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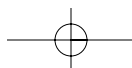
BRAIDING MYSTICISM, LITERATURE, THEORY: THE
CASE OF MARGARET MAZZANTINI'S
NON TI MUOVERE.

There have probably been braids for as long as there has been long hair. And one can also braid things other than hair, of course—food being a popular braiding item: we have all seen braided bread, mozzarella, garlic, onions, hot peppers... In most cases, braiding is an activity associated with women and girls: my five-year-old daughter knows how to braid already, my husband learned a couple of years ago, my nine-year-old son wants nothing to do with it. The following essay mimicks the movements of a three-stranded braid (the most popular of all braids), as I grab and braid strand-like paragraphs of uneven lengths devoted to three discourses: mysticism, literature, theory. The result is sometimes a tight braid, sometimes a looser one: by being braided rather than woven, mystical, literary, and theoretical discourses, until the tassel end of the braid, at least, preserve their integrity even as their appearance is transformed.

The first strand asks a question of the intersection between mysticism and literature: Might the intersection of maternity and spirituality in a largely secular novel point to the continued significance of mystical modes of life-writing for contemporary writing projects (and perhaps life projects as well)?

When I first read Margaret Mazzantini's *Non ti muovere* (2001) I loved it as a fun book, a comfortable book, the kind I sometimes enjoy at night after the kids are in bed and homework has been graded. But upon my second reading I also realized that in this book my two research interests—maternity and mysticism—came together in an uneven and compelling way. Read this way, the book engaged me more provocatively, for example by violating some of the rules I expect fun books to follow.

Turning to theory: Roland Barthes has explained well in *The Pleasure of the Text* the useful distinction between the pleasure afforded by the readerly text—comfortable and reassuring—with the *jouissance* or bliss of the writerly text—disconcerting, unsettling of the reader's linguistic and cultural assumptions (25-6).



What in mystical *jouissance* can bind a saint's text to a novel? One might start with the connection between language and its other: the relation of mysticism with silence *and* that, silence *as* that which exceeds language, or the attempt on the part of mystical language to capture the ineffable: "C'è un indicibile assoluto e c'è una difficoltà storicamente determinata a dire la propria esperienza," writes in *L'ordine simbolico della madre* feminist theorist Luisa Muraro, who has found in women's mystical writings a genealogy for her own more secular philosophical enterprise. "Ma i due indicibili," she continues, "che in teoria possiamo distinguere, alla singola possono risultare non separabili. O lei può non voler separarli, come presentando nella sua ordinaria difficoltà a dire la prefigurazione dell'assolutamente indicibile" (32-3). Or, as a theologian puts it, "to speak of God we must employ an extravagant *modus loquendi* that dismantles our referential pretensions even as it registers the pressure of that to which it cannot refer" (Bauerschmidt 350). This is the tension of the mystical enterprise: to speak of the unspeakable, to push against that opacity that marks the limits of language.

The narrative of *Non ti muovere* engages verbal limits and the ability of language to represent the other: a woman author writes of a male narrator who attempts to access female subjectivity as sacred space through, for example, transgressive sexual practices, abortion as self-abnegation, medical scrutiny. At the same time the novel is a traditional first-person account of an organizing narrative "I," an account in which the meaning of life is found in death—although the centrality of maternity disrupts this emphasis on mortality. As this is a very recent novel, let me say a few words about the plot. *Non ti muovere* is told in the first person by Timoteo, or Timo, a surgeon who is addressing his fifteen-year-old daughter, Angela. They are both in the hospital, his hospital, where Angela is undergoing brain surgery following a *motorino* accident (like so many teenagers, she had neglected to fasten her helmet). As he waits outside the O.R. while his colleague operates, Timo "tells" Angela about his love affair with an ugly, vulgar, lower-class woman named Italia—a woman unlike Angela's mother, Elsa, the narrator's beautiful, elegant, and successful journalist wife. The love affair ends with Italia's death from the delayed consequences of a botched abortion the day after Angela's birth. In spite of a male narrator professionally infected by the touch of death, the maternal experience is central to the novel. Throughout, another hidden theme surfaces regularly: the sanctification of Italia, who is represented more and more, as the novel progresses, with the attributes of a contemporary saint whose multiple failures ultimately guarantee her ability to intercede.

