency, imperfection and vulnerability as inevitable in the writing of stories, as in life. The reader, rather than being guided by the narrator towards becoming comfortable in the fictional world of the novel, is confronted by the contingencies involved in finding *Colomba*. *La donna dai capelli corti* is not convinced that she should take on the project, or what the project is about. The narration stalls repeatedly over the first thirty pages as both reader and narrator are in limbo; something needs to happen to get the novel going, and that thing can only happen if a is taken by *la donna dai capelli corti*, the internal author. The leap finally occurs when *la donna dai capelli corti* is confronted with a surprising synchronicity which connects what her own family has loved and held sacred in their own stories to Zà's family's oral tradition, resulting in a deeply felt 'betweenness'. The story of a fabled alpine captain, Pietr' i pelus' holds a position of lore for both women, and *la donna dai capelli corti* is intrigued to find out that this same alpine captain was Zà's grandfather. This curious beginning is not merely a clever literary game. The uncertainty and wavering that are finally quelled by a 'breakout' moment for the narrator is the first in a series of such moments in the stories of many other people that see telling in the novel. The struggle to arrive at a change in perspective like the one seen in the chance leap made by the internal author equate with the 'two ways of being in the world' that are possible to assume.

La donna dai capelli corti is staying in Abruzzo, where she has come to write. This internal author is the sole protagonist of the novel in the beginning. This introductory frame gives space for the internal author's reflections about the process of tapping into a creative current, and how what she writes about is settled on. Zà, the character who assumes the place of the protagonist for the greater part of the novel is first introduced on page 10, appearing only as a potential at first. The following is the allegory that *la donna dai capelli corti* uses to describe her first encounter with Zà.

Un personaggio ha bussato alla porta della donna da timidamente, è entrato senza fare rumore. (...). Sembrava imbarazzata e vergognosa ma determinata a restare. Poi lentamente, verso sera, dopo avere mandato giù una minestra e bevuto un bicchiere di vino, si è decisa a parlare. È impacciata perché pensa che la sua storia non sia interessante, che nessuno abbia voglia di ascoltarla. Zaira, detta Zà questo è il suo nome, si ritiene una persona anonima, comune e poi ha superato l'età delle eroine a romanzo. Ma allora cos'è che la spinge a infrangere lunghe abitudini di discrezione e silenzio per andare a battere alla porta di una romanziera. (10)

(A person knocked at the door of the woman with short hair. (...). She seemed embarrassed and ashamed yet determined to stay. Then slowly, as evening came on, after having sent down a bowl of soup and a glass of wine, she decided to talk. She talks clumsily because she thinks that her story isn't interesting, that no one has any desire to listen to her. Zaira, called Zà, her name sounds anonymous and common, and she is also passed the age of the protagonists or heroin of any novel.

But what is it that now compels her to break with long held habits of discretion and silence to go and knock on the door of a novelist.)

Maraini has used this same trope of the insistent visitor in describing how her characters and stories choose her.⁵⁵

After having explored the usual avenues for trying to find Colomba, Zà turns to a novelist who is autobiographically consistent with Maraini herself, the empirical author, but will come to be known as the model author of the novel.⁵⁶ The following pages see an alternation between Zà's attempts to tell the story of Colomba's family history through detailed accounts of lives and events and *la donna dai capelli corti*'s reservations about this unexpected guest and her doubts about the purposefulness of the stories she tells. *La donna dai capelli corti* has pre-established plans as an author on how to use her time, working on a novel that has already taken shape in her mind. The working title of this project is *Auschwitz*, one that she intends to change. The details that she has in place for the story line are unmistakably descriptive of the novel that Maraini will publish after *Colomba, Il treno dell'ultima notte*. (20). *La donna dai capelli corti* chases the new arrival away, exasperated as she is otherwise focused and engaged.

La donna dai capelli corti indicates that categories of focus have been formed in her mind as she prepares to write. Boundaries have been drawn around these topics of interest so that focus might not become overly fuzzy by expansion of attention to things beyond that scope. This is a left-hemisphere specialty and liability. Zà, who busily searches for Colomba, does not do much interpretation at least in the beginning. She is the one who encounters things and

⁵⁵ Maraini's 2016 publication "Se un personaggio bussa sulla mia porta: come si racconta" details this description that she has mobilized in characterizing her writing process in interviews and discussions throughout the years.

⁵⁶ In her book *Chiara di Assisi: Elogio della disobbedienza*, an adolescent girl beseeches her beloved author to tell the story of the saint the way she feels it needs to be told, much like Zà and the confidence she must have in this novelist.

ventures into curious places and situations but does not hold presuppositions about what she might find, nor does she feel that she knows how to evaluate and interpret what is found. The pair of protagonists, at this point in the story, might be compared to the functions of the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere of the brain, that, when brought together, strike a balanced tension that enables the knowing and telling of the story of *Colomba* to come into existence.

Like ‘Little Red Riding Hood,’ *Colomba* vanishes into the woods one day, and so the search for *Colomba* takes place in the forest. Both *Zà* and *la donna dai capelli corti* spend time in the forests of Abruzzo, but once they have joined forces, it is *Zà* who stakes out each quadrant of the uncharted areas on foot, while *la donna dai capelli corti* ‘follows’ her into the woods. The interplay of what presences physically in the woods for *Zà*, and the reflections at first carried out by her narrator is how the two proceed to find their way in the narrative forest. The villain or ‘wolf’ doesn’t do much to forestall suspicion; Sal, a stranger, approaches *Zà* at the beginning of story and takes *Zà*’s money in exchange for being the informant that *Colomba* is alive and is being held prisoner in the woods. Sal disappears, from the story and does not resurface until the end of the novel when it is found that what he said was true; the now drug-addicted *Colomba* is his prisoner, he supplies her with drugs and sells her body from a trailer hidden in the woods. What happens in between is a probing of the personal and collective memory of generations past in order to understand what has led to *Colomba*’s psychological and physical confinement.

Zà’s undertaking is strikingly concordant with Ortega y Gasset’s precept, “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia. Si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo” (“I am I and my circumstance. If I do not save it, I do not save myself”). Through her determination to gather up all the stories with loose ends from her family members’ histories, to contextualize them with cultural history, and turning them over to *la donna dai capelli corti*, *Zà* accesses new understandings and revisits deficient

perspectives which facilitate an empathic understanding of her granddaughter, born of generational conditioning, which was not previously available to her. This 'seeing anew' is bred of the transformational reinterpretations she takes of less-than-ideal circumstances and events that nourished her granddaughter's psyche, which include her own critical blindness at times. This transformative experience allows Zà to better understand the psychological and emotional weight that Colomba had been carrying, and to speak and act in a way that privileges connection with others, giving her the strength and comprehension to draw Colomba back from perdition.

The stories of many generations of family members are told in *Colomba* which together create a sort of family quilt. While the stories are told, the storyteller is the one who crafts the ensemble. In this, Zà takes on a similar task as that of *la donna dai capelli corti*. The internal narrator of *Colomba* has been intending to write on topics other than Colomba's story, and she wonders about the possibility of weaving a successful narrative built on other themes.

Per esempio quella di una madre che cerca di rendere appetibile la memoria adulta raccontando a una figlia bambina di donne e di uomini vissuti in altri tempi. Può una madre nascondersi dietro le favole, per trattare dei grandi temi del vivere con una figlia curiosa e appassionata di trame, anche le più sconclusionate?
(11)

(For example, that of a mother who tries to make her adult memory pleasing through the stories she tells to her young daughter about women and men who lived in other times. Can a mother hide behind fairy tales, in order to bring up the great themes of life with a curious daughter who is passionate about stories, even the most disjointed ones?)

This story of a mother and her tales, and where they lead her daughter becomes its own narrative thread that comingles with the story of Colomba's family and her disappearance in subsections of the novel designated by the interruption «*racconta ma' »* ("Tell a story, mom"), in which a mother shares tales with her daughter who is insatiable for stories. The narrative threads not only intersect, but they supply meaning to one another. The curiosity of daughters, their inquisitiveness about the woods and the mysterious things that happen there is taken stock of, as is the need for intentional storytelling by mothers who wish to pass on wisdom in a way that is most befitting a child's inclinations. It becomes apparent at some point that Zà herself is narrating this fairy tale of Colomba's disappearance to her daughter Angelica, after she has departed.

The structure and plot of *Colomba* together invite many returns to a mind object⁵⁷, allowing an ever transforming, intersubjective perspective to mediate understanding. The returns help make the dualities in the perception of these mind objects distinct, and make recognizable the dispositions from which the dualities arise. This is the case when a particular character is torn between two dispositions in their mind. In *Colomba*, Zà's grandfather, 'Pietr' i pelus', is central to the question of the duality of perspectives that vie to become the primary will, which informs action. The divided dispositions at work in the world become increasingly identifiable for Zà and *la donna dai capelli corti* because each must work with her own divided thought; Zà with her *pennuto*, and *la donna dai capelli corti* who must work with the parts of the narrative, a process requiring collaboration between left and right hemispheres. The disinclination to see inconsistencies and destructive ways only in others, to other thoughts and drives that are incommensurable or undesirable, is the hallmark of these truth seekers in the novel.

⁵⁷ I use mind object to mean 'the psychological or phenomenological result of perception and meaning making.'

Storytelling and Intersubjectivity

Zà and *la donna dai capelli corti* both believe in the power of stories and understand that storytelling is a highly consequential art that requires the summoning of the deepest attention and constant vigilance to ensure that the story falls on ears in a way that is faithful to ‘truth’ in meaning. Both of these women learned the art of storytelling from the ‘mothers’ in their families, that is to say, the ability was passed on through the generations, for the most part, from woman to child. The reader knows that Zà, the only protagonist who never disappears from the story, has preserved all of the family stories in her memory. The reader learns that *la donna dai capelli corti* was a child who hung on her mother’s every word. The reader comes to know *la donna dai capelli corti* via the string of mind objects that pass through her and help her in translating Zà’s story. Some of these trains of mental content, as mentioned, begin with the request «*racconta ma’*»: they are interludes that appear at first as digressions, but in actuality do anything but make a departure from the events and themes that stand out in the novel around them. The «*racconta ma’*» interludes are framed, initially, as *la donna dai capelli corti*’s waking dreams which arise in moments when the narrative path that opens to the widest ‘truth in meaning’ is unclear. As the story develops and time jumps to and fro, the characters featured in the «*racconta ma’*» passages resist stable identification. While a mother and child are always featured, their presumed identities bend and they take on traits and circumstances that belong to a multiplicity of other characters, either from the novel or from other texts.

As the novel proceeds and the stories of the generations of families are remembered and narrated, the reader comes to see that there must always be a new generation of storytellers for the story of a family to be conserved. The «*racconta ma’*» passages see a child touched by the love and devotion of a mother who would narrate the world to them, and because of her vivid

childhood memories, the child finds that she can access a fluid subjectivity as she matures into a storyteller, merging her mother's voice, the texts that have influenced her most, and her own new experiences of a new, modern world. With the rise of the new intersubjective storyteller, new stories will emerge, ones that her mother never told, but that are nonetheless firmly within the heritage of the storytelling tradition that has been passed on to her.

Without storytelling, one could find herself stranded with just a void below, without the context of the past, which gives a sense of continuity, bereft of any sense of belonging to something greater. Mcgilchrist confirms the tendency toward unity that represents the proper functioning of the hemispheres, "individuation (...) *within* the tendency to union" (201). It is not that individuality must be annihilated in order to find union, but that the feeling of belonging to something greater and deeper than one's self grounds the individual. The intersubjectivity and unstable identities at play in narration, for both the listener and storyteller, make it an ideal space for understanding how individuation within union might truly be expressed. The «*racconta ma 'è*» sequences relate stories that reflect persons and places from the empirical author's life which Maraini has shared publicly. Someone like her mother is the *raconteuse*, at least initially, sharing her stories with a child who resembles a young Dacia.⁵⁸ Thus, Maraini is signaling to the reader that this is not simply a metatextual paradigm about storytellers and stories, but it is how she received life's meanings and the mechanism by which she transmits her understanding.

The first «*racconta ma 'è*» episode mirrors the impasse of the stalled narration of *Colomba*, the point at which the internal author is unconvinced of the merits of Zà as a protagonist. Not in the mood to tell a story, the mother's mind wanders, and she thinks of Flaubert's Emma Bovary who was cast in such a negative light by the author, was so insufferable, as to make it almost

⁵⁸ Maraini write and speaks about her childhood experiences and the personalities and adventures of her family members in multiple texts and interviews. See *La nave per Kobe* and *La mia vita, le mie battaglie*.

inconceivable that he was able to give literary life to her. The storytelling mother makes a comparison of herself to Emma Bovary, remembering a moment from the text when Emma, while sitting at her child's bedside, thinks to herself, "Ma quanto è brutta questa figlia!" ("But how ugly this daughter of mine is!") (24). In a moment of recognition, this mother thinks of Emma as represented by Flaubert, impietosa, sciocca, crudele" ("always merciless, foolish and cruel") (25), and then wonders "quale somiglianza può esserci fra lei e l'infelice adultera del XIX secolo oltre a questo momentaneo rifiuto del ruolo di madre narratrice" ("what other similarities there might be between her and this miserable adulteress of the 19th century beyond this momentary refusal of the role of storytelling mother") (25). The abdication of the sacred responsibility that belongs to a narrator and to a mother, to give life, to nurture, to accept, to love, are intertwined in the frame of these intertwined impressions. The cruelty of withholding tenderness from a child is likened to withholding it from a protagonist. The abdication of the sacred responsibility of narrating the truth in a way that its essence might be understood is to neglect the expression of tenderness for the listener or reader. When the dream of the «racconta ma'» episode recedes, *la donna dai capelli corti* comes back into focus, wondering to herself how, as an author, she could ever give life to or mother protagonists like Zà, whose mere presence disconcerts her. But then she wonders "Come fermarli?" ("How can they be stopped?") (25). This sequence reflects Maraini's view that an author should, in some way, fall in love with those to whom she gives literary life, just as a mother must love her child, not in spite of imperfection, but because imperfection "is the condition of all things, even of the greatest and not accidentally but essentially" (*Against Criticism*, 239). The coldness with which Emma treats her child is echoed in Flaubert's treatment of Emma. The author treats her with little kindness

and refuses to *accudire* his narrative progeny, his lineage, and the internal author has found an awareness of the imperative of doing better.

The second «*racconta ma*’» begins without introduction, and features one who is presumed to be *la donna dai capelli corti* as her childhood self. She asks her mother to tell a story, “Mi racconti di tuo marito, l’alpinista?” (“Will you tell me about your husband, the mountaineer?”) (28). The mother agrees and tells old stories about the child’s father, her ex-husband and herself, remembering their adventures, young and in love. She recites the songs that they sang, songs that continued on in their family’s repertoire as the child grew. The internal author is transported to multiple places and times in her family’s history by small things remembered.

Le canzoni alpine sono rimaste nella memoria di famiglia, e risuonano due volte, tre volte, in un pensiero che si sta facendo logoro ma ancora dispone di archi sospesi, come le logge della casa paterna abitata dai venti fiorentini. Senza neanche volerlo, solo cantando quelle note, anche dentro una cucina di città, si ripete ogni volta il rito della rimembranza (29).

(The mountain songs have remained in the family memory, and they resound two times, three times, within a thought that has become timeworn but also is disposed of arches suspended, like the loggias of her father, filled with the Florentine winds. Without even wanting to, just singing those notes, even inside a kitchen in the city, there is a repetition of the rite of memory each time.)

A certain captain of a mountain unit in World War I was the subject of many of the songs that the child’s father sang. *La donna dai capelli corti* remembers, as a child, seeing photographs of this legendary captain. When a return is made to the principal narrative, *Zà* shows the author a

picture of her grandfather, whom the author recognizes as *il capitano*, the one whose songs returned to her as a memory in the preceding «*racconta ma* » sequence. It is as if the author presaged the connection, which demonstrates that a ‘betweenness’ is developing between the two women. Once the synchronicity arises, *la donna dai capelli corti* listens without further complaint as Zà fills in the personal history of Pietr’ i pelus’, the alpine captain, who is also Zà’s grandfather. The novel of Colomba, with Zà as the protagonist, is now underway and *la donna dai capelli corti*’s skepticism regarding the merits of the new protagonists’ story recedes. The mother and child do not maintain stable identities in the «*racconta ma* » passages, as the reader gathers from their changing biographies and memories. In this, Maraini shares with Mcgilchrist the understanding that the creation of identities, the birth of ourselves, is an intersubjective process, and that storytelling and the mother-child relationship play a fundamental role in building our sense of self. Mcgilchrist calls this “betweenness,” remarking that “one might say that all experience is experience of difference. (...) our senses respond to the difference *between* values — to relative, not absolute, values. (It seems that knowledge and perception, and therefore experience, exist only in the relations *between* things (...).)” (97). This betweenness is important to the function of intersubjectivity in *Colomba* and gives rise to metamorphosis, in which multiple storytellers merge into one being, and listeners find their worlds of perception and cognition intermingling with those of others.

A meaningful convergence occurred between *la donna dai capelli corti* and Zà, and it led to the discovery of an intersection in an implicit belief they shared, the sense that the alpine captain’s *canto* (poem, song) has something profound to communicate about truth and reality. The two women were thinking about Pietr’ i pelus’ at the same time without knowing that the other one could possibly be acquainted with him or his story. *La donna dai capelli corti* had

previously found Zà's stories unfamiliar and unimportant, she desired to be rid of the woman and her stories. But Zà and her stories transform, with the synchronicity, from something irrelevant to relevant: a shared truth. Mcgilchrist finds Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the nature of truth, and how it comes into being consistent with how the right hemisphere operates in the world.⁵⁹

It is the rootedness of thought and language in the body that we share with others which means that despite the fact that all truth is relative, this by no means undermines the possibility of a shared truth. (149)

Shared truths will be the basis of restoration of connection and trust within the family in the novel. The struggle to find shared truth will prove onerous, actually impossible, first for *la donna dai capelli corti*, and then for Zà, until the dimensions of seeing and knowing that only the right hemisphere can deliver, with time, act as a beacon for perception.

The first episodes in the novel *Colomba*, which feature this tug-of-war for the internal author's attention, set the stage for the introduction of Mcgilchrist's examinations and conclusions from *The Master and His Emissary*. Mcgilchrist offers this most basic description of the mechanics of the mind's awareness: "New experience, as it is first 'present' to the mind, engages the right hemisphere, and as the experience becomes familiar, it gets 're-presented' by the left hemisphere" (163). Mcgilchrist finds that the left hemisphere has a "stickiness" about it, that is, it is difficult, once it has already decided what the world is going to reveal, to go beyond that. Mcgilchrist explains, we become "prisoners of expectation" (163). The internal author has arrived at the novel's starting point with presuppositions of what the subjects of her writing will

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty's thought is a bridge that exists between Mcgilchrist, who attends to the division of thought as originating in the bicameral mind, and Lacan, who treats issues of division and duality in the subject (*io-tanathos*) as a fundamental human condition, although its origin is not made an object of study, but is speculated to derive from archetypal relationships and/or their disruption that each human individual experiences

be, and biases regarding what is worth writing about. The left hemisphere produces stories and beliefs which it employs against anything other or new that might intrude into its field of awareness, as it focuses on what it already beholds and intends to use for a specific purpose. This self-referentiality of the left hemisphere initially sours the internal author's receptiveness to what is present and sees success for some time in imprisoning her thought. But as will happen when good stories are rendered, an author's attention is seized by something outside of herself, something unexpected, organic, authentic. Maraini's allegory of the insistent potential protagonist paired with the tug-of-war-like beginning to the novel shows that she intends to reflect upon the division of the will and thought, phenomenologically.⁶⁰

Magic in Maternal Bonds

To better explain the shrouded and mysterious connection that Maraini holds as extant and palpable, I introduce her recent book *Corpo felice: Storia di donne, rivoluzioni e un figlio che se ne va* (2018), which among other keys to interpretation to themes in *Colomba* provides the following insights into why this particular alpine song stirred her father's emotions so deeply, a song about a captain's dying moments which came after a tour with his troops full of hardship and tragedy. The song that Zà, *la donna dai capelli corti*, and Maraini's father, Fosco, are reported to cherish is the following:

Il capitano l'è ferito/ l'è ferito e sta per morire / e manda a dire ai suoi alpine / che
lo vengano a ritrovar. / Il primo pezzo al re d'Italia / che si ricordi dei suoi figli
alpin / il secondo pezzo al regimento / che si ricordi di un suo soldà / il terzo

⁶⁰ I use 'phenomenologically' here to indicate an attention to lived experience rather than objective study.

pezzo al battaglione/ che si ricordi del suo capitan / il quarto pezzo alla mia
mamma / che si ricordi del suo figlio alpin. (*Colomba*, 49)

(The captain is wounded/ he is wounded and dying / and he sends word to his
alpine troops / that they must come to find him. / The first piece to the King of
Italy / so he remembers his alpine sons / the second piece to the Army / so they
remember their soldier / the third piece to his battalion / so they remember their
captain / the fourth piece to my mom / so she remembers her alpine son.)

Maraini expands the consciousness of intersubjectivity far beyond the limits that we as readers are accustomed to in *Colomba*, and *Corpo felice* is a text that, when read with *Colomba*, delivers a penetrating vision of the marvel and the magic of this betweenness. *Corpo felice* is structured around “i fitti dialoghi segreti” (“the secret deep dialogues”) (217), with Perdu, the child Maraini lost before he had come full term, whom she describes as the “fantasma di bambino che è rimasto vicino a me, anzi dentro di me, che è cresciuto e si è fatto adulto” (“ghost baby who has stayed close to me, even inside of me, who has grown up and become an adult”) (217). Her connection and relationship with Perdu endure despite their separation. As she converses with him on all the important themes of life, the author attempts to inculcate deep truths through stories, but in a way in which consideration of his development satge of his awareness about reality is wielded, as though Perdu has gone on maturing, as the living do. In one such conversation, she tells Perdu about his grandfather and how she believes he might have resembled him in many ways. Maraini says she knows he too would have sung as he climbed in the mountains:

[C]ome cantava mio padre che era stato alpino e conosceva le canzoni della
montagna, le più drammatiche, quelle che raccontano di soldati che vanno in treno

al fronte o quella dal capitano che sta per morire e chiede che il suo corpo sia fatto in tanti pezzi (...). (200)

(How he sang, my father, who had been a mountaineer and knew the songs of the mountains, the most dramatic ones, those that tell of soldiers who go by train to the front or the one about the captain who is dying and asks that his body be divided in pieces.)

The refrain that Pietr' made as he lay dying in *Colomba* is recalled, as seen above, in *Corpo felice*. Maraini then explains that her father had adored his own mother, Yoi, but had always been at war with his authoritarian father who supported the fascists. While the Maraini family was held for two years as prisoners of war in a Japanese concentration camp, she recounts her father's experience the day his mother died, halfway around the world.

[U]n giorno il cuore aveva preso a stringerglisi nel petto come se un topo lo mordersse a sangue. Poi aveva saputo che quel giorno la sua amata mamma Yoi era morta, sussurrando il suo nome, per un infarto, cadendo lunga distesa (...).

(201)

(One day his heart began to clench in his chest as if a mouse was biting it. Then he found out that that very day his beloved mother Yoi had died of a heart attack, murmuring his name and falling down lifeless (...).)

This knowing at a distance that a loved one has passed will happen in the same way with Pietr's mother, Zaira the elder, in *Colomba*, when Pietr' i pelus' dies in the war. Fosco is remembered to have been moved by the song inspired by the captain's last words, which recall the similarities of his own heartbreak; "(...)gli alpini (...) lontani dalla madre e senza un perché, in una stupida guerra fatta di massacri inutili, lo commuoveva" ("the alpine troops, (...) far from

their mothers for no good reason, in a stupid war of useless massacres, moved him”) (200).

Dacia’s father then conserves the song in his working memory, in his repertoire of sensemaking and inspiration for his journeys through the mountains and through the world in such a way that it was deeply absorbed by his daughter, the writer.

Enigmatic connections of intersubjectivity abound in *Colomba*, but what I am hoping to show is that they have also become a discernible development in Maraini’s writing and thought. *Corpo felice* extends the notion found in *Colomba* that the experiences of people of the past truly create the soil which nourish subsequent generations. I have tried to show this through the examination of the intersubjectivity of Maraini, her family members, and the persons she writes about. Perdu, Pietr’ i pelus’ and Dacia’s father, Fosco Maraini, have all been distant from their mothers without the possibility of communication via worldly routes. Maraini has it that each one of them, at the time of death of mother or child, as the circumstance holds, is nonetheless capable of communication through a presence that is felt in the body of the other. This mysterious communication can span great distances and even bridge the world of the living with the afterlife. The following is a passage from *Corpo felice* which affords us an intimate look into the depth of the union of mother and child in the moments after the author learns that the baby, still inside her body, has died.

[P]er me no, non era morto e continuava scalciare nonostante avessi smesso di sentire i colpi contro la carne. (...) A quel bambino, con cui mi ero abituata a parlare in un linguaggio tutto nostro e segreto, ho continuato a rivolgermi con dolcezza (...). «Dove sei?» chiedevo a fior di labbra, mentre il mio respiro si faceva pesante e lento. «Delira!» ho sentito che diceva la suora. Ma io non deliravo, parlavo con la piccola creatura che se ne stava andando. «Dove vai,

amore mio? Aspetta un momento, che vengo con te, dammi la mano, che ti tengo stretto, non voglio che ne vai lontano da me, dammi la mano, aspetta!» (51-2)

(For me no, he had not died, and he continued to kick even I had stopped feeling the bumps against my body. (...) To that baby, with whom I had grown accustomed to talk in a secret language that was ours alone, I continued to speak with tenderness. “Where are you?” I asked under my breath, as my breathing became heavy and slow. “She’s delirious!” I heard the nun say. But I was not raving, I was talking to the little creature that was departing. “Where are you going my love? Wait just a moment, so I can come with you, give me your hand, so I can hold onto you tightly, I don’t want you to go far away from me, give me your hand, wait!”)

The common reaction to the notion that one might continue to speak to the dead is to be unsettled. The author gives voice to this reaction when it comes to speaking with the dead; a friend of the author comments “Mi sa che sei un poco matta (...) non si parla coi morti” (“You are a little crazy (...) one does not speak with the dead”) (217). However, this connection that prevails even after the separation of death appears repeatedly in Maraini’s work, and in each case, it occurs between mother and child. This mother-child bond is a persistent merger of their consciousnesses which must be taken into consideration in inspecting maternal family lines in *Colomba*. The story of the family features both mothers and fathers in each generation: Zaira the elder and Mosè Salvato, Pietro’ i pelus’ and Pina, to Pitrucc’ i pelus’ and Antonina, Zà and Roberto, Angelica and Valdo, all of whom contribute to Colomba’s circumstances. It is important to recognize that the family line is complexedly matrilineal. There is in each

generation after the first, the disappearance of one parent or both parents. When it is the mother who departs, her child is nurtured by a maternal figure of previous generations within the family.

Fairy Tales for Angelica

Zà finds herself inside the local church for the first time since her daughter Angelica died. As she sits there in the pew, surrounded mostly by women at evening mass, she remembers the night of Angelica's accident, foregrounding memories as though they were directed toward Angelica; "Anche se sei lì gelata, vagliolella mia, io so che le tue orecchie, benché fatte di marmo, mi ascoltano" ("Even though you lie there frozen, my girl, I know that your ears, although they are made of marble, listen to me") (299). Although this conversation is told as though it happened entirely in the hospital room the night of Angelica's death, the idea that Angelica's ears would be made of marble reveals a superimposition of the conversation into the church where Zà sits as she remembers. The giant statue of "La Madonna nera" ("The black Madonna") towers above the altar, and Zà remembered how Angelica had taken interest in the story of this figure in her youth (297), and so associating the statue with the departed Angelica who is still with her, alive in spirit. Zà received a phone call, many years before, informing her that her daughter had been killed in an automobile accident and she was required at the hospital to identify the body (298). The memory of that night returns as Zà sits in the church, unsolicited and unstoppable, with a force and clarity that seems to express the vigor with which they had remained suppressed. When she arrived at the hospital and first saw her daughter, she felt the overwhelming urge to escape; "Devo andare, devo andare, questa vista mi è insopportabile, non riesco a guardarla, non riuscirò mai a guardarla, ripeteva meccanicamente." ("I must leave, I must leave, this scene is intolerable, I cannot bring myself to look at her, I will never bring

myself to look, she repeated mechanically”) (299). But she was unable to take a step toward the door. A storm brewed in Zà and she acted out in uncharacteristic violence, fording the doctor to leave her there alone with Angelica. The words of Calderón de la Barca come to Zà, the author whose famous play she had worked on translating during some very difficult times in Angelica’s adolescence:

Credo che i miei occhi siano idropici, perché anche se il bere significa morte, i miei occhi bevono sempre di più e così vedendo che il guardarti mi uccide, muoio del desiderio di vederti. (299)

(I think that my eyes must be swollen, because even though to drink means death, my eyes drink more and more, and so, seeing that looking at you kills me, I am dying with desire to see you.)

These words attest to the difficulty of articulating the feelings and circumstances that Zà lived with as a mother; a powerlessness to connect with her daughter. Zà longed for an opportunity to help her daughter, to reestablish the connection, but it had been ruptured by something unknown and its mending seemed to always lie just out of reach. There was a lack that Angelica carried with her, and Zà always held herself to blame, not because she wanted it that way, but because her understanding of Angelica’s condition was insufficient. Zà does not make of her daughter’s death a simple accident. Her sense is that the accident was more like the climactic scene of a tragic spectacle. The words that she then spoke to Angelica, as she took her hand in hers, mimic the sacrament of extreme unction, in a sort of inverted sense. By confessing to Angelica her failures and allowing all that has been occulted to be expressed even though the truth of these things has been unbearable, Zà knows she must lay out everything she has so that Angelica’s spirit may be at peace, knowing that she is part of an ongoing story, rather than the last chapter

of a meaningless chain of lives. The possibility of communication and connection has arrived, dilatorily, and Zà accepts her fortune.

Infatti era rimasta, e le aveva parlato come non le era mai successo in vita. Parole o forse solo pensieri di una notte dell'orrore da cui sarebbe uscita sfigurata, avendo accettato un dolore che non era accettabile. (299)

(In fact she had stayed, and she had spoken to her (daughter) in a way that had never happened in her life. Words or maybe just thoughts that arose from a night of horror from which she would leave disfigured, having accepted a pain that was not acceptable.)

Zà experienced the magic of her stories run dry while her child struggled in life, but a possibility for meaning to pass between mother and daughter has been given new life.

The reader does not find out until Zà is ready to share the painful discovery that had been obscured from her too, that Angelica was sexually abused by a trusted family member, her grandfather Cignalitt', a secret that she had kept from her mother. Zà's memory of how she came to know of the abuse is related in the same conversation in which Angelica happily informs her mother that she is in love and pregnant with Valdo's child, she also says that she was sexually abused by Cignalitt'(174). The abuse is the original injury, the foundational event from which Angelica's subsequent tribulations spin off. Zà feels deep shame at not having been able to protect her daughter. Zà recommences her motherly storytelling upon Angelica's death, beginning in the hospital room, and this is where the chronology becomes confusing. Angelica and Zà no longer are constricted by worldly time in their contact with one another. Time is now an eternal present, and this allows an understanding of how Zà details her search for Colomba to the child's mother, who died years before her disappearance.

Zà intuitively feels that there are stories that Angelica longs to hear from their shared past, stories of the family. She begins by recalling what for her were happy memories, and Cignalitt', the man who Zà believed to be her father until she was an adult, and Angelica's grandfather. The rupture in the connection between Zà and Angelica is stark as the story rattles on. Zà has not had the occasion to alter her impressions of a beloved Cignalitt' as Angelica was forced to do. The retelling of their shared memories brings this disconnect into focus and Zà is able to attend to a sense of guilt for not seeing the threat of the abuse that occurred in her presence and her guilt at harboring affectionate memories of this substitute father. Zà revisits memories of times she shared with Cignalitt' and attends with more awareness to the past, finding that he was not entirely the exemplar of generosity that he had held her to be. An example of a memory that demands review is that of her mother Antonina's death. Zà finds that Cignalitt' and his desperation and sorrow are at the center of the story, rather than the memory of her mother or Zà's own grief. In so doing, Zà sees anew, alongside the generosity and sentimentality that she had always attributed to him from the time she was a child, a glow of egotism that bordered on tyranny which went undetected by her child self. The memory, no longer static, has come alive for the reader who would take the "inferential walk" that they are invited to take by the model author (Eco, *Six Walks*, 53), to look with wonder upon what has presenced between the past and the point at which it is remembered. When Zà bends down to kiss her daughter, she hears a voice that seems to say to her, "[C]ontinua a raccontare, ma', dimmi qualcosa di più sul nonno Pitrucc' i pelus'!" ("Go on with the stories, ma, tell me something more about grandpa Pitrucc' i pelus'!") (302). Pitrucc' is Zà's biological father, Angelica's grandfather, whom they never had the chance to know. Angelica is interested in hearing about him, in fact it occurs to Zà that Angelica bears some resemblance to him, particularly in her spirited utopian longings (305-306).

Era timido, robusto, sapeva fare tutti i lavori dei boschi, ma si era invaghito del comunismo. E nel suo cuore aveva coltivato un giardino fiorito dove gli uomini andavano nudi come in paradiso e si parlavano con amore e nessuno faceva del male a nessuno e tutti filavano in armonia. (301)

(He was timid, robust, he knew how to do all the trades of the woods, but he became distracted by communism. In his heart he cultivated a flowered garden where men roamed nude as in Paradise and they spoke with love and nobody caused harm to anyone else and everyone got along in complete harmony.)

Zà's words caricature a naive man who falls in love with the idea of a just world during the fascist era, and her words betray an instinctual resistance to fully empathizing with the man she never had a chance to know. As the story goes on, she informs Angelica of the historical facts of the unfair assault on communism by the Fascists and the Church, a more empathetic perspective on Pitrucc's circumstances which only was attained with maturity. Because his life was in jeopardy, she explains, he was forced to leave for Australia, leaving her pregnant mother behind. She isn't able to tell Angelica anything about Pitrucc's life after he departed. Likewise, she acknowledges that she had never spoken much about Angelica's own father, Roberto Valdez, who abandoned Zà when he found she was expecting a child. Zà admits that Angelica asked her many times about her own father, and she tries to understand her own reticence.

Non so perché te ne ho parlato sempre poco, forse speravo che non ci pensassi, che l'avessi dimenticato. A che serve vagheggiare un padre che non c'è? Un altro scomparso della mia vita. Come si ripetono le cose attraverso le generazioni, quasi un destino, una fatalità che si tramanda da padre in figlio, da madre in figlia. Da noi è successo più volte che le ragazze siano rimaste gravide

senza volerlo, è una storia di famiglia, Angelicucc', che si ripete di generazione in generazione. Non so nemmeno se sia una maledizione o una benedizione. (307)

(I don't know why I spoke of him so little, perhaps I hoped that you would not think about it, that you would forget about him. What does it help to yearn for a father who is not there. Another person who disappeared from my life. How things repeat through the generations, almost destiny, a fatality that gets passed on from father to son, mother to daughter. For our family, it has happened so many times that the girls become pregnant without wishing to, it's our family story, Angelicucc', that repeats from one generation to the next. I don't even know if it is a curse or a blessing.)

Zà's words afford fortune a dynamic ambiguity. Mcgilchrist addresses the critical difference between blind fortune and sighted fate in apprehending and narrating people and their stories. He points out that while sighted fate can be an oppressive force that manipulates people and their actions, blind fortune "can liberate us from the frame of things we have devised," making "a mockery of our predictions and plans, though sometimes in a way that gives us cause to rejoice" (*Against Criticism*, 51). Cignallitt' sees the generations of women who have been left to raise children on their own fatalistically, as a curse that he must accustom himself to.

«Propria come mammeta Antonina, vagliolell' mè, propria comm'a issa» (...),
 «pover' a mmì, s'è ripetuta la sorte, me l'aveva 'mmaginà.» (...). «Tu sì na
 vagliola sfortunata, Zà!» (154)

("Just like your mom Antonina, my girl, just like her" (...), "dear me, fate has repeated itself, I should have guessed." (...). "You are an unlucky girl Zà!")

His view binds the women into predetermined roles and also implies the presence of an inherent defectiveness.

Cignalitt's efforts to feel certain about the attainment of his desires is combined with a demand that others conform to the roles that support his scheme. The use value that is perpetuated in his reverence for Santa Colomba is foundational for his introduction into the lives of Antonina and her unborn child, and the detriment he causes to multiple generations of those in the family. The following describes Cignalitt's attitude toward Antonina and the claim that he makes on her when he finds out that she is pregnant and abandoned by her lover.

Per sposarla aveva chiesto aiuto alla santa Colomba che venerava da quando era piccolo. Era andato più volte alla grottasi era ritirata a meditare e l'aveva pregata con le lacrime agli occhi di dargli questa grazia. Santa Colomba, prima gli aveva sorriso e poi lo aveva accontentato. In compenso gli aveva chiesto un cuore d'argento puro, grande come una pagnotta. E lui non si era tirato indietro. Era talmente contento di avere avuto la sua Antonina che era salito alla grottacol pesante fardello del cuore d'argento in braccio. «Tu che s' lassate i casteglie piene d' serve i servitor, i vestite de broccate ricamate d'ore, tu che s' lassate pure le collane de perle grosse comm' vellane e le scarpucc' de rase pe irtene a ffà l'eremite, a vivere dentra na grotto fridda i umida, 'n mezz' ai pipistreglie i ai lupi» (...). «Tu che oggi hai volute ascoltare la voce di un uomo piccolo, senza collo e senza importanza, sei veramente una santa di parola e per questo sono venuto a ringraziarti portandoti il cuore di argento che ti avevo promesso, non perché tu abbia interesse a qualche ricchezza, ma per fare vedere al mondo intero

che pura da morte sai fare i miracoli. Ti ringrazio, Santissima Colomba e ti prometto che quando avrò una figlia, la chiamerò come te, Colomba».

(To marry her he had asked for the help of Saint Colomba whom he had adored since he was little. He had gone many times to the cave where the very young Colomba Pagliara had taken refuge to meditate and had prayed to her with tears in his eyes to concede him this favor. First Saint Colomba smiled on him and then she had granted him his wish. She had asked him for a heart of pure silver in compensation, as big as a loaf of bread. And he did not balk at this. He was so content to have been given his Antonina that he climbed up to the cave in bare feet with heavy sack with the heart of silver in his arms. “You who left the castles full of servants and maids, the dresses adorned with golden brocades, you who left behind even necklaces of pearls as big as hazelnuts and shoes of satin to go to live the life of a hermit, to live in inside a cold and humid cave, among the bats and the wolves” (...). “You who today have listened to the voice of a small, unimportant man without a neck, you are a true saint, and for this reason I have come to thank you, bringing the heart of silver that I promised you, not because you are interested in riches, but to show the whole world that even though you are dead you know how to work miracles. I thank you, saintly Colomba and I promise you that when I have a daughter, I will call name her after you, Colomba.”)

Mcgilchrist sums up the potential for damage in the pursuit of such certainty.

The less chance is permitted to intervene in the course of things, the more we are bounded by what our imagination can conceive. The pursuit of certainty results in impoverishment; it banishes hope. (51)

When Zà wonders whether, in some ways, single motherhood has been auspicious for the women of the family, it is in consideration of the opportunity for developing into a storyteller who crafts her words and messages with freedom of imaginative thought, an ability to conceive of and express her own unique vision of her experience in the world. The stories themselves indicate the possibility of redemption, the ability to transform a story of abandonment, loss and fate into a story of connection through use of the imagination.

When all of the stories take a pause for a moment, Zà tells Angelica not to worry, that she will look after Colomba: “Le farò da madre a da padre, poiché Valdo non si fa più vedere” (“I will be mother and father to her, since Valdo doesn’t come around anymore”) (302). It is here that the reader may have a gestalt understanding; not only has Zà’s conversation with Angelica been ongoing since the time of her death, but the entirety of Zà’s actions and words are dedicated to Angelica symbolically, a mission to never give up on Angelica and her legacy. Zà confesses to Angelica that both the narration and the search for Colomba are, in part, for her.

Ora è scomparsa pure lei (Colomba) e io sono qui come una mula testarda a cercarla per tutte le montagne dell’Abruzzo. Forse con lei, attraverso di lei, cerco tutte le persone amate che sono scomparse dalla mia vita senza lasciare una traccia, un indirizzo. Dove sarà andata tua figlia, Angelica? (307)

(Now even she (Colomba) has disappeared, and I am here like a stubborn mule looking for her over all of the mountains of Abruzzo. Maybe with her, through

her, I am searching for all of the beloved people who have disappeared from my life, without leaving a trace, an address. Where has your daughter gone, Angelica?)

Barbara Meazzi in her article “*Colomba e la scrittura in trompe-l’oeil*” takes Maraini’s allusions to Calderón’s *La vida es sueño* in *Colomba* to suggest that “nulla di quanto vedremo è vero e tutto è verosimile” (“nothing of what we see is true and everything is plausible”) (204). Meazzi argues that the various authors involved in the telling of *Colomba*, use “una commistione di sogno, realtà, verosimiglianza, favola” (“a mixture of dreams, reality, verisimilitude, fairy tale”) (212), which creates an effect analogous to the *trompe-l’oeil*, the illusion of three-dimensionality or life of the ostensible. It is Meazzi’s implied position that Zà has not only been conversing with Angelica for the length of the novel, but that the reader might recognize a *trompe l’oeil* by the author, that the entire story of *Colomba* is nothing other than a fairy tale, that is, it can be read as Zà’s imaginative fabrication from start to finish. The following «*racconta ma*’» interlude is a depiction of a mother who resembles Zà at her daughter’s bedside. She has been telling stories for years, once young, she is now wrinkled and hunched over. The mother is tired and says she must go sleep now, but the daughter pleads, «Mamma, che ti è successo? (...). Lo so che hai ancora delle storie da raccontare. Colomba? Dov’è finita Colomba?» (“Mom, what’s happened to you? (...). I know you still have stories to tell. Colomba? Where has Colomba ended up?”) (307). The mother tells her:

[S]ono secoli che stanno lì in quella stanza lì in quella stanza, una sdraiata sul letto è l’altra seduta a raccontare storie. Nel frattempo sono puntate le radici sotto le scarpe. La bambina gongola perché sa che quelle radici la terranno ancorata

alla stanza per altri secoli, chissà quanti, ascoltando storie sempre più corpose e articolate. (308)

(They have been there in the room for centuries, one of them lying on the bed and the other sitting telling stories. Meanwhile, roots have grown under her shoes.

The child is delighted because she knows that those roots will keep her anchored to the room for centuries to come, who knows how many, listening to stories that become richer and more structured.)

There is a beauty and richness in the above passage as it gently hints at the diverse themes and allegories in the novel, showing how they meld with one another. The mother, who becomes a tree is afforded the life-extending state for herself and her progeny by becoming part of the natural landscape where future generations are nourished. The image of the woman turned tree also restores a felicity to the usage in the mythology of women and others who are resistant to the patriarchal spirit of the law, who are punished by the Gods by being turned into trees. This image of mother becoming tree is consonant with Letizia Giugliarelli's characterization of the effect that Maraini's rendering of temporality has in other novels, drawing on Paul Ricoeur:

La scrittura sembra voler suggerire al suo pubblico che «durare» significa che qualche cosa persista mutando. L'identità che ne risulta non è più quindi una identità logica, ma precisamente quella di «una totalità temporale». Assistiamo infatti al ribaltamento della distanza stabile e rassicurante abitualmente garantita dai tempi narrativi. Si viene piuttosto a creare un contesto in cui momento dell'enunciazione del racconto e scena narrata arrivano a *confondersi*; in cui il

pubblico potrebbe essere coinvolto come attore nelle stesse vicende a cui assisteva in qualità di spettatore. (139)

(The writing seems to want to suggest to its audience that “to survive/last means that something continues to transform. The identity that results is no longer a logical identity, but precisely that of a temporal totality”. We witness in fact the overturning of the stable and reassuring distance that is habitually guaranteed by narrative temporality. What is created, rather, is a context in which the moment of enunciation of the story and narrated scene become *blended with one another*; in which the audience might be engaged as actors in the same affairs to which they attended as spectators.)

Remaining present throughout time, the mother and child become part of what Paul Ricoeur conceives of as a narrative of total life (*Oneself as Another*), and the reader senses that through her participation in the storytelling, and transformation in identity, her life is extended as well.

The Stag with the Golden Horns

What I will refer to as “The Stag with the Golden Horns” is a fairy tale embedded in the texts of both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. It is told in elaborate detail near the end of *Colomba* (327-338), the first of the two novels, by the storytelling mother. The tale reflects on the brutish mental state in which a hunter’s mind is ensnared; motivated by desire and unwilling to reach out to what is alive and new, he kills in order to possess. Maraini’s fairy tale broaches the themes of impersonal and mimetic desire, the other which becomes an object of desire whether woman or animal, and the obstinate blindness of the purely rational mind that denies experience by calling it illusion, and mistakes its own illusions for reality.

The tale, as told in *Colomba*, begins with a lone hunter who slogs through the forest in search of an elusive and mythicized stag described by a fellow hunter as the most beautiful animal he has ever seen, with a star on its chest and two tall golden horns. A contest with clear social rewards for the hunter who is able to possess the animal begins. The hunter in the tale comes upon the fabled stag. He stops to savor the majesty of this stag, part by part, movement by movement, using the feminine form *la bestia* to describe his prey.

Il cacciatore si fermò, interdetto. La bellissima bestia era a pochi metri da lui ma non sembrava essersi accorta della sua presenza. Procedeva, cieca e magnifica verso chissà quale pascolo sulle alture. L'uomo rimase rigido in una posizione di attesa. Aveva paura che anche da una sola mossa, il cervo percepisse la sua presenza scappasse veloce. Voleva godersi la vista di quella bestia meravigliosa prima di ucciderla. Voleva seguirla e compiacersi di quell'incedere, di quel portamento, di quelle corna, di quella testa dorata e solenne che alla fine sarebbe giaciuta immobile ai suoi piedi. (330)

(The hunter stopped, speechless. The beautiful beast was just a few meters from him but did not seem to be aware of his presence. It proceeded blind and magnificent towards who knows what field in the hills above. The man remained rigid in a position of anticipation. He was afraid that with one slight movement, the deer would perceive his presence and would make a quick escape. He wanted to relish the sight of that marvelous beast before killing it. He wanted to stalk her and gratify himself with that stride, that poise, those horns, and that solemn golden head that in the end would lay immobile at his feet.)

The hunter hesitates in moving in for the kill as he delights in the pursuit that will end with annihilation. His hesitation allows another purpose or use value for the animal to occur to him: What if the stag is unknowingly leading him back to his home where a mother deer and fawns can be found? The storyteller reveals his thoughts that maybe he could come away with the two of them and let the young ones grow so that more majestic creatures will be ready for the hunt within a year or two. She then comments on his avarice: “Questi erano i suoi pensieri silenziosi, da cacciatore innamorato della preda, nello stesso momento in cui è determinato a ucciderla. Mistero dell’animo umano” (“These were the silent thoughts, of a hunter in love with his prey, at the same moment in which he is determined to kill it.”) (331). His thoughts draw a contrast between the urgency of his desire to kill with the fleeting satisfaction that he knows will be derived from the kill.)

The tale is interrupted when the child asks about a disconcerting aspect of human behavior: “Possedere vuole dire distruggere?” (“Does to possess mean to destroy?”) (331). A lack of imagination, an inability to envision the subjecthood of the other, lets pass a compulsion to destroy, which the child intuits. Maraini illustrates in her tale how desire creates a purpose for all it sees, and adopts a perverted view of what living beings are in their essence. In so doing, the possibility of a harmonious and purposeless yet profound connection is undermined. This negation of the subjectivity of another through possessiveness which masquerades as affection disquiets the child who makes connections between this story and the story of the missing Colomba that unfolds in her bedtime stories.

The stag, known to the hunters by its bewitching physicality, shows signs that he is an enchanted creature by showing his ability to put himself in the hunter’s shoes. As the hunter tracks him late into the night, the stag seems to be more aware of what the hunter is

doing and thinking than the hunter is aware of what drives the deer.

Le ombre si erano fatte scure. La vista non riusciva più a distinguere bene. Il cacciatore, nell'ansia di perdere la sua bestia, le si era accostato spericolatamente. Solo una volta l'aveva visto voltare la testa sul lungo collo ma senza paura, quasi volesse assicurarsi che l'uomo lo stesse seguendo (331).

(The shadows had become dark. Sight was no longer able to distinguish things clearly. The hunter, in his anxiousness that he might lose sight of the beast, lunged ahead recklessly. Just once had he seen the head turn on the long neck, but without fear, almost as if (the deer) wanted to assure himself that the man was following him.)

One who calls themselves a hunter makes the supposition that he is skilled in thinking like the animal he hunts; to this he attributes his success in finding his prey and moving in for the kill. This idea that a hunter is intimate with the animal's thinking may lead him to believe he shares a closeness with the animal he hunts, even bordering on love.

Back in the tale, the hunter knows his presence has been revealed to the stag, but the animal pretends not to notice. The hunter's misgivings grow. He ponders, "Eppure dovrebbe sentire il mio odore, si diceva l'uomo perplesso" ("And yet, he should be able to detect my scent, he was saying to himself, perplexed") (331-2). As the stag walks through the night, the story describes his gait "andava avanti sicuro, senza forzare la velocità, quasi temesse che il suo inseguitore si stancasse. E in effetti il cacciatore ora aveva il fiatone, era esausto, affamato (...)" ("he moved ahead sure of himself, without forcing the pace, almost like he was fearing that his stalker would get tired. And in fact, the hunter was breathing hard, exhausted, hungry (...)"

(332). Still the hunter denies what he is witnessing, and it is for this reason, in part, that his trek has become so taxing.

The hunter follows the animal into a cave. Once inside, a spacious room opens up and the hunter takes notice of the rows of cupolas on the ceiling (333). This refuge is sanctuary-like, a place meant to help facilitate transformation where worldly concerns cede to the sublime. The hunter hears a voice call to him, “Vieni!”, (“Come!”) and the hunter asks uneasily, “Chi è che parla?” (“Who is talking?”) (333). He is urged on through dark corridors by the voice, and finally as he reaches a hollowed-out den in the rocks, he catches sight of the speaker. There he sees the stag who is about to eat a piece of fruit, but stops and says “Benvenuto nella mia casa! (...) Vuoi una mela?” (“Welcome to my house! (...) Do you want an apple?”) (334).

I take here a brief pause from the tale to discuss this element of recontextualization of the story of Adam and Eve. Maraini has mused in her writings about the implications of the story of Adam and Eve, most recently in *Corpo felice*. Her review of this biblical story in her writings is regularly the first step in a reimagining of how the view of women in Western cultures might be different if the story of Adam and Eve were not construed in the way that the early fathers of the church set forth in doctrines. Maraini asks, in *Corpo felice*, why the tale sees God put a tree in the middle of this garden of perfection and harmony only to then forbid them from eating the fruit.

Ma perché, mi chiedevo, Dio non spiega alle sue creature appena modellate in cosa consista il pericolo di quell'albero che tende verso di loro i suoi frutti voluttuosi? E perché, vedendo un serpente che si arrotola attorno al tronco e prende a parlare con i giovani e ignari esseri umani, non lo caccia via? Non sarà

che il Dio generoso li sta mettendo di fronte al primo dono sublime? Non li starà forse provocando con la proposta di libero arbitrio? (32)

(But why, I asked myself, did God not explain to his newly formed creatures what the danger of the tree's voluptuous fruit that reached down to them consisted of.

And why, seeing a snake that wrapped around the trunk who spoke to these young and ignorant human beings, did he not throw it out of the garden? Could it be that this generous God is offering them his first sublime gift? Could he be tempting them with the proposition of free will?)

Maraini suggests that the speaking snake works, in some sense, in the service of the divine. If we humans at some point in our past, or near our beginning as a species, became separate from the animals and the paradise of nature because of the knowledge we acquired, much of it allowing us to manipulate our experience and to choose more freely, we might all agree that we are, in this day and age, 'out of the garden'. Therefore, the stag cannot be seen as one who tempts the hunter into leaving a paradise where all living things reside in harmony. But, perhaps this speaking animal, again, in the service of something like the divine, tempts the hunter out of a different place, the static mythos of his partial and impoverished view, where objects have replaced living things and the natural world has become fetishized rather than perceived as part of us and we part of it.

The hunter becomes disoriented, and it at this point that the question of whether the story is merely a dream that the hunter is having arises. The hunter asks how on earth the stag speaks his language and is answered with, "Poiché' tu non parli la mia, ho dovuto apprendere la tua. Ti stupisci? ("Because you don't speak mine, I had to learn yours. Are you surprised?") (335). The

hunter begins to slap his face in an attempt to wake himself. Lacan points out the following regarding a subject's position in a dream as distinguished from the waking state.

[I]n the final resort, our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows. He may even on occasion detach himself, tell himself that it is a dream, but in no case will be able to apprehend himself in the dream in the way in which, in the Cartesian *cogito*, he apprehends himself in thought. He may say to himself *It's only a dream*. But he does not apprehend himself as someone who says to himself—
After all, I am the consciousness of this dream. (75-76)

Lacan makes this distinction in his approach to an analysis of the “Butterfly Dream” from the Taoist parables, a story which addresses doubt surrounding whether one is dreaming or is awake, and how, by inspecting the subject position, one might try to determine whether what one perceives is real or illusory. The brief dream and its central dilemma are as follows: the author of the parable, Chuang Tzu, dreams that he is a butterfly. When he wakes, he wonders whether it was he who was dreaming, or it is now the butterfly that dreams he is Chuang Tzu. Lacan's interpretation suggests that in asking himself whether he might actually be the butterfly, he proves that he is not the butterfly in the dream, but that he has indeed “apprehended one of the roots of his identity—that he was, and is, in his essence, that butterfly who paints himself with his own colors—and it is because of that, in the last resort, he is Chuang Tzu” (76). Lacan offers an internal dialogue as proof that it is indeed Chuang Tzu that has dreamed, and internal dialogue occurs, it is surmised, when one is awake, not when one dreams. An analysis of the following dialogue between the hunter and the stag in the tale amounts to a re-

presentation of the well-known “Butterfly Dream,” but with a twist that points to something that goes beyond Lacan’s philosophical employment of Chuang Tzu’s dream.

«Non stai dormendo, sei sveglio.» «E invece io credo proprio di stare dormendo.» «Se stai dormendo, stai sognando e io sono il tuo sogno.» «Forse è proprio vero, sto sognando. Tu sei il mio sogno.» «Ma anch’io sogno, bel cacciatore e mi piace pensare che tu uomo, sei il mio sogno più perverso.» «Io non posso essere il tuo sogno.» «Solo perché hai un fucile? «Mi doveva capitare pure un cervo filosofo! Io sono un cacciatore e sparo. Se mi fermassi a filosofare ogni volta che vado a caccia, non farei più un passo.» «Non si tratta di filosofare, ma di ragionare. Hai un cervello e ragioni.» «Tu non hai un cervello. Sono io che ragiono attraverso di te, questo lo so. Tu sei muto e non puoi pensare, perché il pensiero è degli uomini.» (335)

“You aren’t sleeping, you’re awake.” “And I believe, rather, that I am asleep.” “If you are sleeping, you are dreaming and I am your dream.” “Maybe it’s true, I am dreaming. You are my dream.” “But I also dream, kind hunter, and I like to think that you are my most perverse dream.” “I can’t be your dream.” “Just because you have a gun?” “I had to run into a philosopher deer! I am a hunter and I shoot. If I stopped to philosophize each time I went out to hunt, I would never be able to take a step.” “It’s not philosophizing but reasoning. You have a brain and you reason.” “You don’t have a brain. It is me who reasons through you, this I know. You are mute and you don’t think because thinking is what men do.”)

The conversation between the hunter and the stag first addresses whether it is a dream that occurs, and the consensus is yes. Both of them claim to be the dreamer, but the hunter denies that it might be the deer who dreams. And yet, the deer offers the possibility that the hunter is *his* dream, setting up a situation where the stag has greater subjecthood than the butterfly does in the parable. The deer represents himself, unlike the butterfly, as one who can bear witness to the dream. But if this is a dream, the hunter and deer are both dreamed by one dreamer. I believe that Maraini's re-presentation calls into question whether there ever is just one dreamer. If it is the hunter who dreams, he is both the deer and himself, he denies that the deer has the capacity to communicate, dream and reason that he himself does in the dream. The two subjects in the story, once it becomes clear that it is indeed the story of a dream that is being told, issue forth mental formations that come from a single mind. But it is here that the frame must be remembered. This is a story told to a young child, within a novel, written by an internal narrator, who draws from the reservoirs of her conscious and unconscious memories both as the internal author, the author of title, and the protagonist in the «*racconta ma*'» passages. It is this multi-layered consciousness that brings me to introduce a theory of the betweenness of the consciousnesses that are of most sublime consequence in the reading of the novel, including that of the reader, who has been primed for an awareness of certain themes that are returned to as the spiral staircase is traversed in the structure of the novel. The frame Maraini uses not only allows but necessitates additional dualities to assume a position in the forefront of awareness, even as the dualities were already present in the original parable, they were not given explicit attention, namely, the divide between human and other, and the divide between dreams and fairytales.

I argue that the conclusion of “The Stag with the Golden Horns” invites transformational thought. The story is not ultimately concluded, but the stag does introduce the hunter to his young children whose mother has been killed, and asks if the hunter is not terrified that something might be happening at the this very moment to his wife and children, an image, inverted, that echoes Ariosto’s description of the psychological state of Angelica, likened to a young animal, who has seen her mother hunted and killed, and therefore proposes a woman, as other, placed in a similar object position to the stag. The hunter is reminded of the golden rule by an animal whom he hunts, and so it is that somewhere within his own consciousness he confronts doubts about his waking reasoning and the conventions of his society. Having introduced this brutality toward animals within the forest, which might represent, at least on some level, the unconscious as opposed to the town, the plot of *Colomba* now shows how this brutality extends beyond the bounds of the forest and the hunt, and is seen in its use in connection with intimidation and coercive control, particularly of women and those who do not remit censure of male violence with the excuse that it is natural and therefore licit.

If dreams are agreed, by all of the theorists thus far named, to be the domain of the unconscious, the conscious mind might be considered the domain of the left hemisphere, in as much as it is “that which brings the world into focus, makes it explicit, allows it to be formulated in language, and is aware of its own awareness, it is reasonable to link the conscious mind to activity almost all of which lies ultimately in the left hemisphere” (Mcgil. 2, 188). What is conscious is in the sphere of our shared, often conventional, observations of reality. One of McGilchrist’s fundamentals regarding the divide between the conscious (left) and unconscious (right) is that they are both “us”, in

fact, if one is more ‘us’ than the other, it would be more correct to identify with the right hemisphere, as very little brain activity, including our own will, is conscious.⁶¹ The outlining of the multiple divisions in question in “The Stag with the Golden Horns” might then begin with the identity of the dreamer, although it is not an all or nothing proposition, that is, waking (conscious) vs dreaming (unconscious). The split in the identity of the dreamer must be acknowledged and only then can an interpretation of the divisions between the real and the illusory, between dreams and awakeness, between human and animal begin to be examined.

Ariosto

The novel *Colomba* only first makes mention of the *Orlando furioso* in a contrast Zà draws between the open spaces of the forests found in Ariosto’s epic where “cavalierei e guerrieri si inseguono, si trovano, si perdono” (“knights and warriors chase each other, find each other, and lose each other”) (85) to those described in the tale told by her friend where nothing more than the story of “una spietata vendetta paterna” (“a ruthless paternal vengeance”) (85) is represented. But considering that Ariosto’s text is cited many more times, after the story of Zà, her daughter Angelica and her granddaughter, Colomba, come into focus, one can look at the first 100-150 pages of Maraini’s novel and find elements that strongly suggest the themes and concerns of Ariosto’s epic poem. I will begin by outlining these elements, including *le donne, i cavalieri, l’arme, gli amori, le cortesie e l’audaci imprese*, that are consciously modulated by Maraini in what emerges

⁶¹ Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes points out in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, that we take decisions, solve problems, make judgments, discriminate, reason, and so, without any need for conscious involvement. Current estimates show that conscious brain activity is certainly less than 5%, and probably closer to 1% of all brain activity (McGilchrist, 187).

in the stories about the generations of Zà's family and in the reflections of the internal author. The proposition of the forest as a symbolic setting for losing touch but gaining insight, and the search for one who has disappeared, are steadily advanced in the initial approach to the events of the protagonist's life, which are arrived at only after a detour into the generations of the past, in order that the internal author might understand how things have arrived at this point.⁶² Zà gives her newly born daughter the name Angelica, and it is at the point when her birth is narrated in the novel that a true dawning of reflections of characters and action found in Ariosto's epic poem begins to take shape within the discourse of *Colomba*.

Before delving into the parallels of the background and setting, and the characters and events in *Colomba* and the *Orlando furioso*, it is worth asking what material Maraini finds worthy of further development in the poem, and what resonates with her about Ariosto's approach to the themes he addresses. *Colomba* and the *Orlando furioso* might be characterized as having a similar plot in the following way: the disappearance of a love object, that is, the person who embodies the desires or longings of another. The reaction to this disappearance is, in both stories, the initiation of a relentless quest. While Orlando cannot reconcile the fact that the other, the love object, has her own desires, and goes mad, Zà goes on a search to uncover the hidden longings of her beloved(s) and to understand the pain of the elision of their persons. Zà is Maraini's answer to Orlando, but she has female sensibilities, so her desire or longing is not possessive but rather a caring presence that attends to the needs and desires of the other. However, the two

⁶² In this too, it is reminiscent of The *Furioso*, which has a back story that informs the action: Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* and the chivalric romance generally.

knights errant, Zà and Orlando, have somethings in common. They are both obsessed with the search, and at times, they each misinterpret what they see due to the interference of their desire(s) or longing. Zà is aware of the complexity of reality and positions herself to see truths more fully by attending with care to the other and by appreciating the profound interrelation that everything and everyone shares. Orlando is driven mad because he does not.

Ariosto's intertextual engagement with the arguments of the *querelle des femmes*, which were proliferated in his time, has been widely recognized, as has Maraini's attentiveness to a woman's condition and circumstances generally. In *Colomba*, one finds that the author recalls the contentions and conventions regarding a woman's nature and a woman's place through the epochs in the stories of the generations of Zà's family. The critique of the positions which most resemble those made in *The Orlando furioso* is carried out indirectly in the telling of Angelica's story and the conundrum that arose from the 'free love' movement of the 1960s and 1970s, that is, when male (group) self-interest appropriated the language of freedom.

In Canto IV of *The Orlando Furioso*, Rinaldo, makes an impassioned plea for gender equality specifically regarding one's freedom to engage in sex with whom they please and under whatever condition they please. The appeal resonates as sincere to the reader who feels grateful for his pledge to save Ginevra who is to die because she has been accused of adulterous sexual relations. Rinaldo's argument includes justifiable outrage at the 'moral perversion' that would hand down a death sentence to a woman for such crimes, but especially one who has merely been accused. But Rinaldo's arguments are extreme for his day, and do not take account of the various circumstances of the lives

of real women. He brushes aside the likely impact of such an upheaval of systems of power and authority (Shemek 1,72-75). The consequences of enactment of a similar position, if it should be used to persuade a woman to avail herself of the suggested freedom, would not have been theoretical but real for any woman involved, and in all probability, harsh.

Maraini explores the consequences of a self-interested adoption of the call for sexual liberation made by the man who Angelica falls in love with as a teenager. Valdo who resembles Rinaldo in this, is a teacher who romances and impregnates Angelica, a student, without a bothered thought sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s. He marries her, yet considers himself free to pursue romance with other young girls, leaving his wife behind to care for their daughter Colomba. He is hurt and bitter when his new young lover leaves him to pursue someone else. He does not give the freedom that he takes and burdens his wife Angelica further upon his return with his self-interested remorse. There are other sexual liberties that he takes which he touts as freedoms for all, but they do not end up that way. Angelica, injured by this freedom, does not heal from the fragmentation of having her desires determined for her, and feels the spurn of the movement of sexual liberation which has turned on women.

Shemek explores the thematic case of the elision of women's desire in *Orlando furioso*, (Shemek, 2).

[F]or most of the *Furioso*, Angelica functions less as a real character than as an abstract value, an endpoint for the desirous gaze of the poem's male knights. This simulacrum of a character disappears from the poem when, breaking Orlando's

circular, self-seeking gaze, she acts as an autonomous, desiring subject in her own right. (117-8)

Not only is the fact of a woman having the possibility of autonomous desire inconceivable for those who see woman as absolute other, it becomes a “destructive force” (117). It is the cultural effacement of woman’s desire, its invisibility, that precipitates Angelica’s disappearance from the narrative of *Orlando Furioso* when she “reveals herself to be like the knights who pursue her, a desiring subject but *distinct* from them in what she desires” (118) according to the Shemek’s analysis. On the other hand, Zà’s daughter Angelica, as well as the missing Colomba, hardly see any presence at all in Maraini’s narrative. They are both sought by Zà, and it is not their embodied presence alone that needs recovery, but their stifled desires and longings, their abridged stories. They are a mother-daughter pair whose intergenerational trauma threatens to relegate their stories to oblivion. Angelica’s presence in the novel is disjointed. Her birth and childhood are briefly described, but she does not speak for herself, rather it is the descriptions of her related by others that is reported (155-7). A change of character that overtakes Angelica at age eleven is recalled. (158-61).

Angelica comes to life briefly in her teenage years. Conversations that she has with her mother materialize in the present tense. Zà increasingly feels that she has little power to protect Angelica from herself, as she is driven toward self-harm. Zà’s heartache during these difficult years bring her first close to a new lover, but this does not last. She then immerses herself in the translation of *La vida es sueño* and falls in love. Angelica speaks candidly and openly of her own desires just once in the novel, when she reveals to her mother that she is pregnant. Because it is in this same conversation that Angelica

reveals the abuse she withstood, Zà's world is turned upside down with the revelations. She attempts to talk to Angelica about it so that she might understand how she had remained blind to the abuse. Angelica replies, "La frittata è stata fatta, nun te racconte propria nend. No ne vogli' parla cchiù, chiaro?" ("The damage is done and I won't tell you anything about it. I don't want to talk about it anymore, is that clear?") (176). Angelica's hopes to leave a painful past behind is facilitated by the projection of a utopian future. But in denying the incorporation of the difficulties of her own past, she refuses the post as storyteller of her own life.

These moments of Angelica's life that are brought into the present by Zà's memories are interrupted by Zà's trip to the cemetery on November 2, present time in the novel, who on this "giornata dei morti" ("day of the dead") visits her mother's grave, but ends up talking to Cignalitt', whose grave lies next to Antonina's. Zà beseeches Cignalitt', asking in so many ways why he had done what he did to Angelica. As her lament ends, she acknowledges that the only thing she can do now is to turn her attention to Colomba, Angelica's daughter who is named after the saint who Cignalitt' adored, to whom he had made a misbegotten vow to so many years ago (180). Angelica returns briefly into the present tense and introduces Valdo, her husband-to-be. Colomba comes into her parents' world without much ado (182). Angelica's story as wife and mother is recounted by Zà to *la donna dai capelli corti* and it is clear that Valdo's desires shape the life of the family just as the youthful Angelica had surmised in reference to the rights that Cignalitt' had supposed he'd had to her: "i padre se credeno ca mogli, amante, figlie, sore, so' tutte cicorie degl'orte de casa" ("Fathers believe that wives, lovers, children, sisters, are all just fruits of the garden that come with the house") (180). We barely hear

Angelica's voice through these years. The reader perceives the neglect that she suffers and feels her bitter acceptance of the blows of life that fall down on her. Near the end, abandoned, isolated and heartbroken, the circumstances that lead to her death are precipitated by Valdo who loses his mind upon seeing his daughter's imitation of her heartbroken mother (275). Angelica's death is related and she will not return with a worldly presence to the novel again.

In Lacanian terms, Angelica functions as *object petit a* for Orlando, and for Zà she represents, as for each protagonist, a lost wholeness that they long to recover. In Lacan's theory, the emergence of the object of one's desire is accompanied by the recognition that it has been lost. In the *Furioso*, where Angelica represents the symbol of woman as absolute other, the chasing of her who will always remain out of reach is destined to repeat itself endlessly. The same is not true for Zà and her Angelica, for the Angelica of *Colomba* is named after Ariosto's Angelica the unattainable: she who flees in fright, who evades, beguiles, and disappears. Zà gave her newborn child the name Angelica, after the character in Ariosto's epic poem. The town priest, don Pasqualino had read passages aloud to her in her youth. She remembers the lines, *Timida pastorella mai si presta / non volse piede inanzi a serpe crudo / come Angelica tosto il freno torse / che del guerrier, ch'a piè veniva s'accorse* ("But not from cruel snake more swiftly flies / The timid shepherdess, with startled tread / Than poor Angelica the bridle turns / When she the approaching knight on foot discerns") (141) (translation William Stuart Rose). Zà recalls don Pasqualino's reading the canto known as *La fuga di Angelica*, but also his descriptions of the times in which Angelica chased after Rinaldo: "lo inseguiva per tutta Europa, attraversando a cavallo, da sola, boschi abitati da draghi volanti e maghe infide, battendosi contro cavalieri armati, rendendosi invisibile con un anello fatato, dormendo fra oscuri sassi e spaventose grotte"

(“she followed him around all of Europe, crossing forest inhabited by flying dragons and treacherous magicians alone on horseback, fighting armed knights, making herself invisible with an enchanted ring, sleeping among dark crags and frightful caves”) (141). The name Angelica, then, represents Zà’s awareness her own abandonment by the child’s father while pregnant, would tend to make her her to look to the child as the hope to restore something already lost. Further, she intuited that this child too might flee in fright from those who desired her, and that she would relentlessly pursue a delusory love object that promised satisfaction of a desire that felt like it was more authentically her own. The longing for wholeness, when misunderstood as attainable, turns into a madness of desire, a compulsive seeking. For Angelica, it is to choose Valdo, to refuse to consider any objection, in hopes of definitively distancing her loss of autonomy from the desire of another being thrust upon her as an adolescent. Colomba observed a disquieting beauty, born of longing, in her mother, but does not recognize the nature of her mother’s illness, “una scontentezza di sé irrimediabile e assoluta” (“a discontentment with herself, irremediable and absolute” (273). Colomba interprets the beauty as bound up with her mother’s desire for Valdo, a man who had always taken her love for weakness and elided her subjectivity by omitting the fact that she had a will and desires independent of his own. When the absentee father, Valdo, returned unexpectedly to find an adolescent Colomba alone, emulating her mother’s coping behaviors, he assaulted Colomba and tore apart the apartment where she and her mother lived, an event that immediately preceded Angelica’s fatal accident, but any connection between the events is left almost completely unmentioned (275). The paradigm of desire for something irretrievably lost is reproduced in Angelica’s daughter, Colomba, representative of the next generation, but it takes on a different contour. Her imitation of her mother raises the devil in her father who assaults her. The loss of her mother that same

night inculcates the sense that her imitative desires are true and authentically hers, as the desires of others have been thrust on her with brutality. To be like how she envisioned her mother: beautiful, tragic, in the servitude of the man she loves, that is what Colomba is found externalizing.

Shemek's approach to desire in *Orlando furioso* comes from a Lacanian perspective; for although Eugenio Donato's work on Ariosto's poem points to the mimetic paradigm of desire, Shemek finds that it is "gender-bound" as this desire, mediated by others, "only functions with male characters" in the text (2, 120).⁶³ Lacan's theory recognizes the absence of female desire in conventional culture, and recognizes that woman is defined, in the symbolic (male) order, as an ideal: "a universal symbol for lost plenitude" (2, 122). Although regaining this plenitude becomes seemingly impossible, the subject that desires this other gazes upon her in a way which annihilates her autonomy and "absorbs the other into itself," in order to attempt to experience the desired plenitude (122). What Zà could not know is how Angelica would be immersed in the desires of others who wished to possess her, as the function of (male/universal) sexual desire does, and would herself become *objet petit a* as she would never maintain an autonomy established beyond the bounds of the desire of another.

The reconfiguration of desire that Maraini undertakes in her adaptation of Ariostian material and style, '*dalla parte della donna*,' deserves careful interpretation. Zà is a self-aware female version of Orlando. She desires and does not deny it, but her desires, like other women's, go unarticulated because they do not belong to the universal system of symbols that express desire. What can be said for women's desire in *Colomba*

⁶³ Shemek also notes that "No theories of 'feminine' desire, as such, exist except as mechanical details in theories of male subjectivity" (...) (2, 120) and so there are limitations on theories of desire that one might apply.

is that while it is neglected and omitted by all, the actions of some women demonstrate what more resembles McGilchrist's "longing" as opposed to desire. which leads them "toward something beyond (...) conscious experience," an approach to "intangible values" rather than the attainment of what is tangible. While this could be said to be true, ultimately, for all who desire in Lacanian terms, male desire outstandingly excludes consciousness of and reflection on the paradigm, therefore the object of desire continues to be repetitiously incarnated in the otherness of woman.

Another important element in interpreting the reconfiguration of desire in *Colomba* is the representation of the intersubjectivity of the *objet petit a* as well as the intersubjectivity of she who experiences longing. The cyclical rhythm of the generations also brings the mutability from the position of longed for object to longing subject into our awareness. The first and most vital intersubjective longing is located in the mother-child relations, and it is in mother-daughter relations that the longing reiterates itself most overtly. *Colomba* is the story of the female line of a family in which multiple female subjects find, upon approach to adulthood, that their longings and desires are disregarded, their burgeoning practice of envisioning life as they would live it, disabled and maimed, through violence and *prepotenza*. *Colomba* is also the story of women who are either left behind by men who disappear under various unknown circumstances, leaving their young lovers to raise children alone, or those who do not escape the torment of a *prepotente*. The *prepotente* considers the women of the family to be his possessions, who are either available for satisfaction of his desires, or at least pose no barrier to him pursuing his desires. Either way, the desires of all others in the family are denied expression.

The intersubjectivity of desire as a theme, found in *Colomba*, must be recognized as the inverse of the impersonality of desire on display in *Orlando Furioso*. Shemek raises discussion of “hunting [as a] metaphor” seen in the language used to describe the pursuit of Angelica (2, 133). It is an old game that repeats a notion that a unique treasure is available for seizure, and whoever comes away with said treasure will receive decoration. Each expedition is rehearsed with fervor, notwithstanding the manifest interchangeableness of the object of the hunt, deemed each time inestimable in preciousness and rare qualities. The following is a passage from the *Orlando* that Shemek uses to illustrate Ariosto’s derogation of the posited majesty of the hunt, the chase:

Volgon pel bosco or quinci or quindi in fretta

quelli scherniti la stupida faccia;

come il cane talor, se gli è intercetta

o lepre o volpe a cui dava la caccia,

che d’improvviso in qualche stretta

o in folta macchia o in fosso si caccia.

Di lor si ride Angelica proterva,

che non è vista, e i lor progressi osserva. (XII, 34)

(They turn their shocked faces now here, now there in haste throughout the wood;

like a dog when a hare or wolf it chases suddenly ducks into some narrow den

or throws itself into a thicket or ravine. The pitiless Angelica laughs at them,

unseen, and observes their progress.)

What is observed from this distance, if one is awake and aware, is that the hunt after the desired object is impersonal. Whether in pursuit of an animal or a beautiful woman, the repetition and replication of desire that involves urgency and madness is rehearsed.

Hunting metaphors abound in both the *Orlando* and *Colomba*. Shemek writes:

Removed as they are from worldly concerns Lacan locates in the psychic order of the Symbolic, the knights exist only in the regressive realm of primary narcissism. Each pursues Angelica oblivious to the gaze that constitutes her as a subject; each orients instead to the nonseeing simulacrum that, in the space of the gaze, merely returns his own reflection. Ariosto has placed Angelica in the midst of a pattern of elisions, in contiguous relation to the “Woman” who is and is not she. He thus obtains a perfect illustration of the splitting away of woman’s subjective gaze (and therefore her personhood) in the social construction of the feminine, ideal opposite and complement to male desire. (1, 133)

Like a deer, Angelica finds that she is being denied “the ability both to be visible and to have her own desire recognized” (Shemek 1,133), so once again she flees. In *Colomba*, not only is desire mimetic, but the patterns of the flight from the desires of another are mimetic as well. Ariosto’s and Maraini’s Angelicas, and *Colomba* too, will seek after safety in the illusory, a man on whom they project qualities that are opposite of those of the men who instigate their flights. It is only when they understand the paradigm of desire and longing through heartfelt contact with the stories of others that the illusion of these projections can fall away.

In his book, *Cervantes and Ariosto: Renewing Fiction*, Thomas Hart looks at the multiple themes and multi plots of the *Orlando furioso* and the stylistic elements

employed by Ariosto that serve to unify his work in such an original way. Hart writes, “Ariosto’s favorite image for expressing the importance he attaches to variety is that of a weaver who needs many threads” (21). Ariosto’s authorial voice shares his metaphor with the reader in the *Orlando* on multiple occasions; he reminds the reader of the labor being done: “Di molte fila esser bisogno parne / a condur la gran tela ch’io lavoro” (“It seems to me that I need many different threads to complete my great tapestry”) (Hart, 21, 12.81. 1-2), after first introducing the metaphor of text as tapestry in Canto 2:

Ma perché varie file a varie tele

uopo mi sono, che tutto ordire intendo,

lascio Rinaldo e l’agitata prua,

e torno a dir di Bradamante sua. (Hart, 21. 2.30.5-8)

(But since I need different threads for different parts of my tapestry, and I intend to weave them all together, I now leave Rinaldo and his tossing boat and turn back to his sister Bradamante.)