The abandonment of the “I”—tied to issues of subjectivity and apophysis, of silence and linguistic transgression—is a *topos* in mystical writings, embraced by many mystics and effectively theorized by twentieth-century French activist and mystic Simone Weil in one of her *Notebooks*: “We possess nothing in this world—for chance may deprive us of everything—except the power to say ‘I.’ It is that which has to be offered up to God, that is to say, destroyed. The destruction of the ‘I’ is the one and only free act that lies open to us” (2:337). This abdication of power, and ultimately of the power to be, is paradoxically what confers power to the saint: the self-renunciation of the saintly life, epitomized in the dissolution of mystical union, is central to the hagiographic project (Wyschogrod, 58).

The sanctification of Italia in Mazzantini’s novel, contingent on her dissolution, her abdication of the power to be, as well as on her radical altruism, is a way of coming to terms with suffering—of all the characters—and death—of Italia and possibly of Angela. A poor, ugly, vulgar, thirty-something woman becomes a saint of sorts through some of the narrative strategies employed by hagiographic and particularly mystical accounts: the dualism of action and contemplation, the exchange of one’s self and of one’s heart, the practices of selflessness and redemptive suffering, the processes of abjection and of union. In this book, for example, unbuttoning a blouse is like praying the rosary: “Cominciò a sbottonarsi la camicia, rapidi i bottoni uscivano dalle asole di lurex, correvano sotto le sue dita come un rosario.” Italia’s house is like a church: “...il caminetto contro il muro. Sembrava un altare smesso. Perché nel buio la casa aveva una sua sacralità” (83); and later in the novel Timo says that “la casa ora mi ricordava una di quelle chiese che s’incontrano nelle località di mare. Chiese moderne, senza affreschi, con un Gesù di gesso e fiori fasulli in un vaso senz’acqua” (96).¹ Finally, Italia is a religious figure: when Timo sees her in the rain after a long separation, crying and soaking wet, Italia—who, unlike the other characters in the novel, is a believer—“sembra una santa” (226), when she is sick Italia “sembrava una suora senza velo” (255: earlier in the novel Timo had already said about Italia: “era senza età, come una suora,” 96), when she is lying dead in her coffin she is “una santa burina da portare in processione” (276). When Italia is getting ready to leave her house forever, “va a prendersi la sua giacca di mucilagine che è larga sul divano, con le maniche aperte come un crocifisso in attesa delle sue braccia” (248)—she is, indeed, about to embark on her last journey, from which she will not return alive. The sanctification of Italia allows Timo, a self-proclaimed atheist, to turn to her for intercession: it is to Italia that he prays for his daughter’s life. The maternal mediates between heaven and earth, between sainthood and survival. In the narra-