In these authorial interventions, Ariosto not only tells us what his project is, he asserts supreme confidence that he, as creator, already knows what ingredients are needed and how to assemble them in a way through which a perfect unity of the work will result.

There is an implicit claim to virtuosic technique that recalls the competitive spirit of the Mannerists.⁶⁴

Colomba is narrated by *la donna dai capelli corti*, a writer internal to the novel who makes interventions and interrupts the narrative in ways that suspend the action in

⁶⁴ The Renaissance saw *maniera* as a positive attribute in art and in other areas of life. The word generally meant “style” at the time. Artists had a competitive spirit in garnering the attention and praise of patrons through their style, grace, the difficulty and complexity of their works and the appearance of effortless with which they carried them out, all of which pointed to their virtuosity as artists (Shearman, 1-22).

order to develop other narrative threads. The metaphor of weaving is used by this internal author, as it was by Ariosto, to describe what she must attempt to do in unifying the novel. The apprehension expressed by the storyteller in the first of many interludes which interrupt the main narrative of *Colomba*, the «*racconta, ma'*» subsections, is that control or management of a narrative is not firmly in the grip of the narrator, in fact it is in danger of being lost altogether. The storytelling mother who appears in these sections wonders about how to narrate the intrigues of the world to her young daughter in a way that will edify without causing injury to her innocent spirit. She expresses her unease at the task: “[S]embra che il filo si sia spezzato” (“[I]t seems that the thread has broken”) (24). This worry comes at the point at which it is not yet clear to *la donna dai capelli corti* how she will weave together the themes with one another. The tendency to *errare*, to wander, to get lost in the woods, is a metaphor for the straying from a planned course, to take leave of a purpose-driven mentality in order to discover something new. By relinquishing the command over the narrative that Ariosto’s allusions to his craftsmanship suggest, Maraini’s take is consonant with McGilchrist’s distinctions between right and left hemisphere versions of truth; for the right hemisphere, parts cannot be understood for what they truly are before they are illuminated by an understanding of the whole (1,142). In this view, like a living being, a text comes alive not because the parts are expertly organized with foresight, but because a unique and wholly new presence emerges (1,194-5). It cannot be said that Ariosto did not understand the importance of the whole, for in Cervantes’ famous novel, ‘Don Quixote’ specifically refers to Ariosto’s epic, and makes a poor interpretation, one that exemplifies what Ariosto cautions against—“furious” desire. Specifically, he fails to discern the whole

truth of the textual tapestry, falling into the deluded thought that Ariosto warns against in his analysis of Angelica and her conduct (Farmer 140). Don Quixote then goes on to imitate furious desire for his beloved, Dulcinea, a woman upon whom he has projected a number of attributes that he imagines spur the adventures he then undertakes, projections that give license to his madness. It might be said of Ariosto's epic that an appreciation of the whole persists for the reader who does not deconstruct, even while deconstruction is invited with the author's accentuation of the enterprise of its construction.

The following passage depicts the errancy that is inseparable from finding the way down an untrodden narrative path, a secret and obscured path toward truth for *la donna dai capelli corti*, Maraini's second-self.

La donna dai capelli corti sta tornando continuamente sui suoi passi, con la sensazione sgradevole di avere perso il bandolo che la porterebbe fuori del labirinto. Il camminare, che è il corrispettivo dello scrivere, ha preso un andamento ondoso; ci sono dei bivi davanti a cui rimane ferma, incerta, sembrano tutti portare verso la vitalità narrativa, ma poi scompaiono nella nulla. (21)

(The woman with the short hair keeps going back over her steps, with the sensation of having lost the key that will take her out of the labyrinth. Walking, in its equivalence to writing, has taken on an undulating rhythm; there are crossroads ahead for one who finds herself motionless, uncertain, they seem to all lead to the vitality of the narrative, but then they disappear into nothing.)

In the *Orlando*, Ariosto divulges that he himself has lost his mind in his love or desire for a woman, claiming that "he himself is no different from Orlando. If we have a poem by his hand, it is only because he writes during the *lucido intervallo*, the moments of lucidity

that interrupt his madness” (Shemek 1, 92). But the words of the poem impress something contrary, a sense that Ariosto has a handle on the desires that drive his narrative, that is, he understands them, to some degree, for what they are.

The unity of a work of art was of great concern in Ariosto’s time, and many contemporary commentators of *Orlando furioso* measured their assessment of the whole around thought found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, namely, that the plot of an epic, like tragedy, should be a single action (Hart, 20). But there are multiple themes and persons named in the opening stanzas of Ariosto’s epic poem, and Hart argues that the method by which Ariosto wove the narrative strands—entrelacement—indicates one of his objectives, one that I would argue Maraini emulates in *Colomba*: to mobilize a “series of analogous actions” in the text, in order to help in telling a complex story (24). The divergent plot lines include analogous actions that illuminate events in other narrative strands, at times to contrast the behavior and character of two different actors, and at other times to force recognition that all of us can be inconstant emotional beings (20, 25).

Rapid shifts from one set of characters and one segment of the plot to another have several effects that are important in creating the overall flavor of the work. Contrasts between actors exude irony and can be comical. Ariosto cuts away from scenes of suspense and tragic events to take this “necessary distance” required for playfulness and lightness of perspective (Hart, 26-28). And then there are the authorial interruptions and interventions in Ariosto’s work, which, as seen in the following lines, emphasize the creative act that brings the story to life, as well as the fact that the author wields control over the reader in his awareness of the reader’s desires and his ability to concede or deny their fulfillment at any moment.

Ma troppo e lungo ormai, Signor il canto,
 e forse ch'anco l'ascoltar si grava
 sì ch'io differirò
 in altro tempo che più grata sia. (Hart, 29. 10.115.5-8)

(But the canto is already too long, my lord, and perhaps you are tired of listening to it, so I will postpone my story until a more opportune moment.)

In Maraini's *Colomba*, all of the stylistic elements I have mentioned are reproduced but with some variation. *La donna dai capelli corti* is understood to weave the narrative strands, to intervene and to interrupt, but she is more subtle, less boastful. She does not present herself as a master of her craft, as someone who has full control of the narrative. Instead she shares moments of doubt and states that she too becomes lost in the woods as she writes.

The fact that *Orlando furioso* is the continuation of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, and that the Ariosto's intent was to surpass the first author in skill, has been widely recognized. It is by dint of this fact that the *Orlando furioso* became a symbol of intertextual imitation and emulation, becoming the hypotext for what is widely considered to be the first modern novel, and among the greatest, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (Hart). The symbolic significance of the *Furioso* is part of *il gioco letterario* (the literary game) (Eco, *Six Walks*) that Maraini plays in writing *Colomba*, 'surpassing' Ariosto by humbling his authorial voice with a certain touch of ingenuousness. By placing the author of the novel *Colomba* inside the narrative, the reader learns not only about how she comes to write and to understand things about those she writes about, but also that as an author and a thinker she loses her way, just like her characters. It is then the process

of finding and feeling one's way to understanding that she writes about, not the fact of having arrived. Maraini's approach emphasizes that one cannot know what one will find in coming to understand before they have made the journey. The two protagonists, Zà and *la donna dai capelli corti* are, within the frame of the story, engaged in an extended exchange; events, impressions, memories, and subconscious material are passed between them, and no journey or plot would exist without the betweenness born of their exchange.

The question of the impetus for the difficult work of weaving such narrative tapestries arises. Ariosto, Cervantes and Maraini must be seen, in their crafting of their respective narratives, as addressing crises of their times. What is apparent is that no matter the difference in the historical moment and location, the 'madness,' particularly of men, is emblematic, and depending on one's view, even generative of crises of violence. The crisis that gave Ariosto the impetus to write is, according to Hart, the role of "irrational passions" that dominated in his epoch which made the application of ethical standards difficult (50). Something very similar could be said about the crisis that Maraini confronts in *Colomba*, but with a personalist orientation.⁶⁵ It is the loss of an individual that renders the crisis intolerable, and only by recognizing the web of causation for the loss of individuals can the crisis be addressed. An awareness of violence done to individual women and girls that come of irrational passions is the substance of *Colomba*. But it is not only females in the novel who suffer the repercussions of the irrational desires of 'mad' men, *prepotenti*, who consider their will to dominate permissible and natural, as we see with Pietr' i pelus' and his son Pitrucc'.

⁶⁵ Personalism "underscores the centrality of the person as the primary locus of investigation for philosophical, theological, and humanistic studies. It is an approach or system of thought which regards or tends to regard the person as the ultimate explanatory, epistemological, ontological, and axiological principle of all reality (...)". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Returning to a woman's reaction to being cast as the object of desire of another, there is the trope in fairy tales of the young lady who falls into a deep sleep, residing in darkness, out of view of the world. In *Orlando furioso*, Angelica comes to rest in the *locus amoenus*, a grove in the deep wood. It is here, unseen, that she experiences the most autonomy (Shemek 2, 124, 132). Her relief in coming to this "sanctuary in the darkness" (124) comes after her flight through the woods in which she ran without direction from perceived but unnamed threats:

Fugge

tra selve spaventose e scure

per lochi inabitati, ermi e selvaggi.

Il mover de le frondi e di verzure,

che di cerri sentia, d'olmi e di faggi,

fatto le avea con subite paure

trovar di qua di là strani viaggi (...). (I, 33.1-6)

(She flees through the frightful and dark woods, through places deserted, solitary and wild. The movement of the elms, the beeches, and the rowan that she hears had made her pick strange trails here and there from sudden fears (...).)

Angelica's perspective from this *locus amoenus* "affords her the privilege of viewing herself through the projected gazes of those who, desiring her, efface her own desire and thus her own perspective and gaze." (Shemek 2, 124-5). This place of darkness is then both a comfort taken in its escapism, but also an annihilation of her inborn, if neglected, subjectivity. The trailer that Zà sees in the woods in a moment of *gestalt*, as the narrative action comes to a climax in Colomba, coincides with this version of the *locus amoenus*, a place that her granddaughter chose to go, at least initially. She was denied the

opportunity to explore her desiring self on her own terms, both by her mother's fragmentation and by her father's violent intolerance.

Zà first sees the trailer in the deep woods as she exits, shaken, from a cave where she has come face to face with four slaughtered stags, hidden there by poachers. Seeking to get her bearings, she looks around and “vede in lontananza fra gli alberi una forma che le sembra irreali in quel posto: una roulotte dai finestrini sprangati” (“she sees in the distance between the trees a form that seems unreal in that place: a trailer with bars on the windows”) (323). Zà returns to the site of the trailer and the discovery of the slaughtered deer the next day.

Oscuramente è attratta da quel sotterraneo, da quella roulotte. Come se ci fosse un nesso con la scomparsa di Colomba. Ma perché? Non lo sa, ha dei presentimenti che gravano lividi come piccole nuvole scure e minacciose dentro un cielo terso. (342)

(Something obscure attracts her to that underground cave, to the trailer. It is as if there were a connection with the disappearance of Colomba. But why? She does not know, she has some premonitions that weigh down on her like little clouds, dark and threatening, in an otherwise clear sky.)

Zà waits silently, hidden in the freezing cold, observing the trailer all day. As she lays in wait, her mind travels to Angelica's troubles, and “senza neanche rendersi conto riprende (...) il silenzioso dialogo con Cignalitt” (“without even being aware, she continues (...) the silent dialogue with Cignalitt”) (344). Zà attends to the obscurity of *gestalt* understanding and the obscure connections that nourish them. She recalls other poignant *gestalt* moments of recognition, like when she became aware that Cignalitt' was not her

biological father. In any case, her thoughts return to the man who is in many ways responsible for the wounds that never healed, and brought things to this point.

The sun begins to fall, and she knows she must prepare to return home. A faint impression of movement from the trailer brings Zà to question whether she can trust her eyes as she prepares to leave. But then a light goes on and a glow comes from inside the trailer. She returns the next day, and before she gets to her hideout from which she will observe the trailer, she is assailed by “un disordinato vocio maschile e da un gran tramestio di passi sulla neve ghiacciata.” (“a disordered clamor of male voices and by a great ruckus of steps through the icy snow”) (349), a scene which strongly recalls the commotion of knights who pass through the forest in the *Orlando* (Canto 33). The men go to work loading the deer that they have poached onto a snowmobile. One of the men knocks at the door of the trailer and Zà observes the figure of a woman who opens the door: “il corpo di una donna che potrebbe essere, le pare sia, ma non osa a pensarlo, proprio la sua Colomba” (“the body of a woman who could be, it seems to be, but she does not dare think it, her own Colomba”) (349). The other men leave and the lights go out in the trailer. Zà must wait and observe so that she can understand; though her impulse to knock at the trailer is strong, she must hold back. As she waits, she battles with “il petulante alle sue spalle” (“the know-it-all on her shoulder”) (350), her *pennuto*, who dispenses a mishmash of self-interested verdicts, reasons to abort the mission of truth-seeking and seek comfort instead.

When the men on the snowmobile return, Zà observes one man entering after another and they make lewd gestures that suggest sexual exploitation: “è chiaro che lì dentro tengono una donna con sui fanno l’amore. Prega in cuor suo che non sia

Colomba” (“it is clear that there inside they are keeping a woman for sex. She prays in her heart that it is not Colomba”) (251). But what she fears most is proven when she recognizes Sal taking payment from the others who have used the body of the woman inside the trailer.

Che fare? andare? tornare a casa e denunciare il fatto? aspettare che altri tirino fuori da lì la giovane donna che forse è Colomba? ma come fidarsi? e poi, perché aspettare? L'occasione è questa. Coraggio Zaira, tocca a te! (352)

(What to do? leave? go back home and report the incident? wait for others to pull the young woman, who is perhaps Colomba, out of there? but how can she trust them to? and then, why wait? This is the opportunity. Take courage Zaira, you are the one who must do it!)

Man's possessive desire provides him with psychic identity, but here Zà is unsure if she is hallucinating.

The Myth of Hera and Zeus

The Golden Apples of Hera and Zeus is narrated in *Colomba* by the storytelling mother of the «racconta, ma'» sections. The mother's thoughts swirl as she prepares to tell the child a story about the allure of the forest. She begins “Nei boschi non si è mai soli” (“In the forests one is never alone”) (76) and then pauses as she considers how many legends and fairy tales take place in the forests where things are not what they appear to be. The mother is visited by these thoughts:

Gli alberi poi non sono mai veramente quello che pensiamo che siano, con un nome, e una referenza botanica. Gli alberi sono spesso anche altro, come dicono

le leggende. Possono avere avuto una storia umana ed essere nati da una maledizione o da un desiderio di salvamento. (76)

(Trees are not always just what we think they are, with a name, and a botanical reference. Trees are often also something else, like the legends tell. They may have had a human history and have been born from a curse or from the desire for deliverance.)

The intrigue of the forest and the possibility of metamorphosis occur to both mother and child as the theme of the story for that night. In the mother's telling of this myth, an enchanted tree that produces golden apples was given to the Hera and Zeus as a wedding gift by Gaea, mother of all life and goddess of the Earth. The newlyweds coveted the tree but so did many others. To prevent theft of the apples, the three Hesperides and a dragon with seven heads were installed in the garden as guards. The dragon walked around the tree all day long scaring off all who came near, and while the dragon slept at night the nymphs protected the tree with the fluttering of their wings which made the air frigid and discouraged visitors. Eventually Heracles, desirous of the golden apples, devised a plan to get past the guardians of the tree. He lulled the Hesperides to sleep with his storytelling and then, in the morning, dressed himself in their clothes. He then attempted to trick the dragon into playing chase in order to displace him from his post. Unable to distract the dragon, Heracles killed him, cutting off each one of his heads, and then made off with the golden apples. When the Hesperides awoke and saw what had happened, they knew they would be punished. In fact, Zeus turned them into trees for their improvidence, but the dragon, having fought courageously, was honored for his death in

combat. Zeus installed him in the heavens, and in his metamorphosis, he became a beautiful constellation (77).

The mother's rendering of the myth brings attention to the inequity of the metamorphoses in the myth. Zeus wishes to punish the nymphs while he wishes to honor the dragon, even though neither one of them was successful in protecting the golden apples. But, at the same time, it is recognized that a tree, the very thing that the Hesperides have been turned into as punishment, is the precious treasure that needed protecting, and for which the dragon made his sacrifice. Zeus has the power to take the actions he does, to dole out punishment or reward, but he has not been able to control the course of events on Earth, he cannot stop the tree from producing fruits. The Hesperides, meanwhile, remain in the forest and continue to take part, mysteriously, in human affairs. The mother says that Zeus transformed them into "un olmo, un pioppo e un salice" ("an elm, a poplar, and a willow") (77). She explains, "Si dice che sotto quegli alberi gli argonauti si riposassero dopo le loro grandi imprese, poiché da quelle fronde spira un venticello fresco e carezzevole" ("They say that under these trees the Argonauts rested after their great feats, because a fresh and gentle breeze blows from their branches.") (77). The allure of stories and storytelling is appreciated as timeless and endless, and the punishment for being captivated by stories that befell the Hesperides is an extension of life in their presence and participation in the desire for and pleasure found in stories.

Pelasgian Origin Myth

The inclusion of the origin myth of *i pelasgi* in *Colomba* provides a redress to the blame attributed to the female in the mother's account of "The Golden Apples of Zeus and Hera," a myth that in its telling cannot escape comparison with the anti-woman interpretations of the story

of Adam and Eve that have pervaded Western culture. Zà's friend, the storyteller Cesidio, affirms that he considers himself, as *un abruzzese*, a descendant of the *pelasgi*, a people with great imaginative faculties who lived in Greece before the Athenians and the Spartans (293). His retelling of the myth is rather close to many elements of Robert Graves' reinterpretation in *The Greek Myths*. Cesidio relates that for the *pelasgi*, in the beginning, there was a big egg. Eurynome, goddess of the ocean who resembled a mermaid, nursed the egg in order to give birth to the world. She turned her husband, Ophion, away so that she could put the effort required into the care of this egg from which the world, the rivers and all living things were born. Ophion went around claiming that he had created all of these things, and a dispute between the two ensued. In the end, no good came of it, and the god of time, Cronos, and the goddess of the Earth, Rea, took possession of all things and threw both Eurynome and Ophion into Tartarus, the Greek underworld (293). In Robert Graves' version, Ophion, a serpent who himself was created by Eurynome, fertilizes the egg. After the egg is hatched Ophion proclaims that he is the creator of all and denies that he has had any help. Eurynome punishes him by kicking out his front teeth and he is sent to the underworld. Pelasgus, the mythical ancient ancestor of the Greeks, who taught humans all arts and crafts, then sprang from the teeth that Ophion lost in his defeat to Eurynome. Pelasgus is associated, in ancient myths, with the arts of agriculture, the making of clothes and the construction of shelter, seafaring, and warring.

In Cesidio's reimagining, Pelasgus and the *pelasgi* also are associated with storytelling and the creation of new myths, and for this reason he highlights their imaginative capacities, content to include himself among those who carry on their legacy. Cesidio also modernizes the *pelasgian* origin myth. Graves' version operates with the assumption that fatherhood was not honored and conception was attributed to incidental occurrences in the pre-Hellenic world

(Introduction). Cesidio formulates a punishment for discord between the primogenitors; they both land in the nether regions, dispossessed of their creation.

While the origin myth of the *pelasgi* is pre-Hellenic, “The Golden Apples of Hera and Zeus” is developed in the heyday of Greek civilization, and can be seen to replicate the treachery against and depreciated regard for the figure of the female and her presumed essence, widely found in cultural and intellectual production during the Golden Age of Greek Civilization. It is evident that Graves’ argument, which posits matrilineal succession as well as the dominance of the feminine essence in the religions of archaic civilizations, has many parallels to Maraini’s occupation with the diminishing state of the female deity brought about the degradation of the sacral feminine essence with the changes in political and religious culture, and direction in philosophical bearings, that asserted themselves decisively 4th and 5th centuries BCE. In reference to the changing tone of myth during the Golden Age, Graves writes “Tradition has (...) preserved the memory of a strenuous conflict which ended with the victory of the new gods,” he then asks, “What was it that they overcame on that occasion?” (“Religion and Myth in High Antiquity”, 2). The answer that Graves gives is this: “the new motif that the child is born of the father himself, and in very peculiar fashion, from the head” arises, and with the decisiveness and pervasiveness of the new motif comes the end of the age of the fantastic narrative myth. (“Religion and Myth in High Antiquity”, 4). Graves makes his view clear, “Patrilineal descent, succession and inheritance discouraged further myth-making; historical legend then begins and fades into the light of common history” (Introduction, 6).

Graves also points out that in the development of myth, Hera who was once a goddess revered for her great powers, after being accused of conspiring against Zeus with others for his *prepotenza*, became subservient to him, and their co-sovereign rule under the Olympian system

was dismantled.⁶⁶ The subordination of the goddess Hera came in lockstep with the advent of the domination of the male essence in religion. Graves notes that in the primal world of the gods, “children are wholly on the side of the mother, and the father seems to be a stranger with whom they have nothing to do. Things are very different in the realm of Zeus where the outstanding deities describe themselves emphatically as children of their father.” (“Religion and Myth in High Antiquity”, 2). Maraini has contemplated the weight and consequence of the *Oresteia*, as have many feminist theorists⁶⁷, as the “mythical rendering of a patriarchal takeover” (Case, 322), and an outstanding cultural symbol of the historical usurpation of maternal rights. Maraini makes clear that Aeschylus, the first of the tragedians to write an *Oresteia*, is not the creator of the patriarchal takeover: “This was what had been happening in Greek society for centuries. It was not a new thing. He [Aeschylus] simply registered it, giving wonderful words to it. Mythological history tells us about this kind of struggle between man and woman which is a struggle for power (...)” (Sumeli Weinberg, 69). Maraini’s *I sogni di Clitennestra* is a revision of the *Oresteia*⁶⁸ which, staged in modern times, attests to the fact that mythology which supports patriarchy continues on in our world, and that the annihilation of female relationships, particularly the mother-daughter bond, is a strategic goal of the patriarchal tradition (Cavallaro 2, 345).

In the essay “Clitennestra o la perversione”, Maraini looks at the so called ‘modern’ sexuality of women in studies (Masters & Johnson, Giorgio Abraham and the Hite report) and aims to challenge or at least rethink the conclusions. The first presupposition that Maraini takes

⁶⁶ Not only did Zeus use trickery to gain Hera’s hand in marriage, he punished her attempt to curb his ironhanded behavior by chaining her from the sky so that her cries might serve as a warning to all her fellow Olympians never to resist his power and authority.

⁶⁷ These theorists and writers include Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray among many others.

⁶⁸ For the purpose of this discussion, reference to the events in the *Oresteia*, will include what takes place in any of the three tragedies by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles on the events surrounding Orestes and his parents’ murders. I will cite the author of the tragedy when making a specific point about one over another.

on is the idea that sexuality only became a thing for women once it was separated from reproduction, which according to Abraham, began to happen during the Renaissance. Maraini points to Clytemnestra as an example of a strongly sexed character, condemned as it were, which would attest that the Greeks were well acquainted with sexual pleasure as an end in itself.

Maraini says this of Clytemnestra's assassination of her husband, Agamemnon:

[È] un atto di rivolta, in nome del libero governo di una città e del piacere sessuale che Clitennestra vuole prendersi, fuori dalle regole e dalle limitazioni del matrimonio, proprio come farebbe un uomo. E di questo viene punita, dai figli e dagli dèi, più che del suo delitto. (“Clitennestra o la perversione”, 8)

[I]t is an act of revolt, in the name of free governance of a city and of sexual pleasure that Clytemnestra would like take for herself, outside of the rules and the limitations of matrimony, just like a man would do. And it is for this that she is punished, by her children and by the gods, more so than for her crime.)

Maraini finds that the tragedy makes it plain: “il piacere sessuale è legato alla libertà e la libertà al potere” (“sexual pleasure is tied to freedom and freedom to power”) (8).

Maraini returns to Clytemnestra to look at the enormity of the murder of Iphigenia, her beloved daughter, which was done willingly by Agamemnon to serve the state, and himself as its leader. He conceived their daughter's life as belonging to him, mere property, and destroyed her flesh which she shared with her mother, as well as their bond. And this was supposedly necessary for the prosperity of the city. Maraini sees the filicide of Iphigenia, as an annihilation of the bond of motherly love, Agamemnon's act it is, in part, an assassination of his wife as well. Maraini sees something similar in modern times: the inhibition of the desire for maternity and the emancipation from it, delivered

by birth control. Maraini cautions that it may constitute a moment in which the fight for female rights potentially turns on itself. She warns women, “Il vostro destino di madri è più profondo e radicato di quanto pensiate” (“Your destiny to be mothers is more deeply rooted than you think” (10). Maraini reminds the reader of the essay that the women’s movement has recognized that the patriarchy first interferes in a girl’s life by upsetting the “primo rapporto d’amore carnale” (“the first relationship of carnal love”) (10), which is between mother and child, especially a daughter, with the exigency of educating the child in a yearning and passion for the masculine, first directed toward the father. Maraini expresses the danger that a misguided presumption of sameness of desire and longing between the sexes which underpins the sexual revolution passes over the enormity of the primordial carnal relationship, that of mother and child.

Se posso azzardare una riflessione niente affatto scientifica 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.

(“Clitennestra o la perversione”, 10)

(If I may venture to make a reflection that is not at all scientific I would say that the sexual revolution is not a revolution but a slippage, a cracking open, an earthquake that leads more toward chaos than toward definable progress.)

In *Colomba*, Angelica, a child of the sexual revolution, has her maternal longing made invisible to her, and substituted for with inauthentic desires imposed upon her under the guise of freedom. While her maternal longing is shown no room for expression, the responsibilities that come with being a parent are left for her to contend with.

Pietr' i pelus': Family Archetypes

I now turn to Pietr' i pelus', Zà's grandfather, and although his story is the second chronologically of many life histories that she tells about the generations of her ancestors, his is the first that sees no impatient interruptions from the internal author. The narration of Pietr' i pelus' life, which we know to have ended in the war, supplies an initiatory exploration of the division of thought and will of an individual. Pietr' is the first and only of Zà's family members from past generations who is psychologically transparent in the story. Pietr' was an only son called to arms unexpectedly. He believed, previous to his call to arms, that it was expedient to avoid "sottigliezze" ("subtleties"); his instincts told him that "le complicazioni portano dolore e il dolore porta incertezza, dubbi" ("complications bring pain and pain brings uncertainty and doubt") (44). The future captain's psychological response to his call to arms, and the breakdown of the left hemisphere's maneuvering to keep control of him constitute the intrigue of his story. His response, which breaks the spell of the command of the left hemisphere view of the world, leads to a regeneration of life and the continuation of the fabled family line that is the subject of the novel.

Pietr' was newly married to Amanita, a gainful match. The marriage was based on a friendship forged upon a common exasperation with solitude. Pietr' visited *un bordello* (a brothel) regularly—a legitimate practice according to the sexual mores of the time in Torino where he lived. But Pietr' felt the need to justify his actions to himself by construing his visits to a prostitute as a favor to the chaste Amanita who would remain undisturbed by his physical urges. Amanita in fact guessed at his visits to the brothel and accepted it without trepidation. Thoughts on the institution of prostitution from the early 1900s are elaborated in the text: "una consuetudine talmente radicata che tutti l'accetavano come il modo più razionale per regolare

l'eccessiva tempestosità della sessualità maschile” (“A custom so well established, that everyone accepted it as the most rational way to regulate the excessive boisterousness of masculine sexuality”) (39). Pietr' ascribes to this rationale, for the sake of ease, but at some point, he begins to intuit the incompatibilities of the convention with the truth of his experience. Pietr' has come to Torino from his native Abruzzo. His friend, Penzaperté, educates him on the conventions of this modern society.

Il piacere lecito, anzi doveroso sta da una parte, Pietr', il piacere segreto, avventuroso, dall'altra. (...) i due piaceri non si incontrano mai. D'altronde il bordello che ci stanno a fare? Ti proteggono dalla malattie, ti impediscono di violentare le ragazze per bene. Non si può farne a meno, sono una istituzione, ci sono sempre stati e sempre ci saranno. Lì dentro non puoi amare, devi solo godere. L'amore lo lasci attaccato al gancio dell'ingresso, col cappotto e il cappello. (41)

(Sanctioned pleasure, the kind that is based on duty, is found in one place, Pietr', secret and adventurous pleasure is completely separate, (...) the two pleasures never cross each other's paths. After all, what are brothels for? They protect you from disease, they prevent you from raping respectable girls. We can't do without them, they are an institution, they have always existed and always will. Inside, you can't feel love, you can only enjoy yourself. Leave your love hanging at the hook at the entrance, with your coat and your hat.)

Despite the social permissiveness of visits to the brothel, Pietr' does not abide by these rules laid out by his friend. Unlike other visitors to the brothel, Pietr' does not chase after new exploits but chooses to go with the same girl, Pina, a Sicilian, who is “piccola, bruna e poco formosa” (“little,

dark haired and without curves”) (39) and holds dear to her company, although he denies it to himself (40). When he is called to arms, his habitual orderliness in manner and thought are shaken and begin to betray what he has been hiding from himself with his denial of understanding based on what he experiences, what is present, his fear of disorder.

Appena ricevuta la chiamata, il tenente (...), non ancora capitano, aveva preso a radersi con maggiore attenzione e cura. Gli sembrava che i peli del corpo esprimessero disordinatamente quella paura che lui voleva assolutamente dominare e controllare. (43)

(As soon as he received the call, the lieutenant (...), not yet captain, began shaving with greater attention and care. It seemed to him that the hair on his body expressed with its unruliness the fear that he absolutely desired to dominate and control.)

Pietr’ attempts to negate these fears with a strictly monitored outward exhibition of order and certainty in order to combat the growing strength of this other voice that has become more audible, disturbing the calm of a desired certainty. Only with the inconsequential Pina does Pietr’ have a refuge where he steps away from conventional modes of thought. He lets his fears be known to her and expounds on topics that transcend carnal love. Pietr’, however, had avoided giving Pina an opportunity for self-expression during his many visits before he is called to arms, for if he saw conclusively that she had her own thoughts and desires, cracks in the commonly held justifications for the institution of prostitution would overwhelm the carefully constructed divide he maintained in his mind. It is through denial that a woman who prostitutes is a

reasoning subject that a cruel transgression on the part of the buyer is disavowed.⁶⁹ Pina does in fact offer up some thoughts of her own when she learns that Pietr' has been called to arms. She tells him: "Quando ti piacerà uccidere, non avrai più voglia di fare l'amore" ("When you enjoy killing, you will no longer desire to make love") (44), which betrays her understanding that a thirst for domination is a particular kind of reaction born of the instinct to find security in the face of uncertainty. The uncertainty, among other things, can derive from an encounter with the other, sudden change, and the prospect of death. Pina understands well from her experience in the brothel that it is not just sexual pleasure, but the seeking after a sense of command that is the primary impulse for the men's visits.

The night just before his departure for the war, Pietr' experienced firsthand the existence of a higher desire that he had hidden from himself with his discipline and striving. He intuited the possibility of a new being in his connection with Pina that night: "l'aveva baciata sul ventre, ma con tenera delicatezza, come se ascoltasse il battito del cuore di un bambino" ("he had kissed her on her belly, but with delicate tenderness, as if he heard the beating of a baby's heart") (43-44). But because of the complications he knows will arise in his thought, as he prepares to leave her and report for duty, he rejects the sincerity of his actions and by implication reduces their relationship to the seeking of carnal pleasure, departing with the stale words "Anche se ucciderò, non perderò il gusto dei baci" ("Even if I kill, I will not lose my taste for kisses") (45). But there can only be one master; one who kills does not kiss with love, and Pina has felt how Pietr' has treated her differently, she has intuited his love. Pietr' is the alpine from the song and he will go on to perish in battle. The memory of the alpine song can thus be understood to contribute to an

⁶⁹ "Una prostituta che ragiona" is a phrase that recalls a discussion on the conventions of the limited humanity that must be afforded to a prostitute in order for social conventions that support the 'necessity of the institution' to remain intact, as seen in Maraini's play *Dialogo di una prostituta col il suo cliente*.

origination story of how Zà's father came to be born, and how the soil that came to nourish her growth was compiled.

Pietr's experience in the war marks a complete departure from his former life, and those intuitions and fears that he had meticulously kept at bay by acceding, in bad faith, to conventions of his time can no longer be suppressed. He recognizes for the first time that his marriage is "basato sul nulla" ("based on nothing") and that the rehearsed send off at the train station that he was given by his elegant wife was "semplicemente ridicolo" ("simply ridiculous") (45). He is initiated into war, and it is recalled that, in the trenches, Pietr', "aveva affrontato la sorte con un coraggio che aveva stupito prima lui che gli altri" ("he had faced his lot with a courage that had stunned him even more than the others") (46). Pietr' rapidly comes to see and understand in a much different way during this time. His felling sour at the thought of the life left behind in Torino when he receives Amanita's letters that detail minutia, that "descrivere con plasticità degno di uno scrittore naturalista, i dettagli di ogni scena" ("describe the details of every scene with plasticity worthy of a naturalist writer") (46). He attempts to relish a sense of soaring pleasure in his command over others, another convention, but does not. Pietr' stares at Pina's picture and wonders why she had attracted him.

Pietr' is promoted to captain after he fulfills the first commands given to his troops. But the decoration and congratulation based on the successes he helped to bring about are dashed immediately. He is given the order to retreat, and the mission accomplished that had cost the lives of four men the day before is exposed as a pointless waste of the lives that apparently mean little to central command. The alpine troops are vanquished as they follow orders and abandon the hill, and Pietr' is among those killed (51). The last verse of the song, familiar to both Zà and the *la donna dai capelli*, is heard by one of his troops and they find their way back to Italy, to

Pietr's family. The legacy of Pietr', his story, and his song have a strong resonance in the families of both protagonists. Pietr' attends thoroughly to the qualitative difference between what is present and therefore genuine and living, and what is re-presented, inauthentic and lifeless, at this time of upheaval and crisis which are also his final days. Although his rapid education ended in his own death, the transformational emanations of his actions brought new life into the world in a son. His is a legacy of discernment of artifice and deception, less messy stand-ins for reality and truth, and this rejection of 'the easy way' gets passed down through the generations.

The Forest

As alpine adventure has featured prominently in the shared memories of the protagonists, it is interesting to note that the peaks and soaring heights in the stories are occupied by men, and when a woman is present in these terrains, it is in the company of, if not at the behest of, a man. As I have mentioned, the attribution of gendered propensities to one hemisphere or the other as seen in pop culture is embarrassingly flawed according to McGilchrist, and he avoids differentiating between men and women in every way in exploring the divided mind in *The Master and His Emissary*. However, consideration of how qualities and dispositions of either the left or right hemisphere come to be aligned with the culturally acknowledged propensities of one or the other gender is a topic that cannot be ignored in Maraini's writing in both of the novels in discussion. Recollecting a conversation with her mother as a child, Maraini's second-self, *la donna dai capelli corti*, declares that she prefers the sea to the mountains, and expresses the wish that her mother take her there. This «racconta ma'» passage occurs after the internal author looks at a photo of her young parents who prepare to take a new path through a certain mountain

pass: “più ardua e pericolosa delle altre. Una sfida all’altezza, al pericolo, al futuro” (“more arduous and dangerous than the others. A contest against the heights, against danger, and the future”) (51). Rather than the heights, the mother tells the child that the aspect of the mountains that fascinates her is the forest. The forest, its fruits, and the things that take place in the forest, from this moment forward, become central to the plot. The forest in its singularity comes to symbolize a trove of incongruent dualities. It represents the unknown, a void, but at the same time, the place from which new understandings emanate. The forest is at once alluring, threatening, life-giving and deadly. It is silent but speaks and listens. It is where fairy tales and stories of metamorphosis take place, it is the outstanding setting for the imagination to wander. The paradox is that the forest has a long history of being considered part of the cultural patrimony of men alone. This sense of patrimony is what forbids women and children to wander there; woe to them if they should choose not to heed the warning.

La donna dai capelli corti mulls over the various hypotheses of where the modern-day word *bosco* (woods) comes from and becomes curious about the word the Romans used for the woods, *lucus*; “Da qui viene la famosa *Lucus a non lucendo*; ha nome luce pur non facendo luce” (“From this comes the famous *Lucus a non lucendo*; it has the name light, despite being light”) (52). This phrase has taken on a distinct meaning in popular usage which could perhaps be a reversal of the original logic of the Latin word, a logic “magari tortuosa ma conseguente (...) Il bosco dà legno da ardere, l’accensione della legna produce calore e luce” (“even if tortuous, consequential (...) The forest give wood for burning, and the burning of this wood produces heat and light”) (52). The metaphor proposes the dark dense wood of the forest as the raw material which undergoes an alchemical process when heat or energy is applied. What was dark, dense, and impenetrable becomes illuminate, which of course metaphorically implies the light of

understanding. The forest, as we will see, is a place where a material metaphor for McGilchrist's description of sublimation and sublation occurs.

What is born in the forest or derives from it, the fruits, are themselves primary themes in the novel which are ripe with the kind of dualities that highlight the preferences and dispositions with which the brain's divided hemispheres are appointed. The main avenues for arriving at considerations of the various fruits of the forest will be Zà's adventures in search of Colomba in the woods, and the forest of mind objects such as dreams, tales, histories which are recalled and imagined by the internal author. The mind's adventures into the forest of mysteries, the unknown, which constitute the *sjuzet* of the novel are inaugurated with the following passage which recalls an emblematic entrance into uncharted territory in literature.

Ma nei boschi di oggi, che si cerca di rendere il più possibile domestici, affidabili e quindi non più insidiosi, ci si può ancora perdere, smarrire? *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, mi ritrovai per una selva oscura.* (52)

(But in the forest in today's world, which are rendered as a domestic as possible, safe, and so, no longer insidious, can one still get lost, lose one's way? *In the middle of life, I found myself in the middle of a dark forest.*)

This voyage requires each one to transcend the divisions in their nature, whether regarded as originating in the mind or in the soul, a movement toward unity and resolution.

Seeing anew becomes a potentiality when one faces extraordinary circumstances, an experience that jars us out of our habitual thinking. For example, Dante's miraculous flight to other realms and his propensity to only really see once he had entered in the darkness and

the perdition of Hell, or, in Zà's case, the impasse posed by Colomba's disappearance, oblivion. Colomba is Zà's last surviving family member in the maternal lineage depicted and one more in a long line of disappearances. The only remediation for what might be taken as fate is for Zà to reframe her experiences and reassess beliefs she held in the past. She must access another way of knowing which requires a suspension of preconceptions and allows what is actually present to come into her awareness, just as *il pellegrino* of *La Commedia* must experience other realms, a taste of what lies beyond his awareness in order to change his view, spirit, and disposition in this life.

The forest subsumes a reservoir of life with rich symbolic potential. Maraini engages the world of the forest and the bounty of life hidden there as a metaphor for the unconscious. Perhaps the most protractible and adaptable element of the forest, both as a living system and as a symbol in the novel are *funghi* (mushrooms). The following is a list of the overlapping themes that are touched on with metaphoric application of *funghi*: 1. The visible and the 'unseen'. 2. Consciousness and unconsciousness. 3. Reality and Illusion. 4. Sublimation and sublation. 5. Disappearance/death and re-generation. 6. True nature and surface appearance, which brings up *faux amis* (false friends) and the poisonous doppelgänger.

La donna dai capelli corti stands at the edge of the forest with Zà, just as the author Dante did with his *pellegrino* (pilgrim) and looks into a dark abyss. Fortified with the logic of the phrase *lucus a non lucendo* which she has adapted to take on a singular significance, she looks to the forest as a place where sublation⁷⁰ of that which has been sublimated renews and materializes. The world of the forest, then, is a place where the darkness that prevails is the very

⁷⁰ I will return to the topic of sublation, but for now suffice it to say the word is used by McGilchrist to mark a consequential emphasis on the 'alchemic' power of sublimation, resulting in a 'lifting up' of what was already there and, without erasing it, transforming it into something beyond itself.

thing that allows greater vision and insight into what has been obscured in the full light of day. The darkness of half-light is an integral feature of the forest, symbolizing both the unconscious mind as well as the unknown, and the other in the novel. Mcgilchrist's study of the visage of Romanticism, a sensibility in art and literature of the world as delivered by the right hemisphere as he describes it, intuits that true wisdom can be approached only by "indirect and hidden pathways (...) more from half-light than light" (369).

The first mushroom in the novel is Amanita, Pietr' i pelus' wife. Her father is a famous professor of mycology (35). There are a few personalities in the history of Colomba's family who take an interest in mushrooms and the unseen processes that are the generator of what becomes perceptible. This professor names his only child after a poisonous mushroom, something that Pietr' wonders about at the moment that an internal voice tells him that she is "la moglie che qualsiasi uomo avrebbe desiderato" ("the wife that any man would have wanted") (41). The world of mushrooms and their position as the substratum of life⁷¹ is forgotten in the everyday world, because it is out of sight. The novice mushroom hunter learns through experience of the subtleties involved with identifying types; often explicit information does not suffice, and one can be fooled into believing that they have the knowledge to distinguish one type from another. Committing an error in identification is costly, it can mean death. A mycologist has explicit knowledge of the enormity of the far-reaching systems of the world of mushrooms, which are in fact the most extensive living organisms on Earth, and their unseen involvement is fundamental in nearly all of life's processes. The mycologist is also thoroughly versed on the deceptive capacity of a mushroom's appearances.

⁷¹ Fungi facilitate the existence of new life by decomposing dead matter. They connect the entire web of life.

Knowing the mushroom's capacity for deception, Colomba's father Valdo, an avid mushroom hunter, puts that understanding to use in the manipulation of others. With knowledge, the wielding of power becomes possible, and that power can be wielded in different ways. With this power/knowledge, one can reenact the deceptive capacity observed in order to coerce others and seek satisfaction of one's desires, or one can use knowledge gained to spot deception and be alert to exploitation of trust and innocence. The deceptions of those who wield knowledge and then use it for manipulation prove to be noxious, but the poison takes some time to take its effect.

Colomba herself took an interest in *funghi*. Zà comments on her pastime in an interview with a local reporter:

-Le piaceva passeggiare nei boschi, da sola.

-E che faceva nei boschi da sola? -Cercava funghi. Ha una vera passione per i funghi, li conosce bene. Glielo ha insegnato il padre. (71)

(-She liked walking in the woods, alone.

-And what does she do in the woods all alone? -She looked for mushrooms. She has a real passion for mushrooms. And she knows them well. Her father taught her about them.)

The exchange builds on a convention that is repeated in the novel; walking in the woods and looking for mushrooms constitute suspect activities for a woman. As mentioned, the forest has been culturally constructed as a place reserved for men's recreation, off-limits to women except for purpose driven activities.

Fungo is a dog who first intimidates Zà when she meets him in the woods (101), but they become companions and she tells him, "Se rimani con me ti chiamerò Fungo. Perché sei spuntato dal nulla come i funghi in autunno" ("If you stay with me, I will call you mushroom.

Because you sprung up from nothing like the mushrooms in the Autumn) (104). Mushrooms take you by surprise; they are born from the remnants of decomposed life, the raw material of this past life form has lain dormant, and a reproduction occurs, with inscrutable timing, from material unseen and often forgotten. The abrupt appearance of a child who arrives in the arms of an unknown woman at Pietr's mother Zaira's door, after she has learned of his death in combat and her husband has passed on, bears out the surprise of regeneration. It is Pina who is sick with syphilis and cannot take care of the baby Pitrucc' (126-7). The disappearance of Zà's loved ones had seemed decisive and then this regenerative phenomenon appears, the appearance of this baby born of the genetic materials of those who have expired (126). Although Zaira, or 'Zà the elder', is not central to the novel, she stands at a place beyond which the family memory goes back no further, and so has the role of originator and possessor of the legacy and memory that Zà, her great granddaughter, has inherited. The following passage belongs to the musings of *la donna dai capelli corti* as she prepares to write, and her eyes and thoughts extend outward into the forest. It is a poetic description of the mysterious impressions mushrooms present, as well as a lesson for the novice in mycology, directing attention to what is not seen and often escapes awareness:

La foresta ha anche questa capacità: forzare le età, rimescolare le generazioni, fare sgusciare fuori da una terra addormentata, mai coltivata, che sembra arresa sotto le foglie morte, qualcosa di vivo e fresco come un fungo appena nato che appare improvviso dalla notte al mattino. È il frutto dei ricordi sepolti le cui radici si ramificano in lontananza, nel sottosuolo della memoria. Si nutrono di sostanza organiche, crescono nei sotterranei del tempo, hanno vita filiforme e silenziosa. E diventano visibili solo per un giorno, per un'ora, provocando sorpresa e

ingordigia. Funghi di una mente saprofito. Molti di essi sono velenosi, portano nei loro colori seducenti, nelle loro cappelle profumate, la tentazione del delirio e della fine. È solo la conoscenza che preserva dall'orrore. Ma nessuno può dirsi conoscitore di quella micologia del pensiero che è la memoria. (110-11)

(The forest also has this capability: to force the ages, remix the generations, to squeeze out something alive and fresh out of uncultivated sleeping earth that seems surrendered under a layer of dead leaves, like a newly born mushroom that appears all of a sudden overnight. It is the fruit of buried memories whose roots branch out for great distances, in the underground of a person's memory. They are nourished by organic substances, they grow in the underground of time, and have a silent threadlike existence. And they become visible only for a day, for an hour, provoking surprise and avidity. Mushrooms of a saprophytic mind. Many of these are poisonous, they bring, with their seductive colors and their scented caps, temptation of delirium and the end. And it is only knowledge that staves off horror. But nobody can call themselves a master of the mycology of thought which is memory.)

The passage affirms human possibility when it comes to avoiding the dangers of the world, but suggests that there is no preparation that might hand someone regulatory power over memory.

The theme of memory, its capricious nature and unstable underpinnings is behind the impulse for the journey Zà makes in *Colomba*. Zà's memory must be mined over time for her to gain insight into how perfidious memory can be when it is brought to reckon with perspectives available to the mind, subsequent to a pivotal event. Mcgilchrist does not have a lot to say on memory, but I surmise after careful reflection that the right hemisphere is at a further disadvantage as time

passes after a memory is made. Although the right hemisphere is aware of that which presences at the time an event occurs, as time moves forward, it is bereft of its inclination to continue connecting to what else saw presencing. The mind most easily relies on an abstracted and stable extrapolation of events provided by the left hemisphere when a memory is offered up for recollection. Repression of memory is an adaptive strategy that the mind utilizes. Memories that resurface are most often unproblematic, safe. They are available as memories precisely because they are not the ones that are being repressed. The optimistic left hemisphere is the bureaucrat who categorizes, precisely for the benefits that abstractions provide: black and white judgments and speedy meaning-making. It is the hemisphere that stores the data but also specializes in willful denial in order to maintain its “naively optimistic forecasting of outcomes” (Mcgil.2, 85). It is therefore a divisive and herculean task to bring the perspectives and awareness that one who has ascended the spiral staircase has gained to bear on abstracted events that came before. And yet, the body might store sensations, things that were never made explicit and therefore not codified in memories. Zà has some success at prying her own memories open and re-establishing the primacy of the right hemisphere by reconstructing, with intuition, what may have presenced itself but went unperceived at the time, particularly in regard to Cignallitt’, who she had considered trustworthy for so long.

The metaphoric extension of mushrooms to generational memory that Maraini builds up in relation to Zà’s family lineage ultimately expresses itself in the disappearance of Colomba. The recognition of the foundation of the past that influences and molds the present resists the primacy of left-hemisphere logic, a logic that is renowned as sticking to the facts, but only so long as they are tangible, visible. The multi-generational soil in which Colomba was planted and grew was rich with disappearances and abandonment, but also of reappearances and welcoming

of the unexpected. Mcgilchrist talks about sublation as an organic process that involves a lifting or rising up (Mcgil. 2, 203-4). What rises, or is lifted, are the remnants, what remains after early stages of sublimation. An understanding of the subtleties involved in this are consequential for the implication of the themes thus far addressed in *Colomba*. It is a process of unification within division; vestiges of the past are transformed and live on in an ever-evolving present, without losing the specificity of what they once were but no longer are.

The many valances of the mushroom figure prominently as the narrative proceeds. In a «racconta ma'» passage, the mother reflects as she listens to her child rattle off the various marvels of mushrooms: “Nella nostra famiglia tutti sono stati un poco micologi. Passeggiando per i boschi hanno finito per diventare esperti di funghi” (“In our family everyone has been a bit of a mycologist. Walking through the woods they ended up becoming experts on mushrooms”) (217). Two different ways of coming into knowledge are contrasted in the ways that one takes interest in mushrooms. The science of mycology entails a narrowly focused attention on the properties, structure, and effects of fungi, but by wandering through the forest one can also sense deeply the importance of the interconnection between all of life that fungi so perfectly epitomize.

The Poisonous Double: *Il gemello traditore* and *le faux amis*

Zà describes Valdo, Colomba's father, as a very beautiful man and a passionate high school teacher whose female students adored him: “se lo mangiavano con gli occhi” (“they ate him up with their eyes”) (253). Zà goes on to disclose that Valdo's approach to his female students was playful, or rather, he saw them as playthings.

[E]ra un esperto giocatore di sguardi. Non avrebbe mai sedotto un alunna, ma le incantava, le lusingava. Erano tutte matte per lui. Solo quando andava per i boschi con la figlia sembrava dimenticarle. (253)

(He was an expert at the game of gazes. He would never have seduced a student but he charmed them, he flattered them. They were all crazy about him. Only when he went in the woods with his daughter did he seem to forget about them.)

This passage gives conflicting information. The hypothetical “non avrebbe mai” (“he would never have”), presented as a certainty, is contradicted by the facts that Zà relates to her author immediately after. The verbs *incantare* and *lusingare* both have *un doppio senso* (a double meaning) in how they can be interpreted. There is a candid (in this case, malignant) meaning, and a more affable (benign) meaning. *Incantare* means ‘to enchant’ but a gentler meaning, in this case, would be to understand it as ‘to please’. *Lusingare* means ‘to tempt’, in perhaps the most direct terms of interpretation, certainly a translation that would bring suspicion to Valdo’s character, but it also be taken to mean ‘to flatter,’ also a much more benign word in the context in which it is used. To learn that Valdo *only* forgets about the girls and the games he plays with them when he goes to the forest with his daughter to inculcate the strategies of *il gioco di sguardi* in her demonstrate that he is obsessed, he sees everything as part of the game.

The subsection entitled “*Faux Amis*” in *The Master and His Emissary* takes account of certain words and the concepts they denote. These words hold different meanings for the two hemispheres, and the consequence of the divergent meanings are relevant to the spirit and direction of *Colomba*. The terms that Mcgilchrist cites, each of which transforms in meaning as understood in the context of one hemisphere opposed to the other, are: “knowledge,” “truth,” “belief,” “will,” “familiarity/vs newness,” and “activity /vs passivity.” The crux of the divergent

meanings is the difference in disposition that each hemisphere takes toward the world, as well as the separation between things that can be made explicit through language and those that cannot. The right hemisphere, the one that picks up on interconnectedness, works at a deficit in expression through language, in part, because what it has to communicate is not explicit and cannot be made so. The left hemisphere is able to manipulate the way that things are seen, it makes them fixed so they can be named, grasped. Mcgilchrist describes referential language as “something of a hijack” of the drive to communicate that is at the origins of language (125). The right-hemisphere ‘liability’ of being unable to put things referentially is implicated in the use of dialect by those who wish to communicate thoughts, experiences and desires that fall outside of the expected and accepted conventions in the novel, most starkly, Angelica and Pitrucc’, both of whom have experienced life altering *prepotenza*.

Zà never says directly whether she approved or disapproved of Valdo; on the surface, her words give his person an air of respectability. But something beyond explicit information is communicated about the man, something to behold behind the words. Zà tells of how her daughter Angelica was still a student when she became pregnant, and how she resolved to accept the relationship between her daughter and the teacher. The times were changing, the sexual revolution was in full-swing and Angelica seemed happy. Zà’s cautiousness to avoid judgment in her assessment of Valdo’s character as seen in the citation above is discernible. She refuses to give absolute credence to some of her instincts, but she also is quiet about, even denies misgivings out of a fear of upsetting Angelica’s precarious psychological state. Valdo sees her hesitation to express her discomfort with the situation as weakness, an invitation to continue to exploit a situation, as a good player of a contest would do. Soon after he and Angelica are wed, Valdo takes off with another young woman, also a student. He leaves his daughter and wife in

order to pursue this new love, and when he is in turn abandoned for another, he comes back full of self-pity.

[Lui] aveva sbagliato continuava a dire (...): quella ragazza l'aveva ingannato brutalmente, l'aveva trattato come un oggetto da conquista e niente più. (...) Alzava le spalle e fingeva di ridere, ma non riusciva a vincere un senso di mortificazione che lo rendeva rancoroso e malinconico. (260)

(He had screwed up he kept repeating (...): that girl had deceived him brutally, she had treated him like an object of conquest and no more. (...). He raised his shoulders up and pretended to laugh, but he couldn't manage to beat the sense of mortification that caused him to be rancorous and gloomy.)

Valdo's egocentricity in response to this romantic jilt is glaring. He absolves himself of any responsibility for Angelica's feelings when he discards her and Colomba and doesn't consider how his actions affect others. It is not an oversight on his part; the danger of his selfishness and underhandedness are permitted to go unchecked by a misguided optimism that injury and harm might be mitigated if one simply looks the other way. Zà's reluctance to confront the truth of the corrupt paths of Valdo's thought head-on is revisited throughout the course of the novel in episodes in which she faces rhetoric that attempts to appeal to her sense of the courtesy that she owed others when their logic, which is not applied in good faith, becomes unequivocal. Three times she has encounters with figures of authority, those with the responsibility of protecting others and enforcing the law, in which the domination of the left hemisphere is palpable; whatever has no instrumental purpose in sight, is downgraded and dismissed (Mcgil 2, 174), including the primacy of life, and of the individual person. Zà's representation of Valdo to *la*

donna dai capelli corti draws the reader's attention to his duplicity by showing the reader how it feels to be deceived in the way that she and Angelica were.

Even as Zà tells of Colomba's childhood interactions with her father, the words she uses betray her reservations, her own intuition of a noxious duplicity in Valdo's character. They also betray a division in her own thought that fogs her representation, even her opinion on these matters. Zà talks about the time Valdo spent with Colomba alone.

Conosceva bene i funghi. (...) Angelica, che era innamoratissima di suo marito avrebbe voluto stargli sempre vicina. Ma lui preferiva andare a passeggio con la figlia Colombina. A ogni fungo che incontravano, si inginocchiavano sulle foglie del sottobosco, esaminando per filo e per segno le sue caratteristiche (253).

(He knew mushrooms well. (...) Angelica who was enamored with her husband would have liked to have always been with them. But he preferred to go walking with their daughter, Colombina. At each mushroom they encountered, they bent down on the leaves of the forest floor, examining in detail their characteristics.)

Valdo describes different varieties of the mushrooms, and their subtle characteristics. When Colomba believes she has found a particular mushroom, and ventures to name "una mazza da tamburo" ("a group of parasol mushrooms") (254), he corrects her sharply and informs her of the mistake. Valdo recites his own grandfather's words, from whom he learned the art of mushroom hunting:

[O]gni fungo ha il suo doppio, capito testona? Hanno tutti un gemello traditore e che appena lo metti in bocca ti uccide. Saperli distinguere non solo è una scienza ma un'arte. (254)

(Every mushroom has its double, understood hardhead? They all have a traitorous twin and as soon as you put it in your mouth, it kills you. To know how to distinguish them is not just a science but an art.)

Valdo admonishes his daughter to take care to learn these things while they spend time away from her mother. Angelica is not invited to come on these excursions into the woods; she is not privy to what Valdo has to say about deception and the poisonous double.

Valdo sees those who are deceived as weak. Angelica is duped by Valdo many times over and he takes that as an indication of his superiority. However, he apparently does not wish for his daughter to grow up to be like her mother and so he attempts to educate her on the games of deception. Valdo sees the world in terms of predators and prey, like certain other men, hunters, poachers and pimps. But Valdo's cloak— teacher, hippy, communist, mushroom hunter—provides cover for his ethos. He sees anyone who does not possess the will to deceive or the instinct to mistrust as a dupe, someone destined to be preyed upon. Angelica does not see the world this way even though she has been hurt. Her trust comes not from naivety alone, but from a longing, a deep need to feel loved. What prevents her from protecting herself from Valdo even after the injury he has caused, is a degraded sense of self that went unhealed as a result of the sexual abuse she suffered as a child. In *Colomba*, Maraini points to the similarity between the actions and harm inflicted by someone like Valdo, and the actions and harm done by Sal, Colomba's captor. Both engage in masculine predation of a female victim who has been primed psychologically and emotionally by prior trauma to have a diminished sense of her ability to protect herself from abuse and exploitation.

For Colomba, however, her father was the ultimate authority; she thought that “la conoscenza stessa avesse le forme di quel corpo di giovane uomo (...). Di lui si fidava

ciicamente” (“knowledge itself had the form of that young man’s body. (...) She trusted in him blindly”) (255). Although Angelica was hurt by Valdo’s infidelities, she felt obliged to hide it, for any expression of jealousy was “una volgarità borghese” (“a bourgeois vulgarity”) (260) for this supposedly enlightened generation of young people, veterans of the sexual revolution. Angelica’s silence allowed Colomba to believe in her father’s rectitude without question. Maraini’s representation of the internal divisions of different individuals and how they take effect in the world of *Colomba*, begs the following questions: how are defensible and indefensible expressions of duplicity measured? When are divisions in thought honest representations of what a mind’s processes are, and at what one point does division become duplicity or deliberately treacherous? Intention, as difficult as it may be to know in others, is where the distinction must be made.

The words that McGilchrist introduces as *faux amis* point toward meanings that are pregnant with potential when taken from a right-hemisphere disposition. Even as both hemispheres are involved with identifying type, for example, the naming or denoting of a particular kind of mushroom. That, for McGilchrist, is its “whatness” (171). He then points out that “it can nonetheless have two ‘hownesses’” (171). McGilchrist suggests that the right hemisphere is involved in the identification of archetypes, which entails a *gestalt*. In contrast, the left hemisphere is involved with a straightforward identification of types. The identification of mushrooms as a metaphor for this “howness”, or intentionality in human subjects, takes shape in *Colomba*, and sees further applicability in McGilchrist’s example of the archetype, “family resemblance”:

[‘Family resemblance’] (...) implies a sense of a something that has never yet been seen, and yet that something nonetheless has a meaning in relation to each of

the exemplars that is experienced, and it becomes clearer only with more and more experience. So although we think of a 'type' as a highly reduced phenomenon, 'the lowest common denominator' of a certain set of experiences, it can also be something much greater than any one experience, in fact laying beyond the experience itself, and towards which our set of experiences may tend.

(171-72)

There are archetypes introduced at the beginning of *Colomba*, but they do not become understood as such until their relations to the things that come after is made available. Among these archetypes are Zaira the elder, who holds herself accountable in deed and word to accepting and responding graciously to whatever presents itself while maintaining an independence that is critical to carrying out a preeminent duty and telling the stories that need telling. There is also Amanita's father, the mycologist, who comprehends in a way that most others do not the vast system of the unseen at work in every aspect of reality, as well as the extent to which artifices are mistaken for genuine essence. And then there is Pietr' i pelus', the one who first crosses the minefield of his own divided mind. He was always aware of the discomfort of dualities, and ultimately the attempt by the left hemisphere to banish the right hemisphere, which whispered to him of the negligent opportunism of conventions and ease of either/or thinking, were refused. He can be seen as imperfect-work-in-progress archetype in Zà's family line, who learned through hardship to accept the call to look beyond personal interest and to refuse the temporary benefits that come with complicity with injustice and *prepotenza*. Pietr's son, Pitrucc', raised by his father's mother, Zaira, as well, is nourished by what came before, and he meets the cruel *doppietta* of the political world as an idealist who seeks an end to human strife and war. Escaping fascism in Italy, the profound ideals that he left his own homeland to

pursue became elusive. He encountered the appropriation of his longed for ideals by those who sought power. The utopian vision had become so perverted by the disposition of those who employed its rhetoric that it was being used to sanction torture and murder.

A «*racconta ma*’» passage reports a memory of a father who had no interest in mushrooms, but who “[P]arlava di matematica e di astronomia” (“Spoke of math and astronomy”) and said that “i numeri esprimono l’infinito, che bisogna lasciarli parlare” (“numbers express the infinite, that we must allow them to speak”) (256). The subject who has this memory conjectures, “I padri, in somma, trasmettevano la coscienza scientifica. E le madri?” (“So fathers pass down scientific understandings. And mothers?”) (256). What follows is an ode to mothers and the stories they tell: “L’esperienza profonda e misteriosa del raccontare storie le veniva da sua madre, la bellezza della notte.” (“The profound and mysterious experience of telling stories she got from her mother, the beauty of the night”) (256). Scientific knowledge can be quantified and seems firm. When our minds cannot conceptualize the vastness that science has the possibility of reporting to us as a reality, it is the weaving of texts and imaginative effort that opens our awareness to said reality in a way that we can feel. The stuff of stories is unstable, not quantifiable, it is inflection, energy, and a storyteller’s presence that the listener connects to. The *accudimento* felt in her mother’s presence and the betweenness experienced nby sharing in the captivating tales she tells are of the highest consequence.

[S]apeva trasformarsi secondo le esigenze della favola (...). Era stata sua madre a introdurla per sempre nel mondo fantasmagorico del racconto verbale. A farle fissare l’attenzione lì, (...) dove la forza delle parole si fa carne, lì dove si scopre il terribile dolore della solitudine e la gioia della conquista dell’attenzione dell’altro. (256)

(She knew how to transform herself according to the requirements of the story. It was (the internal author's) mother who brought her in, forever, to the fantastical world of oral tales. To bring her attention there, (...) where the power of the words become real, there, where one discovers the terrible pain of solitude and the joy of conquering the attention of the other.)

What is communicated in stories matters a great deal, in fact, it can be as consequential as life and death. And yet, if one is too focused on either content or form, they will fail to bring a tale into focus, as content and form are inseparable. A "model reader" and a "model author" will not encounter one another if the narration does not do what the mother does, "conquer the attention of the other" (256). It is in this acknowledgment that Maraini yields to the fact that narrators play a game of seduction as well. maintain a self-reflective critical application of nonduality. Seduction and conquest play a role, but they are not the game in itself. The whole, the essence of what is received by the listener or reader is something completely diverse, the sublation of the techniques of enticement. The internal author had a father who regarded scientific knowledge, but returned it to the mystery of the infinite, of eternity. She had a mother who regarded the mystery of the world generally, and used storytelling to teach her child never to lose sight of the great mystery.

Valdo's position as teacher is vulgarized by his propensity to allow his smug duplicity that sees naivety as weakness to be preyed upon. The status of master/teacher is in his case ceded to the left hemisphere, an occurrence that carries a destructive force. Valdo's actions are exploitative but his mastery, an inversion of the master that Mcgilchrist envisions, is the fact that he never has to answer for his corruption. Angelica lives through many hardships as a result of their relationship, she spends much of her adulthood and years as a mother self-medicating. She

ultimately dies in a tragic car accident that is not so much a chance occurrence as the final scene of a person driven out of her senses by trauma (317). Pietr' i pelus' is also a character who travels a path of misuse of knowledge, although he by no means comes across as a 'suspect' soul, certainly less so than Valdo. Pietr' did not feign transformation or remorse as Valdo did, he did not exploit his ability to be duplicitous. His 'misuse' of knowledge was perhaps most appreciable as he began a journey that changed his views. The trajectory of his transformation was underway, both in the world and in his mind, when he met tragedy. One can only look at what he left behind as his legacy, and this legacy is one that follows the logic of his transformation, an openness to truth obscured by artifice. Pietr' opened his awareness to see that he and Pina had a creative force within them, and that Amanita's role as his wife was mere social convention. The family line, life itself, continued on through this illegitimate but genuine strain.

La Caccia / The Hunt

If mushroom hunting represents the intricacies of a quest for knowledge and know-how in the novel, hunting for animals represents the brutality unleashed in the immoderate drive to seize the desired other. The forests surrounding Zà's town in Abruzzo are a protected area for wildlife. Zà encounters poachers—modern day bandits—on her trips into the forest to find anything she can about Colomba's disappearance and whereabouts. Zà covers the different areas of the forest with precision, making trips first alone, and then with her new dog Fungo. Zà encounters poachers in the forest who intimidate her with words and weapons, behaving as though she is a trespasser in their territory.

Dal buio della selva sbuca un ragazzo con un fucile in mano. Non ha la faccia amichevole. E più che a caccia di animali selvatici, sembra che stia andando a caccia di persone curiose. (238)

(Out of the darkness of the woods comes a youth with a rifle in his hand. And more than hunting for wild animals, it seems like he is out hunting for curious people.)

Maraini contemplates *la caccia* (the hunt) in *Colomba* and elsewhere, as a ritualistic activity of brutality and subjugation. The brutal vision and conduct engaged in the hunt spills over into life outside the world of the forest, and there the sport or game continues. The incivilities that are often part of the pursuit of the human other, usually woman, are juxtaposed with the hunting of animals in other works Maraini has written over the years. The object status of *Colomba*'s body duplicates the use value assigned to the animals in the National Forest by the poachers.

Mcgilchrist identifies the right hemisphere as “the mediator of empathic identification” (57). Not only does the right hemisphere deal preferentially with whatever is living while the left hemisphere deals preferentially with whatever is non-living and mechanical, but it also is “critical in making attributions of content, emotional or otherwise, of another’s mind, and particularly in respect of the affective state of another individual” (57). The right hemisphere is only able to muster this pattern of identifying with, empathizing with and in the end imitating, in some fashion, another entity, if that entity is known to it as another living thing (57).

Mcgilchrist illustrates this tendency by pointing to the propensity of the left hemisphere to see “an agglomerate of parts” (55) rather than a whole body, thus leading to the

extraordinarily unempathetic view of bodies as “objects of use, prey, ‘things’ and so on” (55) being that “there is an intuitive relationship between cutting things up and depriving of them of life” (55).

Not laws nor solidarity with the living deter the group of young men Zà encounters in the forest from pursuing a way of life that objectifies and parcels out living beings for exploitative control and material gain. There is no demonstrable need to bring the poachers and exploiters of women to do what they do, it is more an imitation of the savagery of a mythicized and far-off age than action brought on by authentic survival instinct. The narrator recounts the history of *brigantaggio* in Italy, inspecting the brutality of both the outlaws and the authority of the state; each faction was brought low and saw their ideals degenerate in response to aggressions by the other faction. An analogous episode, the story of the famous *brigante* Genco Venco, is retold by the narrator of *Colomba*, which draws a contrast between Genco’s sentiment for his lover Maria, a fellow *brigante*, and the aggression Sal demonstrates in his treatment of Colomba, rather than aggression toward an authority who denigrates the rights and the dignity of the lower social classes (248-9).

Hunting involves reducing a living being in an array of ways to an object: to game or sport, to food, or to desire. Mcgilchrist highlights the imagination as the province of the right hemisphere, something that language, the specialty of the left hemisphere, hampers. (107). Imagination could be formulated as the antidote to a runaway left hemisphere, and, as Maraini lets on in the tale of “The Stag with the Golden Horns,” if the human mind does have propensities that differentiate us from other animals, even highly evolved ones, they would be principally piloted by the right hemisphere, and among the most important, imagination. It is imagination that allows someone to speak the language, walk in the shoes of another and liberate

themselves from the sealed world of solipsistic experience and thought, from obsession with the usefulness of all things to satisfy selfish needs and desires.

Prepotenza and Truth

After Zà is threatened in the woods by the likely *bracconiere* (poacher), she finds that someone has been in her house going through her things. Soon after Zà finds, just across from her house, a dog that has been hanged from a tree. The following scene describes Zà's discovery:

Proprio quando sta per raggiungere il sentiero che la porta a casa, si ferma improvvisamente davanti a qualcosa di scuro che ciondola dal ramo di un grosso olmo. Cos'è, un sacco, una bisaccia? Si avvicina un poco e rimane inorridita. Davanti a lei, agganciato a un ramo non tanto alto da terra, pende un cane nero, impiccato. (...). La corda gli sega il collo. La bocca è spalancata e la lingua sporge sul mento, rigida e violacea. La neve non lo ha ancora coperto; da che si desume che è stato appeso lì appena lei è partita per la ricerca di quella mattina. Uscendo infatti non l'aveva visto. Ora eccolo là, lugubre come un avvertimento minaccioso. Appena se l'è trovato davanti ha cacciato un grido. Ma nessuno l'ha sentita, solo Fungo ha preso ad abbaiare allarmato. Chi può avere impiccato un cane? Ora poi, guardandolo bene, le sembra di riconoscerlo: è Saponett'. Un cane senza padrone, su cui è stato facile infierire. Ma perché?"

(286)

(Just as [Zà] is about to reach the trail that leads to her house, she stops suddenly in front of something dark that is swinging from a branch of a great elm tree.

What is it, a sack, a shoulder bag? She moves a bit closer and remains horrified. Just in front of her, fastened onto a branch not too far from the ground, swings a black dog, hanged. (...). The chord cuts into his neck. His mouth hangs open and his tongue hangs down to his chin, rigid and purple. The snow has not yet covered him; from which one may conclude that he was hanged there just after she had departed for the search that morning. Upon leaving, in fact, she did not see him. Now he is there, a grim and threatening sign. As soon as she saw it she let out a scream. But no one had heard it, only Fungo and he began to bark with alarm. Who could have hung a dog? Only now, looking him over, she seems to recognize him: it is one of the stray dogs that roam around the town become affectionate with Saponett'. A dog without an owner, on whom it has been easy to take one's rage out on. But why?)

Once inside, Zà begins an analysis of what it could mean. If the dog was meant to dissuade her from continuing the search for her granddaughter, then that means that she is "sulla buona strada" ("on the right track") (287). But she also wonders whether it would be wise to denounce the dog's hanging to the police, she is conflicted: "Vai alla polizia! La esorta l'angelo dalle piume" ("Go to the police! The feathered angel urges her") (287). This wavering on whether or not to turn to and trust the official channels of authority in handling matters of vital importance occurs three times in the novel, and Zà finds in her experience with the official channels that thinking is governed strictly by the left hemisphere and that she must in some way take on the issue herself. Zà prepares for sleep, choosing to forestall the decision until the morning, and the next scene finds her in the police station.

[I]l brigadiere la guarda incredulo. «Un cane, ha detto un cane impiccato?» «Sì, proprio davanti a casa mia.» «E chi pensa che...». «Non lo so. Voglio solo denunciare il fatto.» «Sarà una cosa fra pastori, piccole vendetta senza importanza, mi è già capitato.» (287)

(The sergeant looks at her incredulously. “A dog, you said a hanged dog?” “Yes, just across from my house.” “And who do think ...”. “I don’t know. I only want to report the incident.” “It must be something between the shepherds, little vendettas of no importance, it has happened before.”)

Zà explains her suspicions and tells how the hanged dog was located by the trail entrance that she uses to go into the woods each day. The sergeant’s attention takes a quick turn toward Zà’s activities: “E che ci va a fare nei boschi?” (“And why do you go into the forest?”) (287). She tells him that like everyone in town knows, she is looking for Colomba. The sergeant responds:

«Ancora? Ma ormai è passato quasi un anno. Perché non si mette l’anima in pace, signora Zaira?» (...). «Le rischia sa, ad andare da sola per i boschi. Non ha paura dei lupi?» (287-88).

(“Still? But almost a year has passed. Why don’t you put your soul at rest signora Zaira?” (...). “What you are doing is risky you know, going around the forests alone. Aren’t you afraid of wolves?”)

Zà concerns are dismissed, but in a show of courtesy, the sergeant proposes that they go together to have a look at the scene. When they arrive, the dog is no longer there, the sergeant seems annoyed: “Be’ questo cane dov’è?” (“So, this dog, where is it?”) (290). Zà searches around and finds the broken branch from which it hung, and a piece of cord that is still tied to the branch.

The sergeant does not claim that the cord has no significance, but Zà reads on his face that he still gives the matter no importance. Zà understands: “Quel bel viso fatto di certezze, di cortesie, di fede, manca totalmente l’immaginazione” (“That pretty face of certainty, of courtesy, of faith, totally lacks imagination”) (290).

To recap the most pressing elements in this case of the hanged dog, there is the refusal to view a living thing as such, and the dog assumes the status of object, both by the perpetrator and the police sergeant. There is a division in thought in Zà, but only one part of the division is given a clear and explicit voice, *il pennuto*, who is certain in his view. The counterpoint to the certainty of *il pennuto* is the uncertainty found on the other side of the divide. What marks the hesitance of coming to a quick decision is the context of the situation: a close-minded, male dominated police force, and a community that presumes a low probability of Colomba’s recovery, who judges Zà’s psychological and mental health on this realist presumption. Zà’s description of the sergeant’s face, one of a person who completely lacks imagination, is the last thought Zà has on the subject, as her report not only came to nothing, but the sergeant spent his time discouraging her from what she most needs to do, continue looking for Colomba.

In *Corpo felice* Maraini explains just how critical the function of imagination is, and how, once lost, it can rob one of a sense of justice and compassion. Her words are directed toward her son, Perdu.

Ti avevo tanto parlato dell’immaginazione, che per me è il motore più potente del nostro corpo. Ti dicevo che senza immaginazione siamo morti. È l’immaginazione che ci fa capire il dolore degli altri. È l’immaginazione che ci fa

viaggiare nel tempo e nello spazio. È l'immaginazione che ci fa riconoscere le ingiustizie e ci porta a combatterle. (171)

(I have spoken so much to you about the imagination, which for me is the most powerful motor in our bodies. I told you that without imagination we are dead. It is imagination that lets us understand the pain of others. It is imagination that allows us to travel in time and space. It is imagination that allows us to recognize injustices and brings us to combat them.)

McGilchrist proposes the broad attention that the right hemisphere approaches the world with as that which registers what is not preconceived. Imaginative capacities are essential for comprehending and extrapolating the uniqueness and connections in what we experience, how we think about what is other than ourselves, and what fosters creativity and the creation of something new.

Inhumane treatment of animals in the presence of women, enacted precisely for the poignant psychological message it sends, has been seen elsewhere in Maraini's works. The viciousness of the objectification of the living finds lively expression in a social world where physical savagery toward animals is tacitly accepted, if not expected. The patterns of this abuse are acted out in the presence of women which serves to terrorize a member of a gendered group who intuits her/their degradation as a subject, and therefore shares the status of object with the animal. In Maraini's *Donna in guerra* (1975), the protagonist Vannina's request of her neighbors that they not throw their garbage into her courtyard results in a heightened show of disregard for her. Not only does garbage continue to fly, but a badly injured cat, thrown out as just another useless object, is found by Vannina among more trash she finds in her courtyard. The cat dies despite Vannina's efforts to save it. When she confronts the neighbors, she is met

with denial and dissimulation, not accidentally, by the mother in the home, who seems to cover for the aggressors (65-66). The cat's murder relays the unmistakable message that Vannina and her requests are sneered at. Scorn that portends violence for categories of living beings which is part of the culture of the neighbor's household, is emblematic of the arcane and violent culture of many on the island where Vannina vacations.

The woman of the house is seen by Vannina as complicit with the belief that certain categories of living beings deserve to be treated with brutality (65-66). Maraini explains this psychological situation in *Corpo felice*: "Le più deboli e fragili (donne, ma anche bambini) si inventano delle strategie di connivenza col nemico per salvarsi della possibili condanne o anche solo dal ridicolo che le paralizza" ("The weakest and most fragile (women, but also children) invent strategies of collusion with the enemy in order to save themselves from the possible punishment or even just from paralyzing ridicule") (88). This kind of complicity is notably something that the women in Zà's family have resisted. In fact, Zà carries the banner of this potential legacy, resisting complacency and daring to find out what has happened to Colomba. The men in Zà's family also have progressively made a legacy of resisting complicity with political and social forces of oppression and tyranny. The legacy, it must be noted, is always a work in progress and does not move forward without an understanding of the past, with its missteps and setbacks. One finds in *Colomba* that Cignalitt' did not oppose complicity with political and social oppression during the fascist era. It is he who inflicts the pivotal wound that festers, and eventually threatens to end a quiet but powerful family legacy of resistance to dualism and oppression. Zà's father, Pitrucc' i pelus', who is very different than Cignalitt', makes a very unexpected return to her from a lifetime spent far away, and his homecoming provides the spark of hope for the eventual recovery of Colomba, and repossession of the family

story. The stories Pitrucc' will tell illuminate pieces of Zà's family life that would have otherwise remained unknown.

Colomba illustrates a pervasive violent social conditioning that men are subject to in public life, and it is a significant force in the life stories Zà's family members. Beginning with Mosè Salvato, Zaira the elder's husband, issues of social class limit his options and that of his family. Pietr' i pelus' life and those of his regiment are expendable in the eyes of the power structure that governs the nation. Pitrucc', his son, is a direct target of the violent intolerance of fascism, and the events that determine his exile and years of suffering originate in the *prepotenza* of local fascist thugs. What little Zà knows of her father's story she tells the deceased Angelica, in their ongoing conversation after her fatal car accident. But when Pitrucc' unexpectedly returns just as Zà's stories about him near exhaustion, the missing pieces of the family's story are retrieved. When Zà first sees this old man making his way toward her house, she has no reservations: "[P]er istinto quell'uomo le pare affidabile" ("Her instincts tell her that the man seems trustworthy") (309). This stranger who arrives brings her no sense of misgiving, despite the threats and scare she has been visited by. His presence bodes a sense of hope for healing. This moment of *gestalt* recognition for Zà strongly recalls the moment in which she realized, out of seemingly nowhere, that Cignalitt' was not her father, a momentary "manifestation of the inscrutable" (Mcgil. 2, 355).