tor's perception, Italia dies when their aborted child comes for her: as soon as she dies, Timo recalls, "D'istinto mi voltai a cercarla verso l'alto. Allora lo vidi, Angela, vidi nostro figlio. Il suo volto per un attimo mi apparve lassù. Non era bello, aveva un muso gracile e aspro come quello di sua madre. Quel piccolo figlio di puttana se l'era venuta a prendere" (269). So also when Timo's daughter is in the operating room, and her mother is on the plane *en route* to the hospital (she was on her way to London for an interview at the time of the accident), first Timo wonders if his vision of Italia represents Angela's impending death ("Davvero sei venuta a riprendermela?" 289), then he asks Italia to intercede maternally on Angela's—and on her mother's—behalf. He describes his wife on the plane: "Sta guardando una nuvola, sta guardando sua figlia. Taglia quella nuvola, Italia, tagliala come una cicogna. Restituiscimi Angela" (290). Like a stork, Italia can bring birth. Thanks to her own death, Italia can give life. She is the patron saint of motherhood by contrast, because she was altruistically able to give up her own maternity for the sake of Elsa's, to destroy part of herself so that her lover's daughter may have a normal existence. For in contrast with Elsa's practical successes and no-nonsense approach to work and family ("Tua madre è sempre in terra, anche quando è in cielo," is how Timo describes Elsa's behavior on the plane, 18), Italia is a contemplative, who accomplishes nothing of value, who is always waiting. She lives for Timo, and stops living when he is no longer hers. More pointedly, the two women's pregnancies are represented as irreconcilable opposites, one leading to life and the other to death—of both mother and child, a son. The *mise-en-abîme* continues with the very practice of abortion—problematically represented as the death of a child, of a person. Thus, Italia and Timo are like beaten up parents who have lost a child: "due amici bastonati dallo stesso bastone. O forse come genitori che hanno perso un figlio" (197). Italia does not trust hospitals, or more precisely she is alienated from science, medicine, perhaps knowledge itself, and chooses to go to her friends the gypsies, whose camp is adjacent to her little house, to have her ultimately deadly abortion. Clearly, however, one can hardly speak of a free choice: Italia wants her child, and her illegitimate, atypical position (or, instead, her generosity) prevents her from having her wish: again, she is portrayed with the altruism of a saint, she destroys part of herself in order that her beloved's life may remain whole. Her socially marginal yet generous sainthood, in a novel of comfortable and self-absorbed bourgeois characters, is the signifier of Italia's difference—the epistemological privilege she derives from her position as outsider.²

To turn again to the theoretical strand, here are two quotations from nomadic feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti. One: “The ethics of sexual difference [Braidotti is discussing the work of Luce Irigaray] aims at finding and enacting enabling representations of a new female humanity and a female sense of the divine.” (*Nomadic Subjects*, 133). Two: “Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous” (*Nomadic Subjects*, 81). Both quotations, although found in separate and different chapters—one engaging a possible feminist transcendence, the other remaining at the immanent level of bodily monstrosity—ask the question of embodied female subjectivity. The second quotation explicitly engages the fact that difference, pure difference, is unbearable to the logic of the One, it deconstructs representation itself, it elicits simultaneously fascination and horror. Braidotti notes that the morphological dubiousness of the female body—for it is on the body that subjectivity remains founded—is evidenced in its ability to change shape (in childbearing), and thus in its proximity to the monster: mothers and monsters are both “capable of defeating the notion of *fixed bodily form*, of visible, recognizable, clear, and distinct shapes as that which marks the contours of the body” (80).

The monstrosity of the female body, its attraction and repulsion, is related to the horror of abjection privileged by many mystics—the abjection evident when Angela of Foligno eucharistically drinks the water in which she had washed a leper’s scabs (Mazzoni, 53); or when Catherine of Genova eats lice, “learning to handle them as if they were pearls” (Catherine of Genova, 131).

Abjection is an activity both Italia and Timo embrace. Italia cuts her lover’s toenails and keeps them in a velvet pouch for jewels—and Timo will eventually place these abject jewels in her hands when she is buried, toenail clippings instead of a rosary: “Per caso, rimestando nella sua valigia, avevo trovato la sacchetta da gioielli dove lei aveva conservato le mie unghie tagliate. Ce l’avevo in tasca, era una sacchetta floscia di velluto color cammello, gliela nascosi tra le mani. *Ecco, tieni i tuoi gioielli, Italia, queste schegge ingiallite diventeranno sabbia insieme a te*” (272, Mazzantini’s emphasis; see also 106, 210). Timo’s abjection is more pervasive, it is the abjection of a rich and successful man who rapes a woman he finds ugly and even, at times, repulsive, in a house that makes him feel “un misterioso piacere sentendo che tutto intorno a me era davvero squallido” (36), who relishes his lover’s smell of beast, childbirth, and poverty (227), who eats dirt at Italia’s funeral: “Cercavo un gesto per salutarla,” he remembers, “e non trovai di meglio che smerdarmi la bocca” (287).