Zà learns that Pitrucc', after leaving Italy for Australia, traveled to Russia to see the great hope that Communism promised the world. Angelica had dreamed of doing the same. She, like her grandfather, immersed herself in the hope and the promises of a world of equality, of mutual caring and respect among people, but lived under conditions that vanquished that hope. A Russian poetess had a great impression on Angelica in her youth and she clung to her words and

her story through her life. Her mother remembers that there were in fact two portraits of poetesses that Angelica kept.

[Q]uello di Anna Achmatova e quello di Marina Cvetaeva, una più anziana, una più giovane, una bruna e l'altra castana, una severa, regale, l'altra sciamannata e giocosa. La vita amara delle due donne le aveva insegnato qualcosa sulla storia recente che i libri non le avevano saputo dire. Proprio quando il pensiero di un mondo nuovo e giusto si era affacciato nella sua mente come la promessa esaltante di un futuro uguale per tutti, le tragedie private delle due poetesse russe l'avevano risvegliata precocemente da un sonno che abitava nella mente di tanti suoi amici e conoscenti. Era la Russia dei remoti miti politici di redenzione: (...). Ricorda ancora la gioia con cui i suoi giovani amici alzavano il braccio col pugno chiuso negli anni in cui Stalin era considerato un salvatore e la religione una misera illusione. (276-7).

(That of Anna Achmatova and that of Marina Cvetaeva, one older and one younger, one darker one lighter, one harsh and regal, the other disheveled and playful. The bitter lives of the two women had taught her something that books had not known how to say to her. Precisely when the thought of a new and just world had been appeared in her mind, like the exhilarating promise of a future in which everyone would be equal, the private tragedies of the two Russian poetesses had reawakened her prematurely from a dream that lived in the minds of so many of her friends and acquaintances. It was the Russia of the remote political myths of redemption: (...). She still remembers the joy with which her

young friends raised their arms with closed fists in the years in which Stalin was considered a savior and religion a miserable illusion.)

Angelica carries the knowledge and burden of a precocious awareness of the succession of private iniquities, especially those related to sexuality and maternity.

What Pitrucc' encountered in Russia was Stalin's takeover and a perversion of the ideals that Pitrucc' had longed to see come to fruition. Pitrucc', with no intention other than to support the political alternative to the dissipation of social norms and the destruction of life as he knew it wrought by Fascism in his own country, was sequestered by secret police, and accused of counter-revolutionary activity. He maintained his innocence during three days of interrogation by the secret police.

«Songh' comunsite e só venute a Mosca per ajutà la rivoluzione, songh' ne comuniste italiane, scappate da i fascisme perché me volevane fucilà.» Ma loro non capivano o fingevano di non capire. (362)

("I am a communist and I came to Moscow to help the revolution, I am an Italian communist who fled from the fascists because they wanted to kill me." But they didn't understand or pretended not to understand.)

After days of torture aimed at breaking his attachment to the truth, the Soviet secret police handed Pitrucc' a paper and said "Metti la firma Pitrucc' se vuoi vivere" ("Sign your name Pitrucc' if you want to live") (362). His signature attested that he was a traitor, a spy for the Italian and Australian Trotskyites, and he was then transported to a gulag in Siberia. Pitrucc' shares the worst of his memories, hunger, and Zà sees the desperation that the memory brings him. In the year of Stalin's death, (1953), Pitrucc' began his march toward freedom, and was picked up by the Red Cross and taken back to Australia. As he did not feel that he had anything

left to come back to in Italy, he settled there. (364). Zà wonders why he has come back now, but there is no answer given, other than the stories that Pitrucc' has to tell.

Zà has curiously little to say about her own mother. There is a sense that she loved her but saw her as a broken spirit that one could not get much out of. There is no report of the stories that she told Zà as a child, and it is Cignalitt's personality and actions that are at the forefront of all the stories. Pitrucc' talks about the young and beautiful Antonina that he knew, and one afternoon, he tells Zà a story about her mother that she had never heard before, one that called Zà's attribution of the naturally quiet and subordinate nature of her mother into question. In her youth, she was put in jail for several days when a travelling magistrate claimed that she had violently attacked him as he rode through the area near town. The man, as it happened, had attempted to seduce the young girl, and when she refused his advances, he forced himself on her, throwing her to the ground. Pitrucc's words are translated by Zà, who finds his mix of dialect and English very distracting, "Antonina, che di solito era timida e impacciata, diventò una leonessa: gli diede un calcio così potente nella pancia che quello cominciò a vomitare (...) lei ne approfittò per scappare" ("Antonina, who was usually timid and restrained, became a lioness: she kicked him in the stomach so hard that the guy started throwing up (...) she used the opportunity to escape") (324). When she was taken to jail for "Violenza aggravata e minacce a pubblico ufficiale" ("Aggravated assault and threatening of a public official") (324) as the man was *podestà* (magistrate) of a little town not far away, her mother lavished luxury goods on the police commissioner so that he would let her out, which he did, appeasing the townspeople by freeing the girl whom they knew to be innocent. Zà had never seen her mother in this light, as her story and her past had been expunged from the record by Cignalitt' who had gained the upper hand.

Pitrucc' also tells Zà briefly about his relationship with Antonina. She was not ashamed of her desire for him, and she met him for their romantic appointments in the hills. Pitrucc' calls them the most beautiful memories of his life, and tells her that she was created from this sense of health and well-being: "Si nata 'n mezza all'allegria" ("You were born into happiness") (325). He explains that Zà's mother would never have adjusted well in Australia, and does not show the kind of regret that would indicate that he thinks things could have been very different than they were. He seems to already know what the reader knows: that Antonina was married off straightaway, and had absolutely no choice in the matter, once it was found that she was pregnant and that Pitrucc' was gone. He concludes by telling Zà that her mother was from a different generation, that is, the possibilities that were available to her were not available to her mother.

So it is that each generation has had their particular struggles and the injustices that they are subject to mark their lives, but there was not always the possibility of fighting back, in fact, in some cases fighting back would most likely mean the end of one's life, as in Pitrucc's case. And yet, a strong legacy of awareness and condemnation of injustice lived on in Zà's family. Even where there was not the possibility of publicly objecting or rebelling, there was an absence of complicity and a decisive rebuff of opportunism. There is in fact one family story, concerning Mosè Salvato, who underhandedly takes sexual advantage of a peasant girl and ruins her life by getting her pregnant. She is sent to the city, is prostituted by a young pimp from Touta, and has a very sad life. Mosè's wife Zaira, the protagonist's great grandmother, takes him to task for his misdeed for which he repents, and she commits herself after his death to look out for the girl and her child. She goes to Rome with goods from the country, and even watches the child while the mother is out working. Zaira the elder never tried to forget and move on, but accepted the

incident as part of the family story and took personal responsibility for the situation in the best way she could.

The injustices described in this novel, and Maraini's writing generally, are allowed by established patterns of *prepotenza* in the institutions and conventions that constitute shared experience in the era in which they occur. Core questions about human darkness that have held Maraini's writerly attention appear in discrete cases of maltreatment and offense to the individual, but are very often attributable to bigoted attitudes and remnants of conventions that have degraded the humanity of certain categories of the living over the course of history. The integration of a shared truth that has come from Zà's bearing witness to experiences and stories from many subjects and many perspectives, undertaken with courage and resolve, portends something unequivocal about the case of the missing Colomba. It is a culmination of material from the past that determines a degree of psychological susceptibility and the ongoing predation of the vulnerable in her lived experience that have taken Colomba away, even from herself.

When Zà and Fungo come upon blood in the snow as the climax of the plot draws near, they follow a trail of droplets and arrive at the spot where the animal succumbed to its bullet wound. It is clear from the markings in the snow that some poachers have killed a deer and dragged it to a hiding place, an underground cave. Unsure what to do next, as she has already been menaced by a young man with a rifle, been warned by the hanged dog, and had her house ransacked, Zà pauses to think:

Scendere così senza sapere cosa troverà, le sembra una impudenza eccessiva anche per una incosciente come lei. E difatti, mentre se ne sta ferma sul buio dell'apertura, sente nell'orecchio la voce rabbiosa del pennuto che la ammonisce:

Non scendere, non fare la scema, quelli hanno i fucili! Ma sebbene con prudenza, intende andare a vedere. (321)

(To go down, just like that, without knowing what she will find seems like excessive impudence even for a know-nothing like herself. And in fact, while she stands there still in the dark of the entrance (to the cave), she hears the angry voice of *il pennuto* that admonishes her: Don't go down there, don't be a fool, those guys have guns! Despite this, with prudence she intends to go and see.)

Il pennuto, once again, is narrowly focused on what is the safe bet; the left hemisphere opts for what it knows and dismisses the chance the benefits of taking a chance to know more. This view is quickly overridden, and Zà intuitively that, in terms of a bigger picture of Colomba's disappearance, she must inform herself of all that goes on in this forest. Zà's procession through the cave is nearly identical to that of the hunter's in the tale of the stag with the golden horns. She finally arrives at the cave's opening and the following is the scene that confronts her:

[V]ede davanti a sé, ammucchiati l'uno sull'altro, i corpi di quattro cervi morti, ancora intatti e bellissimi, coi musci e il collo insanguinati. Hanno tracce di pallottole sui fianchi, sul ventre. Le teste non sono state toccate, evidentemente con l'idea di ricavarne trofie da appendere ai muri. (...). Le gambe le si sono fatte deboli. Ha bisogno di sedersi. (...). Da quella posizione vede gli occhi di un cervo, quella che sta in cima alla pila, e sembra la guardi fissamente. Sono occhi vivi (...). Occhi luminosi che raccontano la sorpresa di quell'agguato, il dolore di una morte precoce, l'allontanamento straziato della compagna. (322)

([S]he sees in front of her, piled up one on top of the other, the bodies of four dead deer, still intact and beautiful, with their faces and neck bloodied. They

have traces of bullets on their sides, on their bellies. Their heads have not been touched, evidently with the idea of selling them as trophies to hang on walls. (...). Her legs have become shaky. She needs to sit down. (...). From that position she sees the eyes of one of the deer, the one who is on top of the pile, and it seems to look at her fixedly. The eyes are alive (...). Luminous eyes that tell of the surprise of that ambush, the pain of an early death, the torturous separation from its mate.)

What Zà saw in the cave, what she felt when she confronted the *occhi vivi* (alive eyes) of this dead deer has bearing on a moment of *gestalt* that will occur just after she leaves the cave. But between those moments, the tale of “The Stag with the Golden Horns” is told in a «*racconta ma ’*» passage. The storytelling mother shares a serious tale, she feels the responsibility of addressing human darkness in the willful blindness of the hunter, and his servitude to his desires. By attending with the imagination to the violence done to this family of deer and their pain at having lost their mother, Zà and the reader are primed with a sensibility to how the annihilation of life is the eventual culmination of the immoderate desires of some that prey on those who have been left without voice, or whose voices have been ignored, in the expression of any desires of their own.

As Zà leaves the cave, something catches her eye. She is in disbelief that she had not seen it before—it is the trailer in which we know Colomba will be found. Zà has come upon the people who are living in the woods and most likely carrying out the carnage she has seen, and this moment of *gestalt* marks a point of effectuation of the understandings she has gleaned in her adventures in the forest about Colomba and what has happened to her, internally and externally. Before Zà returns to the trailer, she is determined to report the poaching incident to the forest

ranger. She has had the experience with the police sergeant, where what she told him was dismissed as ‘nothing of importance.’ Her experience with the forest ranger goes in much the same direction. His general tactic of claiming to want to calm her fears by saying that she must be exaggerating, implying that she is unstable because she continues her search for Colomba and because she dares go into the woods alone, and at the same time that he calls the poaching incident ‘nothing to be concerned about.’ Here is his advice to her about her search for Colomba and her adventures into the forest:

Mi permetta di consigliarle di smettere, cara signora. Lo sa che è passato quasi un anno? Ormai si deve mettere l’animo in pace e riprendere la vita solita, senza vagare per i boschi come una bestia selvatica. A me sinceramente dispiace che una donna sensibile come lei faccia di questi incontri spiacevoli. I bracconieri hanno i fucili, bisogna stare attenti (340).

(Allow me to advise you to stop it, dear lady. Do you know that almost a year has passed? The time has come to let your soul rest in peace and take up normal life again, without wandering through these woods like a wild animal. For me it is sincerely upsetting that a sensitive woman like you have these regrettable encounters. The poachers have rifles, we must be careful.)

The Forest Ranger’s response highlights, in so many ways, the impenetrability and complacency of the mindset that prevails in official pathways for searching for Colomba that Zà has encountered since the time of her disappearance. He asks her to end her hopes for finding her granddaughter, even to relinquish the desire of finding out what happened to her. The *vita solita* (conventional life) means, it seems, the acceptance of injustice and darkness in addition to a resolution to not object, to blind oneself to it. The suggestion that Zà is something like a wild

animal combines a blame for animals and women, who simply seek to live in the (natural) environments they are surrounded by, for the offenses that they see as well as those that befall them. In the same breath, he affirms what he has denied, that the poachers do indeed constitute a grave danger. He is covering his own sense of impotence to deal with the situation by assuming a cloak of rationality. The ranger previously made the following statements, hand wringing alternated with minimization upon hearing that Zà wanted to denounce a case of poaching:

Purtroppo succede anche questo. E noi, se fossimo più numerosi e bene equipaggiati, potremmo farvi fronte, ma come si fa a controllare un terreno protetto così immense con pochi uomini, pochi soldi, poche macchine? (339)
 (Unfortunately, these things happen. And we, if we were greater in number and well equipped, we might be able to take them on, but how does one patrol such an immense protected area with few men, little money and few vehicles?)

And then moments later, upon hearing the gravity of the incident Zà reports:

[N[oi facciamo di tutto perché niente accada loro. Comunque guardi è gente che viene da fuori. Nessuno nel Parco ucciderebbe le bestie protette. (...) il bracconaggio da noi è minimo, sono episodi trascurabili. E avvengono fuori del territorio del Parco. (339)
 (We do everything we can so that nothing happens to them. Anyway look, it is people who come from outside. No one in the Park would kill protected animals. (...) poaching among us is minimal, just insignificant episodes. And they happen outside the confines of the Park.)

The ranger's attitude is that of denial, a left hemisphere specialty that serves to falsify optimistic evaluations in propping up an existing point of view (Mcgil. 2, 85).

Meanwhile, ‘Saponett’ is a character who stands out in contrast to the *solita* or conventional view in town regarding the treatment of animals. He is first mentioned in the story, described, as the people in town generally regard him as:

[M]ezzo scemo: a trent’anni non ha ancora trovato un lavoro fisso (...) non riesce a trovare una ragazza, fa sempre tardi la notte e quando rientra a casa si porta dietro tutti i cani senza padrone del paese. (79)

(A dimwit: at thirty years old he hasn’t found a stable job, hasn’t found a girlfriend, stays out late and when he returns home, brings all the stray dogs along with him.)

Zà is familiar with the young man because his mother is an acquaintance, the town’s midwife. She is called Saponett’ in a vaguely disparaging way, because, “ha la mania di pulire la casa e gettare secchi d’acqua saponata sulla strada” (“she has a mania for cleaning her house and throwing buckets of soapy water down into the street”) (79), and her son is called Saponett’ as well. The consensus seems to be that the family is wacky, perhaps because she does the job of midwife, long held as suspect, an attribution of a neurosis is attributed to her via her nickname in town. Her son is Saponett’ as well, being a little off in the general consensus. It is a way of delegitimizing someone, and casting their activities and thoughts in a suspect light. Zà has seen a similar delegitimization, she is called “e pazzarelle” (a crazy lady) because she is still convinced that her granddaughter is alive (75). Zà encounters Saponett’ several times throughout the novel. He is occupied with the rehabilitation of an owl. He answers Zà’s question, in dialect, about how he happens to have the owl in his care and Zà learns some things she did not know about him:

Era caduto dal nido, gl'hanne tagliate le ali, ma poi se so' stufati da tenerlo e l'hanne jettate nel giardino di don Filippo. Vedi un po' tu, questo se more, me fa il prete. E invece nun s'è morte. Gli ho dato i vermi, devi vede' come magna!

(314)

(He had fallen from his nest, they cut his wings, but then they got tired of keeping him and they threw him in don Filippo's garden. Have a look you, this owl is dying the priest told me. And instead, he didn't die. I gave him some worms, you should see how he eats!)

Zà warns him that he must release the owl as soon as possible, showing that she doesn't have full confidence in the young man's judgment. He answers:

E che lo tengo prigioniero a ste poste schifuse? Tempo di farglie ricresce l'ali.

Per lo meno isse pò volà libbero! (314)

(And what, I should keep him prisoner in this disgusting place? Enough time to let his wings grow. At least he will fly free!)

Saponett' clearly respects not only the rights of animals, but also envies their independence from the social world that he feels trapped in. Zà asks him why, if he loves animals so much, he is always inside and is not out actively defending them, especially the stray dogs in town who wind up poisoned. He answers:

Non pozz' farci niente Zà, per i paesani me' un cane è meno che un verme. I gufi poi li hanno uccisi tutti con gl'incendi de' boschi. Io, ch' só amico degli animali, só meno che un verme (314).

(I can't do anything about it Zà, according to the people in town, a dog is less than a worm. They have killed all the owls with the fires in the forest. I, who am a friend of the animals, am less than a worm.)

The young man's words betray his defeat. The violence he has seen has jaded his view of people in general and he does not retain hope that anything he could do would make a difference. His manhood has been delegitimized because he has not lived up to the performance of tough guy, and he has resigned in his efforts to be heard. Zà, while shown courtesy by those with authority, the police sergeant and the forest ranger, is similarly dismissed, but without the direct insult to her person, after all she is a woman, and cannot be expected to understand things in the way that the stereotypical male would, according to them. However, when the kind of masculinity that requires a display of domination is not present in a male, the abuse that one incurs is unforgiving. Saponett' has intuited as much as seen in his reasoning regarding his home town of Touta, which he calls a "paese de merda" ("shit town"):

[Q]ua odieno gl'animali. Se potessero gl'accidesse tutte. (...) Pure de me si sarebbero disfatte, che ce vuole: una polpetta avvelenata e via. (313)

([H]ere they hate the animals. If they could they'd kill them all. (...) Even me they would have done away with, what would it take: a poison meatball and see you later.)

Zà's familiarity with Saponett''s perspective along with her experience with authorities in town, first during the investigation into Colomba's disappearance, the reports of the killing of the dog, and then the poaching incident, do not cause her to lose hope. She has not given up and will continue to denounce injustice, but she is wise to the fact that she might not want to involve

these authorities with her detection of the trailer in the woods, as they have consistently misapprehended how to fulfill the obligations that their jobs of title would entail, from an ethical and holistic perspective.

Il pennuto who has been something of a mouthpiece for the perspective of the authorities, “let it be,” “stop this nonsense,” “the woods is no place for a woman to be,” eases up on the shrill certainty that he has touted up until this point in the story. The implications of all that Zà has discovered begin to add up to an upheaval in consciousness, one that breaks through with the new into the left hemisphere. Zà has needed *il pennuto* all along, but has not been able so far to recruit him to her cause. Of course, Zà is not separate from *il pennuto*, she only has one consciousness, but there are two distinct dispositions to the world that operate in her. *Il pennuto* has become somewhat of a nemesis, at least during the time that she has searched for Colomba, because the search is for the unknown, something antithetical to the left hemisphere’s nature.

The journey Zà makes through the labyrinth of the real and metaphorical forest of understanding in seeking to know what has happened to Colomba has prolonged contact with various painful episodes where the darker side of humanity is dominant. She has not allowed herself to look away from the darkness in order to seek comfort and ease of mind, she has not become complacent by allowing oblivion to take over the past. She has responded to what she has encountered with courage and has exhibited the commitment to a betweenness with all those whose stories are told, whose words are spoken, whose travails and conflicts, inner and outer, she uses her imaginative capacities to recreate. Zà’s behavior in this regard is very much like Maraini’s in her encounters over a lifetime of writing with human darkness. Empathy, in the way that Mcgilchrist employs the term, the imagination taking flight and truly putting oneself in

the shoes of the other, does not begin and end with a victim. A pernicious generational cycle of unbridled desire becomes conflated with an intrinsic yet unrenowned, nameless longing in so far as it is not categorically identified in conventional Western usage. One's intimacy and understanding of the difference between one's deep-seated longings and desire comes along after the rapture and trance of desire has been observed in all of the misadventures it foments, some very tragic. The nonduality of those who follow desire and those who see through desire in their ability to regard the longings that underwrite drives and appetites is made certain in a revisitation to the past, to the whole lives of the persons whose stories are told. In *Colomba*, the perpetrators of the greatest destructive acts—those who will never have a chance to redeem themselves before they are separated eternally from those they have harmed, as well as those who disappeared under the weight of the desires of others that were thrust upon them, are understood to be part of the chain of desires. Maraini forgoes appeasing our readerly desires to name a villain. Context is given for all kinds of behavior, not to justify it, but to seek truth regarding the conditions under which the dispositions that influence behavior developed. Even Cignallitt' is given the opportunity to speak, to explain why he may have done what he did to Angelica. His words are imagined by his step-daughter who, as much as she would like to uphold a complete dismissal of his goodness after she finds out about what he did to her daughter, still recalls the past faithfully, including times when he was generous and kind-hearted (305). What differentiates a disposition that informs action that harms from a disposition that informs beneficial action, is the ability to pierce the artifice of desire, seeing through it and recognizing our fundamental longing for a wholeness which feels irretrievable and results in our feeling separateness, a lost sense of interconnectedness.

La bambina e il sognatore

Aspects of each of the novels, *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, would lead someone who has read either one to recognize, at least on some level, the immense bearing they have on one another. What seem to be serendipitous fanciful discoveries of convergence, can lead to much greater realizations of the importance of certain themes that had escaped one's attention until they return again in the other novel. For one, the multitude of texts that are mentioned in passing, quoted, wondered about, purchased, read or translated, in one of the two novels, might be at first understood as a key way that Maraini underscores the importance of stories and storytelling for a certain kind of understanding, certainly a principal theme in both of the novels. The recourse that the protagonists' imaginations take to what they have read, what their minds have been exposed to, often has great influence on their thinking and in informing the intention behind their actions in life. There are several works of literature that gain mention, perhaps more explicitly or with more emphasis in one novel or the other, but the contribution to the development of themes that texts have when found in both novels makes an even greater impression. The migration of the intertexts that operate in a protagonist and readers mind from one novel to another holds the promise that these texts emerge as interpretive keys that continue in their unfolding. There are other pieces of literature that inform the sway of thought in the characters who read them, and clearly in Maraini herself that are introduced in one book or the other. The reader of Maraini's works, however, in some of the cases, is only tipped off that there may be worlds of meaning awakened in the cross-referencing of her own works with the literature that is brought into the field of the reader's attention in the action of the novel. The work is there for Maraini's reader to do if she so desires. Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*

is a text that has intrigued critics for centuries, producing many readings of its central theme as expressed in the title, I would argue is central for a discovery of the essence of the ‘model author’ and gives important contextualization to Maraini’s vision and treatment of dualities, including that of thought. Calderón work is present enough in each of Maraini’s novels that one could say that its themes and possible meanings are taken as inspiration for both, and so I return to the text and its meaning for the protagonist of *La bambina e il sognatore* in this chapter. In addition to the texts that I have already examined as important for meaning making in the chapter on *Colomba*, some of which will be readdressed in this chapter, I will discuss Proust’s *In the Shadow of Young Girl’s in Flower*, the myths of Zeus and Europa, Orpheus and Orion, as well as certain other stories and fables that are pointed to and even retold in the novel. These include an inquiry into the psychology of martyrdom, which becomes impossible to ignore when the reader can cross-reference the attention it is given in the other work. Martyrdom is the ‘story’ behind the story in both novels, the story of a (santa) Colomba and a (santa) Lucia.

Plot

Nani Sapienza, a school teacher, is the protagonist of the novel. There are two occurring dispositions, values, and wills constantly in our protagonist’s mind. Through a strong identification with a particular hemispheric ‘side’, the right, and its steady integrated complex of values, will and disposition, Nani becomes the character, or personality that he is. *Il pennuto*, is then, the ‘side’ of the protagonist, the left hemisphere, that he does not identify with, a voice whose values, will and disposition do not agree with Nani’s own. *Il pennuto* becomes an interlocutor whose voice Nani has no trouble identifying, as his presence is steadfast as is his morally irredeemable personality. *Il pennuto*’s views, in matters of life, the living, social interaction, morality, and deeper understanding generally are known to Nani to be insufficient, if

not contemptible. *Il pennuto* has a prominent role throughout the novel but does not have the status of protagonist equal to Nani's. *Il pennuto* cannot act and does not have free will in the way Nani does. This is because Nani has learned to sublimate the instincts that his *pennuto* proffers, and has become wise to his tactics that might persuade his person to accept, even tacitly, the way of being in the world, the views, that *il pennuto* trots out. Nani is the person actualized, an outcome of the fact that the characteristics of the right hemisphere, as McGilchrist details them, are at the helm. *Il pennuto*, his constant companion when he is alone with his thoughts, has the characteristics of the left hemisphere of the brain, and his instincts and opinions are a source of annoyance for Nani. *Il pennuto*, Nani's foil, his enemy inside, is an intimate of his, and Nani has come to understand his drives and thinking, and his manipulations well. There is a great benefit to Nani in having this materialization of the 'other side' of his person so starkly defined, although it brings him much torment. Nani has, unlike most people, a complete picture of the whole that animates this 'side', this left-hemisphere view. He is familiar with his tactics, particularly his use of language, which has as its objective power and control. Nani is in part able to realize his highest calling, in thought, word, action and intent, precisely because of the internal materialization of an antithesis in *il pennuto*. And so, Nani is in a unique position to perceive the gravity, the consequences of patterns of thought similar to those of *il pennuto* that seek to wield influence and to dominate in the social world. The view and disposition of the left hemisphere can lead to many ills if left unchecked. As it turns out in the novel, the disappearance of a particular little girl in his town, as well as the subsequent attitude that informs a disinterest, a surrender, in the search for her and in the search for truth is attributable to a domination of extreme left-hemisphere ways of being, which amount to extreme exclusion of right-hemisphere sensibilities.

The novel begins with a vivid dream. Nani encounters a little girl on a familiar street which is shrouded with fog. She is walking, but all of a sudden she vanishes into the clouds. He recognizes the the street in the dream as that one that leads to the school where he teaches. Later that morning Nani hears on the radio that a young female student, Lucia, disappeared on her way to school that very day. Many of the details that he comes to find out about the child correspond with the dream: her age, her clothing, her location, her gait. Nani realizes that he dreamt of the girl's disappearance before it could have happened, before she had ever left her house.

Lucia Treggiani is searched for, but not found, and life goes on. Nani, *il sognatore* (the dreamer), makes it his business to carry the torch for Lucia and in so doing gets into professional and personal trouble in so doing. He continues to dream of Lucia but is confused in making interpretations, but they do serve to heighten his belief that she is alive and must be looked for even while the family and the town believe otherwise. Nani is alone most of the time because he has suffered the loss of his family. His own daughter, who reminds him of Lucia, died at eight years old of leukemia. His wife could not bear the sorrows of living her former life and so she chose to live elsewhere.. Nani's solitude and experience with loss facilitate his brave curiosity and he continues probing into what might have happened to Lucia. Nani's habit of reading, dreaming, and allowing his imagination to make connections in the complex web of reality and truth contribute, in the end, to the recovery of the little Lucia. But he is not able to solve things on his own. The dreamer that dominates his person needs a faithful emissary, an analytical left brain to focus on the particulars of the case. He finds that talent in Francesco, one of his students, who unexpectedly becomes his partner. Francesco is the sleuth who takes inspiration from the attention and care to the living that this special and unorthodox teacher exudes in his style of teaching, in the stories he tells.

The bulk of the novel is dedicated to the search for Lucia, but also the search for decency, for truly democratic thought that informs legitimacy of action, in Nani's classroom, town, among his countrymen, in the world. The themes of the martyrdom of women and children, of repressed longing, especially of paternity, and of fundamentalism/absolutism are explored in the novel through Nani's interactions, reading, reflections and dreams. These themes emerge in conversations in which Nani seeks information and asks many questions of people in his community who may have some insight into the case of Lucia. Some of those he meets give answers that feature language and constructs that provide the one who speaks with a feeling of control and power over things that happen in the world. Others answer by showing signs that they are dominated themselves, and have renounced the possibility of controlling their worlds, even in the slightest; they have become complicit with the psychology of martyrdom by renouncing even their own right to faithfully represent their thoughts and experience, preferring to see their hardships as sacrifice, and therefore, sanctified. The interactions and reflections precipitate the unfolding of the enigma of both Lucia's disappearance and a death-drive that is constituent of thought when it is dominated by left-hemisphere views as seen in various instances of illegitimate domination, and *rapimenti* (abductions) mentioned in the novel.

There is another *sognatore* in the novel, Mammucchi, who dwells in a fantasy world. He is the man who holds Lucia prisoner, a child-bride all his own, whom he had eyed as his prey since her birth. The title of the novel is taken to refer to Nani and Lucia, as they are identified from the beginning of the novel as the principal characters, and Mammucchi only shows his countenance much nearer to the end. But an ambiguity exists; Nani is prepared to lend attention in the way he does to the case of a little girl that he has never met because of his close relationship with his own daughter, Martina, the *bambina* in his life, whom he never sees or talks

to in his dreams, although he longs to connect with her. He recalls memories of her so vividly at times that it is almost as if she were there, but she disappears as suddenly as she arrived. The solitude and loneliness that Nani confronts in his life, and his readings and dreaming bear an uncanny similarity to the life of Mammucchi. By the time Mammucchi becomes known to the reader in the novel, it is clear that regardless of some of their common circumstances, namely solitude and the habit of dreaming, the two men are worlds apart in their intentions and dispositions. Segismundo, the main protagonist of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, exemplifies the divergence between the two, one human and one beast, with the two ways of his actions and thought which emerge at distinct moments during the play. The word *sognatore* is then a term that makes a false equivalence between those who might be classified as dreamers. It is not the what, the fact that one dreams, but the how, the way that one responds to their dreams that is of greater consequence and the reasons for which they give attention to their dreams. The correspondence seen between the two kinds of dreamers, separated by the how, also symbolizes the sameness, in terms of potential, that we all have. Each person has the capacity to act basely, tyrannically. It is our way of thinking that determines our actions and their consequences. It is clear that Calderón's, Maraini's, and Mcgilchrist's explorations of the way thinking attempts to penetrate truth and reality have a deep concordance, and do much to offer great expansiveness in our conception of the division of our individual minds and wills, and the divisions and sameness between us all.

Structure

In *La bambina e il sognatore*, "Zeus and the abduction of Europa", and "Orpheus and his trip to the underworld to find Eurydice" are myths that give a frame to the principal undertaking

of the two *sognatori* (dreamers) in the novel, Mammucchi who has taken Lucia and holds her prisoner is implicitly likened to Zeus, and Nani, who wishes he could reconnect with his daughter Martina beyond the bounds of this world, is likened to Orpheus. Nani introduces the *raptus* of Europa to his students in class. Some students found the myth magical, if a little troubling, while others saw the might and prerogative Zeus displayed as laudible. But almost no one had a sense that Zeus's abduction/rape of Europa was censurable, as he was a god. Nani feared as much and follows up by asking probing questions into why the students see things as they do. Nani points to the possible significance of Zeus' choice to transform himself into a beautiful white bull in the myth, to disguise himself and his intentions, in order to lure Europa to play with him and eventually get on his back so he could ride off with her. A resort to trickery may indicate a twinge of the conscience which one would like to quiet, or in other cases, just a strategy to exert one's will more fully and mercilessly. Later in the novel, the *raptus* of the Sabine women is introduced as a topic of discussion in the classroom in order to provide an additional opportunity for the children to put themselves in the shoes of the ones who are taken, and to understand the motivations of those who carry a woman or a girl off against her desires, depriving her of connection with who and what she loves.

Nani on the other hand has what Maraini calls "una grande pratica onirica" ("a great practice of dreaming") and likens Nani's itinerary in the novel to Orpheus' journey to the world of the shadows, for him, it is to find his daughter Martina whom he has lost to leukemia and to find the missing Lucia. This other world is very hard to get into, and then, if one turns around, which may signify waking or returning to normal states of consciousness, effectively breaking off with the dream, as did Orpheus, the one that you seek and love disappears⁷². As we have

⁷² "Dacia Maraini: La bambina e il sognatore". Presentation at the University of Valencia. Nov.16, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS2IshxJooo>

seen, Segismundo of *La vida es sueño* also had an oneiric practice, but he came to confuse reality with dream, something which Nani is accused of throughout the novel. Orpheus was a mortal and was therefore unable to exert his will and choose his outcomes as Zeus could. In any case, Orpheus' undertaking was defined by its unattainability, and yet, he got as far as he did, dwelled in the presence of the shadow of his beloved Eurydice, not by intellectual cunning or words, but by playing music.⁷³ The question of 'might makes right' is explored throughout *La bambina e il sognatore*. Nani returns to the notion repeatedly in the classroom in order that the children be allowed and encouraged to exercise their faculty of reason (91).

I will argue that the structure of *La bambina e il sognatore* is reminiscent of *La vida es sueño*, as each dream that Nani has provides him with information that can only be interpreted with time and a coming of additional intuition. A final dream brings him to intuit the solution, which is to collaborate on Francesco, the detective, to chase after the details, but with a vision that depends on and trusts the impressions of his dreams. It is a particular reading of Calderón's play, one which focuses on divergent patterns of thinking which have deep correlation with McGilchrist's conception of the divided nature of the individual, of thought, of the will, and of being in this world. It is a reading of the classic play by Souflas, "Thinking in *La vida es sueño*" that allowed me to see the pervasive connections between Calderón's view, and the McGilchristian reading I have made of Maraini's novels. Souflas' reading, as the title of the article suggests, proposes that we see Segismundo's moral conversion as the result of the transformation of his thought process. Souflas writes: "Segismundo is not monstrous because of his animalistic behavior but because of his inflexible patterns of thinking. His thinking ability is

⁷³ In *The Master and his Emissary*, McGilchrist gives the example of Orpheus' music to illuminate a discussion about the relative balancing of the hemispheres in Eastern and Western cultures and how the trajectory of this balance has changed over time (458).

actually overdeveloped yet too narrowly focused and detached from active involvement in the world” (291). The connection with McGilchrist’s work is immediately apparent; the different ways that the hemispheres have of being in the world affect thinking and behavior that cannot find separation from moral sensibility. Further, that this monstrosity is attributed to narrow focus and detachment from the living, breathing, changing, flow of the real, places it consummately in the domain of the left hemisphere.

Souflas, to be clear, makes no mention of physical lateralization of the mind, the same it has been noted is true of Maraini. However, the functions, propensities and resultant dispositions of the hemispheres as outlined by McGilchrist see unenviably parallel when the details are considered, with reference to the distinction of what constitutes the ability to undertake directions in thought that will give rise to morally and socially acceptable action and outcomes. These details include: the role of imagination, the inclination to understand through finding sameness rather than to try to understand through categorization on the basis of difference, the shortcomings of rationality, probability and expectation over experiential knowledge, the mistake of disembodied logic rather than recognizing the full humanity of oneself and of others, and the harm of sensual and social deprivation. The resolution for Segismondo, which is no end but rather a new beginning, is expressed by Souflas as a “now limitless capacity for birth since, like everything else, birth also signifies the power to continue to define one’s self more completely. Segismondo can experience that emergence of a fuller humanity that includes a more harmonious balance of all rational faculties, a rebirth into an intellectual and moral order that will allow him to *obrar bien* (to do good) and to collect a reward of everlasting birth and life” (295).

The structure, as outlined by Souflas, is as follows:

Segismondo (...) progresses from the periphery of society to the center and from alienation to affirmation of a more appropriate social identity. His progressive understanding of the meaning inherent, but not evident, in the play's title helps him achieve his goal. The emergence of his humanity lies in his willingness to discover and to affirm his role in the classical order, a process that goes hand in hand with learning how to adjust his inappropriate thinking." (289)

Inappropriate action derives from a lack of "flexibility and adaptability in the face of changed circumstances," it is most visible in the protagonist but as Souflas points out, this kind of thinking is an ongoing struggle for others in the play who are unable to cope with challenges to their narrowly conceived worlds. Basilio, Segismondo's father, imprisoned him in a tower at birth and never spoke of him again, is guilty of aberrant thinking of a very similar type. The generational nature and re-generation of these tendencies is thus exhibited, but then again, so is the opportunity to rebalance and redeem. Souflas argues that the "fragility of the social order" is affirmed in the play, and it asks that we recognize that the "mentality of tyranny exists in everyone" (296). The play does not end with a neat resolution. According to Souflas it rather "suggests a continuation and points to a choice (...) invites its audience to find means and not ends— the means to harmonize thoughts and actions, to grow in wisdom, and to transcend the alienation seemingly inherent in an age at a decisive moment. That subsequent history has taken a turn in the direction contrary to Calderón's vision is unimportant" (296).

The Enemy Other and Absolutist Thought

The two ways of being and thinking that dwell inside the individual in *La vida es sueño* are reiterated with *il pennuto* who makes an appearance as a unitary character who is the sum of

left-hemisphere ways of thinking and being in the world. An important understanding that comes from this awareness of the division within the individual is that the idea that the enemy is an outsider and the outsider the enemy is a very destructive idea founded on the denial of instincts that constitute a death drive that is found in each of us, a denial of “the importance of being two” (Mcgil. 2, 9), a denial of our “essential asymmetry” (Mcgil. 2, 13). When we deny the divisions within ourselves, we subsume our two ways of being into one, and when this happens, it is not the right-hemisphere, the legitimate master who prevails in a power struggle between the two. McGilchrist’s caution is this,

At present the domain—our civilization—finds itself in the hands of the vizier, who, however gifted, is effectively an ambitious regional bureaucrat with his own interests at heart. Meanwhile the Master, the one whose wisdom gave the people peace and security, is led away in chains. The Master is betrayed by his emissary.