Drawing from the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva has analyzed the practice of abjection and its ultimate relation to

the mother's body in her book *Powers of Horror*: the maternal gives life and assures death, and as such it is both holy and soiled, attractive and repulsive. The abject—that which is ambiguous, neither alive nor dead—signifies the relation with the mother's body before the latter becomes an object. It is that from which one must separate in order to attain subjectivity, that which one must reject in order to avoid dissolving into the mother.³ Otherness, in Kristeva's work—both the otherness within us and the otherness outside of us—is essential in our becoming ourselves. For example, the maternal subject, for Kristeva, is a model of ethics, or "herethics," because it embodies alterity within—as she explains at length in "Stabat Mater." Difference is fundamental to ethics. As Michelle Boulous Walker puts it, Kristeva's discussion of the abject "moves us away from a silence/language opposition toward an understanding of the rather more complex relation between the logos and its other;" silence, that is, can be thought of as "a metaphor for the otherness that inhabits the logos, an otherness that is anything but quiet" (99). I would go on to say that the abject, by destabilizing the opposition between silence and the word, can become one way of speaking the unspeakable, of representing the unrepresentable.

Abjection can be the prism through which bodily wastes appear as precious jewels, markers of closeness and distance, oneness and difference, humanity and the divine.

Through and despite its sentimental surface, *Non ti muovere* tackles the difficult question of sanctity today, of the holiness of the other, and of the lessons of difference. In abjection, as in union and exchange, the subject's desire is excessive. Timo and Italia, narrator and narrative matter, man and woman, professional and proletarian, rich and poor... These opposites are bridged by a mystical exchange whose pleasure is lined with the abject.⁴ Their lovemaking follows Italia's pattern, not Timo's—in spite of his initial rape. The two become one, but according to her model, not his: "Lei faceva l'amore così, non io. Mi aveva tirato dalla sua parte" (59). And later as Timo visits her house in Italia's absence, he desires to be her: "Volevo essere lei per sentire l'effetto che io provocavo nella sua carne." This desire to be the other leads Timo to masturbate, to become object and subject of pleasure at once, with the effect that "Il piacere si allargò nella pancia tiepido e profondo, entrò nelle spalle, nella gola. Proprio come il piacere di una donna" (83). Timo and Italia also fantasize being physically contained within each other: first Timo imagines entering her belly button with his whole body, "volevo esser nel suo ventre" (156), and shortly thereafter, when Timo wants to know the place where Italia was before meeting him, she says " 'Stavo qui dentro,' mi toccò la pancia" (157).

Another time, as Timo and Italia embrace, he experiences the exchange of his heart with his lover's: "Sono un medico, so riconoscere le pulsazioni del mio cuore, sempre, anche quando non voglio. Te lo giuro, Angela, era di Italia il cuore che batteva dentro di me" (125).⁵

Does the exchange of self, of language, of heart, emphasize union or difference? Does it claim unity in love, the dissolution of the self in the other, or does it painfully show the impossibility of such unity, the irreducible otherness of the other? Exchanges of the self and mystical unions highlight the issues of subjectivity and alterity, of sameness and difference: For how stable can a subject be if it can get lost in the other? Or, conversely, how can I join the other if true union and the overcoming of alterity are impossible? And, what is the role of that other in my coming into subjecthood and, particularly, in my becoming an ethical subject? Otherness and alterity are of course central to the discussion of sexual difference. Feminist theorists such as Adriana Cavarero and Luce Irigaray, perhaps most notably, have noted the double alterity of women, their alterity with respect to language and to being itself. In Cavarero's words, "la donna è portatrice di una doppia alterità: essa è l'altra assimilata nel linguaggio (io, soggetto universale parlante, che si specifica in maschio e femmina, ciascuno dei quali è l'altro dell'altro, ambedue compresi—previsti!—dall'io), essa è però anche l'Altra, una esistente alla cui interezza appartiene costitutivamente la differenza sessuale" ("Per una teoria della differenza sessuale," 62). Yet the elaboration of sexual difference may ultimately conflict with the practice of mystical exchange: "Il pensiero della differenza sessuale, riconoscendo il duale originario come un intranscendibile presupposto, esclude una logica di assimilazione all'Altro," writes Cavarero ("Per una teoria," 78). Are sexual difference and mystical union contradictory then? At one level, perhaps, the level of the logic of the One. But in mystical union and mystical exchange the other is recognized, acknowledged, thought out, as the confines of the (illusively unified) self are ecstatically transgressed. So that the effect of ecstatic union is not only a dissolution of the self in the other, but also, more radically, a search for the other—both outside of and inside oneself—that other without whom the self cannot be an ethical self, that other whose existence founds our very subjectivity as ethical beings. Ecstatic union, mystical exchange, shake the ultimate oneness of the binary economy of the patriarchal symbolic order, the hierarchical duality of subject and object, reason and passion, logos and corporeality, and of course male and female. Since, in this economy, true alterity is an illusion—because clearly the two sexes do not both have the same power of self-representation—binary economy, as Luce Irigaray has discussed, is founded on the logic of the same, the logic of the mirror

or speculum; it has been called homosexual in the sense that only one sex, the male sex, is its subject. In mystical exchange maleness and femaleness (God and mystic, lover and beloved) are (at times self-consciously) performed (to evoke Judith Butler's concept), they intersect, blend, move each other in ecstatic ways that disrupt sameness and binary logic by questioning patriarchal conceptions of otherness and subjectivity and of the fixity of sex and gender.

Hagiography is a narrative constructed in such a way as to confirm the saint's holiness. A hagiography carries an imperative, it conveys moral force. In her book *Saints and Postmodernism*, Edith Wyschogrod suggests that we look at hagiography as "a proto-novelistic discourse" subject to four criteria: narrativity (its discursive form), corporeality (the alternation of pain and its suspension in the saint's life), textuality (the materiality of writing, with all its instability), and historicity (the sense of historical veracity needed to generate moral practices in the reader). Narrative, corporeal, textual, and historical, the saintly life can only have meaning if it is able to communicate a binding moral value to its readers. "The saintly body," Wyschogrod argues, "acts as a signifier, as a carnal general that condenses and channels meaning, a signifier that expresses extremes of love, compassion, and generosity. In their disclosure of what is morally possible, saintly bodies 'fill' the discursive plane of ethics" (52).

As mystical union is figured in the heart, so also a bodily metonymy may allow us to observe the formation of the self in *Non ti muovere*. Even as it presents bodies that are palpably material—surgical bodies, sexual bodies, maternal and filial bodies—*Non ti muovere* shows the uncontainability of the body by its own anatomy, its pains and pleasures, its reproductive ability.⁶ Three types of bodies appear in this novel: the surgical body as the body of science, of thought, of knowledge; the sexual body as the body of affects, of desire; the maternal-daughterly body as the body of connections, of social bonds (Italy, by the way, is the only one in the novel to incarnate all three bodies: she is Timo's lover, the mother of their child, his surgical patient; Elsa is mother and lover but not surgical patient, and Angela is daughter and surgical patient but not a lover). Nevertheless Mazzantini's bodies—surgical, sexual, maternal-daughterly—escape the boundaries to which each of their inscriptions (and inscribing functions: since these bodies produce as well as being produced) would confine them. Childbirth and abortion, in spite of their apparent contradiction, both bring about life as well as death, they signify natality as well as mortality; and the reproductive body is the site of the generation of meaning, yes, but of an ambiguous meaning at best—in a world where abortion kills and teenagers die.