(14)

The enemy, as Umberto Eco shows in his essay “Inventing the Enemy,” is invariably envisioned and rhetorically constructed in a homogenous way:

There is this need to have an enemy, to use rhetoric and imagery that would attempt to define one’s ‘group’ against its foil, its antithesis. If not the enemy from without, the enemy within. Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one. Look at the generous flexibility with which the skinheads of Verona would, just to identify themselves as a group, choose anyone not belonging to their group as their enemy. And so

we are concerned here not so much with the almost natural phenomenon of identifying an enemy who is threatening us, but with the process of creating and demonizing the enemy. (2)

Eco's observations on the need for an enemy are clear-sighted. A question that arises when considering his work alongside that of McGilchrist's is: If we define ourselves against the enemy to whom we ascribe all things profane, things by and large precipitated by left-hemisphere drives and instincts, would it not be the right hemisphere that we were identifying ourselves with, thereby ennobling this paradigm? It is precisely in striving for the *appearance* or *title* of something holy, pure, good, that the *left hemisphere* would involve itself in, precisely because there is a self-serving purpose for doing so. There is no escaping the hermeneutic circle; it is an untruth to attribute all things bad to an outside being, and it is an untruth that one might somehow perfect one's self in so doing.

Eco then moves from detailing of the demonization of the outsiders, to the same process but used on an internal enemy: the immigrant, the heretic, anyone who is thought of as aberrant. Tellingly, the theories that are developed through the popular voice with regard to Lucia's disappearance point to an outsider of some type, unless a personal enemy in the town of S. exists, and then in several cases, suspicion is cast in their direction. The categories of foreigner, immigrant, heretic, and mentally/behaviorally aberrant are accordingly each proposed as a probable culprit in Lucia's disappearance as construed by the S.'s popular voice or rumor mill. Many sustain that they will never know what happened as it was an outsider who likely raped, killed and buried the girl. And then, it is Nani, who by resisting the dogmatism of the police and the townspeople which claims that a girl, when not found within a certain amount of time, is dead and buried and it is best for everybody to accept it and move on. He is aberrant in his

opinion, and he is aberrant in his ways of knowing. He is a *sognatore* who attributes importance to his dreams, and because he dreamed of Lucia and has confessed to it, he is looked on with suspicion and oddly, even by his own *pennuto*, who of course knows point blank that Nani did not commit the crime.

Martyrdom

In *La bambina e il sognatore*, Lucia's mother works from home as a seamstress, abused by her husband, dominated and isolated. Her trips outside the house are limited to church, and her only pastime outside of work over the years has been to sew an elaborate wedding gown for her daughter, who was only eight years old when she disappeared. Mrs. Treggiani is symbolically preparing this child to be a bride, and is at the same time aware of the terrible sacrifice it has been for her to exist in her marriage. Lucia, in fact, does become the very image of the perfect child-bride in the eyes of Mammucchi, her abductor. Over years he observed her fragility, her sweet and submissive nature, watching her from her birth, and resolving to take for his own when the time was right. In *Colomba*, the women throughout the generations of Zà's family have been abandoned in some way or another by the fathers of their children, and left alone. The resolve that the women have shown to not become martyred by their circumstance is appreciable, but is not sufficient to entirely overcome untimely death and perdition. It is, however, the spirit of mysticism in the family lore and stories passed down through the generations in *Colomba* which proves to be the countermeasure to perdition and oblivion of a family member, and in fact the whole family line.

Colomba and Lucia, the girls whose disappearances drive the action of the novels, were both named, consciously, after martyrs. The traditions of the two female martyrs are related in the texts, but along with them, the personal meaning and interpretation of the significance of the martyrs for the characters within the novel, especially those who had a role in the naming and care of the girls are raised. While Santa Colomba and Santa Lucia are both martyrs, as legend holds, the former adopted a hermetic life and as legend has it, elected to experience the form of suffering that she did, and departed this world through her own choosing. The latter had no choice over her torture and death at the hands of those who persecuted her belief in Christ, but accepted it unflinchingly, exhibiting supernatural powers through her ordeal. But things are more complicated than that. While Santa Colomba has a nearly secular popularity tied to the region of Abruzzo, Santa Lucia is venerated widely, and her official status of saint is recognized by both the Catholic and Orthodox Church. It is pertinent to note that both of these female martyrs were quite young at the time of their death, Colomba 15 or 16 and Lucia in her early 20s. They both came from well to do families, living under conditions in which decisions regarding their marital/romantic life were not their own to make. The consequence of this particular state of affairs plays a critical role in each young martyr's decision to take up a life or position that endangers her vital status, that is, to assert her faithfulness to a higher being, a life of service to the divine, rather than fulfilling the role that society and culture has afforded her.

Nani is not overly familiar with the story of Santa Lucia at the outset of the novel, but certain synchronicities having to do with martyrdom and the connections to the life of Lucia Treggiani bring him to the church of Santa Lucia on several occasions, the which

that the Treggiani attend. He meets with don Antonio, the parish priest, who disapproves of Nani's search for Lucia Treggiani as well as his heedfulness of his dreams and intuitions regarding the case. In fact, don Antonio reveals that he disapproved of Nani before he ever met him, taking in the gossip of the parents about this teacher who 'preaches communism' (111). Don Antonio shows the same certainty that Lucia Treggiani is dead and buried that *il pennuto* does, and retains that it is in everyone's best interest to leave it behind them. But Nani insists:

«Don Antonio, io l'ho sognata. Ho sognato che era viva.» «Sa che io spesso sogno di scavare nel centro della chiesa e di trovarci il corpo di santa Lucia che salta su con allegria gridando sono viva.» (114)

("Don Antonio, she was in my dream. I dreamed that she was alive." "Did you know that I often dream that I dig in the middle of the church and find the body of Santa Lucia, which jumps up with joy shouting I am alive.")

Don Antonio gives dreams no importance, even while he is the priest that resides over the church of Santa Lucia who herself, according to the legend that the Church espouses, channeled supernatural powers and saw things beyond what the eyes could see, what reason could explain. It was decided that she should be burned alive for her declaration of being a Christian. The pamphlet that Nani reads in church says "quando sale sul rogo, le fiamme si allontanano da lei." ("when she was put on the stake, the flames distanced themselves from her") (242). The reason for Lucia's eyes being depicted on a plate is not explained in the brief biography he reads in the church, but Nani comes across several explanations, landing on a meaning that makes sense, that Lucia "disponesse di una doppia vista" ("was disposed of a double vision") (243), to see more than others. Nani

makes clear to *il pennuto*, who sides with don Antonio, his own belief in the importance of dreams: “I sogni ci dicono delle cose che non vogliamo o non possiamo sapere” (“Dreams tell us things that we don’t want to or cannot know”) (114).

When Lucia Treggiani appears to Nani as a modern child suicide bomber in a dream, his attempts to interpret the dream are confused. In another dream, Lucia Treggiani morphs into Santa Lucia who invites him to eat her eyes which she holds out on a plate, just as the eucharist is served (235). The second dream has Lucia asking Nani to look at the suicide bomber dream with new eyes, another vision. The dream has Lucia playing the part of a girl who is groomed by her society, by her circumstance, to accept her martyrdom. Italians, as part of the West, live through this time in which child suicide bombing occurring in the Muslim world so scandalizes them that it is a central feature of media coverage, and the impetus for a more radicalized argumentation of the superiority of Western culture and Christendom. What Nani intuits is that there is a scandalous martyrdom that occurs in the West as well, it is just that we are willfully blind to it. It is the sexual violence against women, girls, and boys, seen in child abductions, rapes and murders, and patterns of solicitation of sex for pay inside the country, and sex tourism outside of the country that increasingly seeks younger and more vulnerable subjects/bodies. The left hemisphere’s inclination to deprive living things of their vitality through objectification, division into parts, and assignment of use value are partly responsible for the crisis, as is the denial of paternal longing and the supposed incapacity for, the abnegation of the responsibility to *accudimre*, in men. This recipe for the martyrdom of the vulnerable is advanced in *Colomba* as it is in *La bambina e il sognatore*. Lucia Treggiani was primed in certain ways for the martyrdom of

subservience in marriage, but never did her mother imagine that she would become appealing to a predator in search of a child bride. Lucia, however, carried a grave presentiment. Her former teacher shares with Nani her belief that Lucia held some secrets, “Era silenziosa, troppo silenziosa e impaurita. C’era qualcosa che le metteva paura, non so cosa, ma certo che non era una bambina felice” (“She was quiet, too quiet and scared. There was something that caused her to be fearful, I don’t know what, but it is certain that she was not a happy little girl”) (126). Nani ventures to ask if by chance Lucia had ever shared any of her dreams with her teacher, and in fact, she did. “Mi ha raccontato quasi spaventata che aveva sognato di essere chiusa in una tomba al buio (...) mi ha spiegato che lei cercava di uscire da questa fossa profonda che non riusciva a scalare” (“She told me, almost frightened, that she had dreamed that she was trapped in a dark tomb (...) she explained to me that she was trying to escape this deep pit that she wasn’t able to climb out of”) (130). Like Nani, Lucia’s dream was prophetic in that it was dreamt before the event that it resembles occurred. Nani and Lucia, then, have dreams that have to do with a confinement in which Lucia is alive. Don Antonio has a similar dream, which he reveals to Nani, that Santa Lucia jumps out of her tomb, and announces to him that she is alive. But the priest dismisses its importance, preferring to find the sacred aspect of Lucia tied up with her death, her martyrdom.

Proust and Mimetic Desire

The writings of Marcel Proust are named in *La bambina e il sognatore* as a principal inspiration for the desires that dwell inside Mammucchi, the man who has abducted Lucia and holds her prisoner, specifically vol. 2 of *In Search of Lost Time; In*

the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower. But the meditations of Proust's writing and the drive behind it do not begin and end with Mammucchi's appropriations of his work. Maraini, rather in agreement with Girard, examines the very nature of desire: its mimetic foundation and the denial of it, its veil of false authenticity and the secrecy that it breeds, its masochistic patterns, the destruction it brings to those who cannot not throw off its shackles, the projections it breeds, in summary, the mighty untruths and misery brought about by ravenous addiction to desire in its many forms. The understandings that Proust seems to have come to regarding the mechanism and force of desire in his own life and the life of all the characters found in his immense novel are wonderfully described in Grande's "Proustian Desire," an article that deeply informs my discussion of desire in Maraini's novels and has allowed me to see redeeming aspects of Proust's work as applied by Maraini to the configurations of desire in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. In addition to desire, the conventional understanding of death is reworked by Proust, and his belief in the extension of life, past physical death and oblivion, that involves being remembered, and more importantly, loved, is deeply invoked in the way Maraini writes about the parent-child bonds, mostly maternal, that refuse oblivion. Riva writes in his article "Death and Immortality in the Works of Marcel Proust" that "Proust refuses to consider physical death as real death, for a person continues to love in the memory of another's consciousness" (469), and goes on to discuss how Proust's work conspicuously points to extension of life through the medium of art. Riva attends to Proust's "absorption with death" (464) in *In Search of Lost Time*, and makes specific that the narrator's death at the end of the novel is not a glorification of death which follows a life of relentless desire, but rather, is enmeshed in the Proustian view of death, the kind

that is welcomed and is the natural result of the final extinction of desire. The difference between the two conceptions is illustrated beautifully by Maraini in Mammucchi's adoration of Proust and his art, which is indeed mimetic, but a catastrophically misguided imitation of Proust's true art: the dogged exposure of the desecration wreaked by desire. The unoriginality, banality, and destructiveness of desire is clearly perceptible in *Colomba*, in fact, it is in many of Maraini's works, especially once its inner workings are so artfully exposed in the character of Mammucchi and his morbid attachment, the *delectatio morbosa* he takes in advance toward his prey, to the desires themselves, and not where they lead, found in Proust's writing.

An example of Mammucchi's impoverished imitation can be detected in his strange home which indeed is *recherche*, in that it stands out as an elaborate contrivance and seems a caricature of a fanciful and illusory past. I quote Mammucchi's cousin who is critical of the man and his character, describing him as "chiuso, segreto, permaloso e pieno di sogni" (closed, secretive, contentious and full of dreams") (302).

Un'orribile villetta floreale, (...). Come gli è venuto in mente di abitare in quella casa non lo so. Con quella torretta sbilenca e tutta rossa. Non ho ragione a chiamarlo stupido? (302)

(A horrible little house in the flowery style, (...). How did he get it in his mind to live in that house I do not know. With that pink lopsided turret. I am not right to call him an idiot?)

Nani is also disquieted by Mammucchi's house as he stops to observe:

Una costosa imitazione, un pasticcio fra gotico e classico, dove tutto allude a una messa in scena storica. Se è vero che le case rivelano chi le abita, questa villetta

preziosa e teatrale racconta una storia di frustranti messe in scena, di ambiziose volgarizzazioni, segreti e crudeltà mai veramente raccontate. (336)

(A costly imitation, a mishmash between gothic and classical, where everything alludes to a historical staging. If it is true that houses reveal who lives in them, this little pretentious and theatrical villa tells a story of disappointing reenactments, of ambitious vulgarizations, of secrets and of cruelty untold.)

Nani's intuitions about the acts that are staged in the house is not only correct, it is informed by the comparison of a skillful reading of Proustian desire with Mammucchi's calumnious reading of Proust, which attends only to the parts, the scenes of desire, rather than the whole which points to the end of destructive desire by and through recognizing one's mimetic impulses. Mammucchi's twisted glorification of Proust revolves around his desire to be authentic in his desires, as he believes, through his reading, that Proust was. Mammucchi reenacts the ignominious imitation of another's desire that Proust dedicated his life's work to exposing and transcending.

The cousin goes on to describe how Mammucchi's dreams take hold of him completely and then fade into nothing when his desire is attracted by something else.

Eppure è un uomo colto, legge molto, conosce tutto della letteratura francese, mi ricordo che sapeva a memoria alcune pagine di *All'ombra delle fanciulle in fiore*, in casa sua tiene appeso un ritratto a matita di Proust, sotto cui ha scritto: "A Cesare da Marcel". Proprio matto! (302)

(And yet he is a cultured man, he reads a lot, he knows all about French literature, I remember that he knew a number of pages of *In the Shadow of Young Girls in*

Flower by memory, in his house he has a portrait of Proust done in pencil hanging, he wrote below: “To Cesare from Marcel”. Completely nuts!)

The passages cited exemplify the restrained tone of Maraini’s textual references to Proust’s work. The allusions to Proust are also used sparingly, and it is not until the end of the novel, when Mammucchi’s journal falls into Nani’s hands that the delusions born of a seduction by Proust’s scenes, which Mammucchi gives himself over to, that the reader sees the whole picture of the story of desire and depravity that has played out in Mammucchi’s abduction and sequestration of Lucia.

Orpheus

Maraini has described Nani’s journey into the world of shadows as comparable to the journey that Orpheus made to the underworld. While Orpheus’ wife has died and gone away, in *La bambina e il sognatore*, it is Nani’s daughter, Martina, who has died. Nani’s wife has left, unable to continue life as it had been lived, with the weight of the tragedy upon the family. This alteration of the story emphasizes the reality of paternal longing, and its conventional repression, which is the outstanding subtext of the novel. The fact that the agony of separation is found in this father-daughter relationship obscures many parallels in the text to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and is, at any rate, unusual as a theme. There is a second narrative in *La bambina e il sognatore* that begs consideration of the resemblance it bears to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, specifically Virgil’s version found in *Georgics*. The character Aristaeus, in Virgil’s adaptation, is effectively the bad omen or the dark cloud that hangs over the couple’s hopes for happiness, personified. Maraini’s alteration of the myth replace the romantic love of newlyweds that is threatened, by the loss of a child, a daughter. It is revealed fairly late in the novel, that

Lucia, the missing girl who appears in Nani's dreams, has been followed by a dark shadow for her entire life, by Mammucchi. He set upon her when she was just a newborn, and has watched, followed and plotted, waiting for his chance to take her (388). The bad omen may have been hidden from view, not explicit, but it was felt by Martina, just as Eurydice felt it. Again Maraini's innovated subtext of paternal longing remains, with Mammucchi, in its catastrophically repressed state.

Events in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice see corollaries in *La bambina e il sognatore*. Nani is a humble primary teacher, but he has an irresistible talent for and love of telling stories. His students become enraptured whenever he begins his spinning of stories and his daughter Martina's closeness and attachment to her father was grounded in the magnetism of his never-ending lyrical compositions. Nani's storytelling is a teaching device. Not only do those who listen to his stories have the opportunity of learning the art of storytelling themselves, their minds are often opened to ideas that they would never have considered otherwise. Orpheus' talent was in playing music and singing. He played the lyre and had the most beautiful voice and it is said that no being could resist the sounds of his songs, not even trees, who would move themselves to be in his presence. Nani and Orpheus both fall in love head over heels with someone, for Nani it is his wife initially, but their daughter, once she is born, is the one he falls head over heels for and his life, from then on, revolves around Martina. Orpheus falls in love with Eurydice, a shy but beautiful girl, at first sight. His love is requited as Eurydice was taken by his lovely voice. Great happiness was relished by each of the duos, and they could not get enough of each other, but it was not to last. At the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice, a great shadow fell, a signal that the end of the celebration had arrived. The diagnosis of leukemia for a young Martina casts a shadow over Nani's spirits, but he is determined not to lose her.

Eurydice was pursued by the shadow of death, accounted for differently in the various versions of the myth. The couple tries to elude the danger, but they are chased and harassed by it. In one version, as the couple ran through the woods, Orpheus felt Eurydice weaken, stumble, and fall. Only when he saw the deathly pallor of her cheeks did he know he would lose her. Eurydice was bitten by a snake and died. Orpheus did not understand the cause, how it came to happen that she met this fate, and he became distraught. Similarly, Martina has an initial recovery from the leukemia after a bone marrow transplant and Nani, masking any intuitions or harbingers of bad fortune, steers Martina back into the world of the living, with an almost excessive vigor (153-4). When the leukemia returns, it is only when she has been tragically reduced and nears the moment of her death that Nani, noting her paleness and fragility, cognitively allows for the possibility that he will lose her. He, like Orpheus, suffers tremendously, as does his wife.

Orpheus, after losing his beloved, was not the same person. His grief is endless. And so he decides to go to the underworld in an attempt to gain entrance and bring Eurydice back with him. He played his lyre and sung at the gates of Hades, and the sorrow in his voice added to the beauty of his music even more. Hades, the god of the underworld, granted him entrance and said that he could take Eurydice with him when he found her, but if he should look back to see her before they had made their return, she would be lost to him forever. Nani himself likens the emergence of his unshakable interest in the case of the missing Lucia, to Orpheus' search for Eurydice. Nani suggest to *il pennuto* that he may be himself searching for his daughter in "il regno dei morti" ("the realm of the dead") (46), and while doing so, he meets other children who might need his help. Nani's search occurs in the world of his subconscious, and his meetings with Lucia occur while he is dreaming. Nani is perplexed by the dreams that he has of Lucia,

experiencing a growing feeling that she must be alive. This is because he has wanted so much to meet Martina in his dreams, but has not found her there alive, but has only memories of her. Later in the novel, it is *il pennuto* who accuses Nani of being just like Orpheus when Nani defends his status as “un cultore della memoria” (“an expert on the memory”) rather than “un becchino della memoria” (“a gravedigger of the memory”) (133), as he perpetually directs his thoughts backwards, into the past. Nani acknowledges the weight of the longstanding edict of “not looking back” in the biblical story of Lot’s wife it is a commandment from God. Nani, however, rejecting what he indicates amounts to a superstition, responds, “Lo so, lo so, se Orfeo non si fosse voltato, non avrebbe perduto Euridice” (I know, I know, if Orpheus hadn’t turned around, he wouldn’t have lost Eurydice”) (133).

In the myth of Orpheus, Hades makes the conditions precise: Orpheus shall not look back upon Eurydice while they are still in the dark; they must emerge into the light, having left the underworld, before he looks at her. All goes well until the very last step he takes as he emerges into the light; he turns to see that she is really there, that she made it. But she was still in fact still in the dark, and she fades back into the underworld. Orpheus is not allowed another attempt and his despair is now total, all hope has been lost, and what is more, he can only blame himself. Nani does not want to repeat this, and his sensibilities keep him from attributing Martina’s disappearance to himself, or to any one thing. He is resigned to the causes for the tragedy remaining unknown, although his mind does make conjectures from time to time.

It is at this point that the stories of Orpheus and Nani split emphatically. Orpheus, finding no consolation in anything and abandoning all receptivity to love, lives in torment, and lies around singing his now very sad songs. He is killed by the same angry women he has scorned, and he doesn’t even have the will to defend himself. He has, in a way, chosen death.

Nani surely suffers as well, but he continues to find meaning in life in helping others. His zest for storytelling does not fade, as he understands that even without another end, like the charming of his beloved, the stories he tells matter to those who hear them and have consequence. His loss will not mean his death. Nani arrives at the position that he is not ready to die, he still has many questions to pursue. Neither does the tragedy in his life spell the end of his love story, and he does not let the loss of his wife bring on disillusionment. Improbable as it seems, he keeps love alive in his heart for and they do reunite at the very end of the novel. Their reunion comes about after she learns in the newspaper of the part that Nani's dreams and intuitions played in finding little Lucia alive. She says "E i sogni profetici? Non sapevo di avere sposato un veggente" ("And the prophetic dreams? I didn't know I had married a psychic") and he responds, "Macché veggente! Sono solo un cretino che non sopporta la solitudine" ("As if I were a psychic! I am just a fool who can't bear my loneliness") (410). Nani has not been consumed by his despair as was the ancient Orpheus, partly because he did not curse fate for his loss, which would amount to a departure from reason in this modern day.

Orpheus went a long way with the gift of music and song that he cultivated, and he was associated through history with mystic rites, a seer or psychic in his own right. The myth, no matter the version, seems to suggest that there are certain dangers associated with and limits to the powers of an untethered fealty and dependence on whimsical (right-hemisphere congruent) propensities. Nani's emissary, the annoying *pennuto*, is the worst of the left hemisphere. Nani is a *sognatore* and does not reject the possibility of numinous understandings. But the dialogues between him and *il pennuto* show that his thoughts are constantly grounded by the left hemisphere's reality, its insistence on categorical analysis, based on what is known, not on what *might be*. Orpheus and Nani are not opposites, but kindred spirits. As an ancient, Orpheus, like

the ancient audience of myth, believed in fate driven by higher powers (gods) who inserted themselves into human events in order to exert their own wills or because of some hubristic human transgression.

Nani, as a modern subject, does not believe that gods can be looked to as the cause for what happens here on Earth. But he is different than most others in that his rejection of supernatural causation does not lead him to dismiss the input of the intuitive mind as profitless. This balanced approach which resists the either/or dominant thought of the modern world, and welcomes what is new and unusual is what moves him to draw close to life. It is when the answers that someone thinks they possessed fail and no more questions are asked that the drive toward death takes hold.

Plato's interventions on Orpheus are worthy of inspection alongside Mcgilchristian contentions about the divided nature of thought and the positions taken by the hemispheres due to their different takes on the world. A look into Plato's treatment of Orpheus illustrates critical developments that Mcgilchrist argues are at the inception of a forceful veering to left-hemisphere congruent patterns in thought. Plato's revisioning of Orpheus is consequential, first because it casts the tragic hero in a negative light, as a coward. His cowardice, which amounted to be unwilling to die in order to be reunited with Eurydice, caused him to make the delusional attempt to extract her from the underworld. Orpheus' punishment for being delusional was to be set upon by further delusion. In Plato's account, the infernal deities presented him with an apparition of Eurydice when he ventured into the underworld, which he took for real. His despair was a product of his faulty perceptions. His refusal to enjoy the company of women after the disillusionment of losing Eurydice ends in his death. Plato's telling of Orpheus' story is truly the version that *il pennuto* puts forth of Nani's story. The self-appointed judge and guide (10-

11), *il pennuto*, continuously attempts to mortify Nani for the sentimentality he harbors for his wife and daughter who have departed, claiming that Nani is a loser because of it. “Lascia perdere” (“Forget about it”) (11) he counsels. The following is typical of the exhortations that *il pennuto* makes that Nani find someone new:

[T]e ne stai lì a sbrogliare le matasse delle riflessioni, invece di imboccare, come tutti, la strada liscia e dritta che si snoda davanti a te; (...) non capisco perché non ti dedichi alla ricerca di una donna da amare, sei ancora giovane, hai appena trentanove anni, sei alto, ben fatto, hai una faccia che piace alle donne, un sorriso irresistibile, non credi che staresti meglio con accanto qualcuno che ti ama, e magari con un nuovo figlio o figlio da amare e accudire, invece di rincorrere le bambine morte. (...) corri indietro alle promesse dei sogni... i sogni ti porteranno alla perdizione. (72-3)

(There you are, attempting to unravel the skein of your reflections, rather than taking the smooth and straight road that is laid out in front of you like everyone else (...) I don't understand why you don't make it your mission to find a woman to love, you are still young, just 39 years old, well put together, you have a face that ladies like, an irresistible smile, don't you think you'd be better off with someone who loved you by your side, and maybe even with a new son or daughter to love and take care of, instead of chasing after dead girls. (...) you pursue the content of your dreams ... dreams will lead to perdition.)

While Nani does not dwell on the possibility of his wife Anita's return, in fact, recognizing how improbable it seems, he does not deny himself, for convenience's sake, the prospect that his love for her is still alive in him. In fact, he feels it very strongly

from time to time and does not repress what he feels. I cite Nani's internal dialogue on the subject: "Qualcosa si è concluso, e tornare indietro mi sembra impossibile. Eppure, mi basta chiudere gli occhi per percepire(la) accanto a me" ("Something came to an end, and to turn go back seems impossible. And yet, all I have to do is close my eyes feel her near me") (185). Nani's love for Martina will not be forgotten either and he resolves that there is no need for it to be. Nani's impromptu memories of certain moments bring Martina into his present, and conversations are recalled as if they are happening anew (232). At other times, Nani's internal dialogues feature exchanges between him and Martina in which they discuss things that might continue to disquiet both of them, especially regarding the cause of her unwanted departure (32).

Plato's views on the merit and value of right-hemisphere endowments are widely dispersed in his *Republic*. Among other arts, he takes aim at music in a way that truly echoes the disdain he develops for the figure of Orpheus in his version of the story.

Plato's proscriptions on music, like so much else about his *Republic*, remind one of a Soviet-style totalitarian state. There is no need of a wide harmonic range; most rhythms and modes are outlawed; flutes, harps and 'harpsichords' are banned, as are all 'dirges and laments'; and there will be need only of two kinds of music, the kind that encourages civic orderliness, and the kind that sternly encourages us to war. All has been reduced to utility in the service of the will to power. (Mcgil. 2, 287-88)

The kind of truth that comes from the story of Orpheus and other myths, and from music is "flattened, even deadened" by the left hemisphere (Mcgil. 2, 288). With Plato, the myth changes from being a statement of a primeval (psychological) reality, to actions and

thoughts that beg discreditation. Plato's refusal to be with Orpheus and his pain is akin to the entreaties Nani's mother makes when he visits her after many long years, and her voice, in turn, is implicitly associated to that of *il pennuto*.

«Sei invecchiato Nano mio, e non hai combinato niente di buono.» La voce mi raggiunge come una frusta e mi sento precipitare nel pozzo dove sono sempre piombato quando mi sgridava da bambino e poi da ragazzo. «Perché sei separato da quella bravissima donna che era tua moglie? Perché non avete voluto fare un altro figlio (...)?» (170)

(“You have aged, Nani my son, and you haven't accomplished anything.” The voice reaches me like a whip, and I feel myself plummet into the pit where I always fell when chided me as a baby and then as a boy. “Why did you and that nice woman who was your wife separate? Why didn't you want to have another child (...)?”)

As an avid reader, Nani's memory is brimming with a tempest of ideas he has encountered in texts that have been very influential for him. In response to the left-hemisphere congruent ideas that deny the worth and merit of right-hemisphere sensibilities, especially in regard to the emotions, intuition, and imagination that propel the journey that Nani/Orpheus make, Nani recalls the important questions in Calderón's *La vida es sueño*: “Dove sta il vero fra tanti specchi che trasformano e deformano le cose intorno a noi?” (“Where can one find what is true between the many mirrors that transform and deform the things around us?”) (201). Nani recalls the impression that the words spoken by Segismundo had on him when he first read them:

Quanto mi colpiva quel passare dalle buie e poverissime stanze della prigione alla magnifica vita della corte reale! Quale era la vera vita, se «ora che dormo e sono qui dentro il sogno, credo di sognare di essere sveglio?» E cos'è più vivo e vero: il delirio, l'illusione, l'ombra, la finzione o ciò che chiamiamo la realtà? Poiché, come sussurravo tra me, entrando con i piedi nudi nelle orme di Sigismondo: «Il bene più grande e piccolo, e tutta la vita e sogno e i sogni sono sogno». (201)

(How it moved me, that passage from the dark and wretched rooms of the prison to the magnificent royal court! Which was the true life, if “now that I am sleeping, I am inside the dream, I believe I am dreaming that I am awake?” And what is more alive and more true: delusion, illusion, the obscure and fictitious, or that which is called reality? Inasmuch as, I whispered within myself as I stepped with barefoot into the steps of Segismondo: “The greatest good is but small, and life is a dream, and dreams themselves are a dream.”)

Nani intuits that it is not his dreams, his longings, that will lead him to perdition, but it is rather a dualistic rigidity in thinking that sustains false separations and limits perspective that will do harm.

Orion

A particular version of the myth of Orion's birth is retold in the novel to the students of Nani's class. It features a mortal, Ireio (Hyrieus), a poor old peasant who offers shelter to three pilgrims one stormy night. To show them honor, he killed his only sheep and cooked it for their dinner. The next morning the pilgrims, who were in fact the gods Zeus, Poseidon and Hermes in disguise, asked the old man what thing he wanted most in the world, to which he replied, a son,

as his wife had died, and he was alone. The three pilgrims then took the sheepskin and each of them urinated on it. They told the old man to bury it and wait. After nine months, the earth opened and the old man hugged his baby son in his arms, and named him Orion, “dato che era nato dell’orina” (“given that he was born from urine”) (175), Nani explains to his students. The similar story of Shen Te from Brecht’s play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, is told alongside the myth of Orion’s birth, certainly to contrast the content. The gods, again in the garb of weary travelers show up at the door of a poor woman of generous spirit who happens to subsist by working as a prostitute. She feeds them and offers them her own bed to sleep in, and when asked in the morning what she desires most in the world, she says she would like her own tobacco shop. Shen Te has asked for the means to make a living, to survive, without having to sell her body.

While there is the endearing honesty about the longing for paternity in the myth of Orion’s birth, there is also an elision of women and their sacred status of generators of life, a pattern of concern for Maraini which we have seen with disappearance of female gods like Kali, and in the repudiation of rights of the mother as seen in the *Oresteia*. In the more modern story of Shen Te, the gods have been searching far and wide for good people but have found few, save this kind girl. The selling of bodies is at issue in both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*. In *Colomba*, Zà’s missing granddaughter is incapacitated due to drug use and a boyfriend doubles as *sfruttatore* (pimp), selling her body from a trailer in the woods. An adumbration of the case of Colomba’s confinement and exploitation is found in the conventions expressed throughout generations in the novel about the legitimacy of prostitution and the myths about those whose bodies become an object of exchange. In *La bambina e il sognatore* the trafficking of children is

omnipresent, but is also neglected and ignored by most people of the town, who prefer to remain uninformed.

Storytelling

Less familiar fables, fairy tales and legends are recounted in *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore*, sometimes faithful to the original, but sometimes altered with forethought by the storyteller so that the meaning derived from them, depending on the audience, is appropriate and useful. For example, The Brothers' Grimm fairy tale "The Three Languages," is recounted by Nani to the students of his class in *La bambina e il sognatore*. The children relish the tale, but as he narrates, Nani becomes aware that the original version will not supply the children with the insights they are most in need. About half way through the tale the children of the class christen the protagonist, heretofore called *il figlio* (the son) or *il giovanotto* (the young man), with a new name, Tamarindo, and the birth of a new adventure is underway. Rather than being perpetually rewarded in worldly ways for his aptitude of speaking the language of animals as it happens in the original version, Tamarindo risks his life to save all of those who do not see and do not hear in the way that he does, and the tale takes on a decidedly spiritual message (94-109).

This seemingly trivial reconstruction of a popular story and its conventional themes is evocative of the way that Maraini recontextualizes surface level understandings of many of the texts that she brings up in the novels. Nani also is teaching the children how to look for deeper messages and how to save themselves from the being poor interpreters, something, as we have seen, can bring one to dark and destructive places.

Tamarindo becomes a saintly figure, not because of his extraordinary gift, but because of how he dedicates the attributes that he has to attending with care to others, and to the world. Tamarindo, in this way, resembles Nani, who has a gift of the imagination. Nani does not hold that his dreaming and intuition should be esteemed outside of the possibility that the connections they generate might be beneficial to others, be out to good use.

Archetypes: *il sognatore* and *il ragno*

Jungian archetypes have a vital role in Nani's experience and what comes into his awareness throughout the journey he makes to find the missing Lucia. The presence of the archetypes, but also the nuanced understandings that they inculcate in the novel, are also vital for a model reader's interpretation of the model author's message. Maraini, like Mcgilchrist, has a penetrating view of the nature of archetypes, which a common understanding of the archetype can neglect. Generally, archetypes are understood to be inherited forms of knowledge, shared by a collective unconscious, the psyche's version of instinct, which play a role in behavior and personality, symbolizing human motivations. Jung believed that while all kinds of archetypes operate within an individual, we are each generally dominated by one specific archetype. The renowned psychoanalyst outlined a variety of such archetypes but thought there to be no limit to the number that may exist. The insight gained in Mcgilchrist's and Maraini's wielding of archetypal imagery constitutes a recognition of the difference between dualistic thought and the understanding that opposing forces can be and *are* united in an individual entity, and most definitely in the archetype. Mcgilchrist makes this explanation which highlights the

importance of seeing that an archetype is not determinative, but will take manifold forms, an understating which belonged to the pre-Socratic philosophies which he extols.

The most familiar point of commonality in pre-Socratic philosophy is an attempt to reconcile a sense of apparent unity of the phenomenal world with its obvious diversity. This suggested that there should be some common originary principle, or *arché* from which all things came: the multiplicity of appearances, phenomena, being a reflection of the mutability of the primary substance, which underlies everything and could metamorphose between different states. This project could, (in my view, falsely) be seen as monistic: I would see it, not as a reduction of the many to the one, but as a way accounting for division within unity, while at the same time respecting the reality of both. (267)

McGilchrist states that the pre-Socratic philosophy also yielded insights “into the necessary, both productive and destructive, nature of coming together of opposites; (...) into the nature of the *arche* as process, rather than thing – all in my view, insights into the right-hemisphere world (...)” (268). Jung himself stressed the dual nature of the archetype, a figure that lived in the psyche and in the world at large and its “numinosity” (*Man and his Symbols*, 90) or ultimate intangibility.

Il sognatore is one expression of the manifold ways that the Jungian archetype of “The Creator/Artist” manifests, along with the artist, the inventor, the musician and the writer. Mammucchi and Nani’s dispositions in the novel are two manifestations of the many ways that this archetype might find expression. If we look at how each of their core desires and goals are colored by their weaknesses and talents, through observation of their inner thoughts in combination with their actions, we can see the strategies that each

of the dreamers employ in life for what they are: more or less productive or destructive responses to their perceived ability to carry out their visions, their deepest drives.

The archetype of *il ragno* (the spider) is elaborated in *La bambina e il sognatore*, in my view, as an aggregate of many cultural and psychical qualities that have connection or have been attributed to the creature throughout history. The spider is a creative genius who seamlessly weaves the masterpiece of connection, the web. The spider is also the destroyer of unsuspecting life, a patient predator who looms unseen and makes a macabre use of the invisible web to capture its hapless victim. Spiders then are an outstanding symbol for the dual natures of all things, and the necessary balance that sustains existence between creation and destruction, life and death. Spiders show up in their archetypal garb to Nani throughout the novel, providing him with insights into the webs of connections that he senses, encouraging his use of intuitive capacities in order to continue to discover more connections, to remind him that there are predatory actors and actions, and to exercise caution to not be manipulated, and to remind him of the dual natures of each person, including his own.

If all archetypes are remembered to be mutable and to be in process rather than fixed, the archetype of Creator and that of the spider seem to be strongly associated with one another. While the drives of the Creator are specified in Jung's work, the spider's drives are described and specified in *La bambina e il sognatore*. If the Creator's primary goal is to "realize a vision," his task to "create culture, express his own vision," his core desire to "create things of enduring value," and his talents are "creativity and imagination," his downfall is either hubris—arrogance regarding his creative superiority, or a sense that he does not have the creative talent to fulfill his desires. Thus the

Creator's greatest fear is mediocrity and his weakness perfectionism. The strategy that the Creator uses is the development of his "artistic control and skill." The creator's motto has been posed as "if you can imagine it, it can be done" which is perfectly befitting of *il sognatore* (the dreamer) and the *lieto fine* (happy ending) of *La bambina e il sognatore*.

Nani and Mammucchi are both *sognatori* (dreamers), a subcategory of the archetype of Creator. But Nani is also a teacher and an innovator of stories. Nani shares the propensities and the weaknesses that Mammucchi faces, but is proactive rather than reactive in confronting all that is within him. Nani also embraces his feminine side, he has learned how to attend to others with *accudimento* (caring presence), and has learned to do so through his embrace of paternal longing. Mammucchi, on the other hand, is reactive. He uses cold logic over intuition in his attempt to carry out a vision that we come to know is not his own, but a poor reenactment of the creative vision of another, namely Proust. Rather than attending to all that is present within himself and others, Mammucchi is plagued by a neurosis, a fear of mediocrity which keeps him from developing creative skills of any kind. Mammucchi's cousin informs Nani about his past and of his impressions of why Nani is reclusive and has such an unfriendly countenance.

Fin da piccolo è sempre stato così: chiuso, segreto, permaloso, e pieno di sogni.

Voleva fare il pianista si è fatto fermare dai crampi alle dita. (...). Ha venduto il pianoforte. Poi voleva fare il giornalista, e al primo articolo che ha scritto, lo hanno cacciato dal giornale perché aveva insultato non so chi. (301-2)

(Since he was little he has always been like this: closed, secretive, contentious, and full of dreams. He wanted to be a pianist but he quit because of cramps in his

fingers. (...). He sold the piano. Then he wanted to be a journalist, and in the first article they fired him because he had insulted who knows who.)

He becomes a recluse, avoiding contact with others which might remind him of his repressed perception of his deficits (284-6). In his solitude, Mammucchi's thought becomes solipsistic, obsessive. Virulent desires to realize a vision take hold of him, a vision not inspired by imagination, but by a dearth of imagination, an unexceptional desire for the possession of a little girl, for whom he will be Master, in his wielding of control over her and her desires.