The multiple connections between birth and death evoke the philosophical concept of natality as the category through which we become who we are—and I am referring to Hannah Arendt's elaboration of natality filtered through Adriana Cavarero's reading. Natality rather than mortality should be our privileged philosophical category, for it is through birth—a social event, unlike death—that we become *who* (and not *what*) we are. In Kristeva's words, Arendt “bequeathed to us a modern version of the Judeo-Christian affection for the love of life through her constant drumbeat of the ‘miracle of birth’ that combines the risks of beginning and the freedom of men [*sic*] to love one another, to think, and to judge.” (*Hannah Arendt*, 46). In Cavarero's elaboration, death “diventa il luogo emblematico della desensibilizzazione, cioè il luogo del distacco dal sensibile, e assume perciò una valenza positiva ed ‘esemplare’ per il filosofare, nella misura in cui questo è già un esercizio che distacca la mente dal corpo e dall’esperienza sensibile. Il filosofo, infatti, vivendo di solo pensiero, anticipa la morte, e, quando la morte viene, al pari di Socrate, l’accoglie come una liberazione dal mondo ingannevole e perturbante delle apparenze cui il corpo è necessariamente ancorato.” Natality, on the other hand, “annuncia il radicarsi degli uomini nella singolarità del cominciamento. In altri termini chi nasce è ‘nuovo’ nel significato reale del termine: è una singolarità fattuale e imprevedibile che appare nel mondo e vi appartiene. Con lui un nuovo ‘chi’ *comincia* essendo *del* mondo, e stando nel mondo insieme, in interrelazione, ad altri ‘chi,’ parimenti nuovi e cominciati” (“Dire la nascita,” 111-112). We are natals rather than mortals, uniquely born of a woman: if the philosophical emphasis on death produces a division between thought and body (with the devaluation of the latter), birth roots the human being in the other. But this other is always a woman—hence the devaluation of natality in philosophy, according to Cavarero: “Proprio per questo può decidere—ha deciso—di non misurare la condizione umana nella sessuazione femminile dell’origine dalla quale il suo sesso è appunto escluso, e di volgere perciò lo sguardo altrove: ossia in quello scomparire, ben conosciuto dall’*homo necans*, dalla cui prospettiva il nascere da madre finisce col mostrarsi come un apparire colpevolmente destinato alla sparizione, un nascere da donna che corre verso la morte. Così è la morte a farsi misura, e il corpo a sopportare l’odissea del caduco” (Cavarero, “Dire la nascita,” 114-115).

Mazzantini's book, like Penelope in Cavarero's interpretation, weaves back together what philosophy had undone: birth and death.⁷ When her mother looks at Angela in the intensive care unit after the operation, Timo tells his daughter about Elsa: “Sai cos’è, con quella faccia da nonna? È

una madre che guarda attraverso il vetro di una nursery. È esattamente così. Una madre in vestaglia, con il seno dolorante di latte, che guarda il suo neonato, la sua scimmia rossa. Ha quegli occhi lì, di una con la pancia floscia e vuota che spia la carne che è uscita da lei” (293). Can birth, rather than death, as Walter Benjamin would have it, be the sanction of storytelling, Mazzantini’s novel seems to ask?⁸ Or will Angela’s story remain untold unless she dies?

So here is the end of the braid, the tassel mixing the three strands of mysticism, literature, and theory. The tie for my braid? A quotation from Hélène Cixous: “There is a difference between what makes things move and what stops them; it is what moves things that changes them” (Cixous and Clément, 157).

“Non ti muovere”: this phrase appears several times in the course of the book. It can refer to simple movements of the body (Italia says it to Timo who is getting up to help her clear the table, 91, Timo says it to Italia when she is about to conceal her ugly naked body, 106, and when he sees her in the rain after a long separation, 225), as well as to the potentially deadly movements of the spirit: Timo says “Non ti muovere” to Angela at the very beginning of the novel to ask her to stay—to stay alive, that is (20), and also to Italia right after she dies; this last “Non ti muovere” is italicized (269), perhaps because it is a speech act which the speaker, unable to bring the dead back to life, is not qualified to make. Later the same command is repeated to Italia’s spirit, in fear that she has come to take Angela away with her (289). Three pages from the end of the book, Timo says “Non ti muovere” to Angela, as he connects her to the respirator—but Angela’s response is a life-affirming refusal of immobility: “Hai uno strano sighiozzo nel petto. Ti riattacco al respiratore, non ti muovere. Invece ti muovi. Mi stringi la mano” (291). So also, right before dying, Italia’s last word is “Portami. E non mi disse dove” (269)—contradicting the imperative of “Non ti muovere.”