Mrs. Treggiani is *una sarta* (a seamstress). She sews constantly, producing wedding gown after wedding gown, while sitting alone at home (239-40). She began work on a wedding gown for Lucia when the child was very young, which is symbolic of a belief on her part that a woman cannot extricate herself from the marriage as duty, even when there is no evidence that a happy union based on love and respect will be what awaits her. Mrs. Treggiani herself suffers an abusive marriage. She does not speak out but makes a martyr of herself. In her weaving of the wedding gown for Lucia, she too perhaps resembles the archetypal 'spider-like'. She, giver of life to Lucia, envisions a future of bondage for her: she will be bound up in white threads, and as pretty as they might seem, Lucia will feel unable to extricate herself from the bonds, her mother's love that demands self-abnegation for the woman. Lucia, then, is held in bondage by Mammucchi in his tower, but also, in another way, she felt the harsh restrictiveness of a future that denied her an expression of her own vision, a chance to explore her own desire. Nani has a dream in which Lucia appears wrapped up like a mummy:

[L]'ho sognata di nuovo la piccola Lucia. Era fasciata da capo a piedi e pareva addormentata. Le dicevo: «Sei viva?». Pensavo fra me a me che sembrava una larva e che forse da quella larva sarebbe uscita una farfalla che sarebbe volata via. Ma non c'erano finestre in quello strano luogo dove stava la bambina. Io le dicevo: «Vuoi che ti tolga queste fasce?» (...). Una volta si usava fasciare i neonati. Mi sono sempre chiesto perché li fasciavano come mummie questi poveri neonati. Una abitudine alla costrizione che doveva segnare il lattante fin dalla nascita? (...). Bisogna sciogliere quelle bende che la tengono immobilizzata, mi dicevo e mi accingevo a farlo, ma appena prendevo in mano quella che mi sembrava una cima, mi accorgevo che non erano fasce bensì grumi di polvere rossiccia che squamavano e frullavano nell'aria. (272)

(I dreamed again of the little Lucia. She was bound from head to toe, and she appeared to be sleeping. I said to her "Are you alive?" I thought to myself that she seemed like a larva and that maybe from that larva a butterfly would emerge and would fly away. But there were no windows in that strange place where Lucia was. I said to her "Do you want me to take off these bands?" (...). At one time they used to swaddle newborns. I had always asked myself why they wrapped up these poor babies like mummies. To make them grow used to be constricted, something they needed to be imprinted with from the time of birth? (...). These bands that have her immobilized must be removed, I said to myself and I got ready to begin, but as soon as I took what seemed like an edge in my hand, I realized that they were not bands but rather clumps of reddish dust that peeled off and swirled in the air.)

The brief dream sees Lucia immobilized and confined. But she seems to have wrapped up for some time, as indicated by the dust, and Nani intuits that it is perhaps, from the time of her birth. Lucia's parents, specifically her mother, are implicated in her bondage in Nani's reflection on the use and purpose of swaddling newborns. The instinct to protect one's child can also smother them, preventing them from learning life's lessons on their own and making their own way in the world. By projecting one's own experience of life and the neuroses that have taken hold onto what the child will necessarily encounter is oppressive. Death lurks in the imagery of the mummy, an image that Nani uses to describe the spider's prey after it has been all wrapped up and waits to die. But there is hope. Nani wonders if she may not come out of the cocoon, but sees that she cannot fly away because she is penned in.

The parasite as subsidiary imagery to the spider as predator is entertained by Nani in the novel. He wonders as he observes a tree outside of his kitchen window that is being laid to waste by *un punteruolo rosso* (a red palm weevil) and tries to reason with the logic of the parasite.

Strano: un parassita non dovrebbe desiderare che il corpo di cui si nutre prosperi e rinnovi? (...). [È] come se un neonato uccidesse la madre che gli dà il latte (...) non sarebbe logico che tu lasciassi a quel povero albero un poco di linfa per continuare a crescere e produrre il midollo di cui sei ghiotto? E rifletto che qualcosa di molto simile a un punteruolo rosso si era insediato nelle ossa di mia figlia Martina e, come questo stupido parassita della palma, si era divorato tutta la sua riserva di cibo, uccidendo la fonte del suo nutrimento. (324)

(Strange: shouldn't a parasite wish for the body on which it nourishes itself to prosper and renew? (...). It is as a newborn who would kill its mother who provides milk (...) wouldn't it be logical for you to leave that poor tree a little bit of sap so it could continue to grow and produce the marrow which you are so greedy for? And I reflect that something very similar to the red weevil took up residence in the bones of my daughter Martina and, like this stupid parasite of the palm tree, devoured its entire reserve of food, killing the source of its nourishment.)

In the following pages Nani compares the logic of the parasite to that of those who exploit children and then kill them, just because they can, even though the living bodies of the children bring them money (330). The logic of the parasite and the logic of spider as predator are mobilized in the novel and serve to heighten awareness of archetypal motivations that dwell in the unconscious. The recognition and musing over such motivations and reasoning comes to Nani's aid in understanding them, foremost for Mammucchi's actions, but also the motivations that lie, perhaps dormant, in each of us. By confronting the parasite and the spider directly, without denying them out of existence in oneself, Nani comes to know his "shadow" in the Jungian sense. (*Man and his Symbols*, 83). Nani converses with the parasite, and the weevil tells him "io seguo la mia natura, (...) non mi importa della logica, ma del mio destino che è quello di mangiare e poi morire." ("I follow my nature, (...) to me, logic doesn't matter, just my destiny matters, which is to eat and then to die"), and Nani responds, "Logica del cazzo!" ("Terrible logic!") (324). It is worth noting that Nani refers to *il pennuto*'s habit of being parasitic of Nani in some ways, for example, his finding an immediate "use value"

(Mcgilchrist) for Nani's learnedness, to make himself feel superior. He challenges Nani to contests of literary trivia, all the while, denying the importance of the messages that the texts themselves communicate with his accusations against Nani.

Sei triste come maestro e poi sogni troppo. Che hai da dire sui miei sogni?

Niente, dico solo che ti affidi eccessivamente a quelle nebulose del pensiero che sono i sogni e non va bene. Nebulose del pensiero ma molto azzeccate. «Nel sogno sei un re, nella veglia sei nessuno»: sai chi l'ha detto? Shakespeare, che se ne intendeva di sogni. «Ora io non so dirti se allora era un uomo che sognava di essere farfalla o se sono una farfalla che sogna di essere un uomo»: di chi sono queste parole? Di un grande filosofo cinese del 300 avanti Cristo. (...). In fatto di memoria ce la giochiamo. Si direbbe che il pennuto legga più di me. Oppure legge attraverso di me, dentro di me, utilizzando la mia memoria come se fosse sua, il parassita. (42)

(You are a sad teacher, and then you dream too much. What do you have to say about my dreams? Nothing, I say only that you trust too much in those clouds of thoughts that are dreams and it is not good. Clouds of thoughts that are spot on. "In dreams you are a king, when you are awake you are nobody": do you know who said it? Shakespeare, who understood about dreams. "Now I don't know if I should tell you that I was a man who dreamed that I was a butterfly or if I am a butterfly that dreams that he is a man": whose words are these? They are from a great philosopher from the third century before Christ. (...). We play contests of memory with one another. What might say that *il pennuto* reads more than me.

Or rather he reads through me, inside of me, using my memory as if it was his, the parasite.)

It is the capacity for imagination that allows the human to guess at the motivations of creatures and figures who, as archetypes, represent extant thought and behavior patterns. It is also the imagination combined with logic that allows discernment of poor logic. The parasite stands for logic that leads to death for others and for itself, a feeble and unfortunate rationale for the behavior is that the parasite, in the archetypal sense, merely follows its instinct. The problem is that in so doing, the archetypal parasite renounces its humanity and the capacity to reason, does not choose to recognize that it can reason and choose freely. The parasite relates then to the left hemisphere's usurpation of the right hemisphere's position as master.

Synchronicities

There is a suggestiveness of Carl Jung's principle of synchronicity throughout *La bambina e il sognatore*. Synchronicities are meaningful coincidences that connect internal worlds with events in the external world that the person who experiences the concurrence could not have possibly brought about. The experience of synchronicity is present in *Colomba*, it is in fact the event that shifts the internal author's psychic state, altering her disposition toward Zà and her story from dismissal to caring attention. In both novels, the principle of synchronicity is confronted directly by the narrator/protagonist in assessing unexplainable coincidence, and both favor an unsuperstitious attitude in their awareness, forgoing fantastic theories about how these coincidences could have come to be. Both Nani and *la donna dai capelli corti* are

nonplused by the coincidences that carry so much personal meaning, but in Jungian fashion, neither attempts to qualify the experience with causal explanation. Nani faces a disconcerting synchronicity at the outset of *La bambina e il sognatore*. His dream featuring Lucia who disappears into a fog coincides with events that were to happen hours after he dreamed them. For those who do not accept the non-causality of the convergence of the dream and Lucia's disappearance, either speculation that Nani's ability to prophesize makes him different and potentially dangerous arises, or it is suspected that Nani must be involved somehow with Lucia's disappearance. The urgency of the case of the missing Lucia and the dreams that Nani continue to have about the little girl leave little room for him as narrator/protagonist to assess the principle of synchronicity initially. But as the days go by, the figure of *il ragno* (the spider) emerges as a figure around which a complex of synchronistic connections revolves. Nani comes to address a conception of synchronistic events through the presence of *il ragno* that looms physically, and in Nani's consciousness, in particular kinds of experiences he has throughout the novel and the search for Lucia.

The spider's predatory tactics are infamous, and the spider is of course the creator of the web, a conceptual figure that reminds us of the intersection and connections from which there are no circumventions or extrications. I quote from *The Neurobiology of the Gods*,

The spider's life of weaving and killing, creating and destroying, is an allegory of the opposing forces on which the existence of the cosmos depends...[it] is a creature of fate, weaving the thread of destiny on which it hangs. It is also sinister,

a dangerous, mindless beast of prey, sometimes an object of fear, in many instances amounting to frank phobia, which is probably phylogenetically induced. The spider also carries the symbolic meanings of creativity, aggressiveness, and convergence on a central point; also the moon is depicted as a giant spider in many myths, perhaps reflecting on qualities of rhythmicity and life/death symbolism. (73-4)

Nani first notices the looming presence of the spider as he listens intently to the radio on the morning after his dream to hear anything more that might be said about the disappearance of Lucia. From his bathtub where he has gone to try to relax his nerves:

Me ne sto immobile a guardare il soffitto su cui è disegnato un enorme ragno. Chi abbia disegnato quel ragno non lo so. Ha qualcosa di sinistro ma anche di ingenuo e infantile. Piegano il capo da una parte e osservandolo di sbieco, fa pensare a un polipo. Se invece lo scruto da un altro angolo, assomiglia a un millepiedi: una dozzina di zampine nere e pelose che, nella foschia del vapore, sembrano muoversi lentamente. (17)

(I lie there in stillness looking at the ceiling where there is a design of an enormous spider. I have no idea who designed that spider. It has something sinister but also naïve and infantile about it. Leaning your head to one side and observing it sideways, it reminds you of an octopus. If instead I look at it from another angle, it resembles a millipede: a dozen or so dark hairy paws that, in the mist of the steam, seem to be moving slowly.)

Nani goes on to recall that he first noticed *il ragno* on the ceiling when he submerged his weary body after an argument in which he had said things he never should have said to

his wife years ago, thinking at first that the spider he saw was “il prodotto della mia fantasia mortificata” (“the product of my mortified fantasy”) (18). Nani then recalls, from the bathtub, how he ended up on the topic of spiders with his students in class, and in sharing this memory admits that he often tends to “uscire del seminato” (“veer off topic”) (18) in class:

Quel giorno ricordo che spiegavo cosa fosse la Via Lattea, e osservando la ragnatela di una costellazione mi sono messo a raccontare delle tecniche di predazione dell’aracnide. La ragnatela è fatta così bene, di un materiale tanto vischioso ed elastico, ma anche trasparente, dicevo ai miei studenti bambini, che molte prede non la vedono, vi rimangono impigliati senza saperlo. Il ragno non appare subito. Lascia che la preda scarichi le sue energie nel tentativo di liberarsi. Poi, con lenta e sistematica sicurezza, fascia il corpo del disgraziato incappato nella sua rete con strati e strati di saliva, in modo da trasformarlo in una mummietta. Infine, quando la saliva si è fatta dura e secca, e il corpo è morto, ma ancora caldo, lo divora. (18)

(That day I recall that I was explaining what the Milky Way was, and looking at the web of a constellation, I began to tell of the predatory techniques that the arachnid uses. The web is made so well from a material so sticky and durable, but also transparent, I told my young students, that many creatures of prey don’t see the threads, and get ensnared in them without even knowing it. The spider doesn’t appear right away. It allows the prey to drain its energy trying to free itself. Then with slow and systematic resoluteness, it wraps up the body of the poor wretch caught in its web with layers and layers of saliva, transforming it into

a little mummy. After that, when the saliva has become hard and dry, and the body is dead but still warm, [the spider] eats it.)

Nani's recollection of the description he made in class of the spider's predation seems superfluous, irrelevant, even invites the reader to skim and move on at this early stage in the novel. However, the tactics that Nani describe, when considered alongside what the reader finds out later happened to Lucia, what Nani says in class transforms into a penetrating archetypal device in making sense of Mammucchi's actions. The extent of his premeditation is shocking. The years that he spent planning and preparing specifically for Lucia's entrapment halfway creates the impression that her stalking and eventual abduction was related to fate. Nani's subsequent dreams about Lucia, which all give him the impression that she is alive, confined somewhere, feature various aspects of his descriptive account of how exactly the spider operates.

The figure of *il ragno* becomes implicated in a variety of synchronicities as well as being symbolic of the web of connection to which synchronicities awaken our curiosity. Nearly a year after Lucia's disappearance, Nani first bumps into Lucia's mother at the church of Santa Lucia where the bereaved had gone to pray and he invites her to have a word with him outside so that he might tell her about the dreams he has had in which her daughter appears. She is hesitant, but she agrees:

Ci sediamo al tavolino di un bar (...) che si chiama Il Ragno e penso alle coincidenze che costellano la mia vita. Sul menù infatti è disegnato un enorme ragno azzurrino. Tratteggiato in maniera infantile e approssimativa, assomiglia a quello del mio bagno. Solo che questo è azzurro e dovrebbe comunicare un senso di allegria. (66)

(We sit down at a little table at a bar (...) called The Spider and I think of the coincidences with which my life is sprinkled. On the menu there is in fact a design of an enormous bluish spider. Sketched in a childlike way, roughly outlined, it resembles the one in my bathroom. Only this one is blue and it is supposed to communicate a sense of cheerfulness.)

Nani tells Mrs. Treggiani that he believes that Lucia is still alive and that the search for her child should not be halted. He believes that her diffidence regarding his interest in the case has been conquered once he talks about his daughter Martina and how he lost her to leukemia. But he has not yet told her about the dreams that he has had in which Lucia appears. Nani takes courage and starts, “Vede, io sono ossessionato dalle coincidenze” (“You see, I am obsessed with coincidences”) (67), and he goes on to relate the extreme coincidence of the dream that he had of Lucia’s disappearance as well as the coincidence of setting off to familiarize himself with Lucia’s house, her church, and the layout of the streets she had traversed on the morning of her disappearance and winding up meeting Mrs. Treggiani herself as they both sat in silent contemplation beneath the famous painting of “*Santa Lucia dagli occhi cavi*” (“Saint Lucia with hollow eyes”) (64). The theme of the painting parallels his most recent dream. Nani’s conversation with Mrs. Treggiani ends after she probes him with some questions about his interest in the case of her missing daughter, and she indicates her hopefulness at his devotion to finding Lucia, telling him “Magari ci fosse qualcuno che potesse aiutarmi a ritrovare mia figlia! Viva o morta, voglio sapere dov’è.” (“If only someone could help me find my daughter! Dead or alive, I want to know where she is”) and he sees her smile, and it is “un sorriso fiducioso” (“a trusting smile”) (69). Nani will soon find out that the suspension of doubt did not last

for Mrs. Treggiani. The looming figure of the spider and its predation apparently colored her recollection of their conversation, and she does not relinquish questioning “se non c’è sotto un trucco” (“if underneath, there isn’t a trick”) (67), going to the police and making a report of her conversation with Nani.

Nani comes into contact with a variety of others whom he hopes can shed light on Lucia and her disappearance, and on several occasions, the meetings take place at bar Ragno. I argue that each time that a meeting at bar Ragno takes place, the different aspects of what the archetype of the spider can represent are mobilized.

On a particular occasion, Nani arranges to meet a Muslim doctor from Nigeria at bar Ragno, a friend of a friend whom he hopes can help him bring some insight into the interpretation of his recent dream which featured Lucia as a child suicide bomber, an image that reproduces content that comes from speculation of Islamic terrorism’s reach into Italy and even into the town of S. Nani seeks Mohamed’s opinion on whether or not Lucia could have been abducted by Muslim terrorists in order to use her in carrying out a suicide bombing, as his dream depicted. Mohamed Adjani gives his own decisive views on the violence occurring in the Muslim world, and harshly criticizes the view from Europe as “[n]arcissismo storico che ben conosciamo” (“familiar historic narcissism”), remarking the “voi non c’entrate per niente, salvo per dare risalto alle notizie di cronaca di cui siete ghiotti e sapete diffondere molto bene” (“other than to give a spotlight to the news cycle for which you are so avid, and that you know how to disseminate so well”) (224). Nani’s impressions of this reproach are registered:

[Mohamed] ha uno sguardo severo e mobile. Tende a farmi sentire in colpa e ci riesce benissimo, quasi più del mio pennuto. Eppure la sua voce è morbida e senza spigoli. Lo ascolto con interesse. (224)

(He has a gaze that is shifting and severe. He tends to make me feel guilty and he manages to do so very well, perhaps even more so than my feathered-friend. And yet his voice is soft and without a sharp edge. I listen to him with interest.)

Nani's conversation with Mohamed broaches many of the topics that have defined the notion of a clash of civilizations between the West and the East. Mohamed criticizes the inability of Europeans to understand the idea of submission upon which his religion is founded, a notion that has implicit connection to the concept of martyrdom which Nani has come to discuss, above all, because of their belief in individual liberty. In fact, Mohamed balks at the notion of individual liberty by proposing the fragility of humankind, and he sustains that only a regimented discipline of thought can save man and civilization. The following statement is an example of the astute yet shifty argumentation that Mohamed makes, which can render defenseless a listener who finds themselves caught in its web.

Io sono contrario all'idea che il fine giustifichi i mezzi. Non l'ho mai pensato e credo che neanche il nostro profeta lo ritenesse giusto. Ma la tentazione di imporre con la forza un'idea è seducente, e se si vuole veramente andare a fondo in quest'idea, si finisce con l'accettare il concetto, come dice lei, che il fine giustifichi i mezzi. E fra i mezzi c'è anche la pretesa di imbottire di tritolo il corpo di una bambina e mandarla al macello. Se è fatto in nome di Dio, perché no? dicono i fanatici. (226)

(I am opposed to the idea that the end justifies the means. I have never thought it did and I believe that our prophet never considered the idea justifiable. But the temptation to impose an idea by force is seductive, and if one wishes to truly go all the way with this idea, one ends by accepting the concept that the end justifies the means. And among the means there is also arrogation of loading the body of a little girl up with explosives and sending her to slaughter. If it is done in the name of God, why not? say the fanatics.)

Moments later, Mohamed claims that *voi* (all of you Westerners/Christians) have “una visione sacra del corpo umano, (“a vision of the human body as sacred”) (227) and then points to the hypocrisy of the West which continuously transmits and enjoys all that is obscene and violent in their media production and consumption. Mohamed is able and ready to see the incongruities, the contrasts of the West, as a testament to the duplicitousness of Westerners, a sign of their hypocrisy, of their fundamental errancy. He is nevertheless able to represent, and accurately, the oppositional tendencies in thought and act in the contemporary Islamic world as a division between moderates who he sustains are in fact more true to their religion than the others, the radicals, who he sees as perverting the foundations of Islamic culture, no less than through imitation of the West’s historical malefaction.

At certain points in their conversation Nani interjects with the suggestion that Mohamed himself may be a bit divided: “A me sembra che lei sia un po’ in bilico” (“To me it seems that you might be caught between two positions”) (229) as well as challenging that “Questo “voi” mi sembra un poco generico. Le cose sono più complicate.” (“This “you all” seems a little generic. Things are a bit more complicated”)

(228). Nani's responses to the conversation are paradoxical, for one, because the argumentation he has listened to with openness has been experienced by both hemispheres of his mind. As the conversation with Mohamed draws to a close, Nani reflects.

Lo guardo mentre parla e non posso fare a meno di pensare che questo medico intelligente e preparato si trovi sull'orlo di quel baratro che denuncia. Condanna le violenze ma ragiona con violenza. Eppure mi viene da abbracciarlo, perché è una persona coscienziosa, che prende sul serio il suo lavoro, le sue idee e non ha paura di confrontarsi col mondo. (229-230)

(I look at him as he talks, and I can't help but think that this prepared and intelligent doctor finds himself on the brink of enacting that which he denounces. He condemns violence but reasons with violence. And yet, I feel like hugging him, because he is a person of conscience, who takes his work and his ideas seriously, and is not afraid to discuss them with the world.)

Just as the archetype of *il ragno* affected Mrs. Treggiani's impression of her conversation with Nani at bar Ragno, and sees the revisitation of the event change her trust to suspicion, Nani leaves his meeting with Mohamed somewhat convinced that he should accept the advice that he should give up his search for Lucia. But just after the meeting, he dreams again of Lucia, she is just there, silent, unresponsive and looks out of a window where she can see and smell the beauty of the springtime flowers (234). Lucia takes on the persona of Santa Lucia the Christian martyr in the dream, and holds out a plate with two eyes on it. Nani understands that she implores him to take them into his mouth and he swallows them whole, and then awakes. Nani turns to the newspaper where

he reads the news of Elena Lievi's death in Cambodia and reads the commentary on "barbarie" ("barbarity") and "guerra fra civiltà" ("war between civilization") (236), and feels compelled to pay a visit to Lucia's mother to discuss the news and sort out any possible connection to Lucia's disappearance. He then heads to the church of Santa Lucia where he learns the story of Saint Lucia's life and martyrdom.

Another meeting that takes place at bar Ragno is between Nani and the principal of the school where he teaches, by whom he was seduced into sharing a night of love making. He was taken by surprise at the part of himself who was easily persuaded to have this tryst, but has thought better of it, as his deeper longings point him in another direction. Rosa, the principal, has other ideas and has not understood Nani's continued love for his wife and his hope to return to her as a barrier to their physical relationship, a resoluteness to not share sexual pleasure with her in the meantime. For the first time at this meeting, Rosa and Nani discuss their impressions of Mammucchi, a man whom the principal has seen around the neighborhood, and the man that has provoked Nani's suspicion. Rosa retains that he is unremarkable, "un uomo qualsiasi" ("an ordinary man") who is surely harmless, and that Nani is "troppo curioso e troppo sospettoso" ("too curious and too suspicious") even though they both indicate the same impression that he gives them of "un corvo (...) cercando vermi da beccare" ("a crow (...) looking for worms to peck at") (296). Rosa gives no importance to the images that Mammucchi has stirred up in them both and he is critical not only of the web of connection that Nani recognizes through archetypal imagery but also, pointedly, at his continued interest in the case of Lucia. Rosa takes offense at a comment Nani makes, that perhaps she and Mammucchi would make a good pair, and she storms off: "Si allontana sui tacchi alti, e

mi sento liberato” (297), Nani reports. *Il pennuto* is irked by Nani’s actions and tells him how he could have continued to enjoy an affair with her if her had not insulted her.

Nani’s answer connects Rosa’s attitude regarding the conflict between unreflective sexual freedom and the exploitation of those whose rights and freedoms, due to age, country of origin or economic situation, are limited or nonexistent. A subplot in the novel is Nani’s involvement in the case of Fatima, a girl taken by her Cambodian father to visit family in his home country, and ends up being trafficked in the child sex trade in. He becomes a trusted ally of her mother, Elena, who travels to Cambodia to find her and is killed because of the treat she poses to the illicit enterprise. Nani defends his position to *il pennuto*:

Sì, forse sono scemo ma l’idea di quel marito che va a Bangkok per scoparsi le ragazzine a poco prezzo mi fa vomitare. (...). Non mi piace che lei incoraggi il libertinaggio del marito per essere più libera, non voglio essere l’oggetto di quel tipo di scambio.

(Yes, maybe I am foolish but the idea of that husband of hers who goes to Bangkok to screw little girls at a bargain cost makes me want to vomit. (...). I don’t like it that she encourages the licentiousness of her husband so that she can be more free, I don’t want to be the object of that kind of exchange.”). (298)

Rosa expresses her position on sexual freedoms, even those that exploit with the liberal and innocent enough sounding solicitation “Che male c’è?” (“What’s the harm in that?”) (292) which she in fact uses to proposition Nani. The meeting with Rosa at bar Ragno illuminates for Nani the patterns of sex tourism of “buoni padri di famiglia” (“good fathers of family”) (293) who travel to exotic places in order to have sex with children

without worrying about legal repercussions. Nani also is afforded a good look at the complacency, even complicity, of so many who would refuse to know the details, finding instead that they might employ the apparent licitness of these *avventure* (“affairs”) (293) as a bargaining chip for a greater degree of freedom to pursue fulfillment of their own desires. Nani sees Rosa’s determination to deny the possibility that any harm might be caused by her husband’s *avventure* in pursuing sexual adventure without acknowledging the fact that the girls he sleeps with are in a position of voicelessness, that is, they cannot speak up about what they want or don’t want inconsideration of their age, and/or economic status or status of abuse. There is a perceptible parallel in her game of seduction, which incidentally she continues instead of following up on her gut instincts about Mammucchi: Nani has been clear that his concern is the welfare of Lucia and Fatima and the death of Elena Lievi, and this is why he agreed to meet her. He has also told her that he is still in love with his wife and does not desire to see her romantically. Rosa resembles Nani’s *pennuto* in various ways: they want the same things: ease of life and mind, sex, a feeling of control, and to be ‘important’, and they use many of the same strategies to try to get those things.

Nani’s final meeting at bar Ragno is with ‘Talamone’, the man who Elena Lievi met in Cambodia and who helped her to locate her daughter Fatima in his visits to the brothels. Talamone is an enigmatic character. He worked in Cambodia as *un commercialista*, he knew the brothels well, most probably because of his patronage, but he also volunteered his time, energy and resources to help Elena Lievi find Fatima. He tells Nani an anecdote at this meeting that has a good deal of explanatory power in connection with his apparently divided nature, the dispositions of the left and right

hemispheres and the trouble of repressed paternal longing. Nani asks Talamone why he didn't warn Elena that she was being spied on and surveilled by potential assassins, and Talamone answers,

«Le racconto una cosa: una volta che camminavo in campagna cacciando fagiani, mi sono trovato in mezzo a una famiglia di cinghiale. Sono sbucati da un cespuglio. Erano piccoli ma con certe zanne da fare paura. La madre, che faceva da guida ai suoi figli, appena mi ha visto, mi è avventata contro con una furia che mi ha sorpreso. Tante volte avevo incontrato cinghiali sulla mia strada, ma non mi avevano mai aggredito. Quando vedono un uomo, si voltano e se ne vanno. Ma lì c'era una madre e c'erano dei piccoli da difendere. Me la sono data a gambe e lei è tornata felice fra i suoi figli.» «Cosa vorrebbe dire con questo aneddoto?» «Che le madri possono diventare imprevedibili e pronte a qualunque cosa quando si tratta dei loro figli. (...)» (357)

“Let me tell you something: one day I was walking through the countryside hunting pheasant, and I found myself in the middle of a family of wild boar. The appeared out of a bush. They were little but had claws that were quite scary. As soon as she saw me, the mother, who was acting as guide for her children, came at me with such fury that it surprised me. Many times I had encountered wild boar on my street but they had never attacked. But this time there was a mother with little ones to defend. I turned and ran, and she happily returned to her children.”

“What are you trying to say by sharing this anecdote?” “That mothers can become unpredictable and are liable to do anything when it comes to their children. (...)”

In placing himself in the subject position of hunter in his story, the adversary of the mother who seeks to protect her children, Talamone reveals a great deal about how he perceives the situation. Talamone's presence as predator at the scene implicate him as a serious threat to all the animals he might happen to come across, including the young wild boars. The anecdote has him see with his own eyes, up close, the ferocity of the mother's love. He has the capacity to be predatory but has also experienced the force of parent-child love, which he felt he was no match for. He took on a daring, caring and fatherly role in bringing Fatima back home and making the decision to stay by her side which shows that he learned to honor the power of familial connection. However, the role that the attitudes revealed in the anecdote played in Elena Lievi's assassination remain in question. While he claims that it was those who ran the brothels with child sex slaves who were scared out of their wits by the prospect of the desperate mother denouncing them, Talamone's story suggests that he may have been scared enough by the mother's tenacity to 'change direction'. Talamone ends his conversation with Nani by saying "Forse è meglio che sua madre sia morta." ("Maybe it is better that her mother died.") (358), maintaining that she would not have recognized Fatima in the condition she is in. Talamone has clearly been touched and changed through his contact with Fatima, but his facile riddance of the mother's life and role in her daughter's life is problematic, and one might question whether his *accudimento* is completely sincere as he takes the place of the mother and her *accudimento*, a mother he was too easily was able to say is "better off dead".

Seduction

The technique of seduction to gain power over someone by appealing directly to their desires is introduced in the novel, most poignantly by the archetypal seductress, the principal, Rosa, whom Nani refers to as *la leopardata* (the leopard-skin). But because desire is not in itself bad or wrong, seduction is something that Nani can admit he utilizes in his storytelling, through the creation of suspense and intrigue, which serve to draw in the children's attention. But rather than appealing to the children's desires, and telling them exactly what they want to hear, Nani appeals to their sense of curiosity and tells stories that encourage them to reason for themselves. Once someone can reason, they can identify desires for what they are and will therefore be in a position to be less susceptible to predatory uses of seduction.

Nani senses Rosa's duplicity in his first conversation with her reported in the novel. He has been called to her office because of some complaints about his telling the myth of Zeus's *rapimento di Europa* (rape/abduction of Europe). Rosa reproaches Nani for his indiscretions and for straying from the scholastic program.

La guardo cercando di capire se è sincera o sta recitando una parte. Spero nella seconda, perché indicherebbe una consapevolezza che fa parte del suo ruolo. (...). Cosa devo fare? fingere? Dire di sì e poi fare come mi pare? stare al gioco? mostrarmi pentito e riverente? (...). Ritiene onestamente che io sia un insegnante immorale, che parla di cosa proibite in classe, quasi un pervertitore di bambini.

(59)

(I look at her and trying to understand if she is being sincere or if she is playing a role. I hope it is the latter, because it would indicate an awareness that plays a

part in her role. (...). What should I do? Say yes and keep on doing what I want in the classroom? play along? Show that I have repented and will reform? (...). She honestly maintains that I am an immoral teacher, who mentions prohibited topics in class, close to being a perverter of the minds of children.)

Rosa's seduction begins once she perceives Nani's deeply held intentions that underlie what and how he teaches. She says:

«Non si avvilita, Sapienza, so che lei è sincero ed è un buon insegnante. Non l'avrei chiamata, se non avessi avuto delle lamentele dai genitori di alcuni alunni. Guardi che i bambini sono spesso delle perfide spie e si divertono a mettere il professore in cattiva luce presso i genitori. Sperano di mortificarlo. Io le conosco queste strategie infantile. Non se la prenda. Sia però più prudente. (...)» (59-60)
 (“Don't be dispirited, Sapienza, I know that you are sincere and are a good teacher. I would never have called you here if I did not get some complaints from the parents of a few students. Look, often children are cunning little spies who enjoy casting their teacher in a bad light for their parents. They hope to embarrass him. I know these infantile techniques. Don't put up with it. But be more prudent. (...).”)

Nani does not know what to make of her conduct, but she has made gains in winning his sense that she understands him and his approach to teaching, and that she herself values the same things that he does. He is reproached a second time by the principal for talking about “sesso, etnie e violenze” (“sex, ethnicity and violence”) (90) in class, being that the students were introduced to Zeus and Europe, the science behind skin color, and the disappearance of their schoolmate Lucia. Rosa insists that by including a discussion of

these themes, Nani demands that the children “ragionare come persone adulte” (‘reason like grown-ups’), and “non va bene” (‘that is not right’) (91). Nani defends his methods and answers that the sooner the children learn to reason for themselves, the better (91), and returns to class to confront little Ahmed who has been reporting questionable assessments of what Nani has to say in class to his fundamentalist father. Nani tells Ahmed that the classroom is a place where they come to learn to reason for themselves, not to be indoctrinated by the teacher (91-92).

Armed with certain insights into Nani’s intentions gained through her informants on what is said in class and what Nani himself has said, Rosa sets off to truly seduce Nani one day when school has been canceled. He hesitates but accepts her invitation to meet her for lunch, proposing to have a conversation about the problems that the school is facing regarding “la pluralità culturale” (‘cultural plurality’) and the “famiglie che si stanno radicalizzando” (‘families who are becoming radicalized’) (142). Over lunch, Rosa begins her conversation with Nani by proposing instead her enthusiasm for games of seduction, remarking that “sedurre (...) è un bellissimo esercizio” (‘to seduce (...) is a lovely exercise’) (145). At a certain point in their conversation that touches on radical Islam as well as the disappearance of Lucia Treggiani, *il pennuto* points something out to Nani:

Guarda che ti sta tendendo una mano che striscia sulla tovaglia come un serpentello voglioso, afferra quella mano e stringila, lascia che finisca in festa questo pranzo, (...). Non ci penso nemmeno, rispondo seccato. E invece sì, non puoi rifiutare l’offerta di una mano femminile dolce e seducente. (...) è una bella

donna e odora di buono, abbracciala ed esci da questa tua castità stupida e inutile!

(149)

(Look, she is stretching her arm out to you, it is slithering across the tablecloth like a desirous snake, grab her hand and squeeze it, let this lunch finish with a bang, (...). I will have none of it, I respond dryly. Oh yes you will, you can't refuse the offer of a feminine hand, sweet and seductive. (...) she is a beautiful woman, and she smells so good, embrace her and say goodbye to your stupid and useless chastity).

So it is that Nani is seduced by *la leopardata*, the archetype of the seductress. But Nani also characterizes certain techniques he uses in his storytelling as similar to seduction: it is a game to participate in and it pleases him. As he draws in the attention of the students for another enticing story, Nani reflects:

La storia, ogni storia, nasce quando ci sono un corpo e una mente che si preparano all'ascolto. Il corpo non è meno teso e attento del pensiero che assorbirà, attraverso le parole, un racconto, con il suo eroe, le sue geste e la sua conclusione. E io sono già saltato dentro, con tutti e due i piedi, in questo rito fatato. Mi sono impaesato assieme a loro e godo nel raccontare, come loro godono nell'ascoltare. Niente ci può fermare in questa impresa comune, antichissima e meravigliosa della narrazione e dell'ascolto collettivo. (174-5)

(The story, every story, is born when there is a body and a mind that prepare themselves to listen. The body is no less anxious and attentive than thought, that will absorb, through the words, a story, with its hero, his exploits and the conclusion. And I have already jumped in with both feet in this enchanted ritual.

I have acclimated myself along with them, and I take pleasure in storytelling, just like they enjoy listening. Nothing can stop us in this marvelous, ancient and common venture of narration and a collective audience.)

Suspiciousness regarding the seductive nature of stories is also a concern to some of the parents of students in Nani's class. Nani relates that he is "attento a non suggerire testi considerati pericolosi dai genitori, che stanno sempre con le orecchie appizzate, sospettosi e diffidenti." ("careful to not suggest texts that are considered dangerous by the parents, who always have their ears perked, and are suspicious and untrusting") (346). One of his students shares that "Mio padre non vuole libri in casa (...) Dice che mettono malattie nel cervello." "My father does not want books in the house. (...) He says that they put diseases in your head") (346). And then there is the seduction that Mammucchi solicits from Proust's writings which truly lead to infirmity of thought.

The intention behind techniques of seduction matters. Nani's intention is to tap into, awaken his students' longing to make sense of the world, to acquaint themselves with reality in its radical form through stories and a passing of wisdom. Other seductions, such as seductive lines of argumentation, or Rosa's romantic seduction prey on people's desires and seek to disarm the capacity the individual has to access a sense of their deeper longings, their higher priorities or values. In the notebook that Nani and Francesco discover, Mammucchi indicates the delight he takes in appealing immoderately to the imprisoned Lucia's appetites.

[L]ei ha capito, ha acconsentito, si è adeguata direbbe qualcuno, ma qualcosa di più e di più profondo, si è accomodata nella tana del mio cuore e da lì sogna e delira e mangia le cose buone che le porto ogni giorno. Da qualche tempo non è

mai sazia di gelati. Con la panna, dice, con la panna montata, perché la prigionia produce ingordigia, e quale ingordigia! (...) mi piace guardarla mangiare quel gelato, (...) gli occhi le brillano, (...) mi piace come mi fissa, ansiosa, una cagnolina in cerca di consenso, sa bene chi sia il padrone qui dentro (...). (397)

(She has understood, has consented, has adapted some would say, but something more and more profound, she has settled in the den of my heart and from there she dreams and raves and eats the good things I bring her each day. For some time now she can't get enough ice cream. With cream, she says, with whipped cream, because prison causes greediness, and what greediness! (...) I like to watch her eat that ice cream, (...) her eyes twinkle, (...) I like how she stares at me, anxious, a puppy searching for approval. She knows well who the master is here inside (...).)

Mammucchi's intends "to tame" ("*domare*") Lucia by making her completely dependent on him for everything, even her thought (398). He acts as a parasite on Lucia, for he is the one who has made himself dependent on her, and he reaches his goal as the parasite by making her feel that she is a slave to her desires, enticing her appetites while withholding everything else in the world from her. This makes Mammucchi feel omnipotent, godlike, but this uncompromising quest for a piece of eternity, derived from a sense of power and control, will in fact lead to death. It is the logic of the parasite that Mammucchi deals in, an unreflective tethering of oneself to another with the wish to completely 'consume' them, which predictably ends in their demise, and therefore one's own. In fact, so banal is Mammucchi's absorption with the fulfillment of his mimetic desires and appetites that Francesco predicts, nearly to a tee, exactly how things will end

for Mammucchi: he will try to escape until he is trapped, he will then abandon Lucia, and then he will kill himself. Francesco adds “È una probabilità. Vedremo poi nei fatti” (It is the most likely thing. We will see how it plays out.”) (395).

A variety of texts have influence on Nani, and although *il pennuto* suggests that they play a role in Nani’s excessive dreaming and the corruption of his thoughts, Nani is not looking to be seduced. In fact, often, Nani reaches for a text, or words occur to him from past readings that make meaningful connection with the contents of his thoughts outside of the book. Having had enough of being verbally battered by *il pennuto*, Nani decides to pick up a book off his shelf on a particular afternoon which happens to feature a dead child found unexpectedly at one’s doorstep.