Let me tie the braid again: “There is a difference between what makes things move and what stops them; it is what moves things that changes them.”

There is one instance—and with this I will conclude—when “Non ti muovere” is spoken twice within two lines, and it is when Timo has driven Italia to the private clinic where his best friend Manlio, a well-known ob-gyn, is supposed to perform the abortion (though this does not happen, and she goes to the gypsies for it). As he watches her cross the gravel walkway from his car, Timo sees Italia trip and fall—contrary to his expectations, for she always looks precarious when she walks: “Invece cade, un

ultimo passo e si accascia di botto. Riacchiappa la borsa, ma non si alza, resta lì accovacciata in terra. Non si volta, è convinta che io sia già andato via. *Non ti muovere*, dico, senza sapere quello che dico. E forse lei sa che ci sono. *Non ti muovere*. Perché ora mi sembra che quella parte di lei che mancava l'abbia raggiunta, come un brandello di stracci alati le sta coprendo la groppa" (150). At this point Italia's body is silently suspended between maternity (she is pregnant), medicine (she is about to enter the clinic), and sexuality (we see her through her lover's eyes). If she could speak, she might address the ethics of her marginal position, the creativity of her self-abdication, the dissolution in and of her quest for union. But a fourth dimension, "quella parte di lei che mancava," is joining all this in the scene I just described. It is something which can only be seen in the fall into abjection, in the loss of self through altruism, in the life-giving communion with the Other. I would like to suggest that this missing part is the sacred, the spirit, the holy, that which Italia points to throughout the novel, that which will finally give her wings—or at least "un brandello di stracci alati."

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NOTES

¹Belden Lane writes that "This curious phenomenon of the sacred place as ostensibly unexceptional can be seen to cut across all periods and cultures Repeatedly, in the economy of salvation, what is almost prosaic and commonplace is chosen as the site of divine blessing" (25).

²More on the epistemological privileges of marginality can be read in Terdiman, "The Marginality of Michel de Certeau."

³This is a disturbing aspect of Kristeva's theory: that subjectivity must be attained through the hostile exclusion of the mother, of the other—the point that Luisa Muraro seeks to undo in *L'ordine simbolico della madre*: "Anche Kristeva sembra pensare che l'indipendenza simbolica, il comune saper parlare, si paghi necessariamente con la perdita del punto di vista dell'antica relazione con la madre. In contrasto con lei, io affermo che l'ordine simbolico comincia a stabilirsi necessariamente (o non si stabilirà mai) nella relazione con la madre e che il 'taglio' che ci separa da questa non risponde a una necessità di ordine simbolico" (44).

⁴There are oxymorons in this novel as in mystical texts: Italia is "una bambina appena invecchiata" whom Timo rapes "perché l'ho amata subito e non volevo amarla, l'ho fatto per ucciderla e volevo salvarla" (129).

⁵The mystical exchange of the heart has been described by Catherine of Siena, Veronica Giuliani, and especially by Gemma Galgani: "In these instants,

my heart and the heart of Jesus are one single thing” (Rudolph Bell and Cristina Mazzoni, 207).

⁶In thinking about the body, I found especially helpful Rosi Braidotti’s discussion in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.

⁷“Penelope tangles and holds together what philosophy wants to separate. She brings back the act of thinking to a life marked by birth and death” (Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, 29).

⁸“Death,” in Walter Benjamin’s dictum, “is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.” Thus, a character’s story becomes transmissible at the moment of her death and, to quote from Benjamin again, “the meaning of [her] life is revealed only in [her] death” (151, 156).

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