Per togliermelo di torno apro un libro di poesie di Vivian Lamarque. (...). Mi mette allegria. E io so che il pennuto si annoia a morte a sentire le poesie. (...). Quel ritmo guizzante e giocoso, però, fa presto a trasformarsi in dolore, in osservazione amara della sofferenza. Leggo a caso, stupito della mia incredibile capacità di attirare le coincidenze. (334)

(To get rid of him I open up a book of poetry by Vivian Lamarque. (...). It cheers me up. And I know that *il pennuto* is bored to death listening to the poems. (...). That fleeting and playful rhythm, however, quickly makes a change to pain, in bitter observation of suffering. I read at random, stupefied at my incredible capacity to attract coincidences.)

Nani does not turn to familiar content that he obsesses over again and again, but rather is receptive to what is new, or ready for a fresh interpretation to presence. Texts are read by others with a particular use in mind. For example, Nani finds that Mr. Treggiaani, like

he, is enthusiastic about Dostoevsky's *Memorie dal sottosuolo* (*Notes from the Underground*), but then Mr. Treggiani makes the assumption that he and Nani are similar in their interpretations of things because of what they have taken interest in, rather than the intention, the 'how' behind their interest. Mr. Treggiani tells Nani that he finds the character 'Liza', a prostitute, extraordinary, and wonders if he will ever himself have an encounter with one like her, unashamed to admit that he visits prostitutes himself. Mr. Treggiani describes the women he visits as "spesso straniere, portate da lontano: comprate e vendute per pochi soldi, hanno famiglie da mantenere e sono dure come sassi." ("often foreigners, brought here from far away: bought and sold for very little, they have families to maintain, and they are hard as rocks.") (166). Nani points out to Mr. Treggiani that in buying the use of their bodies, he becomes an accomplice to this sex trade. Mr. Treggiani laughs and says "Va là che siamo molto più simili di quanto pensiamo... Lei insegna, io guida un camion, ma non abbiamo rinunciato a pensare. E i libri aiutano." ("Come off it, we are much more similar than we think... You teach, I drive a truck, but we haven't renounced thinking. And books help.") (166). Indeed both men think and reason. While the left-hemisphere style of thought looks to categorize, to fix, to abstract, the right hemisphere makes connections between things. Whether it is a text or the world, the disposition taken in attending to any particular thing produces a very different vision of that thing. Mr. Treggiani uses the book to justify his search for a prostitute like Liza, and also to make the judgment that Nani, like him, solicits prostitutes, due to his having taken interest in reading Dostoevsky's book.

Repressed Longing and Irascible Desire

Francesco and Nani find a well-hidden notebook in Mammucchi's house after he takes off with Lucia because of the evidence that Francesco has compiled which brings suspicions against him, and a reopening of Lucia's case. As Nani begins to read the rambling contents, he asks himself:

[C]osa sto leggendo: il diario di un pazzo, come dice il pennuto alle mie spalle, o le riflessioni di un uomo in preda a deliri di onnipotenza? Un uomo colto che cita Proust e la cui fantasia si mescola, con strani percorsi mentali, alle reminiscenze letterarie: Balthus, *Lolita*, Proust, e naturalmente il reverendo Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll.

(What am I reading: the diary of a lunatic, as *il pennuto* claims from his perch on my back, or the reflections of a man in grips of delusions of omnipotence? An educated man who cites Proust and whose fantasy mix, with strange mental pathways, to literary references: Balthus, *Lolita*, Proust, and naturally the Reverend Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll.)

The reader knows that the directions that Nani's literary impressions take are also strange, and so in this musing, Nani acknowledges a likeness between himself and this "uomo diabolico" ("diabolical man") (399). *Il pennuto* claims that Nani himself behaves in these ways. But again, it is the intention, the distinction between the imaginative capacities that allow penetration of reality, and the attempt to avoid reality that fantasy makes by building its own worlds as an escape.

Il pennuto and Francesco have little interest in what is written in the notebook, beyond what can be used as damning evidence of Mammucchi's crime. *Il pennuto*

retains that there is little to understand, that Mammucchi is “uno psicopatico e basta” (“a psychopath and that’s all”) (382), and Francesco wants no more than to see Mammucchi imprisoned and executed, if only it were possible, for his crime, saying “Non merita altro” (“He doesn’t deserve anything else”) (392). The web of connections that has led Nani, with Francesco’s help, to Mammucchi is exposed in the notebook when read with Nani’s sensibilities. Mammucchi documents the pre-meditated steps he took in capturing and imprisoning Lucia, his planning, his cunning. He documents his belief in his superiority of vision and what he conceives for his common future with Lucia, a life of domination and co-dependence. Mammucchi makes clear that he imitates what he believes is the path of the great artist, the superior man, to relentlessly, violently, pursue his desire. He writes in the opening passage in his notebook these words, apparently addressed to Proust:

Marcel mio, sul litorale di Balbec, lì dove le fanciulle in fiore ti aspettavano con le rose fra i capelli, sono io o sei tu mio prolungamento letterario, mio amato Marcel che stupidamente inseguo? (384)

(My Marcel, on the coast of Balbec, there where the young girls in flower awaited you with roses in their hair, my beloved Marcel, is it me or are you my literary extension that I stupidly pursue?)

In this passage, Mammucchi intimates that he himself does not know his own desires from those of others, but pursues them anyway, whatever they are, because he believes that great art’s subject is the pursuit of desire and that art as desire is the perfect contrast to the banality of life, a life not worth living in his eyes it seems. Not only does Mammucchi seek a *prolungamento* as a meaningful ‘annex’ to everyday life, he also

takes up Proust's idea that life can be extended, prolonged, and one can avoid oblivion, stay alive longer, through their creation. Mammucchi sees his creation as a coming to dominate, control, and become everything to Lucia, and he believes he has enlightened inspiration from superior men, men who shared the desire of omnipotence through pursuit of desires, especially sexual ones involving young girls, like Proust, in Mammuchhi's tragic reading.

But there is also in Mammucchi's writing evidence of a deep void that leads to a desire for domination. Mammucchi outlines his strategy for how he plans to dominate Lucia's will. He makes an entrance in the notebook at some point during that first few days he spends with the captive Lucia who is terrified and combative:

[I] calci si trasformeranno in abbracci e quello che rifiuti oggi, l'accetterai domani con il consenso di una coscienza addormentata ad arte, quell'arte che io conosco benissimo, (...) lei si rifiuta di mangiare, ma i suoi occhi già pregustano quel cibo e io la domerò come si domino le colombe troppo libere, tagliandole le ali. (385-6)

(The kicks will turn into hugs and that which you refuse today, you will accept tomorrow with the consensus of a consciousness put to sleep artfully, that art that I know so well (...) she refuses to eat, but her eyes already are tasting that food and I will dominate her like doves who feel too free, by cutting off their wings.)

Mammucchi proposes to make Lucia dependent on him for needs, and to exploit her appetites and desires by separating her from all others, all other sources of meaning, of life. He will make her as helpless and dependent as an infant is on her mother, physically and psychologically. It is much more than sex that Mammucchi desires. He wants a

creature, a child of his own, but his paternal desire is devoid of a sense of longing which presupposes a disposition of *accudimento* and openness, curiosity about that which is other. His repressed paternal longing has been perverted into a desire for domination. Mammucchi is certain that the day will come, be it years, when Lucia has truly been mastered, and that day will be marked by her asking him to fulfill her sexual desires, which he knows at that point will perfectly mirror his own. In the end, sex plays a huge role in Mammucchi's crime, but it is the symbolic weight it carries as an expression of domination, that makes it so. Nani perceives a terrible wound that festers in Mammucchi upon reading the final thoughts found in his notebook.

[C]'è qualcosa di terribile, qualcosa di odioso ma anche, a momenti, struggente, nonostante l'odiosità. Il terribile destino di essere uomo e non potere concepire da solo e non essere in possesso di un ventre in cui covare e nutrire una creatura nata nel buio delle proprie viscere, una creatura di carne e sangue, che sia totalmente e perfettamente tua. (399-400)

(There is something terrible, something odious, but also, at times, heartrending, despite the odiousness. The terrible destiny of being a man not able to conceive on their own and to not be in possession of a womb in which to harbor and nourish a creature born in the dark of your own organs, a creature of flesh and blood, that is totally and completely yours.)

It is here that Nani returns to consider Geppetto, a figure implicated in the observation of paternal longing and his love of his own daughter Martina that even his wife Anita thought were excessive at times. Geppetto, in his old age, thought with presumption to extend his life by becoming godlike and being the sole creator of a living being similar to

himself (400). As newlyweds, Anita would tease Nani about his excitement over the possibility of having a baby. Anita had different theories about why it was so, but Nani explained to her:

Ho voglia di un figlio, che male c'è? Il perché non mi interessa. È una voglia profonda e priva di scopi. Si pensa che solo le donne abbiano di questi desideri, ma è una convenzione, una stupida distribuzione delle parti che non corrispondono al vero. I maschi, per me, lo rimuovono questo desiderio, o lo reprimono, perché viene considerato femminile e quindi tabù. Ma è profondissimo e forse ha a che vedere con la continuazione della specie, non lo so... È un sentimento struggente e bellissimo. (117)

I want to have a child, what's wrong with that? The why doesn't interest me. It is a deep longing without objective. People think that only women have this desire, but it is a convention, a stupid distribution of roles that don't correspond to the truth. Men, in my opinion, dismiss this desire, and repress it, because it is considered feminine and therefore taboo. But it is profound and maybe has to do with the continuation of the species, I don't know... It is a poignant and beautiful sentiment.)

But Nani also admits that his longing sometimes became exaggerated, and a certain amount of presumption was registered. He admits, "Mi sembrava che avrei potuto occuparmi di tutto io, quasi facendo a meno della madre. Ma non era così" ("It seemed to me that I could have taken care of everything, almost not needing the mother. But it was not really true") (122). Anita the following comparison: "in fondo, tu come Geppetto, ritieni di avere costruito questa creatura da solo, senza l'aiuto di nessuno" ("at

the core, you like Geppetto, retain to have constructed this creature by yourself, without the help of anyone else”) (122). Nani vocally denies what Anita points at, but somewhere inside he recognizes that she is not completely incorrect (122). Nani has embraced his paternal longings, and also accepts the opportunity to reflect on the schism in the male over his conceit regarding reproduction, namely that there may exist some amount of false projection that masks a perceived lack.

Mammucchi’s likeness to the predatory aspects of the spider archetype is captured in so many ways in what he expresses in his notebook. From the years of preparation, the calculated patience while the victim struggles, the trickery and manipulation, the disarming of the victim’s capacities by making them psychological and physically immobile, and in the end, cold blooded domination. What Francesco knows all too well, because of tragedy and abuse that have touched his young life, is that Mammucchi’s vision will end like the parasite’s, in his own death. In recognition of all of these aspects of Mammucchi’s actions, Nani, the dreamer, and Francesco the detective share the following observations.

«Il ragno fa il suo mestiere» sentenza Francesco, che ogni giorno diventa più adulto e più logico. Il suo senso della realtà mi mette un poco a disagio. Lo sento più maturo di me, più attento osservatore, più pratico, più razionale, più costruttivo. «Il ragno fa il suo mestiere» convengo, «ma è un mestiere disgustoso: chiudere in un sudario una creatura vivente e poi mangiarla.» (392)

(“The spider does what a spider does” says Francesco, who only day becomes more logical and adultlike. His sense of reality makes me a little uneasy. I feel that he is more mature than me, a more attentive observer, more practical, more

rational, more constructive. “A spider does what a spider does” I add, “but it’s a disgusting profession: to trap a living creature in a shroud and then eat it/her.)

Nani and Francesco strike a perfect balance, and Francesco, the mature 13-year-old is the one to voice it:

Forse l’uomo pratico con il senso della realtà ha bisogno, accanto a sé, del sognatore. (392)

(Maybe the practical man with his sense of reality needs, by his side, that of the dreamer.)

Francesco excels at the kind of attention that the left hemisphere brings to the world, especially focused observation. Nani is his *maestro* (teacher/master) and he allows his teacher to act as his guide. Francesco knows that the case of Lucia would not have been broken open were it not for Nani’s intuitions even though Francesco found all of the evidence. The intuitions led the pair to Mammucchi and to an understanding about the type of crime they were dealing with. The pair were celebrated for their partnership, the girl was saved, love returned to Nani’s life and the community found a place in their mind and heart to tacitly accept and appreciate Nani’s ‘strange’ ways of being in the world.

Conclusion

What does narrative have to do with the divided brain and what about narrative makes it a privileged space for understanding the two ways of being in the world? And how is it that questions of human darkness, evil and suffering are exigent in Maraini's narratives that explore divided thought and the two ways of being? In the conclusion to this dissertation I will look to the philosophical perspectives of ethical personalist Paul Ricoeur in *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, and to Adriana Cavarero's investigation of postural ethics in her book *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, to inspect how narration, belief in the irreducible person, and free will intersect, and together form the basis of connection between McGilchrist's and Maraini's approach to a reconciliation of divided thought through an affirmation of right hemisphere propensities and dispositions. The faction of division in thought that is opposed to the reconciliation of unity within division has a dark side, which involves a devaluation of life and of the person.

In the chapter of conclusion to *The Master and His Emissary*, "The Master Betrayed", McGilchrist names the many things that one would expect in a world where the left hemisphere had become "so dominant that, at the phenomenological level, it managed more or less to suppress the right hemisphere's world altogether" (428). Among the darker aspects of a takeover of this kind would be increased manipulation, exploitation, and the will to control. An intolerance for what is new or other would flourish as would the emotion of anger. There would be an assault on the embodied nature of life, on the mythos that underwires spirituality—"something that gives us something other than material values to live by" (442), and on art.

Mcgilchrist characterizes the body, the spirit and art as “vehicles of love (...) the attractive power of the Other, which the right hemisphere experiences, but which the left hemisphere does not understand and sees as an impediment to its authority” (445).

Ethical personalism posits that the person, distinct from identity or ego is an “ontologically unique category” (Hilt, 131) that is foundational for understanding, wisdom and ethical action. Neither substantive nor transcendental, the person is an actor, who becomes a person through their interactions with others. Only in her intentional acts can a person overcome the identity of roles, and it is the quality of the betweenness that she feels with others that will inform the disposition, the intention with which she acts. Freedom to act is then inextricable with “fallibility”, the capacity to ‘fall’, to do evil, to cause suffering. Ricoeur’s theories convey that narration alone is what reflects the life of persons. The narrative points to who they are in their essence, in their totality. Narrative organizes action in a temporal realm that allows the interpreter to ascertain a plot at work by recognizing the changing disposition behind an arch of actions that the person-protagonist comes to hold and is discovered in their intentional acts.

The second half of McGilchrist’s *The Master and his Emissary* is a narration of the identity of discrete cultures through history, but also of collective humanity, irreducible to identity in time. It is not fiction, but it has “emplotment” (Ricoeur 2, 147), namely the betrayal of the master, which is the belief that the left hemisphere or the emissary comes to hold that he can do without the master. This betrayal amounts to the decimation of the other, a forced exile, and a disappearance that will result in the pain of separation. The interpretation I have made of Maraini’s novels is similar to the plot of the betrayal of the Master: there is a modern crisis and it is the campaign of violence against the vulnerable other. The vulnerable others in focus are Colomba and Lucia, two girls, one younger than the next who suffer the violence of being made

to *scomparaire* (disappear). The aporia (Ricoeur), or massive lacuna in the human capacity to understand evil and where it comes from, is to be found in the inspection of the two ways of thinking and being in the world. The arduous process of unconcealing, making *ricomparire* (re-appear) what the left hemisphere's arrogance and obstinacy has made vanish through denial and layers of rationalizing thought is the ethical obligation of the protagonists as well as our own.

Emplotment must be carried out on an ethical front. Maraini's rejection of ideologies echoes Ricoeur's insistence that "official stories" can seduce and manipulate, and are able to do so because they do not recognize the person, they do not attend to the whole person and their vulnerability with care (Hilt, 140). McGilchrist writes:

The concept of the individual (entity or person, whatever it may be) is therefore an ambiguous concept. On the one hand it can be seen as a part, which has prior existence to the whole in which it resides, and that whole is seen as reached by summing the parts — the individual as a 'unit' in a complex of units, like a block amongst building blocks (left hemisphere point of view). On the other, the individual can itself be seen as a whole, indivisible into parts from which that whole could ever be recreated once dismembered; but nonetheless not itself separate from a greater whole to which it belongs, and which is reflected in it, from which, even, it derives its individuality (right hemisphere point of view). Thus, according to this point of view, the divisive tendency towards individuation exists *within* the tendency to union; individual entities are distinguished, but only within a union which supervenes, and qualifies that distinction. (Mcgil. 2, 201)

Who then is the other? When we tend to someone with openness rather than with fixed ideas about their identity, we come to know their uniqueness. We also come to realize their

fundamental “inaccessibility” (Hilt 137) because we recognize that they, like us, experience a depth of intimate context that others cannot know. This allows us the possibility of “emotional identification” (Hilt, 137). The “total life” of a person or their absoluteness is this understanding of a person “we never will be able to fully meet” (Hilt, 138). The other must be approached with the ethical understanding that they will always be other. I have argued that Maraini, by compiling the left hemisphere way of being in a personality, *il pennuto*, has recognized the capacity for fallibility, self-love, manipulation, violence, darkness, within each person, starting with the self. The other is like us in their capacity for fallibility, but if they have done wrong, the evil is not substantive, rather, it issues from their fundamental freedom to choose.

In his book *Evil*, Ricoeur posits that evil is an aporia because it amounts to a negation. It is the absence of action that reflects our ethical calling to be receptive to the other, to show responsiveness to their vulnerability. It is *not* listening, *not* interpreting, *not* responding to the other as a person whose life “proceeds from untold and repressed stories” that if imagined, if narrated, make the other recognizable. It is through narrative reflectivity that violence done to another by imposing complete knowability and by pursuing the claim to fully possess, to know, might be averted. The practice of narrative reflectivity that asks us to receive the story of the other is an ethical obligation based on a philosophy of affirmative alterity. But there must be a redress for the aporia, the gap in understanding evil. By truly listening and tending with care to those who experience evil, to those who suffer, we can dismiss the psychology of martyrdom, the paradigm of the scapegoat, and the passive nature of evil, all which serve to justify the necessity of suffering as retribution for an individual or collective sin (42). We can then come to see evil as resulting from the freedom we have to negate our responsibility to love and to attend with care to others, and the revisioning moves “the whole problem of evil over into the sphere of action, of

the will, of free will” (Ricoeur, 46). Ricoeur has no answer to the problem of evil but does say that we need a response to the aporia in acting and feeling. He writes:

[E]very action, whether ethical or political, which diminishes the quantity of violence exercised by some against others diminishes the level of suffering in the world. (...) This practical response has an affect at a speculative level: before accusing God or speculating on a demonic origin of evil in God himself, we should act against evil ethically and politically. (Ricoeur, 66)

But this practical answer is not enough when attention is turned to the person who suffers, and the question *why me?* must be taken up. Ricoeur says that there must also be an emotional response, brought about by “philosophical and theological meditation” (68) on suffering, through which wisdom is gained. The meditation hinges upon renouncing certainty, acknowledging chance and vulnerability, but also an “indignation at evil”, along with the courage to face it and to bear it. Ricoeur describes the aim of this wisdom in action and feeling to be “a renunciation (...) of the desire to be rewarded for one’s virtues, a renunciation of the desire to be spared suffering, a renunciation of (...) the desire for immortality (...) (71). As prescribed, Nani, Zà and *la donna dai capelli corti*, as Maraini’s second-self, interrogate but accept the tragic loss of their own children without cursing fortune, they act to diminish suffering without further aim, they incline themselves toward the vulnerable other “gratuitously” (72), and do not concern themselves with retribution. It is also the case for Nani, Zà and *la donna dai capelli* that narratives found in literature and the return to memories are crucial for understanding and recognizing the other and themselves.

Cavarero's *Inclinations* is a fascinating philosophical work that traces the geometrical imagery that has subordinated, feminized, and even demonized the disposition to bend one's attention to a vulnerable other. Cavarero's work is optimistic. If the perspective of the vulnerable and those inclined toward them is assumed, the philosopher sees the possibility of freeing ourselves from the imposition of a mute resistance to violence due to the persisting imagery of being up-right as a demonstration of rectitude and righteousness, and being inclined as morally and intellectually unstable, weakened, indicative of a bending leading to a fall (15). Cavarero finds in Hannah Arendt's politics a relational space where "reciprocity and interdependence are the essential elements" (114) where those who tend to the other, the vulnerable, the wounded, are understood as responsible actors who responds to this moral imperative. Cavarero argues that Arendt introduces an inversion of the paradigm of mortality that she argues ensnares the thought of nearly every philosopher. Holding up Levinas as an outstanding example, Cavarero contends that even as he worked on a remedy for totalitarian violence and a theory of the other, he expounded an egocentric view of the father as true generator of the newborn child, making the new life not truly other than self (Cavarero, 146). By reintroducing birth as a "the miracle that interrupts the natural cycle's monotony (...) with punctual regularity"(112), Cavarero shows that Arendt reinserts the capacity for action that we must expect from the newborn: "the new and unexpected, the unpredictable and the incalculable" (112). The twist in the plot introduced by the person who is newly born "breaks with every automatism, so that individual life can no longer be thought of as a straight line running to ruin" (112).

Cavarero argues that the mother is the primary ethical subject who comes with existing imagery and she must be held up in order to counter the weight of the imagery of the self-

sufficient, vertical man. Cavarero devotes a chapter to Artemisia Gentilleschi's *Allegory of Inclination*, and interprets the painting which depicts a young woman, inclined toward a star which symbolizes creativity and creation. The positive depiction of inclination is furthered in Cavarero's examination of da Vinci's *The Virgin and the Child with St. Anne*. Cavarero writes:

The asymmetry of this portrait, modulated as it is by inclination, translates nicely into the movement of relationality that reflects the everyday experience of the maternal than the monumentality of the sacred. With Leonardo, the artistic process of humanizing the mother reaches its peak: (...). The mother here is inclined over her child who, as an emblem of dependent and vulnerable creature, attracts her in a forward motion, in a protrusion beside herself that endangers her balance. (99)

Cavarero characterizes the absence or avoidance of being disposed to attend with care to the vulnerable as "evil as an expression of irresponsibility" (105) and goes on to say that "The alternative between care and wound, as well as that between love and violence, is by contrast entirely inscribed in inclination as a predisposition to respond" (105).

Cavarero's *Inclinations* redeems the oblique way of being in the world in a similar way to how Mcgilchrist attempts to redeem the right hemisphere in *The Master and His Emissary*, and the subordinated ways of being in each paradigm have a world of similarities between them.

Self-abnegation and martyrdom are taken on in both of Maraini's novels, as is the scapegoat mechanism which spares the community by enacting violence on an individual symbolically, the flipside of mimetic desire (Girard). Both martyrdom and scapegoating involve death as a resolution and Maraini exposes this destitution. Cavarero also wants

to rethink stereotypical altruism that requires abnegation and death (174). The protagonists in Maraini's novels act with spontaneity, do not think much about self-preservation, and it is implied that they accept their mortality without fear of when or how death might come. They lose touch with self-awareness in their inclinations to act altruistically, demonstrating their renunciation of praise, or of a particular outcome. This combination stands in contrast to the martyr's mindset. (Cavarero, 174).

Cavarero sees the mother as the positive symbolic figure needed to overturn the blindness precipitated by the gaze of the intellect and the prejudices it has inculcated by way of geometrics in imagery (175). Maraini on the other hand approaches the problem by considering how to move men and women alike to take on the ethical posture of inclination by building narrative imagery that does not reserve *accudimento* (attentive care and love) shown toward the vulnerable other for the female gender. And then again, she does not presume to disavow the profound imprint that the power of the potential for pregnancy and maternity have on women, both from a natural and cultural perspective, which predisposes them, more so than men, to what has become known as the "maternal inclination" (101). Maraini makes brilliant use of myths that touch on either expressed, repressed or tyrannical paternal desire or longing, and points to the violence and suffering that results from an incapacity for imagining that the ethical posture of inclination, separate from the biological capacity for maternity, might be assumed by the figure of the father, and by men. Because women and mothers find that they are inclined, especially because of the maternal roles that they play or are being primed to play, they are often vulnerable, their inclinations "a threat to [their] equilibrium" (Cavarero, 3). Maraini's reflections on the tale of Pinocchio demonstrate Geppetto's vulnerability as a poor, old,

single man who longs for a child. This old man learns quickly that he has no choice but to become off-balance in his love for Pinocchio, something he did not anticipate. His life is thrown into upheaval, and he loses or is separated from all of the material things he had gained in his life because of his love for his child. *La fata dai capelli turchini* provides a practiced model of imperturbable love for Geppetto who learns that caring for the vulnerable and becoming vulnerable one's self are indivisible.⁷⁴ In the following passage Maraini explains her position regarding gender and the inclination toward the vulnerable other.

Il sentimento che io definisco di maternità non deve intendersi legato solo al concepimento, ma comprende tutta una storia di analisi e comprensione dell'altro da me, una storia di generosità storiche e pratiche della cura del più debole. Molti uomini assumono queste qualità storiche femminili. (...) quando parlo di maternità uso una convenzione linguistica, perché stacco la maternità dal fatto biologico e chiamo maternità la capacità di chinarsi con dolcezza, con attenzione, con amore e con sacrificio verso l'altro. È una cosa che può fare sia l'uomo che la donna. Qualche volta lo fanno anche i miei personaggi maschili. (Maraini and Cesari, 30-31)

(The sentiment that I define as maternity should not be understood as connected to conception alone, but includes a whole story of analysis and compassion of who is other than me, a story of historic generosity and practices of care for the most fragile. Many men assume these historically feminine qualities. (...) when I

⁷⁴ One should note the resemblance of the pseudonyms of the characters *la fata dai capelli turchini* and *la donna dai capelli corti*. One may extend the notion of a practiced modeling of attending to the vulnerable to the internal author of *Colomba*, Maraini's second-self.

speak of maternity I am using a linguistic convention because I separate maternity from biological facts and I call maternity the capacity to bend with gentleness, with attention, with love and with sacrifice toward another. It is something that men and women alike can do. Sometimes my male characters do it too.)

In *La bambina e il sognatore* Nani embraces his paternal longings. His spirit of *accudimento* is not something he takes on without encountering resistance, both external and internal. He must shed historical notions of masculine rectitude which postulate that one must be self-sufficient and not in need of the care, the attention and the help of others, that is invulnerable. He finds traces of this kind of malignant denial of the contributions of others even within himself, and he finds his way to sublimating these impulses through curiosity and interrogation.

Maraini's choice to take up the voice of a male protagonist in a novel for the first time in *La bambina e il sognatore*, a novel that gives the most the most explicit attention to the divided nature of thought is significant. The inclination toward *accudimento* but also vulnerability is largely represented in the lives of women and girls throughout Mariani's oeuvre. The proceedings of Nani's sublimation of left hemisphere drives and views are on exhibition in his conversation with *il pennuto*. Sublimation can then lead to *aufhebung*⁷⁵, or sublation, which, according to McGilchrist is necessary for the process of reintegration of the two ways of thinking and being that belong to the hemispheres: "the principle of division (that of the left hemisphere) and the principle of union (that of the right hemisphere) [that] need to be unified: in Hegel's terms, the thesis and the antithesis

⁷⁵ The word "*aufhebung*", often translated as sublation, literally means a "lifting up" of something, and refers to the way in which earlier stages of an organic process, although superseded by those that comes after, are not repudiated by them, even though the later stages are incompatible with the earlier one" (Mcgil 1, 203).

must be enabled to achieve a synthesis on a higher level” (Mcgil. 2, 198). McGilchrist names dreams and imagination as activities that foster this reintegration (198-9) and tellingly, *il pennuto* reserves his fiercest smear campaigns for Nani when he participates in these activities. McGilchrist writes:

My choice of the Nietzschean fable of the Master and his emissary suggests that right at the heart of the relationship between the hemispheres I see a power struggle between two unequal entities, and moreover one in which the inferior, dependent party (the left hemisphere) starts to see itself as of primary importance. (204)

The power struggle can turn into a war when social conditions that excite fundamentalist and fanatical positions flare up. McGilchrist declares the inevitability of left hemisphere “to see the workings of the right hemisphere as purely incompatible, antagonistic, as a threat to its dominion” (206). Maraini characterizes our contemporary human incapacity to condemn war as the inability to sublimate anger, pride, and as a disbelief in the possibility of reintegration of opposing viewpoints. She writes:

Noi che siamo arrivati a condannare il sentimento della vendetta, (...) non riusciamo a condannare la guerra, che continua a eccitare gli animi come se si trattasse di una grande partita di pallone. Cerchiamo il sangue perché solo il sangue può saziare la collera di chi è stato ferito nell’orgoglio e nell’amore di patria. (...) la guerra è considerata prima di tutto una libagione di sangue, un atto sacro. Il destino normale di un guerriero è quello di offrire vittime agli dèi, poi di cadere egli stesso sulla pietra sacrificale. Egli diviene allora nei cieli un compagno di Sole. Possibile che ancora non riusciamo a liberarci di questa arcaica

simbologia? Possibile che non ce la facciamo a superare il sentimento antico della vendetta e del sangue? Tutti pensano che sia più importante fracassare la testa del nemico piuttosto che cambiargliela. (di Paolo, 62-3).

(We who have come to condemn the sentiment of vengeance, (...) we have not managed to condemn war, which continues to excite souls as if it were a big soccer match. We look for blood because only blood can satiate the anger of he who has had his pride and love of country injured. (...) war is considered above all libation of blood, a scared act. The normal destiny of a soldier is to offer victims to the gods, and then to fall himself on the sacrificial rock. He then becomes placed in the heavens, a companion of the sun. Is it possible that we have not yet been able to liberate ourselves from this archaic symbology? Is it possible that we have not managed to overcome antiquated feeling of vengeance and blood? Everyone thinks that it is more important to smash his enemy's head than to change what it in it.)

The symbolism of death in the psychology of war and martyrdom alike represents a faithlessness in the possibility of reintegration of thought, of reconciliation. Maraini specifies that a kind of cold war between two ways of being in the world seems to be occurring in the present atmosphere:

[I]l mondo sembra quasi avere nostalgia delle vecchie divisioni ideologiche, della guerra fredda. Solo che oggi i paesi non sono più divisi per aree di influenza, le divergenze sono diventate spartiacque profondi che separano i popoli all'interno dei paesi stessi, dividono le famiglie, separano i lavoratori negli uffici, nei negozi, nelle scuole, nelle università. Eppure le due mentalità hanno sempre convissuto,

con pulsioni più o meno dialettiche. Ora però sembrano diventate antitetiche e nemiche. (di Paolo, 83)

(The world seems almost to have nostalgia for the old ideological divisions of the cold war. Only that today, the countries aren't divided over area of influences, the divergences have become deep social divides that separate populations from the inside of the country themselves, they divide families, separate the employees in offices, in the stores, in the schools, in the universities. And yet the two mentalities have always coexisted, with impulses more or less dialectic. Now they seem to have become polarized and adversarial.)

In accord with Mcgilchrist, Maraini sees the ebb and flow of intransigency propagated and diffused by left-hemisphere understandings across cultures and time, and characterizes our modern age as a time when the rise in inflexibility, the disinclination to listen to another viewpoint is rife. Maraini expands her reflection on the cultural conditions that bring about cold war like positions to what she sees as one of the most serious maladies of our epoch, sexual exploitation and violence against women and children:

Certamente l'essere umano conosce il male e trova il modo di compierlo. Ma non basta la propensione alle violenza da sola. Ci vogliono condizioni culturali che incoraggino questa violenza proponendo connivenze sotterranee, compiacimenti e indulgenze, perché si creino queste larghe anestesie della coscienza comune. (di Paolo, 104)

(Certainly the human being knows evil and finds ways to carry it out. But the propensity for violence is not enough by itself. Cultural conditions are needed

that encourage this violence, proposing covert connivance, gratification, and indulgences, because they create this huge anesthesia of the communal conscience.)

Maraini locates the reification and objectification of the human body as a primary ill. Bodies are made evermore enticing and seductive the more that they seem to promise “piaceri proibiti” prohibited pleasure (di Paolo, 105). In this reification of the body we inevitably lose sight of the person and their experience. Maraini writes that this disinheritance of our ethical inclinations should make us stop and reflect. Maraini believes that we must “ritenere offensiva e quindi (...) denunciare e condannare qualsiasi occasione in cui il corpo umano venga manipolato e allusivamente proposto alla vendita di se; ovunque la dignità della persona venga offesa e umiliata”, (“retain offensive and denounce and condemn any occasion in which the human body is manipulated and proposed allusively as for sale; wherever the dignity of a person is offended and humiliated.”) (di Paolo, 105-6).

When positions solidify and the power struggle shifts to a war like mentality, the consequence is that we are even more disposed to see others formulaically and as stereotypes of what they supposedly represent.

The war like mentality belongs to the left hemisphere alone. The right hemisphere does not carry the intention of wiping out the left hemisphere, its emissary. McGilchrist explains that an exploration of the divided human brain results in this finding:

[T]he relationship [is one] between two unequal powers, one of which grounds the being of the other, and indeed needs the other for its fulfilment, and which

therefore has to make itself vulnerable to that other; who, through blindness and vanity, rejects the union that would have brought about the *aufhebung* of both, and prefers instead a state of war without end. (Mcgil. 2, 459)

The fallout of this war, or otherwise put, the left hemisphere's attempts to consolidate power, is that human beings suffer the ongoing torment of disconnection and separation that rejection of reconciliation creates, and violence and evil continue to proliferate at an increased rate.

Mcgilchrist insists on the primacy of the implicit. He writes:

Metaphor (subserved by the right hemisphere) comes before denotation (subserved by the left). This is both an historical and epistemological truth. Metaphorical meaning is in every sense prior to abstraction and explicitness. (...) Metaphor is not just a reflection of what has been, however, but the means whereby the truly new, rather than just the novel, may come about. When a metaphor actually lives in the mind it can generate new thoughts or understanding— it is cognitively real and active, not just a dead historical remnant of a once live metaphor, a cliché. All understanding, whether of the world or even of ourselves, depends on choosing the right metaphor. The metaphor we choose governs what we see. Even in talking about understanding we cannot escape using metaphors. 'Grasping' things, for example, won't get us as far as we'd like, because the most important things in life refuse to be grasped in either sense. (179)

Cavarero's examination of the postural inclination of the mother is a very good visual metaphor for the divisions at work in the world, as are Maraini's wide use of metaphor in

the novels discussed, including mushrooms and the poisonous double and *il pennuto* as left hemisphere views personified. But even more than metaphors that we can name, a sense of the implicit is what Cavarero's philosophical investigations, the plots to Maraini's novels, and Mcgilchrist's study hinge upon. Mcgilchrist puts it very well, in an apologist's attempt to justify a lack of objective determinacy to his hypotheses.

What the neuropsychological data I have considered in this book exhibit are some underlying tendencies — tendencies that can, however, be ultimately highly revealing. Overall a picture develops from a mass of small details, not necessarily by summing them all, left-hemisphere fashion, but perhaps by seeing the pattern, as the Dalmation emerges from the blur of splashes and dots, right-hemisphere fashion. (460)

The same apologist's account could be made for Cavarero's and Maraini's works in discussion. Mcgilchrist names the paradox of philosophy as our need to "get beyond what can be grasped or is explicitly stated, but the drift of philosophy is always and inevitably back toward the explicit" and goes on to recall that certain influential phenomenologists perceived that "that explicitness ties us down to what we already know, however much we may carry on 'unfolding' and 'unfolding' it" (Mcgil. 2, 179). Applicable to Cavarero's brilliant study as well, Mcgilchrist says of Merleau-Ponty, Scheler and Heidegger's writings "[they] are replete with metaphorical images which not only embody, but themselves express, implicitness" (Mcgil. 2, 180).

Maraini, the novelist, escapes the pull of philosophy back toward the explicit. Meanings and figures do not have firm boundaries and their metaphoric bearings seep into one another in such a way that disentangling them would be unimaginable. What is

found in her novels is such an abundance of content that is implicitly connected with such capriciousness that an attempt to explicate what is found there within would liquidate any and all potential meaning. I would propose that the imperfections and loose ends that will be found in this dissertation as, among other possibilities, a testament to a restraint from hubristic certitude.

Not rectification, as in a straightening up, but reconciliation of the postures or dispositions of the hemispheres is what McGilchrist and Cavarero call for, and what Maraini implies. Zà makes this reconciliation in attending to her memory, and reintegrating what she now understands with what she had believed, as painful as dealing with certain memories is for her. Nani, who also delves without fear into his painful memories too, participates in the reconciliation between the hemispheres in his partnership of mutual trust and faith with Francesco, his pupil. They are *il maestro* (the teacher or the master) and his *alunno* (student, disciple). *Il lieto fine* (The happy ending) of both *Colomba* and *La bambina e il sognatore* is constituted by a *ricomparsa* (“reappearance”), which is both brought about by the proper reintegration of hemispheric differences in seeing the world, and miraculously delivers something, someone born anew, who because of her deliverance from the evil of the extreme disinclination toward the other enacted by her abductor, has the potential to see and act in a way that suspends the war between the factions.

McGilchrist’s description of the process of reintegration by way of *aufhebung* or sublation is a perfect fit for what is implied by the happy endings of Maraini’s novels.

What is offered by the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere is offered back again and taken up into a synthesis involving both hemispheres. This must be

true of the process of creativity, of the understanding of works of art, of the development of the religious sense. In each there is a progress from an intuitive apprehension of whatever it may be, via a more formal process of enrichment through conscious, detailed analytic understanding, to a new, enhanced intuitive understanding of this whole, now transformed by the process that it has undergone. (206)

If Maraini has no explicit knowledge involving the objective study of the mysteries of the divided mind, the metaphor that the novels I have discussed make for the affective reality and consequences that come of the division of the mind as Mcgilchrist has described it is wondrously unexpected. Mcgilchrist concludes *The Master and His Emissary* by honoring that his theory might not turn out to be literal, but rather, a metaphor for understanding the world. He writes:

[T]he brain is divided into two relatively independent chunks which just happen to broadly mirror the very dichotomies that are being pointed to — alienation versus engagement, abstraction versus incarnation, the categorical versus the unique, the general versus the particular, the part versus the whole, and so on — it seems like a metaphor that might have some literal truth. But if it turns out to be ‘just’ a metaphor, I will be content. I have a high regard for metaphor. It is how we come to understand the world. (462)

Mcgilchrist resubmits the knowledge gained through detailed scientific inquiry to the broader context of the right hemisphere in this last insight. The ethical obligation of the inclinations of the right hemisphere are described, prescribed and modeled in the writing of both Mcgilchrist and Maraini. As writers they are both model emissaries to the

Master, and their writing reveals an ultimate longing to cede the individuation of the emissary to the unity of the whole.

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